Your VOICE Matters 2022

By Amy Woodworth

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2 | Introduction

Your Voice Matters is Barnardo's annual survey of the children and young people we support across the UK. Starting in 2021, it captures the voices of children and young people to ensure that we understand their views and experiences and are able to represent them across all of the work that we do as a charity.

This year, we received 316 survey responses from children and young people aged between 11 and 25, and ran focus groups with 30 participants, with fieldwork taking place between October and December 2022. In some cases, comparisons can be made between responses from 2022 and 2021, although 2021's response rate was lower with 115 responses, and in some cases question wording has been altered. This has been noted where applicable.

Many thanks to all the children and young people who took part in this research, and to all Barnardo's colleagues involved in this project, particularly colleagues in our services who shared the survey and supported children and young people to participate.

Special thanks to Laura Parkes and Jamie Farrell for additional analysis.

3 | Key Findings

Mental Health

- **65%** of respondents selected at least one positive emotion to describe how they were feeling, a decrease from 72% in 2021.
- **42%** of respondents reported feeling stressed, an increase from 30% in 2021.
- **48%** of respondents thought that that their schools, colleges, universities or local areas were doing enough to support student mental health and wellbeing, an increase from 41% in 2021.
- **'Having trusted adults you feel you can talk to'** and 'talking about how you're feeling and how to look after your mental health and wellbeing' were once again the top two things respondents thought education providers needed to do.

Respondents overall felt more negative in 2022 compared to 2021. Although there was an increase in respondents who described themselves as feeling happy, **there was also an increase in feeling stressed and an increase in feeling bored.**

Respondents told us about ongoing challenges in accessing support, both in school and through other services, with barriers including negative past experiences, lack of availability, or long waiting times.

Participants also felt that they would prefer to receive mental health support from someone independent, rather than a teacher. This was to help ensure confidentiality and the feeling that they could say something without it being shared elsewhere.

Recommendation

We're calling for Mental Health Support Teams (MHSTs) to be rolled out in all schools and colleges in England, helping schools to focus on wellbeing as well as identifying and providing early support to children and young people through specially trained staff.

Read more in our policy report: *"It's hard to talk." Expanding Mental Health Support Teams in education.*

'It's Hard to talk';
Expanding Mental Health Support Teams in Education

December 2022

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Poverty and Cost-of-living

- **52%** of respondents worry about whether they or their family have enough money to spend on essentials, and **53% say it has become harder to afford essentials in the last year.**

- **47%** of respondents have struggled to afford education-related expenses in the last year.

- **16%** of participants said that they have gone hungry or skipped meals as they or their parents/carers were unable to afford food.

Participants felt that rising costs limited their opportunities in the future by making it more difficult to move out of their family home, to live independently, or to find a job (particularly a job that paid enough to cover basic necessities). This was a particular concern for young people with disabilities who felt they had even more limited opportunities.

Recommendation

It is clear more needs to be done by the UK Government and governments in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland to mitigate the impact of the cost-of-living crisis on children, young people, and families. We are calling for all governments to:

- take more targeted and strategic action to address child poverty.
- extend the provision of universal free school meals.
- embed preventative approaches to reduce the impact of poverty on children's health.
- increase the incomes of the poorest families so they can afford to replace or repair essential items.
- prioritise solutions to keep children safe and warm for longer.

Read more in our policy report:
A crisis on our doorstep: The deepening impact of the cost-of-living crisis on children and young people in the UK.

A crisis on
our doorstep

The deepening impact of the cost-of-living crisis on
children and young people in the UK

By Ali Cooper
Date: March 2023

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Internet and Social Media

- **33%** of respondents completely agreed that they feel safe when they're online, and 11% somewhat or completely disagreed, ⟷ in similar rates to 2021.

- **54%** of respondents have felt bullied or harassed online at some point, with 8% often or always feeling bullied or harassed.

- **67%** of respondents had seen things online that made them feel worried or scared, with 10% seeing them often or all the time.

- **87%** of respondents thought that the internet and social media creates at least some pressure for children and young people to look at certain way, with 35% saying it creates a lot of pressure.

- **68%** of respondents reported having been made to feel badly about how they look because of things they'd seen online, ⤴ a rise from 54% answering a similar question in 2021.[1]

- **36%** of respondents had been contacted online by someone they didn't know who made them feel worried or scared, including 9% who said this had happened many times. In 2021, 54% of respondents told us that they saw unwanted messages or contact from people they didn't know, potentially indicating a difference between the overall number of young people experiencing this kind of contact, and those who find it distressing.

Being and feeling safe online were key concerns of participants, particularly around bulling, viewing harmful content (e.g. around eating disorders, suicide, self-harm), and the sharing of identifiable information (e.g. school uniform, location). Many participants took the view that more education on online safety would be beneficial for children, particularly younger children who they viewed to be more at risk.

Participants also told us about the many benefits of the internet. It was felt that the internet allows young people to keep in touch with friends who they might not see often, but also to create opportunities to make new friends or find people with shared interests. This was discussed in terms of feeling like they can belong to an online community. It was also discussed in terms of how young people may sometimes find it easier to talk to people online rather than in person.

Recommendation

Barnardo's supports children who have accessed pornography sites. We see first-hand that watching this content harms children's mental health and can normalise aggressive and harmful sexual activity.

That's why we're calling for the Government and web companies to do more to protect children from harmful content, including through the Online Safety Bill.

