



Well-being

Article 39 of the UNCRC states that children who have experienced neglect, abuse, exploitation, torture or who are victims of war must receive special support to help them recover their health, dignity, self-respect, and social life. All looked after children have experienced a traumatic event, as they have been separated from their families. In addition, many have experienced parental abuse and neglect and others have experienced the trauma of being a refugee or an unaccompanied asylum seeker. These experiences can all have an impact on well-being.



[I need]
help for my
headaches
and dark
thoughts.

11-18yrs

Having worries and feeling supported

The literature review⁹⁴ that informed the development of the surveys found many studies highlighted the lack of mental health support, especially for depression and anxiety. Studies using the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire⁹⁵ consistently report that 51% of children in care have scores that are a cause for concern or 'borderline' in comparison with about 13% of their peers in the general population.



At the time we were developing the surveys, children in the general population were asked, as a measure of their wellbeing, about their experience of anxiety. However, the young people in our focus groups did not like this question with its sole focus on anxiety. Instead, children and young people aged 8-18yrs developed a two-part question. First, the question asked if they worried about their feelings or behaviour with answer options of 'all/most of the time', 'sometimes', 'hardly ever' and 'never'. If they responded 'all/most of the time', or 'sometimes', the follow-up question asked if they felt they got help with those worries with a yes/no response.

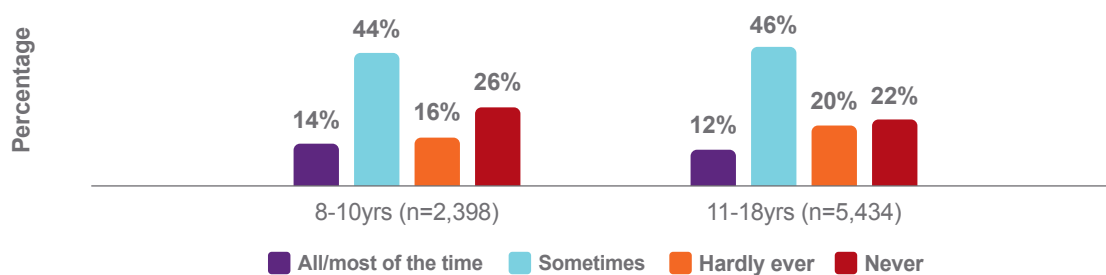
Around 6 out of 10 children (8-18yrs) worried about their feelings or behaviour.

⁹⁴ 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>

⁹⁵ Ford T, Vostanis P, Meltzer H, Goodman R. (2007) Psychiatric disorder among British children looked after by local authorities: comparison with children living in private households. *Br J Psychiatry*. Apr;190:319-25.

- ▶ 58% of children (8-10yrs) felt that they worried ‘all/most of the time’ or ‘sometimes.’ (Figure 31). Of those who worried, 86% felt they were getting help. There was no statistical difference in responses on whether they had support from adults by the child’s sex, ethnicity, or types of placement.

Figure 31: Worrying about feelings or behaviour



Base 7,832

Children aged 8-10yrs wrote about their worries:

[I would like to] know that adults will listen to me, especially when I am worried and help me. 8-10yrs

Over half (58%) of young people (11-18yrs) worried ‘all/most of the time’ or ‘sometimes’; 76% of whom felt they were getting help. In this older age group, there were statistical differences in the proportions reporting worrying by sex, placement type and by ethnicity:

- ▶ 60% of girls (11-18yrs) reported worrying compared with 55% of boys.⁹⁶
- ▶ Those living somewhere else (67%) and in residential care (64%) more frequently reported worrying compared with those in foster care (56%) or kinship (55%).⁹⁷
- ▶ 65% of Asian young people or Other (66%) ethnicities reported worrying compared with young people of Mixed (59%), White (57%) or Black (53%) ethnicities.⁹⁸
- ▶ Although a larger proportion of ethnic minority young people reported worrying compared with White young people, fewer felt they were getting help.⁹⁹ 22% of White, 24% Mixed, 30% Asian, 33% Black and 40% of young people of Other ethnicities felt they did not get help with their fears and worries.

Worrying among teenagers was associated with:

- ▶ **Sex:** More girls (60%) reported worrying compared with boys (55%).
- ▶ **Placement type:** Those living ‘somewhere else’ and in residential care (64%) worried more than those in foster care (56%) or kinship (55%).
- ▶ **Ethnicity:** 65% of Asian young people and 66% of Other ethnicities reported worrying compared with young people of Mixed (59%), White (57%) or Black (53%) ethnicity.

⁹⁶ $\chi^2 = 12.207$ [n=5,313] df1, p<.001

⁹⁷ $\chi^2 = 25.737$ [n=5,379] df3, p<.001

⁹⁸ $\chi^2 = 18.504$ [n=5,358] df4, p<.001

⁹⁹ $\chi^2 = 38.573$ [n=3,419] df4, p<.001

Young people wrote about their anxieties, fears of moving again, worries about family (sometimes living in other countries), fears for the future, and their asylum applications:

[What would make care better?] Help staff understand my anxieties better and understand when I am becoming anxious and what is the right thing to do. 11-18yrs

I worry if I will get the help I'm going to need when I finish my apprenticeship. 11-18yrs

I am happy at home, but I worry about my family in Afghanistan. I also worry about my appeal to stay in the UK. I don't sleep well. 11-18yrs

Several young people wrote about a lack of mental health support and interventions that would enable them to recover from their earlier experiences. For example:

I feel like a lot of my problems are a result of my mental instability. Unfortunately, I do not know where to turn to talk about my feelings. I have been on the waiting list for a psychologist from CAMHS for months. Talking to a school counsellor wasn't helping, as I felt like I was only digging up childhood trauma and the counsellor wasn't doing anything to help me deal with that. All she did was listen and even tear up on some occasions which made me rather angry, I don't need sympathy, I need help. After two years of counselling, I simply stopped turning up. ... Talking to my foster parent is difficult, as I am scared that she will be angry at me for feeling this way or think that I am ungrateful. I feel like she doesn't really understand me. She often says I have no real problems to be worrying about, which is far from the truth. She calls me childish. 11-18yrs

I worry that when I kick-off that will be the end of my placement. They will make me leave. They say they won't and that it wouldn't be the same without me. But as much as I am trying, sometimes I still break things or kick the staff. It's not right, but I don't think about it until afterwards. One day they will say enough is enough and I'll have to go. Where will I go? This is my home. We are like a family. Me, X (the other young person) and staff. I really love them, I do. I don't want it to end because I mess up again. I have had people who like me before, but they kicked me out, and sometimes it wasn't even my fault. Sometimes another person in the house was against me. It's always me that has to go. 11-18yrs



Happiness with appearance

I get bullied for many reasons and for how I look as a whole.

