



The Big Summer Survey

Annex to *A positive approach to a parenting:
Part 2 of the Independent Family Review*

January 2023

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Executive summary

The Children's Commissioner for England, Dame Rachel de Souza, has been asked by the Government to undertake an independent review into support for families, following on from a recommendation of the 'Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities'.

As part of the independent Family Review, the Children's Commissioner launched 'The Big Summer Survey' (TBSS), a national conversation with children across England. This survey was carried out to engage children primarily through schools rather than designed to be nationally representative. However, children responded from all regions in England and findings have been weighted to be nationally representative by gender and age.

The survey was designed to understand how children spend their school break and who they spend their time with. The survey also asked children about their family and who they would turn to for support with family life.

TBSS was launched on September 1st 2022, and ran for 7 weeks until October 24th 2022. In total, over 15,800 children responded to TBSS across England, from 800 schools across all regions of England. All statistics mentioned in this report are from this survey unless otherwise stated. Responses were analysed at an aggregate level by respondent demographics and geographic region. Comparisons between percentages for different indicators were made using two-tailed statistical tests at the 95% significance level. All statistically significant differences are highlighted.

This report shines a light on the current gaps in the provision of summer activities for children across England, and highlights variation in access to outside spaces and places to safely spend time with family and friends, both online and offline.

A summary of the key findings is below.

Survey findings

Family time

- **89% of children enjoyed all or most of their summer holiday** and 89% said they enjoyed all or most of the time they spent with family.
- **Some children were more likely to enjoy their holiday.** Children who were younger (age 7-11), boys and children from Asian or Asian British and Black ethnic groups were significantly more likely to enjoy their summer holiday.

-
- **18% of children that responded to TBSS thought they had not spent enough time with their family in the previous 4 weeks.**

Summer activities

- **The majority of children (79%) told us that they spent time reading, writing, or doing art during the summer holiday, of which 30% did these activities with a family member.**
Younger children (age 7-11) and girls were significantly more likely to spend time doing these activities with their family members.
- **Overall, 73% of children who responded to TBSS used social media during the summer holidays of whom 88% used social media alone,** including 54% of children aged 7-12 and 85% of children aged 13-17.
- **Likewise, 81% of children who responded to TBSS played online games during the summer holidays of whom 68% of children did so alone,** including 57% of 7-12 year olds and 49% of 13-17 year olds.
- **Three quarters of children (75%) played or did exercise outside at least a few times per week** during the summer holidays, but 6% only went outside less than once per week.

Support with family life

- **72% of children would turn to their parents for support with family life.**
- Children who wouldn't turn to their parents were most likely to turn to their friends for support (45%), 25% of children didn't know who they would turn to and 23% said they would turn to other relatives such as grandparents or extended family.
- **Children who wouldn't turn to their parents for support were significantly more likely to be in the older age groups** (12-17 years old), male and from Black, Mixed or multiple ethnic groups or not sure of their ethnic group.

The Children's Commissioner's Big Summer Survey

Enjoyment of summer holiday

The vast majority of children who responded to TBSS (89%) enjoyed all or most of their summer holiday. Children who were younger (age 7-11), boys and children from Asian or Asian British and Black ethnic groups were significantly more likely to enjoy their summer holiday (Table A1).

Time with family

Quality time with family

When asked whether children who responded to TBSS enjoyed their time with family members during the summer holiday, **89% of children enjoyed all or most of the time they spent with their family**, 5% of children neither enjoyed or didn't enjoy the time they spent with family and 2% didn't enjoy most or any of the time they spent with their family. Only 1% of children said they didn't spend any time with their family during the summer holiday.

