

Keeping out of trouble

Children's views reported by the
Children's Rights Director for England



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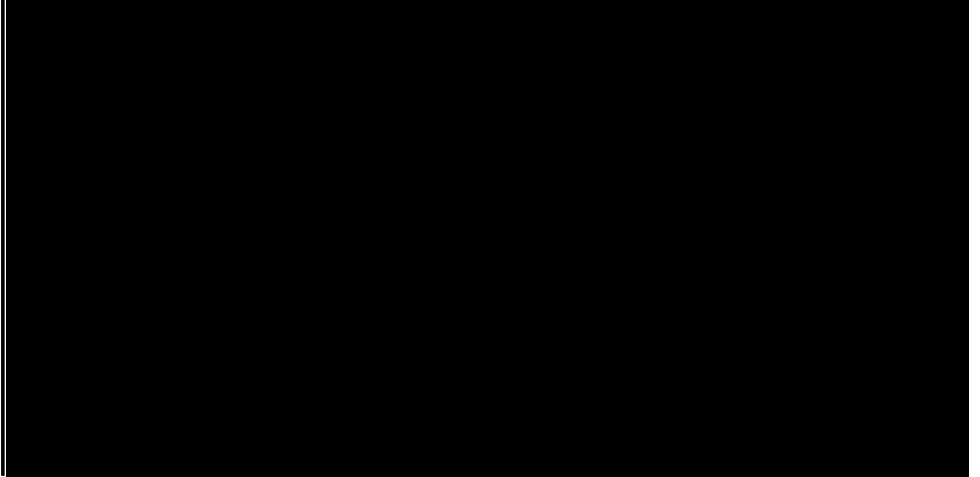
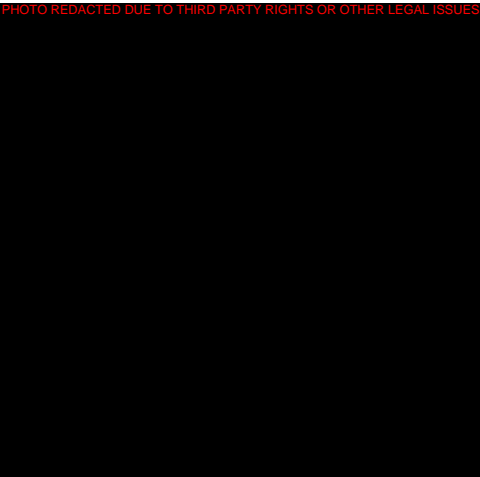


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Introduction

Roger Morgan, Children's Rights Director for England



As Children's Rights Director for England, the law gives me the duty to ask children and young people in care for their views about their rights, their welfare, and how they are looked after in England. The law also gives me the duty to ask children getting any sort of help from council social care services, as well as care leavers and children and young people living away from home in any type of boarding school, residential special school or further education college.

As well as asking children and young people for their views and publishing what they tell us, with my team I also give advice on children's and young people's views and on children's rights and welfare to Her Majesty's Chief Inspector at Ofsted, and to the government. I have a duty to raise any issues I think are important about the rights and welfare of children or young people in care, getting children's social care support or living away from home. With my team, I do this both for individual young people and for whole groups of young people.

For this report, we asked children and young people for their views and experience about what can keep a child or young person from getting into trouble with the law. We asked both children and young people who had been in trouble with the law and those that had not. This report therefore gives the children's view of what makes the difference for a child.

I am sending this report to the government, to councils and to people making decisions now about looking after children and how to help keep them from getting into trouble with the law. I hope that the children's views in this report will help them reach the decisions they need to make, for everyone's sake.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Roger Morgan'.

Dr Roger Morgan OBE
Children's Rights Director for England

How we asked children and young people for their views

We asked for the views of children and young people in two very different situations. We asked children and young people in care, and we also asked young people living in two different secure training centres.

We asked the children and young people in care for their views at a big consultation event we held in the north of England. We invited children from different local authorities across the country, and did not just choose children we already knew or who were already in local participation groups or Children in Care Councils. We asked the children for their views in a series of discussion groups. At the same event, we ran other discussion groups to ask children and young people for their views on two other subjects for other reports. These were running away and physical restraint.

Altogether we held nine discussion groups on the subject of keeping out of trouble. Each group we ran was led by a member of the Office of the Children's Rights Director, and another member of our team took notes of the views the children gave. Parents, carers, staff members and other adults who had brought children and young people to our discussion groups were not with the children during the discussions, so that the children could freely talk about their views.

