



Children and Young People's Voices on Emotional Well-Being

Report for NICE 2007

What is this Report For?

YoungMinds were asked by NICE to seek the voices of primary aged children and young people in relation to emotional well-being; to find out what they felt caused emotional distress, what they felt constituted quality support in order to improve their emotional health with in primary school, and who they felt they would like support from in order to overcome the difficulties they may have had.

Children and young people are experts of what it is like to be their ages, encountering issues that they are encountering, and at receiving the current support currently available. Therefore, it is vital for these children to tell us themselves what is working and what isn't, so that we are able to offer the best possible services for children and young people, which meet their needs in a child-centred way which suits them.

This report was commissioned by NICE in order for them to inform their decision-making when commissioning emotional support services in primary education. The aim of this report is to offer children's voices on what they feel those services would look like, the needs that they feel children their ages have, and what works in relation to improving their emotional health and well being. The report has been written by Carly Raby, the Children and Young People's Participation Manager at YoungMinds, who has coherently written up children's voices directly, and added notes, where appropriate, in relation to some of the findings. The percentages in the report are based on the number of primary school aged children in London who attended on the day.

How were children selected?

Primary aged children and young people from across central London were invited to this conference. An email was sent to Head teachers and secretaries of all schools in central London boroughs, with availability for five children per school, on a 'first come, first served' basis. Sixty children applied for places and their support workers/ learning mentors and teachers brought them along to support them in having their voices heard. Fifty three attended on the day. They were from the following schools/ services:

- Wormholt Pary primary school
- Rotherfield Primary School
- Edith Neville Primary School
- Enfield Parents and Children's Service, The Ark
- Drayton Park School
- Hungerford Primary School
- Rosary Catholic Junior School
- Redbridge CVS

The Conference:

The conference was held at 11 Million (previously named the Office of the Children's Commissioner) and was facilitated by the Young Person's Participation Manager at YoungMinds.

The whole day had been designed by children of a similar age, to ensure that it was fun, engaging and created in a way that ensured maximum participation due to the children feeling relaxed and comfortable. For example, children of primary school age had informed us that they were only able to focus for fifteen minutes at a time, and then they liked doing something fun. So, we gathered their feedback on issues for 15 minutes at a time, using different methods and techniques and after each session they then had a fifteen-minute session of fun (for example, hip-hop dancing and graffiti art). The whole day started with a warm up act from a magician and the staff who facilitated the day were all child-centred practitioners. In total, the conference lasted for two and a half hours, with a lunch break included.

It is important to note that all views gathered, were gathered through group work, and so some children may not have been comfortable in sharing information that they felt was too personal or that they did feel comfortable sharing with others.

Methods:

The methods we used were created and developed by children. The children's voices were recorded in a range of ways by the facilitators of each group, depending on the methods used. For example, some were recorded on flipchart paper, others were written notes from listening to children's voices directly. In one group, their feedback was recorded in art work (puzzle pieces) designed by the children in response to questions, and some were the children's words directly, gathered through qu



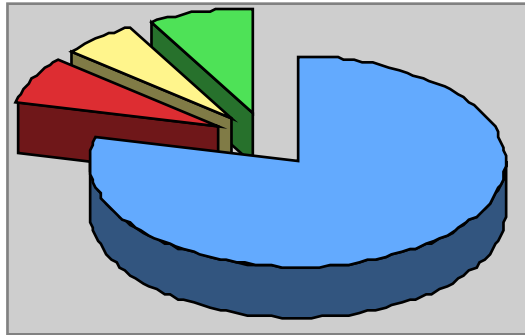
Hip-Hop Dance session: Photographer Amit Lennon

