



The Children's Happiness Scale

Scale and data for children in care, receiving social care support, and living away from home in boarding or other residential schools or colleges

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Introduction

From 2001 until April 2014, the Children's Rights Director has been a statutory role with the duty to find out and report the views of children in care, getting help from social care services, living away from home in boarding schools, residential special schools or residential further education colleges, and care leavers. Other functions have included providing advice and assistance to individual children whose rights are being breached or are at risk of being breached, and providing advice on children's rights, especially to Ofsted and to government.

The Office of the Children's Rights Director has produced very many Children's Views reports over the years. Each of these gives the views of children themselves, without leaving out anything that I, professionals, the government, or adults generally might disagree with, and without adding adult comments or other research.

This is our report on a project I and my team carried out to find out a way of measuring the happiness children we have been working with. Research people might also call this 'subjective wellbeing' – but 'happiness' is the word we have used for this project.

We carried out this project because of government interest in how people feel about their lives, alongside measuring things like how well off they are and various figures about their welfare. Our task was to develop a questionnaire, or scale, to measure how happy a child or young person might be on a given day.

The report includes the questionnaire we developed for children to fill in to tell how happy they are. And it includes the results of using the questionnaire with over two thousand children and young people, so anyone using it in the future can compare their results with those figures.

I and the team are happy for anyone to use this Children's Happiness Scale if they think it will help them in work they do for children and young people. We hope you will find it of use.



Roger Morgan

Children's Rights Director

How did children describe 'happiness'?

Children we consulted said happiness is one of the main emotions a person can have. The others were feeling sad, angry, excited, upset, frustrated, lonely, shy, anxious, afraid, embarrassed, guilty, joyful or annoyed. The dictionary says that happiness is 'feeling pleasure or contentment'. The children added other words to describe happiness, like 'joy', 'achievement' and being 'cool, calm and collected'. Happiness also meant being satisfied with how things are for you, being with people you want to be with, and not being depressed.

Children we asked said that people are not born as happy or unhappy sorts of people. They are made happy or unhappy by what happens to them. But people's backgrounds will give them either chances or bad luck in life that are likely to make them happy or unhappy. So you 'can't be born happy, but can be born into happiness.'

Money can help you to be happy, but money on its own cannot make you happy. A lot of what makes you happy is not about money – for example, family.

Things that can make a child unhappy are lack of trust, being bullied, people being prejudiced against you, being treated unfairly, losing somebody who matters to you, not being cared for properly, being abused, not being listened to, being excluded from things, not being told things you needed to know, and being let down by people who should be supporting you.

For very young children, being looked after well and being given good support are important. So are being able to explore and try out new things, being able to have some responsibility, being given attention, and having toys and plenty of things to do. Older teenagers are more likely to remember things that had happened to them and to be thinking about their future, which makes a lot of difference to how happy or unhappy they feel.

Many thought that children are becoming unhappier these days as life becomes more competitive, with higher expectations of children and young people, increasing pressure and examinations at school, and worries about the economy and recession.

How we developed the Happiness Scale

Our children's happiness scale is based on children's views and judgements. We drew up a list of 100 statements proposed by children about feeling happy or unhappy. Then we asked 147 children and young people to use a rating scale to judge how happy or unhappy they thought a child saying each of the statements would be.

Then we picked out 20 statements where our judges agreed most on their ratings, and which gave us a good range of statements from those scoring as very unhappy to those scoring as very happy. They are in random order – not in order of happiness score.

The final scale itself, and how to score it, is printed on the next page. Please feel free to copy it and use it.

The Children's Happiness Scale

Here are 20 things children or young people might say about themselves. Just read each of them and tick all the ones that are right about you. Leave the others blank.

