



Relationships



The *Your Life, Your Care* surveys contain questions that ask children and young people about whether they have a trusted adult in their life, their relationship with the adults they live with (carers), and their relationships with social workers, friends, and families. There is also a question that asks about pets, as children who helped develop the survey told us that pets provided an important relationship too. Children and young people who supported the development of the survey identified trust as key to having positive relationships and also emphasised the importance of feeling trusted by others. Trust is further explored in Chapter 4.



Trusted adult

I used to not be able to trust anyone and now I can trust people who I know won't let me down like others have in the past.

11-18yrs

Research on the recovery of children who experienced traumatic events has highlighted the protective role of a trusted adult.¹³ Having a trusted adult is also the most important single factor to prevent children from being (re)abused. The children and young people who helped co-produce the *Your Life, Your Care* surveys thought that having a trusted adult was very important for their well-being. They described a trusted adult as someone dependable, reliable, and who would not give up on them.

Q:

In our surveys, children (8-10yrs) and young people (11-18yrs) were asked, 'Do you have an adult who you trust, who helps you and sticks by you no matter what?'

More than 9 out of 10 children in care had an adult that they could trust, but the proportion who felt that there was a trusted adult in their lives decreased for older teenagers and those living in residential care or 'somewhere else'.

¹³ Pringle, J., Whitehead, R., Milne, D. et al. (2019) *The relationship between a trusted adult and adolescent outcomes*: http://www.healthscotland.scot/media/2325/the-relationship-between-a-trusted-adult-and-adolescent-health-outcomes_6588.pdf

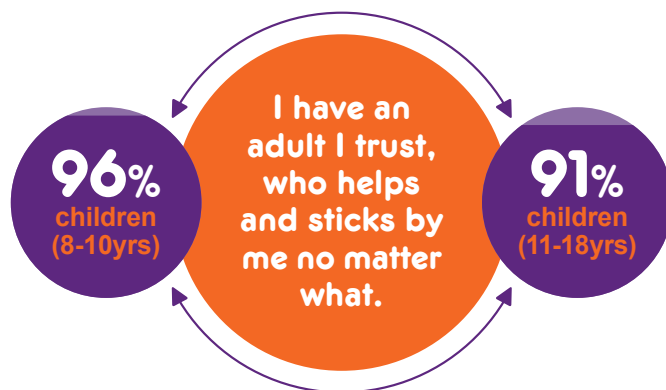
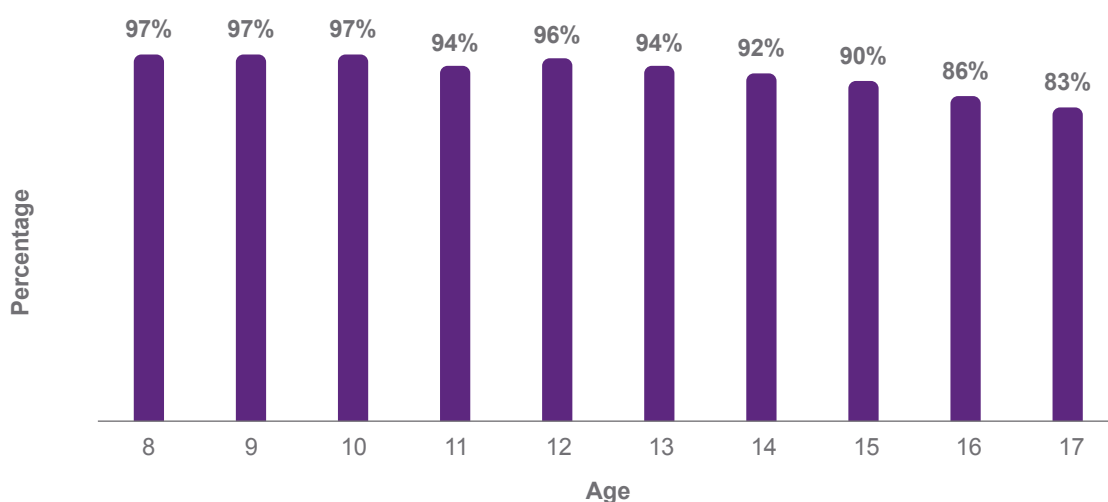


Figure 7: Percentage of children who had a trusted adult by age



Base: 3,540

There was little variation in the responses on the presence of a trusted adult by the sex of the child or young person but there was variation by ethnicity, the local authority¹⁴ and the placement type.

- ▶ White and Mixed ethnicity young people (11-18yrs) more frequently reported having a trusted adult in their lives: White (94%), Mixed ethnicity (91%) Asian (82%), Black (82%) and Other (81%) ethnicities.
- ▶ Between 66% and 100% of young people felt they had a trusted adult in their lives depending on the local authority caring for them.
- ▶ A quarter of those aged 11-18yrs living 'somewhere else' and 14% of those in residential care did not have a trusted adult compared with 8% of young people 11-18yrs in foster care and 5% in kinship care.¹⁵

¹⁴ Suh E. and Selwyn J. (2022) Exploring local authority variation in looked after young people's subjective wellbeing, *British Journal of Social Work* bcac117, <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcac117>

¹⁵ $\chi^2 = 126.626$, [n=5,353], df3, p < .001

Relationship with carers



I really trust
my carers and
love living
with them.

8-10yrs

Trust in carers

Having loving and caring relationships with primary caregivers is important for all children's healthy development. Children and young people in care need their caregivers to provide the same caring relationships.¹⁶



Q:

Children and young people were asked whether they trusted the adults who were caring for them. The youngest children (4-7yrs) had two response options: 'mostly yes' and 'mostly no'. Children aged 8-10yrs and young people aged 11-18yrs had four possible responses: 'all/most of the time', 'sometimes', 'hardly ever' and 'never.'

The majority of children trusted their carers, but the proportion who trusted their carers decreased for the older age groups and those in residential care or living somewhere else.

¹⁶ University of Bristol & Coram Voice (2015) *Children and Young People's Views on Being in Care A Literature Review*.
<https://coramvoice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Childrens-views-lit-review-FINAL-2.pdf>

- ▶ 97% aged 4-7yrs, 85% aged 8-10yrs, and 77% of young people aged 11-18yrs trusted the adults that they lived with 'all/most of the time'.

