



What Worries SA Children Most

- ✓ Not being listened to
- ✓ School and homework
- ✓ Being bullied and navigating relationships with friends and family
- ✓ The environment

Across government, business, and community planning and decision making, the views, perspectives and experiences of primary school aged children need to be considered.

This Snapshot is designed to support capacity for this to occur.

The data is drawn directly from consultation undertaken with South Australian children in 2020 and 2021.

It is designed to inform decision makers, researchers, policy makers, and others who have an interest in understanding what children aged 8–12 years think and need.

Children are growing up, learning, and navigating relationships in a hyperconnected, fast-paced world. Their diverse and complex lives have been shaped by vast technological, cultural, political, and environmental change, while the decisions being made by leaders, decision makers and policy developers affect children and young people's daily lives.

As critical stakeholders and citizens, children and young people have a right to inform the development, design, and implementation of legislation, policies, programs, and services that have a direct or indirect impact on them now, and in the future.

Children are asking adults to take a sharper focus on their rights, interests, and wellbeing, and to integrate these into economic, social, and environmental policy.



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We want children and young people to see that change is possible and that adults can be effective in addressing the issues they've told us they see as most important.

Children want more of a voice and to be taken seriously – in the classroom, in their homes, in the community, and at government level. Being heard is key to them making their own lives better and improving their whole communities. By listening, empathising, and validating their experiences, we will be building enduring relationships that are grounded in trust.

In 2020, a total of 8,379 postcards from 219 Public, Catholic and Independent schools across metropolitan Adelaide and South Australian regional centres, and rural and remote communities, were received via the Commissioner's Student Postcard initiative. This snapshot report provides a summary of what they said worries them most.



Commissioner
for Children &
Young People

What children say will improve their lives

A common suggestion made by children on ways to improve their lives was to help children express themselves 'through hard times', particularly in their relationships with friends and family. This includes adults providing the conditions and situations that would make it easier for children to talk to them about how they are feeling.

A significant number of children spoke about feeling as though their worries were too often dismissed. For example, being told they "worry too much". As one 12 year old put it, "most adults think kids don't go through things like depression and anxiety, or become involved in friendship or relationship problems".

“ ‘You don't know how to control yourself when your sad.’

– 10 year old (Metropolitan Adelaide)

“ ‘People bossing me around and not listening to what I got to say and some of it is actually important to my mental health because sometimes I think about the world negatively.’

– 11 year old (Metropolitan Adelaide)

“ ‘Parents always say you can't do things because your too young or little, and girls don't get treated the same as boys.’

– 9 year old (Fleurieu and Kangaroo Island)

Relationship worries

Children also worry about their relationships with others, particularly the health and wellbeing of their family and friends, and all those they love. Children said that having good relationships with friends and family is particularly difficult when you're not listened to. They described adults at school who did not intervene effectively (if at all), and parents at home who did not "listen or understand" them, and that this therefore meant these significant adults could not provide them with the support they needed.

“ ‘Being lonely and having no friends/ comfort/someone to rely on.’

– 9 year old (Limestone Coast)

“ ‘Being lonely at school, knowing that at the moment people are living in poverty.’

– 10 year old (Eyre and Western)

They wanted assurance that when they raise concerns they will be taken seriously and supported appropriately. They specifically asked for changes to be made to the way in which schools manage bullying. They also wanted children to be provided with more help to make friends. They suggested this could include being given opportunities to gain confidence in expressing their concerns, ideas, and dreams, by practicing conversations about these things with their peers, as well as through creative pursuits such as art, music, and performance.

“ ‘Make sure every kid has loving and caring parents and every kid has a family that they can talk to about their mental health and feelings with.’ – 11 year old (Metropolitan Adelaide)

“ ‘Give them better ways to deal with bullying. I want adults to stop living in a fantasy world where you say ‘stop I don't like it’ and people will stop. If you walk away they follow, if you ignore them they keep going until you snap’ – 10 year old (Metropolitan Adelaide)

Fear of the unknown

Children described their present and future worries, saying fear of the unknown was probably one of the scariest things for them to contemplate. Their concerns related to the wellbeing of their families, their schools, and their community. It also related to the needs and wellbeing of other children and families who they knew were already 'doing it tough'.

