Vision for a good childhood for all
If a Child...

If a child lives with criticism
He learns to condemn

If a child lives with hostility
She learns to fight

If a child lives with ridicule
He learns to be shy

If a child lives with shame
She learns to be guilty

If a child lives with tolerance
He learns to be patient

If a child lives with encouragement
She learns confidence

If a child lives with praise
He learns to appreciate

If a child lives with fairness
She learns justice

If a child lives with security
He learns to have faith

If a child lives with approval
She learns to like herself

If a child lives with acceptance and friendship
He learns to find love in the world

(Anonymous)
Introduction

The Children’s Society’s Vision for Good Childhood for All is a culmination of our 128 years of experience. It is based on our learning from direct work with children and young people, research (both ours and that gathered for The Good Childhood® Inquiry), policy work and campaigning that has taken place over the life of The Children’s Society.

The starting point of Our Vision for Good Childhood for All is what children and young people themselves have told us. Their views, aspirations and perceptions of their lives and the environment they live in is at the heart of this work and sets the future direction of our organisation. This document sets out our vision of what we would expect to see in society if all children were to have a good childhood. It expresses an inspiring and ambitious view of the world, a vision that we seek to achieve, working in partnership with others. It sets out the standards and principles that we should collectively strive to deliver for each and every child in the UK.

We’ve listened to children and young people. We’ve taken on responsibility to make childhood better and this document shares our vision of a good childhood for all.

Bob Reitemeier
Chief Executive
The Children’s Society

Bob Reitemeier
Chief Executive
The Children's Society
In 2006 The Children’s Society launched *The Good Childhood* Inquiry, bringing together an independent panel of experts to consider the conditions for a good childhood in the 21st century, the barriers to achieving it, and recommendations for ensuring those conditions for all children and young people.


While supporting the Inquiry to conduct its work and come to its independent conclusions, The Children's Society has itself examined the evidence offered to the Inquiry, and we have developed our own *Vision for a good childhood for all*. This vision has been particularly led by the priorities and issues that children and young people told us about in their evidence to the Inquiry, and sets a visionary context for the work The Children’s Society does, today and in the future.

### Childhood

The Oxford Dictionary defines childhood very simply as ‘the state or period of being a child’. However evidence to *The Good Childhood Inquiry* demonstrates that childhood is in fact one of the most complex and contested social concepts.

The Children’s Society defines childhood, in terms of age, as the period between birth and the legal age of maturity, 18, as defined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and domestic legislation. Alongside this age definition we acknowledge that children’s experiences before birth may have significant impact on the conditions of their childhood, and we recognise the diversity of individual characteristics, experiences and specific developmental needs among children and young people. We also recognise that while an important legislative distinction, 18 is not a magical cut off age at which all young people become uniformly ready for adulthood. We support the range of ways in which many modern services and systems continue to make special considerations for young adults up to 25, including those designed to support vulnerable young people in transition from childhood to adulthood.

The Children’s Society believes that childhood is a social construct that has changed significantly over our history, varies across nations and continents, and cannot be understood in isolation from other variables such as class, gender, ethnicity and culture. In setting out the standards and aspirations we believe necessary for each and every child in the UK to experience a good childhood, we have sought to reflect as far as possible the consensus and strongest messages across the wide diversity of children and young people who gave evidence to us, and have sought not to be prescriptive or judgmental about the rich and positive diversity of individual, family and cultural traditions and lifestyles within the UK.

While we believe that childhood is a social construct or concept, the real experience of being a child is not. That is why we have given such high priority to the evidence we received from children and young people experiencing childhood today in developing our *Vision for a good childhood for all*.

### The Children’s Society’s vision for a good childhood for all

The Children's Society has listened closely to what children, young people, parents and our professional and academic colleagues have told us throughout the course of *The Good Childhood Inquiry*. We have examined the independent panel’s report, the extensive research evidence summaries collated for the Inquiry, and have added all that evidence to what we know about childhood from our organisation’s practice experience over more than 125 years.

The aspirations for childhood that we have constructed are intended to aim high, and to express a set of conditions, standards and principles that we should collectively strive to achieve for all children – not just for a majority, but each and every child in the UK today. They do not constitute a detailed policy agenda for any one or more of the UK nations, as our intention was to look for common ground in the vast array of experiences of childhood today.

Our hope is that they should constitute a set of aspirations that can be signed up to widely, and can inform specific analysis and assessment of the priorities and reforms that could make them a reality for all children in each nation and across different communities and cultures in the UK.
1. Love and friendship at the heart of childhood policy

‘I love my family and they love me. I have friends that love me. I also have pets that love me and I love them.’

In a modern world where many people worry that childhood has changed beyond recognition, that it has become dominated by technology and commercialism, the overwhelming message from all of the evidence should be both assuring and potentially challenging. People are what really matter to children, not computers or the right trainers, and love is the very heart of a good childhood – not just the love of parents, carers and wider family, and children’s mutual love for them, but just as importantly, the love, enjoyment and respect children find in their friendships.

A childhood with extensive material wealth and incredible educational opportunities will still be poor if lived in loneliness, without love. And while The Children’s Society believes we must always seek to prevent and eradicate any avoidable hardship or injustice wherever we can, a childhood lived in the face of adversity can not only be survived, but can be a learning and growing experience if supported with the love and respect of good friends and caring adults.

Sometimes this simple truth becomes lost in debates about childhood. The support and nurture of loving personal relationships within society, and by the many professionals who work with children specifically, can be a subject that we in the UK can feel extremely uncomfortable talking about publicly. However the almost unanimous strength and consistency of children’s clarity that love is the most important thing in childhood must encourage us all to be more open and willing to overcome our discomforts, and to discuss and embrace the significance of strong, loving personal relationships throughout society.

This is not to suggest that the job of a children’s sector professional is to provide the love needed in children’s lives themselves. It is to propose that it should be a primary objective for all policy and professional practice affecting children and families that it should respect, allow time and space, and provide positive support for the personal relationships that mean the most to children; should seek to help repair or strengthen struggling personal relationships when they falter; and should help children to develop new personal bonds where love is truly lacking in their life. For some children whose situations may appear complex, challenging, even unsolvable, we may overlook the possibility that the single most significant thing we could do, with the most positive impact on their life, would be to help them identify and nurture a relationship, with a peer or a significant adult, in which they can find they are truly respected, valued and loved, perhaps for the first time.

2. Personal responsibility founded on the understanding that children learn from all of us

‘Don’t treat people how you don’t want to be treated.’

‘If there were no values, there would be chaos.’