Figure 8: Trust in carer by placement type 4-7yrs

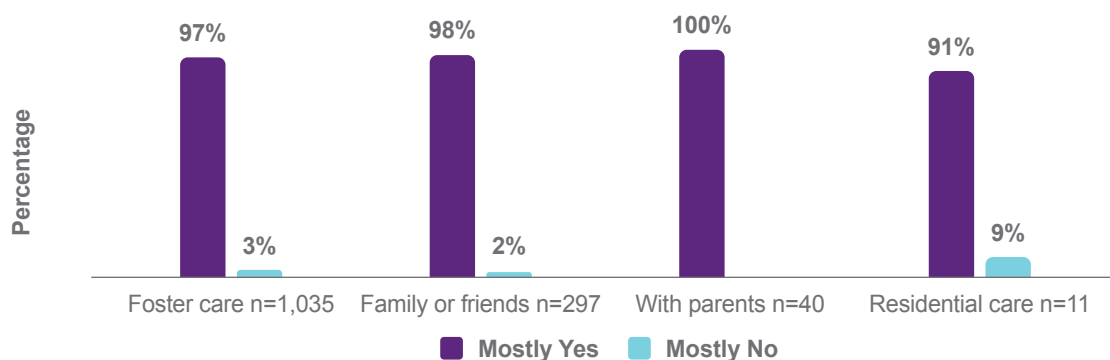
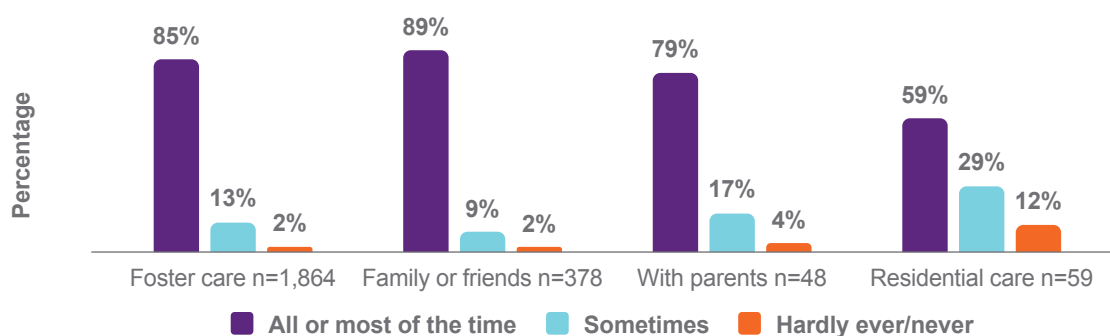
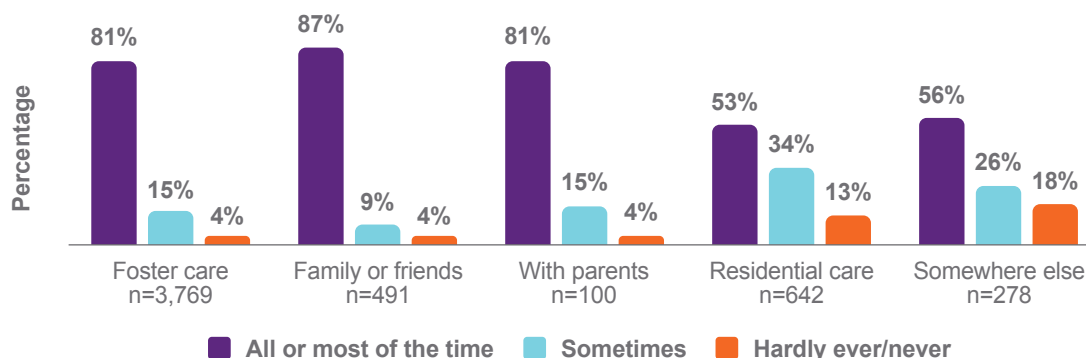


Figure 9: Trust in carer by placement type 8-10yrs



Figures 8-10 show that children and young people in kinship placements were the most confident in trusting their carers closely followed by those in foster care. Young people in residential care and other arrangements had the lowest ratings of trust in their carers.

Figure 10: Trust in carer by placement type 11-18yrs



Children and young people left comments about a whole range of issues connected to their carers. They wrote positively about carers who treated them the same as their own children and who made them feel part of the family and loved:

I love my nan and I never want to leave her side. 4-7yrs

My foster family is very lovely. They love me and I love them. 11-18yrs

Younger children wrote about wanting to stay with their carers and some wanted to call their foster carers “Mummy and Daddy”:

It's lovely because I love [name of foster carers]. I dance with them and kiss them. 4-7yrs

I want my foster carers to be my real Mummy and Daddy. 8-10yrs

Although our analysis showed there were more negative responses from those in residential care, there were also a few positive comments that demonstrate that high-quality residential care can make a difference. For example:

I think the residential home I am in at the moment is absolutely brilliant. The staff are supportive, and it is the right place for me. I think there should be more places like this to help young people in my situation. 11-18yrs

Some young people (11-18yrs) left comments about how they wanted their foster carers to be trusted by Children’s Services and for carers to be allowed to make more decisions:

Whatever you want to do you need social worker's permission and the social worker takes forever to reply to your carers. Social workers can have a say, but I feel it's more the foster carer's decision. 11-18yrs

Simple things like not being able to book a holiday without the social worker's approval makes me not feel like a regular family. 11-18yrs

There were also comparisons made between the life children had previously experienced and life with their carer. Children valued having their basic needs consistently met:

I don't want to live with my old Mum anymore because she never fed us and just did things. I love living with my new Mum because she feeds us and gives us treats. 4-7yrs

I no longer have to worry about turning up to school with a black eye or being killed in a heated argument where furniture and knives end up being thrown. In care, I am given nice food every day and people care about me. Coming into foster care has saved my life. 11-18yrs

A small minority wrote negative comments about the care they were receiving:

I don't trust my grandad, he tells lies. 4-7yrs

I don't like foster carers - nope they don't give a shit about you, only money. 11-18yrs

I heard my foster mum's husband speaking about me at night when I came down for a drink and he was saying that I need to shut the hell up sometimes and saying I need to do things. ... I feel like a slave. 11-18yrs



Having carers who are sensitive and notice how children are feeling

[I would like] people to take notice of when I'm feeling down to talk to me, as I'm bad at going to people.