Executive Summary

- Ideally, primary aged children like to talk to their families about their difficulties above any one else.
- Bullying and racism scored the highest in relation to things that made children feel sad.
- Children valued the role of an adult/s who had the appropriate skills and personal skills they valued, who could support them in coping with their personal difficulties
- Children feel that if they were involved in the recruitment of support staff (and by implication, in developing emotional support projects) they would be more likely to get staff with skills that they value.
- The issue was raised that occasionally when emotional support projects come in to schools other staff, who children may have felt comfortable talking about their emotions to previously. This emphasises the importance of getting the right person in this role.
- 'Have more fun' was the most popular answer to how head teachers could ensure that children in their schools felt happy. 'Stop bullying' was also high in their tasks for head teachers, to help their pupils to feel happy.
- There was the suggestion raised by some children, that what made them feel sad was 'school itself.' This is a finding which is shared with other national charities, speaking to primary aged children this year.
- There was a significant concern about terrorism, and also a high level of concern about asylum seeker and refugee children being deported (either themselves, or friends) and people being removed from parents by social services. This perhaps highlights the need for children to be supported by school staff in processing difficult information and facts.
- There is a great need to reduce the stigma around mental health, even from a very young age. There were also clear ideas about how to share information with children, about mental health services, in ways which may be more accessible.
- There was great confusion about what could or could not remain confidential, leading to children potentially not discussing things that they were worried about.
- Pets scored significantly highly on the list of things that make primary ages children feel happy.
- Music came out as the most popular way of primary aged children calming down when they feel angry, although what type of music they think helps to calm them down is important to find out.
- The use of chocolate to deal with emotions was alarming. There were noted concerns around chocolate being used in relation to stress, but it was an even higher percentage of primary aged children who mentioned it being something that they did to cope with feelings of sadness (55%). This has been noted by other charities.

Section One-Children's Voices on: The Type of Support/ Personal Qualities Requires in Someone Supporting Children

Who do you like to talk to about difficult feelings?



■ Family 79%

■ Not Sibling 7%

■ My Dog 6%

■ Myself in a diary 8%

My family 79% (broken down as 'my parents' 8%, 'my family' 48 %, and 'my brother or sister' 23%), Any one except my brother or sister' 7%, My dog 6%, My self in a diary or something 8%

The percentages in the report are based on the 53 primary school aged children in London who attended on the day.

This made clear that primary aged children like to talk to their families above any one else. This is important in thinking through who we are targeting training at, in order to improve children's emotional health and well being.

What kind of person would you want to help you (5-8 year olds)?

Someone who:

Take things seriously, is smiley, encourages you to make the right choices, someone who had had training, someone who actually gives advice, a good listener, a secret-keeper, a good friend, someone smart, it is good if that person is sometimes a child (peer) and sometimes an adult-depending on what it is you want to discuss with them and what kind of help you need, someone who understands what you are going through, someone kind, someone respectful, someone understanding, someone you could trust, someone empathic, someone reliable, someone dependable, someone experienced, someone calming, someone reassuring, someone cheerful, someone sensible, someone gentle, someone peaceful, someone who is good at sharing and is generous, someone quite confident, someone funny, someone who is able to help make friendship groups which are good for you, someone polite, someone who is able to make you feel safe, somebody who can remember what it is like to be a child too, someone who can understand about different feelings children have and how to

help with them, someone non-lazy, someone who will be there for you, someone who co-operates, someone who is active and keen to help, a good listener, a good advisor.

We had a brief discussion about children being involved in recruitment and selection of staff and many of them felt that this would improve their chances of getting someone to do the job of a counsellor, or support worker, who did indeed have the skills that they valued. They felt that questions or tests needed to be put in place, in interviews, to test for the qualities they have mentioned above. Another important point that came out of the day is that when one person is named as the 'counsellor' at school, other staff sometimes take a step back from the role of offering emotional support. Because of this they feel it is even more essential that the person who is chosen for that role is someone who the children choose themselves, otherwise they might not like them and then there might not be any one else to talk to instead, so instead of gaining one new counsellor, they feel that they have lost three potential teaching staff to talk to.

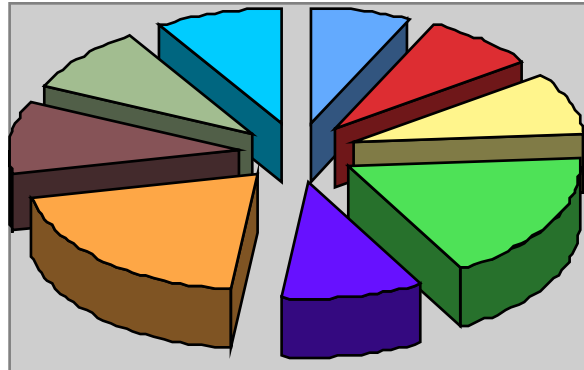
What Skills and Qualities in Worker would You want to See (8-11 year olds)

Smile, be trustworthy, be understanding, easy to talk to someone we can have a laugh with, someone experienced in working with teenagers, someone who is caring, someone fair, someone reliable, sensitive, empathic, confident, someone to help us feel safe, someone who gives us informed choices, someone happy, someone truthful, someone confidential, someone respectful, someone honest, someone who gets to know us, someone who sees patients as people.