Amount of time with family

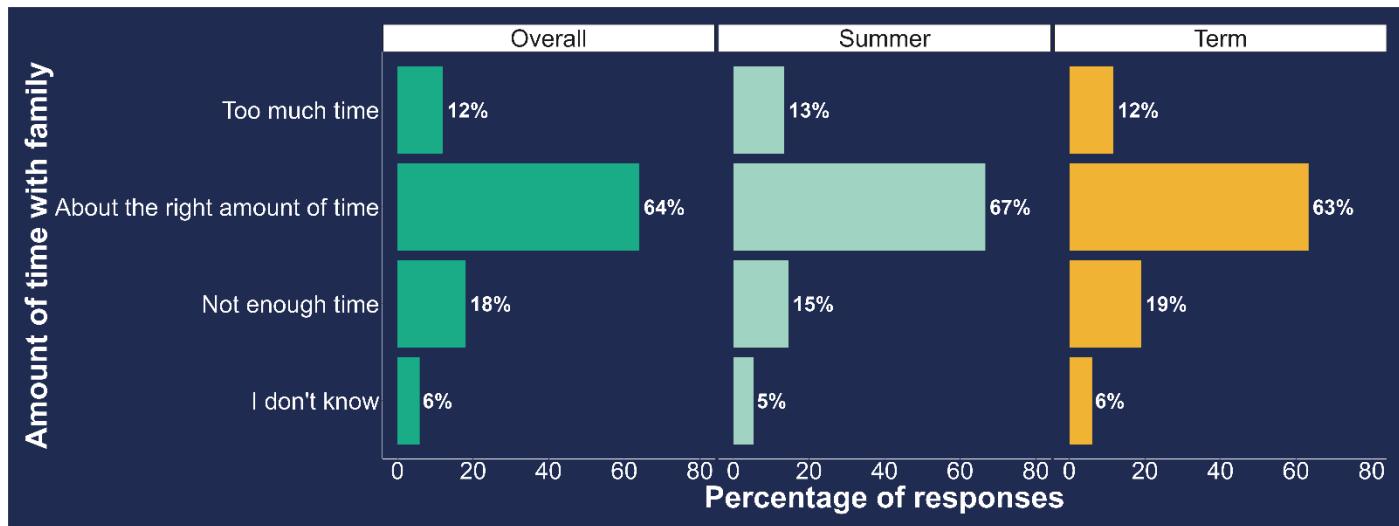
In the Family Life Survey (FLS)¹, a nationally representative survey of parents and children aged 8-17 which ran in March 2022, 60% of parents thought they spend 'about the right amount of time' with their family in general, 34% said that they thought they spend too little time with their family, while 4% thought they spend too much time. Female parents were more likely to think they spent too little time together as a family (36%) than male parents (28%).

In TBSS, children were asked whether, in the last four weeks preceding the survey, they felt they had spent enough time with their family members. Responses were grouped as those who responded within four weeks of the end of the summer holiday (September 23rd, 2022) and those after that date, for which the last four weeks had been within school term time only².

Overall, 18% of children said they hadn't spent enough time with their family members in the previous 4 weeks. Children whose response only considered term time were significantly more likely to say they hadn't spent enough time with family in the past four weeks (19% not enough time) compared to those whose response time period included the summer holiday (15% - Figure 1).

Controlling for the timing of the survey, older children (age 12-17) were more likely to say they had not spent enough time with their family members, compared to 7-11-year-olds who completed the survey (Table A2). Girls and those attending schools with higher levels of free school meal (FSM) eligibility were also more likely to say they didn't spend enough time with their family in the past four weeks.

Figure 1. Perceptions of the amount of time spent with their family over the previous 4 weeks, overall and grouped by date respondents took the survey.



Who did children spend most time with?

Overall, children were likely to spend the most time with family members (88%) during the summer holiday, particularly parents/guardians (75%), and siblings (51%), highlighting the importance of spending time with family for children during breaks from school.

Table 1. People children were most likely to spend time with during their summer holidays.

| Option | Weighted count | Percent of sample (%) |
|--|----------------|-----------------------|
| My family (including parents, siblings etc.) | 12,856 | 88 |
| My friends (including boy/girlfriend) | 6737 | 46 |
| On my own | 3575 | 25 |
| My pets | 2845 | 20 |
| Someone else | 294 | 2 |
| I don't know | 202 | 1 |
| Prefer not to say | 140 | 1 |

Note: Children were able to select multiple options.

Summer activities

In Part 1 of the Family Review³, the CCo presented evidence from the UK Time Use Surveys⁴ on the time that families spend together and how this has changed over the years. The CCo's analyses found that the average amount of time families spent in the same location but doing things alone (often

known as 'alone-together' time) increased from 95 minutes a day in 2000 to 136 minutes a day in 2015⁵.

In TBSS, the CCo asked children in England about the activities they did over the summer holiday, including both online and offline activities, who they did them with and also whether they generally do the same activities during term and the summer holiday.

Overall, 49% of children told us they mostly did the same activities in term time and in the summer holidays while 36% of children told us they mostly did different activities.