11-18yrs

Recovery from trauma and/or maltreatment requires carers who can put themselves in the child's shoes and think and feel how the child might be feeling. Research¹⁷ has shown the importance of foster carers who try to understand the reasons for a child or young person's behaviour and to do so without making assumptions or jumping to negative judgements.



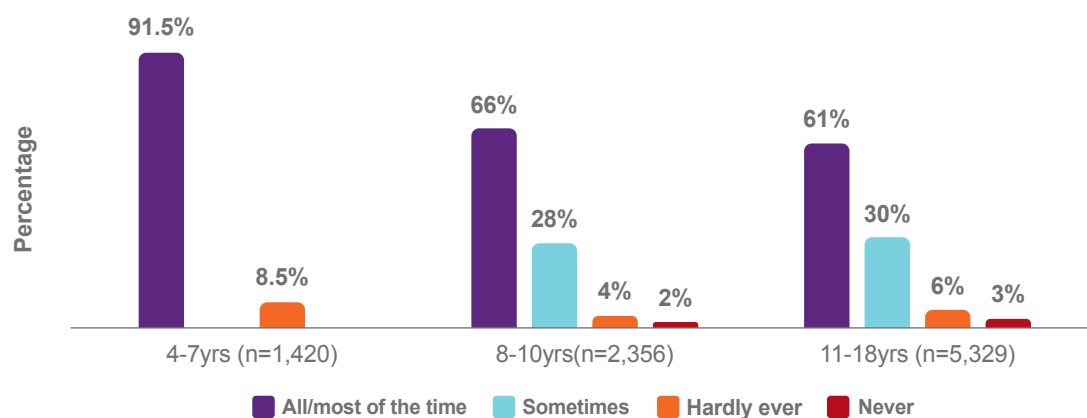
Children (4-10yrs) and young people (11-18yrs) were asked if they thought that their carers noticed how they were feeling.

9 out of 10 children and young people felt the adults they lived with noticed how they were feeling at least 'sometimes', but girls and those living in residential or somewhere else more often felt that their carers 'hardly ever' or 'never' noticed their feelings.



¹⁷ Bammens, A-S., Adkins, T. & Badger, J. (2015) Psycho-educational intervention increases reflective functioning in foster and adoptive parents. *Adoption & Fostering*, 39, 38-50.

Figure 11: Perception of whether their carers noticed feelings



- ▶ Overall, 9% of young people (11-18yrs) felt that their carers ‘hardly ever’ or ‘never’ noticed how they were feeling.
- ▶ Girls (11%) more frequently than boys (7%) reported that their feelings went unnoticed.¹⁸
- ▶ Young people (11-18yrs): 29% of those living ‘somewhere else’, 15% of those in residential care felt their feelings went unnoticed compared with 7% in foster or kinship care.

Children and young people of all ages left comments about the sensitivity and responsiveness of their carers. Most comments were positive and for example, children wrote:

My bear cards help me to tell my carers how I feel. 4-7yrs

Nanny and Grandad help me with my worries, and they know when I’m sad. 8-10yrs

I feel guilty for feeling happy and safe in care. I have so much anger towards my nan, grandad and mum, I hate it. I now know what a normal family do, say and treat each other. I love it here! 11-18yrs

¹⁸ $\chi^2=15.403$ [n=5,214], df3, p<.002



Talking with adults (carers) about things that matter

[What would make care better?]
If I could talk to my foster dad more.

11-18yrs

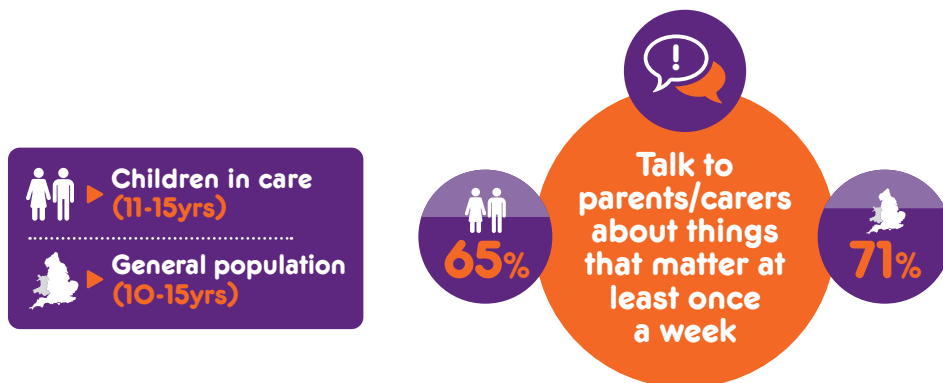
Positive and supportive relationships, particularly with friends and family, including having someone to talk to and rely on have been consistently stated as children's top priority to have a happy life.¹⁹ *The Understanding Society* survey asks young people aged 10-15yrs, 'How often do you talk to your parents about things that matter?' - 71% reported talking to their mothers and/or fathers at least once a week.²⁰



How often do you talk to your parents about things that matter?' was added to the *Your Life, Your Care* surveys for young people aged 11-18yrs in 2017-18 with the phrase 'the adults you live with' replacing parents and using the same response options of 'most days', 'more than once a week', 'less than once a week' and 'hardly ever'.

1 in 5 young people reported 'never' speaking to their carers about the things that mattered to them.

