

The Big Ask annex to 'Family and its Protective Effect: Part 1 of the Independent Family Review'

September 2022

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Introduction

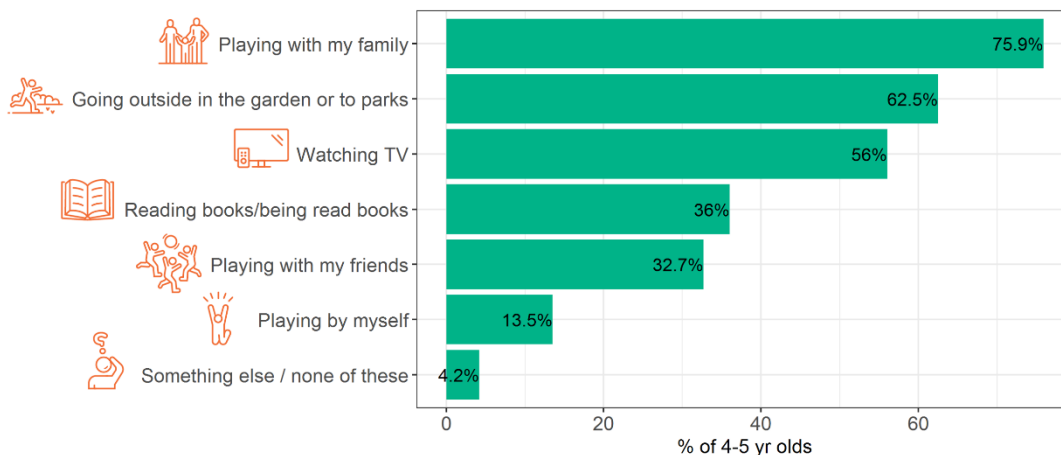
The Big Ask is the biggest ever survey of children, with over half a million responses. The survey was open to any child in England aged 4-17 and the Children’s Commissioner launched this survey online between April and May 2021, running for six weeks. It was a publicly available survey and children’s participation was anonymous and voluntary, to ensure that as many children could be reached as possible, and they could feel comfortable speaking freely. The Big Answer summarises the responses from children aged 6-17.¹

1. What we learned about family from children aged 4-5

We received 12,359 responses from children aged 4-5, who were asked different questions than children aged 6-17. This is the largest survey of 4- and 5-year-olds that we’re aware of. Children aged 4-5 were asked to choose up to 3 pictures each for a series of 3 questions: what they most liked at school, what they most liked at home and what they wanted to do more of. The results are unweighted but there is an even split between gender and the responses are geographically disperse, as shown in Table 1 and Table 2.

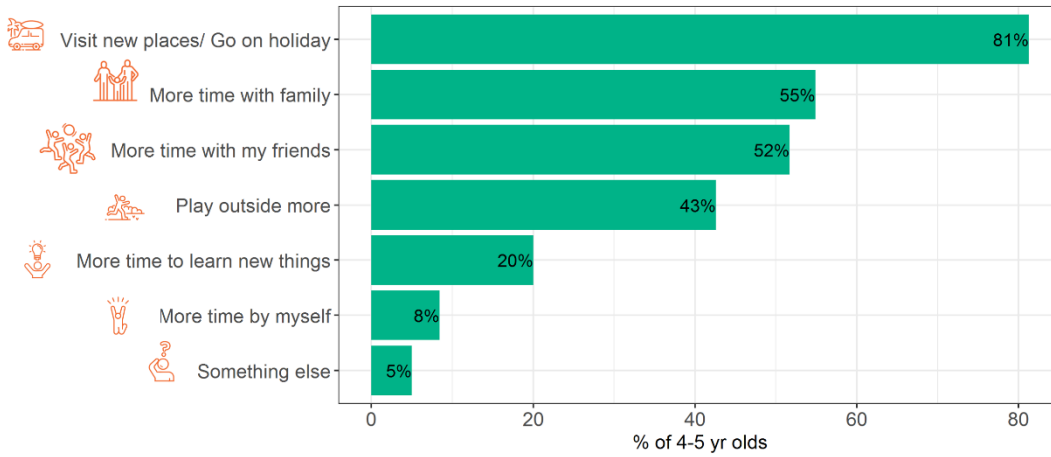
When asked what children most liked to do at home, the most popular response was playing with their family (76%), followed by going outside (63%), as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: What would children aged 4-5 most like to do at home?



