The Good Childhood Report 2025

Summary



The Children's Society



Introduction

The Good Childhood Report 2025 is The Children's Society's 14th annual report on the wellbeing of UK children and young people.

The Children's Society started its Good Childhood research programme, focusing on children's subjective wellbeing, 20 years ago, in 2005. Researching children and young people's subjective wellbeing means exploring what children and young people themselves feel about how their lives are going.

> "Wellbeing is how we're doing as individuals, communities and as a nation, and how sustainable that is for the future."
>
> **What Works Centre for Wellbeing**[1]

At The Children's Society, we measure children and young people's wellbeing annually in our own household survey, and we also report on other surveys that track children and young people's wellbeing. This is important so that we can paint a clear picture of what is happening with children and young people's wellbeing, including:

- what is it like now, and how it has changed over time
- what are the aspects that young people are unhappy with, or worried about
- how it is different for girls and boys.[2]

This year, we have also done something different, something new: we have consulted directly with a group of 10 Young Advisors, supported by our partner organisation Leaders Unlocked. The Young Advisors also helped us by gathering the views of a larger number of other children and young people. We have also consulted with professionals who work with, and for, children and young people. Young people and professionals helped us understand what is going on with children and young people's wellbeing, and what should happen so that these challenges can be addressed.

This report summarises the main findings from The Good Childhood Report 2025:[3]

- trends and latest figures in the subjective wellbeing of children in the UK based on the Understanding Society survey and our own household survey
- findings from the consultations with children and young people
- findings from the consultations with professionals.

The solutions to the challenges shared by both young people and professionals helped us develop our policy recommendations. An overview of these recommendations is presented in this report, with the details set out in our separate publication, **Reclaiming Hope in a Changing World: Policy Recommendations**.[4]

[1] What Works Centre for Wellbeing, n.d.
[2] The Good Childhood Report 2025 is only able to present binary gender analysis and so, in this report, 'gender' refers to binary gender (female and male). For more information, see The Good Childhood Report 2025, Chapter 1.
[3] See The Good Childhood Report 2025.
[4] The Children's Society, 2025a.

Trends in children's subjective wellbeing over time

The Good Childhood Report 2025 looked at how children responded to the Understanding Society survey to understand how wellbeing is changing over time, looking at all children, and by gender.

Source:

Understanding Society (UK Longitudinal Household Survey)[5]

Understanding Society is a large survey that includes thousands of households that it follows over a long period of time.[6] The sample is selected to be representative of the wider UK population, so that the findings provide a good picture of people's lives and experiences.

Adults and a sample of 10- to 15-year-olds who live in their households are interviewed every year.[7] **In the latest survey, in 2022/23 (wave 14), 1,623 children completed the youth questionnaire.**

Understanding Society asks 10- to 15-year-olds in the UK how they feel about:



Life as a whole



Family



Friends



Appearance



School

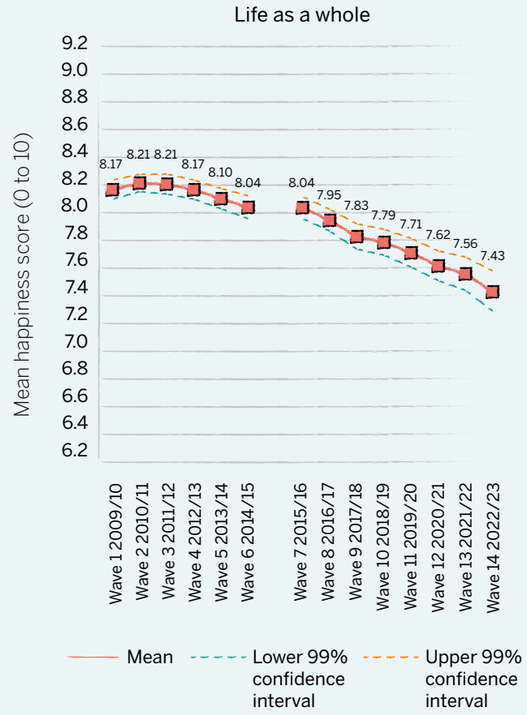


Schoolwork

[5] For further details, see understandingsociety.ac.uk/.
[6] This is called a longitudinal study.
[7] A small number of 9- and 16-year-olds were also included in some waves and are also captured in the analysis presented in The Good Childhood Report 2025.

Understanding Society asks children how happy they are with their **life as a whole**. As shown in Figure 1, **children's happiness with their life as a whole has declined:** their average happiness score was significantly lower in 2022/23 than when the survey started in 2009/10.

Figure 1: Trends in children's happiness with their life as a whole.



Source: University of Essex, Institute for Social and Economic Research. (2025). Understanding Society: Waves 1-14, 2009-2023 and Harmonised BHPS: Waves 1-18, 1991-2009. [data collection]. 19th Edition. UK Data Service. SN: 6614, DOI: doi.org/10.5255/UKDA-SN-6614-20.

Understanding Society also asks children how happy they are with five specific aspects of their life: their **family, friends, appearance, school, and schoolwork.**[8] In 2022/23, **their average happiness scores for these five measures were also all significantly lower than when the survey began.**

For the first time, this included a significant decline in children's happiness with their family, though this was still the aspect of life that children were on average most happy with.

They were, on average, **least happy with their schoolwork**; this is a new observation for 2022/23.[9] There has also been a particularly **steep decline in children's average happiness** related to the two school-based measures, **school and schoolwork**, compared to the previous wave.

Gender

When looking at gender differences in the latest wave, **girls were significantly less happy on average than boys with their life as a whole, family, appearance, and school.**

The aspect of life that the **largest proportion of girls was unhappy with**[10] was **their appearance** (21.2%).[11] **For boys,** the aspects of life they **were most commonly unhappy with** were the two school-related measures, **schoolwork** (13.2%) **and school** (12.7%).[12]

Looking at changes in wellbeing over time, **girls' average scores were significantly lower across all six measures** in the latest dataset **compared to when Understanding Society started** in 2009/10. **For boys, this was the case when looking at five out of the six measures – excluding family**, which has remained broadly stable when comparing the first to the latest waves.