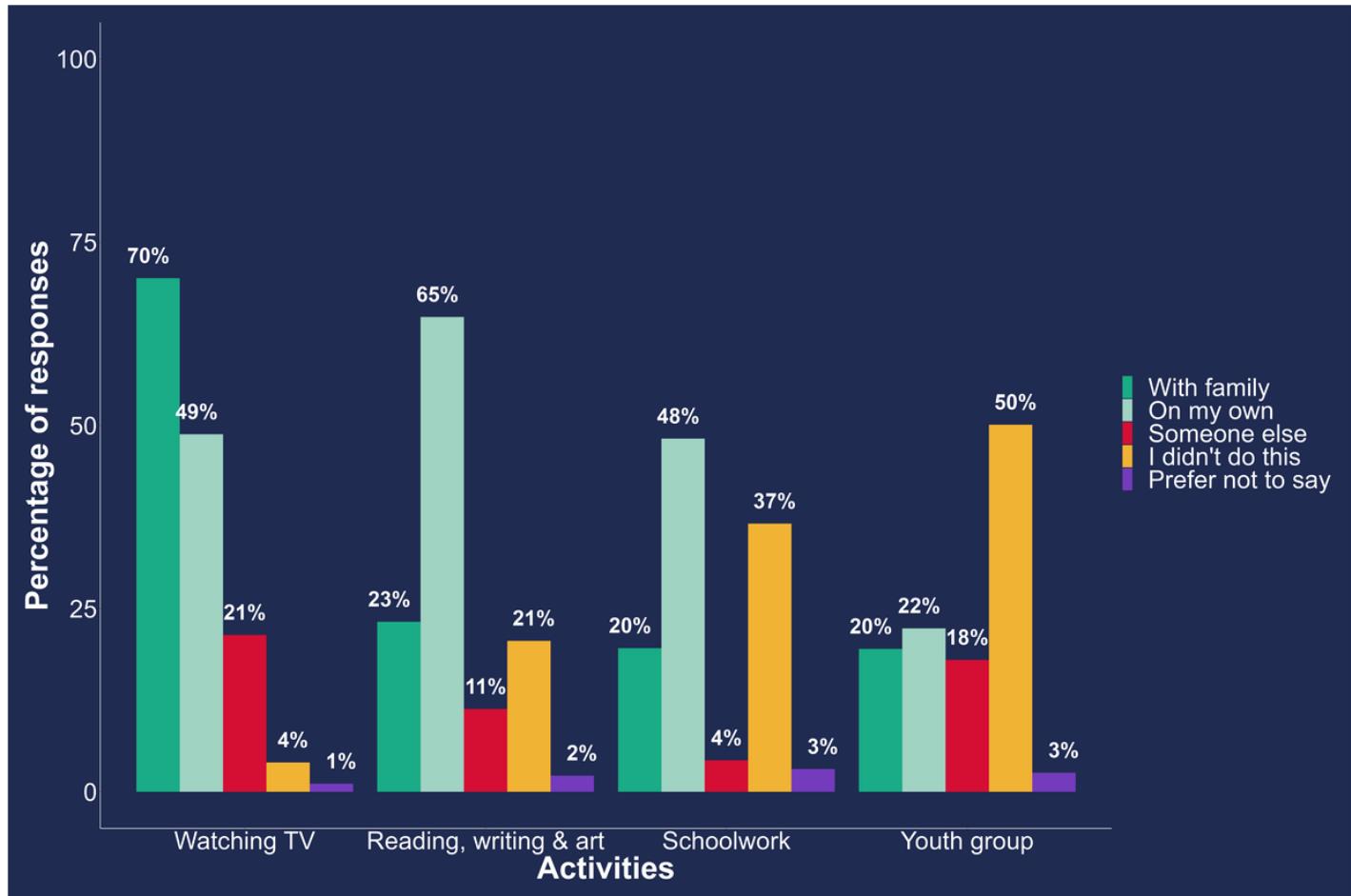
Offline activities

In 'The Big Ask', the largest ever survey of children in England with over 550,000 responses⁶, children of all ages told us that they greatly valued outside spaces to play in their local communities. Outside spaces and facilities such as youth clubs are often particularly valued by vulnerable children and those who do not always have a safe space to spend time at home. As one girl told us in The Big Ask: '*Youth clubs could help as it's a place to go if we don't want to go home*' - Girl, 13, The Big Ask.