When asked what children would like to do more of, the most popular response was visiting new places/ going on holiday (81%), followed by spending more time with family (55%), as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2: What would children aged 4-5 like to do more of?



The Big Ask also includes questions to parents of children aged 4-5. Figure 3 shows that while over 80% of parents were happy with most aspects of their child’s life, only 54% of parents were happy with the things to do in their local area.

Figure 3: Share of parents happy, neutral, and unhappy with aspects of their 4-5 year old’s life

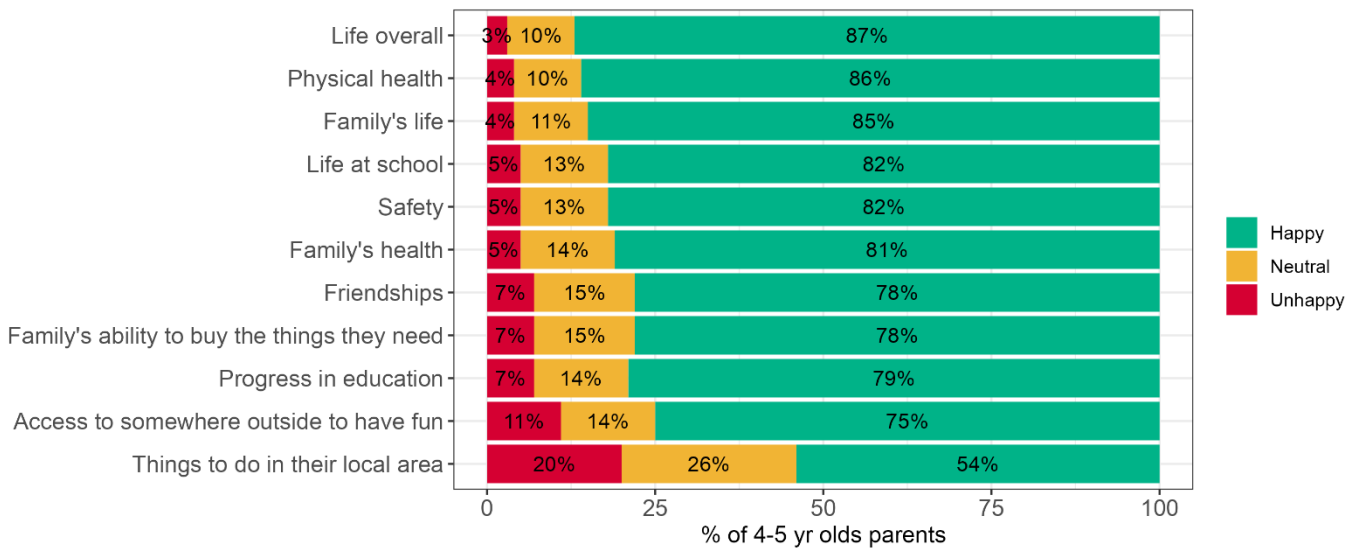
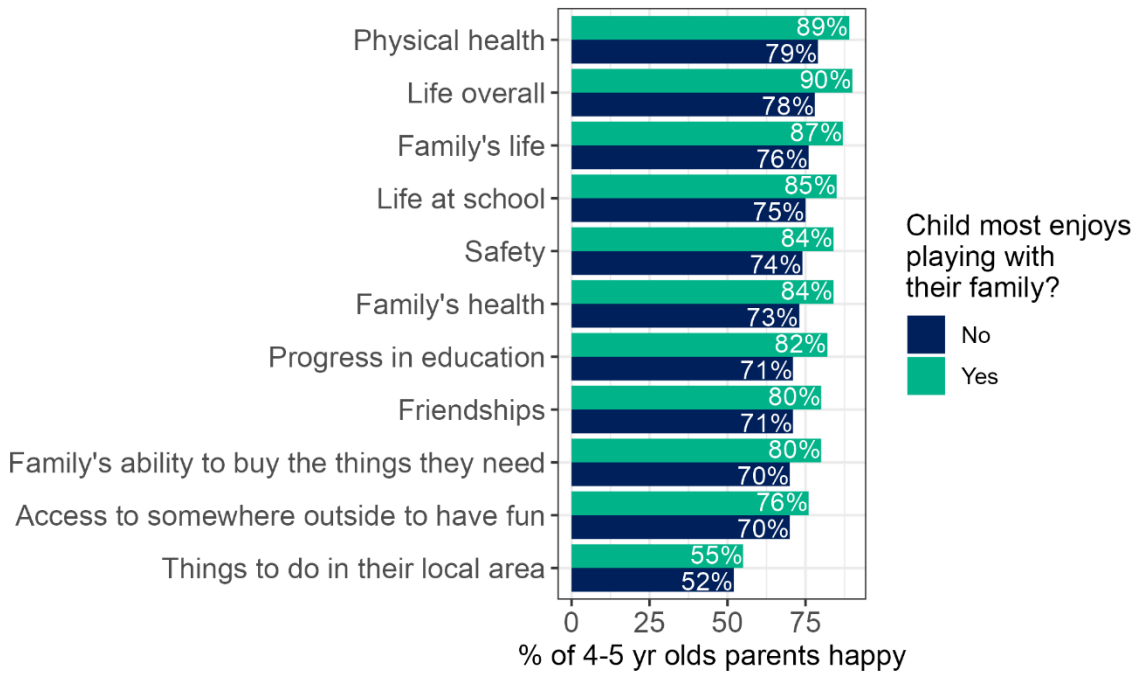