We gave children a shopping token to thank them for taking part in our discussions, and they were also able to take part in activities for young people at the activity centre where we held all our nine discussion groups.

At that centre, we also set up some electronic screens on which children could enter more views while they were waiting for our groups, or waiting to join activities, or during the lunch break. The answers typed on to those screens have been used in this report, alongside what was said in our discussion groups.

As always in children's discussion groups we run, we asked open questions for discussion, but did not suggest any answers. We told the children and young people that they did not have to agree on any 'group views', but could give different views and could disagree without having to argue for their views against anyone else. We would write down all their different views.

We used a secure web survey to ask young people at the two secure training centres for their views on keeping out of trouble. As always with our web surveys, we gave young people secure login details and passwords, so they could complete the surveys themselves.

This report contains, as far as we could note them down, all the views given by the children and young people in the web survey and discussion groups, not our own views. We have not added our comments. We have not left out any views we might disagree with, or which the government, councils, professionals or research people might disagree with. Where we have used a direct quote from what a child or young person said, this is either something that summarises well what others had said as well, or something that was a clear way of putting a different idea from what others had said.

As with all our reports of children's views, we have done our best to write this report so that it can be easily read by young people themselves, by professionals working with young people and by politicians.

You can download copies of all our children's views reports on our children's website: www.rights4me.org.

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The children and young people who gave their views

Altogether, 91 children and young people took part and gave us their views in our nine different groups. These included both boys and girls, children and young people from different ethnic backgrounds and children from different types of care placement.

The same children made 65 responses to questions on the electronic screens at our consultation event.

We had a total of 96 responses to our web survey from young people in the two secure training centres. The youngest was 14, the oldest was 18 and the 'middle' age was 16.

This report is therefore based on the views of 187 children and young people.

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What sorts of trouble are serious?

On our electronic screens at the consultation event, children gave us their views on what is currently against the law that they thought should not be, and what is not currently against the law but they thought should be.

Views differed widely on smoking tobacco and taking drugs. **Some wrote that they thought the use of cannabis should not be against the law, but others wrote that all use of drugs should be made illegal. Some wrote that it should be legal for children to buy cigarettes, others that smoking should be made against the law.**

Other actions that one or more children thought should not be against the law were swearing in public, painting graffiti, playing over-18 games under age, riding cycles on pavements and drunk driving.

Three different actions were identified as needing to be against the law by more than one child in each case. These were fighting, bullying and adults smacking children.

Other actions that one or more children thought should be against the law were making and selling sexualised music videos, running away from foster care, moving children out of care before the age of 16, racial abuse between young people and dropping litter.

We asked both the children and young people in care and the young people in secure training centres what they thought was the worst sort of trouble someone their age could get into. This did not have to be about trouble with the law.

Our discussion groups with children in care told us that **getting pregnant was a serious sort of trouble to get into**. Most other sorts of trouble were to do with breaking the law. We were given examples of trouble that resulted from breaking the law – like getting arrested, getting locked up, being sent to a secure unit or being given an anti-social behaviour order (ASBO). One young person told us how the worst trouble they had got into was getting arrested while they were at work.

The most frequent examples of worst sorts of trouble, from our discussion groups with children in care, were murder, stealing, taking drugs and violence. Each of these was raised and discussed by over half our groups. Other examples of worst sorts of trouble, each raised by two or more groups, were **smoking, drinking, fighting, car theft, robbery and knife crime.**

Here are the **top six worst sorts of trouble according to the young people in secure training centres.** Each of these came from more than one in 10 young people answering our web survey.

- Murder – from 35 young people
- Criminal offences – from 24 young people
- Drugs, drinking and smoking – from 20 young people
- Getting involved in gangs – from 18 young people
- Debt – from 11 young people

The top six worst sorts of trouble from these young people included generally **committing a crime (with murder singled out as the one worst thing), but also personal problems such as misusing drink and drugs, being involved with gangs and getting into debt.**

Sorts of trouble listed by fewer than one in 10 young people from secure training centres included getting yourself locked up, having family problems and being sexually exploited.

To check on this, we also asked those in secure training centres what they thought were the worst crimes a young person could commit. **Murder, sexual offences, violence and assault topped the list of worst crimes according to the young people in secure training centres.** Here is the full list that came from at least one in 10 of the young people from secure training centres, in order, starting with the worst.

