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Research and analysis

Children's social care questionnaires 2023

Published 19 October 2023

Applies to England

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Summary of findings

We received a total of 45,655 responses to the survey from all audience types this year. Of these responses, 6,614 were from children. This was a slight increase on the number of responses we received last year. These are our main findings:

- The majority of children who responded to the survey said that they saw the people who are important to them 'always' or 'most of the time'.

- Generally, the number of children and young people in boarding schools and further education (FE) colleges who said they felt safe has increased since last year. Although this means that more children felt safe in their residential accommodation, this is still the group with the highest proportion of children who do not feel listened to or asked about things that are important to them by the adults that look after them.
- Children in foster care were more likely to always feel safe where they live than children in other types of care. Nearly all (99%) children in foster care feel safe all the time.
- More children reported that they did something fun in the last week.
- The majority of children in group care reported that they got along with other children and adults where they lived or stayed. Of these children, a higher percentage told us that they got on with the adults compared with those who told us that they got on with the children.
- Children in group care and those living in foster care told us that stability and a lasting sense of belonging were important to them. They wanted to stay where they lived until they were at least 18 years old, and some said forever.
- Some children use institutional language about where they live. It is likely they have heard this from those around them, including the adults.

Background

We use online surveys to gather views about children's homes, secure children's homes, adoption services, fostering services,^{[\[footnote 1\]](#)} residential family centres, boarding schools, residential special schools and further education colleges.^{[\[footnote 2\]](#)}

The surveys are for:

- children
- learners
- parents
- foster carers^{[\[footnote 3\]](#)}
- staff
- social workers
- other professionals, such as independent reviewing officers

We ask providers to share the online questionnaire with these groups of people on our behalf.

The surveys were open between 6 February and 26 March 2023.

We use the responses, along with other information we have, such as previous inspection findings and any concerns we receive, to decide the timing of the next inspection and what to focus on when we do inspect.

Trained staff read the responses as soon as they came in to identify any potential safeguarding concerns. If any concerns are noted, they are immediately referred to the inspectors and their managers, who decide on the appropriate action to make sure that children remain safe at the places where they live or stay. If any responses raise serious concerns, we take the appropriate action immediately.^[footnote 4]

We reviewed how we asked children questions in the 2022 survey. Following the review, we changed the look of the survey by making it more colourful. We added a video introduction for children to tell them all about the survey. We also added emojis to illustrate each response and help children better understand their response.

The questions we asked in 2023 are similar to those we have asked previously, focusing on the most important things we wanted to know about children's experiences.

Like last year, we are publishing the accompanying data for all adult responses separately.^[footnote 5]

Who are the children we are talking about?

According to the Department of Education's most recent statistics^[footnote 6], there are 12 million children aged between 0 and 17 years in England.

82,170 are children looked after.^[footnote 7]

70% of children looked after live with foster carers.^[footnote 8]

This year, 6,614 children told us about the place where they live or stay^[footnote 9], such as their children's homes, residential special schools or with foster carers. Not

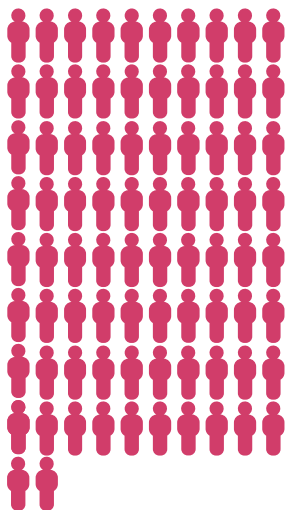
all of these children are looked after.

View the [accompanying data for this publication in an accessible format](#).

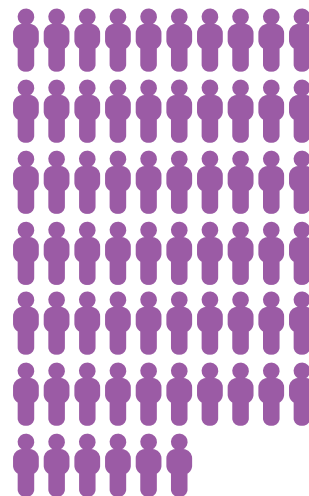
According to the Department for Education's 2022 statistics:*



There are **12 million** children aged between 0 and 17 years in England.



82,170 are children looked after.



70% of children looked after live with foster carers.

This year, **6,614** children told us about the place where they live or stay, such as their children's home, residential special school or foster carers. Not all children are children looked after.

*As at the date of publication, the Department of Education had not yet released statistics for 2023.

