

**The  
Children's  
Society**

# **Loneliness in childhood**

**Exploring loneliness and well-being  
among 10–17 year olds**

**March 2019**

**No child  
should feel  
alone**

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# Introduction

The Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness,<sup>1</sup> and the subsequent publication of the Government's loneliness strategy<sup>2</sup> have resulted in an unprecedented focus on loneliness in the UK and a wide ranging conversation about what can be done to tackle loneliness across society.

The Government strategy defines loneliness as:

*'A subjective, unwelcome feeling of lack or loss of companionship. It happens when we have a mismatch between the quantity and quality of social relationships that we have, and those that we want.'*

In order to tackle loneliness we must understand both the extent of the problem and be able to measure any change. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) has recommended four questions for use when measuring loneliness among adults,<sup>3</sup> and last year The Children's Society worked with the ONS to establish a similar set of questions suitable for children and young people. The findings of this work were published recently by the ONS in 'Children and young people's experiences of loneliness: 2018'.<sup>4</sup> In this short briefing, we do not seek to rehearse the ONS findings but rather contribute further insights from the data. Indeed we recommend this briefing and the ONS report be read in conjunction.

The statistical data about loneliness contained in this briefing was collected as part of our ongoing research programme into children's subjective well-being, the findings of which we publish annually in our series of Good Childhood Reports. It was collected through our annual household panel survey.

Children aged 10-17 completed the household survey in May and June of 2018. It collected data from children on their well-being and experiences of loneliness together with information from parents on household circumstances, such as income. The survey covers 2,000 households in England, Scotland and Wales, and is socio-economically representative. The survey asked four questions about loneliness each with three possible answers:

**Table 1**

<b>Questions:</b> <i>How often do you feel...</i>	<b>Responses</b>		
	<i>Hardly ever or never</i>	<i>Some of the time</i>	<i>Often</i>
that you have no-one to talk to?			
left out?			
alone?			
lonely? <sup>a</sup>			

Further details on the questions can be found in the ONS report "National Measurement of Loneliness: 2018".<sup>5</sup>

As part of wider research undertaken jointly with the ONS, we also carried out a small set of focus groups and interviews with children and young people to gather some qualitative insights into children's experiences of loneliness.

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<sup>a</sup> In this briefing this fourth question, "How often do you feel lonely" is often referred to as the 'direct measure'

## What do we already know?

Whilst much is known about older people's experiences of loneliness, there is relatively little research focused on children and young people.

ONS research found that younger adults (aged 16-24) were more likely to report being lonely compared to every older age group (every age group from 25-34 to 75+), and that women were more likely to report being lonely than men.<sup>6</sup> Other factors related to loneliness, relevant to young people, included being a renter rather than a homeowner and having a weak sense of belonging to the local neighbourhood.

The importance of these factors were reinforced when the ONS did analysis to look at cohorts of people with shared characteristics who were lonely. The ONS found that "Younger renters with little trust and sense of belonging to their area" were one of three different groups most likely to be lonely.<sup>b</sup> 61% of individuals in this group reported that they felt lonely 'occasionally' or more frequently, compared with 46% of the sample overall.

The finding that young adults are more likely to be lonely was replicated in the BBC Loneliness Experiment, where 40% of young respondents (16-24) said they felt lonely compared to 27% of older respondents (every age group from 25-34 to 75+).<sup>7</sup> A key question must be whether loneliness arises in the transition from childhood to adulthood, in the years from 16-18, or whether loneliness pre-dates this.

Action for Children did a poll of 500 children as part of the Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness and found that 39% of children reported feeling lonely in the last week.<sup>8</sup> This snapshot is a good starting point upon which our joint work with the ONS builds.

## Themes explored in this briefing

In this briefing we look in detail at how loneliness relates to children's subjective well-being and their material circumstances. Our analysis focuses on children aged 10-17. This is different to the ONS analysis which considers 10-15 year olds. Finally, based on the interviews and focus groups we conducted with children, we provide some initial thoughts into what children themselves feel could be done to tackle loneliness.

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<sup>b</sup> The two other groups identified were 'widowed older homeowners living alone with long-term health conditions' and 'unmarried, middle-agers with long-term health conditions'.

# Exploring loneliness among children

## Loneliness and well-being

Our ongoing research programme into children’s subjective well-being, published annually in our Good Childhood Report provides the latest data on well-being among children in the UK. Broadly, we understand well-being to relate to how happy children are with their lives as a whole. Our Good Childhood Index combines measures of overall life satisfaction with measures of well-being in relation to ten aspects of life that children and young people themselves have told us are the most important.

In the 2017 Good Childhood Report we found that the majority of children aged 10-17 score on or above the midpoint of a 0-10 scale of life satisfaction (where 0 is the lowest score and 10 is the highest on a multi-item measure of overall life satisfaction). 11% of children have low well-being, meaning that they score less than five on our measure.<sup>c</sup>

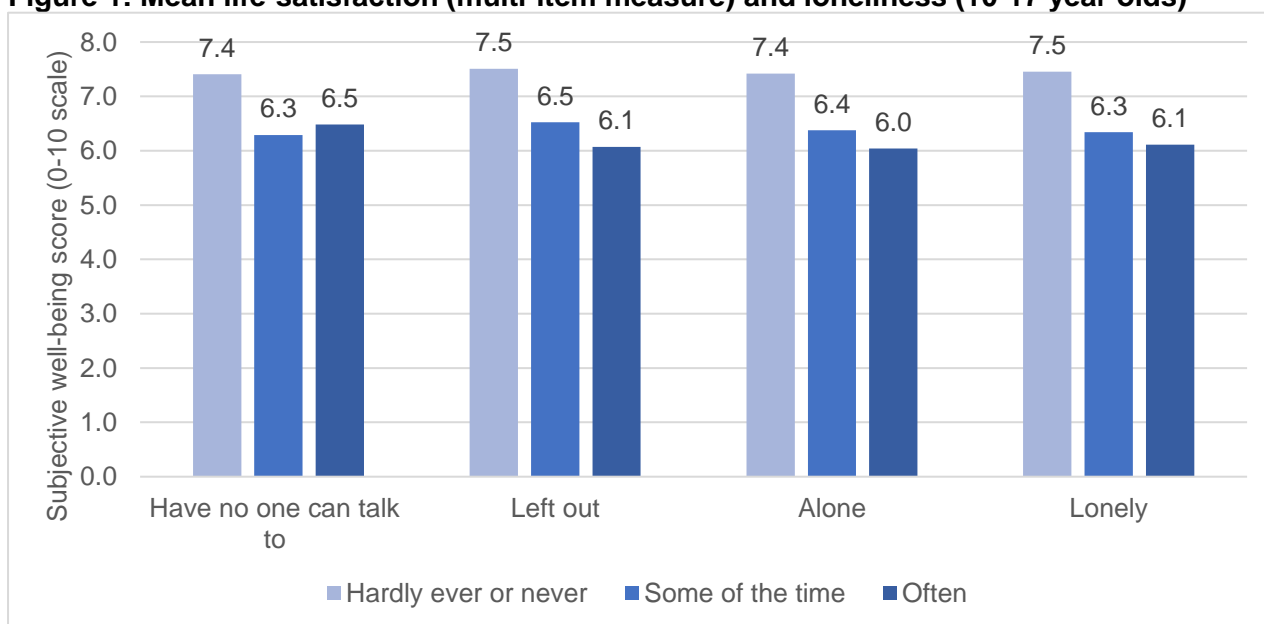
Children’s relationships with others are one of the most crucial factors affecting their overall well-being. Loneliness, as commonly understood, is closely related to the quality and quantity of relationships. Therefore it seems likely that the two concepts will be connected in some way.