Read more in our:
open letter to leading pornography sites
and
our briefing on the Online Safety Bill

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[1] **2021 question:** 'When you go online, how often do you see things that pressure you to look a certain way or encourage negative body image?'

4 | Mental Health and Wellbeing

At Barnardo's, we know that supporting children and young people's mental health is vital to prevent long-term health, social and financial impacts into adulthood. Schools and colleges are increasingly playing a part in recognising children and young people in need and providing mental health services.

That's why we're calling for Mental Health Support Teams (MHSTs) to be rolled out in all schools and colleges in England, helping schools to focus on wellbeing as well as identifying and providing early support to children and young people through specially trained staff.

Read more in our policy report:
"It's hard to talk." Expanding Mental Health Support Teams in education.

How are children and young people feeling?

Trends – 2022 compared to 2021:

- **53%** of respondents felt happy, an increase from 47%
- **65%** of respondents picked at least one positive emotion to describe how they were feeling, a decrease from 72%
- **42%** of respondents felt stressed, an increase from 30%
- **27%** of respondents felt bored, an increase from 9%

Respondents overall felt more negative in 2022 compared to 2021. Although there was an increase in respondents who described themselves as feeling happy, there was also an increase in feeling stressed and an increase in feeling bored. Overall, 65% of respondents selected at least one positive emotion to describe how they were feeling, a drop from 2021's 72%.

Demographic differences

- Girls were more likely say that they have been feeling overwhelmed (37% vs. 7% of boys).
- Respondents of Asian, African and Caribbean heritage were less likely to be feeling relaxed (11% vs 25%).
- Respondents living in poverty reported feeling more negatively across almost every option, including feeling more stressed (48% vs 32%), overwhelmed (32% vs 7%), worried (24% vs 11%), and less happy (46% vs 66%).
- LGBTQ+ respondents reported feeling more overwhelmed (37% vs 17%), sad (21% vs 8%), and less happy (42% vs 60%).
- Respondents aged 21 – 25 were more likely to feel worried (28% vs 18%), and respondents aged 11 – 20 were more likely to feel bored (29% vs 16%).

Mental health and wellbeing support in education

Trends – 2022 compared to 2021:

- **48%** of respondents thought that their schools, colleges, universities or local areas were doing enough to support student mental health and wellbeing, ↗ **rising from 41% in 2021.**

- **'Having trusted adults you feel you can talk to'** and **'talking about how you're feeling and how to look after your mental health and wellbeing'** were once again the top two things respondents thought education providers needed to do.

Demographic differences

Overall, 30% of respondents thought that their school, college, or university doesn't do enough to support mental health and wellbeing. Children and young people with a range of marginalised protected characteristics were more likely to say this:

- 34% of disabled respondents;
- 37% of respondents living in poverty;
- 40% of LGBTQ+ respondents.

Challenges in receiving support

Participants felt that schools, colleges and teachers focus too much on learning, behaviour, and imposing uniform restrictions and not enough on mental health and wellbeing support. They felt they were not listened to when accessing support and that school stripped them of the chance to express their individuality or identity by imposing restrictions (e.g. uniform) which had a negative impact on their wellbeing.

Where support was available in schools and colleges, it was often felt that support wasn't good enough, didn't go on for long enough, was often a 'box-ticking' exercise, and focused only on depression and anxiety, causing other mental health issues to be neglected. While participants felt it was easier to access support at university, due to more routes to access, this support also fell short due to not being joined up.

Where support was available in schools and colleges, young people found it hard to access due to a lack of awareness or knowledge about what was available. Language barriers were frequently discussed and the difficulties this created for some young people to access support.

'**I think it is important to let young people know that these services do exist in school** because my school had a counselling team but it was almost really hidden for some reason, young people didn't know about it and you had to talk to your teacher if you wanted to access it'

What should schools do?

Similarly to 2021, the top things that children and young people thought education providers should do were talking about how you're feeling and how to look after your mental health and wellbeing, and having trusted adults you feel you can talk to.

Other mental health support services

Negative experiences of support in the past were acknowledged as putting young people off seeking or accessing support in the future. Previous experiences of not meeting thresholds exacerbated this. The current pressure on health services and long waiting times that this was creating were also frequently cited as barriers. Some young people felt that staff or mental health professionals didn't recognise their lived experience and felt that services were not adequately meeting the needs of all children and young people.

'There's no relationship building either, which I think is one of the fundamental things of support, and there's just no time.'

'Yeah, the six week support thing, you get six CBT sessions and then you're out of the door, it's not really going to…'

'But then it was just box ticking exercises, so it was like on a scale of one to 10 how you felt the last week and I just didn't really think it helped me.'

'Can I just say, it's also really heavily focused on depression and anxiety. The other ones are ignored.'

'I think for me, giving access to formal support is massive because it's just so limited everywhere else, and I feel like although things like raising awareness about mental health are important, people are becoming more aware of mental health, but sometimes the awareness is ahead of the actual support available. People might be really aware of it and be able to talk about it, but then there's not really enough support still.'

'I also think there's massive issues with accessibility of mental health services and them not really being supportive of young people and recognising certain groups of young people, so like disabled young people, LGBTQ+ young people, young people from different ethnic minority backgrounds, and meeting those needs. I think there's a massive shortfall with that.'