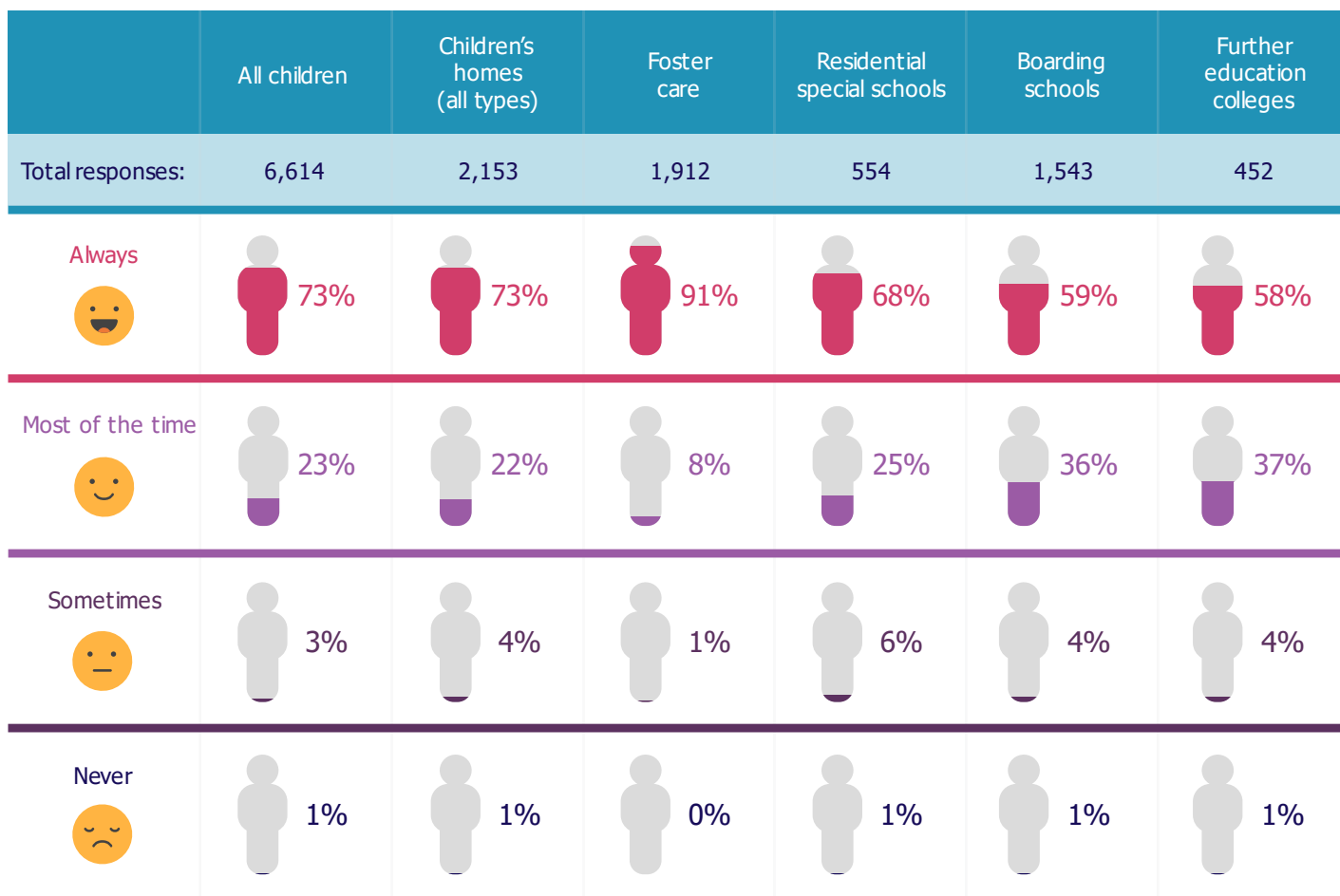
What we found in 2023

Do you feel safe where you live or stay?

This year, 95% of children living in children's homes said that they felt safe 'always' or 'most of the time'. This was a small increase from last year. The percentage of children in foster care that felt safe 'always' or 'most of the time' has stayed the same as last year – that is, 99% of the children who responded.

A lower percentage of children and young people who stay in FE colleges or in boarding schools said that they 'sometimes' or 'never' felt safe. For both, this is 5% compared with 10% in 2022. This means that a greater percentage of children feel

safe.



Children's homes (all types) include residential special schools and secure children's homes.

View the [data for figure 1 in an accessible table format](#).

What children told us about feeling safe where they live or stay

"I feel safe and happy in my boarding house, the staff members make it not only an enjoyable but also disciplined environment."
(child in boarding school)

"Another resident sometimes scares me at night time when he is shouting or banging on the walls. This is the only thing I can think of that makes me feel unsafe."
(child in children's home)

“I think that the place I stay is nice and friendly because I have nice friends and staff members that care for me and make me feel safe and protected. I also really like my house because it is comfy and cozy and I get on with the people very well this also affects my mental health in a Good way because this house is very happy.”
(child in boarding school)

