

**Securing a better childhood and
a brighter future for every child
in Scotland**

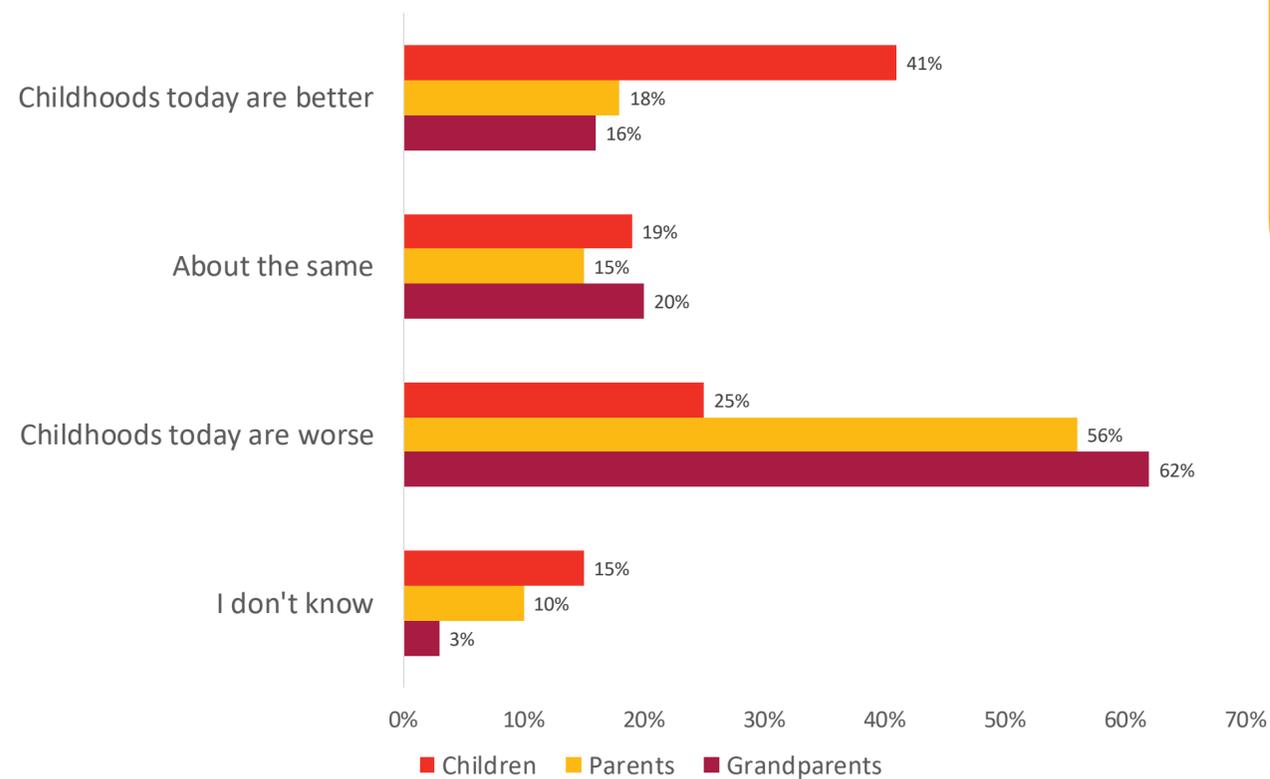


Are childhoods getting better?

One of the first and most fundamental responsibilities of any government is to make sure that every generation of children has a better childhood and a brighter future than the last.

However - our survey of children, parents, and grandparents, found that many families do not see this reflected in their own lives.

What families surveyed in Scotland think about childhoods today



Marissa's family across three generations told us how they think childhood has changed:

Marissa, 13 - "With social media you can see what is happening, it's distressing, you feel alone, like you are the only person who cares."

Marissa's mum, Suzanna, 53 said she is "100% sure childhood is worse now today than it was for me or my mum."

Marissa's grandmother, Daphne, 76 "Things are going up... there are more worries now about being able to afford things like housing... You have to leave the area you grew up in to get a job, there are no jobs for them down here".

Over half of parents and nearly two-thirds of grandparents surveyed in Scotland (62%) said that childhoods today are worse, and a quarter of children (25%) agreed.

What we did and our recommendations

To understand people's perceptions of the quality of children's lives, we conducted a unique survey of grandparents, parents, and children across the UK.

Across the UK we surveyed 2,073 children, 2,115 parents, and 1,353 grandparents. Additional survey boosts were also undertaken to increase sample size at the nation level. In Scotland, we surveyed a total of 244 children, 201 parents, and 199 grandparents.

The results show **that too many children face big barriers to fulfilling their potential.**

To help ensure that this generation of children does have a brighter future than those before, we think the Scottish Government should take three steps:

1. Invest in early mental health and wellbeing services for children.
2. Ensure that all families have a right to family support that is adequately funded.
3. Take further action on child poverty to ensure that the child poverty targets are met.