'I think also sometimes there's shame around it and people not wanting other people to know that they're struggling. And just being busy as well. I think in an ideal world we'd have all the time in the world, but I think it's so busy we've got to put this on the back seat and not really deal with it and not wanting to acknowledge it sometimes."

'That's also not mentioning the fact that say you want to get professional help, that's not mentioning the fact that say if it's through the NHS, they're busy with COVID, which means if you want to get a check-up just to see if you have something, just to see someone, you have to wait between a week and six months.'

'They [my friends] actually care. When it comes to the NHS, they don't care. When it comes to like therapists, you have to pay for them. You have to pay for therapists outside of the NHS, which is dumb.'

'On the NHS you get like what, eight sessions, twelve sessions if you're lucky. And then it's like a six month waiting list minimum.'

The importance of trusted relationships

Participants felt that good mental health support would come from someone independent, with no relation to the school or teachers. This was to help ensure confidentiality and to make sure that they could say something without that being shared elsewhere.

Young people had concerns that they might be treated differently if they disclosed their feelings or talked about their mental health. They felt it was therefore often easier to talk to someone they didn't know, rather than a member of staff in school.

Friends and peers were important sources of support. Participants often felt their friends were a safe space to reach out to, and felt they could trust their friends more than professionals.

'So I think it's easier whenever you have **a close friend that you can just say everything to**.'

'I also think trusted relationships, that one is probably next on my list. **I think it's so important that young people have those trusted adults** because they might not have any elsewhere. That can make a big difference.'

'It's like when it comes to mental health, **I don't want to go for professional help** because of everything we just listed. I have to go to my friends, and **my friends are probably the best counsellors I don't have to pay for, because one, they've been through similar situations to me, which means they can relate and give me advice** on how to work it. Two, if they don't know how to do it, they still give me advice on how to work it from a basis, understanding of it. And three, **they're my friends, which means I can trust them with anything in the world**.'

5 | Poverty and Cost-of-living

No child should grow up in poverty, yet even before the cost-of-living crisis intensified in 2022 the situation in the UK was critical with more than one in four children living in poverty.

It is clear much more needs to be done by the UK Government and governments in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland to mitigate the impact of rising costs on children, young people and families.

Read more in our policy report: *A crisis on our doorstep: The deepening impact of the cost-of-living crisis on children and young people in the UK*

The cost-of-living crisis is having an enormous impact on all areas of children and young people's lives, exacerbating existing challenges and creating new ones.

- **52%** of respondents worry about whether they or their family have enough money to spend on essentials, and **53% say it has become harder to afford essentials in the last year.**
- **31%** of respondents said that they have 'Lied to my friends or family that I didn't want something, because I didn't want to admit I or my family/carers couldn't afford it.'
- **22%** have 'felt embarrassed because I or my family/carers couldn't afford something other people I know had.'
- **12%** have 'Been teased or made to feel ashamed because I or my family/carers didn't have money or something that other people have.'

Demographic groups

Compared to 52% of respondents overall who are worried about having enough money for essentials, the number rose to:

- 57% of girls
- 58% of LGBTQ+ respondents,
- 70% of respondents aged 21 to 25.

Disabled children and young people were more likely to have been teased or made to feel ashamed because they or their family/carers didn't have money or something that other people have (28% vs 16%).

Girls were more likely to be worried about being able to afford the essentials (57% vs 47%) or to feel that it had become harder to afford the essentials in the last year (57% vs 49%).

LGBTQ+ children and young people were more likely to have gone hungry or skipped meals (40% vs 21%).

White children were also more likely to have gone hungry or skipped meals (30% vs 15%).

Age was a significant factor in respondents' experiences of poverty for the following options

In the last year, have you:	11-15	16-20	21-25
Been teased or made to feel ashamed because I or my family/carers didn't have money or something that other people have	24%	23%	13%
Lied to my friends or family that I didn't want something, because I didn't want to admit I or my family/carers couldn't afford it	53%	22%	67%
Gone hungry or skipped meals because I or my family/carers couldn't afford food	4%	37%	30%

> **'I've started bringing my own lunch to school and college,** or work and college, because it's just, **it's too expensive not to.'**

Food

Many children and young people supported by Barnardo's are keenly aware of the rising costs of food, which in some cases is having a direct impact on them. 16% of participants said that that they had gone hungry or skipped meals as either they or their parents or carers were unable to afford food.

Participants told us about seeing their parents and carers spend a lot of time price comparing between different supermarkets to get the best value possible, or relying on discounts and food in the reduced section.

One young person working as an apprentice told us that although rising prices aren't always directly discussed at work,

> 'I know whenever we go to the shop **we always go straight to the baked section and then we go to reduced, it's sort of one of those things. Nobody buys anything unless it's reduced.'**

The rising cost of food is a particular source of stress for autistic children and young people, or those with mental health problems such as depression, as more accessible food options such as ready meals become unaffordable. One young person told us,

> **'I don't realise how hungry I am until I'm keeling over because I'm really hungry. And at that point I need ready meals because it's like a three minute thing, it's like a five minute thing** and then it's warm food.'

Affording essentials

Over half of respondents worried about whether they or their family have enough money to spend on essentials, and also saying that it has become harder in the last year.

One young person was due to be moving into their own place soon, and was concerned that after paying for rent, bills, food and transport to work, they'd have nothing left over for anything else at all.

Children and young people are also aware of current government and media messaging around the cost-of-living crisis. One felt frustrated.