- Murder
- Sexual offences
- Violence and assault
- Theft
- Arson
- Gun and knife crime
- Drug-related crime

Bombing and terrorism came next on the list, but from fewer than one in 10 young people. Offences against animals came lower down the list. Looting, damage to property and car crime were each listed by just one young person as a worst sort of crime. **With the exception of theft, which came high on the list, the crimes listed as the worst sorts of crime were those that involved harming people.** Drug abuse was something that can harm people: ‘Drugs lead to violence and they both destroy families and lives.’

We also asked both those in care and those in secure training centres whether they thought any sorts of crime didn’t really matter much. **A third of the 90 young people in secure training centres who answered this question said there were no sorts of crime that didn’t really matter.** This was the most frequent answer to the question. Young people said: ‘they wouldn’t be crimes if they didn’t matter’; ‘someone is always affected’; ‘all crime is bad’.

‘Drugs lead to violence and they both destroy families and lives’

However, **three sorts of crime were still listed by at least one in 10 as crimes that don’t really matter. These were theft, shoplifting and criminal damage.** The people who gave these answers told us they thought they didn’t really matter because they were crimes against property and didn’t have much impact on people, and they were crimes that would probably only lead to a fine but not jail.

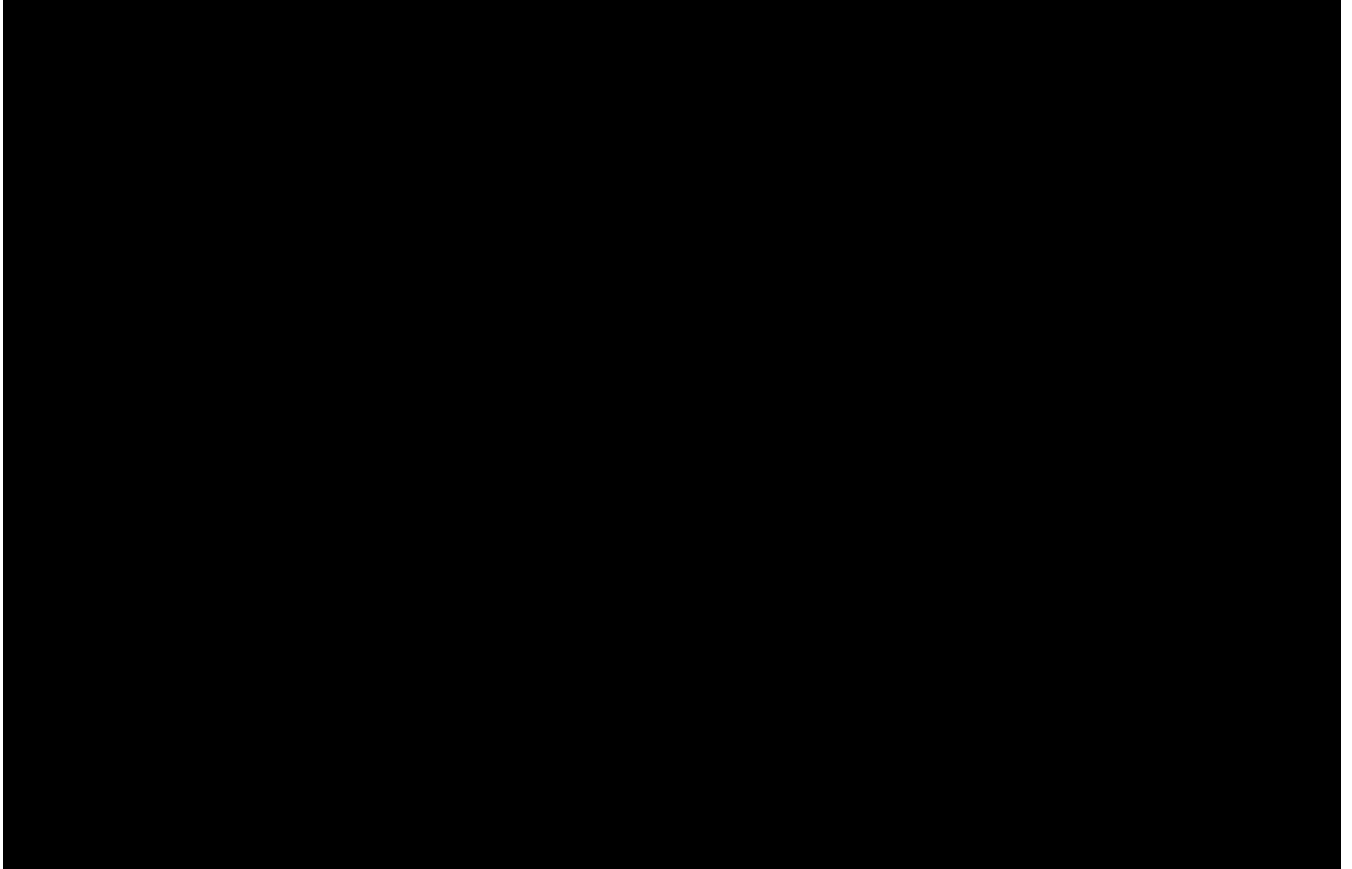
Our discussion groups with children in care came up with a different set of answers. Some thought that under-age smoking did not matter much, and nor did using abusive language or dropping litter. One group thought that **under-age sex between young people was not as serious as it is usually thought, and nor is fighting between young people on the streets, because most young people get into fights or scrapes at one time or another.** One group also thought that although vandalism can be serious, **vandalism by young people is usually seen as being more serious than vandalism by adults,** and they thought that was wrong. Some in care also told us that criminal damage in a care home isn’t among the more serious crimes.

