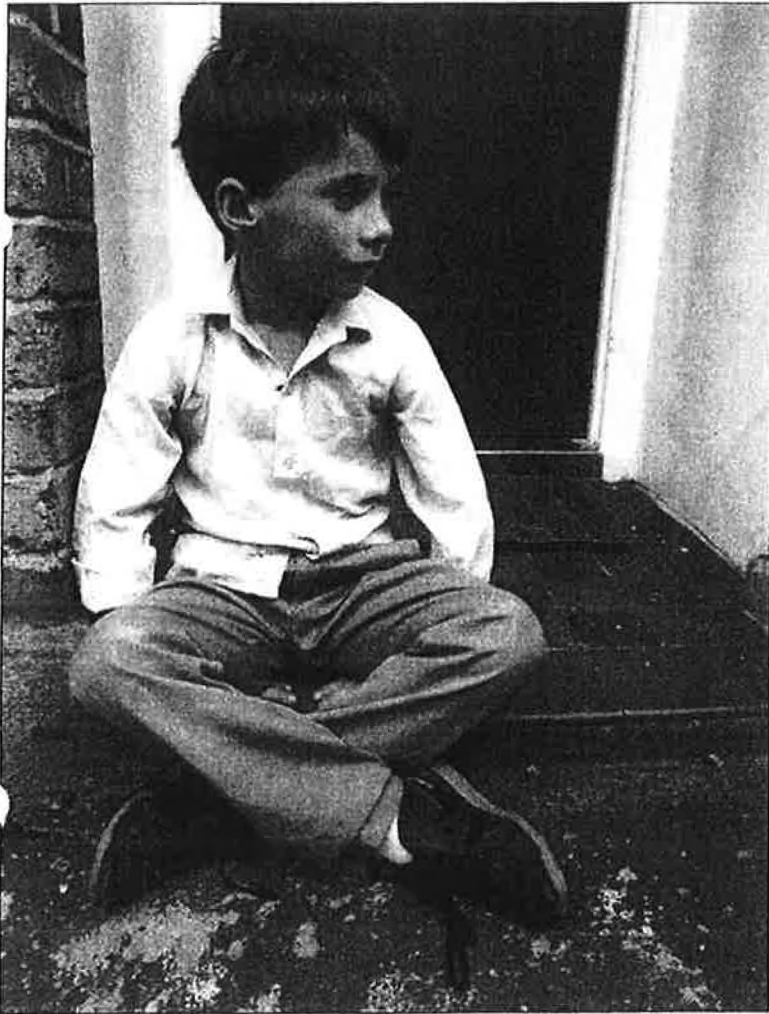


## CHILDHOOD &amp; GROWING UP

## CHILD CARE

## Whatever happened to childhood?



(NSPCC Photographic Library. All photographs posed by models)

According to the United Nations a child should grow up in a family environment — in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding — to develop a well-balanced character

**T**HE subjects of children and childhood have been in the headlines recently. But not all the news has been positive.

In the United States, a new report by the AMA (American Medical Association) revealed that children as young as two years old are being given

anti-depressant drugs.

In Hamburg, Germany, the city council has set up a 'hole in the wall' where unwanted babies can be delivered.

In Britain, it is reported that a growing number of children live in poverty. And of course, there was the shocking news — once again from the US — where a 6-year old child shot and killed a classmate. With tragic stories like these we could well ask the question: *whatever happened to childhood?*

It is often said that in childhood we experience the happiest days of our lives. And for most children that is still the case. But a growing number of children are suffering in our 'modern' western societies.

To answer the question: 'whatever happened to childhood?' perhaps we

should first ask another question: *whatever happened to parents?*

There was a time, not so long ago, when parents actually looked after their own children. There were no nurseries or other institutions where parents could place their children. The arrival of a baby usually meant that mother and child stayed together at home.