Young people themselves spoke about how loneliness and well-being could be inter-related during our interviews and focus groups:

***‘Most people... don’t want to admit to themselves, as well as other people, that they’re feeling lonely because admitting to yourself that you are lonely is actually kinda hurtful.’***

Overall 10% of respondents aged 10-17 reported ‘often’ feeling lonely using the single direct question measuring loneliness. There was some overlap between those who felt lonely ‘often’ and those who had low well-being. In total, 25% of those with low well-being also responded that they felt lonely ‘often’.

**Figure 1: Mean life-satisfaction (multi-item measure) and loneliness (10-17 year olds)**



<sup>c</sup> The Children’s Society’s preferred measure of children’s overall life satisfaction is a version of Huebner’s Students’ Life Satisfaction Scale. See pages 11-13 of The Good Childhood Report 2017 for more information.

Figure 1 shows the mean well-being scores (using our preferred multi-item measure of overall life satisfaction, which has good psychometric properties, see Good Childhood Report 2017 for more details)<sup>9</sup> for those who answered ‘hardly ever or never’; ‘some of the time’; or ‘often’ for each of the four ONS loneliness measures.

There is a clear relationship between well-being and three of the loneliness measures, with children hardly ever or never feeling ‘left out’, ‘alone’ and ‘lonely’ experiencing higher average well-being, and those experiencing these feelings ‘often’ having the lower average well-being.

The relationship with having ‘no one to talk to’ was less clear. Average well-being of respondents answering ‘some of the time’ in response to this question was lower than those who experienced it ‘often’. Further survey work would be required to establish the significance of this finding.

**Figure 2: Relationship between high and low well-being and each of the loneliness measures**

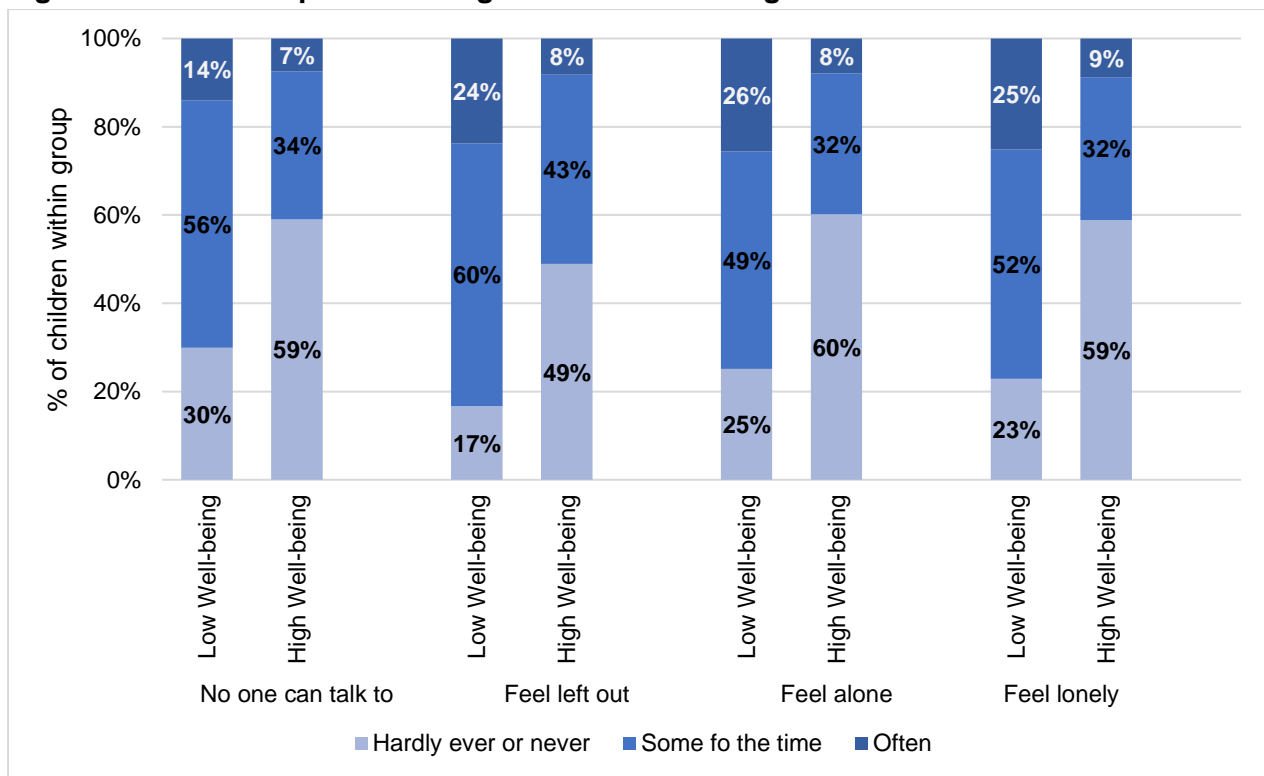


Figure 2 shows that higher proportions of children with low well-being report feeling lonely, left out and alone ‘often’. Unlike in Figure 1, the ‘no-one to talk to’ measure was broadly the same as the other measures although the differences were less pronounced.

