



What SA Children say about Looking After the Planet

- ✓ We must create a sustainable future
- ✓ Climate Change is affecting the Earth's environment
- ✓ People and places, plants and animals, need us to act now
- ✓ We all need to ride bikes and drive electric cars
- ✓ Adults can't expect us to clean up their mess

Across government, business, and community, the views, perspectives, and experiences of primary school aged children need to be included. This snapshot is designed to support the capacity for this to occur.

The findings are drawn directly from consultation undertaken with South Australian children in 2021. It is presented in this snapshot format to inform decision makers, researchers, policy makers, and others who have an interest in understanding what children aged 8 to 12 years think and need.

Regardless of where they live, South Australian children aged 8 to 12 years share many of the same interests, passions, aspirations, and ideas for how to build a better world. Children from across the State want to be taken seriously and to be provided with more opportunities to have a say at every level of decision-making – in their homes, schools, and local community, as well as at all levels of government, with opportunities to have input into the service systems being designed for them including how they're being delivered.

They were clear that adults listening to their unique imaginations, creative perspectives and big ideas not only improves their own wellbeing, self-confidence, and trust in adults, it also benefits the whole school and community.



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From metropolitan Adelaide to regional and remote communities, children wanted grownups to know more about them, their lives, and their interests. Those in metropolitan areas wanted grownups to know more about what they are good at, as well as what their aspirations for the future are. Those in regional towns and communities focused more on grownups knowing about the kind of person they are, how they feel, and when they do and don't need support.

Climate change, natural disasters, mental health, and a global pandemic are just some of the complex issues that permeate the lives of children in our primary schools today. While new and emerging trends have always shaped children's lives, the differences between the responses received on the 2021 postcards and those received in 2019 and 2020 reveal just how much the fast pace of technological, cultural, political, and environmental change is impacting children's lives in the twenty-first century.

WHAT SA CHILDREN SAY ABOUT LOOKING AFTER THE PLANET

If we fail to listen to what children in this age group are telling us, we risk alienating them at a time in their lives when they are seeking reassurance that the adults in their lives can be trusted. By listening, empathising, and validating their experiences, we will be building enduring relationships grounded in trust and hope for the future, reinforcing the message that children are valuable stakeholders and citizens who have a right to be heard and have their ideas acted upon.

The environment was a top concern for many children in this age-group. The postcard responses made many mentions of nature, the planet, climate change and global warming. A majority of 8 to 12 year olds told the Commissioner that they're really worried about pollution and the impact climate change is having on their communities. They care about people and places, and plants and animals, and they worry that environmental disasters like fires and floods will continue to impact on all of these.

There was a real sense of frustration that their generation will live with the consequences of a lack of action from previous generations. They believe adults and leaders today are not doing enough and fear they will be left with the responsibility of fixing the 'mess' that has been made by older generations.

Drawings of planet Earth were common. While some children depicted Earth as happy and smiling, surrounded by love hearts, or people holding hands, others drew the planet on fire, or had contrasting pictures of their ideal healthy planet sitting alongside a more grim 'reality' showing a planet that was 'dying'.

It was common for children to want to 'clean up all the rubbish' and to stop littering altogether, seeing this as one of the most visible and tangible signs of environmental damage that could be addressed. Children also wrote more generally about the impact of global warming, with many outlining specific actions they believe must be taken to protect animals, oceans, and the planet if we are to make a better and 'more sustainable future'. Specific actions they proposed

ranged from stopping pollution and the cutting down of trees, to reducing plastic use and ensuring 'most things like cars and food products were more environmentally friendly' and 'sustainable'.

For other 8 to 12 year olds a better world would use more renewable and sustainable energy sources, rather than 'greenhouse gases' or fossil fuels. Many want to see changes made to the transport system to reduce carbon emissions and help increase the affordability and uptake of bicycles and electric cars.

“ if we used less fossil fuels or found more sustainable energy sources, sexism and racism rates go down, we stopped destroying the land, water, air.” – 12 year old, male, Barossa, Light and Lower North

“ The government and grownups cared about our future and didn't just ignore the fact that we are ruining earth, and basically just making a bad future for the next generation.” – 11 year old, female, Adelaide Hills

“ if you used bikes, not cars, or if you take the pollution out of cars.” – 9 year old, female, Northern Adelaide

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

- **What SA Children say about the C word**
- **What SA Children say about Grownups**
- **What SA Children say about Wellbeing**

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