11-18yrs

Studies have shown that poor body image is associated with low self-esteem, depression, and self-harm.¹⁰⁰ The work of The Children's Society has drawn attention to young people in the general population feeling unhappy with their appearance and the influence these feelings have on young people's well-being. The Good Childhood Report 2020¹⁰¹ found that 14% of children (10-17yrs) were unhappy with their appearance and girls more so than boys. A similar question on appearance is used in several different surveys of young people (10-15yrs) in the general population.¹⁰²

Q: Beginning in 2017, the *Your Life, Your Care* survey asked young people (11-18yrs) if they were happy with the way they looked on a 0-10 scale. Young people scoring 0-4 are rated as having 'low' happiness, scores of 5-6 moderate, and 7-10 high happiness with their appearance

Most young people (11-18yrs) were happy with their appearance: 15% rated themselves as having low happiness.

Girls were more frequently unhappy with how they looked compared with boys.



¹⁰⁰ Cash T & Smolek L (2011) *Body Image: A Handbook of Science, Practice and Prevention*. Guilford Press: London

¹⁰¹ <https://www.childrensociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/2020-11/Good-Childhood-Report-2020.pdf>

¹⁰² The ONS reports happiness with appearance using data from the *Understanding Society* study. The question on appearance uses a 7-point scale ranging from 'Completely happy' to 'Completely unhappy'. Just over three-quarters (76%) report being relatively happy. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/datasets/childrenswellbeingmeasures>
The HBSC survey (2020) asks if young people (11-15yrs) feel that their body is the right size: 60% do and girls aged 15yrs were least likely to feel their body is right. Children's Worlds survey (2020) in England, a survey of 717 children (age 10-11yrs) in the general population: 21% scored 0-6

1 in 3 girls in residential care and 1 in 5 girls in foster care were unhappy with how they looked.

- ▶ A third (33%) of girls (11-18yrs) in residential care were unhappy with how they looked compared with about 20% of girls in foster or kinship care.¹⁰³
- ▶ White girls were more frequently unhappy with how they looked compared with girls of Asian, Black, or Mixed ethnicity.¹⁰⁴
- ▶ More Asian boys (12%) were unhappy with how they looked in comparison with boys of White, Black or Mixed ethnicity aged 11-18yrs.¹⁰⁵
- ▶ The Children's Society 'Good Childhood Report' 2020¹⁰⁶ provides data on happiness with appearance that enables a comparison between young people aged 10-17yrs in the general population and young people in our sample aged 11-17yrs. In the general population, 14% of young people score in the low rating (0-4) for happiness with appearance compared with 15% of young people in care.



Life getting better

I feel healthy, safe, and supported. From what my life was like 3 years ago it is now much, much better.

11-18yrs

In our focus groups that helped develop the survey, many young people were keen to stress that their lives were getting better.



Children and young people aged 8-18yrs are asked, 'Is your life getting better?' with the answer options 'Much better', 'A bit better', 'no change', 'A bit worse', 'A lot worse'.

Despite all the young people's worries and concerns, the vast majority thought that their lives were improving.

¹⁰³ Placements and young person's sex and unhappiness with appearance: girls in foster care 21%, kinship 20%, residential 33% $\chi^2 = 18.038$ [n=1920] df3, p<.001

¹⁰⁴ Ethnicity and sex and unhappiness with appearance: White girls (24%), Mixed (19%), Black (18%), Asian (11%), $\chi^2 = 34.345$ [n= 1,919] df12, p<.001

¹⁰⁵ Asian young men (12%) the most dissatisfied compared with White (8%), Black (7%), Other (6%) Mixed (3%) $\chi^2 = 30.013$, [n=2,051] df12 p<.003

¹⁰⁶ <https://www.childrengoodreport.org.uk/sites/default/files/2020-11/Good-Childhood-Report-2020.pdf>



- ▶ 85% of children (8-10yrs) and 83% of those aged 11-18yrs reported that their lives were getting better.

Many comments highlighted how being looked after had made their lives better:

Everything is better. I have lots of friends and my best friends are [name] and [name]. 8-10yrs

Even though I'm not happy living with my current carers, I think that being in care is a good thing and overall has been better for me than when I lived at home with my parents. 11-18yrs

... being in care has changed the opinions I have on the world. I am a complete new person and I have changed for the better, extremely. I don't know what I would do if I wasn't in care because right now if I wasn't in care I would be talking to my friends about what the latest post on Instagram was or the newest TV program. But instead, I am talking about all my options for my life and what I want to be when I am older. The few times I have been asked how being in care is and at the beginning I couldn't answer this. But now I can just casually say that I couldn't be happier of where I am and what life I am living. 11-18yrs

But there were also comments from those who felt being in care had mixed effects, or who felt it had made their lives worse.