We also explored the relationship between the loneliness measures and the ten aspects of life we ask children about in our Good Childhood Index.

**Figure 3: Good Childhood Index domains and ‘feeling lonely’ measure**

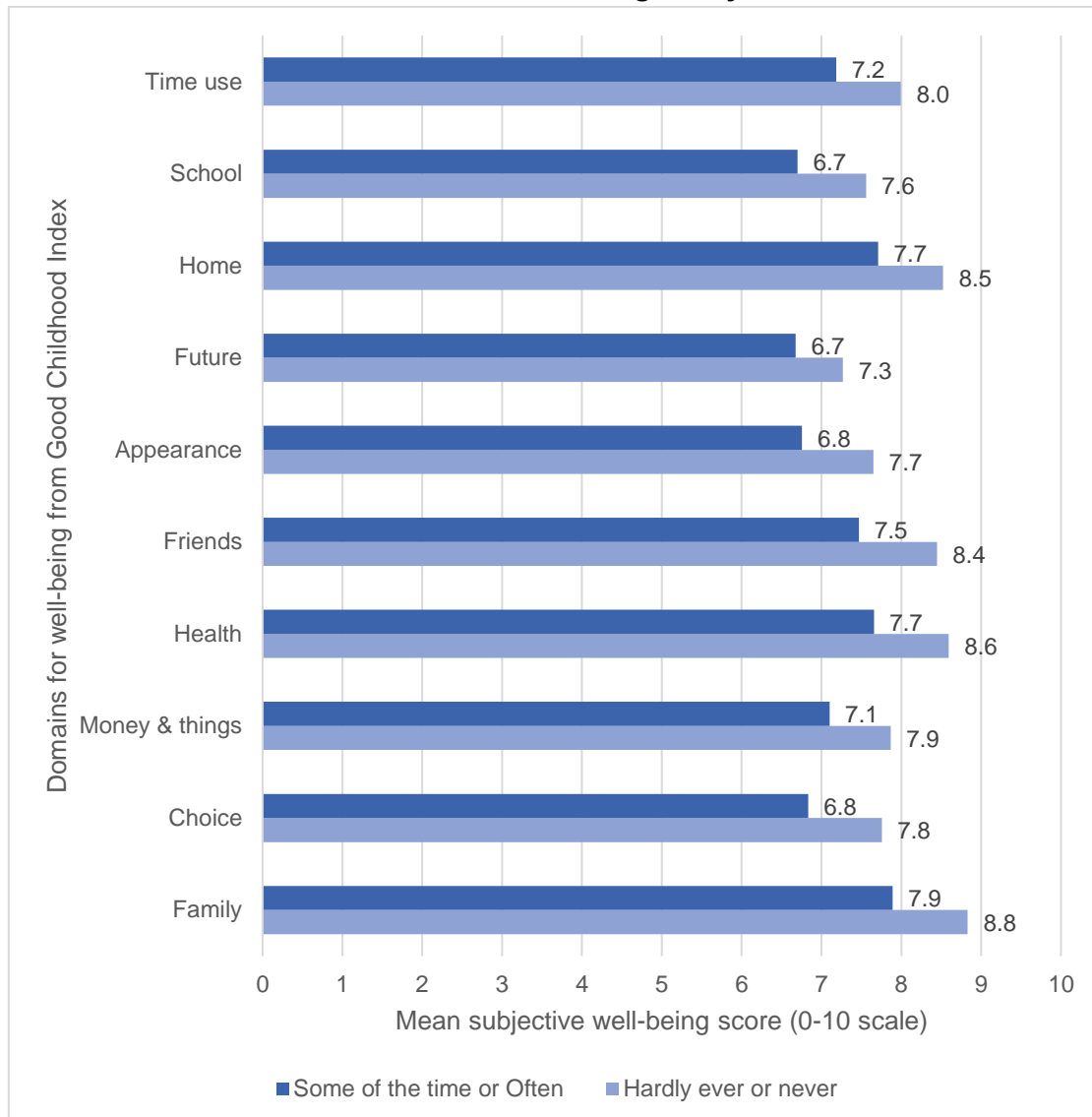


Figure 3 shows that for each of the ten domains of the Good Childhood Index, children responding that they ‘hardly ever or never’ felt lonely had higher average well-being than those who experienced loneliness ‘some of the time’ or ‘often’. This finding held across all four measures of loneliness in the survey.

Figures 1-3 all demonstrate the strong links between well-being and each of the loneliness measures separately. We felt it was also important to look at how the loneliness measures might combine into a summative measure and this measure’s relationship to subjective well-being.

When we talked to children, they could see links between the concepts of being lonely, alone, left out and not having anyone to talk to, but they also felt that the relationships between them could be complex and that experiencing these things could have a range of emotional consequences, from being very distressing, to actually being quite beneficial:

***‘Alone can be many things, personally sometimes I like to be alone because it is very therapeutic, but some people don’t like to be alone... Sometimes even, being alone makes you think ahead.’***

***‘Loneliness can be many different things. It’s not just that you have no friends.’***

***‘If someone says they have never felt it then they are basically lying to themselves.’***

We therefore wanted to explore how often children experience the four measures of loneliness (having no one to talk to, feeling left out, feeling alone and feeling lonely) simultaneously and whether they give an indication of ‘depth’ of loneliness. Using the idea of ‘depth’ or intensity of loneliness, we are assuming that multiple experiences of the different aspects of loneliness highlighted in the four questions are more painful than experiencing a single aspect of loneliness.

**Table 2: Proportions reporting experiencing one or more ONS loneliness measures**

<b>Number of loneliness measures</b>	<b>Per cent of children responding ‘some of the time’ or ‘often’</b>	<b>Per cent of children responding ‘often’</b>
0	34	83
1	14	7
2	11	4
3	12	3
4	29	4

Table 2 shows that the majority of children experienced at least one of the four ONS loneliness measures (having no one to talk to, feeling left out, feeling alone or feeling lonely) at least ‘some of the time’, but only a small minority experienced all four measures ‘often’. Overall, 66% of children responded ‘some of the time’ or ‘often’ to at least one of the loneliness questions, and 29% to all four questions (having no one to talk to, feeling left out, alone or lonely). Comparatively, only 17% of children responded ‘often’ to at least one question, and 4% to all four (often having no one to talk to, feeling left out, alone and lonely).