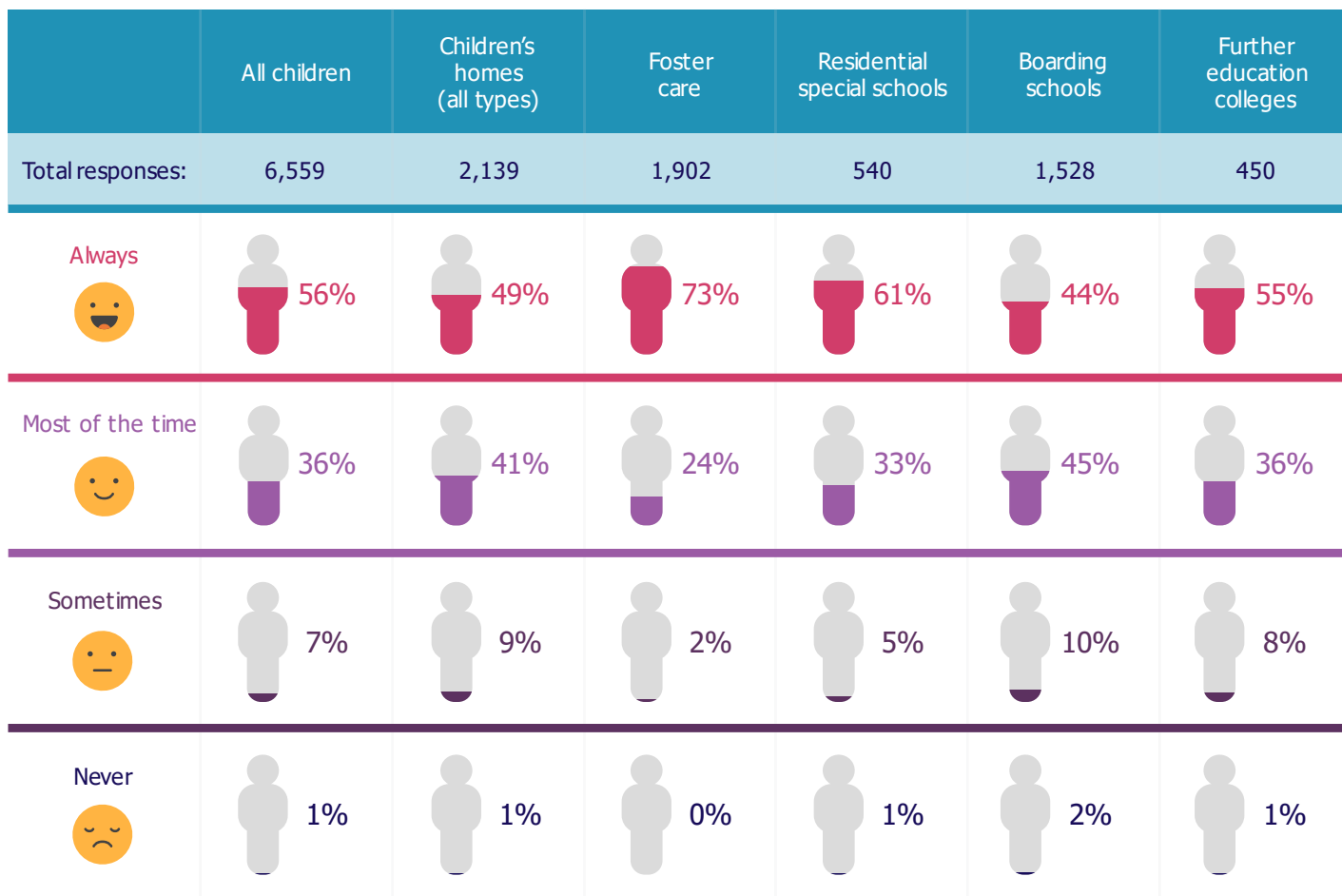
“I think it’s a safe space and if anyone ever had a problem you can go see the wardens, call them or email them for help. They are always supportive with problems and helpful in areas you wouldn’t expect.”
(child in FE college)

“I enjoy staying at college as it has helped me to become more confident and independent knowing that I have support there if needed from the college.”
(child in FE college)

How well do you get on with the adults where you live?

Ninety-two per cent of all children said that they got on with adults where they lived or stayed ‘always’ or ‘most of the time’.

However, 12% of children in boarding schools and 9% of children staying in FE colleges said that they got on with adults ‘sometimes’ or ‘never’.



Children's homes (all types) include residential special schools and secure children's homes.

View the [data for figure 2 in an accessible table format](#).

What children told us about getting on with adults

"That I can talk about anything to my foster carer. We get on well, I like the fact that the area is quiet."
(child in foster care)

"Staff nice and i get on with them well, i get to choose things in the house and in my room."
(child in children's home)

“I really like where I live because the staff, the manager and the area manager, all of them support me a lot of the time. The staff make me dinner and I really like it because they all are good cooks. The children are really supporting as well including the adults.”

(child in children’s home)

“It doesn’t feel homely I would like more male staff because there are too many females and I would like to do more manly man stuff like paint balling, air softing and bike rides.”

(child in children’s home)

“I think that it is good since I don’t have to travel far do get to school but there are a few problems such as independence, some of the rooms are quite poor, the food can be good but sometimes but its not all the time and we don’t get a lot of say in some things, the wifi does not work meaning that I have to use a lot of data for work. I would not say I am close to most of the boarding staff since a lot of staff I was close to have left which can sometimes bother me.”

(child in residential special school)

“This place is quite good as most people are nice and kind. However, the facility are quite old and sometimes the staff does not give you time to explain and gives you unfair punishment. This issue have slight improvement during recent and I always feels safe about this environment.”

(child in boarding school)

“...unit staff to be more reflective in situations. and for them to know when it is appropriate to make jokes.”

(child in secure children’s home)

