



Children instinctively know that having a great childhood involves them learning how to be happy, healthy, and hopeful, as well as how to be confident in themselves and their identity.

As adults, our responsibility is to listen to what our children and young people tell us about their lives, and to deliver on the things they've said they need across six key domains – Family, Fun, Friendships, Freedom, Future, Fulfilment.

We must invest in children's classrooms, sporting teams, service clubs and communities, placing a focus on valuing, understanding and listening to what children and young people tell us will help them grow their local connections and feel they belong. We must support them to make a difference in their schools and communities, helping to raise their self-confidence as they identify, develop and apply their unique talents and capabilities.

Every child or young person wants to be good at something and to learn new things. They want to experience what it feels like to have mastery over a skill and to achieve a goal they've set themselves.

They also want time to "be" and "do" with others outside of those in their family, so they can be confident of their place in their world.

They want trusted adults they can tell their worries to and to be taken seriously when they do. They want their schools to be the safest places possible, filled with others who care about them and who want to build connections and value them. They want to learn communication skills that will enable them to deal with and resolve conflict, deflect negativity and avoid loneliness.

As they grow into their teenage years, they want to learn how to manage their lives in practical ways such as paying bills, getting jobs and preparing food. They want assistance and support to address the impacts of illness, money worries and family challenges too.

All children and young people growing up in South Australia have a right to enjoy a great childhood and it is our responsibility to do all that we can to deliver on their expectations.

# What SA children and young people say makes a great childhood...

## What do you like most about childhood?

- Learning and trying new things, mastering new skills
- Meeting new people, celebrating and being in community
- Building connections, relationships and engaging with adults, friends, and pets
- Pursuing activities, interests, creativity and hobbies
- Planning for the future

## What do you need to be successful?

- To feel known
- To feel valued
- To have a voice
- To have a purpose
- To have the capacity and opportunity to make a difference

## What do you like to do?

- Hang out, chill, relax with friends, have some alone time
- Play sport
- Be active
- Play games, make and create
- Be in nature

## What do you want from school?

- More outdoor learning, creativity and discussions
- Class pets
- Accessible, safe and clean toilets
- More interactive lessons and excursions
- Ways to provide direct feedback to teachers on lessons and school rules

## What do you worry about?

- Not being listened to or taken seriously
- Difficult relationships with friends and family
- Not feeling prepared for adulthood
- The environment and climate change
- The cost of living

## What do you want in the community?

- More local places to hang out and connect with friends
- Safe streets and transport options
- Welcoming places to play, have fun and be creative
- Affordable things to do



# What does a 'great childhood' have?

## Family

A 'great childhood' is measured by the quality of each child's relationship with their parents and/or carers, as well as with members of their extended family who trust, listen to and respect them as valued members of their families and communities.

When children and young people do find the courage to voice their concerns about what they feel needs to change in their lives, they told me they often feel that they are not being taken seriously, or that the issues they raise are not being adequately addressed.

**We must facilitate positive intergenerational respect and understanding.**

**Ways we can do this include:**

- Listening to children and young people, acknowledging and/or understanding their point of view.
- Allowing them to have their say and taking them seriously when they do.
- Understanding that childhood is a time of learning and that we therefore need to be kinder and more forgiving, stress less and support children and young people to learn from their mistakes.
- Spending time, having fun and playing with our kids, but also allowing them to have some freedom and independence from us too.

## Fun

A 'great childhood' is measured by the amount of fun a child has in their daily life. Children and young people of all ages tell me that fun and play are what they want more of at home, in the classroom and out in the community. It's through play that children test their limits, explore new possibilities, and learn new things most effectively. They know their experiences at school and their engagement with their local community would be much better if it was more playful.

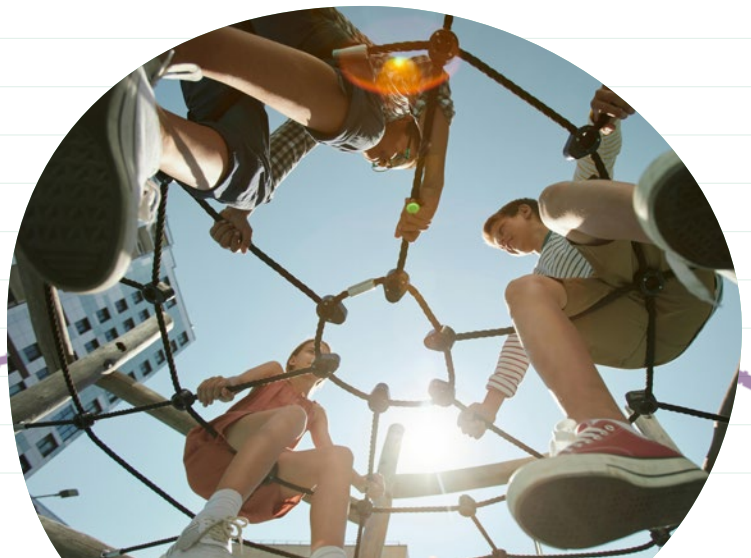
**We must actively work on creating and being part of expanding opportunities for fun in children's daily lives.**

**Ways we can do this include:**

- Providing children with time and space to play on their own and/or with others of differing ages every day.
- Allowing children to experience the joy that comes with their birthday being celebrated, visiting the zoo, going to the beach, learning how to swim, going on school excursions, engaging with music and exploring the arts.
- Recognising when they master skills and achieve goals as well as providing them with opportunities to take risks and challenge themselves, so they can build their abilities and confidence.