[8] The means presented in The Good Childhood Report 2025, The Good Childhood Report 2024 and The Good Childhood Report 2023 differ slightly from those presented in previous Good Childhood Reports (up to and included The Good Childhood Report 2022), due to a change of approach to the weights provided in the Understanding Society datasets available from the UK data service. See The Good Childhood Report 2023 for more detail.
[9] In almost all previous survey waves children had been least happy with their appearance.
[10] Children are considered to be unhappy when they scored below the midpoint of the scale (0 to 4 out of 10) on specific measures.
[11] The proportion of girls unhappy with their appearance was double that of boys (9.3%).
[12] The proportions of girls who were unhappy with their school and schoolwork were higher than the proportions of boys, with 17.2% of girls unhappy with their school and 16.7% with their schoolwork.

Most recent findings on children and young people's wellbeing, 2025

The Children's Society's annual household survey 2025 offers a very recent snapshot of the subjective wellbeing of 10- to 17-year-olds in the UK.

Source:

The Children's Society's annual household survey

Our surveys include a minimum of 2,000 UK children and young people aged 10 to 17, and a parent or carer for each, every year. The children and young people who take part in the survey are selected to match the UK population.[13]

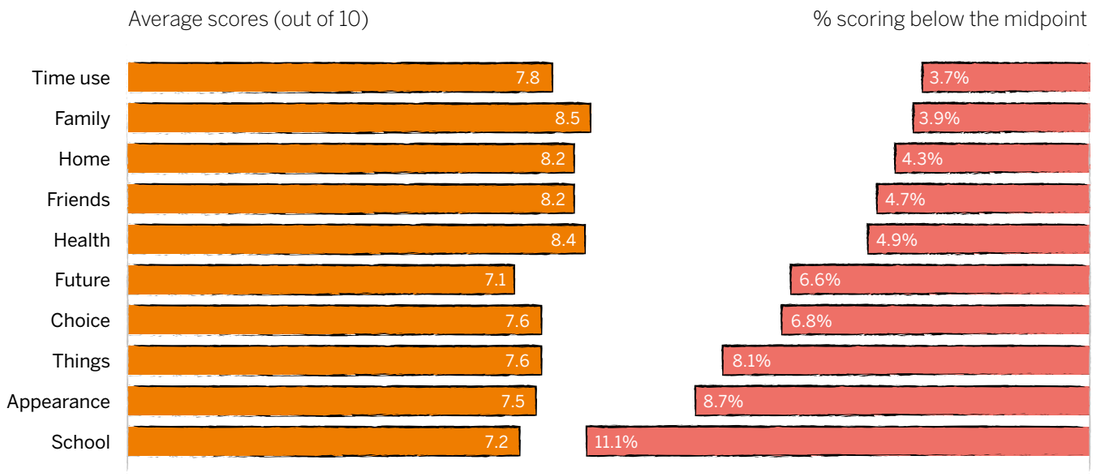
In 2025, 2,007 children and young people took part in the survey, in April to June.

The Good Childhood Index

This survey includes the **Good Childhood Index (GCI)**, which asks children and young people **how happy they are with 10 different aspects of their life**, shown in Figure 2.[14]

- **In 2025, children and young people were, on average, most happy with their family**.
- The area of life that children and young people were **most commonly unhappy with was school**, followed by appearance.[15]

Figure 2. Latest figures from the Good Childhood Index.



Source: The Children's Society's household survey, wave 24, April to June 2025, children and young people aged 10 to 17, UK, weighted data. Excludes missing responses (including 'prefer not to say').

[13] Participants are selected based on four criteria: their age, gender, the region or country of the UK that they live in, and their household's socio-economic group (based on the social grade of the main income earner in their household).
[14] The Good Childhood Index was developed by The Children's Society and is made up of 10 single-item domain measures which ask children about their happiness with specific aspects of life, as well as a multi-item measure of overall life satisfaction. For further information, see The Good Childhood Report 2025.
[15] Children are considered to be unhappy when they scored below the midpoint (0 to 4 out of 10).

In terms of the GCI's measure of overall life satisfaction,[16] in 2025, **9% of children and young people who took part in our survey had low wellbeing.**[17]

The proportions of children and young people with low life satisfaction and who were unhappy with the 10 aspects of life included in the GCI were slightly smaller this year than in previous years; it is not clear why that is.[18]

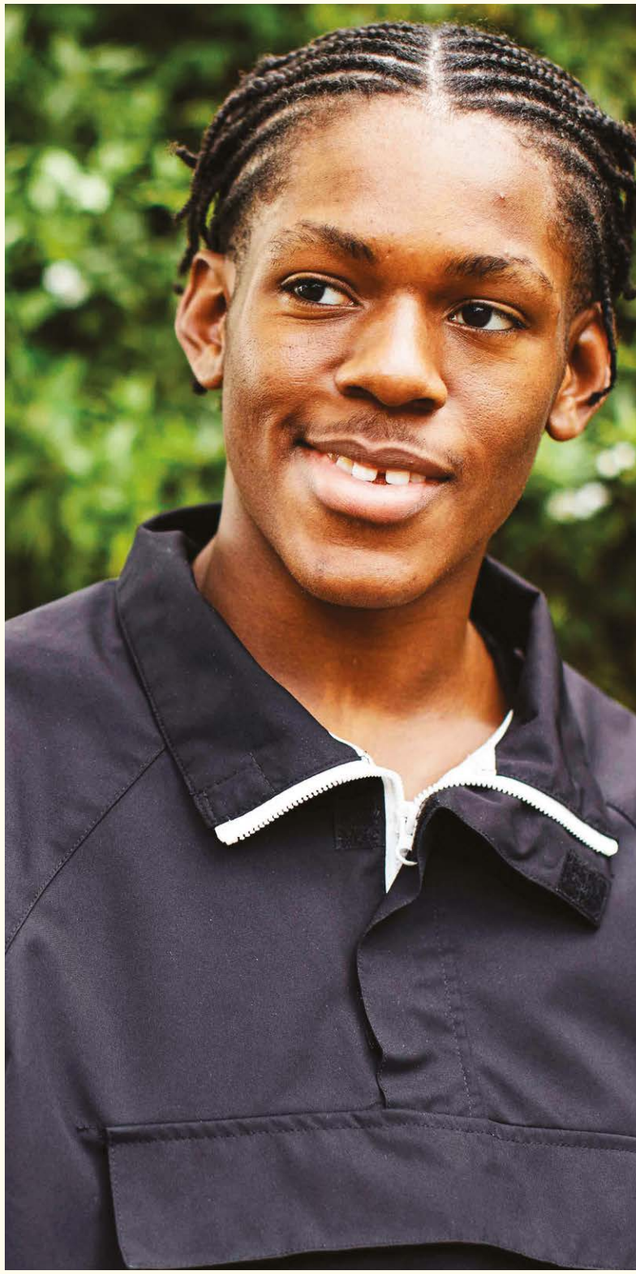
Children and young people's views about aspects of life important to their own future