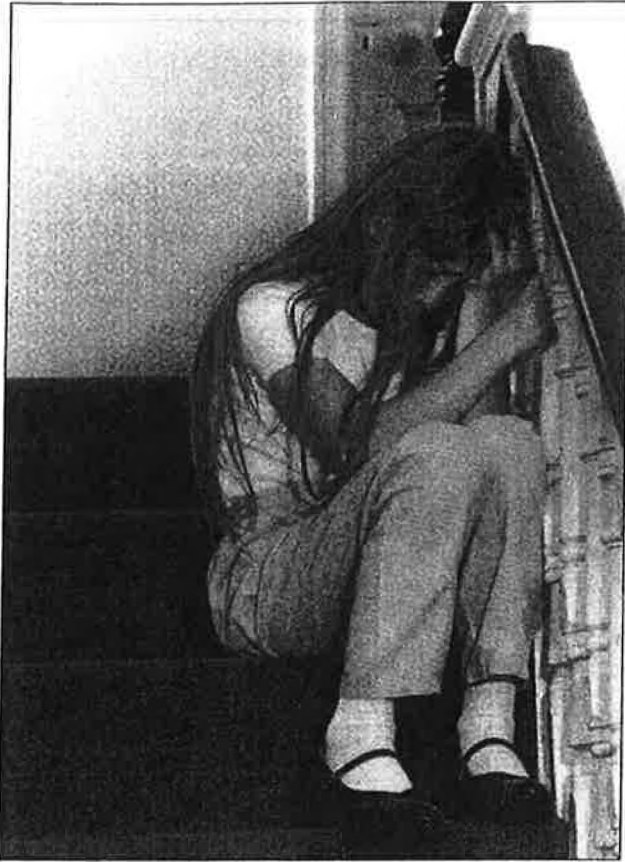
Parents also relied on help from uncles, aunts and grandparents. These other family members took some of the stress and strain of coping with a new-born baby. And they also became an important part of the child's inner circle of trusted and loving friends.

Times have changed. Western societies treat their youngest members very differently these days. This is due, in part, to the fact that both parents work outside the home. Our modern lifestyle often demands more money than one parent can earn alone. But the rush for material riches is leaving our children a lot poorer.

This was the subject of a recent newspaper column by the American reporter, Philip Delves. His article 'Children of two put on Prozac', describes how some US parents use drugs as a 'quick fix' for overactive children. The only thing 'wrong' with these restless

*continued on page 13*

## CHILDHOOD &amp; GROWING UP



(NSPCC Photographic Library. All photographs posed by models)

*'In the little world in which children have their existence .... there is nothing so finely perceived [understood] and so finely felt, as injustice.'*

Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations* (1861)

children is that they miss the love and affection of their parents.

To make matters worse they are labelled 'problem kids' by the institutions where they are left by busy parents. These institutions often expect behaviour from a child that he or she is not yet old enough to give. So, parents 'reach for the pill bottle' as a solution to their hyperactive, restless children.

Delves describes how these children — some as

young as two years old — are given drugs such as Prozac and Ritalin. This is in spite of the fact that little is known about the long-term effects of the drugs on young bodies and minds. And also in spite of the fact that a change of diet and therapy could provide *real* solutions for 'problem children'.

It would seem that the irresponsibility of these parents is matched only by the greed of the drug companies who supply these drugs — with few restrictions.

Kofi Annan, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, recently spoke these wise words on the subject of child care:

'To look into some aspects of the future, we do not need projections by supercomputers. Much of the next millennium can be seen in how we care for our children today. Tomorrow's world may be influenced by science and technology, but more than anything, it is already taking shape in the bodies and minds of our children.'

Every time you see a young child or a baby you are looking at the future. As Mr Annan points out, our future will only be as good as the treatment we give our children today. There can be no higher task for society today than to make sure that its youngest — and most helpless — members get the start in life they deserve. This doesn't come from a bottle of pills but from the love and care of parents. □

#### WORDS

**anti-depressant drugs** — drugs used to prevent or treat depression

**aspects** — in the text, parts or elements

**behaviour** — the way a person acts or 'behaves'

**greed** — extreme desire to have more than one needs or deserves

**institution** — in the text, a place where children are looked after (outside the home)

**irresponsibility** — having no responsibility; stupidity

**labelled** — called; described as

**material riches** — wealth; expensive things (cars, houses, expensive clothes, and so on)

**nursery** — day-care centre for young children

**poverty** — state of being extremely poor

**projections** — predictions;

thoughts about the future

**Prozac** — anti-depressant drug

**quick fix** — quick solution (not always the best solution)

**restrictions** — safety controls

**Ritalin** — drug used to treat

hyperactivity and children who

have difficulty concentrating

(however, many professionals

fear that the drug is being used

on healthy, active children as

a 'quick fix')

**solution** — answer; remedy

**stress and strain** — difficulty

**taking shape** — forming

**treatment** — therapy;

medical care

For links to more information on this subject check the 'latest' page on our web site:

[www.schooltimes.com/latest.htm](http://www.schooltimes.com/latest.htm)

➔ 673 words,  
3,169 characters  
2¼ normalsider

#### Discuss with the class

1 'Sperm banks' offer single women the chance to become pregnant. But the resulting child will never know his or her biological father. Do children, even unborn children, have rights? And do we have the right to deny these children a real father?