Especially during the summer months and in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, children are likely to meet friends and family outside. Overall, 75% of children who answered TBSS said they went outside to play or do exercise at least a few times week during the summer holiday. By contrast, **6% of children went outside less than once a week**. Furthermore, when asked which activities children spent time doing over the summer, 49% told us they attended a youth group at least once. Of these children, 46% went to a youth club on their own, 40% went with a family member and 37% with someone else.

By contrast, **96% of children and young people who responded to TBSS watched TV or films during the summer holiday** (Figure 2), of whom 73% watched TV with their family and 51% watched TV alone. **The majority of children (79%) spent time reading, writing or doing art during the summer holiday**. Of those, 30% did these activities with a member of their family, **including 28% of 7-12 year olds and 15% of 13-17 year olds**, and 83% of children that did these activities did so alone. and 83% of these children were alone. Unsurprisingly, younger children (age 7-11) were significantly more likely to spend time reading with their family members than older age groups (12-15 and 16-17 year olds). Girls were also more likely to read with family than boys overall (Table A3).

Figure 2. Proportion of respondents that spent time watching TV, reading, writing & art, schoolwork or attending a youth group during the summer holiday.



Note: Percentages are calculated across all respondents and respondents were able to select more than one option per activity.

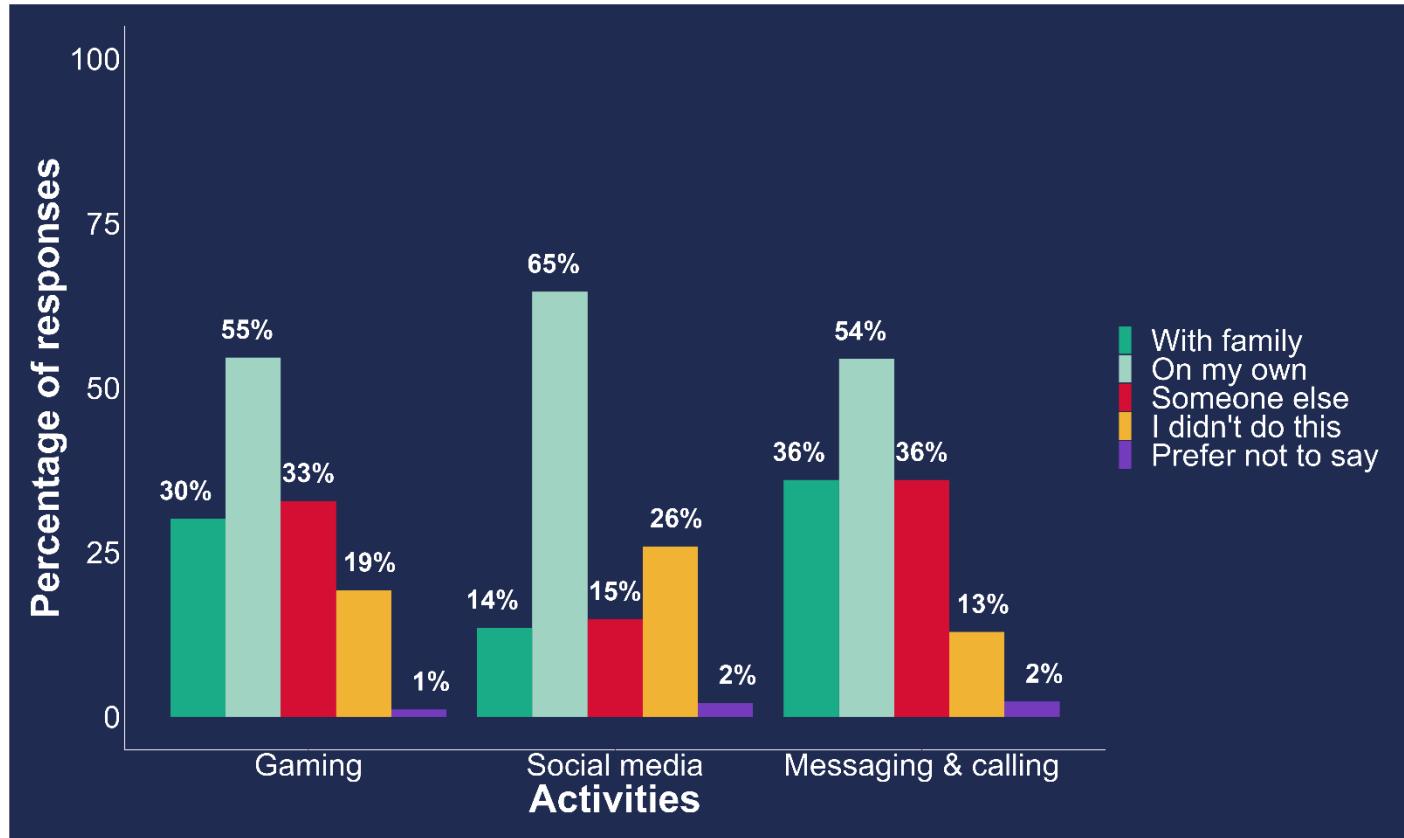
Online

During the summer holiday, respondents were more likely to use social media, gaming and communicate online alone rather than with family or friends (Figure 3). **Overall, 73% of children who responded to TBSS used social media during the summer holidays of whom 88% used social media alone, including 54% of children aged 7-12 and 85% of children aged 13-17.** These figures are comparable to a recent nationally representative survey of children and their parents regarding children's experiences online⁷, in which the CCo found that 65% of 8-12-year olds use a social media platform as well as 91% of 13-18-year-olds.

Likewise, 81% of children who responded to TBSS played online games during the summer holidays of whom 68% of children did so alone, including 57% of 7-12 year olds and 49% of 13-17 year olds. Ofcom's Children's Media Use and Attitudes survey⁸ similarly found that 75% 12-17 year olds

played games online, compared to 69% of 8-11 year olds, and boys were significantly more likely to play games online than girls across all age groups (66% of boys; 51% of girls).

Figure 3. Proportion of children that spent time doing online activities during the summer holiday.



Note: Percentages are calculated across all respondents and respondents were able to select more than one option per activity.