'There's a lot of emphasis on personal responsibility, especially for young people. You hear the older generation saying, 'Well if they stopped buying Starbucks or avocado or whatever it is this time', but this is so much more, this is so much bigger than that.'

Participants also often spoke about the importance of budgeting, their awareness of their parents and carers' financial concerns, and the challenges they faced affording essentials for themselves or as part of their family.

One young person told us,

'My mum's like, we're only having the radiators on for 30 minutes and that's it. The rest of the day. I say to my mum, 'Can I have a bath tonight? I've not had a bath in like five days or something, because I'm like I can't be bothered having a shower, Mum, can I have a bath? I want to relax,' and my mum's like,'You need to have a shower. You don't want to waste £1 on your bath.'''

Participants frequently discussed how the price of everyday items has increased and the impact this is having on families in terms of being able to feed themselves and being able to afford bills. Participants discussed the importance of budgeting and only paying for necessities and cutting back on 'treats' as a way to reduce costs.

The cost of petrol was significant for participants, and they frequently spoke about how it made getting to school, college or university expensive and more difficult, as well as how it limited opportunities to get to support or services. Taking public transport was often not a viable alternative as this was too expensive and unreliable

'For me, **the biggest thing is petrol. I drive to uni and it is just such a nightmare.** Every time I fill up it's getting more and more and more. And **it's not really something I can save on because I just need to get to uni, I need to do that journey.**'

'Kids worrying about stuff that don't need to worry about at a young age.'

'I live in a really bad public transport area, so there is the option to get public transport but before, **the buses have been cancelled and it's taken two hours to get home for what would usually be a 20 minute journey.** It's just one of those things.'

'I think [poverty is] **not being able to live and provide the things that you need for yourself.** But also I do think if you're **not able to treat yourself once in a while, that is also part of living in poverty, because I do think that that is important.**'

Participants spoke about how rising costs were creating difficulties and concerns for parents and carers, but also the impact this has on younger children who could pick up on these worries. Participants felt concerned that the cost-of-living was not something children should have to think about. Rising costs led to parents working longer hours which gave them less time to spend with their children.

'**Having absent parents, when they've got to work so much,** when they need the money, they're working every shift they can, then that **will also affect the kids, not being able to see them.**'

Education and employment opportunities

47% of respondents have struggled to afford education-related expenses in the last year, most commonly trips (22%), transport to school/college/university (21%), and devices and internet access (19%). The cost of school uniform was also frequently mentioned and was a particular issue for secondary school pupils who needed to wear items like blazers.

One focus group participant who is a university student told us that

'**I know people who are working 40 hours on night shifts** and then **also doing a full time degree** alongside that.'

Participants also saw that the cost-of-living crisis is having an impact on young people's life chances and opportunities. One young person told us that,

'**I think it's massively impacting people being able to move out.** I think before people would be moving out and after uni particularly, people would be moving out. I think at the minute t**here's going to be a lot more people living with their parents and their families and things for longer.**'

Participants felt that rising costs limited their opportunities in the future by making it more difficult to move out of their family home, to live independently, or to find a job (particularly a job that paid enough to cover basic necessities). This was a particular concern for young people with disabilities who felt they had even more limited opportunities for work.

For participants who were already living independently or at university, the cost of petrol and travel made it difficult to visit family or friends as it was too expensive, leading to feelings of isolation and a lack of support.

Not being able to afford to go out and do things for fun or leisure was another lost opportunity. Participants also frequently discussed inequality, particularly the gap between those living in poverty and those who are not, how this was widening, and how difficult it is to close this gap due to a lack of opportunities.

'In my case **I have chronic pain in multiple different ways. It is physically, like I can't work.** I have friends similar to me that can't work. We are, irrelevant of age, we cannot move out, because we can't work. So what we would earn as a whole wouldn't be enough to pay rent, let alone food or energy bills or anything like that. **It is physically impossible for us to survive on our own**'

'**I think it means that people are going into less meaningful jobs.** Before **people might be able to do work experience while they're at uni** or concentrate on the study that they want to do, look at a job in the field that they want to go into, **but now people are grabbing zero hour contracts, doing whatever they literally can to get by. It obviously widens that gap** of the people who have the financial security are able to do that kind of thing and then further into their jobs, but then those that don't, it's almost like the gap's getting wider, and uni isn't able to level that.'

'**Yeah, it's difficult for her to get home** and when other people in her flat go home she sometimes can be the only one there and **it's just a bit rubbish.'**

'**That's a lot for a family to manage** and then you've got to think the out of school activities, when you're going to school say your football, you've got to pay for a strip, you've got to pay for the travel where I think that should be in schools it should be, and even the council for your swim packs, you've got to pay'

Demographic differences

LGBTQ+ children and young people were more likely to struggle to afford devices or internet access (25% vs 16%).

White children and young people were more likely to struggle to afford transport to and from school, college, or university (24% vs 12%).

30% of young people aged 21 – 25 struggled to afford transport, compared to 23% of 16 – 20 year olds and 11% of 11 – 15 year olds. 11 – 20 year olds were more likely to struggle to afford devices or internet access (20% vs 13%).

Mental health

The cost-of-living crisis is having a direct impact on children and young people's physical and mental health. Cost is a limiting factor in their ability to access mental health services like counselling, particularly when waiting lists for provision such as CAMHS are so long.

'You don't feel good, because you're not yourself. And everything that you try and do to make yourself feel yourself costs money.'