2 Some adults become parents before they themselves have 'grown up'. They are sometimes so badly prepared for the experience of being a parent that their children suffer as a result. If we demand that people have a licence to drive a car, should adults be made to have a licence before having children? And if there were such a licence, what kind of things should people know and learn about before passing their 'test' — and getting their 'parent licence'?

3 We know that experiences in early childhood years affect the rest of our lives. What practical steps can society take to make sure that children get the best start in life?

4 Can adults who have experienced a 'loveless childhood' love their own children?

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**SOCIAL ISSUES**


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GROWING UP

# Children's Happiness

*New research by The Children's Society looks at the subject of the well-being of young people today*



*The family unit has changed in our modern world. But how have these changes affected children's well-being? The Children's Society in Britain has been looking at this subject*

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**C**HILDHOOD should really be a time of carefree happiness. And for most young people it is. The early years are very important because they often shape the rest of a person's life. But what makes a happy childhood? How are the golden memories created that should last a lifetime?

In Britain, The Children's Society has been studying

the subject of children's happiness. Throughout 2008 and 2009 the Society interviewed thousands of children and young people. And in January this year they published the results of their study.

**One of the things they found was that children's well-being and happiness is deeply affected by 'family conflict'. In other words, children are much happier if their parents 'get on**

**and speak nicely to each other'. Of course, that's nothing new. In fact, it's common sense — or it really should be common sense to everyone.**

However, the other part of the study showed that it was more important that parents got on, than that they lived under the same roof. In other words, children seem less affected by the 'structure' of the family than how its members treat each other.

**The Children's Society found that family conflict can seriously damage or 'destabilize' children's lives. Young people who felt that their family got on well together had much higher levels of well-being and happiness than those who did not.**

But the study also looked at other issues. Among the other things

*'The early years are very important because they often shape the rest of a person's life.'*

that affected children were worries about their appearance and the amount of freedom of choice they had. It is perhaps the age we live in, but 17.5 per cent of children said that they were unhappy about their appearance. This was the one single thing they were most unhappy about.

**It may well be that television shows with perfectly made-up celebrities are having a negative influence on young people. Far from**

*continued on page 7*

**SOCIAL ISSUES**

**inspiring them, these shows may leave them with a sense of being 'plain and ordinary'.**

Magazines no doubt play a role, too. They often present children with unreal, air-brushed images of men and women that are almost impossible to live up to. What the magazines don't show is how ordinary these models often look when they are not made-up — or their images air-brushed in 'Photoshop'.

**The world of the media seems to be driven by the search for the perfect 'image'. And it's a shame that children are not being told that physical beauty 'is only skin deep'. Our modern society seems to have no place for the things that make people really interesting and good to be with — a likeable personality and a kindly nature.**

On the other hand, children and young people are sometimes wiser than adults. They'll probably find this out with or without the help of their parents — it's called growing up.



⇒ 449 words  
2,174 characters  
(1½ DK normalsider)

**For more on this subject, see Worksheet 2 and for more on childhood see The School Times Century, Chapter 7**

**WORDS**

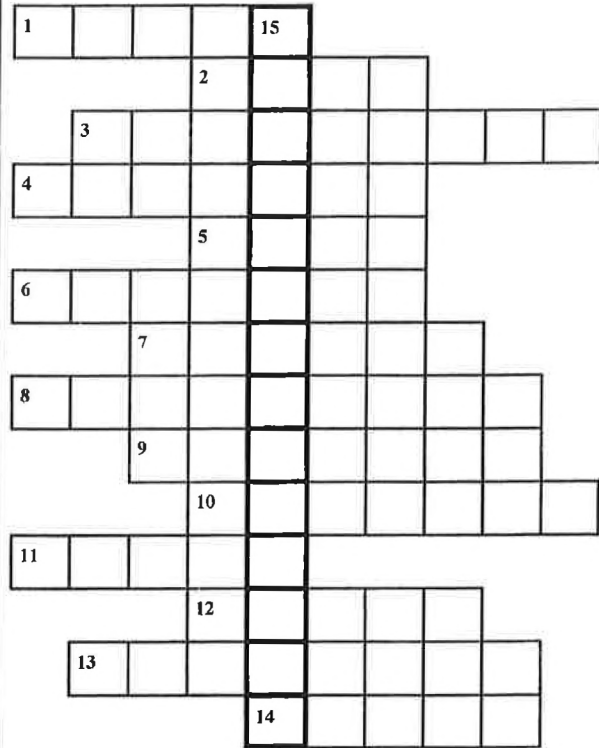
**affect** – have an effect on  
**air-brushed** – changed in a photo editing programme such as Photoshop