I feel more  
creative close to  
my friends



## Freedom

A 'great childhood' is measured by the level of freedom, independence and decision-making capacity children and young people experience. Having freedom to be independent and away from the constant oversight, direction and moderation of adults is a developmental requirement. Children and young people must be supported to try new things, challenge themselves, build their confidence, solve problems and take calculated risks that will support them to develop a positive attitude towards challenges and the unknown.

**We must facilitate children and young people's independence and capacity for decision-making.**

**Ways to do this include:**

- Providing more opportunities for children and young people to experience life outside the gaze of adult eyes and adult challenges.
- Building neighbourhoods where knowing and interacting with neighbours is safe and supported.
- Promoting opportunities for children and young people to explore nature, forests, oceans, rivers, and fresh air both at school and out in the community.
- Bringing more outdoor learning into the classroom experience.
- Creating more active travel in neighbourhoods and opening up schools on the afternoons and weekends for social, creative and sports activities.

## Friendships

A 'great childhood' is measured by the quality of children's relationships with their peers. Children and young people tell us repeatedly that their parents and teachers underestimate the importance of their online and real-life friendships, and the crucial role they both play in promoting their individual wellbeing, mental health, and overall happiness.

Online friendships are particularly important to those children and young people who have no one to talk to at home or at school, and who may regularly feel left out. These may be children who had poor relationships with peers in the past which led to them having fewer or no friends in real-life, but who then successfully developed friendships online. Strategies to address loneliness in children and young people need to be grounded in their own life experiences.

**We must actively work on supporting opportunities for children and young people to make and maintain friendships both online and offline.**

**Ways to do this include:**

- Respecting and valuing the importance of childhood friendships and investing in developing children's skills to find, keep and connect with friends on and offline.
- Providing accessible community places and spaces for children to connect with peers around shared interests.
- Actively teaching inclusion, diversity, and the challenges for peers through hands on learning and activities.



*More Youth  
themed activities*



## Future

A 'great childhood' is measured by how positive children are about their future. Children and young people are capable citizens able to meaningfully contribute to the decisions that impact on their lives. By empowering children and young people to make decisions about issues that affect their lives, the lives of others, and the environment, we reinforce their role as valued stakeholders in our community who deserve to be heard and have their ideas acted upon.

**We must facilitate children and young people's empowerment and capacity to create new futures.**

### Ways to do this include:

- Taking children to unfamiliar places to broaden their horizons, see alternative possibilities and encourage use of their imagination.
- Involving children and young people in discussing and determining creative solutions to issues and problems at school and in their local neighbourhoods.
- Providing opportunities for children and young people to develop open, curious, and welcoming mindsets that celebrate and value diversity.



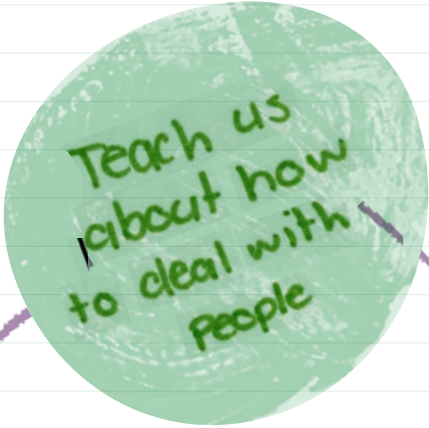
## Fulfilment

A 'great childhood' is measured by how physically, mentally, and emotionally fulfilled a child or young person feels each day. This includes feeling safe and involved, inspired and engaged, being a successful learner and an active participant in society. It also includes building environments where all children and young people thrive, feel respected and valued, and supported to make meaning of their life in ways that lead them to experience personal fulfilment.

**We must create the environments that support individual and collective wellbeing.**

### Ways to do this include:

- Prioritising life skills, relationships, and social issues education in all schools.
- Supporting children and young people to volunteer and connect with others and to take community action by standing up for something.
- Having open conversations with children and young people about social issues so they understand they are not alone.



Teach us  
about how  
to deal with  
people







## The Commissioner's Role

The South Australian Commissioner for Children and Young People is an independent statutory position, established under the *Children and Young People (Oversight and Advocacy Bodies) Act 2016* ('the Act'). The Commissioner's role includes advocating for systemic change to policies, programs and practices that impact the rights, development and wellbeing of South Australia's children and young people.

This work is informed by the experiences and issues of children and young people themselves, with a specific focus on those who struggle to have their voices heard.

The Commissioner's strategic agenda was formulated with direct input from children and young people. In particular, children and young people asked the Commissioner to facilitate their involvement in decision making, and to create opportunities for them to experience authentic participation.

The Commissioner is working with a number of partners on this agenda, including ways in which children and young people can have greater input into the design and delivery of policies, programs and practices that affect their lives.

## Acknowledgements

Thank you to the South Australian children and young people who shared their views and ideas with me over the past eight years. I am so proud to have served as your inaugural Commissioner (May 2017 to April 2025). This guide is a summary of what you told me makes a great childhood. It is my hope that the adults in your lives will put your advice into practice for you and future generations of South Australian children and young people.

## Suggested Citation

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