If someone 'good' had helped you, how would you know that you were 'better'?

You wouldn't need their help again, You'd feel better, They would support you in getting other people to make changes and therefore your life would be better, You'd get an apology at the end of it all from whoever it was who abused you and caused all these problems in the first place, You'd trust people again, You'd be back on track, Peers and family would notice good changes, You'd be back in school, You'd be more motivated, By the way you act-people could tell, By the way you look-like a load had been lifted off your shoulders, By the way you talked-no anger in your voice any more, By our behaviour, By how you react to stress in the future.

Children's Voices on: What Helps when you have difficult Feelings?



- Having a bath 7%
- Talking about it 8%
- Hitting something 9%
- Sleeping or going to bed 18%
- Watching TV 10%
- Eating chocolate 20%
- Playing on the play station 10%
- Laughing 9%
- Working at school 9%

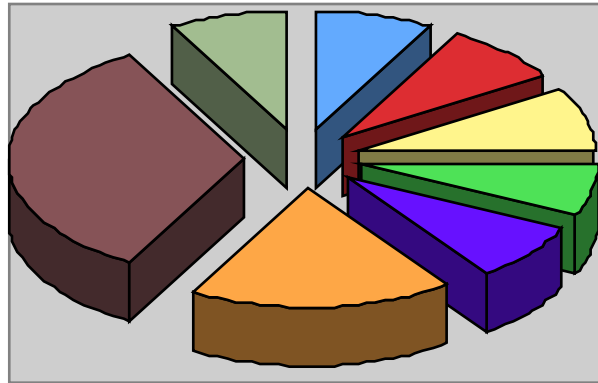
When you feel stressed, what helps you?

Having a bath 7%, Talking about it 8%, Hitting something 9%, Sleeping or going to bed 18%, Watching TV 10%, Eating chocolate 20%, Playing on the play station 10%, Laughing 9%, Working at school 9%

The percentages in the report are based on the 53 primary school aged children in London who attended on the day.

'Eating chocolate' was 12% more popular than 'talking about it', which was interesting. 'Eating chocolate' was also considered to be the most popular way of coping with stress by primary aged children. The YoungMinds Participation Manager has spoken to other national charities, which have run focus groups around emotional health in the last year, following this alarming feedback. We have found this to be a shared finding, and one that causes us all concern in relation to obesity, physical health and appropriate support for positive mental health.

If you were the head teacher of a school, what would you do to make sure that children in your school felt happy?

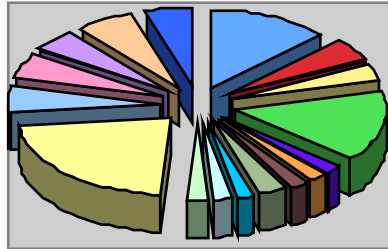


- | | | |
|-----------------|----------------------------|---------------------|
| ■ No Uniform 8% | ■ More challenging work 8% | ■ More breaks 9% |
| ■ Less tests 7% | ■ More PE/Games 8% | ■ Stop bullying 18% |
| ■ More fun 34% | ■ Free uniform 8% | |

The percentages in the report are based on the 53 primary school aged children in London who attended on the day.

‘Have more fun’ was the most popular answer to how head teachers could ensure that children in their schools felt happy. ‘Stop bullying’ was also high in their tasks for head teachers, to help their pupils to feel happy. Having spoken to other national charities and local organisations running focus groups about this issue, we have learnt that a significant number of primary aged children feel that their school (in particular) makes them feel unhappy. They have specifically been asked whether it is to do with other factors at school, or outside of school that may make them unhappy, and they have said that it is to do with tests, teachers feeling excessively stressed, bullying and the school environment itself. If we take this in to account, we can learn from these answers that a way forward might be to think through how to make schools feel more fun, maybe taking in to account their suggestion of having performers and more games. We also really need to focus on bullying, as it has been an ongoing an issue which has been top priority for children, across most organisations for the past few years.

What things make you happy?