In every alternate Good Childhood Report since 2019, our household surveys have included a question asking children and young people how important they feel that seven aspects of life are for their own future. These were:

- getting good grades at school/college
- being able to go to university if you want to
- being able to find a job
- having enough money
- having somewhere to live
- your mental health (e.g. your mood, thoughts, emotions)
- your physical health (e.g. your body).

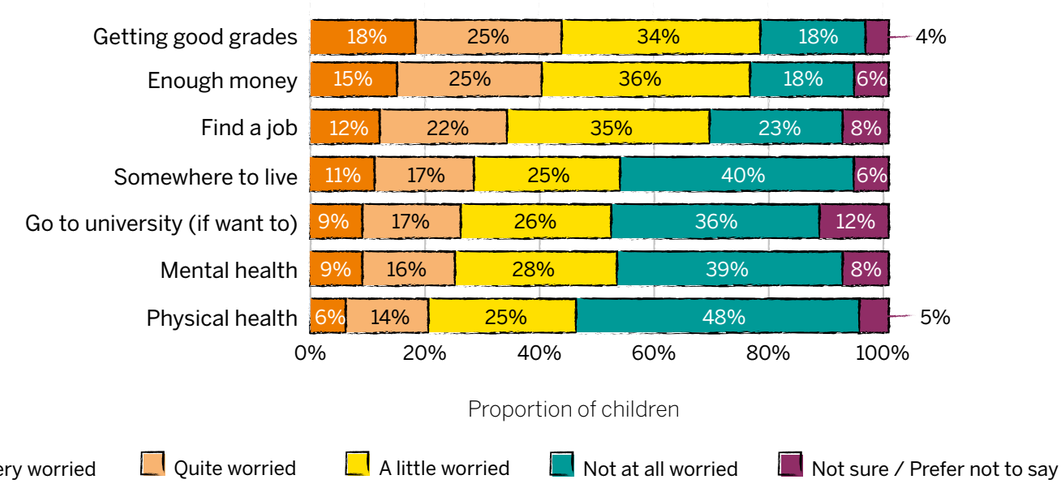
What children and young people rated as most important for their future in 2025 was **having somewhere to live** (75% rated this 'very important').

Children and young people were then asked how much they worried about this same list of seven items. As shown in Figure 3, what worried children and young people the most was **getting good grades at school or college**. This is the first time that has been children and young people's top worry.[19]



[16] This is based on responses to a multi-item measure of overall life satisfaction, based on Huebner's Student Life Satisfaction Scale. See: Huebner, 1991.
[17] Children and young people were identified as having low wellbeing they scored below the midpoint (scoring 0 to 9 out of 20).
[18] Some presentational changes were introduced to our household survey this year; however, a pilot survey and a comparator survey were conducted in advance, which indicated that these formatting changes were unlikely to affect the way that respondents answer these questions. See The Good Childhood Report 2025, Appendix C. These smaller proportions could, ostensibly, suggest that wellbeing has improved over the last year. However, some methodological points are important to bear in mind when assessing the significance of this finding: our household surveys not being longitudinal and therefore not strictly designed for year-on-year comparisons; it being unlikely that children's wellbeing would have improved on all 10 measures; differences in findings, but also in coverage, with Understanding Society; and a suggested improvement in wellbeing being unexpected in terms of the wider context and evidence base. Those considerations are detailed in The Good Childhood Report 2025, Chapter 2.
[19] In our previous surveys, in 2023, 2021 and 2019, the top worry had been having enough money, followed by being able to find a job. See The Good Childhood Reports 2019, 2021 and 2023.

Figure 3. Extent of children and young people's worry about their own future.



Source: The Children's Society's household survey, wave 24, April to June 2025, children and young people aged 10 to 17, UK, weighted data.
Note: Percentages for each item may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

Children and young people's worries about issues in society

Children and young people were also asked how much they worried about nine broader issues in society. These issues were:

- the environment
- levels of unemployment
- the amount of crime
- online safety
- homelessness
- inequality
- new illnesses / pandemics
- refugee and migrant crisis
- rising prices.

In 2025, **rising prices was the issue worrying children and young people the most,** with 40% being 'very' or 'quite' worried about this. This was by followed by **crime** (38%).[20]

[20] The issue that children and young people were least commonly worried about in 2025 was homelessness (28%). Rising prices had also been children and young people's top worry in 2024 and 2023; see The Good Childhood Reports 2023 and 2024.

Understanding 'why': What is affecting children and young people's wellbeing?

Source:

Evidence from the Good Childhood research programme

To prepare for the consultations we held with young people and professionals, we reviewed the evidence from previous Good Childhood Reports on key themes and trends in children and young people's subjective wellbeing.

This helped us identify the main recurrent, or emerging, challenges for children and young people's wellbeing. It also highlighted where hearing from young people and professionals was the most needed to help us understand what is behind the survey data.

Key learning from the Good Childhood research programme[21]

Decline in children's wellbeing

- Each annual Good Childhood Report since 2017 has shown a significant decline in children's wellbeing.[22] This remains the case regarding the latest data, collected in 2022/23.