'It is a horrible, horrible thing that everything to do with mental health is either such a limited supply, doesn't exist, costs money, or doesn't care.'

Participants were also concerned about the impact of the cost-of-living crisis on the mental health and wellbeing of younger children.

One young person telling us that,

'Children where parents now are tightening their belts and budgeting, children wonder where the treats have gone. Where's our Saturday night takeaway. I know of a young person that asked their parent, is it my fault we don't get this. Because younger children don't understand, they think at some point has it got something to do with me, is it me, is it not me. Parents are not wanting to explain to young people, children younger, for them not to worry. But I think children at a very early age pick up on when their parents are worried.'

6 | Internet and Social Media

The internet is a crucial part of children and young people's lives, but it's also somewhere where they can be exposed to many kinds of harmful content.

Barnardo's supports children who have accessed harmful content on pornography sites. This includes accessing harmful and degrading content, including content that suggests or shows rape, incest, domestic abuse and child sexual abuse. We see first-hand that watching this content harms children's mental health and can normalise aggressive and harmful sexual activity.

That's why we're calling for the Government and web companies to do more to protect children from harmful content, including through the Online Safety Bill.

Read more in our *open letter to leading pornography sites* and *our briefing on the Online Safety Bill.*

What do children and young people do online?

The most commonly-used websites and apps among respondents were **YouTube (90%), Snapchat (73%), TikTok (73%),** Instagram (71%), and Facebook (55%). Other sites including Twitter, Reddit, Discord, Twitch and Tumblr were used by 33% of respondents or fewer.

The most common activities online were **listening to music, podcasts or other audio (81%),** watching videos and streams (79%), looking at content on social media (73%), and talking to offline/real life friends (69%). Only 39% of respondents said that they posted content on social media.

Online safety

Methodology note: we asked similar questions in the 2021 survey, but the wording of the questions for 2022 was updated to put more emphasis on the impact or effect of encountering these kinds of online harms. Where comparisons are described, the differences between the questions is noted, and full data tables are below.

Children and young people reported a wide variety of experiences online. Although few participants disagreed with the statement 'I feel safe when I'm online' (11% somewhat or completely disagreed), 67% had seen things online that made them feel worried or scared, 87% of respondents thought the internet and social media creates at least some pressure for children and young people to look at certain way, 54% of respondents have felt bullied or harassed online, and 68% of respondents reported having been made to feel badly about how they look because of things they'd seen online. 36% of respondents had been contacted online by someone they didn't know who made them feel worried or scared, including 9% who said this had happened many times.

Trends – 2022 compared to 2021:

- Respondents reported feelings of safety in very similar rates in 2022 and 2021.

- In 2022, 68% of respondents reported having been made to feel badly about how they look because of things they'd seen online, a rise from 2021, where 54% said that they saw things online that things that pressured them to look a certain way or encouraged negative body image.

- **36%** of respondents had been contacted online by someone they didn't know who made them feel worried or scared, including 9% who said this had happened many times. In 2021, 54% of respondents told us that they saw unwanted messages or contact from people they didn't know, potentially indicating a difference between the overall number of young people experiencing this kind of contact, and those who find it distressing.

How much do you agree with the following sentence: 'I feel safe when I'm online'	
Completely agree	33%
Somewhat agree	24%
Don't agree or disagree	34%
Somewhat disagree	6%
Completely disagree	5%

2021:

On a scale from 1 – 5, how safe do you feel when you are online	
5 | safe all the time	30%
4 |	23%
3 | safe some of the time	35%
2 |	9%
1 | not at all safe	1%

Have you ever felt bullied or harassed when you are online?	
I never feel bullied or harassed	46%
I rarely feel bullied or harassed	20%
I sometimes feel bullied or harassed	26%
I often feel bullied or harassed	6%
I always feel bullied or harassed	2%

Do you think the internet and social media creates or adds to pressure for children and young people to look a certain way?	
I don't think it creates any pressure	13%
I think it creates a bit of pressure	6%
I think it creates some pressure	33%
I think it creates quite a lot of pressure	13%
I think it creates a lot of pressure	35%

Have you ever felt badly about how you look because of something you've seen online?	
Never	32%
Occasionally	10%
Sometimes	36%
Often	7%
All the time	15%

2021:

When you go online, how often do you see things that pressure you to look a certain way or encourage negative body image?	
Never	40%
Sometimes	27%
All the time	27%
Don't know	7%

Have you ever unintentionally seen things online that made you feel worried or scared?	
Never	33%
Occasionally	16%
Sometimes	41%
Often	7%
All the time	3%

Have you ever been contacted online by someone you didn't know who made you feel worried or scared?	
Yes, many times	9%
Yes, more than once	13%
Yes, once	14%
No, never	49%
I don't know	12%
I don't want to say	3%

2021:

When you're online, how often do you see unwanted messages or contact from people you don't know?	
All the time	15%
Sometimes	37%
Never	41%
I don't know	7%
I don't want to say	0%

Demographic differences

- Girls were more likely than boys to use TikTok and Facebook, while boys were more likely to use Reddit, Discord or Twitch, the latter platforms being commonly associated with more stereotypically male-dominated parts of internet culture, particularly related to gaming.

- Although boys were somewhat more likely than girls to play games by themselves online (70% vs 54%), the difference was much greater when it came to playing games with other players, which only 29% of girls did compared to 66% of boys.