Games 13%

Friends 5%

Family 3%

Learning 2%

Jokes 2%

Good grades 3%

Toys 2%

Pets 22%

Holiday 6%

TV 6%

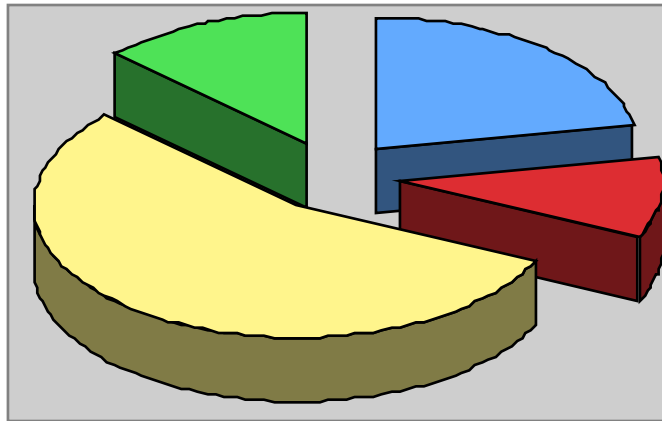
Music 5%

Games 13%, Friends 5%, Family 3%, Chocolate 15%, Football 2%, Learning 2%, Jokes 2%, Good grades 3%, Bikes 2%, Clothes 2%, Toys 2%, Pets 22%, Holiday 6%, Seeing family 5%, End of school 5%, TV 6%, Music 5%

The percentages in the report are based on the 53 primary school aged children in London who attended on the day.

Pets scored significantly highly on the list of things that make primary ages children feel happy. This might be worth taking in to account if considering schemes involving pets for primary schools. Chocolate also scored highly, again, which is an area of concern (see answers 2 and 4 for more detail).

When you feel sad, what helps to make you feel better?



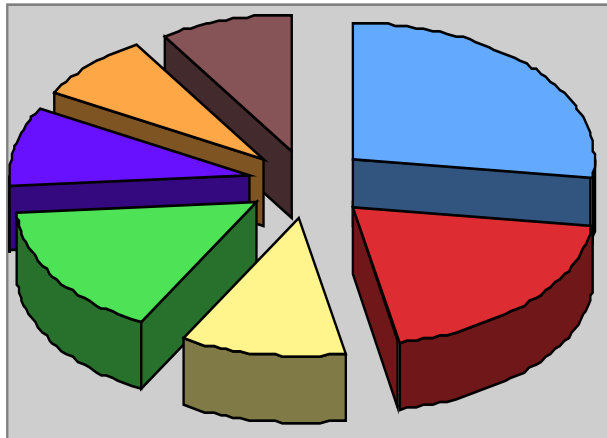
■ Singing 22% ■ Sleeping 10% ■ Chocolate 55% ■ Being with Family 13%

Singing 22%, Sleeping 10%, Chocolate 55%, Being with my family 13%

The percentages in the report are based on the 53 primary school aged children in London who attended on the day.

The answer to this question was quite shocking in response to the use of chocolate to deal with feelings. 55% of primary aged children said they eat chocolate to help them deal with feeling sad. We have noted the concerns around chocolate being mentioned as a way of coping with emotions in the question about stress, but it was an even higher percentage of primary aged children who mentioned it being something that they did to cope with feelings of sadness.

When you feel cross what helps you to calm down?



■ Listen to music 27% ■ Talk to Friends 20% ■ Eating chocolate 11% ■ Having a bath 16%
■ Reading 9% ■ My brother 8% ■ My mum 9%

Listen to music 27%, Talking to my friends 20%, Eating chocolate 11%, Having a bath 16%, Reading 9%, My brother 8%, My mum 9%

The percentages in the report are based on the 53 primary school aged children in London who attended on the day.

Music came out as the most popular way of primary aged children calming down when they feel angry. This might be interesting when thinking through use of music in the classroom, for example. However, having run other focus groups around emotional well-being in the classroom, children do not necessarily feel calm when listening to music that adults say help them to feel calm, so it is important to listen to children, about what types of music make them feel calm and happy. For example, in one school I visited a teacher was playing classical music to 'make everyone feel calm and relaxed', but the children said it made them feel 'sad, and think about more and more sad things!'

If you became a mum or dad one day, what would you make sure you did, to try to keep your children "emotionally healthy?"

