

# THE GOOD CHILDHOOD REPORT 2019

Supporting the  
well-being of children  
and young people

**A worship resource for  
churches and church groups**

**The  
Children's  
Society**



## Contents

Foreword by Mark Russell,  
CEO, The Children's Society 3

### Introduction

The Good Childhood Report 2019:  
Key findings 4

How to use this resource 5

**Talk suggestions 6**

Quotes from young people 8

Discussion points 9

### Prayers:

Intercessions 10

### Prayer stations idea:

Five Ways to Well-being 12

**Youth group activities 16**

Suggested hymns/songs 18

Resource list 19

# Foreword

As the new Chief Executive of The Children's Society, I am proud to introduce this resource to encourage churches to talk about mental health and well-being, and to listen to what our children and young people are saying about their lives.

This year, we publish our eighth Good Childhood Report, capturing the very latest information on the state of children's well-being. It provides new and important insights into a range of issues affecting children's well-being, including family finances and children and young people's feelings about the future.

Modern childhood is complicated. The vast majority of children are happy with their lives, but since 2009, children and young people have become increasingly less happy with their lives. Our figures suggest about a quarter of a million children could now be unhappy with their lives. This is really concerning, but why is it happening?

Our research points to a variety of important factors. Children are increasingly unhappy with their friendships. For years, we have reported girl's struggles with how they look, but this year boy's happiness with their appearance has reached a record low.

It's not just children's past and present experiences that matter. How they feel about the future counts too. Large proportions of children report being worried about everything from money and getting good grades at school, to wider issues like crime and the environment.

As I join this incredible organisation I am acutely conscious of how much must urgently be done to put modern childhood back on the right course. But how do we solve problems like rising mental ill-health, huge numbers living in poverty and too many young people lost to knife crime and exploitation?

It's clear to me that we must start by listening to our young people. Really listening. And then working together, in partnership with them, to build solutions. We need to stop side-lining them and harness their enthusiasm and energy for change.

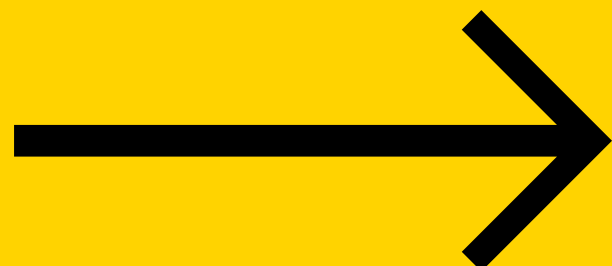
And church is one of the key places where all generations meet together. Being part of a worshipping community gives us a wonderful opportunity to listen to what's really going on in each other's lives and to support one another better.

I am delighted to commend this resource and hope you will consider holding a service on mental health and well-being. Let's get the conversation started, and let's all pledge to hear what our children and young people are saying. **#IHearYouth**

With every blessing.



**Mark Russell**  
Chief Executive, The Children's Society



# Introduction

## **The aim of this resource**

This resource is designed to help you hold a worship service or small group discussion on the theme of mental health and well-being. The focus is on children and young people, linked to the findings of our Good Childhood Report, but we hope that this resource will get everyone thinking about their own mental health and well-being.

## **The Good Childhood Report 2019: Key findings**

This year sees the publication of our eighth Good Childhood Report, which offers a snapshot of the current state of children's mental health and well-being.

The **headlines from this year's report** are that:

- The vast majority of children are happy with their lives, but since 2009, children and young people have become increasingly less happy with their lives. Our figures suggest that about a quarter of a million children could now be unhappy with their lives.
- Whilst girls remain unhappier with their appearance than boys, more boys are now unhappy with the way they look — and the gap is narrowing.
- Children are more unhappy with school and with their friends than in 2009 (although the increase in those unhappy with school is a new finding for this year rather than a longer term trend).

- Children and young people are concerned about the future and, not surprisingly, this appears to be strongly linked to well-being. For their own personal futures, they are worried about having enough money and getting a good job. They also worry about broader issues like crime, the environment and unauthorised sharing of information online.

## **What do we mean by well-being?**

'Well-being' is a common topic of everyday conversations, yet differences in what people mean by this term abound. Happiness, relaxation, not being ill, having enough money, being spiritually fulfilled or being successful are just some examples of what well-being can be taken to mean in different contexts.

Historically, we have tended not to take children's well-being very seriously. Parents, teachers and other adults often guess or make assumptions about the well-being of children in their care. Yet often these assumptions are wrong. That's why at The Children's Society we ask children and young people themselves how they are feeling about their life. They know themselves best — so we ask them! This is called subjective well-being because it is based on a person's own self-reported feelings about how things are going for them.