The sample of children responding that they ‘often’ experienced all four measures was too small for further analysis. We were able to do some statistical testing on those children who answered ‘some of the time’ or ‘often’ to all four measures. Here we found that a significantly higher proportion of these children were receiving Free School Meals and living in relative poverty compared to the overall household sample.<sup>d</sup> We explore the experiences of these children more fully in the next section of this briefing.

A simple assumption would be that experiencing loneliness ‘often’ is worse than experiencing it ‘some of the time’ and that experiencing four of the measures is worse than experiencing just one. To test this we looked to see how the experience of multiple aspects of loneliness were related to both average well-being and the proportion of children experiencing low-wellbeing.

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<sup>d</sup> The differences between the proportion of children reporting receiving Free School Meals and in Relative Poverty in this group compared with the proportions in overall household sample were statistically significant at the 0.01 significance level. Unweighted n = 579.



We found that mean well-being (using the multi-item measure of overall life satisfaction) declined with each additional measure of loneliness children reported experiencing 'some of the time' or 'often'. Mean well-being for those experiencing none of the measures was 7.7 compared with 7.2 for those experiencing one of the ONS measures and 6.4 for those experiencing two or more measures. The differences between these mean well-being scores were statistically significant at the 0.01 level.

**Figure 4: Experience of multiple loneliness measures and low well-being**

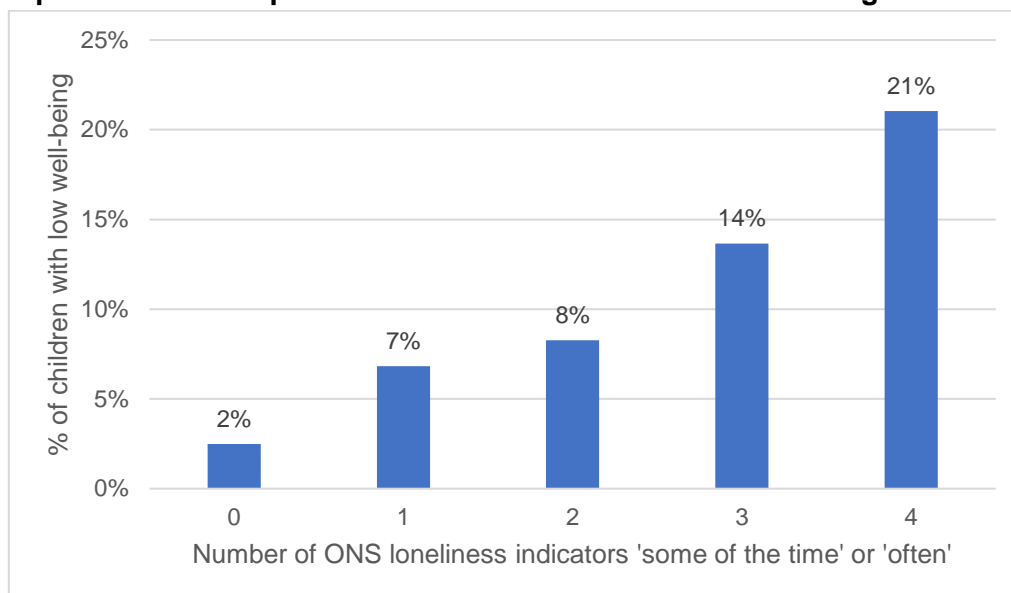


Figure 4 shows the proportion of young people with low (rather than average) well-being who reported experiencing multiple loneliness measures. The proportion of children with low well-being increases with the number of indicators experienced 'some of the time' or 'often'. Overall, 21% of children experiencing all four loneliness measures 'some of the time' or 'often' had low well-being.

## Summary

It is not surprising that there are strong links between loneliness and well-being. When considering all four of the loneliness measures together the questions about 'having someone to talk to' and 'feeling left out' seem particularly relevant to well-established themes in research on children's well-being.

Relationships are the most important factor in children's well-being – particularly with their family, carers and friends. As a result, any instance of feeling left out, or not having anyone to talk to, is likely to damage the strength of children's relationships and potentially lower their overall well-being. Furthermore, we know from research looking at the links between children's well-being and their material circumstances that children are particularly affected when they feel left out, or marginalised because their material circumstances do not allow them to participate in the same activities, or have the same possessions as, their friends.<sup>10</sup> This is a topic we will discuss in more detail in the next section.

There are some important overlaps between loneliness and well-being. Indeed, we found that in total, 25% of those with low well-being also responded that they felt lonely 'often'. However well-being is a much broader concept than loneliness and there are many, many more reasons why children's overall

happiness with their lives could be low. As a result, we argue that there is value in measuring well-being alongside loneliness if you want to build a more holistic picture of children's experiences. Some children may not report being lonely, but may have low well-being and asking about both sets of issues may help to identify these young people.