- 60% of LGBTQ+ respondents said they felt completely or somewhat safe online compared to 52% of non-LGBTQ+ respondents, perhaps due to being able to connect to online LGBTQ+ communities and resources that may not be available in their local area. However, fewer LGBTQ+ respondents said they never felt bullied or harassed online (35% vs 51%), and were more likely to have felt badly about how they look (77% vs 62%), seen something that made them feel worried or scared (79% vs 62%), and been contacted by someone they didn't know (41% vs 36%).

- Girls were also more likely to have been contacted online by someone they didn't know who made them feel worried or scared more than once or many times, 32% compared to 14% of boys.

Concerns about harmful content

Being and feeling safe online were key concerns of participants, particularly around bulling, viewing harmful content (e.g. around eating disorders, suicide, self-harm), and the sharing of personal or identifiable information (e.g. school uniform, location).

Young people felt bullying was prevalent online and it was easier for people to say hurtful or harmful things online compared to offline. While it was recognised that anyone can experience these harms online, participants spoke about how younger children were at particular risk due to a lack of awareness, understanding, and education around online harms which put them more at risk of sharing personal or identifiable information.

'I do worry though because on **TikTok** as well a lot of younger people, I think it's a big young people thing, **show themselves in their school uniform,** the school they go to, and **then things suddenly go viral, and then they've got 10,000 likes** or whatever, and it's like, oh, **that's a bit worrying.** It's difficult.'

'For a lot of people, **you can just be scrolling through stuff and then suddenly they'll show you things** like someone talking about triggering potentially eating disorders or self-harm, talking about their self-harm or whatever.'

'There's not much really hiding from, like say stuff's going on at school **and people are teasing you and bullying you, you go home, that's it, whereas say if it's on social media, you can turn it off,** but a lot of people depend on the phone, and soon as they turn it off they're sitting there, what do I do? And then as soon as they turn it on, **it's just constantly, and so it's just one of those things.'**

Better education to reduce the risk of harms

Many participants took the view that more education on online safety would be beneficial for children, particularly younger children who they viewed to be more at risk. Participants felt that as they got older and gained more experience of being online, they were more likely than younger children to be safe online and therefore education about online safety would be best targeted at younger children.

'I think it's a bit unfair because **if you [don't] teach kids about how to be safe until much later on,** after they've gotten their phones and then **strangers will have already messaged them by that time** and then you might've said the wrong thing **and then they wouldn't realise.'**

'I think younger kids, in our century **I feel like younger kids have been getting phones and they may not know what to do when a stranger is asking for personal information.** They might just give it to them because they're not sure what to do. Not teenagers, maybe kids that are younger.'

Benefits of the internet

It was felt that the internet and access to technology allow young people to keep in touch with friends who they might not see often, but also to create opportunities for new friends or finding people with shared interests. This was discussed in terms of feeling like they can belong to an online community. It was also discussed in terms of how young people may sometimes find it easier to talk to people online rather than in person.

'**You don't have to go to people's houses just to meet up with them,** you can easily text them asking do you want to meet up. you can easily text them and don't have to actually go to their house and ask.'

'And then also **online communities and online friends** and keeping in touch with those kind of people.'

'**Yes I probably would, because you can find people who've common interests,** like there's boys in work I work with, and I follow football but they don't. So then you're like kind of sitting there, what do I have to speak about to them, whereas I can go online and I could see five different people and only one of them follows football. I don't have to speak to the other four. I can just speak to the one and have something to speak about.'

'Some of my massive friendships that I've had are online and it's amazing, yeah, it's so good. And thinking of a lot of autistic people in particular, there's massive communities, lots of people don't feel comfortable socialising in person, it's massive and I think it gives people a lot of belonging and things, so I think yeah, it's so important.'

Participants felt that the internet and technology offered a platform for learning new things such as new dances on TikTok. It also was seen as an opportunity for education, reading and studying

'Like studying, doing like homework for school, research for like random things like you want to know about, you can read online. It's much helpful.'

'For information. If you want it know about anything, you need to go and find contacts or doing education, it's a big tool to have a phone and access to it.'

'Actually for learning new things it's important. Sometimes we learn how to make a cupboard. Sometimes, you know, how to sew, things like that.'

7 | Celtic Nations Questions

To support our influencing in the devolved governments, we asked respondents from Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland some additional questions relevant to the current policy context in each nation.

Scotland

28 Scottish participants answered questions in this section.

Over half of them (15, 54%) agreed that their voices are listened to and suggestions they make about their care and support are acted upon, **while 5 (18%) disagreed.**

They were less sure if they had a role in shaping services, with approximately a third each answering **yes (11, 39%), no (8, 29%), and I don't know (8, 32%),** but most agreed that those who provide care and support know what is important to them, with **18 (64%) agreeing** and **5 (18%) each saying no or I don't know.**

Wales

14 Welsh participants answered questions in this section.

Responses varied on whether or not participants felt happy and confident attending school, with **4** saying they felt not at all happy and confident, **7** saying a little bit or somewhat, and **3** saying very or completely happy and confident. Only **4 respondents** said that their school provided any assistance around attendance.