To download a copy of the Executive Summary of this year's report, or to order copies of the Youth Summary, go to **[childrenssociety.org.uk/good-childhood-report](https://childrenssociety.org.uk/good-childhood-report)**



### How to use this resource

The range of resources offered below is intended to give you some options to choose from to fit the style of worship and context of your church. It is not suggested you try and use everything here, but we hope it will enable you to assemble a service around the key themes below.

#### The key themes of this resource are:

- Enabling good mental health and well-being for all.
- Importance of openness and listening to one another, especially voices of children and young people.
- To consider how young people in our church can lead us on issues that affect everybody.

### When to hold your service

You can of course hold your service at any time, but why not think about doing so around World Mental Health Day (10 October), which is also close to St Luke's Day (18 October). St Luke is traditionally regarded as the patron saint of healthcare and healing, so it may be particularly appropriate to focus on mental health and well-being around this time.

### Additional resource

There is a downloadable takeaway leaflet with top tips on supporting the mental health of children and young people available from [childrenssociety.org.uk/shop](https://childrenssociety.org.uk/shop)

### The author

This resource has been written by the Revd Fraser Dyer, Vicar of St Anne's and All Saints, South Lambeth, London. His church has a particular focus on mental health and well-being.

All Saints is also the church at which Edward Rudolf, founder of The Children's Society, was a Sunday school teacher.

### Feedback

We welcome your comments and feedback on this resource. Please contact us at [church@childrenssociety.org.uk](mailto:church@childrenssociety.org.uk)

# Talk suggestions



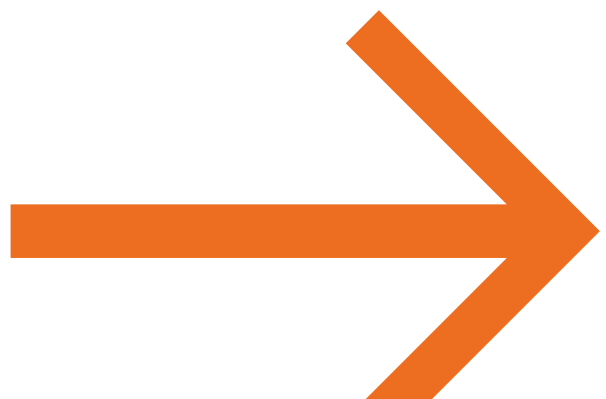
## Bible reading - Matthew 19.13-15

Some people brought children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them and to pray for them, but the disciples scolded the people. Jesus said, 'Let the children come to me and do not stop them, because the Kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.' He placed his hands on them and then went away. (Good News Bible)

---

### Talk points

- This is a familiar reading from Scripture, so familiar in fact that we are sometimes in danger of over-sentimentalising it and forgetting the radical nature of what Jesus is doing here. The social hierarchy in the time of Jesus very much looked down on children. They were not highly regarded. Their value to society was only realised when they were old enough to be economically useful. Until then, they had very little social status. Disciples shooing them away may seem harsh and unsympathetic to us, but it would have been entirely normal behaviour for adults at that time.
- Jesus, of course, saw and valued children for who they were and drew them into the centre of the crowd's attention.
- It wasn't so long ago in the UK that it was commonly believed that 'children should be seen and not heard' and that they shouldn't speak until spoken to. Perhaps some in the congregation remember those days.



- Today, children and young people are more valued and appreciated, and yet this year's Good Childhood Report from The Children's Society points to a decline in their well-being in key areas of their lives:

### OPTION 1

Use a video clip of young people speaking. You can find one by visiting our Good Childhood hub: [childrenssociety.org.uk/good-childhood](https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/good-childhood)

### OPTION 2

Ask some of your church's young people to read out the quotes on page 8. Explain that these are things young people said to The Children's Society during this year's research, and they illustrate some of the concerns revealed by this year's report. Ask each young person to step forward from a line at the front of church to read a quote in turn and then step back into line.

### OPTION 3

Simply incorporate these quotes into your talk.

- As you've heard, The Children's Society's research has given voice to young people's concerns about the environment and climate change, politics and Brexit, crime and personal safety, their schooling, their appearance and how others view them, about housing, employment and what kind of future they will have.
- We all know what it feels like for our mental health to be under pressure of some kind: a sleepless night worrying about a problem or person, feeling stressed about school or work. One in five of us will at some time see a doctor about depression, anxiety or other mental health condition.
- These are not restricted to adults: children and teenagers also experience mental ill-health or poor well-being.
- Society today is slowly bringing mental health issues in from the cold. Instead of not talking about it, we are learning to be more open. There is still some way to go on this, and the Church has an important role to play – not least helping our young people open up about how they feel. One young person who spoke to The Children's Society said, 'Parents listen to you and support you. Friends support you. Family support you. Church can pray for you.' Hopefully we do pray for our young people, but wouldn't it be great if they could come to church knowing it is a place where they will also be listened to?
- 'Let the children come to me...' means the whole child; Jesus sees us for who we are. 'There is nothing that can be hid from God; everything in all creation is exposed and lies open before his eyes.' Hebrews 4.13 (GNB)
- What in our own inner life is hidden and unspoken about that we would like to invite Jesus to see and understand?
- What can we do to help others, particularly children and teens, to be heard and understood about the pressures and worries they face?
- And how can young people in our congregation help everyone in church to improve their well-being?
- Lead into discussion points (page 9) OR go to intercessions/prayer stations (page 10).