**appearance** – look (how a person looks, physically)  
**carefree** – without worry  
**destabilized** – upset; damaged  
**family structure** – family arrangement or make-up (the 'normal' family structure is mother, father and children all living together)  
**got on** – in the text, were happy with each other  
**issues** – topics; subjects  
**negative influence on** – bad effect on  
**obvious** – clear; understandable  
**only skin deep** – this phrase usually means that although someone can look good on the outside they may be very ugly on the inside. Another phrase that is used in this connection is, 'Don't judge a book by its cover'  
**Photoshop** – Adobe Photoshop, a popular photo-editing programme  
**treat each other** – behave towards one another

**Questions on the text**

- 1 What should childhood really be?
- 2 Who did The Children's Society interview for their study?
- 3 What was the one thing that 'deeply affected' children's well-being and happiness?
- 4 What did children say was more important than their parents living 'under the same roof'?
- 5 What other things 'worried' children and affected their feelings about themselves?
- 6 How does the media affect you? Do 'perfect' images of celebrities make you want to be like them? Or do they make you feel that they are just stupid people who are in love with themselves?
- 7 What attracts you to the people you want to be friends with? Is it their physical appearance or is it that they are fun and have a good personality?

**The Happiness Quiz**



**CLUES**

- 1 'Children's well... and happiness is deeply affected by family conflict'
- 2 Many young people feel it's more important that their parents get on than that they live under the same ...
- 3 The study was done by The ... Society
- 4 The amount of '... of choice' they have also affects children's happiness
- 5 'Beauty is only skin ...'
- 6 Every child usually has two ... — a mother and a father
- 7 'Children seem less affected by the "structure" of the ... than how its members treat each other
- 8 Are television shows with ... made-up

celebrities having a negative influence ?

- 9 It's important that family ... treat each other nicely
- 10 Does our modern ... have a place for the things that make people really interesting?
- 11 'There' and '...' sound the same but mean different things
- 12 'Children and young people are sometimes ... than adults'
- 13 Childhood should really be a time of ... happiness
- 14 The first few years can ... the rest of a person's life

**Key words** (15 Down )

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## SOCIAL ISSUES

## PROTECTING CHILDREN

# 'Hit Means Lost It'

*Leading children's charity aims to help parents control their anger — before anger controls them*



*Modern life can be very stressful — especially for the parents of young children. With both parents working there is often too little time for families to be together. And those parents with very young children know only too well how easy it is to become angry and lose control*

**O**ne in six parents loses his or her temper with their child almost every other day. This information comes from the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) in Britain as it begins a campaign to help the parents of young children.

Since 1884 the NSPCC has worked to protect

children from cruelty. But their latest campaign, 'Hit means lost it', is aimed at supporting parents to better understand — and manage — their stress and anger.

**Anger can be a major reason why parents hit their children. And information gathered by the NSPCC shows that parents who often lose their temper are more likely to hit their baby or**

**toddler than the average parent.**

'Parenting is one of the most rewarding jobs in the world,' says Eileen Hayes, parenting advisor for the NSPCC, 'but it is also very hard work. Stressed parents can easily become angry parents. Though anger is a natural human emotion, it's not always easy to recognise or control — which is dangerous when you are

looking after a child.' It seems parents are most likely to lose their temper when their child is being physically aggressive.

'When parents feel the pressure mounting, our advice is to take a step back before you say or do something you will later regret. Don't give in to anger, take control before it controls you,' says Eileen Hayes.

As part of the new campaign the NSPCC is providing advice for parents through its 'helplines' and its family centres. The campaign will also be advertised on radio and television.

The main message the charity wants to get across is that there are better and safer ways to discipline young children. And Eileen Hayes gives a good example when she says: 'Praising the behaviour you want to encourage, whilst ignoring the smaller problems' is one way to deal with losing one's temper and anger.

□

⇒ 318 words,  
1,508 characters  
(1 DK normalside)

#### WORDS

**aggressive** – violent; destructive  
**campaign** – project; plan  
**cruelty** – bad treatment; unkindness  
**discipline** – teach; educate  
**lose their temper** – become angry  
**manage** – handle; deal with  
**mounting** – building up  
**regret** – feel sorry about  
**rewarding** – satisfying; pleasing  
**toddler** – young child