Of the options listed, the most popular forms of support for ability and confidence to attend school were 'a quiet space to relax and take a break when needed' **(8),** 'a dedicated staff member to support you' **(6),** and 'support with transport costs' **(4).**

Northern Ireland

22 Northern Irish participants answered questions in this section.

17 (77%) respondents said that they had friends who lived in a different country before moving to Northern Ireland, including almost equal numbers of those who have lived in Northern Ireland less than five years **(8)** and those who have lived there their whole lives **(7).**

Respondents had mixed views or whether they learn enough about healthy relationships and consent in school, with **6** saying they did, **8** saying they didn't, and a further **8** saying they didn't know.

8 | Appendix B: About our participants

Age:	The majority of respondents were aged between 16 and 20 (57%), with 36% of respondents being either 16 or 17. 27% of respondents were aged 11 to 15, and 17% of respondents were aged 21 to 25.
Location:	75% of respondents live in England, with 11% from Scotland, 9% from Northern Ireland, and 5% from Wales.
Gender:	We had equal numbers of male and female respondents (47% each), with a further 3% of respondents being non-binary, and 2% choosing either 'other' or 'unsure/ questioning'. 9% of respondents said that their gender now was not the same as their gender given at birth, with an additional 1% 'unsure/questioning'. Combining those respondents with those who selected 'non-binary', 'other' or 'unsure/questioning' in the question above shows that 31 (10%) of survey respondents are trans or questioning their gender identity.
Sexuality:	82 respondents (26%) described their sexuality as something other than 'straight/ heterosexual', most commonly 'bisexual' (10%) and 'gay/lesbian' (7%). Combining the answers to all three gender and sexuality questions shows that 86 (27%) respondents describe themselves as under the LGBTQ+ umbrella.
Ethnicity:	77% of respondents were white, selecting only 'White English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish or British' (69%), 'White European' (8%), and/or 'White - any other background' (4%). 23% of respondents selected at least one non-white option (respondents could choose multiple options), including 7% selecting 'mixed race', 6% selecting at least one Black background, 6% selecting at least one Asian background, and 4% selecting Arab.
Religion:	Respondents most commonly selected 'atheist/no religion' (50%), following by Christian (23%), Muslim (8%) and 'any other religion' (3%).
Disability:	38% of respondents said that they had a disability.

9 | Appendix B: All Data Tables

Only whole-number percentages are listed to preserve anonymity. The average response rate per section is provided. Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding or due to questions allowing multiple responses.

Section 1	About you

Average response rate: **304**

1.1	Where do you live?	%
	England	75
	Northern Ireland	9
	Scotland	11
	Wales	5
	Don't want to say	1

1.2	How old are you?	
	11	4
	12	5
	13	3
	14	9
	15	5
	16	17
	17	9
	18	11
	19	4
	20	5
	21	2
	22	4
	23	2
	24	3
	25	6

1.3	What is your gender?	
	Male	4
	Female	4
	Non-binary	3
	Other	1
	Unsure/questioning	1
	Don't want to say	1

1.4	Is your gender now the same as the gender you were given at birth?	
	Yes	89
	No	9
	Unsure/questioning	1
	I don't want to say	1

1.5	What is your ethnicity? (Please select all that apply.)	
	Arab	4
	Asian - Bangladeshi	1
	Asian - Chinese	1
	Asian - Indian	1
	Asian - Pakistani	3

Asian - any other background	2
Black	1
Black African	2
Black Caribbean	4
Black - any other background	1
Mixed race	7
White English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish or British	69
White European	8
White - any other background	4
Any other background	2
I don't want to say	1
**1.6	Would you say that you have a disability?**	
Yes	38
No	48
I don't know	12
I don't want to say	2
**1.7	What is your religion, if any?**	
Atheist/no religion	50
Christian	23
Muslim	8
Buddhist	0
Hindu	0*
Jewish	0*
Sikh	0*
Any other religion	3
I don't know	11
I don't want to say	4
**1.8	What is your sexuality?**	
Straight/heterosexual	66
Bisexual	10
Gay/lesbian	7
Pansexual	4
Queer	2
Asexual	1
Unsure/questioning	4
I don't want to say	7

Indicates responses were less than 1% but greater than 0.

Section 2 | Mental health and wellbeing

Average response rate: **281**

2.1	How are you feeling at the moment? Pick up to three words below for how you've been feeling over the last two weeks.	%
Happy	53
Stressed	42
Bored	27
Overwhelmed	23
Relaxed	23
Worried	20

Excited	17
Lonely	13
Sad	12
Angry	12
Other	12
Don't know	6
Scared	4
Don't want to say	4

2.2 | Do you think your school, college or university (or other local services) does enough to support children and young people's mental health and emotional wellbeing?	
Yes	48
No	30
Don't know	21
Don't want to say	2

2.3 | What do you think are the most important things schools, colleges, and universities should do for children and young people's mental health and wellbeing? Choose up to three	
Talking about how you're feeling and how to look after your mental health and wellbeing	58
Having trusted adults you feel you can talk to	58
Raising awareness about mental health and wellbeing	39
Helping you deal with stress about exams	37
Giving you access to formal support like counselling	31
Giving you time to relax, meditate or practice mindfulness	31
Supporting you with making friends	26
Giving you time to spend outside or do sports and exercise	25

Section 3 | **Cost-of-living**

Average response rate: **272**

3.1 | In the last year, have you experienced any of the following?	**%**
Missed out on a trip or activity because I or my family/carers couldn't afford it	31
Lied to my friends or family that I didn't want something, because I didn't want to admit I or my family/carers couldn't afford it	30
Felt embarrassed because I or my family/carers couldn't afford something other people I know had	22
Gone hungry or skipped meals because I or my family/carers couldn't afford food	16
Been teased or made to feel ashamed because I or my family/carers didn't have money or something that other people have	12