Low wellbeing

- An important proportion of children and young people have low subjective wellbeing overall, with almost one in 10 (9%) of the 10- to 17-year-olds who completed The Children's Society's household survey this year identified as having low life satisfaction.
- Low wellbeing is associated with a range of different experiences, like financial struggles, feeling unsupported by family, having no friends, or having been bullied at school.

Concerns about girls' wellbeing

- In the two latest Understanding Society datasets (2021/22 and 2022/23), girls were on average significantly less happy than boys with their life as a whole, their appearance, family, and school.

Unhappiness with school and appearance

- Our annual household surveys highlight school as the area of life that children and young people (aged 10 to 17) are most commonly unhappy with, and the latest Understanding Society data (2022/23) showed a steep decline in children's (aged 10 to 15) happiness with school.
- Meanwhile, appearance features as the aspect that children are most commonly unhappy with in Understanding Society, with this trend largely driven by girls' unhappiness with their appearance.

[21] For more detail, including full references to our previous research, see The Good Childhood Report 2025, Evidence Review section.
[22] Each year these trends are based on the latest Understanding Society survey wave, compared to when the survey started in 2009/10.

Children and young people's views: What is happening with children's wellbeing?

The Good Childhood Report 2025 presents insights shared by children and young people in consultations. These insights enabled us to understand the reasons behind the patterns and recurring themes that our reports show. Young people also helped us examine what solutions are needed to address these challenges, so children and young people's wellbeing can be improved.

Source:

Young Advisors and consultations with children and young people

The Children's Society worked in partnership with Leaders Unlocked to establish a group of 10 Young Advisors who worked with us between March and September 2025. They were aged 13 to 17, come from various locations across England and have varied backgrounds and experiences.

The Young Advisors also ran consultations with 105 children and young people, to collect the views of a larger number of children and young people.[23] An additional 40 young people, including some who are supported by services provided by The Children's Society, participated in a separate consultation.[24]

In total, 155 children and young people took part in the consultations.

A number of key themes, linked with each other, came out of the consultations with young people.[25]

Relationships with self and others

Young people highlighted **how important the way they feel about themselves is to their wellbeing**. They shared that this can be negatively impacted by several factors, which in turn also affect how young people behave towards each other. These factors include:

- **Societal expectations and perceived standards**

> "There is a standard being pushed of what everyone should look like and that plays a big role with satisfaction if you don't feel like you meet that."

- **Peer pressure and bullying**

> "Unkind relationships between many students, students feel peer pressure to fit in which leads to large friendship groups who make fun of others."

- **Adults not always understanding young people**

> "Adults often misunderstand young people. They might think someone is being rude or lazy, but that person could be feeling stressed or sad. This shows that better communication between adults and young people is really important for wellbeing as they could be massively influential to a young person's life."

[23] The peer consultations took place either in an education or youth work setting, or with other networks of young people facilitated by Leaders Unlocked. Additional details are provided in The Good Childhood Report 2025. The Children's Society would like to thank the schools, colleges and youth clubs that kindly took the time to support the Young Advisors in delivering their peer consultations.
[24] We are grateful to the young people who shared their views as part of the Have Your Say – Cheltenham Young People consultation exercise, which took place in June 2025. The methods used to gather the views of these young people were similar to that of the consultations conducted by the Young Advisors, however, this consultation was led by adults. See The Good Childhood Report 2025 for more detail.
[25] In this chapter, we use the term 'young people' to refer to all children and young people involved in the different strands of consultations.

A key point that young people raised was the **positive difference that adults can make if they are there for young people** when they need them, having established a relationship of trust with them.

School

Young people felt that **school can be stressful and a source of pressure**. In particular, they spoke about how **workload and academic demands** can, at times, turn into overwhelming pressures for young people. They described a school system that is over-focused on academic achievement, and said that this contributed to some students feeling unhappy or as though they did not belong at school:

> "If you're not seen as achieving... you're not belonging."

They felt that schools should be a place where they should be able to access support with their wellbeing when they need it. They emphasised the difference that school staff can make when they are there for young people when they need it to offer support, but they shared that overall, **support is not always available at school when they need it**.

The community

Young people reflected that they could feel isolated from their wider community. They said that **they did not always have the opportunities and spaces to socialise safely** in their communities. They spoke about the importance of spaces that feel safe to them, which they described in the following way:

> "[A safe space is] knowing you are welcome and you don't have to leave."

They felt that this was linked with, and contributed to, them **relying more on digital interactions** instead, in search of a sense of community, connection, and belonging.

Negative messaging

Young people spoke about all types of media with nuance. They spoke about negative content that they are confronted with online and in particular on social media, but they emphasised that **negative messaging or content that has an impact on their wellbeing is not limited to social media** or the digital world:

- They shared how being **exposed to a constant stream** of mainstream news as well as digital content can feel overwhelming.
- They also highlighted that **negative messaging about young people, in particular teenagers,** impacts their experiences in their community as well as how they feel about themselves.

Feelings about society, the future and ability to improve things

Overall, **young people felt that their generation has so much to worry about**, including being able to afford things**,** and **limited power to change things for the better**:

> "If [young people] can't afford things it also means they'll miss out on opportunities, and will feel left out, including from sharing memories together with their friends. The more a person socialises the better they feel, and they can share their feelings, but if they haven't got that opportunity because they can't afford it..."

> "A lot of people say there are so many opportunities ahead of you, but still a lot of young people worry about the future."

While they said that **most young people do want to be active in changing things for the better,** some young people queried whether their voices would even be taken into account.

The Children's Society did ensure that young people's voices were taken into account: their hopes and aspirations formed the backbone of our recommendations to Government for the change that is needed. These calls for change are reflected in our separate publication, **Reclaiming Hope in a Changing World: Policy Recommendations**,[26] and summarised in the **Recommendations** section of this report.

Young people overwhelmingly told us that they needed better support from adults to:

- increase their **opportunities to connect** with other young people and their wider community
- have an **equal chance to thrive** in school
- belong to a **society that includes and represents them better**.

The Children's Society is extremely grateful to the Young Advisors who worked with us on this project, and to all the children and young people who shared their views in consultations in the hope of improving all young people's wellbeing.

[26] The Children's Society, 2025a.