A great deal of public focus in given to concerns over the behaviours and values of today’s children, often seeking to ascribe perceived problems of youth crime and anti-social behaviour to the impacts of divorce and family separation, and other changes in family patterns and structures. It is clear from children and young people’s evidence alone that argument and conflict at home, separation and significant changes in their family relationships can have a major and often painful impact in their life. However what is even more clear from the whole body of evidence is that it is how adults behave towards each other and towards the children affected by their behaviour, not a formulaic approach to what constitutes a good family, that really make the difference to a good childhood.
There is a wide diversity of circumstances within which children are conceived and born. Many children enter the world planned for and wanted by their parents and that commitment may only grow and strengthen over time. On the other hand, a childhood may result from or encounter a wide variety of unplanned or unusual circumstances, but may still be a good childhood if loved and cared for by one or more people (whether birth parents or not) who give priority to them, and show personal commitment and responsibility towards them. Even when separation or divorce may be the inevitable choice for a couple whose relationship has broken down badly, it will be the way in which the adults conduct themselves, in their on-going behaviour towards each other and in each giving continued priority to their child, that will mean the difference between the child experiencing a supported journey through unsettling and upsetting change on the one hand, and the child struggling to overcome the impact of a damaging and traumatic personal disaster on the other.

Children learn about their own personal responsibility, about the values that underpin good relationships and about acceptable standards of behaviour, from the relationship behaviours that they experience and witness. It is not enough to look only to the responsibilities of parents, or to the events and possible difficulties experienced within family relationships, to explain everything about children’s values and behaviour. Children learn from, observe and analyse everything in the world around them. All adults are either overtly witnessed by children in their behaviours or children learn about our behaviour through stories and events they come to hear about, whether discussed with friends, or through stories in the media. We all therefore contribute to the standards of behaviour that children learn from, and we show them ‘in action’ the values that we really hold and adopt towards each other.

If we wish for children to understand and show respect towards other people, it is, first and foremost, our respectful conduct towards them and towards each other from which they will learn to do so. Perhaps most challengingly to current debates and policies, it is precisely those children who have experienced or witnessed bad behaviour at first hand - and whose own behaviour may as a result become most concerning - who need most urgently and consistently to be shown the example of what it means to be treated with dignity and respect in their interactions and relationships within the wider environments in which they experience their childhood.

‘It’s whoever you meet – they [values] don’t necessarily come from your parents. When people do something that you admire, or even when you don’t, you can take something from that.’

‘I want to change the wourld to a nise calm place where people did't scream or be nasty.’

3. A society ordered and structured to give priority to family and caring relationships

A society that prioritises children’s most significant relationships is one that acknowledges that for all of us it is our personal relationships that are the cornerstone of human existence. The formation and maintenance of good relationships requires time and commitment, but from the volume of evidence we received it would not be overstating things to say that for most families managing money and time are often the two most absorbing features of everyday life. Children tell us that they want to spend more time with their families and adults tell us parents don’t feel they get enough time to spend with their children. Many feel that parents and carers have to put their work or career first even if this affects their family life. With strong loving personal relationships at the very heart of our belief of what constitutes a good childhood, it should be clear that whether or not children get to spend enough time with the people most important to them is not simply a matter for private concern, it must be a matter for societal and political action.
Placing love and relationships at the heart of a societal commitment to children would require policy and practice across the board to be “relationship-proofed” and for governments and employers to ask how they are contributing to the promotion of good relationships, in particular children’s relationships with their parents and carers. It would require a broad review of the current political thinking and policy, for example that employment is always the solution to poverty.

It would also necessitate a change of emphasis in family policy towards ensuring that parents and carers are afforded the financial and practical support they need in order to give priority to their relationships at home. In practice it would mean, for example, that parents and carers are supported to spend time with their children in a myriad of ways: from making choices about working or staying at home, to requests for time off and flexibility when the family has to deal with sickness, disability or bereavement, or for such simple but important things as attending a child’s sports day. It would also mean making more widely and readily accessible personal advice and help in negotiating difficulties in parental and partner relationships.

More fundamentally, however, it is for all of us individually and collectively to consider our priorities and attitudes towards each other. If we place priority on the importance of what we do for work and what we own and can afford, we collectively create the pressure on parents to put careers and earnings before time invested in relationships at home. If, however, we place greatest priority on the happiness and health of the people and relationships that mean most to us, and of course in particular the relationships that mean most to children, then we may start to create a culture in which the financial rewards, satisfactions, achievements and demands of the workplace act in support of, rather than competition with, the most important relationships in society.

‘It used to matter to me but now I realise that spending money on brands, I’m not getting richer!’

4. A society that respects and nurtures children’s friendships

The value children place in their friendships is overwhelmingly clear from their evidence. In particular it is clear that children want and need the freedom to establish and explore their friendships, to play, have fun and build relationships with their friends on their own terms, without constant adult supervision. It is equally clear from research evidence that the development and learning that takes place in childhood friendships, including the learning that comes from making mistakes and misjudgements, are some of the most essential building blocks in a good childhood.

Throughout society and children’s policy, however, relatively little attention is paid to positive nurturing and guiding of children in their developing friendships. Children’s friendships may be viewed by adults as simply happening incidentally as a result of children finding themselves together in the same place, at school or other shared settings. It can be accepted, as if a ‘fact of life’, that while some children have many friends, others are simply unpopular. In many respects societal attitudes can be negative or dismissive, viewing children’s friendships with fear and suspicion, in particular as children become teenagers. Attention can often become focussed on the negative aspects of some children’s relationships with peers – bullying, peer pressure, the potential for friends to negatively influence each other’s behaviour, and adults’ protective fears about children’s developing romantic and sexual feelings.

If we are true to the evidence children and young people gave us, there is a need right across society, and childhood policy in particular, to give greater positive recognition to the centrality of friendship in childhood. There is a need to place greater emphasis on respecting and nurturing children and young people’s friendships, and being concerned for those children who are isolated or prevented from socialising with their peers, or who seem to find difficulty in establishing good friends. We know, from our practice, for example, that many disabled children have little freedom or

‘I would be lost without my best friend’
support to develop friendships on their own terms, particularly to develop friendships with children who are not disabled.

It is essential to strike the right balance between our collective and parental instincts to protect children from being hurt, injured or harmed on the one hand, with ensuring their freedom to take some degree of physical and emotional risks in their explorations with friends on the other. It was clear from children’s evidence that while they understand the balance is difficult, many feel they are losing out on essential freedoms to build and explore their friendships at the moment. Policies that are premised on separating children from their closest friends, such as Anti-social Behaviour Order conditions, or the dispersal of groups of young people socialising together, should be reviewed from the perspective of understanding the central importance of friendship to happiness and healthy development throughout life.

“You don’t make as many friends if they [adults] are too over protective.”

“It doesn’t matter how supported you are if no-one likes you… If you don’t have friends there is no point in going to school.”
1. Children are seen and treated as unique individuals, with equal respect for the significance of their membership of family and community

‘my family supports me in what ever I want to do in my life.’