Figure 4 shows that if a child most enjoys playing with their family, 90% of their parents report their child is happy with life overall, compared to 78% for children who don’t pick that they most enjoy playing with their family.

Figure 4: Share of parents happy with aspects of their child’s life, by whether their child most enjoys playing with their family



2. What we learned about family from children aged 6-17

In The Big Ask, 83% of 6-8 year olds and 80% of 9-17 year olds said they were happy with their family life. Where children were unhappy with their family life, they were 9 times more likely to be unhappy with life overall.² The below analysis on living arrangements is restricted to children aged 9-17 year olds.

Family type

The vast majority of children aged 9-17 said that they lived with a parent or parents, but we also heard from a large number of children who lived in care whether in foster care, in a children’s home or in kinship care. There were around 5,000 children who choose “other” when asked ‘where they live now’ and added a free text response.

Ninety four percent of 9-17 year olds respondents said that they lived with parent(s), however:

- Over 5,000 children said they lived with another relative (kinship care)
- Nearly 3,500 children said they lived with foster parent(s)
- Around 1,600 children said that they lived in a children’s home
- Nearly 5,000 children chose ‘Other’ when asked where they live now and added a free text description

We identified a sample of 1,847 9–17-year-olds who selected “Other” in answer to the question of ‘where they live now’ and then added free text answers to where they live now that would not fit in an existing category. The children who specifically stated mum only or dad chose specifically to have that noted as they could have chosen the main option – I live with my parent(s).

- Of the 1,847 children identified:
 - 1,260 children said that they lived with their mum only, their dad only, in a blended family or lived across two households
 - 587 children said that they did live with other relatives (kinship care), lived in multi-generational households or with friends

We investigated the demographics of those children who chose to state that they were living with a lone parent, in blended households or across two households. Figure 5 shows that compared to the overall sample of children there were: a higher percentage of girls, a higher percentage of younger children, a higher percentage of white children and a lower percentage of children from Asian backgrounds.

Figure 5: Demographic characteristics of those who said they live with lone parents or across two households

Demographic characteristic	% living with Lone Parents or in Split Households	% of all 9-17 year olds respondents
Female	61%	48%
Male	39%	52%
Aged 9-12	69%	48%
Aged 13-17	31%	52%
Asian ethnic groups	3%	12%
Black ethnic groups	4%	5%
Mixed ethnic groups	5%	5%
White ethnic groups	88%	78%

Discussion of family in children's open-text responses

In The Big Ask, the main qualitative/open text question was "What do you think stops children achieving what they want to achieve when they grow up?" (from the 9-17s questionnaire, slightly adapted for 6-8s).

All children

Over a quarter of a million children responded to this question (around half of all respondents aged 6-17). Of this number, over 23,000 children mentioned 'family' or a family member (e.g., 'mum, dad, sibling,

sister, brother, cousin, aunt, uncle...). It was one of the most common themes mentioned – after education, school and mental health/health.

Figure 6 shows the top 100 words used to answer the question. The most commonly used word is 'Family', alongside health and mental health, education, people, good, friends, money and school, among many others.

Figure 6: 'What do you think stops children achieving what they want to achieve when they grow up?'