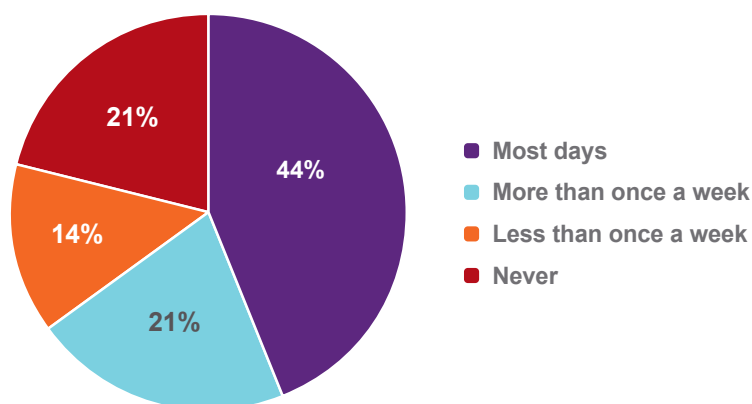
Compared with young people aged 11-15 in the general population, except for those in kinship care, a smaller percentage (65%) of young people (11-15yrs) in care spoke to the adults they lived with about things that mattered to them.



¹⁹ ONS (2018) *Children's well-being and social relationships, UK*. Office for National Statistics. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/datasets/childrenswellbeingmeasures/march2018>

²⁰ University of Essex, Institute for Social and Economic Research, NatCen Social Research, Kantar Public. (2020). *Understanding Society: Waves 9, 2017-18* UK Data Service. SN: 6614, <http://doi.org/10.5255/UKDA-SN-6614-14>. n=2,610 Age range 10-15yrs

Figure 12: Frequency of talking to carers about things that matter



Base 3,954 11-15yrs

- ▶ In the general population, 71% of young people (11-15yrs) speak at least once a week to their parents. Selecting those aged 11-15yrs in our surveys, only young people in kinship care (71%) spoke as regularly with their carers; a statistically larger percentage than those in foster care (65%) or residential care (64%).²¹

Life is great with my granddad and grandmother. They're so kind, give us all the help we need and all the support we need. They're just really ace! I am so lucky to have someone like them in my life !!! 11-18yrs

- ▶ Young people who felt that the adults they lived with were less sensitive to their feelings more frequently chose not to confide in them: 81% of those who felt their feelings went unnoticed by their carers also reported not talking regularly to them about things that mattered.

My current placement is very happy and settled but it does depend on the people you are placed with. A previous placement was not so good. The carer would not really talk to me or do things with me. I think that being in care would be better if foster carers were consistently nice and friendly. 11-18yrs

²¹ $\chi^2 = 17.523$ [n=3.916] df3, p<.001



Friendships

Good friends

I don't trust anyone except my friends. I can only trust my friends and now you move me.

8-10yrs

Having good friends is very important for children's well-being. Friends provide a sense of security and belonging providing companionship and shared intimacy. Friendships support the development of social, cognitive, and emotional skills and having friends is associated with liking school and academic achievements. During adolescence, peers become more influential, as young people spend more time with their friends and less with their parents/carers. For those without friends, feelings of loneliness can lead to low self-worth, anxiety and depression in young adulthood and place young people at greater risk of victimisation and exploitation.²²

In the general population, there is some evidence that there has been a decline in young people's happiness with their friendships, particularly among girls. When asked about loneliness, more than one in ten (11%) children in the general population report feeling "often" lonely.²³

The *Your Life, Your Care* survey does not ask about loneliness, as there is evidence that loneliness can occur even if there are friends available. Testing of a question on loneliness by the ONS also found that children did not like talking about loneliness, as they saw it as a personal failure.²⁴

²² Holder, M. D., & Coleman, B. (2015) *Children's friendships and positive well-being*. In M. Demir (Ed.), *Friendship and happiness: Across the life-span and cultures*. (p. 81–97). Springer Science

²³ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/articles/childrensandyoungpeoplesexperiencesofloneliness/2018>

²⁴ Question asks, "How often do you feel lonely?" with three response options of 'often', 'sometimes' and 'hardly ever or never'



The children and young people who helped co-produce the *Your Life, Your Care* surveys suggested that instead of asking about loneliness we should ask about friendships. We, therefore, ask all age groups if they have a really good friend.

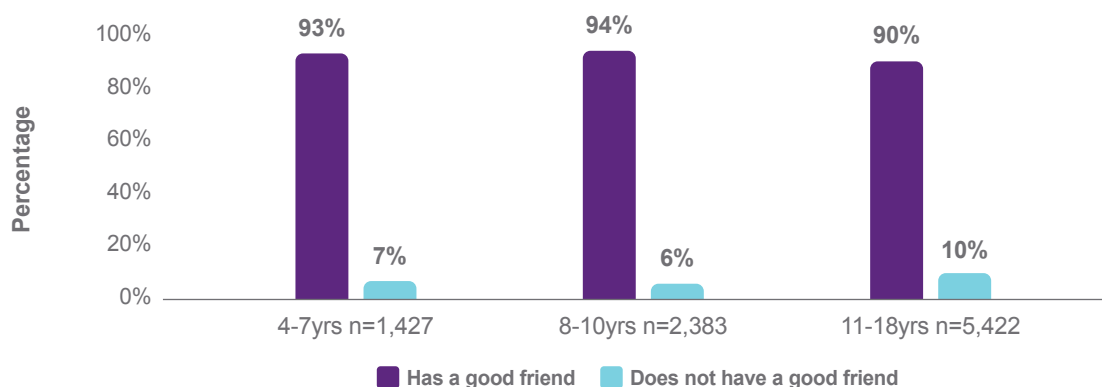
More than 9 in 10 young people had a good friend, but the percentage without a friend (7%) was greater than for young people (2.5%) in the general population.

- ▶ Examining the survey responses between 2016 and 2021, unlike the general population trend, there was no evidence of a decline in the proportion that did not have a good friend, and neither were there any statistical differences in the responses of boys and girls.



- ▶ The majority (about 9 out of 10) of looked after children and young people (4-18yrs) had at least one good friend (Figure 13): between 6% and 10% did not.
- ▶ In the general population, the ONS reports that 5% of children aged 10-15yrs have low satisfaction with their friendships²⁵ and the Understanding Society survey found that 2.5% of children aged 10-15yrs reported having no friends.²⁶

Figure 13: Children and young people's friendships



²⁵ ONS (2018) *Children's and young people's experiences of loneliness: 2018*. Office for National Statistics. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/articles/childrensandyoungpeoplesexperiencesofloneliness/2018>

²⁶ University of Essex, Institute for Social and Economic Research, NatCen Social Research, Kantar Public. (2020). *Understanding Society: Waves 9, 2017-18 UK Data Service*. SN: 6614, <http://doi.org/10.5255/UKDA-SN-6614-14> n=2,764

A few children (8-10yrs) and young people (11-18yrs) wrote about not having enough friends and identified more friendships as what would make their lives better.