Not really. It's made my life better in some aspects and more difficult in others. Better I can see I get looked after better and more comfortable in the home I live in that makes me happier as a whole. Relationship with parents has changed for the better, but all of my relationships have changed and I don't see my friends as often as I used to. Everything has changed. 11-18yrs

Being in care has made my life worse and I wish I had never been taken into care and am going back to live with my Mum when I finish school. 11-18yrs



Overall well-being

Comparison with children in the general population

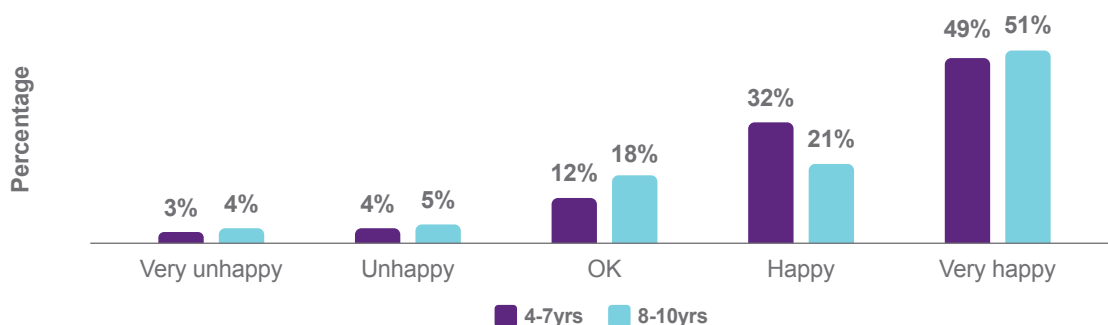
The Millennium Cohort Study asked 14,000 children aged 7yrs in the general population, 'How often do you feel happy? The response options were 'all of the time', 'some of the time' and 'never'. More than a third of children (36%) in that survey reported that they felt happy 'all of the time', and 62% felt happy 'some of the time'. A small minority (2%) reported that they 'never' felt happy. The children who regarded themselves as happy 'all of the time' were those who got on well with their siblings, had fun together with their family at weekends, and had lots of friends. They were also more likely not to bully others and were less likely to be bullied themselves. Children whose parents reported shouting when the child was naughty had lower odds of being happy than children whose parents 'never' or 'rarely' shouted.¹⁰⁷

Children aged 4-10yrs

Q: In the *Your Life, Your Care* survey, children aged 4-7yrs and 8-10yrs are asked how happy they were the previous day, using a 5-point scale ranging from 'very unhappy' to 'very happy' (with accompanying emojis).

A minority of children reported being 'unhappy' or 'very unhappy' the previous day (Figure 32).

Figure 32: Happiness yesterday: children aged 4-7 and 8-10yrs



Base: 4-7yrs n=1,432, 8-10yrs n= 2,390

¹⁰⁷ Chanfreau J., Lloyd, C., Byron, C., Roberts, C., Craig, R., De Feo, D. & McManus, S.(2013) *Predicting wellbeing*. NatCen Report for Dept of Health.London

Whether a child was happy or not the previous day can be affected by many transient concerns. To understand more about the well-being of the children who had responded negatively to the question on happiness we examined their responses to all the questions.



Low well-being 4-7yrs

I want to see mummy more. I want to play in the park more. I want to be happy because I am not happy in foster care.

4-7yrs

1 in 30 children (4-7yrs) gave responses that suggested they had low well-being.

Just over a hundred children (112: 7%) reported that they were unhappy the previous day.

Forty-eight children (3%) gave negative responses to multiple questions in the survey. These children with low well-being:

- ▶ did not feel settled or safe,
- ▶ did not trust their social worker or their carers,
- ▶ disliked school,
- ▶ did not have fun at the weekend, and
- ▶ did not have a good friend.

The child's sex, ethnicity or placement type was not associated with low well-being.

Children whose responses suggested they had low well-being often wrote about missing their mums or siblings, not understanding why they were in care and not wanting their carers to shout. For example, writing,

I don't feel safe in my care home, as she shouts at me. But she takes me out a lot, more than Mummy and Daddy did. 4-7yrs

I miss my Mummy. 4-7yrs

Getting my sisters back home with me. 4-7yrs

Why am I in foster care? 4-7yrs

It would be better if I didn't get told off at school. I get told off if I have been fighting. I would like to fight at school. 4-7yrs



Low well-being 8-10yrs

I have lots of worries and I miss mum all the time at night and get sad mainly all the time.

8-10yrs

1 in 20 children (8-10yrs) gave responses that suggested they had low well-being.

Nearly one in ten (217: 9%) children aged 8-10yrs recorded that they had felt 'unhappy' the previous day. Five per cent (n=131) gave many negative responses to survey questions. These 131 children were categorised as having low well-being. Associated with their low well-being were the same indicators as those identified for the younger age group and in addition, these older children reported that they:

- ▶ felt their carers did not notice their feelings,
- ▶ reported bullying,
- ▶ wanted more contact with their families.

The child's sex, ethnicity, or placement type was not associated with low well-being.

Comments from the children reflected their concerns but also their worries about having to change placements and uncertainty about the plans for their future. The children with low well-being responded to a question that asked 'What would make care better?' in the following ways:

Going out and doing things at the weekend a lot more instead of staying home all the time. 8-10yrs

I would like my foster carers to understand how I feel and not make fun of how I feel. 8-10yrs