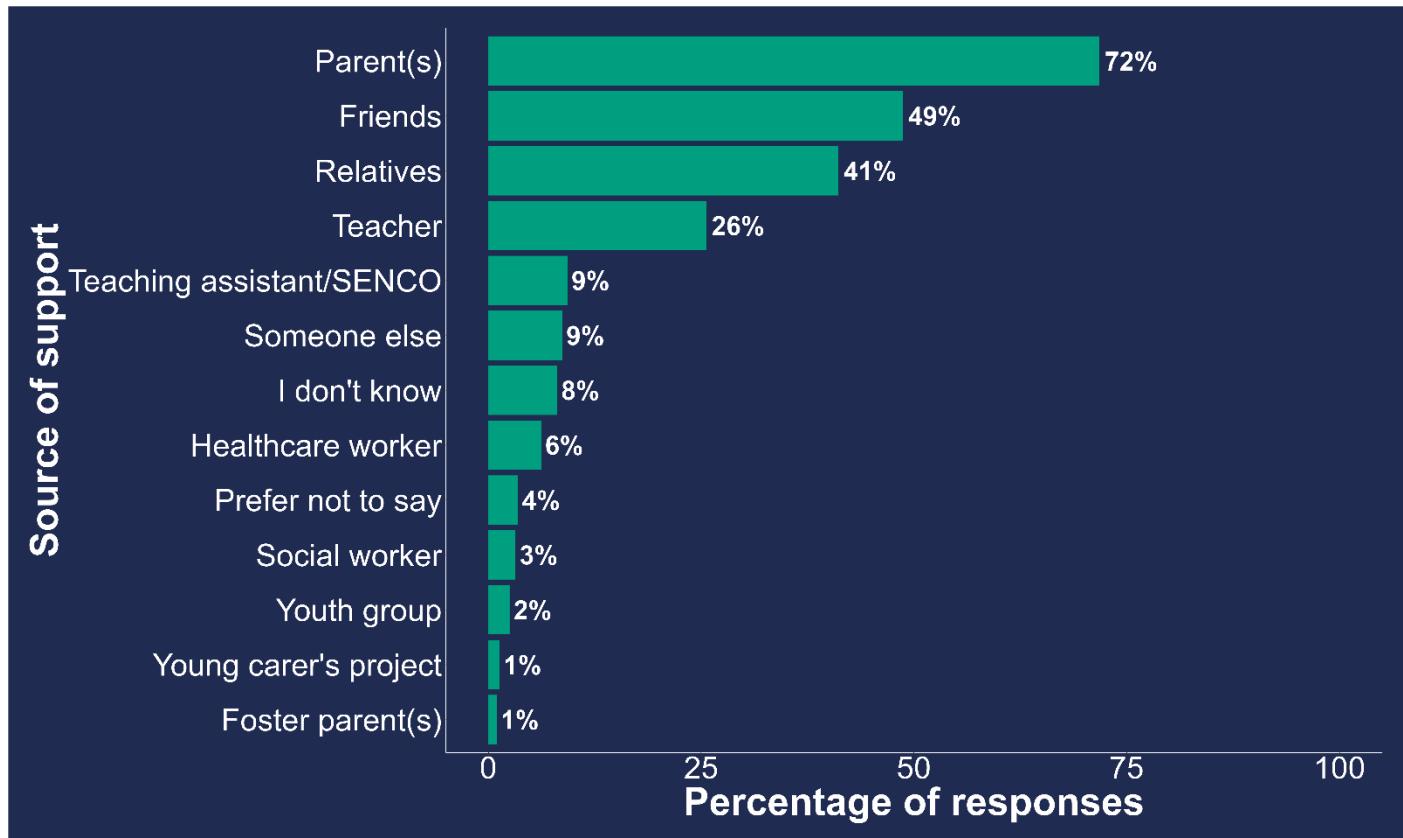
Support with family life

72% of children who responded to TBSS said they would turn to parents if they needed support with family life, 49% of children said they would talk to friends and 41% said they would turn to other relatives (Figure 4). Just over a quarter (26%) of children who responded to TBSS would talk to a teacher for support with family life highlighting the value of pastoral support at school for many children.

When looking at which types of support were selected together, 78% of children said they would talk to someone in their family if they needed support with family life, and 8% of children would approach a health or social worker. In a similar question to parents in the FLS, 78% of parents selected family members and 51% selected friends, suggesting that both parents and children rely heavily on friends and family for support with family life. A similar proportion of children and parents across both

surveys selected social and health workers (8%) and in the FLS, 7% of parents said they wouldn't seek any help, similar to 8% of children in TBSS who said they didn't know who they would turn to.

Figure 4. Where children said they would go to for support with family life.



Of the 28% of children who wouldn't turn to their parents for support with family life, these children were most likely to turn to their friends for support (45%), 25% didn't know who they would turn to and 23% said they would turn to other relatives such as grandparents or extended family. Children who wouldn't turn to their parents for support were significantly more likely to be in the older age groups (12-17 years old), male and from Black, Mixed or multiple ethnic groups or not sure of their ethnic group, compared to those from White background (Table A4). Breaking this down by age group, 12-17 year olds who wouldn't turn to their parents were most likely to turn to their friends, or they didn't know who they would turn to.

Conclusions

This report provides new insights into how children spend their summer holidays, how much they enjoy their summer holidays and who they spent the majority of their time with, both within and outside their family members. These findings provide insights into possible gaps in support for young people in England, particularly those who may not or cannot turn to their family members for support with family life.