It is from within the emotional security and positive support of loving personal relationships that children’s individuality and sense of self are free to find positive expression. Each child is as unique as each of the adults who created them, and while every child is profoundly influenced and shaped by those people closest to them, each is nonetheless their own person, with their own mind, or ‘inner world’, and the capacity to influence and shape the ‘outer world’ in which they live and grow. It is therefore essential that every child is seen, from birth onwards, as an individual in their own right, not simply the sum of their parents’ characters and influence. The fact that two or more children can have the same parents, live in the same home and community, and share similar life experiences, and yet still be distinct and often very different individual characters from their earliest days, is the most universally recognisable expression of this basic truth. Each child plays their own unique role in shaping their childhood experience – children are not simply or passively ‘brought up;’ they actively grow up.

A society that values and sees all children as the unique individuals they are, with their own personal integrity, will ensure that children are not dismissed or overlooked as simply the product or possession of their family, nor grouped and stereotyped together as an homogeneous group.

It is clear from children’s evidence about the significance of family relationships that for most children certain aspects of their family life will form a strong and positive part of their developing sense of self, such as their family history, cultural heritage and traditions, their sense of belonging to a particular community, nationality or faith. It should be clear, however, that such belonging is only of positive value to a child’s well-being and sense of individual identity when chosen by them voluntarily as significant as the grow older. Adherence to particular traditions, beliefs or practices should never be forced upon a person against their own will and instincts, and any that demean or hurt a child physically or emotionally can never be justified. Children’s developing individuality can also lead them over time to question, explore, experiment and give significance to different values and ideas, and sometimes to reject beliefs or traditions valued by their family – in other words, to embark on their own journey of discovery and learning through which they decide for themselves what is important to them about who they are and want to be. It is not only for parents and wider families to achieve the sometimes difficult balance between their child’s need for a sense of belonging and their freedom to assert their individuality, but for the whole of society, and childhood policy-makers in particular, to ensure that this careful balance is struck.

‘Many people have their parents values, some people have different values to their parents. So for example, I may have picked my friends depending on the person I was because of the values they had given me. But as I grew, I may have picked up some of their values.’
2. Every child is seen, heard, encouraged and taken seriously in their self-expression

‘When I have freedom and when people respect my views no matter how silly they sound.’

Every child, whatever their age or abilities, is capable of self-expression, and it is both in the freedom to express themselves and in the response they receive that their unique individuality becomes truly known and affirmed. Children’s imaginations, ideas, opinions, feelings, needs and worries can be expressed not only through words for those able to talk or sign, but through physical movements and body language, non-verbal sounds, or creative expression like play, dance, music and art.

Our society has moved on in many ways from the days of wishing children to be ‘seen and not heard’. Children and young people’s views are increasingly sought in developing policy for children, for example, at both local and national levels. However children and young people’s self-expression can still widely be viewed as less valid than adults’ due to their young age, and their ideas and opinions are often dismissed or belittled as simply cute, naïve, ill-informed or at worst, irrelevant. When children do express their perspectives and feelings they can, in fact, offer a great deal for adults to learn from. Even very young children’s observations and ideas about our world, and about themselves, coming from the fresh perspective of a most recent entrant to our society, can in fact be profound and challenging to those who really listen.

Some children, for example those who are disabled and have communications impairments or for whom English is a new language, may not be given the time, support or encouragement to discover the ways in which they can best express themselves, or find that their attempts to do so are not understood or given credence. For any child to feel that they are prevented from expressing themselves, or ignored or disbelieved when they do, is a most profound and damaging kind of isolation. Children’s self-expression, and being recognised, understood and appreciated for what they have to say, is the foundation of the strong personal relationships that are at the heart of a good childhood, and the only truly authoritative basis for all professional practice that seeks to support, help and protect children.

3. Children know and understand that the pleasures of having fun, playing and laughing are important to us all

‘In my life I would change to have fun all the time.’

Q: What do you think all children need to have a good life?
A: ‘Laughing’

Throughout the evidence children gave us about the people and things that are most important to them, having fun, playing (on their own or with family and friends), enjoyment and laughter were vitally important. Some of the most cherished childhood experiences, often those that last long into adulthood as self-defining and treasured memories, are very often those that were memorable for the purity or intensity of their fun and pleasure.

To place value upon fun and laughter, happiness and the pursuit of pleasure in childhood is not to advocate pure hedonism. Most children in their evidence were able just as clearly to identify ‘serious’ issues as vital in their childhood, like education or feeling safe. Many children also spoke or wrote about the reality of there being down sides of life, such as losing a close relative or arguing with friends or family, but it is precisely in this context that fun, laughter and happiness
are most significant. Being serious about the importance of fun in childhood is essential to achieving balanced individuals. Play and fun offer the chance for children to know that others enjoy and take pleasure in their company, just as they enjoy and take pleasure in their companions. Children who can create their own fun, and who can distract and entertain themselves in their play and pastimes have learnt a vital self-discipline. These are building blocks in developing the self-esteem and resilience to deal with difficult, serious, boring or emotionally painful events when they happen. Children also learn all sorts of important skills, lessons and knowledge most powerfully while playing and having fun, and many of the positive comments children gave about their teachers or schools focussed on their appreciation of making classes fun and enjoyable.

Many children will identify adults as a group as ‘too serious’. Even the most serious adults, with the most serious jobs and lots of responsibilities are, however, usually willing to admit that one of the many joys of becoming a parent, carer, aunt or uncle is the feeling that they can, once again, return to the pleasures of playing with games and toys, playing make-believe, and having the ‘pure’ fun of just being silly, when they play with the children they know. Fun, play and laughter are important to all of us throughout life, and it is vital that the time, space and resources for fun times throughout childhood are given high priority as essential building blocks for personal growth and emotional well-being.

4. Children grow through learning and exploring their talents and interests

They need to have a fun hobby.’

Children are hard-wired to learn, whatever their individual abilities. Childhood is the time of our most rapid learning as human beings, absorbing, analysing and acquiring extraordinary amounts of new information and developing new skills from our very first moments. Children learn least from what they are told, and most from what they observe and experience, and from what they do and try, including times when they fail or make mistakes. A high proportion of children spoke of the importance of learning in a good childhood, and many spoke and wrote of the pleasure they take in exploring and building their personal talents and interests, whether in or out of school.

The significance of learning for children is located in both their present and future selves. Learning is important to children in the here and now in the sheer pleasure and excitement of discovery, whether discovering new information, explanations and ideas, or discovering their own interests, preferences and talents, which is a vital part of a child’s developing sense of their own identity. Children also value learning as giving them a sense of growing up, and in their ideas about their future life, in which they are aware that their learning and achievements in childhood will shape the potential for their adult lives and careers.

Our society is not one that could be criticised for ignoring or under-emphasising the importance of education for children. Education and schooling have long had a high level of political importance and public debate. A great deal of focus, however, is premised on the idea that children learn mainly what they are taught in classes, and that education is important primarily to their choices of career and potential to earn later in life. The critical message, at the heart of our aspirations for a good childhood for all, is that the pleasure, sense of self and personal growth that children find in learning and discovery is something that is essential for each and every child’s emotional well-being. Learning is what children do, it is the job of parents, governments and wider society to nurture, guide and stimulate children’s innate capacity to learn on the basis that is important to who they are today, not just for who they become tomorrow.