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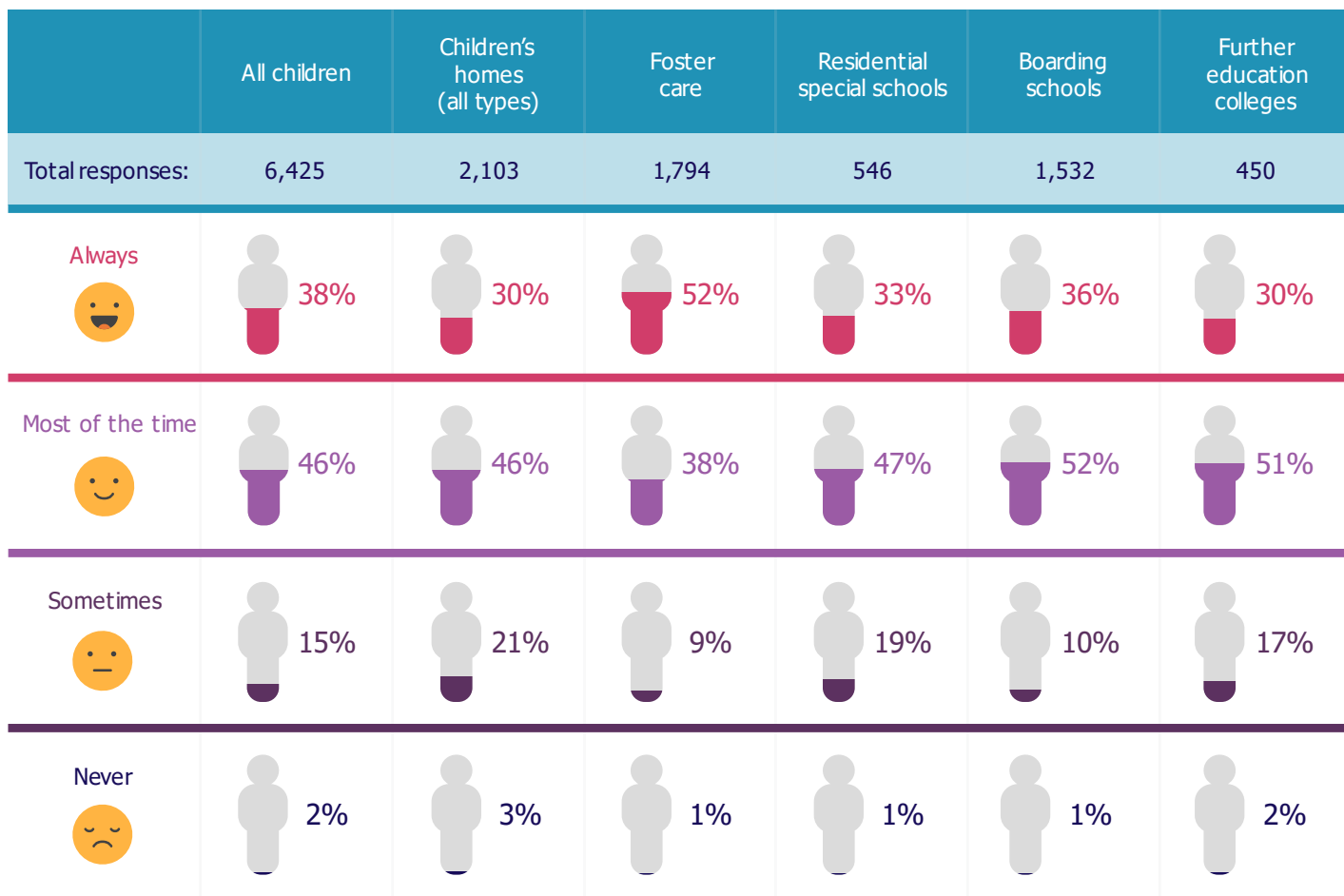


How well do you get on with the other children where you live or stay?

Eighty-four per cent of all children said they got on with others where they lived or stayed 'always' or 'most of the time'.

In children's homes, 76% felt they got on with other children 'always' or 'most of the time'. This is 14 percentage points lower than the number of children who reported how they got along with the adults where they lived or stayed.

Like last year, 90% of children in foster care reported that they got on 'always' or 'most of the time' with other children where they live.



Children's homes (all types) include residential special schools and secure children's homes.

View the [data for figure 3 in an accessible table format](#).

What children told us about getting on with the other children

"I enjoy staying here, however, it is sometimes stressful due to the behaviour of other students and noise levels."
(child in FE college)

"It's a bit fun but can be a bit noisy. Staff are really nice and they are fun."
(child in residential special school)

“Boarding is very fun and it is really fun living with your mates.”
(child in boarding school)