Living with one carer and sticking with them only. 8-10yrs

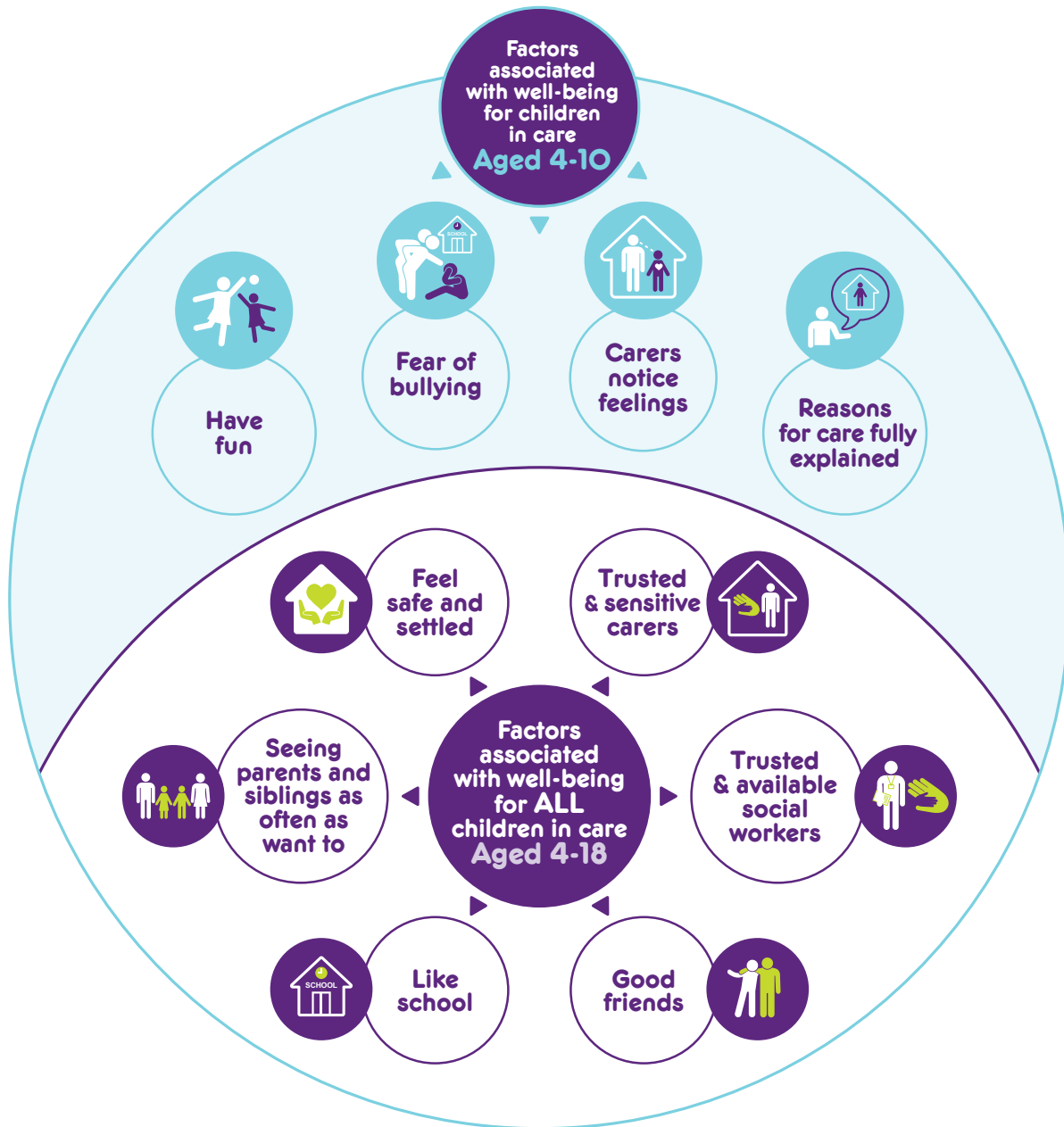
I think children should be given photos of their birth family. 8-10yrs

To know what is going to happen in the future. To see more of my dad. To see my sisters. 8-10yrs

To let mum see us a bit more. To be able to let my feelings out. 8-10yrs

Sometimes people shout at home. Make me have more fun at school. We only do work, and I get really angry and bang my head off the walls, table anything. 8-10yrs

Figure 33: Factors associated with well-being for children aged 4-10yrs



Young people aged 11-18yrs

The Children’s Society has been recording and reporting on children’s well-being since 2005.¹⁰⁸ Some of their findings are incorporated into the Office for National Statistics (ONS) online publication of the well-being of the child population.¹⁰⁹



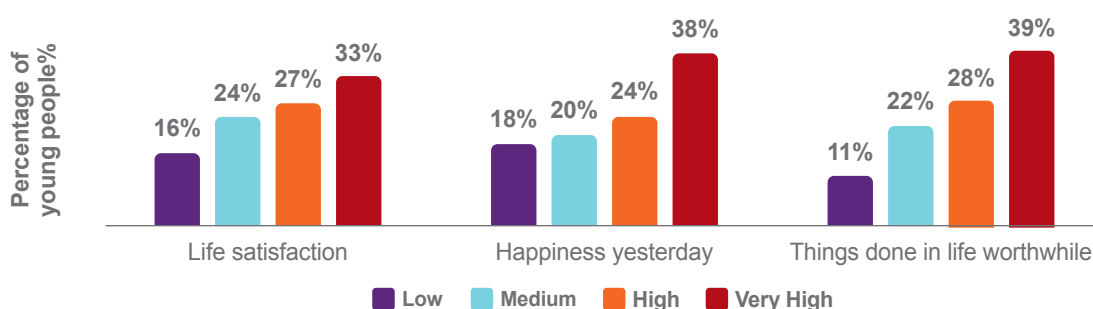
Our survey for young people (11-18yrs) includes three questions that are also reported by the ONS on the well-being of young people in the general population. The questions all use 0 to 10 scales with zero being the lowest point and ask:

- Overall, how satisfied are you with your life nowadays?**
- Overall, to what extent do you feel the things you do in your life are worthwhile?**
- How happy did you feel yesterday?**

The ONS categorises the responses as 0-4 low, 5-6 moderate, 7-8 high and 9-10 very high.

Figure 34 illustrates looked after young people’s self-ratings on the scales. In the analysis below, we first report the findings for the whole sample (11-18yrs) and then compare the ratings given by looked after young people (11-15yrs) with the ratings given by their peers (10-17yrs or 10-15yrs) in the general population.

Figure 34: Looked after young people’s ratings on the three well-being scales



Base 5,236 - 5,346 young people 11-18yrs

The majority of young people did not rate themselves as having low well-being on these scales. Between 60% and 67% selected 7-10 (high or very high) on each scale. The Children’s Society¹¹⁰ provides information on young people (age range 10-17yrs) in the general population who completed the ONS scales as part of their household surveys. Table 11 shows that while many young people in care (11-17yrs) felt they had good well-being, in comparison with peers there was a higher percentage self-rating as ‘low’.