We asked what makes a crime serious. **Children and young people in care told us that crimes that risk killing people, and taking people’s property, are particularly serious. There was agreement that murder was the worst of crimes. Generally any crime that hurt someone else was serious.**

They also thought that some crimes are serious, not only because of what they do to other people, but because young people cannot easily escape pressure to commit them. An example was gun crime, which is both serious in itself, and where ‘we are pressured into it – can’t get out’.

Taking drugs was serious for a different reason – because it could damage your health or even kill you. **Other crimes were serious because of their consequences for you:** ‘there could be consequences for the rest of your life’; ‘stop you doing other things in life like getting a job’. Some groups were clear that **committing crimes was serious because you were left with a criminal record.**

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The young people in secure training centres gave us two main factors that make a particular crime a serious one. These were if the crime had a big impact on the victim or their family, and if the crime itself was doing something horrible or disgusting. They also told us that you can tell how serious a particular sort of crime is by the length of the custodial sentence it attracts.

Examples given of horrible or disgusting crimes were rape, and offences against children: 'it makes me sick to even think about it'; 'it's the most un-human thing a civilised person can do'.

A few of those in secure training centres told us that a crime is a serious one if most people think it is, or if it is something that happens frequently. Young people in care in one of our discussion groups also made the point that something can be serious if it happens frequently.

'There could be consequences for the rest of your life'

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What would stop children and young people from breaking the law?

The young people from secure training centres who completed our web survey listed three main things that would help stop people of their age from committing crimes.

- More local activities and places to go – from 46 young people
- Jobs for young people – from 13 young people
- Government help for young people – from 10 young people

Twelve of the young people thought there was nothing that could be done to help stop young people their age from breaking the law: ‘you’ll never stop crime’; ‘it’s up to them’; ‘not for all – some don’t listen’.

Activities and places to go to keep young people occupied came top of the list for stopping young people from breaking the law, by a long way:

‘better local facilities and sports events’; ‘youth clubs at weekends, during the day and at night make a big difference, especially when kids get kicked out of school’; ‘stop them getting bored and hanging round with the wrong types’.

Having jobs was seen as important, and not only in terms of full-time employment: ‘part-time jobs even for the younger ones’; ‘give them responsibilities’.

Some told us more about what further help the government could give: ‘making change and perhaps listening to what people have to say instead of parliament’; ‘more money’; ‘have programmes to keep young people off the streets and not bored’; ‘groups to share feelings’; ‘just try and put as much help out there as you can’.

Our groups of children and young people in care also stressed the importance of young people having activities to do and jobs to go to. As one group summarised it, **‘If we had better things to do we wouldn’t get into trouble.’** Some in our groups recommended **anything that helps to keep children and young people off the streets**, including youth activity centres and just ‘places to hang out’. For

younger children, staying with their parents or carers rather than being out and about was helpful.

One discussion group advised that **activities shouldn’t be so expensive to take part in that young people have to make up their own entertainments on the streets instead.** One example given was that many challenging activities, like rock climbing, would be popular and would help to keep young people out of trouble – but few have the money to do them.