## Loneliness and household income

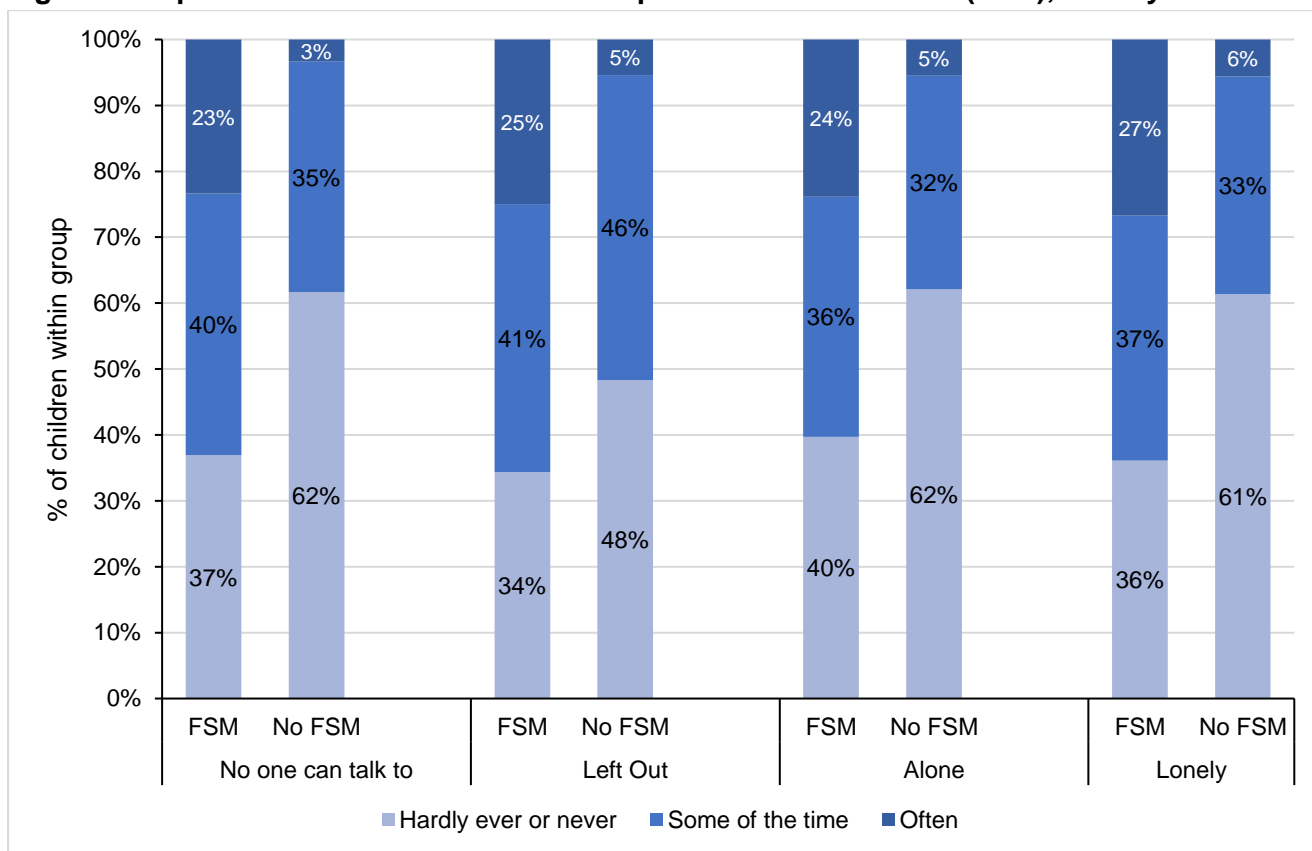
Children drew clear links between material deprivation and loneliness:

***‘A new pair of trainers might come out, people get it, they can’t get it, they will feel alone, thinking “Why can’t I get this?”’***

*(15 year old girl)*

In their publication, the ONS drew attention to an important finding that 27% of children aged 10-15 receiving free school meals (FSM) reported often being lonely, using the direct measure of loneliness. This made them more than four times more likely to often be lonely than those not in receipt of FSM.

**Figure 5: Experiences of loneliness and receipt of free school meals (FSM), 10-17 year olds**



FSM is an important proxy for identifying children who may be living in poverty and as such this is a useful finding to help inform decisions about where to target any help or support to relieve loneliness.

FSM are not necessarily the best measure of child poverty however. To be eligible for FSM families must be in receipt of certain benefits or tax credits, which means that some groups of children living in low-income families miss out – particularly those whose parents are in low paid work. Furthermore, many families do not claim their FSM entitlement.

There are also important methodological concerns. Some children and young people may not know if they do, or do not, receive FSM.

In this section, we further explore the relationship between loneliness and income. Alongside free school meals, we also look at children living in relative poverty (defined as household with income less than 60% of the median income in the sample), and at overall household income so we can understand whether or not loneliness affects children from high-income households differently than those in low-income households.