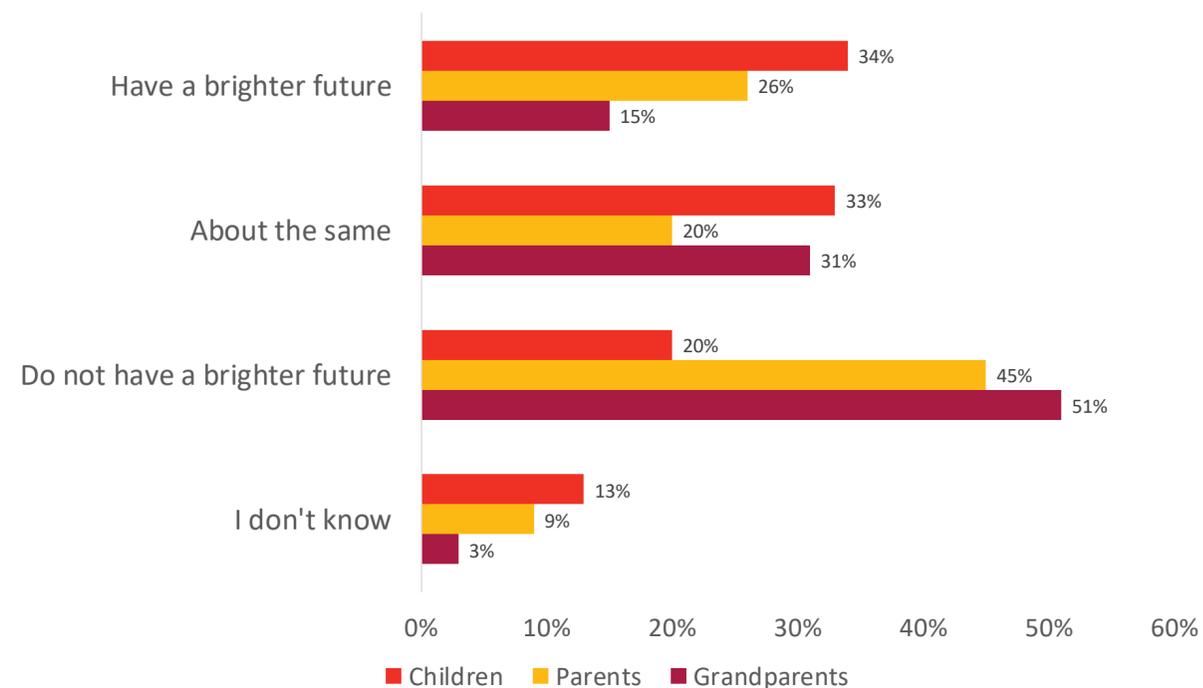
Do children have brighter futures?

At Action for Children, we give children the foundations they need to thrive and fulfil their potential. For lots of families in Scotland, it doesn't feel like children do have bright futures in front of them.

When asked if they have a brighter future than their parent's generation:

- Only a third (34%) of children surveyed in Scotland said yes.
- Only a quarter of parents (26%) and 15% of grandparents said their child/grandchild has a brighter future.
- One in five children surveyed in Scotland (20%) said they didn't think they had a brighter future than their parents did at their age – and this pessimism increases significantly across the generations.

What families surveyed in Scotland think about children's futures



Barriers to having a brighter future

To understand more about the barriers children and young people face, we asked them what they think makes it more difficult to have a brighter future than their parents did.

Children surveyed in Scotland said:

37%

Fewer opportunities to get a good job



35%

More use of social media and devices



35%

More pressure from school



34%

More pressure around physical appearance



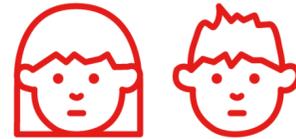
Parents pointed to their **child's physical appearance** (52%), **more use of social media/devices** (46%), **pressure to fit in with friends** (36%) and **fewer services that support children & families** (35%) as all making it harder for them to have a brighter future than they did.

Grandparents surveyed in Scotland said that **use of social media/devices** (50%), **less safe streets** (46%) and **the pressure on their grandchild's physical appearance** (45%) are all factors in making their future less bright than their parents' generation.

What is getting in the way of children's potential?

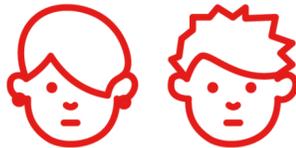
Children

- The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic (47%)
- Too much pressure from school (42%)
- Poor mental health (40%)



Parents

- The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic (56%)
- Too much time spent on social media (49%)
- Poor mental health (41%)



Grandparents

- The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic (54%)
- Too much time spent on social media (48%)
- Being overwhelmed by negative news (36%)



What are children worried about?

As well as being concerned about their futures, children in Scotland are worried about their day to day lives.

Our survey found children were most commonly worried about:

50% Pressure from school

44% Fear Of Missing Out

42% Their physical appearance

39% Climate Change

39% Their mental health



57% of children we surveyed in Scotland said they **cover up at least one of their worries** from their parent/carer.