School worries included tests, due dates, and the volume of schoolwork and homework they're being expected to complete. There was some worry about transitioning into the next year level at school, and for some about starting high school.

Many children said they were stressed out about homework and the NAPLAN tests, and that they believed schools should review how many tests and how much homework is really necessary. They asked for more opportunities to be made available to learn cooking, gardening, and other 'life skills', which they see as being key to their overall mental health and wellbeing.

Children had several ideas about ways to improve the physical and social environments of their school. These included having animals and meditation classes to help children relax, providing more play spaces, PE, and swimming lessons, and holding more 'wellbeing camps around SA' each year.

Work worries

Many children expressed their concerns about the future of work, and whether they'll be able to find a job and make enough money when they're an adult. They worried whether they could 'do well enough' or get the grades they think they need to get into university.

Many children said they were worried about jobs for family members and 'reducing the cost of things needed to live'. The prospect of not being able to achieve family goals or meet the expectations of others is a source of constant concern for some children.

Worries about what others think

A significant number of children were also concerned about how their peers perceive them in terms of popularity, schoolwork, sporting abilities, and appearance. They described the 'FOMO' (fear of missing out) on what their friends are doing, as well as worries they have about dealing with conflicts arising with their friends.

Some children reported on the negative impact they experience when adults overestimate their abilities and maturity, as well as how they are often being compared

to other children their age and made to feel as though they aren't likely to achieve the same goals.

“ ‘Some adults think that you can do more than your capable of doing. Can you please let adults know that sometimes they put too much pressure on us to act older than we are’ – 10 year old (Metropolitan Adelaide)

“ ‘Pressure to do well – parents don't listen/trust you – hard to stick up for yourself and for things that aren't right.’ – 11 year old (Metropolitan Adelaide)

Cost of living worries

Children also worry about the 'cost of living', particularly bills relating to rent and housing costs, health and medications, food and other essential items, such as access to the Internet and new clothes when they're needed.

They want adults to find ways to make 'more jobs', reduce taxes, and increase wages. They also want adults to make wages across different jobs more equal.

Some children wrote about lowering the minimum working age so that they could help support their families financially.

“ ‘Make more jobs so people can work to get a house, and helpful resources they need.’ – 9 year old (Northern Suburbs)

“ ‘Make bills shorter’ – 9 year old (Yorke and Mid North)

“ ‘Give free internet.’ – 12 year old (Fleurieu and Kangaroo Island)

“ ‘For uni to be free.’ – 10 year old (Southern Suburbs)

Worries about the environment

The area that children worry about most is the environment. Children wrote about climate change, pollution, the ocean, waste, plastics, drought, deforestation, and bushfires. Uncertainty about the future is one of the worst worries children have, as is the hopelessness they feel in response to what they perceive are now overwhelming odds.

They see these things as unjust and unequal in the world, and something that their generation is unfairly inheriting, particularly in relation to the impact of climate change on future generations.

“ ‘Not many people listen to us and climate change will be worse for us.’

– 12 year old (Metropolitan Adelaide)

Children identified several ways adults can take better care of the environment and help address environmental issues. These ranged from reducing plastic waste to addressing deforestation to minimise climate change. They included planting more trees and investing in renewable resources, manufacturing more electric vehicles, and making more non-plastic alternatives readily available. They also wanted to see more recycling of soft plastic and for different recycling systems that are not toxic to the environment to be developed and introduced.



“ ‘Decrease the number of rubbish entering our oceans by only having landfill bins out once a fortnight and increasing the number of metal, glass, plastic and paper/cardboard getting recycled into something new.’

– 12 year old (Eastern Suburbs)

“ ‘Try to get lots of windmills running in the Energy and grow more trees for the environment.’

– 8 year old (Northern Suburbs)

For more information on *The Things That Matter To Children* see other snapshots in this series:

- **What SA Children say about Jobs, Skills, and the Future**
- **What SA Children say about School**

For more information on the *Job Aspirations of South Australian Children aged 8–12 years* visit:

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