**Figure 6: Experiences of loneliness and child poverty**

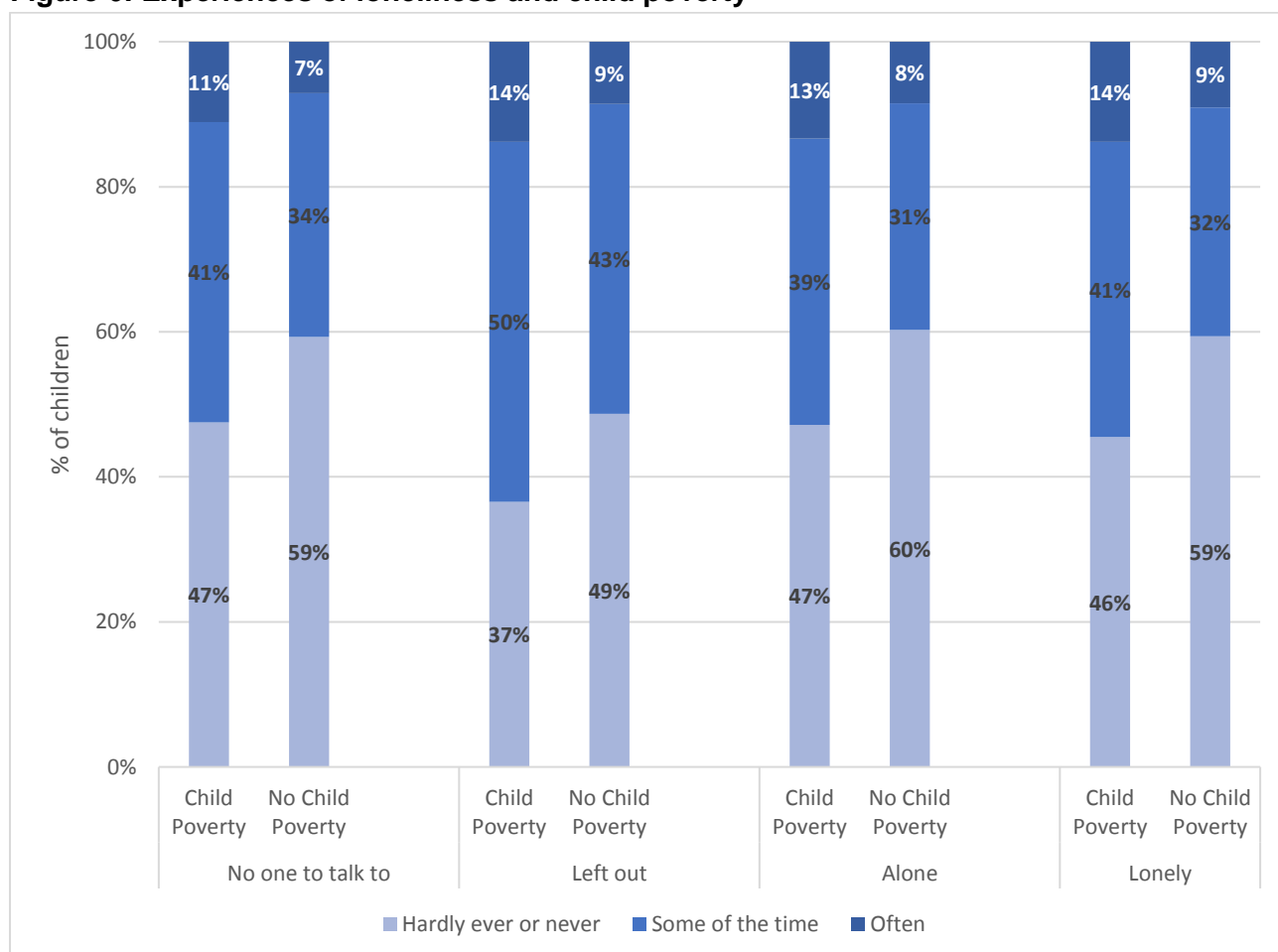


Figure 6 shows a weaker link between relative child poverty and experiencing loneliness 'often' than the results based on receipt of free school meals. It is important to understand the extent to which there is overlap between receiving free school meals and living in child poverty. In the sample, 11% of children were both living in poverty and in receipt of free school meals.

**Table 3: Number and proportions of children in child poverty and in receipt of free school meals (weighted data)<sup>e</sup>**

Measure/s	Weighted N	% of respondents
Children in receipt of Free School Meals (FSM)	464	24%
Children living in relative poverty	560	29%
Children in relative poverty and receiving FSM	209	11%

<sup>e</sup> Weighted N's and proportions are based on those answering the questions and exclude missing/don't know responses. The calculation of those in poverty and also in receipt of FSM is based on those children who answered both questions only (Weighted N=1,910).

There is a relationship between poverty and loneliness for children. However a strict focus on poverty could be misleading as there may be important findings in relation to the loneliness experienced by children not living in poverty that are as, or more, important in explaining the experiences of children and young people. As a result, we felt it was important to examine the income of all households in order to understand any differences between low, middle and high-income households.

**Figure 7: Household income and experiences of loneliness**

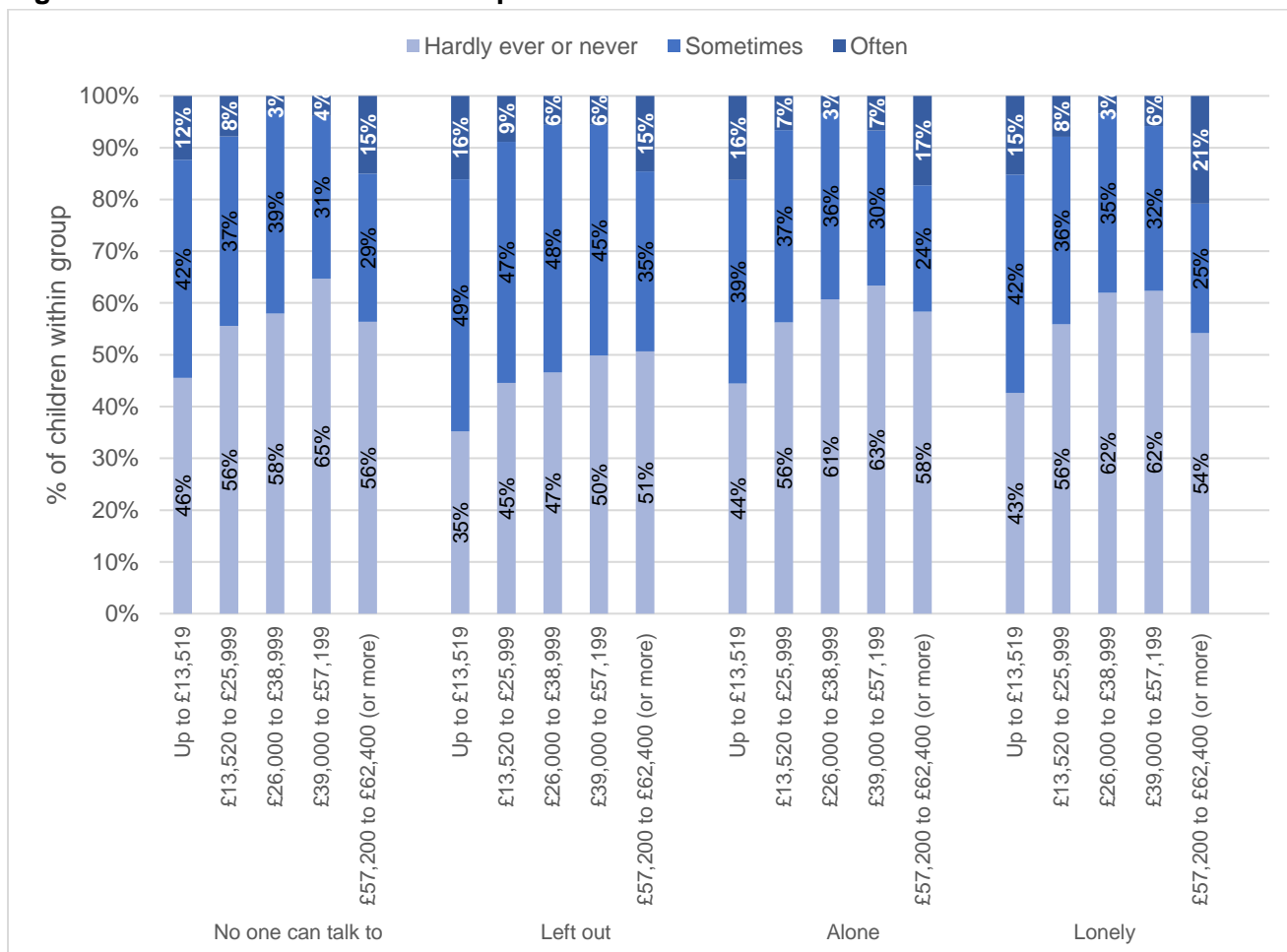


Figure 7<sup>f</sup> sheds more light on how loneliness is experienced across the income spectrum. Children from the lowest income households are least likely to ‘never or hardly ever’ experience any of the loneliness measures, reinforcing the findings on FSM and relative poverty. However, when considering the whole income spectrum there is an inverted ‘U-shape’ to be found in the relationship between experiencing any of the four measures ‘often’ and household income. For the measures related to having no-one to talk to, being alone and feeling left out similar proportions of children in both the highest and the lowest income families experiences these feelings often. When considering