Professionals' views: How can we improve children's wellbeing?

We also gathered insights from a broad range of professionals who work with children and young people. We consulted with them on the issues that they feel impact children and young people's wellbeing, as well as what they see are barriers and enablers to solutions that would help reverse the decline in children's wellbeing.

Source:

Consultations with professionals

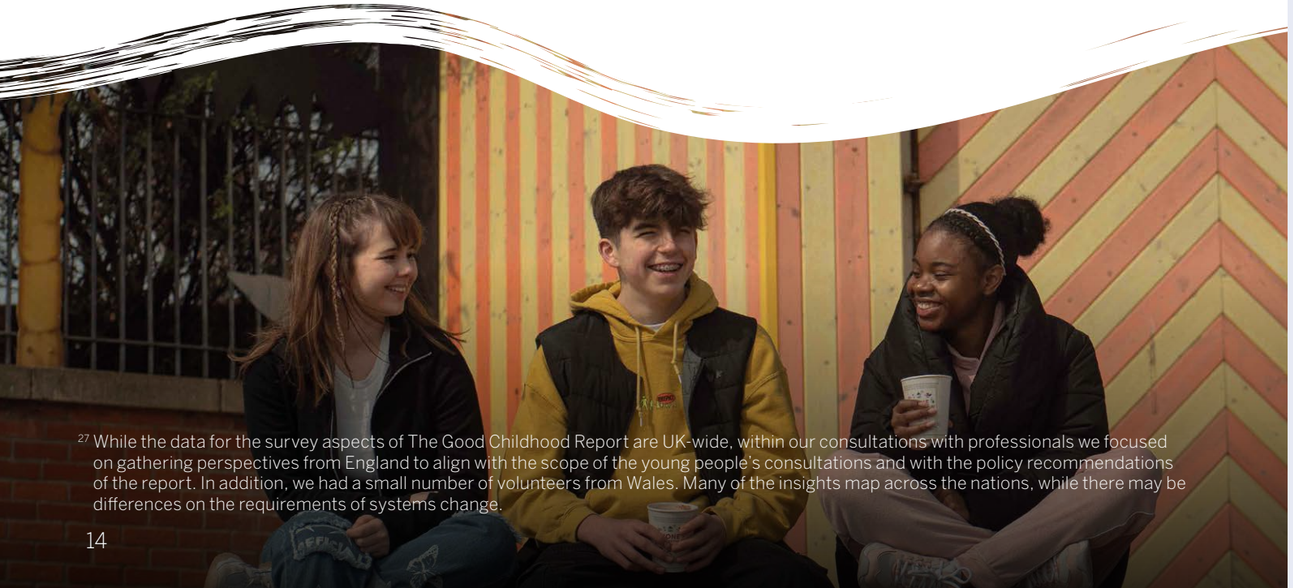
The views of a range of professionals were gathered through a survey and a series of consultations between April and June 2025. We worked with practitioners from across The Children's Society as well as others in the sector working across education, youth work, the third sector, mental health support services, and others across England and Wales.[27]

We collected insights from 142 professionals via a survey, and then conducted group insight-gathering and workshops with 114 professionals and one-to-one conversations with 12 professionals. **In total, we consulted 247 individual professionals**.

When professionals spoke about the reasons why they felt children and young people experienced low wellbeing, they raised a number of issues that they believed were linked in multiple and complex ways. One phrase we heard many times from professionals was:

"It takes a village to raise a child."

This phrase was important because it sums up the underlying theme we heard from professionals: they felt **a loss of a sense of community**, and with it **a loss of collective responsibility for children and young people's wellbeing**. They explained that this contributed to young people experiencing low wellbeing in the first place, and also made it more difficult to address the things that could lead to low wellbeing for children and young people.



[27] While the data for the survey aspects of The Good Childhood Report are UK-wide, within our consultations with professionals we focused on gathering perspectives from England to align with the scope of the young people's consultations and with the policy recommendations of the report. In addition, we had a small number of volunteers from Wales. Many of the insights map across the nations, while there may be differences on the requirements of systems change.

Issues affecting children and young people's wellbeing

Professionals' insights highlighted common issues affecting children and young people's wellbeing.

Increased pressure on the household and family unit

Professionals witnessed the impact of these pressures on children and young people, for example as a result of **increasing levels of poverty**, **poor housing** and a **lack of access to external help and support**.

> "The home becomes this horrible pressure cooker."
>
> Interview respondent

Children and young people being isolated

Professionals spoke about a **lack of a variety of safe adults and safe spaces** in the community that could support young people with maintaining good wellbeing, or help when their wellbeing was low.

> "There are so few contexts for an adult to build to a trusted relationship, a dialogue and empathy with a young person."
>
> Interview respondent

Lack of support and flexibility within systems

Professionals spoke about a **lack of universal and early support services** for children and young people. They also felt that a **lack of flexibility within systems** for children and young people that, on the contrary, had **increasing levels of control** also contributed to low wellbeing.

> "[they] are in crisis, but their issues are not understood holistically... we need a more holistic intersectional approach, a joined-up approach and thinking."
>
> Interview respondent

Gap between expectations and realities, and lack of hope for the future

Professionals saw a **growing gap between young people's expectations and their lived realities**. This was viewed as the result of things like:

- **pressure to achieve at school** or college
- the **pros and cons of the digital world** and social media
- a **sense of reduction in the options and opportunities** for children and young people to make change in their own lives and in wider society.

They felt these things led to a **worrying lack of hope for the future** that they saw in many of the children and young people they worked with.

> "Young people are anxious about not meeting the expectations put on them."
>
> Workshop respondent



What does 'the village' look like?

When discussing solutions to the challenges they spoke about, professionals talked about the importance of **holistic, community-focused support: the return of the 'village to raise a child' mentality**.