‘And my art… all this things calm me and help me through bad times.’
5. All children are supported to value and take care of the health of their body and mind

‘Lots of sports and healthy food and drinks.’

‘If you have good health you’re happy.’

Being happy and healthy are fundamentally important to children, and to our collective aspirations for children as a society. Many children showed high levels of awareness and concern about things like healthy eating, exercise and playing sport as part of the evidence they gave us, or spoke about being ill or having health problems and worries as being some of things that got in the way of having a good childhood. Even more prominently, it was clear that children and young people are acutely aware of the negative impact of emotional and psychological pressures and stress on their mental health, such as anxieties over school achievement, body image, or feeling pressured to take risks with drinking, smoking or drugs.

It is essential that there is a responsible and caring approach towards children's health right across society – in supporting parents and schools to introduce children to foods and activities that are balanced, healthy and enjoyable; in assuring access to excellent healthcare that meets children’s needs; in incorporating learning about personal health and well-being into schools and informal education; in ensuring that family income is no barrier to children and young people accessing a wide range of opportunities, activities and resources through which they can maintain their physical and emotional health and fitness; and in considering how we can best protect children from some of the raw and damaging pressures of our culture of competitiveness over achievements, beauty and money.

All of the things that adults and governments can do are important, but at the root of a healthy childhood must be a commitment first and foremost to the child’s developing personal responsibility, self-awareness and self-esteem. Children are often the first to recognise that feeling good about yourself lies at the heart of taking good care of yourself and your health. This is not to say that children are simply or solely responsible for their own happiness or for their own good or poor health. It is, however, to place each individual child, and the conditions that will nurture their positive sense of self, at the centre of strategies to address and improve their physical and emotional well-being. As they grow we must support and empower children to respect, value and take good care of their bodies and minds, to seek out the services, information and advice that will help them to do so, and to believe that their health and happiness are important.
Childhood environments
The aspirations we have set out for childhood, built on the foundations of strong, loving personal relationships, within which each child develops their unique sense of self are, we believe, the common core of what makes for a good childhood for every child. Children’s lives and relationships do not, however, exist in a vacuum. Childhood takes place in a wide range of different virtual, social and physical environments, all of which can have a significant positive or negative impact in their own right. If we are to achieve the best possible childhoods for all children, we need to ensure that all the environments in which childhoods take place are organised and ordered to respect, support and nurture the individual child and the relationships that are most important to them. We have chosen to analyse and address these in six categories, or environments: law; home; community; state; society and economy. The diagram below is intended to show a simple representation of the relationships between the child’s self, developing in the context of their most important relationships, and the environments in which their childhood takes place.

Throughout children and young people’s evidence there are four key factors that are consistently cited as most significant in their experiences and treatment during childhood: balancing their protection and safety (both physical and emotional), with the freedom to be themselves, to take some risks and make some decisions for themselves; and feeling that they are treated with respect for who they are, and with sense of fairness. We have sought to consistently apply these principles to the aspirations we have to support good childhoods across all of the environments we have identified.

In the following sections, we have articulated our aspirations for childhood as far as possible in positive terms, in order to describe the situation that we believe should prevail for all children. We recognise that some of these aspirations may already describe the reality for some or many children in the UK, or indeed that current policies and systems within the UK may already partially or wholly meet with the aspirations. In other words, we are not trying to say that no child currently enjoys any of the conditions for a good childhood, rather to describe what we would want to be able to say for all children.

‘Supportive family that cares but gives you some freedom and trusts you.’
The ‘laws of the land’ create their own virtual environment in which all of our lives are lived, not only by creating rules about legally acceptable and unacceptable behaviours, but in the ways our laws define roles and relationships in society, and regulate systems and expectations of State agencies. Courts and tribunals are also a significant environment in which childhoods are shaped and affected by decision-making, ranging across courts’ roles in prosecutions, family law, settling civil disputes, and in their critical role in defending and enforcing individual rights and freedoms. While recognising that there are distinct and significant variations in laws and legal systems across the UK, we have sought here to establish a common set of aspirations for the ways in which the law should treat, define and support childhood in any of the four nations of the UK.

1. Children have the status in law of being a citizen of equal value and personal dignity to all others, protected from negative discrimination and less favourable treatment

This is not an aspiration to see children treated as adults, which can be a common misunderstanding, but rather the need for children to be recognised as people of equal individual significance and worth to all others in society and treated as such in all areas of life. The Children’s Society believes that the UN Convention on the Rights of Child embodies the legal and practical standards that would make real this aspiration of respect for the child as an equal citizen, and should be made directly enforceable in domestic legislation and courts.

The Children’s Society is committed to children’s equality with adults and recognises the many ways in which children can be discriminated against both in law and in everyday lived experiences. While there are many laws that have made provision for children’s rights and protection as individuals in some areas, in others continued and overt discrimination exists, for example in not assuring equal legal protection from assault.

‘I think treating people equally – because more people should be treated fairly.’
2. The positive role and responsibility of a parent in our society is clearly defined in law, as the basis for State duties to support and intervene in families

The Children’s Society believes that the role and responsibilities of a parent in our society are far too important to go without clear, positive legal definition. Outside of Scotland, and in most current legislation there is nothing to clarify in a useful way the positive duties of parents. Parenthood is predominantly covered by a range of ‘negative’ laws that only serve to sanction parental failings, for example failing to register a birth or to ensure their child receives an education. Children are dependent not only upon their parents, but are also necessarily dependent upon provision outside of their family to ensure that all their needs and rights are protected and provided for. Seeking a positive statutory basis for the role of a parent would provide the basis for greater clarity about the expectations of parents in relation to their children, of the State in relation to children and to parents, and the corresponding duties of State to support parents, and to intervene where needed on behalf of children. Critically, a clear legal basis for parenthood would give a clear message that caring for children is not a completely private affair, only to be interfered with when things go wrong, but that parenting is an important commitment to a child that needs to be positively supported and recognised by society and in law.

3. Consistency and clarity are brought to the ages at which children acquire different legal freedoms and responsibilities

There are currently many anomalies in law in relation to defining transitions from childhood to key aspects and societal markers of growing responsibility, independence and freedoms. For example, the ages of criminal responsibility, of 8 in Scotland and 10 in the rest of the UK, do not sit coherently or compatibly with legislation on consent to sexual activity, medical treatment, engagement in legally binding contractual agreements, buying alcohol or tobacco, paying tax, marriage, leaving education and training, and many other aspects of acquiring the rights, responsibilities and freedoms associated with transitions to adulthood. The Children’s Society is committed to the need to raise the age of criminal responsibility significantly, but also believes there is a need for a wider and more fundamental review of the rationales for and interactions between the wide range of ‘age-defined’ markers of childhood. The current situation is confusing for society at large, and for children and young people in particular, both in terms of how young people experience the legal framework and in how we collectively conceive of children and young people at different stages along what we might term the ‘childhood spectrum’.