All children who mentioned family (n=23,523 of 260,724)



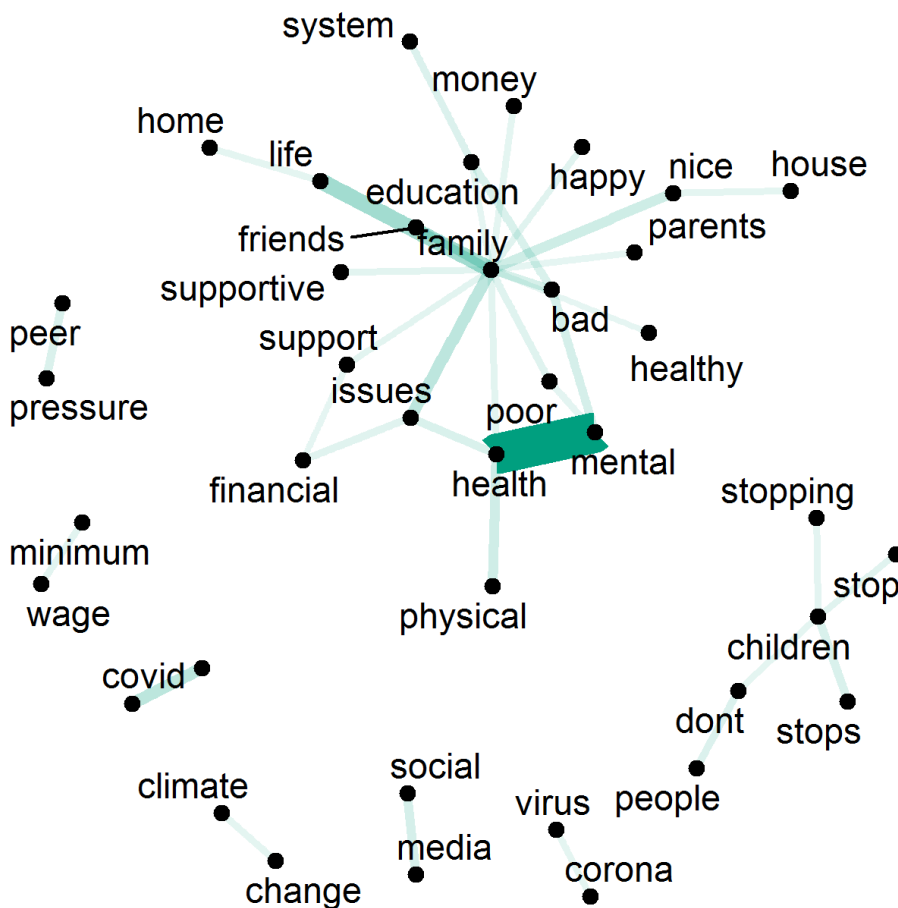
Another way of looking at these children’s responses is using a bigram map, shown in Figure 7 (filtered by words used over 100 times), in which the strength of the line indicates how often these words were used together in a sentence. For example, mental and health were the most frequently used words together, followed by family and friends, family and life, family and issues etc. Across a very large sample, like 23,000, it’s hard to see what the general themes are, but word clouds and bigram maps help us understand the key themes.

“Money- some families don’t have as much money meaning that they sometimes can’t afford an amazing education. Family- some people may have difficult families and may struggle living with them, or their family may not treat you well” - Girl, 12

“Not having a good education. being from a poor area, having abusive relationships with friends or family. while the UK is far better than many other countries when it comes to racial equality, people are still discriminated against, and that’s a factor too. I’m worried that I don’t really know the truth about it, as I’ve had a very privileged life.” - Boy, 16

“A bad family life or friends that are a bad influence as well as negativity from both family and friends. money also stops people achieving certain things as people at 16 may have to choose between earning good money by having a full-time job or continuing in education.” - Girl, 17

Figure 7: All children who mentioned family (n=23,523 of 260,724)