Giving me some friends who care about me. 8-10yrs

Being able to make good friends and keep them. 11-18yrs

Stay in the same school long enough to make friends. 11-18yrs

Children (4-10yrs) left comments about friends in an open question asking if there was anything else they wanted to say about being in care. They wrote about missing friends they had made in previous placements, the challenge of making new friends, or difficulty in maintaining relationships when they had multiple placements. Children wrote:

It's hard because I don't know if I can stay living with my foster carers.

It's hard to change schools and lose friends and make new friends. 4-7yrs

I would like to stay in touch with the children of my foster carer when I leave because they are my friends, and they also make me happy, and we have lots of fun. 8-10yrs

Children and young people highlighted the factors that affected their friendships.

Factors that affected looked after young people's friendships

- ▶ **Rules & restrictions** - Preventing friends from visiting/sleepovers
- ▶ **Same opportunities** - Not being able to do similar things to friends
- ▶ **Digital access** - limited or no access to phones & social media
- ▶ **Changing placements & schools** - moving homes/schools broke friendships
- ▶ **Location** - living far away made sharing activities and sustaining friendships difficult



Rules and restrictions

I just want to be able to sleep at a friend's house without having police checks.

8-10yrs

Children and young people wrote about wanting to see their friends more often, to be able to invite their friends to their homes, to have sleepovers, or go out with their friends. When asked, what would make care better children wrote:

To be able to go out with my friends on my own like the other children in my class do. 8-10yrs

To be able to have a phone so I can phone my friends at holiday times and weekends to see how they are doing. 8-10yrs

The older young people (11-18yrs) also wrote about wanting to see more of their friends with fewer restrictions imposed, including around sleepovers.²⁷

1. Rules at the unit, can't bring females into my room; 2. Friends have to leave at a certain time; 3. Sleepovers are restricted. 11-18yrs

[Being in care] is quite challenging because of the rules. When I want to meet friends I have to wait for a response or get a negative response. 11-18yrs

²⁷ This is a form of discrimination and a recurrent issue reported by children in care despite guidance being issued repeatedly to challenge this practice. For example see: Department of Health/Department for Education and Skills (2004) *Guidance on the Delegation of Decisions on 'Overnight Stays' for Looked After Children*, London: DH/DfES, 2004
<https://www.scie-socialcareonline.org.uk/guidance-on-the-delegation-of-decisions-on-overnight-stays-for-looked-after-children/r/a11G00000017qeGIAQ>
DFE (2014) *Delegation of authority to carers Young people's guide*,
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/305147/Delegation_of_authority_to_carers_YP_version.pdf
Care planning guidance is not so clear on this point and could be strengthened. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1000549/The_Children_Act_1989_guidance_and_regulations_Volume_2_care_planning_placement_and_case_review.pdf



Doing similar things to friends

I would like to have the opportunity to spend more time with my friends out of school.

11-18yrs

Parity with peers was a key issue raised by the children in the focus groups that underpinned the development of this survey. Having opportunities to participate in hobbies and fun activities with friends provides a sense of normality. Young people in care also often emphasised not wanting to stand out as being different.²⁸



Young people (11-18yrs) were asked, 'Outside of school or college, do you get the chance to do similar things to your friends?'

1 in 6 young people in care felt that they could not do similar things as their friends and these young people more often reported that they did not have a good friend.

- ▶ 17% of young people felt they 'hardly ever' or 'never' did similar things to their friends.
- ▶ Increasing autonomy was expected to be seen as young people got older, but that was not the case, as 18% of those aged 16-18yrs also felt unable to do the same things as their friends.
- ▶ Young people who could not do the same things as their friends more frequently reported that they did not have a good friend.²⁹
- ▶ 28% of young people in residential care felt they could not do the same things as their friends compared with 16% of young people in foster care and 13% in kinship care.³⁰

Young people who felt they were given chances to be trusted more frequently reported that they could do similar things to their friends.³¹

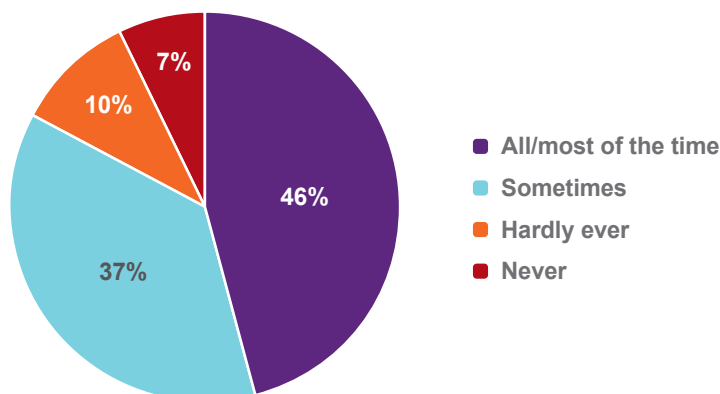
²⁸ Wood M and Selwyn J (2017) Looked after children and young people's views on what matters to their subjective well-being. *Adoption & Fostering* Vol. 41(1) 20-34 <https://ora.ox.ac.uk/objects/uuid:7d9d9db9-8eb5-4ca4-a3fc-698d30fb4db4>

²⁹ $\chi^2=285.654$ [n=5,275] df1, p<.001

³⁰ $\chi^2=93.350$ [n=5,281] df5, p<.001

³¹ Somers' D .308 p<.001

Figure 14: Young people's feelings about being able to do the same as their friends



Base 5,330 young people 11-18yrs

Young people wrote about the importance of being able to do things with their friends:

Maybe hanging around with friends on the weekend and getting to walk to school with them. 11-18yrs

I like that I'm going to start horse riding again with my friends. 11-18yrs



Social media



The ONS report on the loneliness of children and young people found that using social media to connect with others could help address loneliness. It could help young people maintain connections over time and at a distance, giving an opportunity to casually check in on friends and help friendships develop during periods of transition and ease introductions.³² Yet social care professionals are sometimes wary of mobile devices and social media because of potential risks of continued abuse or disruptions of placements when used to maintain contact with adults who might pose a risk.³³ The risks need to be considered alongside the benefits.