‘The age of having legal sex and drinking at a legal age.’
4. All children have access to expert advice and representation when they need it, to ensure they can seek and secure legal justice

When the law is so significant in the many ways it can shape and protect childhood, it is essential that children are able to fully and appropriately participate in legal processes and to seek legal redress. Children are involved in and directly affected by legal processes in many different areas of their lives in family, civil and criminal law and the immigration and asylum systems. There are also instances in which children may need and want to initiate proceedings in law as any other citizen. We know from our work with disabled children, refugee children, children in trouble with the law and looked after children that their ability, both practically and financially, to access to representation and legal remedy is a cause for great concern. This aspiration would address not only children receiving legal advice and representation at critical points but also ensuring that children are supported through legal processes and developmental stages in a way that attends to their individual needs as children.
Home

Home, just like childhood, is a term that at first may appear to be commonly understandable, but upon exploration becomes more complex. A child’s home may most usually be a fixed site, private building or flat in which they live, but for some children they may have two or more such places that they consider their homes. For some children home may be geographically mobile, as part of a Traveller lifestyle and heritage, or for others they may live in a communal residence with more than one family sharing the same place. For yet other children who spend significant proportions of a year in a residential unit, treatment centre or school these may become the child’s effective home.

In addressing the environment of ‘home’ we aim to reflect the meaning and significance of home for children and young people when they refer to it in everyday usage – for example when going home after a day out, or having trouble at home. ‘Home’, therefore, is used here to refer both to the physical place where a child lives and sleeps on a routine basis, and the emotional significance, attachments and experiences they have within, and associate with, the place they call their home.

1. All children have a home that is stable, that provides the physical and emotional warmth, comfort and safety they need, with adequate room and resources for them to play and have fun

‘living in poor, depressing, bleak places[stops young people having a good life].’

A good home needs to meet basic material standards to be the kind of environment in which a happy, healthy childhood can be nurtured. These include the ‘absolute basics’ of being warm; structurally sound; secure; clean; equipped with adequate furniture and fittings for everyday living, such as beds, seating, cooker; and adequate in size to enable all family members to feel they have enough space to sleep, eat, live and play together without feeling oppressively cramped and overcrowded. For children this basic standard also includes having adequate resources for them to learn and play, as appropriate to their age, such as some toys, books, and so forth. For too many children in the UK today, this list of most basic everyday material needs in their home are still not met.

Many children also spoke of the disruption and significant emotional impact of moving home, particularly for those children whose experience was of multiple and regular changes of home arrangements. While for many families, moving home will be a positive and inevitable reality at times of life or career change, instability and regular or sudden changes in home and housing for children, and in particular the impact of family eviction and homelessness on children, need to be recognised as having a detrimental effect on children’s emotional well-being.
2. Home is a haven, where all members feel respected, and the inevitable disagreements and tensions that can come from living together are resolved in ways that strengthen rather than damage relationships.

A strong theme in children and young people’s evidence concerned their feelings about arguments and conflict at home getting in the way of a good childhood. Of course, when different individuals, however close their relationships, have to share, work and play together in the same space, there will inevitably be times of disagreement and tension, but it is essential to the love and strength of the relationships that mean most to children that disagreements and conflict at home should be minimised and resolved. The Children’s Society’s research and practice with runaways over many years lends further support to this theme from young people, and has shown how the escalating impact of problems and conflicts at home can lead some children and young people to feel driven to the extreme of leaving their home altogether. For most children and young people, their home will be with their parents or carers. For some older children, after the age of 16, home may no longer be with their family or carers but the place where they live on their own or with friends, or indeed they may have become the parent in a new family home themselves, but the same aspiration for home to be a physically and emotionally safe place for them is no less important.

Many people, both children and adults, may at times want or need help, practical advice, mediation or counselling in order to tackle problems at home, and to learn different ways of avoiding or resolving conflicts, easing tensions and restoring calm. The Children’s Society believes that such support should be widely available and encouraged in helping family households to cope with upsetting or unsettling changes, resolve problems and maintain an atmosphere of understanding, tolerance and peace for everyone’s emotional well-being.

‘What I would change is that my parents would never argue and always get along with each other.’

‘When trouble comes, you’ve got to work things out together.’

3. The boundaries and rules that children need at home are established and maintained in ways that are respectful and safe.

‘being able to be free in the choices they make and still have good discipline and feel safe and secure.’

The Children’s Society knows and believes that boundaries and rules are an important, normal and healthy part of life, and that it is also normal for children to misbehave and to test those boundaries at times. As adults we need to have a good understanding of children’s development in order to determine our responses to their behaviour and to set age-appropriate boundaries. In evidence to the Inquiry children told us that guidelines for behaviour and discipline were part of what makes for a happy home and family. Many also told us that they saw the value in having rules explained to them, being taught about right and wrong and what is expected of them. In keeping with The Children’s Society commitment to participation we aim to see children involved as much as possible in setting boundaries and rules, and in developing an understanding of the rules and their rationales. We also believe that parents should be able to seek practical information and advice to help them in learning and exploring methods for setting and maintaining boundaries and rules that meet the tests of being effective and being respectful of children.
4. The calm, stability, caring discipline and material standards to which we aspire for any child at home are exactly the same for any child who needs, for any reason, to be looked after by the State

The Children’s Society is committed to equal treatment and provision for all children, with regard to their right to a home environment. Our aspiration recognises the role of the State in providing care for children who are without parents or guardians who are able to provide it themselves. It is essential that children do not feel punished or neglected because of their family circumstances. Many children looked after in care have very poor experiences of care and are often subjected to multiple placement moves and environments in which they do not feel safe or supported.

‘You can’t have friends round in children’s homes – if you are going to call it a home it should be treated like a home and you should be able to invite friends… there are different rules for different children’s homes in the same area.’

5. Children who arrive in the UK, trafficked here or seeking asylum, and a long way from their usual home, are always offered a safe, caring home for however long they may stay here

In whatever circumstances they find themselves, and by whatever means or route they arrive here, The Children’s Society believes that all children should be treated and responded to as children first and foremost, regardless of immigration status or nationality. The current situation for many children arriving in the UK, and particularly those arriving alone and older children, is that they are often left for the most part to fend for themselves in hostels and bed and breakfast hotels or are removed from settled foster care arrangements at 16. Children living in asylum seeking families are equally in need of the same good basic material standards at home as any other child. Many children arriving here dream only of returning to the place they know as home if or when it may be safe for them to do so. While here, their home should be a place where they can feel safe, recover from traumatic experiences, and build a secure base on which to plan for their future, wherever that may be.
Community
Community

In talking about ‘community’ as an environment in which children experience their childhoods, we recognise and particularly focus here on children’s local geographical neighbourhoods as extremely significant, but also include the many other social communities in which children are members of networks that reach wider than their home and family – for example social communities based on ethnicity, lifestyle or faith, or social networks within the virtual environment of the internet.