Methodology

Data collection

TBSS was designed, piloted and conducted using SmartSurvey, an online survey platform. The survey was open between September 1st and October 24th, 2022 and used a custom accessible theme and was designed to take less than 10 minutes to complete by children aged 7 to 17 years old. The survey was piloted by over 50 children, aged 7 to 17 to ensure the questions were clear and understandable by the full age range.

The survey was advertised through the CCo website, blog posts, social media channels and through email campaigns to schools and directors of children's services across the country. Respondents were able to access the survey via an online link leading directly to the survey. The survey was not nationally representative and was run as an open survey to engage children across England as a national consultation into children's activities during the summer holiday, who they spent time with and who they would go to for support with family life. However, while the survey was live, bi-weekly monitoring reports were used to track sample demographics and ensure a wide representation of demographics (age, gender, ethnic group and region) were collected.

Data preparation and analysis

All data cleaning and analysis was conducted in R by CCo researchers between September and November 2022.

To clean the dataset, any illogical responses were removed, for example, where a respondent selected 'I didn't do this' as a response, all other positive responses to this question were removed. Any respondents who selected 'Other' or 'Prefer not to say' for age or gender (n=1,216) were removed from the original sample as national level statistics are not available for these respondents, therefore a survey weighting could not be calculated. Although the survey was not designed to be nationally representative, findings were weighted by age group and gender to ensure that data is more representative of the population of children in England. There was good representation of children from all ethnic groups and regions of England.

Comparisons between percentages for different indicators were made using two-tailed statistical tests at the 95% significance level. All statistically significant differences are highlighted.