<sup>f</sup> The Children’s Society’s household survey collects data on the income (details of either weekly, monthly or annual income are collected) of families of participating children, using 42 banded categories. Weekly, monthly and annual income information were collated into one variable denoting one annual income grouping (out of a total 42) for each child. Annual income was then divided into five groups of similar sizes, using the ‘cut points for 5 equal groups’ function in SPSS Frequencies (NB. As data were already grouped into categories, it was not possible to obtain five exact quintiles).

the direct measure (How often do you feel lonely?), the proportion of children from the highest income households who 'often' feel lonely is 6 percentage points higher than for the lowest income group. The proportions presented for the 'often' categories in Figure 7 above are often based on small numbers. For example, for the direct measure, the weighted N's for those responding 'often' in household income quintile 1 (Up to £13,519) is 60, the weighted N for quintile 2 (£13,520 to £25,999) is 32, 14 for quintile 3 (£26,000 to £38,999), 21 for quintile 4 (£39,000 to £57,199) and 75 for quintile 5 (£57,200 and over).

Figure 8 reinforces a well-established finding from our work into well-being and its relationship with income and material possessions. We consistently find that whilst income does have an affect it is crucial that we ask children how they experience this in their everyday life. Children and young people themselves tell us that it is often more about whether they feel they fit in, or whether they feel they have the same opportunities as others that matters most to them. As a result, the issue at play here might be more to do with economic inequality than with poverty and low income.

Whilst much more work would be needed to determine the relative importance of poverty and economic inequality there was some support for the role economic inequality had to play to be found in the qualitative data. Whilst some children did speak about low income (for example the quote about trainers that opened this section) others talked more about 'fitting in' which as a concept is not necessarily related only to low-income. As one young person put it:

***'if you're the outsider you probably feel like you're lonely'***

Another said:

***'they feel lonely because of the way they dress, the way they talk, the way they look'***

*(13 year old boy)*

The quotes suggest that we need to broaden our horizons beyond a strict focus on income – and consider how economic inequality could be related to loneliness. It seems both children from high and low income families might feel like the outsider at times.

## **Summary**

The ONS finding that 27% of children receiving free school meals reported often being lonely, using the direct measure of loneliness was particularly striking. Our additional analysis has replicated these findings for children living in relative poverty, but not quite as strongly.

The findings using household income highlight that loneliness is not just an issue disproportionately affecting children in the poorest households however. The analysis demonstrates that children in the highest income households also struggle with loneliness. It could be that an important factor at work is inequality, rather than exclusively low-income.

If this is the case, it is a particularly important finding from a public policy perspective because interventions that reduce these inequalities will have positive impacts across the income spectrum for lonely children. As a result, we argue that the role of economic inequality on loneliness experienced by children and young people must be a key area for further research.

The qualitative work undertaken into loneliness, and wider research we have done with children and young people over many years highlights the importance that young people place on 'fitting in' and the impact that material circumstances have on their ability to do so. Income inequality can be experienced in both subtle and explicit ways by both wealthy and poorer children.

As such, any support provided to tackle loneliness will need to be carefully designed to avoid stigma. Indeed, given the extent to which 'fitting in' was identified as an important theme it may be more effective to focus on community-based approaches rather than interventions for individuals. For example, in schools, The Children's Society has found that projects to 'poverty proof' the school day can be an effective way of increasing inclusion for the poorest children and young people without marking them out as different.

## Tackling loneliness

If we know that some feelings of loneliness are common, and that loneliness is related to children's well-being, we must ask children and young people themselves what would help to tackle loneliness. The qualitative interviews we conducted included questions about what young people thought might help and in this final section we draw out some initial themes.

It is worth stating, at the outset, that children and young people themselves recognised how difficult it might be to support someone experiencing loneliness:

***'I'm not 100% sure what you do because they're not going to open up and talk to you if they feel left out'***

The young people we interviewed were clear that asking anyone directly to admit that they were lonely and if they would like some help was unlikely to work. There was also a sense that once you are lonely, it may become even harder to ask for help, so that loneliness can be self-perpetuating:

***'I would eventually... not sink inside myself, but isolate myself, and feel like there's no-one to care for me'***

Children had mixed views about whether adults could help. One child, who had experienced having a mentor, thought that something similar to mentoring might be useful and some children spoke about how teachers might help. Others were less sure however with one saying:

***'The teachers can't do anything, they can't sort our problems out, they try to do their best but it just never happens.'***

The parallels between how children speak about loneliness and bullying were strong. There may be relief in having someone - an adult, or a peer – know that you are lonely, but there is also an acknowledgement that even though this might make you feel a little better, others cannot solve feelings of loneliness for you. This is something children often say about bullying – that talking to someone about it helps them feel better but it does not necessarily solve the problem.

Indeed, children were keen to emphasise what they could do, both to address their own loneliness, and that of others. Participants acknowledged the valuing in talking about their feelings, for example:

***'Talk to them, some of them feel real stressed out sometimes, I never knew people were so stressed out or get depressed and feel lonely, feel alone. They are not alone. There are millions of people in the world that feel the exact same thing. If they were put in the same room, you'd realise you were not the only one.'***

But often they suggested that some young people might not want to do that and that it was more helpful to just include them – to start playing with them, to ask them to join in, or to start a conversation about something else:

***'Get a person out of their comfort zone, you never know a person could thrive out of their comfort zone'***



Another theme that emerged was the idea of change and transition. This ranged from moving schools, the transition from primary to secondary school, or even just changing friendship groups:

***'[it] Started in Year 7, it took time to find people that have the same interests as you'***

***'She is really good now, she has been going with the right people, socialising with the right people.'***

In sum, 'solving' loneliness was felt to be complicated – this was especially obvious when children were asked what might help children they know who are lonely. Often children responded that it was 'relationship' factors – like new friendship groups or two friends making up after an argument that addressed the loneliness children had been feeling.

There are two initial conclusions that could be drawn. Firstly, children really value having someone to talk to about feeling lonely – if they did not have a parent or teacher or friend they could turn to they found things very difficult. In many ways, the growing conversation in society about loneliness should help here. As long as adults do not write off the loneliness of children as "just part of childhood" then a society more able and comfortable to talk about loneliness should be a good thing for everyone – including children.