They also spoke of how schools and colleges could help by **motivating young people to have high aspirations and helping them to achieve them.** Personal education funding is important. They spoke too of the need for more help for vulnerable children and young people to **counter peer pressure** and help them build good relationships with friends, parents and organisations that can support them. Being in the right group of friends is important.

One group told us that knowing right from wrong was basic, and two groups told us that **knowing the consequences was important in putting young people off committing crimes.** You might be put off by the shock of seeing a friend get into trouble. Yet another group said that more could be done to **reduce under-age drinking:** ‘It’s so easy to get a bottle nowadays.’

One of our care groups thought that **too many changes of social worker, and social workers being too busy, meant less help to young people in care to keep out of trouble:** ‘when you try to speak to them they say they’ve got a lot of cases’; ‘social workers change too often and you can’t talk to them because there’s no trust built up’.

Finally, some in our care groups spoke about **things that might stop young people from carrying on committing crimes once they had started.** Important here was being able to make some mistakes, but then learning from them, and having counselling. You also had to learn to shrug off being put down so often as someone from care.

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What makes children and young people likely to break the law?

We asked each of our discussion groups to tell us what they thought led young people their age to break the law. There was a lot of agreement that the main factors were **peer pressure, boredom with little else to do, and progressing from being involved on the edges of crime with friends into becoming fully involved.** An example of this was helping friends who were committing a theft by acting as a look-out for them, then getting more and more involved in committing or leading the crime yourself. Getting drunk could lead into taking part in more serious crimes with others in your peer group.

There were a lot of different points about how peer pressure worked. For some it could mean **simply 'getting in with the wrong crowd', for others it was wanting to help your friends. Sometimes it was wanting to belong and fit into a group and be respected by the others in the group, and sometimes a young person was bullied by others into committing crimes in a group:** 'you'd do whatever to be in that group rather than be bullied'; 'you feel like you belong, like you are a part of something and like you have a purpose'. Being respected by the group could mean having lots of attention from others in the group or, we were told by some young people, boys in the group getting into trouble to impress girls. For many, you 'want to look hard in front of your mates – do not want to look like a wimp'.

'You'd do whatever to be in that group rather than be bullied'

Some said that when you are with a peer group, you 'can't think about it – you just do it when you're under pressure'. You want to go with the others: 'You are made to stand out if you don't get involved.'

Some in our groups told us that in a group of friends, **breaking the law for some is for fun, for a 'buzz':** 'Being naughty is well cool.' A young person may **start doing something for fun, but then progress to worse law-breaking to keep in with their group of friends:** 'People sometimes do it for a laugh and to follow the crowd.' For example, something can start as fun at a party and then progress to serious crime, without anyone having planned for that to happen – people get carried along in the group. There is 'not a set plan to get into trouble'.

Some in our groups told us that **wanting money was a major factor for some:** 'We can't afford most things.' One of our groups said that there is a lot of pressure for young people to have the latest 'techno things' and that can lead to either stealing those things or stealing to get the money to buy them: 'young people need money for everything these days, mobile phones, clothes, everything'; 'if you don't have money you go to a shop and rob it to get what you want'. Wanting money could lead to crimes ranging from shoplifting to mugging someone.

Not having money and being bored could go together to make someone likely to commit a crime: 'money is a big factor, you need it. When you haven't got any you get bored and think "what shall I do now?"; 'you can't go to the cinema or bowling with friends, so you're sat in the park, bored'; 'you get bored, so you want to do something which seems good at the time'.

Other thoughts from some of our discussion groups were that for a few, getting into trouble could be a reaction to something upsetting in your life, or because you are just generally stressed or depressed. It could be a reaction or defence against being bullied, or sometimes violence could be the reaction of a victim against being bullied. One young person said, 'If you're bullying a bully, that would be fun.'

We heard from 94 of the young people in the secure training centres about what they thought leads young people their age to break the law. Here is the list of factors that were listed by at least one in 10.

- Gangs and peer pressure – from 49 young people
- Getting money – from 39 young people
- Drugs and drink – from 29 young people
- Being bored – from 24 young people
- To have fun or get a buzz – from 18 young people
- Stress or anger – from 12 young people

Seven young people from the secure training centres said that family influences had led them into breaking the law.

Well over twice as many of the young people in secure training centres said that peer pressure, including in gangs, led them into breaking the law as said it was to have fun or for a 'buzz': 'People do it to fit in or get respect.'