Sample demographics and education status

In total, 15,825 children responded to TBSS of which 14,609 were included in the final weighted sample. As shown in Table 2 below, the weighted sample demographics broadly mirror the national population, and the sample is geographically dispersed across England.

Table 2. Overview of sample demographics, including age, gender and ethnic group and where children said they lived at the time of the survey. Note: The sample count and percentage are weighted to be nationally representative by respondent age group and gender.

| Demographic variable | Unweighted count | Weighted count | Weighted percent of sample (%) | National population (%) |
|----------------------------------|------------------|----------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------|
| <i>Age group</i> | | | | |
| 7-11 | 6,524 | 7,188 | 49 | 48 |
| 12-15 | 7,503 | 5,136 | 35 | 36 |
| 16-17 | 582 | 2,306 | 16 | 17 |
| <i>Gender</i> | | | | |
| Female | 8,039 | 7,647 | 52 | 51 |
| Male | 6,524 | 6,982 | 48 | 49 |
| <i>Region</i> | | | | |
| East Midlands | 355 | 387 | 3 | 8 |
| East of England | 3,649 | 3,344 | 23 | 11 |
| London | 915 | 1,070 | 7 | 17 |
| North East | 944 | 934 | 6 | 4 |
| North West | 586 | 694 | 5 | 13 |
| South East | 2,213 | 2,173 | 15 | 16 |
| South West | 300 | 368 | 3 | 9 |
| West Midlands | 1,726 | 1,971 | 14 | 11 |
| Yorkshire & The Humber | 2,560 | 2,326 | 16 | 10 |
| N/A | 1,316 | 1,362 | 9 | - |
| <i>Ethnic group</i> | | | | |
| Asian background | 1,689 | 1,725 | 12 | 9 |
| Black background | 579 | 646 | 4 | 5 |
| Mixed/multiple ethnic background | 921 | 969 | 7 | 2 |
| White | 9,714 | 9,544 | 65 | 78 |
| Other ethnicities | 355 | 365 | 3 | 1 |
| I don't know/ Prefer not to say | 1,351 | 1,380 | 9 | - |
| <i>Living situation</i> | | | | |
| I live with my parent(s) | 13,866 | 13,800 | 94 | - |
| I live with my foster parent(s) | 83 | 89 | 0.6 | - |

| | | | | |
|---------------------------------|---------------|---------------|-----|---|
| I live on my own | 48 | 57 | 0.4 | - |
| Somewhere else | 72 | 102 | 0.7 | - |
| I don't know/ Prefer not to say | 540 | 582 | 4 | - |
| Total sample | 14,609 | 14,609 | - | - |

* National population estimates for age, gender and region are calculated using the [Overview of the UK population - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](#) and Families and households in the UK: 2021 dataset. Ethnicity is calculated using the [2011 UK Census](#). Where region is 'N/A' respondents either chose to not provide school information, were home educated or not currently taking part in education.

Most children who responded to TBSS attended a school or college at the time of the survey (94%), 3% of respondents were home educated and 1% were not currently in education (Table 3).

Respondents took part from 801 schools across England, of which the mean proportion of FSM students at these schools was 21%, similar to the national average for England (22.5%⁹) in the 2022/23 academic year.

Table 3. Respondents place of education at the time of the survey.

| Source of support | Unweighted count | Weighted count | Weighted percent of sample (%) |
|------------------------------------|------------------|----------------|--------------------------------|
| Attending a school or college | 13,752 | 13,684 | 94 |
| Home educated | 369 | 413 | 3 |
| I don't take part in any education | 66 | 77 | 1 |
| I don't know/ Prefer not to say | 422 | 455 | 3 |

Annex

Table A1. Binomial regression model testing variation in whether children enjoyed their summer holiday.

| <i>Dependent variable:</i> | |
|--|------------------------|
| | Enjoyed summer overall |
| Age group (7-11) | -1.012*** (0.078) |
| Age group (16-17) | 0.309*** (0.079) |
| Gender (Male) | -0.276*** (0.064) |
| Percentage free school meal eligibility | 0.021*** (0.002) |
| Ethnic group (Mixed or multiple ethnic groups) | 0.137 (0.124) |
| Ethnic group (Asian or Asian British background) | 0.232** (0.095) |
| Ethnic group (Black background) | 0.435*** (0.136) |
| Ethnic group (Other ethnic group) | 0.133 (0.197) |
| Ethnic group (I don't know) | 0.106 (0.153) |
| Constant | -2.339*** (0.071) |
| Observations | 12,407 |
| Log Likelihood | -4,307.984 |
| Akaike Inf. Crit. | 8,635.968 |