¹⁰⁸ Children’s Society - Good Childhood Index accessed at: <https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/information/professionals/good-childhood-index>

¹⁰⁹ ONS (2018) Children’s well-being measures. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/datasets/childrenswellbeingmeasures>

¹¹⁰ Children’s Society (2020) The Good Childhood Report 2020 <https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/2020-11/Good-Childhood-Report-2020.pdf>

Table 11: Comparison of well-being: young people in care and in the general population

		Average scores (Out of 10)	% self-rating as low (0-4)
Overall, how satisfied are you with your life nowadays?	Young people in care	6.9	16%
	General population	7.2	9%
How happy did you feel yesterday?	Young people in care	6.9	16%
	General population	7.2	9%
Overall, to what extent do you feel the things you do in your life are worthwhile?	Young people in care	7.3	20%
	General population	7.4	8%

Base *Your Life, Your Care* 11-17yrs n=5,162. Young people in the general population 10-17yrs n=2,000

Variation by age

Well-being declined as young people got older.

A larger percentage (14%-20%) of young people aged 16-18yrs scored 0-4 (low) on all three scales compared with the 11-15yrs age group where 11%-18% rated themselves as low. A similar decline is reported by peers in the general population, but the decline is not inevitable. Research has found that decline varies by the quality of parent/child relationships and other factors.¹¹¹

Variation by ethnicity

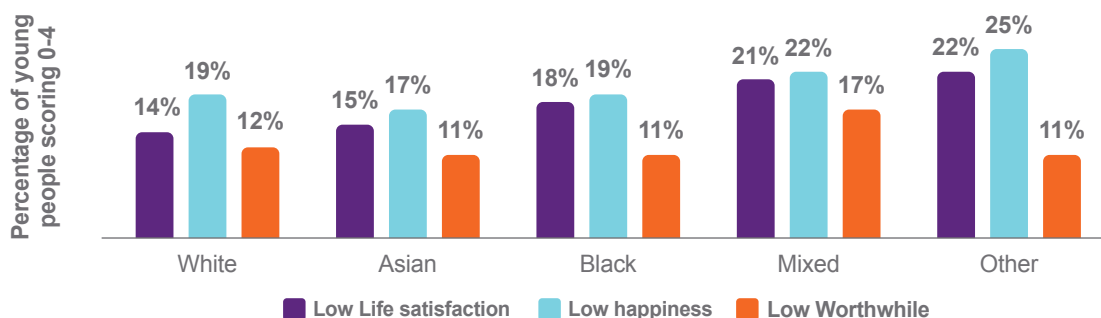
Low well-being was more common among young people of Mixed or Other ethnicities than among White, Asian, and Black young people.

There was variation in the proportion rating themselves as 'low' on the 'life satisfaction' and 'things done in life being worthwhile' scales by the young person's ethnicity (Figure 35). Young people (11-18yrs) of Mixed or Other ethnicities more frequently self-rated as 'low' compared with young people of White, Black, or Asian ethnicity.¹¹²

¹¹¹ Gutman, L., Brown, J., Akerman, R. & Obolenskaya, P. (2010) *Change in wellbeing from childhood to adolescence: risk and resilience* [Wider Benefits of Learning Research Report No. 34]. Centre for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning, Institute of Education, University of London: London

¹¹² Life satisfaction $\chi^2=27.791$ [n=5,258] df4 p<.001; Things done in life worthwhile $\chi^2= 15.946$ [n=5,162] df4, p<.003. Happiness yesterday not statistically significant $\chi^2=8.364$ [n=5,248] df4, p<.08.

Figure 35: Percentage rating as 'low' on three well-being scales by ethnicity



Variation by sex

More girls than boys rated themselves as having low levels of life satisfaction, happiness and feeling that the things that they did in life were worthwhile.

On each of the scales, a significantly larger percentage of looked after girls rated themselves in the low range in comparison with boys.¹¹³ We selected young people aged 11-15yrs to compare with data published¹¹⁴ on differences by sex of children (10-15yrs) in the general population. In the general population girls (age 10-15yrs) also rate themselves lower on each of the scales in comparison with boys but the difference was much greater for those looked after (Table 12).

Table 12: Low ratings (0-4) on the ONS scales by sex and comparison with peers

Well-being scales	General population Boys 10-15yrs	Looked After Boys 11-15yrs	General population Girls 10-15yrs	Looked After Girls 11-15yrs
Low life satisfaction	2.9%	10.7%	4.8%	18.1%
Happiness yesterday	5.8%	14.3%	7.4%	21.8%
Things done in life are worthwhile	3.8%	7.2%	5.1%	14.1%

¹¹³ Girls compared with boys: Life satisfaction $\chi^2=18.851$ [n=1,651] df1 p<.001. Happiness yesterday $\chi^2=15.988$ [n=1,647] df1 p<.001 Things done in life are worthwhile $\chi^2=20.711$ [n=1,624] df1, p<.001

¹¹⁴ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/datasets/childrenswellbeingmeasures>



Positivity about the future

I'm glad because it has made my life better. It has also made me be able to have a better future with more options to choose from.

11-18yrs

Optimism about the future is linked with happiness and resilience.¹¹⁵ The children who helped develop the *Your Life, Your Care* survey thought that the questions used in the Children Society/Children's World 2014 surveys on happiness, life satisfaction, life worthwhile and being positive about the future were important questions to ask. These national surveys have since removed the question on positivity about the future, but we retained this question as children in care felt it was important. When the ONS reviewed their children's well-being indicators they found that future prospects, including having the skills and education to live independently and develop their careers were important to children.¹¹⁶ In the Children's Commissioner 'Big Ask' survey, children in care generally reported similar aspirations to other children, i.e., 'to get on in life'. Top aspirations were 'a good job or career', 'enough money to buy the things they need', and 'good friends'.¹¹⁷



In addition to the three ONS well-being questions, the *Your Life, Your Care* survey asks young people (11-18yrs) if they feel positive about their future with responses on a 0-10 scale. The scale is categorised into 0-4 (low/pessimistic), 5-6 (moderate), 7-8 (high) and 9-10 (very high positivity) about the future