According to those we asked in secure training centres, **getting money came second to peer pressure in leading young people into crime, with drugs, drink and boredom being common triggers for crime:** 'when teenagers get bored, they get into trouble'; 'it's because where I come from there isn't a lot to do and people get bored and tempted to do something they find funny, but it's not funny to other people'.

'Not a set plan to get into trouble'

In our groups we also asked whether there were any particular sorts of young person who are especially likely to break the law. There was no general agreement in our discussion groups. There were many different answers, ranging from 'chavs' to people living in poor areas, to young people with a poor education, to those with a 'bad' background or parents who had been in trouble themselves, to people in gangs, and to young people who have been mistreated. Some thought particular age groups, such as those aged 14 to 16, were most likely to get into trouble, but others thought that age wasn't a big factor. Some thought that boys were more likely to get into trouble than girls, often to show off to girls, but others disagreed with that.

One group told us that **children who have always been made to feel they are not worth much are likely to get into trouble:** 'Those who have been told since they were young that they'll never amount to much. When that is said you don't need to try, being in trouble is expected of you.'

One group thought that 'all young people get into trouble at some point, it's part of being a teenager'. **People care more about what they do as they grow older, but when you are young you want to live life to the full – and for some, that leads to getting into trouble:** 'Anyone can get themselves into trouble.'

We also asked the young people in secure training centres whether there are any particular sorts of young person they thought were especially likely to break the law. Here are their top three answers, each coming from at least one in 10 of those who answered our survey.

- People with unstable family lives – from 23 young people
- People who are poor or deprived – from 22 young people
- Children in care – from 10 young people

Some other groups of young people, listed by fewer than one in 10 young people responding, were those from families with a criminal history, young people with personal problems, young people in gangs, and drug users.

The young people in secure training centres, like many in our discussion groups of children in care, clearly saw that **family background is important to whether someone is likely to break the law. Instability or poverty both made young people in the family more likely to commit crimes:** ‘families who don’t care about them’; ‘they have no support from a family, no parental guidance, you feel you have nothing to lose’. On poverty, one young person summed up a general view that ‘breaking the law is all about money’.

One person summed up the risks of inner-city life: ‘Kids in the inner cities – they get into gangs.’ Another young person summed up what they thought about being led into crime in one sentence: ‘Cos they’re angry, they get bored, unhappy, they’re mugs!’

It was clear that the **young people in secure training centres saw children in care as likely to break the law. Only one of our discussion groups of children in care said the same. They thought that children in care were specially vulnerable to getting into trouble,** and that those living in a children’s home could easily build up anger: ‘If you are

in care it can be hard to keep out of trouble.’ These points did not come up in other discussion groups of children in care, though. The same group told us that some professionals and people in the general public expected children in care to get into trouble anyway: ‘when I was arrested and police found out I was living in a foster home, they expected me to be a problem child’; ‘I was in a taxi one day and he knew I was in care, and he asked me what I did’.

On the question of whether some young people are born likely to commit crime, or whether they become likely to do this over time, the young people in secure training centres had a very clear view. **The great majority thought that young people are not born criminals – they become criminals.** This was the view of 85 of the 96 young people who answered the survey – that is, of almost nine out of 10. Only eight thought that young people could be born criminal.

The same view came from our discussion groups with children in care. Many thought that being born into some family backgrounds, and how the child was shaped as they grew up, could make a child more likely to get into trouble, but this was not the same as being born criminal. As well as this, a child ‘might be brought up in a good environment but turn bad’. Or they might be brought up in a bad environment but choose to keep themselves out of trouble: ‘Depends on your family business. My uncle is a burglar but I’m not.’

‘When teenagers get bored, they get into trouble’

‘Those who have been told since they were young that they’ll never amount to much. When that is said you don’t need to try, being in trouble is expected of you’

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Some quotes show how young people could become criminal over time, without being born criminal.

‘You can’t be born to do a crime’

‘You might come from a good background but still get into trouble’

‘It’s the area you grow up in or the people you hang around with’

‘No kid is born bad – kids learn and imitate stuff’

‘Most of the time people fall into a life of crime due to peer pressure or social upbringing’

‘They’re not born like that – they just got bored’

‘Generally peer pressure, not own choice’

‘Don’t think you are born a criminal, or perfect, mostly people around you who influence your decisions’

‘They become likely – it’s your choice in what life you take but as young people we become influenced’

We asked the young people, both in our discussion groups and in secure training centres, how likely they thought it was, on a scale of one to 10 (with 10 as the most likely), that a young person of their age would commit a really serious crime. The middle score from our discussion groups of those in care was six, and the middle score from secure training centres was seven out of 10.