- Play football with them
- support them
- talk about feelings more normally, like every day
- tell them that if they had things on their mind they should tell me
- give them good advice about dealing with difficult feelings
- it is hard being in care, because lots of adults give you different advice about how to deal with things, and you just don't know who is right
- read them stories and tell them about good things that happen in the world and happy things

Children's Voices on: Issues that create difficult feelings for primary aged children

What kind of problems might children your age have, that they would want help with?

- Bullying
- Siblings being mean
- Parents getting divorced
- Being new
- Moving home and leaving friends behind
- Not getting enough sleep
- Someone hurting your body
- Someone saying you are not cool
- Not getting what you want
- Things that we see in the news and no-one talks to us about properly
- Conflicts in different areas
- Bombs Explosions
- Moving to big school
- Getting in to the school you want
- Getting bad grades
- Work at school is too hard

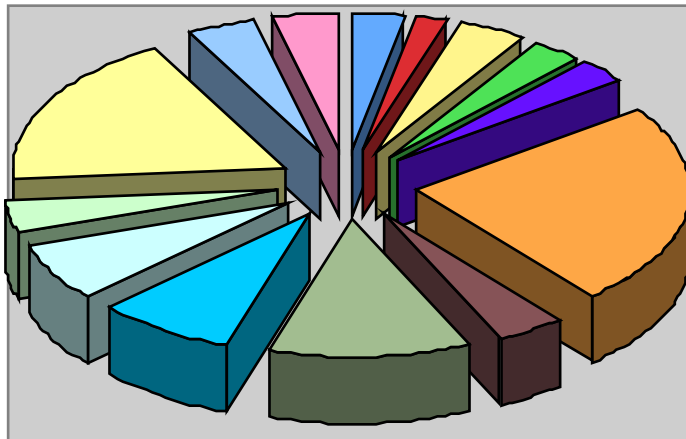
- Worrying about getting to school late
- Mean people starting fights
- Getting teased about your religion
- Family problems
- Gangs
- Family members dying
- Mum and dad always arguing
- Stressed by exams like SATS
- Global warming
- Scared of going on the tube, because that is where the bombs were
- Worried about money
- Wars in other countries and them starting wars on us too
- Problems for asylum seekers and refugees
- Burglars
- Feeling lonely
- Living with parents who don't look after you
- Missing friends
- Some people make you worry because they spoil all the fun by being mean
- Child abuse
- Racism
- Worries about being allowed to stay in the country, being deported
- Worries about being taken away from your parents by social services

It was obvious that there has been a dramatic increase in the concerns that primary aged children are having about bombs, war related issues, explosions and so on, which is not surprising considering that this conference took place in central London, where recent terrorist activities occurred. In fact it should be noted here that on the day of the conference itself, one school group did not attend as they felt it was too much of a risk in light of recent terrorist activities. Visible security measures have been taken in central London, which reassured some, but made others feel even more panicked. This may be a significant thing for schools to consider, in relation to how they discuss these events and how they help children to process information like this and in providing them with ongoing reassuring support and information about political situations, safety developments etc. There was also a significant area of concern around asylum seeker and refugee children being deported (either themselves, or friends) and people being removed from parents by social services.

In the discussion there was a noted concern about what is or isn't confidential when you talk to teachers or support staff at school. There was a lack of understanding of what would trigger them notifying your parents, and a little confusion around what type of

events would lead you to be taken away from your parents. Some children had experienced schools notifying social services, parents or even the police about things which do not appear to directly threaten the safety of a child or any one that child is coming in to contact with. For example we had a story of one child who thought that they might be gay. They talked this through with a teacher, and the child thought it would be confidential but their parents had been notified by the time they got home. They feel there is often not a clear, consistent approach to confidentiality in the adults they speak to. Children and young people would like to see this information in clear language available somewhere they can access, so that they can make an informed choice about whether or not they then speak to someone about their difficulties (maybe as a part of information available about an emotional support project at school, for example). This is important to address because increased understanding of this might lead to primary aged children feeling more comfortable in talking about their feelings to adults at school.