1. Children are treated as equal and integral members of their communities

The Children’s Society’s belief in children’s equality and significance as people within our society leads to a particular desire to see this attitude towards them in their local communities in which they live and socialise.

We know from children and young people’s evidence that they often report feeling alienated and unwanted in their communities. Children responding to The Good Childhood® Inquiry reported a lack of positive interaction with adults in their communities and many reported feeling that their area does not care about children. The Children’s Society’s practical experience and principled belief is that children and young people learn about respectful relationships through feeling valued and respected themselves. Neighbourhoods and other social communities have, therefore, a major role to play in affecting children’s values and behaviours, based on how children experience community members’ attitudes and treatment towards them.

‘People thinking we are all the same e.g. a teenager might have been rude to someone, elderly, person etc. So they think we are all like that and then be rude to other teenagers.’

‘Adults look down on them, they group them together, give them no respect.’

2. Children’s and young people’s opinions and perspectives are influential in community debates and decisions

The Children’s Society believes strongly that children and young people should not only have a voice within their wider communities through facilitating children’s engagement in a wide range of local fora, but that they have many imaginative and valuable contributions and ideas to offer from which all community members can benefit. We would hope to see a widespread recognition that community decisions cannot claim to be anything other than partial if they have not been informed by the children who live in them.
3. An end to the use of restrictive and invasive measures that target children and young people on the basis of their age rather than their individual behaviour

The Children's Society is concerned about the increasing and indiscriminate emphasis in law, public policy and the media on children as perpetrators of crime and anti-social behaviour, and this concern was shared in much of the evidence from young people and other professional organisations. Over recent years it has been increasingly the case that children and young people congregating in groups are seen to be anti-social regardless of the behaviour that they are engaged in, and there is a presumption that young people gathering in a group or wearing ‘hoodies’ present a menacing threat. Yet children and young people say that they hang out in groups for their own safety or because they don’t have anything else to do, and because they want time and space away from organised activities. The Children’s Society believes it is essential that children learn about fairness by being treated fairly by our laws and within our communities. To treat all young people with suspicion, caution or control because of the behaviour of only a small minority, is simply not fair.

The Children's Society therefore believes that measures that penalise young people as a whole, or that are premised on negative presumptions about them should be repealed. This includes calling for an end to measures such as mosquito devices and dispersal orders that indiscriminately target children for being children.

‘The police are introducing more measures to tackle anti social behavior but often get the rong people like with this football card thing where you get a penalty for being in a large group.’

4. Children and young people have the freedom to use the spaces and resources of their community, to socialise together and be active participants within their community

‘Adults dont want you to play there – they are being unsocialable to us.’

This aspiration aims to ensure that children’s communities are places where they have the resources and spaces to play, socialise, explore and enjoy their friendships. This requires in particular the appropriate balance between sensible safeguards against exposure to undue significant dangers, such as fast traffic, or unlit spaces at night, and the vital freedoms children need increasingly as they grow. It requires not just investment in the facilities and opportunities for young people to occupy their leisure time, but the promotion and acceptance of the sights and sounds of children and young people socialising and playing in the public spaces and venues within their communities, which may in many communities require a significant shift in current attitudes.
5. Children are encouraged to take full advantage of the opportunities afforded by new technologies and the internet, in the knowledge that important safeguards are in place to prevent their exploitation and harm.

The Children’s Society recognises that new media technologies and the internet offer a range of extraordinary learning and global networking opportunities for all of society, not least children. We also recognise that these opportunities come accompanied by risks, and that there is a great deal of legitimate concern and fear amongst parents and other adults about children’s access to the internet and new technologies because of this. Just as in matters of play and the physical freedom to explore the world, The Children’s Society believes that adults need to strike a healthy balance in relation to children’s access to online communities and activities.

We need to balance the opportunities these new virtual and technological worlds provide to communicate and make friends, to learn from other people and for some children, to offset loneliness, with recognition that there are risks of bullying, harm and exploitation from strangers, and the potential for exposure to inappropriate, alarming and even traumatising material. The Children’s Society is greatly supportive of the conclusions and recommendations of the Byron Review to achieve this balance, and in particular the parallel drawn there between the approach to supporting and protecting children in relation to new technologies, and the approach parents and other adults would commonly take to ensuring children are kept safe and supervised in swimming pools to guard against drowning, while at the same time supporting children to learn to swim, and to be able to swim further and deeper on their own as their confidence and maturity grows.
State

In looking at the environment of the ‘State’ we recognise that the span of services, specialisms and different ‘arms’ of the State and its role in children’s lives is enormous, for example ranging from providing schools and health services, to child protection and policing crime and disorder. We also recognise the significant and increasing diversity of ways that State services and systems are designed and operated across the four nations of the UK. We have therefore sought here to articulate principles that are consistent with the key principles in children’s evidence, of respect, fairness, and the balancing of safety and freedom. We hope that they could serve to create shared aspirations and principles across local, regional, national and UK-wide statutory roles, rather than to make detailed or specific recommendations about each and every different ‘arm’ of State responsibilities.

1. All state services and systems make children feel welcome and safe, help them to understand what’s going on and enable them to influence decisions and practices involving them

Children and young people are service users, clients and customers, subjects, applicants, pupils and patients right across the majority of State services and agencies, whether in a targeted way, or as part of the wider population. It is essential that there is a consistent commitment to ensuring child-friendly and appropriate practices, including:
- the need for professionals and services to be focussed on children’s welfare and protection;
- to ensure safe and child friendly environments;
- to communicate in age-appropriate ways; and to ensure that children are asked and able to contribute their views about their own treatment and experiences, in decision-making and the development of services and practices. As part of making this aspiration a reality The Children’s Society’s believes that all children need to be able to make complaints and representations about the treatment and the services they receive, and to have independent support to take up their issues through complaints and representations processes.

2. No child is excluded or feels deterred from the services and help they need on the basis of who they are

This aspiration is intended to address all injustices of discrimination and prejudice amongst and between children and young people, including racism, sexism and gender stereotyping, homophobic bullying and discriminatory attitudes towards disabled people. The Children’s Society’s Just Justice research evidence showed widespread feelings that young people do not believe the police are there to help or protect them if they become a victim of crime, because of their age and their race. Our research has also shown that over a third of advocacy services were unable to offer a service to a child with communications impairments. Refugee children and families can be explicitly refused certain health services, or charged for them, under current policies. And we know that many Gypsy and Traveller children face harassment and ignorance in trying to access services and schools.
3. The assessment of children’s health, abilities, progress or problems is only done for their personal benefit in better meeting their needs, and always asks for children’s own assessment of their situation and what helps them

This aspiration is intended to address the pressures and sometimes counterproductive effects of testing and measuring children when it is done primarily to meet professional targets, interests and concerns rather than the needs of children themselves. It was clear from children’s evidence, for example, that pressures and anxiety about compulsory testing and the use of test scores to measure and compete in schools performance (league tables) were notable among children in England. This aspiration also presents a fundamental challenge to practices like putting asylum-seeking children through bone and teeth x-rays to try to answer Home Office doubts about their age rather than because they are needed for treatment.