Almost 9 out of 10 were positive about the future

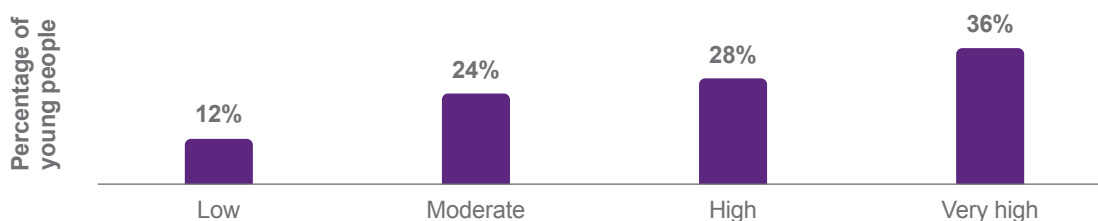
¹¹⁵ Conversano C, Rotondo A, Lensi E, Della Vista O, Arpone F, Reda MA. (2010) Optimism and Its Impact on Mental and Physical Well-Being. *Clinical Practice and Epidemiology in Mental Health*, 6, 25-29.

¹¹⁶ ONS (2020) *Children's well-being indicators review, UK: 2020* <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/articles/childrenswellbeingindicatorreviewuk2020/2020-09-02>

¹¹⁷ Children's Commissioner (2021) *The Big Answer* https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/occ_the_big_ask_the_big_answer_2021.pdf

The majority (88%) of young people (11-18yrs) were positive: 12% rated themselves as pessimistic (Figure 36).

Figure 36: Young people’s positivity about their future



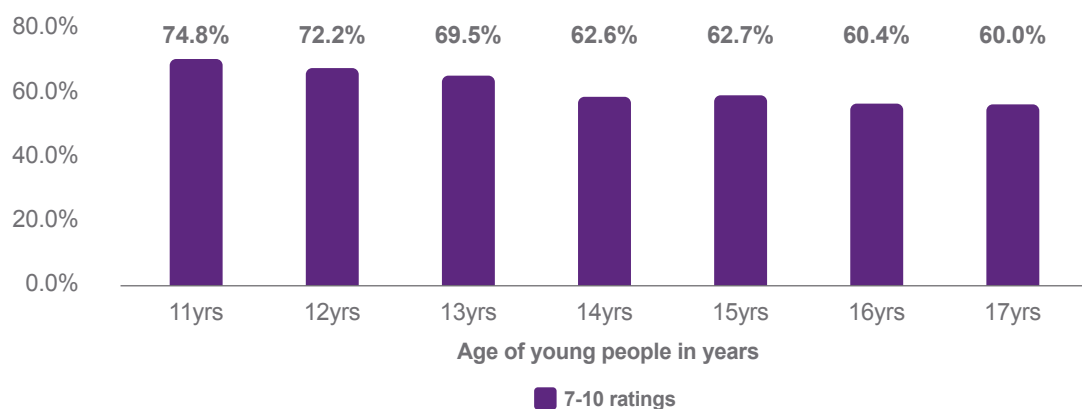
Base: 5,284 Young people 11-18yrs

- ▶ Girls (11-18yrs) were on average more pessimistic about their futures than boys: 14% of girls compared with 10% of boys rated themselves as low (0-4 on the 0-10 scale).¹¹⁸
- ▶ The ethnicity of the young person (11-18yrs) was associated with their feelings about the future. Fewer Asian (10%), White (11%) and Black (11%) young people felt pessimistic (scoring 0-4 low) compared with 17% of young people who described their ethnicity as Mixed or Other.¹¹⁹
- ▶ Placement type was also associated with optimism about the future. About 10% of those in foster and kinship placements, 18% of those in residential care, and 21% of those living somewhere else rated themselves as pessimistic about their future.¹²⁰

Optimism about the future decreased as young people got older and more girls than boys felt pessimistic.

At 11 years old three-quarters of young people reported high positivity about the future compared to only six out of 10 at age 17yrs. (Figure 37)

Figure 37: High or very high positivity about the future by age



Base: 2,492 Young people 11-17yrs

¹¹⁸ $\chi^2=34.832$, [n=5,168] df2, p<.001

¹¹⁹ $\chi^2=18,240$ [n=5,209] df4, p<.001

¹²⁰ $\chi^2=57,920$ [n=5,231] df3, p<.001

Young people wrote about their hopes and concerns:

We talk about things, but they do what they want to do anyway. When I leave care, I will have to go into some horrible bedsit or something. I haven't done well at school and don't want to go to college but there is nothing else. I couldn't earn enough to support myself. I just look forward to a life on benefits like my family. I think I came into care too late, problems at home went on for ever and foster care didn't make things better. 11-18yrs

Planning is sometimes talked about too soon and I then get anxious (I am an anxious person generally). I know we have to talk about when I am 18 but that is scary stuff and it is all "possibly" or "maybe" nothing definite. I could be living anywhere when I am 18 as nothing can be paid for before this? I don't want to stay with my foster carers, as I want to try and be independent, but I don't want to live in a hostel or YMCA or anything like that. I probably won't be able to afford a flat or a bedsit though, so I don't have many options. Shared housing can be scary if you are with other care leavers - they all seem to have so many problems. That's life though, isn't it, SCARY. 11-18yrs

I'm happy. I want to learn to be a mechanic. 11-18yrs

So many good things for me. I am now going to college and my English is improving very fast. I look to the future with confidence. 11-18yrs

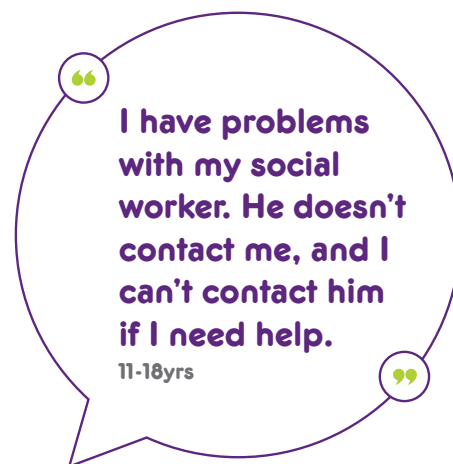


Low well-being 11-18yrs



Young people were categorised as having low well-being if they rated themselves as 0-4 on two or more of any of the four well-being scales in the *Your Life, Your Care* survey (life satisfaction, happiness yesterday, things done in life worthwhile, positivity about the future).