Professionals repeatedly spoke of the need for **balance**:

in responsibility: making sure that the wellbeing of children and young people is not seen as any one person or organisation's responsibility; that instead it should be everyone's business

in consistent and personalised support: making sure that support is consistent, to avoid postcode lotteries where the support young people get is dependent on where they live; that instead support should be tailored for individual children and families, based on an understanding of their own specific context



in empowerment and avoiding burden: making sure that children and young people are empowered with high aspirations, but that they define those aspirations themselves and do not feel pressured

in educational focus: making sure that young people have the skills required to do well in a future career, while seeing school as an opportunity to prepare them now and for the future

in media regulation: making sure that young people can forge their own path and make the most of connectivity, hope and learning through the media, including social media, while at the same time making sure that content across all media channels is safe and avoids feeding into children and young people's worries and fears.

The challenges facing young people are multiple, complex and constantly changing. It is imperative that the system, and wider society itself, is better equipped so that professionals across the country are resourced and supported, to enable young people to thrive.

Together with the insights from children and young people, **the findings from our consultations with professionals have helped us develop policy recommendations**, presented in the **Recommendations** section below and detailed in **Reclaiming Hope in a Changing World: Policy Recommendations**.[28]

The Children's Society thanks all the professionals who shared their experiences and insights with us in the hope of mapping out a better tomorrow, where all children and young people feel happy about their lives.

[28] The Children's Society, 2025a.

Discussion: Reflections on findings

The Good Childhood research programme is 20 years old this year, and it is inexcusable that we are unable to report improvements in children and young people's subjective wellbeing.

The latest Understanding Society data **once again shows a decline in children's wellbeing**, with children's average happiness for all six of its measures the lowest ever recorded.

While survey data enables us to measure and quantify trends and patterns in children's wellbeing, it does not explain ***why*** we see these trends.

The consultations with children and young people gave us a richer picture of what they feel affects children's wellbeing, based on their direct experiences. The Young Advisors and the other children and young people who shared their views represented a variety of characteristics and experiences. Their collective insights helped us understand more about why children and young people respond to wellbeing questions in the way that they do, and what needs to change so that these declining trends are reversed.

Similarly, **consulting with a range of professionals who work with children and young people**, within The Children's Society and externally across the children's sector, allowed for an additional lens to help us better understand the issues affecting children's wellbeing. This also helped us identify common barriers and solutions that these professionals encounter in their work when aiming to improve children's wellbeing.

Key findings from survey data and consultations

An important observation from our work on **The Good Childhood Report 2025** is **how much the survey data, the insights from young people, and the insights from professional resonated with and complemented each other**, allowing us to develop a more detailed picture of the different factors that impact how children and young people feel.

School

Education remains a worry for many children and young people. This is seen in survey data, with:

- **schoolwork** as the aspect of life that children were **least happy with** on average (Understanding Society, 2022/23)
- a particularly **steep decline in children's happiness with both their schoolwork and school** (Understanding Society, 2022/23)
- **school** as the aspect of life that children and young people were **most commonly unhappy with** (The Children's Society's household survey 2025)
- **getting good grades** at school or college being children and young people's **top worry for their future** (The Children's Society's household survey 2025).

These results were echoed by both children and young people and professionals in consultations, who provided more context for how young people may feel about school:

- Both groups talked about the **pressures that the school environment can represent for children and young people**, in particular in terms of **expectations of academic achievement**.
- **Young people also spoke about issues with peer pressure and bullying**.
- Both young people and professionals felt that children and young people would benefit from there being more focus on wellbeing at school, for example **having dedicated personal, social, health and economic (PSHE)[29] teachers and giving more focus on learning for life** within the curriculum.

Happiness with appearance and gender differences

Issues related to children and young people's happiness with their appearance were also both identified in survey results and frequently raised in consultations:

- Looking at survey data, **appearance remains the aspect of life that children were most commonly unhappy with** (Understanding Society, 2022/23). This particularly affects girls: in all survey waves, girls have been less happy than boys with their appearance, and in the latest dataset, **over double the proportion of girls than boys were unhappy with how they looked.**
- Young people and professionals **frequently mentioned body image** in consultations. They emphasised **the impact that some of the content that children and young people are exposed to** has on their happiness with how they look, particularly for girls. They spoke about the impact this has on how they feel, and about the pressure to conform to expectations.

Survey data shows that differences in subjective wellbeing between girls and boys are not limited to their appearance: girls were also significantly less happy than boys with their life as a whole, their family, and school (Understanding Society, 2022/23).

Financial worries

Unsurprisingly given the current economic context, our research has found that **children and young people worry about money matters**. This is important, as evidence shows that experiences of financial strain are associated with increased likelihood of having low life satisfaction.[30] Findings from survey data and consultations detail these worries:

- Survey results showed that **rising prices remained children and young people's top worry** in society (The Children's Society's household survey 2025).
- Young people reflected on this topic in consultations, feeling that **financial difficulties should not be something that children and young people have to worry about**. They commented on how they might lead to children and young people **missing out on opportunities** that their friends can afford, and talked about how this can impact their wellbeing.

The community

While not a topic that can easily be captured in surveys, both young people and professionals spoke in consultations about the **impact of the loss of a sense of community on children and young people's wellbeing**:

- They both highlighted the **need for a wider variety of safe spaces for children and young people to have the opportunity to connect in their communities**, both with other young people and with trusted adults.
- In particular, while young people spoke about **digital spaces as important spaces for children and young people to meet, socialise and engage in collective activities**, they also felt that there was a need to create **more alternatives to online spaces** for children and young people. This was especially as **they often felt unwelcome in public spaces** or had no access to spaces created specifically for them.

[29] This is now called relationships, sex and health education (RSHE), however, we have used the language that the young people used in the consultations.
[30] See The Good Childhood Report 2024.

- Professionals too spoke about young people, in particular teenagers, being **pushed out of public spaces**. Professionals also felt that the loss of a sense of community meant that households had **less access to support networks** when they faced issues.

Support

Throughout the consultations, young people and professionals both frequently discussed **the importance of support being available for children and young people when they need it**:

- Young people wanted **better support in place**, including in their **school** environment, with staff that they felt comfortable with and that they could trust.
- Professionals spoke about **systemic issues**, like the lack of universal services, long waiting lists for available support, and the lack of flexibility within systems to accommodate to children's individual needs.