The Children’s Society’s commitment to the voices of children and young people mean that we are committed to the principle that children’s own view and assessment of their own well-being and what positive or negative impact services and systems have had for them, should be at the heart of all attempts to measure and improve outcomes for children.

4. All children receive a stimulating education that supports, nurtures and encourages their development right across academic, vocational, sporting, social and emotional learning, and recognises and rewards their progress and achievements

Whether provided at home, in privately-funded schools or, as for the majority of children, within the State-funded sector, The Children’s Society aspires for every child to receive the highest possible quality of education, including an engaging, well-rounded and creative curriculum for learning, founded on an understanding of children’s capacities for learning and the flexibility to respond to their individual needs. We recognise the importance of qualifications as one of the most significant outcomes of learning for children as they grow older, but we believe that exam grades and qualifications must not be seen as the primary objective of children’s education, rather one of the markers of children’s growth, learning and achievements among many others.
5. Children participate in diverse and inclusive school communities, where they feel safe and respected as individuals, and they do not have to face personalised selection or social segregation in decisions about the school they attend

For most children, for most of their childhood, their school is the most significant social community to which they will belong and in which their childhood is profoundly shaped. In recognising the social significance of school for children, The Children’s Society therefore aspires for school to be a community that mirrors our organisation’s aspirations for wider society – namely to be one in which children feel valued themselves as individuals, mix with and learn about a wide diversity of different children and their families, and do not face barriers or less favourable treatment on the basis of their family circumstances, wealth, class, or any other judgements or assumptions about them at such an early and formative stage.

The Inquiry was very concerned about the evidence of a ‘postcode lottery’ effect within the current English system, where parents who are able to afford to move to be in a ‘good school’ area can have the knock-on effect of creating socially segregated ‘sink schools’ of the poorest children.

6. Children experience consistency in approaches to misbehaviour and resolving conflict across all state agencies and settings

This aspiration reflects The Children’s Society’s understanding that children learn through making mistakes, and that it is normal to expect children and young people at times to disagree, argue, misbehave, test boundaries. What is vital is to understand that it is how such behaviours are responded to that is critical to what children learn and how their behaviour develops.

The key principles that underpin this consistent approach are: explaining what’s wrong, and showing what’s right; committing to resolve disagreements and repair relationships affected by misbehaviour; using sanctions that are respectful of the child’s dignity and teach useful lessons; being concerned for the possibility that misbehaviour is a cry for help or a symptom of a behavioural or health problem; and showing the commitment to stand by and focus on the welfare of the child who has done wrong, however serious their wrong-doing, or however much their behaviour may be attempting to push people away.

‘Because when you do something bad, you feel sorry and guilty and ashamed.’
7. Essential State powers to use court intervention in families are used swiftly and effectively to protect children from harm, but in the context of an overall commitment to respect the freedoms of children and their families where such risk is not present

The Children’s Society is committed to the vital role and importance of State powers to use legal force to intervene in family life, but also to the parallel need to restrict the use of coercive powers to situations where such use of power is truly warranted for safeguarding a child’s welfare. It is an essential part of our collective responsibilities towards children that the State should have and decisively use the legal powers to remove and protect a child from harm. There are unfortunately still many cases and situations where our aspiration would be to see more children effectively identified and protected from the hidden harm they are experiencing in silence.

With the creation and extension of a wide range of recent powers to coerce and constrain individuals, including orders that can effectively force parents to accept helping services they have not used voluntarily, or curfew powers intended to keep children off the streets at night, there are many different areas in which it is to be questioned whether a new enthusiasm to use court intervention and State powers has lost sight of that critical balance of respecting the most fundamental individual and family freedoms - the freedom to decide for ourselves about our individual and family routines, associates, lifestyle and activities, so long as no-one is being harmed by them.

8. The State’s standards of care and legal obligations to any child who has to live away from the family home should be exactly the same regardless of what type of care it is, or the reasons for being there

Children may need to live away from home for a wide range of reasons, ranging from emergency care when a lone parent is seriously ill, to spending significant periods living in special educational or health centres; from being in foster care for protection from abuse, to being in criminal custody. The Children’s Society’s aspiration is that the State should act consistently and responsibly as a ‘corporate parent’ across all such settings. While recognising and retaining the different specialist nature of the diversity of types of placement a child may need, we believe that it is only fair to children that the kind of standards of care, procedures, legislative frameworks and safeguards that are put in place for them in one kind of care placement should be the same as for any other child living away from home.
9. The State actively goes to all possible lengths to prevent and avoid the necessity of depriving any child of their liberty, and takes proper care to protect and help the child who genuinely requires security

The Children’s Society has long held serious concerns about the detention of children right across immigration, justice and welfare systems. We believe that the State has not only the duty to take special care of any child detained, but a positive duty to have taken practical action to prevent the need for detention, whether by providing alternatives or by a much earlier investment in preventing the escalation of problems. The Children’s Society believes that with such a positive commitment, few children should ever face the genuine need to be held securely, and never for the purposes of immigration control.

10. Children and young people do not miss out on exciting activities and adventures because of excessive caution over potential risks to their safety

There are widespread concerns, many of which were shared within evidence to the Inquiry, about excessive risk aversion in the public sector, including the problematic impact of insurance costs and the ‘no win no fee’ claim culture, on the willingness of a wide range of agencies, such as schools, care homes or youth work schemes, to offer and organise activities, visits or holidays that may encounter some degree of identifiable risk to children. Of course reckless or negligent practice must be safeguarded against, but a financial or emotional desire on the part of professionals to eradicate all potential risks to children’s safety will be paid for by children being deprived of important, enlivening and learning experiences that they need and deserve.
Society
Society

While there are overlaps between the aspirations in both this and the ‘Community’ environment, we talk about and discuss ‘society’ here as a distinct environment in the sense of there being a wider shared experience and dimension in life at a ‘whole population’ level. This includes the built and natural environment in which we live, and aspects of our ‘national’ lives, such as our political systems and debates, the media and TV programming. This environment incorporates the idea of all members of society playing a part and having an impact on childhood, and incorporates the idea of ‘public space’ as an important environment in which childhood, as a social construct, is understood and experienced.