3.2 | Do you worry about how much money you or your family or carers have to spend on essentials (things like food and paying bills)?	
Yes	52
No	30
Don't know	15
Don't want to say	4

3.3 | Do you feel like it's become harder for you or your family or carers to afford the essentials in the last year?	
Yes	53
No	22

Don't know	23
Don't want to say	1

3.4 | Over the last year, have you or your family struggled to afford any of the following for you when attending school, college or university (select all that apply):

None of the above	35
Trips	22
Transport to and from school, college, or university (for example a bus ticket, or petrol for a car)	21
Devices or internet access	19
I don't know	18
Activities	17
School uniform	14
Other	9
Stationery and craft materials	6
Textbooks	5
I don't want to say	3

Section 4 | Internet and social media

Average response rate: **264**

**4.1	Which of these apps do you use? Select all that apply**	%
YouTube	90
TikTok	73
Snapchat	73
Instagram	71
Facebook	55
Twitter	34
Discord	32
Twitch	23
Reddit	18
Other	13
Tumblr	4
I don't want to say	2

**4.2	Which of the following do you do online? Select all that apply.**	
Listen to music, podcasts or other audio content	81
Watch videos, streams, or other video content	79
Look at content on social media (for example, TikTok, Instagram or Discord)	73
Talk to offline/real life friends	69
Play games by myself	64
Shop online	52
Talk to online friends	47
Play games with other players	47
Post content to social media (for example, TikTok, Instagram or Discord)	39
Homework or studying	35
Read blogs, articles on websites, or other text-based content	26
None of these	1
I don't want to say	0

4.3	How much do you agree with the following sentence: 'I feel safe when I'm online.'	
	Completely Agree	33
	Somewhat Agree	24
	Don't agree or disagree	34
	Somewhat Disagree	6
	Completely Disagree	5
4.4	Have you ever felt bullied or harassed when you are online?	
	I never feel bullied or harassed	46
	I rarely feel bullied or harassed	20
	I sometimes feel bullied or harassed	26
	I often feel bullied or harassed	6
	I always feel bullied or harassed	2
4.5	Do you think the internet and social media creates or adds to pressure for young people to look a certain way?	
	I don't think it creates any pressure	13
	I think it creates a bit of pressure	6
	I think it creates some pressure	33
	I think it creates quite a lot of pressure	13
	I think it creates a lot of pressure	35
4.6	Have you ever felt badly about how you look because of something you've seen online?	
	Never	32
	Occasionally	10
	Sometimes	36
	Often	7
	All the time	15
4.7	Have you ever unintentionally seen things online that made you feel worried or scared?	
	Never	33
	Occasionally	16
	Sometimes	41
	Often	7
	All the time	3
4.8	Have you ever been contacted online by someone you didn't know who made you fee worried or scared?	
	Yes, many times	9
	Yes, more than once	13
	Yes, once	14
	No, never	49
	I don't know	12
	I don't want to say	3

Note on Celtic Nations questions – these were segmented based on the nation of respondents and so had lower response rates.

Section 5 | Scotland

Average response rate: **28**

5.1	Do you feel your voice is listened to and that suggestions you make about your care/support are acted upon?	%
	Yes	54
	No	18
	I don't know	29
	I don't want to say	0

5.2	Do you feel you have a role in shaping how services are provided to yourself and others?	
	Yes	39
	No	29
	I don't know	32
	I don't want to say	0

5.3	Do you feel those that provide care and support to you know what is important to you?	
	Yes	64
	No	18
	I don't know	18
	I don't want to say	0

5.4	In Scotland there is a commitment to put children's rights into national law. Do you know what children's rights are?	
	Yes	57
	No	29
	I don't know	14
	I don't want to say	0

5.5	If yes – how often do you feel your rights are upheld?	
	Never	11
	Sometimes	44
	Always	15
	I don't know	30
	I don't want to say	0

Section 6 | Wales

Average response rate: **14**

6.1	How happy and confident do you feel about attending school or college every day?	%
	Not at all happy and confident	29
	A little bit happy and confident	14
	Somewhat happy and confident	36
	Very happy and confident	14
	Completely happy and confident	7

6.2	Does your school / college provide any assistance to support you with attendance?	
	Yes	29
	No	29
	I don't know	43
	I don't want to say	0

6.3	What kind of support would you like your school to provide to support your ability and confidence to attend?	
	A quiet space to relax and take a break when needed	57
	A dedicated staff member to support you	47
	Support with transport costs	29
	Signposting to sources of support outside school	21
	Peer mentoring	14
	None of the above	14
	Support preparing for school (e.g. more help with school uni-form)	7
	Something else	7
	School-based counselling	0

Section 7 | Northern Ireland

Average response rate: **22**

7.1	How long have you lived in Northern Ireland?	%
	Less than five years	45
	Between five and ten years	5
	Over ten years	5
	All my life	45
	I don't know	0
	I don't want to say	0
7.2	**Do you have friends who have lived in a different country before moving to Northern Ireland?**	
	Yes	77
	No	23
	I don't know	0
	I don't want to say	0
7.3	**Do you think you learn enough about healthy relationships and consent in school?**	
	Yes	27
	No	36
	I don't know	36
	I don't want to say	0

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