Children living with their parents

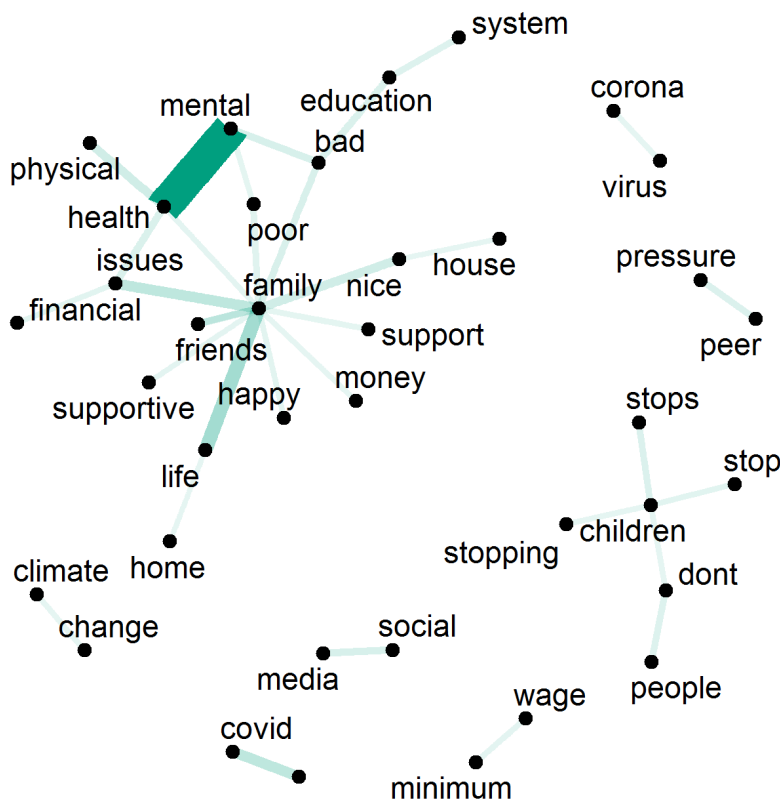
Figure 8 shows that the responses from children living with their parents are similar to the full sample of all children that mentioned family, as the majority of children live with their parents (94%).

“Mum and Dad stop bossing me around” – Girl, 9

“Family can influence for example, if your mum and dad don’t have jobs or are not very well educated or don’t show any enthusiasm or interest into your education for example, can make you feel education etc aren’t important” – Girl, 13

“Relationships in general, whether its with family or friends social experiences are the things that affect us most. if these relationships are bad it creates problems for other things, e.g. education.” – Girl, 13

Figure 8: Children living with their parents that mentioned family (n=22,182 of 248,330)



Children in care

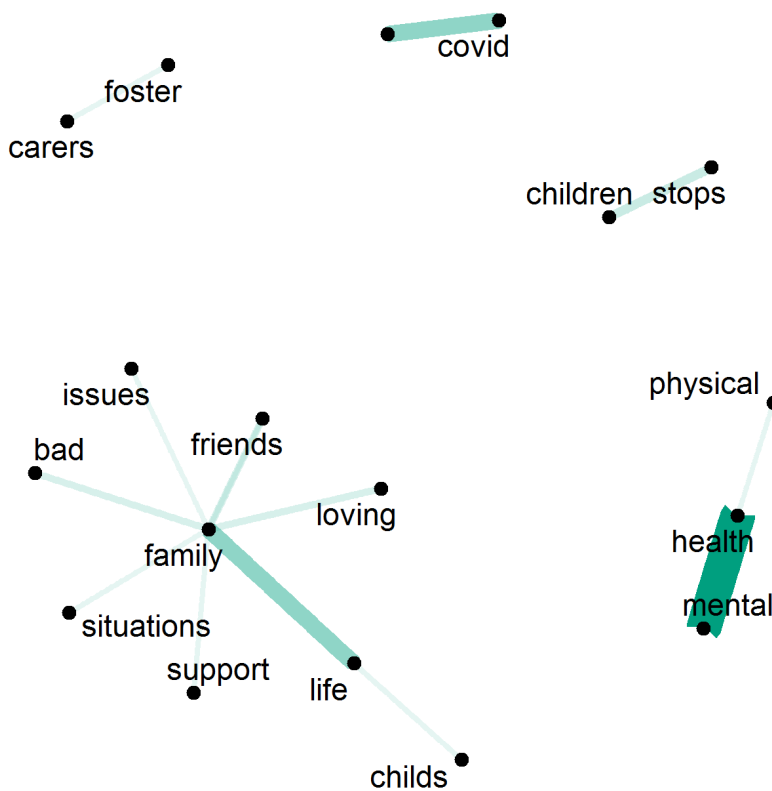
Figure 9 is a bigram map of responses for the 260 children in care (defined as those living in children’s homes and with foster parents when asked ‘where do you live most of the time?’) who responded to the open text question on barriers to success and mentioned family or a family member.