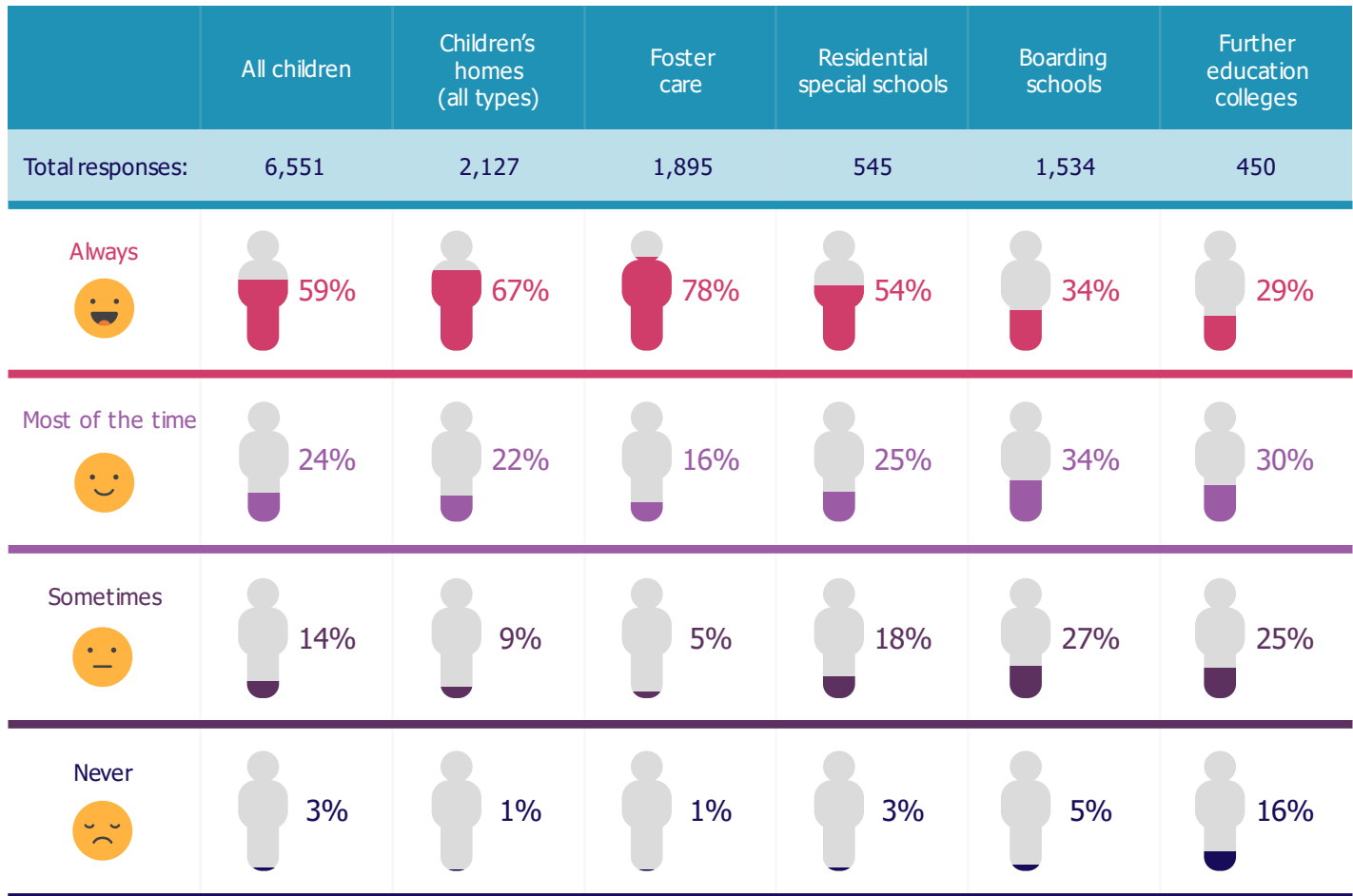
“The place I stay is the place where I learnt how to be independent and where I worked on my self esteem. The staff ensure we are safe and happy where we are. I enjoy spending time with my friends, roommates and classmates. The staff ensure the food we get is up to all of our standards, trying new things and asking us about it and making sure it is healthy too. We are able to go on trips too and staff come along to keep us safe. This place has made me a better person, a better version of myself and it has taught me a lot of morals and self discipline. The staff also make sure we have a good time here, arranging activities where we can all participate and unite together as a whole institute.”
(child in boarding school)

“I enjoy school. I have lots of friends. It is right by a park where I meeting my friends. My carers take me swimming and to the shops.”
(child in foster care)

“I love my bedroom and stuff, like that my friends can come in and chat with [foster carers] and everyone. People look after me but I’m also allowed to go out and do things with my friends. We do loads of camping, and try new things.”
(child in foster care)

Do the adults where you live ask you about things that are important to you?

Eighty-three per cent of all children who responded felt that adults asked about things that were important to them ‘always’ or ‘most of the time’.



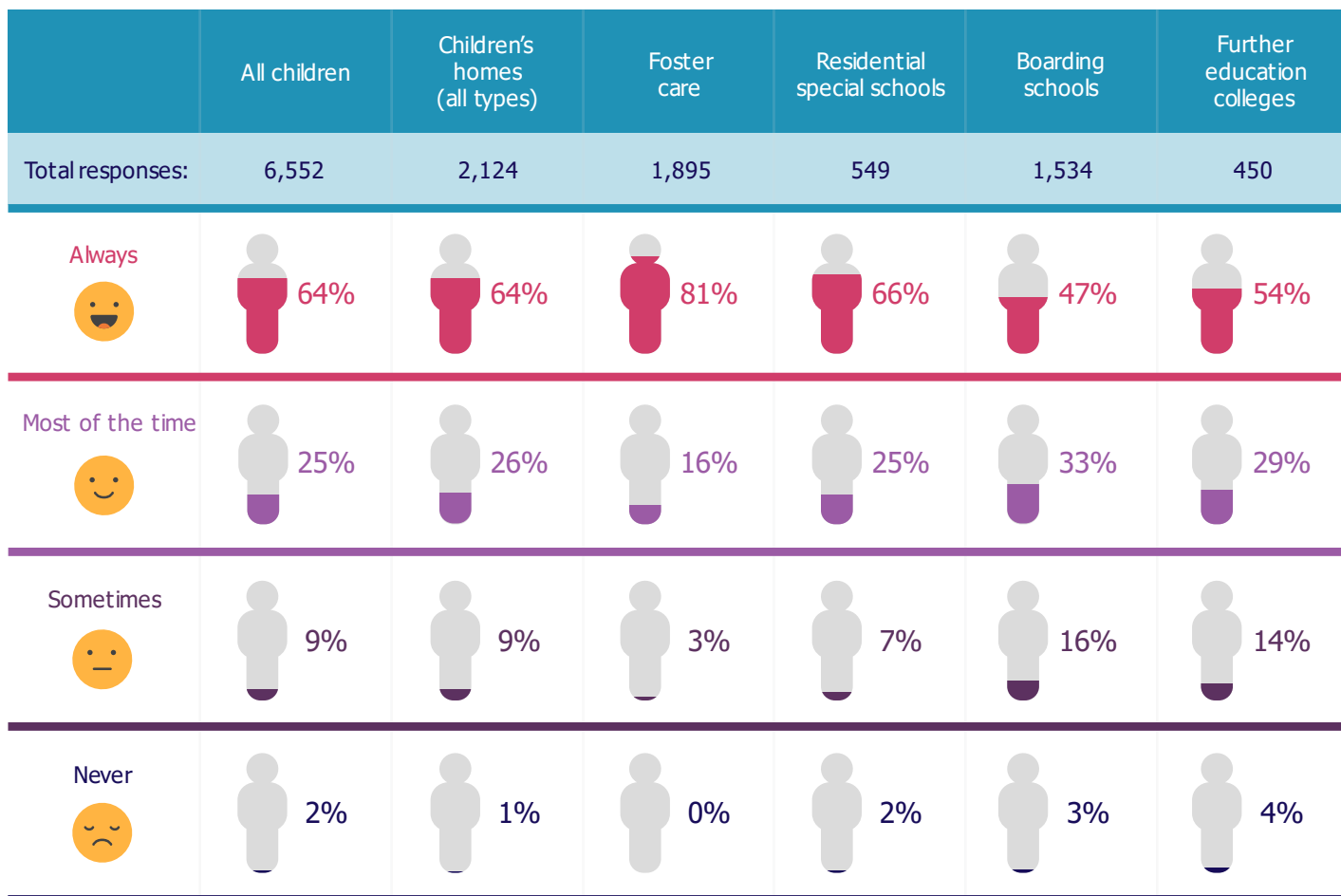
Children's homes (all types) include residential special schools and secure children's homes.