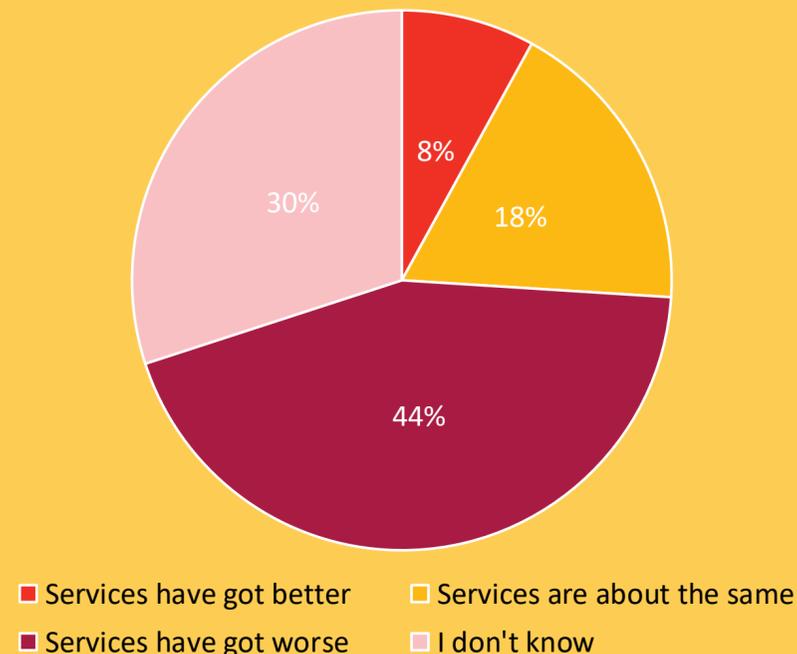
28% of children with mental health worries said they covered them up from their parent or carer.

Are we doing enough?

72% of Scottish parents that we surveyed in Scotland, and **69% of grandparents**, think the Government is **investing too little in services that support childhoods**. This was the highest among all the nations of the UK.

Almost half of parents surveyed in Scotland (44%) and **40% of grandparents** felt that **services supporting childhoods in their areas have got worse since 2011**. Only 8% of parents and 6% of grandparents thought they have improved.

Parents' views on local services that support childhoods



What needs to happen: Mental health

Even before the pandemic, children were experiencing long waiting lists for mental health services. During the pandemic, many young people were adversely affected by bereavement, social isolation, a loss of routine, anxiety and uncertainty about their futures, or a breakdown in formal and informal support structures.

This is supported by our survey data. 39% of children surveyed in Wales said they worried about their mental health in 2022, compared to 31% in 2019. The coming years will likely see an increase in demand for mental health services which current supply will be unable to meet. Greater investment in preventative mental help services is clearly needed.

We call on the Scottish Government to invest in early mental health and wellbeing services for children.

Roots of Empathy: For the past decade, we have run the Roots of Empathy (RoE) programme for children of primary school age. It is an early intervention programme developed to help children build empathy using a unique approach, with a local parent and baby (or 'Tiny Teacher') alongside a trained instructor who guides the children to observe and understand the baby's feelings, to mark and celebrate the stages of development, and in turn their own feelings and growth. This inclusive approach is particularly effective in connecting with those who do not 'normally' engage.

A recent independent evaluation report examined the impact of our decade long service delivery. It showed that RoE is a high-quality intervention which is both cost effective and sustainable, equating to only £30 per pupil.

What needs to happen: Family support

The fact 57% of children we surveyed in Scotland said they cover up at least one of their worries from their parent/carer is a real concern.

Action for Children run family support services that aims to help children and their families. We work together at an early stage to explore solutions and prevent more long-term problems from arising. Our support builds on the strengths of families, promotes parenting skills and increases the parents' ability to nurture successfully, while developing the resilience of children and young people.

We call on the Scottish Government to ensure that all families have a right to family support, with a bold funding commitment to match the scale of this ambition.

"Family Support wasn't just about the kids, but it focused on my needs too, I feel more confident, I have changed as a mother but also as a person. The parent journey is not scary anymore, having a Family Support worker is like having a friend."

- Testimonial from a parent helped by an Action for Children service

What needs to happen: Poverty

In our survey, **26% of children surveyed in Scotland said they worry about their family having enough money to live comfortably.**

Scotland is the only part of the UK with statutory income targets on child poverty. Despite this, **24% of Scotland's children live in poverty.**

We welcome the Scottish Government's commitment to increase the Scottish Child Payment to £25 and extend it to under 16s by the end of 2022. However, this action alone will be insufficient to meet Scotland's child poverty targets.

We call on the Scottish Government to:

- Increase the Scottish Child Payment so it is worth £40 per week per child to eligible families.
- Deliver on the planned extension to Free School Meals to all children in primary school and to all secondary school pupils where a parent or guardian is in receipt of universal credit or equivalent benefit.
- Publish a 'children's budget' that includes adequate resources to address the poverty and inequality facing Scotland's children and provides transparency on expenditure.



There's a
Star in every
Child

Help them shine