Life is good for me at the moment	<input type="checkbox"/>	3.64
I am treated fairly	<input type="checkbox"/>	3.13
I know what is happening next in my life	<input type="checkbox"/>	3.15
I have big problems but am dealing with them	<input type="checkbox"/>	2.55
I am quite proud of myself	<input type="checkbox"/>	3.65
I am trying to change some things about myself	<input type="checkbox"/>	2.57
I don't have any big problems at the moment	<input type="checkbox"/>	3.22
I have lots of friends	<input type="checkbox"/>	4.01
I get confused about what is going on	<input type="checkbox"/>	2.43
I never feel safe	<input type="checkbox"/>	1.74
I often get anxious	<input type="checkbox"/>	2.32
I get lonely	<input type="checkbox"/>	1.68
People are prejudiced against me	<input type="checkbox"/>	1.77
I learn from my mistakes	<input type="checkbox"/>	3.18
I am a shy person	<input type="checkbox"/>	2.63
I get bullied	<input type="checkbox"/>	1.68
I am good at learning new things	<input type="checkbox"/>	3.70
I am getting all the help I need	<input type="checkbox"/>	3.38
I have lots of fun	<input type="checkbox"/>	4.25
I am easily depressed	<input type="checkbox"/>	1.75

To find out your 'happiness score' on this questionnaire:

1. Add up the numbers next to all the items you have ticked
2. Next, write how many items you ticked
3. Now divide the number you wrote against (1) by the number you have just written against (2) and write the answer in the box

That is your happiness score for today on this questionnaire!



Office of the Children's Rights Director

How children score on the Happiness Scale

The highest ('happiest') possible score is 4.25. The 'middle' score is 2.88. (That is what researchers would call the 'median'). The lowest possible score (unless someone doesn't tick any of the items in the questionnaire at all!) is 1.68.

To find out how children usually score on the scale, to give a standard for people to compare their own scores with, we had the scale filled in by 2,186 children and young people. These were from all the groups of children and young people that by law I work with as Children's Rights Director. So they were children in care, children getting support from children's social care services, children living away from home in all types of boarding schools and residential further education colleges, care leavers, or children living in residential special schools. It is important for people using this scale in the future to bear in mind that our figures relate to children in these groups.

The children's happiness scale gives a score for how happy a child is feeling on the day the filled in the questionnaire. The average score for all 2,186 children and young people was 3.22. For boys it was 3.26, and for girls it was 3.18. For children aged under 14, the average score was 3.25, and for young people aged 14 and over it was 3.15.

Children in care scored very slightly lower (less happy) than those not in care, at 3.16 compared with 3.20. Children in foster homes scored slightly higher (happier) at 3.18 than children in children's homes, who scored on average 3.08. Care leavers scored on average 3.01, slightly lower (less happy) than young people generally. Boarders in boarding schools scored an average of 3.22, exactly the same as the children and young people scored overall. Children in residential special schools averaged 3.18. Disabled children scored slightly lower than children generally, at 3.14.

There were wider differences in the happiness scores of young people aged 14 and over than there were in other group of children and young people. Their scores ranged the whole way from the lowest to the highest possible scores (that is, from 1.68 to 4.25).

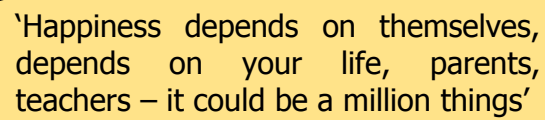
The groups with happiness scores that were closest together were asylum seekers, and residential students in further education colleges. The scores for asylum seekers ranged from 2.30 to 3.70. The scores for residential further education students ranged from the least happy student scoring 2.29 to the most happy one scoring 3.72.

Something unexpected

While we were analysing our results we found something we had not expected, though perhaps we should have seen it coming. The 147 children and young people who judged our statements agreed more over things that tell us a child is unhappy, than over things that tell us a child is happy. We used some statistics to check this out and found that it was what is called 'statistically significant', which means it is extremely unlikely to be a fluke.

So it looks as if we are actually measuring unhappiness, not happiness itself. Happiness seemed to be more 'not being unhappy' than as being something separate in itself.

Children in our discussions indeed agreed over things that usually made a child unhappy – but told us that what makes you happy is very individual to you. As one group told us:



'Happiness depends on themselves, depends on your life, parents, teachers – it could be a million things'