“Always live with my foster mummy and daddy forever until I’m old” – Girl, 6

“Education as you need this to get a good job, home life can be difficult for some children as they are focusing on something else like family problems in the home.” – Boy, 11

“As a looked after child, I feel that the system sets us up to fail. to attend a top tier university which has been my dream since I was little, I would have to forfeit my placement which has become my forever family and I don’t think that’s fair as no child should be made to choose between an education and dream career or their family. Children who were lucky enough to get to stay with their biological families don’t have to make this choice...”- Girl, 17

Figure 9: Children in care that mentioned family (n=260 of 2,261)



Children in kinship care

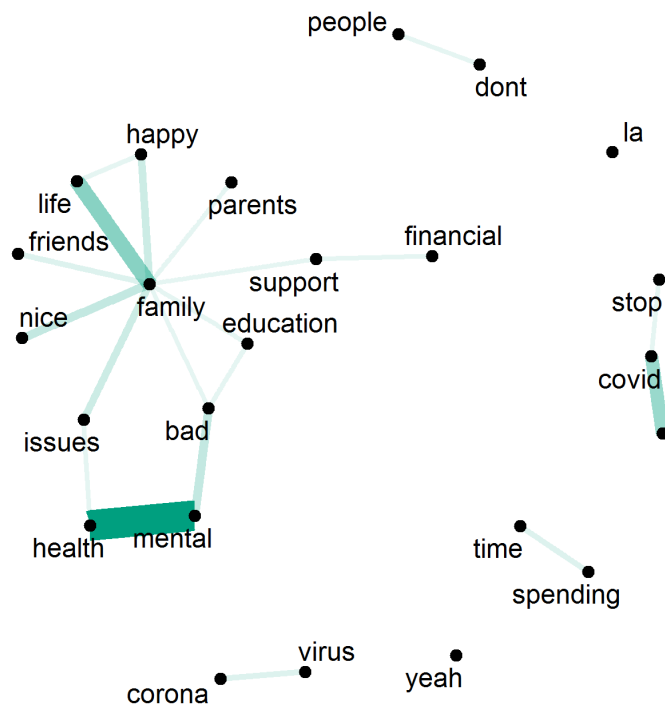
Figure 10 is a bigram map of responses for the 311 children in kinship care (defined as those living with relatives other than their parents (e.g., aunt/uncle, grandparents) when asked ‘where do you live most of the time?’) who responded to the open text question on barriers to success and mentioned a family or a family member.

“For my mummy to still be alive, but I am happy with nana and grandpa. I would like not to have to keep going to hospital and be more healthy when I’m bigger.” – Girl, 6

“Not enough support...I am a young carer, my family earn enough for us to only just keep afloat...you have to be in the worst situation to get support.” – Girl, 17

“I am in care, I know I will have a better chance for myself, because my foster carers work hard to help me and promote my relationship with my birth parents. because of that I feel like I have more love than a normal child...if I had stayed living with my dad I think I would be in a lot of trouble now and if I think I had gone to live with my mum I would not be a very nice person and hate the world and blame everyone. I love my foster carers, they treat me like their own but still support me loving and accepting my parents. they do so much more than they have to and so much more than the other 4 foster parents I have had. I’ve told them I’m staying with them until I’m 25” – Girl, 14

Figure 10: Children in kinship care that mentioned family (n=311 of 2,707)



Sample Description – Children aged 4-5

Table 1: Number and share of respondents by region

Region	Count	Percentage (%)
South East	2,086	17
East of England	1,746	14
London	1,449	12
West Midlands	1,411	11
North West	1,281	10
Region unknown	1,263	10
East Midlands	957	8
Yorkshire and The Humber	895	7
South West	882	7
North East	389	3
Total	12,359	100

Table 2: Number and share of respondents by gender

Region	Count	Percentage (%)
Female	5,952	48
Male	5,937	48
Prefer not to say	470	4
Total	12,359	100

Table 3: Number and share of respondents by age

Age	Count	Percentage (%)
4 years old	3,900	32
5 years old	7,911	64
Prefer not to say	548	4
Total	12,359	100

¹ Children's Commissioner, The Big Answer, available at: https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/occ_the_big_ask_the_big_answer_2021.pdf

² Children's Commissioner, The Big Answer, available at: https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/occ_the_big_ask_the_big_answer_2021.pdf