We then asked those in secure training centres what were the most likely ways for a young person their age to break the law. Eighty-four answered this question. Here are the top five answers, each coming from at least one in 10 of the young people answering.

- Robbery – from 39 young people
- Burglary – from 31 young people
- Violence or assault – from 27 young people
- Theft – from 20 young people
- Drugs – from 19 young people

Although they were suggested by fewer than one in 10 of the young people answering, motor vehicle crime came next, followed by alcohol and vandalism.

The most likely types of crime were seen to be against property, but with robbery as the most likely crime of all, and violence or assault against people coming high up on the list.

‘Breaking the law is all about money’

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What could be done to stop children and young people getting into trouble?

Those in secure training centres told us that **two main things would help stop young people from committing crimes and so keep them out of secure training centres – activities for young people to do, and having good supportive families around them.** One said you need ‘more supportive parents – not like my parents’.

Only five out of the 88 young people in secure training centres who answered this question thought that harsher sentences would help stop young people from committing crimes. Among the children in care in our discussion groups, who were not detained following any crimes, some thought differently and said that harder sentences would make a difference.

As we heard when we asked what kept some children and young people from getting into trouble, **knowing the consequences** is important, including ‘the embarrassment and the shame’, and the likely punishment. Life in prisons being harder would make a difference. A few however said that some people commit crimes because life in prison is better and safer than their life at home. Some thought that **visiting a prison** to see what it was like and to talk to some people who had been convicted would put some young people off committing crimes – but others disagreed with that.

Our discussion groups also told us of other things that help to put young people off getting into trouble. As we had already heard, **having a criminal record and how that might affect getting a job in the future was a real deterrent** from crime for many.

Being given **welfare benefits money** was also helpful, as it meant the young person had at least some money. But we also heard that having your benefits stopped could lead directly to you stealing things.

Being given **guidance**, having support groups, and perhaps help from CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services) could be important in stopping someone committing more crimes. Having somebody to talk to and be guided by was important. It would help if there was a range of people for you to choose someone you could approach and discuss your life with.

Being helped to do other things and being able to get involved in good activities were also important. There needed to be more youth groups and activities than now. If you did get to prison, being educated properly there about how crime is wrong should help.

Some thought **taking part in sports** could help, both as a discipline and as a way of getting rid of anger.

Some in our discussion groups talked about what difference **the likelihood of getting caught** might make. They reached two opposite conclusions. For some young people, the risk of getting caught might put them off committing a crime, but for some others, that risk might be a thrill and make them commit more crime. It also depended on what sort of crime it might be. The more serious the crime, the harsher the punishment was likely to be, so the more you would worry about the risk of getting caught. It could also depend on your age: ‘Older people have heavier consequences.’

Some consequences did not have much deterrent effect, according to one of our groups. Their example was the ASBO (Anti-social Behaviour Order): ‘It gives us kudos, more like a badge of honour for us.’

Two groups talked about **things the police could do.** Getting more involved in activities with children and young people could help. So could police visiting schools and children’s homes more to get themselves known and to teach children about safety and risks. On the other hand, some police always seemed to stop and question young people wearing ‘trackies and hoods’, and that made them resentful and anti-police. In one group, we were told, ‘Because they’re asking me questions about something I haven’t done, I may as well go and do it.’

Some thought **having more police around** to be seen would be a deterrent: ‘Whenever you do or see a crime, they’re never about!’ It would help if the police were ‘more visible, accessible and approachable to young people’.

It also depended very much on the personality of the individual police officer: ‘Some police can be all right and some out of hand.’

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Are children and young people more or less likely to break the law these days?

Ninety-three young people in secure training centres gave us their view on this question. **By a majority of 82 to 4, they thought that young people their age were getting more likely to commit crimes.** (The other seven were not sure or in the middle on this question.)

Some quotes that came with their answers were: 'there's hardly any punishments and you get good money'; 'there are less jobs and people just join gangs and start drugs and crime'; 'there's nothing to do out there'; 'more parents are being made redundant'.

