Play, safety and the mental health of children and young people.

The Happen Survey explored the factors that children believe influence their play, safety and mental health at school and within the community. The data is based on 1,200 responses from June 2024.

Active Play at School

When asked what could make them happier at school, children asked for more opportunities to take part in active play. The responses included:

- Outdoor lessons and more visits to the park.
- PE lessons three times a week, including trampolining, climbing, gymnastics, dance and skipping.
- Taking part in Forrest Schools.
- Better and safer play equipment.
- A variety of games to play during breaktimes, including sports day games all year round.
- Visits from external sport coaches.
- More sports clubs.
- A shelter to play outside in all weather conditions.

Increased opportunities for play within communities

When asked what could make them happier outside of school, children asked for more opportunities to play in their community. The responses included:

- Areas to relax in and socialise with friends, especially for girls.
- Bike paths.
- A gym for children and young people.
- Low-cost sports club.
- Leisure Centres
- Green spaces
- More exciting and safer equipment in parks
- An area to play in during all weather conditions.

The Impact of Pollution on Children's Play in Communities.

The responses indicated that children would be more likely to play in their communities if there was less pollution. This includes:

- Pollutants from cars
- Dog mess
- Litter and the remnants of cigarettes, vapes and drugs.

Safety at School.

Children would feel safer at school if:

- There was less bullying, violence and racism.
- Increased support for children and young people with autism.
- Playground monitors.
- Individual consequences as opposed to whole class consequences.
- Teachers better supported children's emotional wellbeing.
- Teachers took children's problems more seriously.

Safety within Communities

Children would feel safer within their communities if there were:

- Less burglaries.
- More police.
- Homeless shelters.
- More people followed the 20mph speed limit.

Mental Health and a Healthy Lifestyle at School.

The responses indicated that the mental health of children would improve at school if they followed a healthier lifestyle. The participants asked for:

- More water fountains.
- Healthier school dinners and snacks, including gluten free options.
- Bigger portions of food at lunch time.
- Meditating, mindfulness and having calm areas.
- More green spaces and garden areas.
- Taking part in the Daily Mile.
- Longer breaktimes.
- An afternoon break when one is not already available.
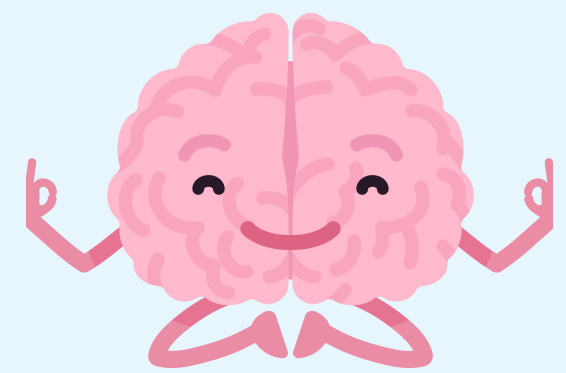
The Cost of Living Crisis and Children's Mental Health.

The responses identified how the cost-of-living crisis has impacted children's mental health, with them worrying about their families' financial situations. Participants noted feeling:

- Sad
- Stressed
- Concerned about their families wellbeing.
- Wanting to give their friends and family money.