Pressures piling up, now and for the future

While survey data measures how much children and young people worry about specific things, now and for their future, in consultations young people said that they felt like their generation has so much to worry about. Both young people and professionals also spoke about how young people feel, both now and about the future:

- Young people felt that **worries keep "piling up",** and that **adults did not always understand them** or their experiences.
- They also felt a disconnect between a sense – and being told – that they have many opportunities ahead of them, and at the same time, feeling **a real sense of worry for their own futures, and the future of the world**.
- This sense of worry for children and young people's future was also witnessed by the professionals we consulted with.
- Professionals and young people both highlighted the importance of **sustaining children and young people's hope for their future aspirations**, and to **empower them** so they can meaningfully engage in making their own future, and that of wider society, better.

What next?

Sadly, some of the young people in the consultations queried whether there was any point in sharing their views about how children's wellbeing could be improved; they felt that their ability to change things remained limited. **Hope is important to children and young people's sense of wellbeing, and yet not all young people are hopeful that their voices will matter**.

The Children's Society is committed to listening to children and young people. In this year's report, we have done this in different ways, using both larger-scale quantitative datasets and more in-depth qualitative consultations with young people and professionals. This allowed for deeper insights into what is going on for children and young people.

But, we have not just collected young people's insights to understand more about the challenges they are facing; we also want to address these challenges. And so, **the solutions shared by both young people and professionals were integral to the development of our policy recommendations**, presented in the next section and detailed in our separate publication, **Reclaiming Hope in a Changing World: Policy Recommendations**.[31]

[31] The Children's Society, 2025a.



Ambition for the future

Children and young people continue to pay the price for a lack of ambitious and decisive action. The complex and rapidly changing world continues to present ever-growing challenges that are contributing to the ongoing decline in children and young people's wellbeing. Failing to respond to these challenges will result in the concerning trends and insights highlighted in this report continuing – risking generations of young people being let down. Each statistic of low life satisfaction or unhappiness is a young person's childhood, one that they only have one chance at. An intention has been set out to lower the voting age, a welcome step forward in enabling young people's voices to be heard.[32] But we don't have to wait until then, and we shouldn't restrict their voices to the ballot box. This report has shown how young people's lives are lived and experienced, and their views on the challenges they face. Collectively, we must listen to them now.

Overturning the ongoing decline in children and young people's wellbeing cannot be achieved with one singular solution or policy initiative. Young people have told us that it requires bold systemic change to eliminate inequalities in our society, and it also requires a personal and heartfelt approach at an individual and a community level. Both of these forces must unite to realise the ambition for children and young people – a society for all children and young people.



[32] Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, 2025.

Policy landscape

The past year has seen a growing recognition of the need to support children and young people's wellbeing and mental health. An array of initiatives has been announced that seek to directly improve young people's lives by growing the support systems around them, and alleviating burdens that negatively impact their wellbeing. However, questions remain as to whether piecemeal announcements will match the ever-growing need to address the complex challenges that young people face. Delays to policy initiatives, whether that be strategies or funding, simply enable the problem to grow. Taking time to review, engage and propose a forward path is welcome, as are some of the commitments announced in the last 12 months, but these only succeed when they make a profound impact on children and young people's day-to-day lives.

- In May 2025, it was announced that **Mental Health Support Teams would be expanded** to reach almost one million more young people by March 2026, and with full rollout by 2029/30.[33]
- The **10 year health plan** was launched in July 2025. The plan emphasised a shift towards localised care, alongside a **greater focus on prevention**.[34] Many aspects pertaining to children and young people's mental health and wellbeing alluded to implementation of Young Futures Hubs and the National Youth Strategy.
- The **Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill** has progressed through Parliament following publication in December 2024. The Bill, among other things, seeks to place a **cap on the number of branded school uniform items** with a view to reducing costs on families and improve **multi-agency information sharing** to provide more joined-up support for children and young people.
- New statutory guidance on **relationships and sex education (RSE) and health education** was updated in July 2025, including a greater emphasis on addressing sexual harassment and a focus on the impact of change and bereavement for mental health and wellbeing.[35]
- **Eligibility for free school meals** will be expanded from the start of the 2026 school year following an announcement in June 2025 that every pupil whose household is on Universal Credit will be entitled to free school meals.[36]
- **Wales' 10-year Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy** for all ages was published earlier this year, along with a three-year delivery plan to implement the strategy's commitments. These included developing a 'no wrong door' approach, strengthening signposting and embedding social prescribing.

These changes have, in some ways, marked a positive direction towards improving children and young people's wellbeing. However, the scale of the challenge requires this action to go further. The accelerated expansion of existing mechanisms such as Mental Health Support Teams is welcome, but simultaneously, commitments on rolling out early support hubs in communities have been diverted away from a focus on holistic wellbeing support. Similarly, a Bill entitled "Children's Wellbeing" is encouraging, yet the provisions within the Bill rarely capture and frame themselves within the prism of improving young people's wellbeing – and it fails to introduce a comprehensive understanding of children's wellbeing with the absence of any national measurement programme.

Previous commitments and welcome statements of intent are positive, but their impact is determined by the implementation and ambition of these. This year's Good Childhood Report emphasises the need for action to go further and, importantly, be rooted in what young people are telling us.

[33] Department for Education (DfE), 2025a.
[34] Department for Health and Social Care, 2025.
[35] DfE, 2025c.
[36] DfE, 2025b.

Recommendations

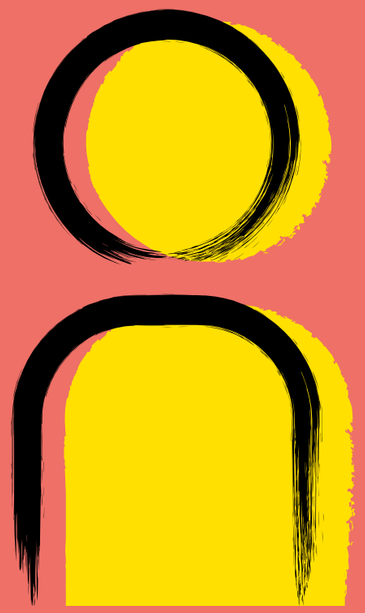
In order to overturn the decline in children's wellbeing, concerted action needs to be taken by the Government to ensure that the issues raised in this report are addressed, and the challenges overcome.