The top three reasons they gave for young people getting more likely to commit crime were, first, being more bored with nothing to do, then being more likely to be involved in gangs and peer pressure, and then that there were more young people wanting money.

Most – but not all – of our discussion groups with children in care thought that children and young people are getting more likely to commit crimes nowadays. As one put it, 'More crime as we have less to do with ourselves.' Some told us this was linked to more alcohol abuse among young people. Others said, like the young people in secure training centres, that it was to do with the growth of gangs. One group thought that there was less attention given to discipline and good behaviour in children's social care these days. One of our groups looked back in time and said that in the past things like National Service had stopped young people from having the opportunity to commit serious crimes.

One discussion group thought that **whether youth crime was going up or down depended on which part of the country you were talking about:** 'London is dangerous.' The same group said that you were given different information about whether youth crime was rising or falling anyway: 'Government statistics show that all crime has gone down. But the next day the *Sun* newspaper said knife crime had gone up' – so you never really knew the truth.

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One group thought that there was not much change in how much youth crime happens, but that adults always tend to think (wrongly) that 'they didn't do it in my day', and therefore **many adults believe that young people are worse nowadays than they were when they were young.** Part of the same problem was that generally 'older people are scared of us'.

'More crime as we have less to do with ourselves'

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Are children and young people more likely to commit crimes on their own or with a group?

The 91 young people from secure training centres who answered this question thought overall that **young people are more likely to commit a crime when they are in a group or gang**. This was the view of 74 of the 91, compared with only seven who thought they were more likely to commit a crime on their own. Eight more thought that young people were most likely to commit a crime with just one other person. Some said young people were not likely to commit a crime on their own, but it could be with just one person or with a group of other young people.

Those in care in most of our discussion groups also told us that young people are more likely to commit crimes with others than alone. Some told us that this was because **lots of crime is committed because of peer pressure in a group**. One discussion group though thought differently – that young people were more likely

to commit a crime on their own, as in their view it was easier to escape being caught if you were on your own.

Some quotes told us more about committing crimes in a group: 'they want to look good in front of others'; 'don't want to look weak'; 'it's harder to get caught'; 'safety in numbers'; 'they feel more confident, you have someone watching your back'.

One young person told us that this question is complicated. They thought that age comes into it, but so does dangerousness. They told us that younger ones were more likely to commit crimes in a group, but older ones might well commit crimes on their own, aiming to get more for themselves, and were more likely to carry a weapon.



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Does being in a secure training centre make you less likely to commit crimes afterwards?

Since we were asking 96 young people in secure training centres about keeping out of trouble, we thought it was appropriate to ask them whether they thought their experience of life and training in those centres was likely to help them keep out of trouble after they left.

We asked them whether they thought spending time in a secure training centre made them more or less likely to commit a crime after they left the centre, or made no difference at all.

In all, 86 answered this question. **Almost two thirds thought their time in the secure training centre made them less likely to commit any crimes after they left.** Fifty-six said this, compared with only four who thought that being in the secure training centre made them more likely to commit crimes afterwards. Twenty-two thought their time there would make no difference.

The following quotes illustrate how young people felt time in the secure training centre would help them keep out of trouble in the future.

‘It teaches you a lesson being in here’

‘It made me realise what I’m missing’

‘I have a lot to lose – family that care about me and want me to do well’

‘Makes you think there’s more to life than being locked up’

‘I miss my family and it may affect getting a job in the future if I keep getting locked up’

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‘I’m not going to take my freedom for granted’

These young people described for us what sort of support they had been given in the centre, beyond simply being detained. The most common help and support was with drug and alcohol problems, support generally from staff at the centre, help with personal skills and behaviour, specific help to stop reoffending, and being given help with education. A quarter though, 21 out of the 85 who answered this question, said they did not think they had been given any particular sort of support at the centre.

Last words...

Young people who had committed crimes gave the following advice to others.

'Don't do it – it's not worth it'

'Don't think you're better than others because you've committed a crime'

'Just for people to think about what they are doing and the people it affects, like families'

'Before you get into trouble think about the consequences'

'Everyone's got a path – you need determination to prove people wrong'

And they gave this advice to professionals and politicians.

'Give kids like me more help'

'Give anger management'

'Clubs for young people'

'Just do your best for us and do more stuff on the streets'

'Put in better opportunities for young people'

'More time supporting kids who are vulnerable and need it'

'Bring the costs of activities down'

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