The second conclusion concerns the importance of children's relationships. Our long-running research into well-being has consistently found that it is relationships, with family primarily, but also with friends, that are major factors in determining a child's well-being. Given that loneliness and low subjective well-being appear to be related a focus on relationships should be particularly powerful as it will likely improve a range of outcomes compared to efforts that are singularly focused on tackling loneliness in isolation.

Children did recognise the stigma in admitting to feeling lonely. This, in conjunction with the fact that many children responded that they felt lonely at least some of the time, suggests that a greater focus on helping children to form, maintain and strengthen their relationships seems a promising way to address loneliness. This would be a positive approach based on 'connectedness' and stronger relationships instead of a deficit based approach targeted at 'the lonely children'. This is also important in light of our findings around the links between loneliness and economic inequality as community approaches that build and strengthen relationships could benefit many children across society.

## Recommendations

Below are some initial recommendations aimed at reducing loneliness and improving well-being among children.

- Children identified the importance of strong relationships in tackling loneliness. Those looking to tackle loneliness among children should consider how they could strengthen family relationships. This could be through providing activities for families to spend time together. For families facing specific challenges family therapy should be easily accessible. More support for parents with their parenting skills could be effective, particularly for those with older children as parenting support is often aimed at new parents.
- Relationships with friends are important. Those looking to tackle loneliness could consider how to support children to build strong friendships, possibly targeting support at children who might struggle to make and sustain friendships like those who are experiencing homelessness, children with learning and/or physical disabilities, or children in care, for example.
- Other relationships with positive adult role models could be effective in addressing loneliness and low well-being. Those looking to tackle loneliness could consider providing befriending or mentoring opportunities for adults to support children who might be struggling with loneliness, or could consider volunteering opportunities for young people to befriend older people.
- The three recommendations all speak to the importance of community building. Youth services, children's centres, green spaces and safe neighbourhoods free from crime and anti-social behaviour all have a role to play in reducing loneliness and improving children's well-being. However, it's important to recognise the role this kind of provision plays in context. Cuts to local government mean that many of these services are increasingly threatened or are already seriously reduced.
- Loneliness was linked to low well-being and as a result could be an indicator for future mental ill-health although much more research would be required to establish this link. In many areas, it is very difficult for children to access support for their emotional health unless they meet the clinical threshold of NHS mental health services. Commissioners should consider how they can provide early and easy access support which does not require an appointment, or a diagnosis, and provides children with a safe environment to talk about what is troubling them. At The Children's Society we provide services like this through our easy access drop-in hubs for emotional and mental health support. Support like this could also be delivered digitally.
- Bullying was a significant concern for young people in the qualitative data but quantitative data did not allow us to triangulate this. Quantitative research into bullying and loneliness would be useful to help further understand the relationships between these issues.
- Schools should have a whole-school approach to improving well-being that includes a comprehensive approach to prevent and tackle bullying. Schools should also consider how they might poverty-proof the school day, in a non-stigmatising way so that all children can participate in school life equally. We also recommend that the Department for Education fund access to counselling in every secondary school as a matter of urgency so that those who are struggling can easily access early support.

## Loneliness in context

- It is clear that there is much more for us to learn about children’s experiences of loneliness and how it is related to their well-being and a range of other indicators and outcomes. However, in order to drive meaningful change loneliness cannot be treated as a separate issue, divorced from some of the most pressing problems facing children today like poor mental health services, increased knife crime and serious youth violence, and rising rates of child poverty. All of these issues, including loneliness, are damaging our children’s well-being, making them unhappy in the present and putting their futures at risk. We recommend the Government seriously consider how it will coordinate all of the work it is doing to tackle these serious issues through a comprehensive and cross-departmental well-being strategy for children and young people.
- Such a strategy will need to be long term and the structures will need to be put in place to measure change. Children’s well-being in the UK has been in decline since 2009 and it is important that decision makers take steps to address this at every level. Nationally, there is a need for more robust measurement of children’s well-being, which may include experiences of loneliness. Only with this data will we be able to properly measure progress and hold decision makers to account. National well-being measurement could be achieved through the addition of a well-being measure to the National Pupil Database which is collated through the school census and held centrally by the Department for Education.
- Better national data on children’s well-being is a long-term ambition of The Children’s Society. There are however many things that can be done right now to improve the data gathered on children’s well-being and to ensure it is used more widely. The Government must endorse a specific set of measures and then use its influence, through guidance and funding streams, to ensure the widespread adoption of these measures throughout society. At the national level, a review of all the existing surveys that gather insight into the lives of children and young people and ensure that standardised well-being measures are used which allow for comparisons between surveys and across childhood is needed. The upcoming guidance for schools on well-being and the new “State of the Nation” report into children’s well-being that the Department will publish in October provide excellent opportunities to move this agenda forward.

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<sup>1</sup>[https://www.ageuk.org.uk/globalassets/age-uk/documents/reports-and-publications/reports-and-briefings/active-communities/rb\\_dec17\\_jocox\\_commission\\_finalreport.pdf](https://www.ageuk.org.uk/globalassets/age-uk/documents/reports-and-publications/reports-and-briefings/active-communities/rb_dec17_jocox_commission_finalreport.pdf)

<sup>2</sup><https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/a-connected-society-a-strategy-for-tackling-loneliness>

<sup>3</sup><https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/methodologies/measuringlonelinessguidanceforuseofthenationalindicatorsonsurveys>

<sup>4</sup><https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/articles/childrensandyoungpeoplesexperiencesofloneliness/2018>

<sup>5</sup><https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/compendium/nationalmeasurementofloneliness/2018>

<sup>6</sup><https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/articles/lonelinesswhatcharacteristicsandcircumstancesareassociatedwithfeelinglonely/2018-04-10>

<sup>7</sup><https://www.bbc.co.uk/mediacentre/latestnews/2018/loneliest-age-group-radio-4>

<sup>8</sup><https://www.actionforchildren.org.uk/how-to-help/support-our-campaigns/jo-cox-commission-on-loneliness/>

<sup>9</sup><https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/what-we-do/resources-and-publications/the-good-childhood-report-2017>

<sup>10</sup> Main (2014) ‘Child poverty and children’s subjective well-being’, *Child Indicators*, 7(3) p451-472

Right now in Britain there are children and young people who feel scared, unloved and unable to cope. The Children's Society works with these young people, step by step, for as long as it takes.

**We listen. We support. We act.**

There are no simple answers so we work with others to tackle complex problems. Only together can we make a difference to the lives of children now and in the future.

**Because no child should feel alone.**



**The  
Children's  
Society**

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