# Quotes from young people

**'Loads of politics don't focus on important things like global warming, greenhouse gas etc.'**

'It just seems like there's more crime as time goes on and it just doesn't seem like it's going to be a nice place in the future because of where it's going now.'

'Children need to have a say in what happens to our world. The government needs to listen to young people's views.'

'Social media portrays people in a "perfect" way. It rarely shows people's imperfections which causes young teens like myself to compare ourselves to an impossible life/appearance. I think it damages people's self-esteem and makes them question their self-worth.'

'It is scary when you start getting older and realising you need a job because you worry about getting hired or being unhappy in your job.'

**'I'm worried about my exams and the results, along with the stress and anxiety they come with.'**

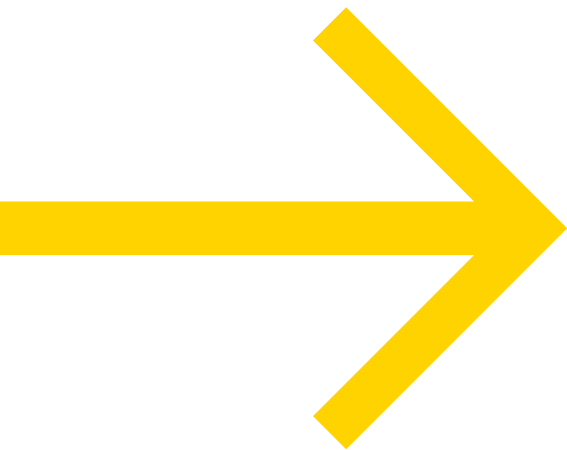
'I worry that I won't be able to afford to live where I want to.'

**'Young people are 20% of our population and 100% of our future.'**



# Discussion points

- Think of a good friend. How do they make you feel when you are talking together? Why is this?
- Who understands you the best? What is it they do that makes you feel heard and understood?
- How, as a church community, can we ensure our children and young people, are (a) heard and understood, and (b) feel included and involved about decisions that affect them?
- Try out a listening exercise: in pairs, select person A and person B. You could either do this with everyone in the congregation, or prime two volunteers to come to the front and play the exercise out. Person A has two minutes to tell person B about a favourite place and why they like it or their last holiday or talk about the best book or film they've enjoyed recently. While person A is talking, person B behaves distractedly (avoiding eye contact, fidgeting, checking phone/watch, sighing, rolling eyes, etc). Once two minutes are up, or person A dries up, take time to debrief:
  - (To person A) How easy was it to talk when someone is clearly not paying attention?
  - What were they doing that indicated they weren't listening?
  - What do we need to do to help another person feel they are being heard and understood?
- What role could our young people at church play in helping to improve well-being for all of us?
- What do they have to say to us that we need to hear, and how can we make sure they are heard?



# Prayers

If you have a children's or young people's group, you may like to ask them in advance to write their own prayers based on the themes of the service and to lead the whole church in them.



# Intercessions

These could be read by whoever normally leads intercessions, or they could be divided up among children and young people to read in turn.

Lord Jesus, we thank you for our children and young people, and for the energy, curiosity and imagination they bring to the life of our church [and/or] community. We remember how you reached out to young lives and blessed them, and we pray for your continued blessing on our young people.

[Lord hear us,  
**Lord, graciously hear us.]**

We thank you for the clarity with which young people see injustice in the world. May we learn from them about how best to work together for the kingdom of God.

[Lord hear us,  
**Lord, graciously hear us.]**

We pray for those issues that concern young people most. For how best to care for your creation and build a sustainable future for our planet. For our leaders and politicians that they would be motivated to work for the common good, and in building an economy that will serve the future needs of our youth. We pray that we can look forward to a society where they will feel safe, valued and included.

[Lord hear us,  
**Lord, graciously hear us.]**

We pray for the mental health and well-being of young people in this parish [and/or] community.

We pray for those who live in challenging circumstances at home; for those who have experienced bullying or threats in their school or community; and those for whom life is stressful and anxious.