View the [data for figure 4 in an accessible table format](#).

Do the adults where you live listen to you?

Eighty-nine per cent of all children who responded said that they felt they were listened to by the adults where they lived or stayed ‘always’ or ‘most of the time’.

The percentage of children and young people in boarding schools and in FE colleges who said they felt listened to ‘sometimes’ or ‘never’ is larger than for other children, although it is similar to last year.



Children's homes (all types) include residential special schools and secure children's homes.

View the [data for figure 5 in an accessible table format](#).

What children told us about being asked about things that are important to them and about being listened to

"I feel safe and am happy with my home. The staff are always there to support, comfort and listen to my thoughts and wishes. I get to see my family each week and I am very happy about this. Staff will take me to and from my school each day and take me out to all of my chosen activities."
(child in children's home)

“The Foster give me right and they try to solve my issues about education. They are always available to listen and talk with me about how i getting on with education and mental issue.”

(child in foster care)

“safe, listened to by staff, staff help and don’t judge, nice place to live, I see family and friends and do fun activities, I go to the gym.”

(child in children’s home)

“It’s awesome, staffs help you if you need them and boarders here help each other too, especially the older ones take care of the younger ones which is lovely. However, some of the staffs in my boarding house often don’t really listen to boarders in some way, maybe because they think they are older and they are always right, I’m not sure why but I assure you that this don’t happen that often.”

(child in boarding school)

“I enjoy living at [name of home], we do fun stuff i enjoy when i’ve been to school like go to [restaurant]. they ask me how school was and support me the best they can do.”

(child in children’s home)

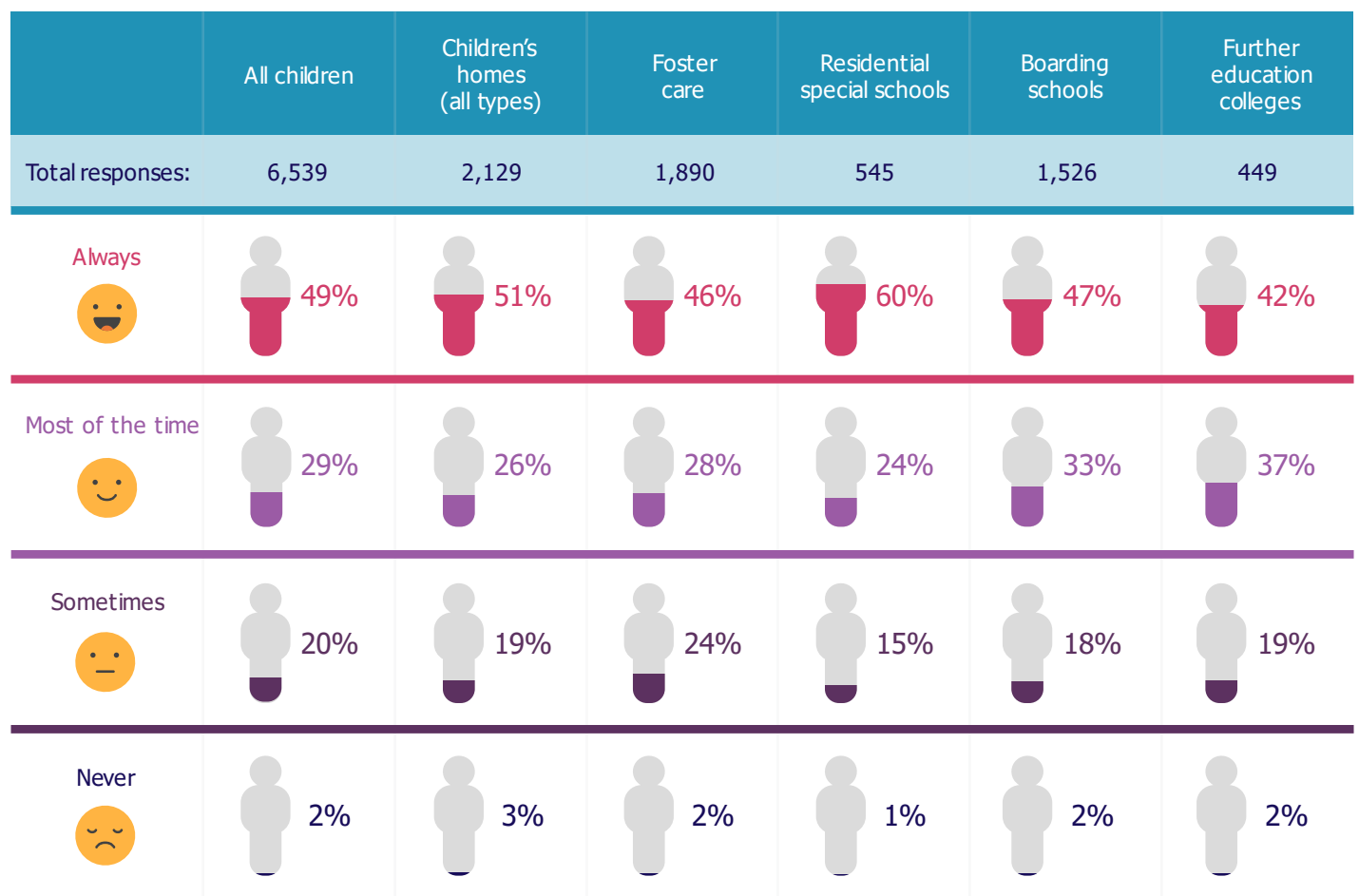
“My carers have put everything in place for us with school myself in college and gave us a permanent home. The only problem we have is no consistent social worker this will be the 4th in 17 months we have no contact with any family members we have been asking for a while now to have contact with aunties sisters but nothing happens the social worker for us are changed so much we don’t have no trust that they get things done for us.”