1 in 6 young people (11-18yrs) gave responses that suggested they had low well-being.



All the survey questions were statistically associated with low well-being. To identify which of the indicators had the most influence on young people's low well-being, a series of logistic regression models were used (see the appendix for the detail). Some questions could not be included in the model because they had either been recently added to the survey or were highly correlated with each other.

Compared with young people who rated themselves positively on each of the indicators below, the odds of having low well-being increased:

- ▶ **2.7 times if the young person mistrusted their carer and felt that they were not trusted**
- ▶ **2.6 times if they disliked school**
- ▶ **2.3 times if they worried 'always /sometimes' about their feelings or behaviours**
- ▶ **2.2 times if they felt unsafe where they lived**
- ▶ **2 times if they didn't have a trusted adult in their lives**
- ▶ **1.8 times if they felt they could not do the same things as their peers**
- ▶ **1.7 times if not given opportunities to practise life skills**
- ▶ **1.5 times if they felt excluded from decision-making compared to those who felt included**
- ▶ **1.5 times if they were unhappy with how often they saw parents and siblings**
- ▶ **1.3 times if they found it difficult to contact their social worker**

The odds of having low well-being were 1.6 times greater for girls compared with boys and 7 times greater for those who disliked their appearance.

Not statistically associated with well-being was whether parental contact was occurring. It was not that contact was unimportant for well-being, but it was the young person's rating of satisfaction with the frequency of contact that was associated with well-being rather than its presence or absence.¹²¹

Young people with low well-being wrote:

I hate foster care. They make you feel like rubbish and make you want to hurt yourself. 11-18yrs

Don't know my social worker. School is shit. Wtf would make anything better for care? Care might as well die. 11-18yrs

I hate being in care and if I say something that is worrying me, it gets blown out of proportion. 11-18yrs

I hate where I am living. I tell my SW (Social Worker) that I am too far away from friends and college, but he doesn't care. I don't cook in the house because the kitchen is dirty. The keyworker is never happy to spend time with me. It is lonely. 11-18yrs

It feels like you have to bottle stuff up otherwise social workers find out and are sly and unreliable. 11-18yrs

¹²¹ Lewis, S. et al., 2021 Staying Connected: children and young people's views of their contact arrangements. Rees Centre/Coram Voice <https://coramvoice.org.uk/for-professionals/bright-spots/resource-bank/staying-connected/>

Very high well-being

To identify those with very high well-being, young people who rated themselves as 9 or 10 on two or more of any of the four well-being scales in the survey were selected.

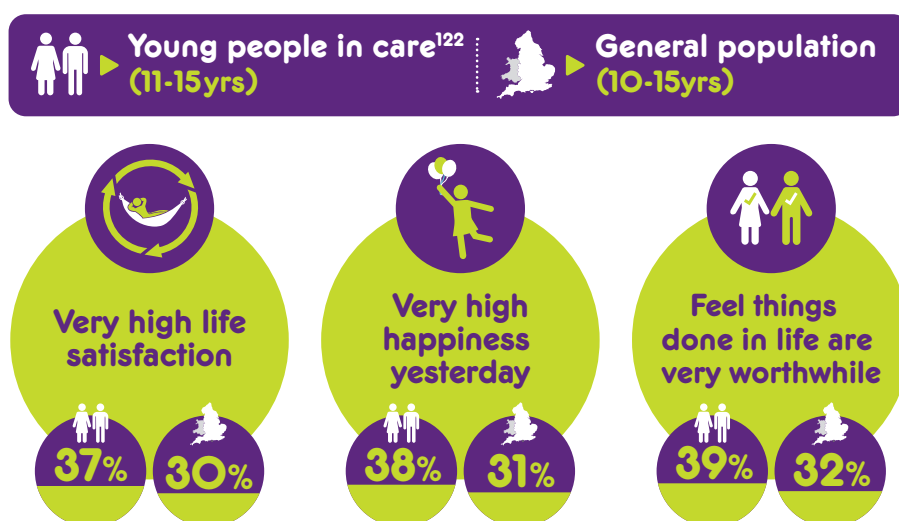
Just under a third of young people (11-18yrs) rated their well-being as 'very high'.

To consider the indicators that had the most impact on 'very high' well-being, logistic regression models were developed in the same way as done for those with low well-being. However, in this analysis, those with 'low' well-being were excluded from the analyses, as we were interested in what differentiated those who scored 'very high' compared with 'moderate' or 'high' well-being.

Compared with those who rated themselves moderately or high (scoring 5-8 on any two of the four scales), the odds of having 'very high' well-being increased:

- ▶ 3 times if young people felt settled in their placements
- ▶ 2.4 times if they liked school
- ▶ 2.2 times if they did not worry all/some of the time about their feelings and behaviour
- ▶ 1.7 times if they had a good friend
- ▶ 1.5 times if they felt included in decision-making
- ▶ 1.5 times if they had a trusted adult in their lives
- ▶ 1.5 times if they trusted their social worker
- ▶ 1.4 times if they had been in care for more than 3 years
- ▶ 1.3 times if they felt contact with a parent was 'just right'

The odds of having very high well-being were 1.2 times higher for boys compared with girls.



¹²² YLYC n=1,668-1,696; ONS n=2127-2297, year 2017-2018 ONS (2018) Children's well-being and social relationships, UK: 2018 <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/articles/measuringnationalwellbeing/march2018>

Figure 38: Factors associated with well-being for young people aged 11-18yrs



Comments on the 'very high' and 'low' well-being findings

Surprisingly in the 'very high' well-being group feeling 'safe' in placements was superseded in statistical importance by feeling 'settled'. Satisfaction with sibling contact was also not significant in the regression model of 'very high' well-being, but satisfaction with parental contact was. The presence of a 'trusted adult' was also of more importance for those with 'very high' well-being rather than the variable 'trusting carer and being trusted' and so too was 'having a good friend' rather than 'being able to do the same as friends'.