³² ONS (2018) *Children's and young people's experiences of loneliness: 2018*

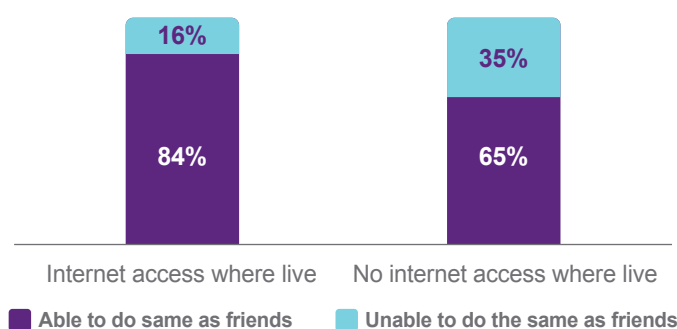
³³ Simpson, J (2020) *Children in care and their use of mobile devices and the internet for contact*. Accessed at: <https://www.iriss.org.uk/resources/insights/children-care-and-their-use-mobile-devices-and-internet-contact>

Nearly one in ten (9.3%) of young people wrote that they could not connect to the internet where they were living.

Young people who did not have access to the internet where they lived more frequently reported being unable to do the same things as their friends.

- ▶ 1 in 3 of those with no internet access felt unable to do the same as their friends compared with 1 in 6 of those who could connect to the internet (Figure 15).

Figure 15: Internet access outside of school and ability to do the same things as friends



n= 4,827 young people 11-18yrs

Young people wrote about the importance of using the internet:

Have the internet more often, as what 15/16 old hasn't got the internet every day? I feel a bit left out, as I only have it 2 times a week for an hour. I would like it almost every day. 11-18yrs



Location of placements and friendships



Where children and young people lived affected their friendships. Distance prevented new friendships from being formed and made sharing activities difficult. Comments on distant placements and schools often mentioned loneliness.

I have so many foster carers, I move nearly every week. It is not fair. I can't see my friends at school or go to clubs because the school is too far away. I have to get up early in the morning to go to school and it is dark when I come home so I can't play out. It is boring. I don't like school because people can be mean. I can't play with friends as they won't let me, as I don't do the clubs anymore. 8-10yrs

I do not like living where I am living - I want to be close to my college and my friends but I am far away. I am lonely. 11-18yrs



Family relationships

I love to see my family. I love to go bowling. I am happy when I am with my family.

8-10yrs

Family is important to all children but, unlike children living with their parents, those in care have contact plans that set out who, where and how often children see their relatives or other important people in their lives. Looked after children and young people who helped create the surveys identified satisfaction with their contact arrangements as a key indicator of 'feeling good' about their relationships.



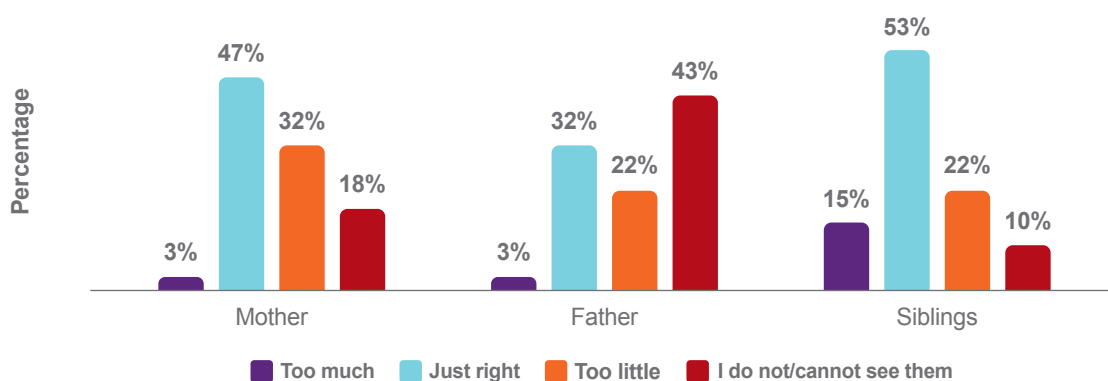
Children and young people aged 8-18yrs were asked whether they were happy with how often they saw their mum, dad, and siblings. The youngest children (4-7yrs) were not asked a question about their feelings on contact with relatives.

Most children in care wanted to see their parents and siblings more frequently, but a minority wanted to see them less often.

Figure 16 and Figure 17 show children’s satisfaction with the frequency of contact.

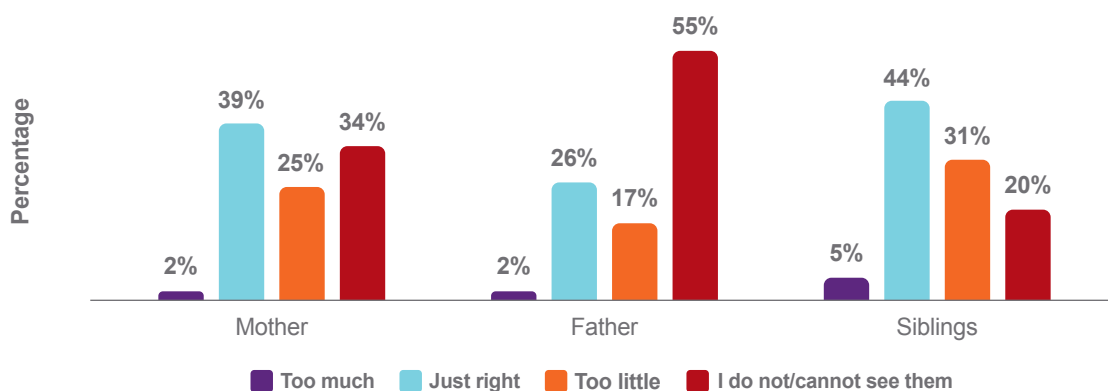
- ▶ 1 in 8 children (13%) and more than a quarter (26%) of young people had no contact with either parent.
- ▶ Seven per cent of young people reported that their mothers and 9% that their fathers had passed away.³⁴ In comparison, 1% of children in the general population experience the death of their mothers under the age of 16 years old.³⁵ There are no available statistics on the proportion of children in the general population experiencing the death of fathers.
- ▶ Overall, the percentage of children who were satisfied with how often they saw their family changed little between 2015 and 2021.