Note:

*p **p ***p<0.01

Table A2. Mixed effect binomial regression model testing variation in children's thoughts on the amount of time they spent with their family members during the summer holidays.

| <i>Dependent variable:</i> | |
|--|-------------------|
| | Time with family |
| Age group (12-15) | 0.153*** (0.057) |
| Age group (16-17) | 0.705*** (0.066) |
| Gender (Male) | -0.087* (0.049) |
| Ethnic group (Mixed or multiple ethnic groups) | 0.163* (0.092) |
| Ethnic group (Asian or Asian British background) | -0.222*** (0.081) |
| Ethnic group (Black background) | 0.096 (0.113) |
| Ethnic group (Other ethnic group) | -0.165 (0.163) |
| Ethnic group (I don't know) | -0.050 (0.113) |
| FSM | 0.002*** (0.0002) |
| Constant | -1.941*** (0.132) |
| Observations | 11,593 |
| Log Likelihood | -5,464.396 |
| Akaike Inf. Crit. | 10,950.790 |
| Bayesian Inf. Crit. | 11,031.730 |

Note:

*p **p ***p<0.01

Table A3. Binomial regression model testing variation in whether children spent time reading with their family members during their summer holiday.

| <i>Dependent variable:</i> | |
|----------------------------------|--------------------|
| Reading with family (Yes/no) | |
| Age group (12-15) | -0.736*** (0.066) |
| Age group (16-17) | -1.026*** (0.096) |
| Gender (Male) | -0.262*** (0.055) |
| FSM | -0.001*** (0.0002) |
| Age group (12-15): Gender (Male) | 0.007 (0.098) |
| Age group (16-17): Gender Male | 0.051 (0.148) |
| Constant | -0.636*** (0.045) |
| Observations | 13,236 |
| Log Likelihood | -7,289.454 |
| Akaike Inf. Crit. | 14,592.910 |

Note:

*p **p ***p<0.01

Table A4. Binomial regression model output testing variation in whether children would go to their parents for support with family life.

| <i>Dependent variable:</i> | |
|--|---------------------------|
| | Parental support (Yes/No) |
| Age group (12-15) | -0.875*** (0.048) |
| Age group (16-17) | -1.292*** (0.058) |
| Gender (Male) | 0.344*** (0.041) |
| Ethnic group (Mixed or multiple ethnic groups) | -0.349*** (0.078) |
| Ethnic group (Asian or Asian British background) | -0.153** (0.065) |
| Ethnic group (Black background) | -0.300*** (0.096) |
| Ethnic group (Other ethnic group) | 0.022 (0.140) |
| Ethnic group (I don't know) | -0.335*** (0.089) |
| FSM | -0.002 (0.002) |
| Constant | 1.465*** (0.047) |
| Observations | 12,900 |
| Log Likelihood | -8,366.283 |
| Akaike Inf. Crit. | 16,752.560 |

Note:

*p **p ***p<0.01

References

- ¹ Children's Commissioner for England, *Family Life Survey annex to 'Family and its Protective Effect: Part 1 of the Independent Family Review'*, 2022, [Link](#).
- ² Sample sizes varied between the two groups. 3228 children's responses were in relation to a combination of summer holiday and term time (responses submitted between 01/09/22 and 23/09/22) and 11,093 responses were in relation to term time only (responses after 23/09/22).
- ³ Children's Commissioner for England, *Family and its protective effect: Part 1 of the Independent Family Review*, 2022. [Link](#).
- ⁴ UK Economic and Social Research Council Centre for Time Use Research, *Survey data*. [Link](#)
- ⁵ Killian Mullan and Stella Chatzitheochari, 2019. 'Changing Times Together? A Time-Diary Analysis of Family Time in the Digital Age in the United Kingdom.' *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 1-17. [Link](#)
- ⁶ Children's Commissioner for England, *The Big Answer*, 2021, [Link](#).
- ⁷ Children's Commissioner for England, *Digital Childhoods: A survey of children and parents*, 2022, [Link](#).
- ⁸ Ofcom, *Making Sense of Media - Children's Media Use and Attitudes Survey*, 2022. [Link](#).
- ⁹ Office of National Statistics, *Education Statistics for 2021/22 academic year*, 2022. [Link](#).