1. A society that understands adults to have a collective responsibility towards all children

The Children’s Society believes that all of us as adults are, in effect, the collective parent for the whole generation of our children and young people. Parents, carers and the State have many direct and specific responsibilities towards children, but we believe that even adults who are neither a parent themselves, nor working on behalf of the State, still have a particular and distinctive responsibility towards children over and above that they already have towards all fellow citizens. That distinctive responsibility towards children is to be conscious and mindful of how adult behaviour can positively or negatively influence children’s lives and learning, and to be similarly conscious of children’s safety, with a willingness to act to protect their welfare.

2. Children are viewed and treated as integral members of our society

‘Equal rights and equal opportunities children getting heard.’

This aspiration is another expression of The Children’s Society’s most fundamental belief in children as whole individual people of equal value and worth within society. In this area of ‘society’ in particular, achieving this aspiration will require us all to address the conception, perceptions of and attitudes towards children and young people that are held within our cultural and political life, and challenges many people’s view that a person only ‘joins society’ when they reach voting age and adulthood.
3. Children and young people are portrayed fairly, without negative stereotyping, and are referred to respectfully, across all forms of media, and public communications

The Children’s Society’s belief in children’s integral membership and equality in our society is the basis for our deep concern over the widespread cultural phenomenon of negativity about younger generations, sweeping characterisations and stereotypes about young people, and the use of offensive, insulting or belittling terms related to children. Recent observations from the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child also noted and expressed deep concern about attitudes in the UK towards children, and in particular teenagers.

‘To socialise and not to be discriminated against because we are young. We all are not thugs or vandals.’

4. Children have an equal and respected say in society’s debates and decisions about the built and natural environments in which we all live

Children and young people’s evidence demonstrated to us their awareness of, and care and concern for the world around them, and their strong feelings about the environmental impact of decisions today on the world they will inhabit long after many of today’s adults have passed on. This Vision for childhood is committed to children’s voices being heard and included as widely as possible. However at the societal level the case for children’s particular prominence in issues to do with the built and natural environment are perhaps particularly compelling because today’s children and young people will be even more affected for an even longer time to come by our society’s decisions than the adults in charge of the decision-making today. This included as widely as possible.
The Children’s Society believes in the importance and validity of children’s stories, views, passions, interests and creative talents playing a meaningful part within the cultural life of our society. Young people can share with us their talents and passion in drama or in making and playing the music they love, and it is similarly important that issues and events that are about children and young people, or have a significant impact on them, should feature in the news and issues that get discussed in our public life and environments. It is equally important, however, that this should be balanced with a commitment to protect children from the harmful glare of negative publicity, or over-exposure when they are too young to the pressures of being publicly known, famous or notorious. The Children’s Society is concerned about many issues of respect for children’s and families’ privacy in the public realm, and questions of appropriateness when children appear in the media, as well as recognising the positive importance of children and young people being visible participants and contributors to our society and our shared social and cultural life.
Economy
Economy

This environment recognises the fundamental significance of money, trade, work and commerce in having a profound impact on the conditions of children’s lives. In particular it recognises the direct and lasting human impact of material deprivation in children’s lives, but also seeks to recognise the many ways in which wider economic decisions and conditions, and the world of commerce, impact on children lives in other ways too.

1. In a society with more than enough wealth to go round, no child should suffer the indignity and damage of living in poverty

The unprecedented step, in 2000, of a government target to eradicate child poverty, and lift millions of children out of poverty, was a landmark commitment, and one that The Children’s Society would wish to see as a fundamental commitment for any Government that seeks to ensure the conditions for a good childhood for all. The Children’s Society’s is a founding member and continued committed supporter of End Child Poverty, and we believe it is essential to see that the investment and measures are taken to lift every single child out of poverty by 2020.

2. The inequalities between the wealthiest and the very poorest children and families in society are actively reduced

‘it is not fair that some people is rich and some are poor. No one help me and my family.’

This aspiration goes further than the commitment to simply alleviate poverty at the lowest levels of family income, to articulate the Children’s Society’s belief in the importance of collectively striving to achieve greater social and economic equality. We believe that achieving this aspiration will include needing to ensure that tax and welfare policies act fairly to support families, based on the principle of collecting from those who can afford it, proportionate to their ability to pay, and redistributing State resources to those who most need it.
3. Balancing young people’s empowerment and learning in paid work with their protection from exploitation and the priority on learning

Young people not only enjoy the experience of earning their own money, from as early as childhood paper rounds or washing neighbours cars, through to formal employment as they get older, but it can be an exciting and formative experience for them in which they learn and grow personally. It is essential however that our commitment to them as children leads us to ensure that they are not drawn away by paid work from opportunities to further their educational learning and achievements, and that they are not exploited financially as cheaper or less experienced employees.

4. Balancing children’s consumer rights and power with protection from aggressive or inappropriate marketing

Children and young people increasingly grow to be aware of their role and potential power as consumers in commercial markets. Many have strong views about different brands, and strong feelings about the ethics of buying different products, such as foods and eco-friendly products. Their commercial choices and preferences, for example in the clothes they choose, the leisure activities they enjoy with their friends, or music they prefer and buy, can be an important and meaningful part of them developing and expressing their sense of self. The Children’s Society aspires to see a balanced approach towards children’s involvement in and exposure to the consumer world, setting these potential benefits and opportunities in a context of ensuring safeguards against the intrusive and pressurising impact of pervasive advertising, especially when it targets young children and ‘pester power’ as a tool for increasing sales.
Further reading

Children’s views

Individual differences (between children)

Love and attachment

Parenting

Friendship and play

Romantic and sexual relationships

Parental separation
Dunn, J. (2008) Family relationships, children’s perspectives, One Plus One

Different family forms

Parental employment & time together as a family

Poverty & inequality


**Childcare**


**Learning/education**


Gardner, J (2005)(ed.) Assessment and Learning, Sage


Mayall B (2005) Children’s lives outside school and their educational impact. Primary Review Research Survey 8/1, University of Cambridge


**Adolescents/young people**

Adams, G. & M. Berzonsky (eds.) Blackwell handbook of adolescence


**Leisure activities & provision**

Balding, J. (2007) Young People Into 2007, Schools Health Education Unit


**Media**


**The commercial world**


Local environment

Misbehaviour and offending

Physical health, diet and exercise
British Medical Association (2005) Preventing childhood obesity
Centre of Social Marketing (2003) Review of research on the effects of food promotion to children, The University of Strathclyde

Alcohol and drug use
British Paediatric Association/Royal College of Physicians (1995) Alcohol and the Young, Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health
Moore T. et al. (2007) ‘Cannabis use and risk of psychotic and affective mental health outcomes: a systematic review’ The Lancet

Royal College of Psychiatrists/Royal College of Physicians (2000) Drugs: Dilemmas and Choices, Royal College of Psychiatrists

Mental health
**Well-being**


**Children’s rights, welfare and participation**


**Religion and spirituality**


**Maltreatment**


**Fatherhood**


O’Brien M (2005) Shared caring: bringing fathers into the frame, Equal Opportunities Commission