(child in foster care)

Do you spend time with people who are important to you?

Seventy-eight per cent of children said that they saw the people who are important to them 'always' or 'most of the time'.

Eighty-four per cent of children who stay in residential special schools said they saw those who are important to them 'always' or 'most of the time'. This was the highest percentage of all children who responded.



Children's homes (all types) include residential special schools and secure children's homes.

View the [data for figure 6 in an accessible table format](#).

What children told us about spending time with the people that are important

to them

“My carers are great, this is my first stay away from home and I was very scared, but they made me feel welcome and part of their family. I still get to see my own family, as well, and my carers have explained everything to me as we go along. I really struggled going to sleep at first, but my carers were really good with me, sitting at the end of my bed for hours till I fell asleep.”
(child in foster care)

“I like the adults in the home as they always help me do things that I can't do or things that I struggle with. That can either be school work or life skills that I haven't quite mastered yet. They also care about me and help me get excited about things like going to see my Mum and sisters (they live quite far away from me). I feel that I can talk to the adults in the home about anything and they encourage me daily to be the best version of myself. This inspires me to want to be successful in the future.”
(child in children's home)

“I would like to see mum and dad more. Better WIFI would be good. We need to finish back garden as I like to play football. I think my room is the best. I like everything about my room. The staff are sound.”
(child in children's home)

“It is a nice care home but I would not want to live here for a long time because I want to go back to London to live with my mum or dad.”
(child in children's home)

In the last week, did you do something fun?

Last year the survey provided 4 possible responses: 'yes', 'sometimes', 'not very often' or 'never'. This year, we decided to simplify the choices by giving a 'yes' or 'no' option.

This year, there has been a big reduction in the number of negative responses from children who answered this question. Only 9% of children said 'no' to this question this year compared with 18% in 2022 who said that they 'never' did anything fun.



Children's homes (all types) include residential special schools and secure children's homes.

View the [data for figure 7 in an accessible table format](#).

What children told us about having fun

"I enjoy playing sports in the free time, I love spending time with my friends and relatives. Also we have a common room where we can watch tv and documentary. I learned English as I am from France. I learned how to play

dodgeball as I used to be scared of the ball but after a few time of playing I got better and managed to get a certificate for best at sport.”

(child in boarding school)

“It can be fun we do decent activities every now and again, for example, football matches. I go and watch Sheffield Wednesday (we are on top of the league). I have a customised room (just waiting for a wall to be painted).”

(child in children’s home)

“We do a lot of fun activities and the staff are awesome!! They always make sure we are looked after and we are alright.”

(child in children’s home)

“No TV control panel in lounge. Food! Love school. More practical/physical activities.”

(child in secure children’s home)

“[Foster carer’s names] are fun and they take us on fun activities that we like to do we eat great food and we all get along very good.”

(child in foster care)

“We get to do fun activities. We go out and about. I like swimming on Thursdays.”

(child in residential special school)

“It’s a good place to live and where I can do lots of fun activities, Like going out with family to the Restaurants and other good places.”

(child in foster care)

“My dorm is very nice and in my house I have many friends and friendly staff. I got to do fun activities and play with my friends. There are a limitless amount of opportunities in my school.”

(child in boarding school)

“When I came I didn’t want to live in a children’s home but I know enjoy living here. we get to do lots of activities.”

(child in children’s home)

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What would you like to tell us about the place you live?

We asked children to tell us anything they wanted to about the place where they lived or stayed. Of the 6,614 children who responded to the survey, 5,350 answered this question.

One of the most common responses from children (around 1,800) was their overall enthusiasm for the place they lived or stayed, describing it as being brilliant or similar.

Children were divided about their free time. Half were happy about the amount they had and the other half said there was not enough.

Children also commented on the staff where they lived or stayed. Comments were generally positive.

Children staying in group care or living in foster care commonly said that they would like to stay where they are until they were 18 or forever.

Thank you to everyone who has completed our surveys and shared their views with us.

Annex of data figures

Data for figure 1: Do you feel safe where you live or stay?