Figure 16: Satisfaction with the frequency of family contact (8-10yrs)



Base 2,326-2,354

Figure 17: Satisfaction with the frequency of family contact (11-18yrs)



Base 2,326-2,354

The wishes and feelings of children and young people about contact with the key people in their lives have been explored in a previous report.³⁶

³⁴ The option 'passed away' was added to the survey in 2019/20 and the frequencies reported use data from 2019-2021 (n =1,574)

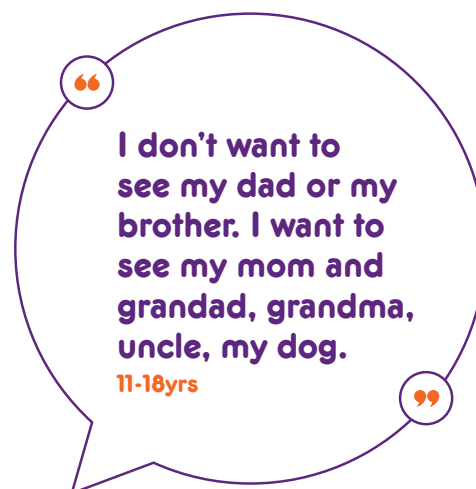
³⁵ ONS (2019) Children aged under 16 years who have experienced the death of their mother. Office for National Statistics. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/datasets/childrenagedunder16yearswhohaveexperiencedthedeathoftheirmother>

³⁶ Lewis, S. & Selwyn, J. (2022) *Staying connected: The views of looked after children and young people on their contact arrangements*. The percentages slightly differ in this report and the Staying connected report, as the report included data from Wales <https://coramvoice.org.uk/for-professionals/bright-spots/resource-bank/staying-connected/>



Key relationships and support for contact

Children and young people wanted to see parents and siblings more, but also extended family members and other important adults in their lives.



I would like to see my mum more often than I do. 11-18yrs

Young people gave reasons as to why they thought they saw their parents infrequently such as their own family's circumstances, the long distances that they or relatives had to travel, or felt that their social worker had not taken their wishes into account.

I cannot see them as they are going through a tough time at the moment.

11-18yrs

I'd like more arranged contact but it's expensive to travel to and from counties. I'd like a travel warrant. 11-18yrs

It is all so false and can't happen at the weekends. How stupid is that! I am told the 'contact team' doesn't work at weekends. If that is their job, then they should work when I can have contact ... not just business hours. It's stupid, stupid, stupid. My mum works and so after school contact is difficult and only an hour! 11-18yrs

My social worker told me months ago in a LACK review that she would work on me having more contact with my little brother. This was in November, it's now halfway through March and nothing has been said to my mum about it. My mum told me my social worker hasn't even contacted her. 11-18yrs

Not all children and young people wanted to see their parents more. A few children and young people (2-3%) wanted parental contact to cease or be reduced as they felt unsafe when they saw their parents or they found the meetings too difficult.

I'm scared of my dad, but I still have to have contact with him. I don't want to. 11-18yrs

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Most of the written comments from children and young people were about how much they enjoyed living with a sibling and missed siblings who were not in the same placement. A few complained of bullying or wanting more privacy and a separate bedroom.

I am lucky to live with my sister. 8-10yrs

I was brought up with my siblings as brother and sisters, but we have different dads. Now my sister's dad has stopped me from seeing her. 11-18yrs

I would like to be in a separate room from my older brother. 11-18yrs

Children and young people preferred contact to be easy to get to, in large enough rooms or take place outdoors, to offer privacy and for the visit to involve everyday activities such as walking the dog, going for a meal, or playing games.

When I see them, I would like to not be in a small room all the time. 11-18yrs

Comments on seeing family members (4-7yrs)

Although children aged 4-7yrs were not asked about seeing their families, when asked 'What would make care better?' fifty children left comments on contact. Most wanted more time with their parents and siblings, had concerns about what was happening in their families, and complained about the long journeys to contact centres. A small minority wanted to stop seeing their families. Children (4-7yrs) wrote:

I'm sad because I only get to see my Mum a little. I miss my Dad too. 4-7yrs

I was supposed to see Mummy yesterday at the contact centre, but it was cancelled. I asked why, and nanny said she was ill. I am worried about her. 4-7yrs

Not travelling to contact so much it's a long way in the car and it's bedtime when we get back. 4-7yrs



Pets

I'd like a pet,
a dog, in my
foster home.

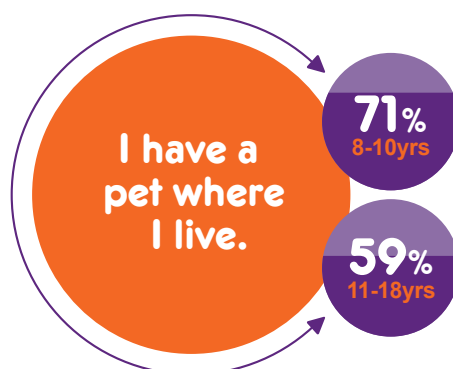
8-10yrs

Pets are part of many people's lives and can be a very significant relationship for any child. For those who have experienced trauma and/or maltreatment, pets can help in many ways. They provide an opportunity to have some comfort and to build trust. Carers can use the experience of taking care of a pet to begin conversations about taking care of others and improving self-care. It has been argued that a child who learns to care for a pet with kindness and with patience, learns also about empathy and treating people well.³⁷ Children who helped developed the surveys described how they could speak in confidence to a pet, with nothing revealed or recorded in case files. They also reflected that pets were always happy to see them and could be held and stroked.³⁸ Yet the importance of pets in the lives of children in care has received little attention in the social care literature.



