
SOCIAL ISSUES

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

CHILDHOOD 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

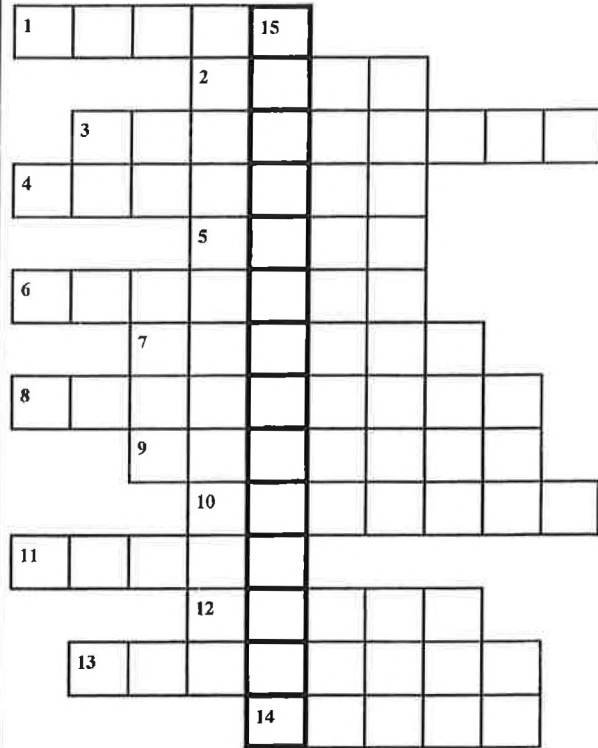
affect – have an effect on
air-brushed – changed in a photo editing programme such as Photoshop

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)