Alongside this report, a policy briefing summarising the key themes and associated recommendations is available: **Reclaiming Hope in a Changing World: Policy Recommendations**.[37]

Policy activity needs to happen at all levels to address: the issues impacting young people's perception of themselves; their engagement with peers; their experience at school; their engagement with their community; their experiences of societal challenges; and their hope for the future.

Every recommendation must involve young people in the design and implementation, with a national wellbeing measurement programme underpinning this – enabling comprehensive monitoring of whether these policy calls lead to improved outcomes and experiences for young people, via hearing from them directly.

Recommendations at a glance:



Myself

- Programmes tackling gender stereotypes
- Online accountability and digital literacy
- Shared understandings and training on bullying for all relevant professionals and organisations



My school

- Increased focus on personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) and life skills in the curriculum
- Whole-school approaches to wellbeing
- Support for primary to secondary school transition
- End punitive behavioural policies in schools



My place

- Restoring and expanding youth services
- A trusted adult guarantee, providing chosen trusted adults
- A focus on holistic wellbeing in early support hubs rollout



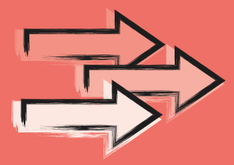
My world

- Ambitious implementation and monitoring of the Child Poverty Strategy
- Increase intergenerational opportunities and understandings of teenagers' lives
- Improved moderation and responsibility across media and society



My future

- Introduce a national wellbeing measurement programme
- Increase opportunities for young people to directly influence their society



[37] The Children's Society, 2025a.

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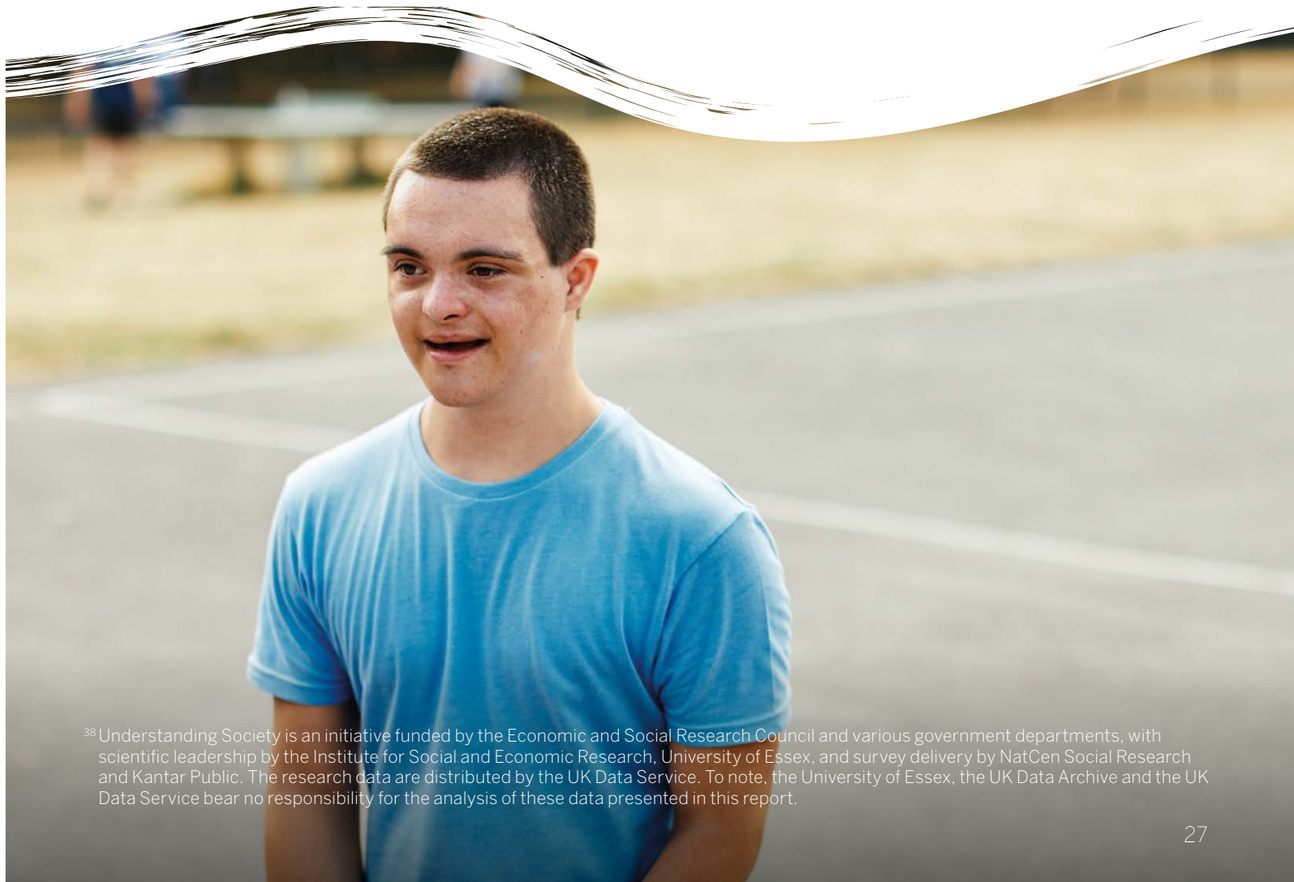
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[38] Understanding Society is an initiative funded by the Economic and Social Research Council and various government departments, with scientific leadership by the Institute for Social and Economic Research, University of Essex, and survey delivery by NatCen Social Research and Kantar Public. The research data are distributed by the UK Data Service. To note, the University of Essex, the UK Data Archive and the UK Data Service bear no responsibility for the analysis of these data presented in this report.

Teenagers' needs are being ignored, with those who face abuse, exploitation or neglect only receiving help at crisis point.

We reach teenagers where they are to tackle the struggles they face today, providing complete support that's specific to them, and challenging the government to deliver policies that will continue to protect them. Because a future of hope and happiness belongs to every young person.

Together, we can set a path to a good childhood.

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