It is possible that young people with very high well-being were in a high-quality placement with a sibling and with the right frequency of contact with one or both parents.

'Not having a good friend' and 'being unable to do the same things as friends' were statistically associated. Therefore, it may be that young people with 'low' well-being feel that it is the restrictions that are preventing them from having a good friend rather than their capacity to make and maintain friendships.

Summary - Well-being



Worrying about feelings and behaviour

- ▶ 58% of children (8-10yrs) worried about their feelings or behaviour 'all/most of the time' or 'sometimes'. Most (86%) thought they were getting help to deal with their worries.
- ▶ 58% of young people (11-18yrs) worried about their feelings or behaviour 'all/most of the time' or 'sometimes.' Girls (60%) worried more frequently than boys (55%). Those living somewhere else (67%) and in residential care (64%) more frequently reported worrying compared with those living in foster care (56%) or kinship care (55%). Of those who worried, 76% felt they were getting help.
- ▶ Although a larger proportion of Asian (65%) or Other (66%) minority ethnic young people reported worrying about their feelings or behaviour compared with White young people, a smaller proportion felt they were getting help.



Happiness with appearance

- ▶ A similar proportion of young people (84%) aged 11-15yrs felt happy with their appearance as their peers (86%) in the general population.
- ▶ Girls (23%), especially those in residential care, more frequently felt unhappy with their appearance compared with boys (7%).
- ▶ White girls (24%) were more dissatisfied with their appearance compared with girls of minority ethnicity. There were no significant differences for boys by type of placement, but Asian boys (12%) were more dissatisfied in comparison with boys of White (8%), Black (7%), Other (6%) or Mixed (3%) ethnicity.



Positivity about the future

- ▶ Overall, 64% of young people (11-18yrs) felt positive about their futures compared to 78% of their peers in the general population.
- ▶ Girls (14%) were on average more pessimistic about their futures than boys (10%).
- ▶ About 11% of White, Black, and Asian young people felt pessimistic (scoring 0-4 low) about their futures compared with 17% of young people who described their ethnicity as Mixed or of Other ethnicities.
- ▶ Type of placement was also associated with pessimism about the future. About 10% of those in foster and kinship placements, 18% of those in residential care, and 21% of those living 'somewhere else' rated themselves as pessimistic.
- ▶ Positivity about the future decreased as young people's age increased.



Well-being children 4-10yrs

- ▶ About 3% of children aged 4-7yrs gave negative responses to many questions suggesting that they had low well-being. These children recorded that they did not feel settled or safe, did not trust their worker or their carers, disliked school, did not have fun at the weekend, and did not have a good friend. They wrote about missing their mums or siblings, not understanding why they were in care, or not wanting their carers to shout.
- ▶ About 9% of children (8-10yrs) gave responses that suggested they had low well-being. Associated with low well-being were the same indicators as those identified for the younger age group. In addition, children who felt they did not have good relationships with their foster carers or their social workers, disliked school, reported bullying, lacked friends, and wanted more contact with their families. Comments from these children reflected their worries about having to change placements and the plans for their futures.



Well-being young people aged 11-18yrs

- ▶ Three 0-10 well-being scales were completed by young people: a) overall satisfaction with life, b) happiness yesterday, and c) feeling that things done in life were worthwhile. These questions are also used to measure the general population's well-being and are published by the ONS as part of the wider data on well-being. The scales are categorised with ratings of 0-4 (low), 5-6 (moderate), 7-8 (high) and 9-10 (very high). The majority (84%) of young people did not rate themselves as having low well-being on these scales.
- ▶ However, between 16% and 20% of young people (11-17yrs) in care rated themselves as 'low' on one of the three ONS questions, which is a much higher percentage compared to the level reported (8%-9%) by their peers aged 10-17yrs in the general population.
- ▶ A larger percentage of older young people rated themselves as 'low' (age 16-18yrs compared with 11-15yrs) or were girls or of Mixed or Other ethnicities.
- ▶ Using the three ONS scale questions and the scale on positivity about the future, young people were categorised as having 'low' well-being if they rated themselves as 0-4 on two or more of the four scales. Just over one in six (16%) young people (11-18yrs) gave negative responses that suggested they had low well-being: more girls (19%) than boys (12%).
- ▶ To identify which of the indicators had the most influence on low well-being a series of binary logistic regression models were developed. Some questions could not be included in the models because they had either been recently added to the surveys or were highly correlated with each other.

- ▶ In order of influence in the model predicting 'low' well-being were young people (11-18yrs) who: mistrusted their carers and felt they were not trusted, disliked school, worried about their feelings or behaviour 'always/sometimes', felt unsafe in their placements, did not have a trusted adult in their life, felt unable to do the same things as friends, lacked opportunities to learn life skills, felt excluded from decision-making, thought contact with siblings and parents was not "just right" and who found it difficult to contact their social worker. They all increased the odds of having low well-being.
- ▶ Just under a third of young people had very high well-being i.e., they rated themselves as 9 or 10 on two of any of the four well-being scales. Surprisingly in the 'very high well-being' group feeling safe in placements was superseded in importance by feeling settled. Satisfaction with sibling contact was also not significant in the model for 'very high' well-being but satisfaction with parental contact remained significant. It is possible that this group of young people were in a high-quality placement with a sibling and had the right frequency of contact with one or both parents. Girls had increased odds of having 'low' well-being compared with boys.
- ▶ The odds of having 'very high' well-being increased if young people felt settled in their placement, liked school, 'hardly ever/never' worried about their feelings or behaviour, had a good friend, had a trusted adult in their life, trusted their social worker, felt included in decision-making, had been in care for more than a year, and felt contact with at least one parent was 'just right'. Boys had increased odds of having 'very high' well-being compared with girls.