Things that make you sad:



- | | | |
|-------------------------------|-------------------|---------------------------|
| ■ Pulling hair 3% | ■ Swearing 2% | ■ Fighting 4% |
| ■ Arguing 3% | ■ Grumpiness 3% | ■ Bullying and racism 24% |
| ■ Unkind words 4% | ■ Death 12% | ■ Moving house 8% |
| ■ Teasing 7% | ■ No chocolate 4% | ■ Going to school 18% |
| ■ Breaking up with friends 4% | ■ Weather 4% | |

Pulling hair 3%, Swearing 2%, Fighting 4%, Arguing 3%, Grumpiness 3%, Bullying and Racism 24%, Unkind Words 4%, Death 12%, Moving house 8%, Teasing 7%, No chocolate 4%, Going to school 18%, Breaking up with friends 4%, Weather 4%

The percentages in the report are based on the 53 primary school aged children in London who attended on the day.

Bullying and racism scored the highest in relation to things that made children feel sad. We know that this concern is felt by children across the country and often comes out as a priority for children and young people's groups and panels. We need to think about how we can really address tackling this, which will no doubt improve emotional well-being in

primary school and reduce difficult feelings relating to being bullied turning in to more specific and acute mental health difficulties which then often affect access to education also.

Following in a close second place to this came 'going to school' in itself (see comments about answers to question 3 for more comment on this).

Children's Voices on: STIGMA

What do people think of when they hear the words 'mental health'?

Freak, Mad, Psychopath, Saddy, Unhappy, Cookie in the head, Clump, Crazy, Stupid, Mental, Mind missing, Sick, Dull, Blue, Basket-Case, Nutter, Nerd, Coconut, Twit, Confused, Sad, Loony, Off your trolley, Insane, Whacko, Plonker, Idiot.

It doesn't take much expertise to interpret that the words 'mental health' carry negative connotations! This children's conference was interesting because it targeted primary aged children and we were interested in what age children began to feel that mental health carried stigma, but it appeared that it already carried enormous stigma, even with the youngest children at the conference. When we had follow on discussions children felt that changing the name 'mental health' to 'emotional well-being', or any thing else, wouldn't necessarily make any difference. We needed to get rid of the stigma that there is and the fear about mental illness itself, not the name.

How do young people want to receive information about mental health so that they can access it with out encountering stigma?

- A DVD or email about what the service offers
- Posters on the back of toilet doors and places where children and young people can take in all the information-with pull off phone numbers at the bottom and information about confidentiality
- Magazines or video information from other young people who have mental health problems
- Letters addressed to me in language that they can understand!
- Websites / helpful organisations / people you can call in an emergency
- Better information for family members
- Posters in waiting area
- Leaflets
- Help lines
- Internet support – specific to CAMHS
- Games which are fun-computer games, explaining about mental health and where to go for support

Children's Voices on: The Future:

Emotional Needs

(as identified by children and young people themselves)

Children and young people feel that these are their major needs and would like children's services to see them holistically and have capacity to help them to get these needs met, generally. They feel that would help with the future emotional well-being of children.

- Supportive Friends
- Supportive Family
- Enough Sleep
- Sense of control
- Continuous Learning
- Sense of Achievement and Pride
- No money worries (financial advice)
- Safe place to live
- Someone who really knows us completely and accepts us for who we are
- Enough exercise
- Being able to sleep
- Having a good diet
- Time to yourself just to chill
- People respecting you

What would you want to Tell Us to Do?

- More emotional support training to front-line staff
- Recruitment of the right staff, based on skills that we value
- Training to families or at least distribution of information for support services so that they can signpost CYP (of voluntary and statutory support services)
- High quality training to peers

“Please make sport free for children so their mummies and daddies can take them to do sport with out worrying about the money.”

“You tell people to walk to school but if you live far away from school your legs get tired and you can’t concentrate properly when you get there because you feel really sleepy.”

“Let all children have a holiday each year.”

“Please give more money to my family so my mum and dad don’t have to work until so late.”

“Stop bullying in schools.”

“Make new laws to protect children more”.

Additional Note:

Children reported that they got their need for ‘control’ met by playing play station/ PS2 and computer games. We thought they may have got ‘a sense of control’ mixed up with the ‘controls’ on computers and made this as a link, but they were clear in their thoughts and feelings, adding “I mean when I feel the boss of things,” and “I feel I have control and can make things happen.” One boy approached the question and said “No, I disagree, but then I am on the school council.” It was surprising how many children responded by discussing how their sense of control was met by computer games and Play Stations. If we are discouraging children from spending too much time on these, we need to be making sure we are replacing that sense of control and ability to affect change with something else, which is more positive. It also showed how that need can be met through participation and active involvement (with the school council) if it is an effective and meaningful model, which leads to change.