	All children	CH (all types) RSS and SCH	Foster care	Residential special school	Boarding school	Further education college
Always	73%	73%	91%	68%	59%	58%
Most of the time	23%	22%	8%	25%	36%	37%

Sometimes	3%	4%	1%	6%	4%	4%
Never	1%	1%	0%	1%	1%	1%
Total respondents	6,614	2,153	1,912	554	1,543	452

Children's homes (all types) include residential special schools and secure children's homes.

[See figure 1.](#)

Data for figure 2: How well do you get on with the adults where you live?

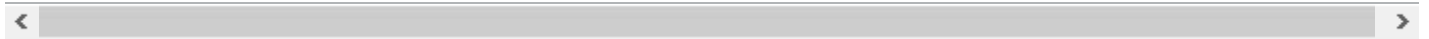
	All children	CH (all types) RSS and SCH	Foster care	Residential special school	Boarding school	Further education college
Always	56%	49%	73%	61%	44%	55%
Most of the time	36%	41%	24%	33%	45%	36%
Sometimes	7%	9%	2%	5%	10%	8%
Never	1%	1%	0%	1%	2%	1%
Total respondents	6,559	2,139	1,902	540	1,528	450

Children's homes (all types) include residential special schools and secure children's homes.

[See figure 2.](#)

Data for figure 3: How well do you get on with the other children where you live or stay?

	All children	CH (all types)	Foster care	Residential special school	Boarding school	Further education college
Always	38%	30%	52%	33%	36%	30%
Most of the time	46%	46%	38%	47%	52%	51%
Sometimes	15%	21%	9%	19%	10%	17%
Never	2%	3%	1%	1%	1%	2%
Total respondents	6,425	2,103	1,794	546	1,532	450

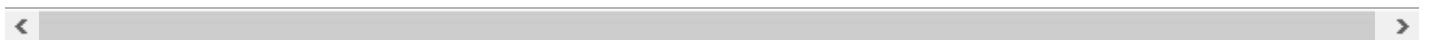


Children's homes (all types) include residential special schools and secure children's homes.

[See figure 3.](#)

Data for figure 4: Do the adults where you live ask you about things that are important to you?

	All children	CH (all types)	Foster care	Residential special school	Boarding school	Further education college
Always	59%	67%	78%	54%	34%	29%
Most of the time	24%	22%	16%	25%	34%	30%
Sometimes	14%	9%	5%	18%	27%	25%
Never	3%	1%	1%	3%	5%	16%
Total respondents	6,551	2,127	1,895	545	1,534	450



Children's homes (all types) include residential special schools and secure children's homes.

[See figure 4.](#)

Data for figure 5: Do the adults where you live listen to you?

	All children	CH (all types)	Foster care	Residential special school	Boarding school	Further education college
Always	64%	64%	81%	66%	47%	54%
Most of the time	25%	26%	16%	25%	33%	29%
Sometimes	9%	9%	3%	7%	16%	14%
Never	2%	1%	0%	2%	3%	4%
Total respondents	6,552	2,124	1,895	549	1,534	450

Children's homes (all types) include residential special schools and secure children's homes.

[See figure 5.](#)

Data for figure 6: Do you spend time with people who are important to you?

	All children	CH (all types)	Foster care	Residential special school	Boarding school	Further education college
Always	49%	51%	46%	60%	47%	42%
Most of the time	29%	26%	28%	24%	33%	37%
Sometimes	20%	19%	24%	15%	18%	19%
Never	2%	3%	2%	1%	2%	2%
Total respondents	6,539	2,129	1,890	545	1,526	449

Children's homes (all types) include residential special schools and secure children's homes.

[See figure 6.](#)

Data for figure 7: In the last week, did you do something fun?

	All children	CH (all types)	Foster care	Residential special school	Boarding school	Further education college
Yes	91%	94%	96%	92%	84%	80%
No	9%	6%	4%	8%	16%	20%
Total respondents	6,544	2,121	1,896	548	1,528	451

Children's homes (all types) include residential special schools and secure children's homes.

[See figure 7.](#)

1. 'Adoption services' includes voluntary adoption agencies and local authority adoption services. We sent the surveys to regional adoption agencies where they now carry out some local authorities' adoption functions. 'Fostering services' includes independent fostering agencies and local authority fostering services. [↵](#)
2. Under the Care Standards Act 2000, Ofsted has the powers to inspect these types of services. There is no law to say that children, staff and professionals have to share their views with us through this survey. It is optional, and we highly value the information we receive. [↵](#)
3. We do not inspect individual foster carers. We inspect the local authorities and agencies that recruit them. [↵](#)
4. For more on how we use information, [see our privacy notice](#). [↵](#)
5. The data throughout the report has been rounded to the nearest whole number. This means that some percentages may not add up to exactly 100%. [↵](#)
6. As at the date of publication, the Department of Education had not yet released

statistics for 2023, so these figures are from the 2022 survey: [‘Children looked after in England including adoption: 2022’, Department for Education, 2022.](#) ↩

7. [‘Children looked after in England including adoption: 2022’, Department for Education, 2022.](#) ↩
8. [‘Children looked after in England including adoption: 2022’, Department for Education, 2022.](#) ↩
9. In relation to children’s homes and fostering services, the responses from children do not solely relate to children looked after. A number of children who are not looked after receive services: for example, children who receive short breaks or are placed under other arrangements. Most users of short breaks are children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, but other children in need may also receive short breaks. The breaks usually have two aims: to enable the child to participate in fun, interesting and safe activities and to provide a break for parents. ↩

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