In the *Your Life, Your Care* surveys we ask children (8-10yrs) and young people (11-18yrs) if they have a pet where they live.

Far fewer children and young people in residential care had a pet compared with those in foster or kinship care. Placement type was associated with having a pet.



³⁷ O'Haire, M.E., Guérin, N.A., & Kirkham, A.C. (2015). Animal-Assisted Intervention for trauma: A systematic literature review. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 6. Sable, P. (1995). Pets, attachment, and well-being across the life cycle. *Social Work*, 40,334-341.

³⁸ Wood, M., & Selwyn, J. (2017). Looked after children and young people's views on what matters to their subjective well-being. *Adoption and Fostering*, 41(1), 20-34. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0308575916686034>

- ▶ A quarter (25%) of children (8-10yrs) in residential care had a pet compared with 69% in kinship care and 74% in foster care.
- ▶ 18% of young people (11-18yrs) in residential care had a pet compared with 66% in foster care and 62% in kinship care.

Children and young people wrote about the pets where they currently lived but also wrote about missing pets that they had left behind in the family home or who were in previous placements. For example, writing:

I would also like to see the dog again [in the previous foster placement].

4-7yrs

My mum doesn't come [to contact visits]. I miss my cat. 8-10yrs

Be able to have a pet. I used to look after the dog at my old placement really well. 11-18yrs

They also wrote about what they liked doing during contact visits and this sometimes involved their pets,

We go out in the woods and take the dog for a walk. 8-10yrs

Children and young people also wrote about wanting pets in a question that asked, 'What would make care better?' They wrote:

I would like my own pet for example a cat, hamster, or fishes. 8-10yrs

To get my dog that I stroke and talk to. 8-10yrs

The relationships children and young people had with the key people in their lives were important to their well-being. In the next chapter, we consider children's relationships with their workers and their experience of the care system.

Summary - Relationships



Trusted adult

- ▶ Research on the recovery of children who experienced traumatic events has highlighted the protective role of a trusted adult. 96% of children (8-10yrs) and 91% of young people (11-18yrs) felt they had a trusted adult in their lives
- ▶ Type of placement affected whether young people (11-18yrs) felt they had a trusted adult. A quarter of those living 'somewhere else' and 14% of those in residential care did not have a trusted adult compared with 8% in foster care and 5% in kinship care.
- ▶ White and Mixed ethnicity young people (11-18yrs) more frequently reported having a trusted adult in their lives compared with young people of Asian, Black, or Other ethnicities.
- ▶ There was local authority variation in the percentage of their young people (range 66% to 100%) who felt they had a trusted adult in their lives.



Carers

- ▶ 97% of 4-7yrs, 85% of 8-10yrs and 77% of 11-18yrs trusted their carer 'all/most of the time'. Trust decreased as young people got older but also varied depending on the type of placement. Children and young people in kinship placements were the most confident in trusting their carers followed by those in foster care and fewer of those in residential care.
- ▶ Children (4-10yrs) and young people (11-18yrs) were asked if they thought that their carers noticed how they were feeling and most responded positively. Nearly one in ten (9%) felt that their carers 'hardly ever' or 'never' noticed how they were feeling. Girls (11%) aged 11-18yrs more frequently than boys (7%) reported that their feelings went unnoticed. Type of placement also had an impact: 15% of those aged 11-18yrs in residential care felt unnoticed compared with 7% in foster or kinship care.
- ▶ Young people (11-18yrs) in kinship care more frequently talked regularly with the adults they lived with compared with those in foster or residential care: 71% in kinship talked regularly (the same percentage as their peers in the general population) compared with 65% in foster care and 64% in residential care. Young people who chose not to confide in their carers also often reported that their carers did not notice how they were feeling.



Friendships

- ▶ In the general population, there has been a decline in young people's happiness with their friendships, particularly among girls.³⁹ Examining the responses of looked after children between 2016 and 2020 there was no evidence of a decline in the proportions who had a good friend nor any statistical difference in the responses of boys and girls.

- ▶ In the general population, there has been a decline in young people's happiness with their friendships, particularly among girls.³⁹ Examining the responses of looked after children between 2016 and 2020 there was no evidence of a decline in the proportions who had a good friend nor any statistical difference in the responses of boys and girls.
- ▶ Most looked after children and young people had a good friend but 7% of those aged 11-15yrs did not. A larger proportion than 2.5% of peers of the same age in the general population.
- ▶ Children (8-10yrs) wrote about missing friends they had made in previous placements, the difficulties in making new friends or maintaining relationships when they had multiple placements or were placed out of area.
- ▶ Young people (11-18yrs) also wrote about wanting to see more of their friends with fewer restrictions imposed.
- ▶ The majority of young people (11-18yrs) felt they got the chance to do similar things to their friends outside of school or college, but 17% ticked the 'hardly ever' or 'never' options. Increasing autonomy was expected to be seen as young people got older but that was not the case, as 18% of those aged 16-18yrs felt unable to do the same things as their friends.
- ▶ Associated with being unable to do the same things as friends were, not having a good friend and type of placement: 28% of young people in residential care felt unable to do the same things compared with 16% of young people in foster care and 13% in kinship care. Conversely, young people who felt they were given chances to be trusted also felt they could do similar things to their friends.



Family relationships

- ▶ One in eight children (13%) and more than a quarter (26%) of young people had no contact with either parent. Seven per cent of young people reported that their mothers had passed away as had 9% of fathers.
- ▶ Many children and young people were unhappy with how often they saw their parents and brothers and sisters and also wanted to see extended family members.
- ▶ Rates of satisfaction with frequency of seeing relatives had changed little since the surveys first began, but continued to vary depending on the young person's sex, placement type, length of time in care, placement stability, and ethnicity.



Pets

- ▶ 71% of children (8-10yrs) and 59% of young people (11-18yrs) had a pet where they lived.
- ▶ Type of placement was associated with having a pet. Far fewer children and young people in residential care had a pet compared with those in foster or kinship care.

³⁹ ONS (2018) *Children's well-being and social relationships, UK: 2018*, Office for National Statistics