We pray especially for those who have experienced depression and other mental ill-health, that they would know your healing touch and your longing to bring us all to wholeness.

[Lord hear us,  
**Lord, graciously hear us.]**

We pray for those who support and care for our young people, at home and at school, in church and in society. Give them wisdom and discernment in helping children and teenagers to face the challenges of today, and to offer hope and encouragement for tomorrow. May all our young people feel loved, cherished and of value. In particular, we pray that their voices are heard and listened to in all spheres of their lives.

[Lord hear us,  
**Lord, graciously hear us.]**

We pray your blessing on this year's Good Childhood Report, for those who will read it and report on it. We pray that it will play a part in making sure the important things young people have to say are heard, and will in turn shape public policy and practice for the benefit of all our children and teenagers. And we pray for the ongoing work of The Children's Society, and for all they do to support young people in need.

[Merciful Father,  
[We ask these thing in Jesus' name,  
**accept these prayers or Amen.]**  
**for the sake of your son,**  
**our Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen]**

---

# Prayer stations

Children and young people can help maintain their own well-being by following the five simple ways we have developed with New Economics Foundation. The following prayer stations are built around the Five Ways to Well-being for adults.

1. **CONNECT:** The first way to support your well-being is by connecting with the people around you.

2. **BE ACTIVE:** Research has shown that people's mood can be improved by single, short bouts of exercise. Exercise doesn't necessarily need to be vigorous – small changes in your activity levels may lead to improved well-being.

3. **TAKE NOTICE:** It is important when thinking about our own well-being to acknowledge how we are feeling in the moment and what is going on around us. Just taking time to be.

4. **LEARN:** Whether it is something you have been learning for a while or completely new, there are benefits to engaging and learning.

5. **BE CREATIVE AND PLAY:** Making specific time to do something you enjoy can improve your well-being. This might include engaging in artistic, music-related and organised activities, playing computer games and – for younger children – simply playing.



# Suggestions for prayer stations:

The following prayer stations are based on the Five Ways to Well-being. In addition, we have added two prayer stations that focus on looking outwards to care for others in our community (station 5), and caring for our world (station 6). For each station, there is a suggested object(s), a prayer and suggested actions. Feel free to cut out the boxes below to use in your stations.

**Use the following suggestions to set up a series of prayer stations around your space. Invite people to make their way around them in a reflective way.**

## 1. Connect **Object:** A cup of coffee and/or a chain of people cut out of paper (see [wikihow.com/Make-a-Paper-People-Chain](http://wikihow.com/Make-a-Paper-People-Chain)).



### Prayer:

Loving God,  
you made us to live in community  
and to become a people that are  
a blessing to others.  
Help us to spot new ways of relating  
to our community,  
and to resist creating isolated lives  
that cut us off  
instead of connecting. Amen.

### Action:

Take time to chat to someone you don't know so well at church, work or school. Join a new activity or club in your community that will help you meet new people. Volunteer for a charity or community group that works in your neighbourhood or parish.

## 1. Connect



## 2. Be active **Object:** A bottle of household cleaner and a cloth and/or a walking boot.



### Prayer:

Lord God,  
You came to us in your Son,  
and took on a human body.  
Help me to respect my body  
as a temple of your Holy Spirit,  
and to care for it  
as you care for me. Amen.

### Action:

Set easily achievable goals for building more activity into your day. Get off the bus a stop early and walk the rest of the way. Use the stairs instead of the lift or elevator. Or put some extra vigour into your housework to get your heart pumping!

## 2. Be active



## 3. Take notice

**Object:** A pair of binoculars and/or a pair of spectacles.



### Prayer:

Creator God,  
you fill our world with wonder.  
Help us to take note  
of the beauty around us,  
whether in the grand sweep of nature  
and the cosmos,  
or the smallest creatures and flowers  
found in the cracks of the pavement. Amen.

### Action:

Put down your smartphone and look around you. Look up in the city and notice the details of the architecture. Look down in the park or countryside and notice the world beneath your feet. Take time to stop outside and notice what you can see and hear. Watch a nature documentary on television. Give thanks to God for the world around you.

## 3. Take notice



## 4. Learn

**Object:** A school jotter or notebook, and pencil and/or a pile of non-fiction books.



### Prayer:

Lord God,  
Give me a spirit of curiosity and inquiry  
to continue to discover new things  
about you, your love,  
your world,  
and how I can be my best self  
in service of your kingdom. Amen.

### Action:

Browse the non-fiction section of your library for something that piques your interest and read it, or find an interesting new blog or podcast online that will expand your horizons. Start a plan to read the Bible in a year – see [biblica.com/resources/reading-plans/](http://biblica.com/resources/reading-plans/)

## 4. Learn



## 5. Give

**Object:** Knitting yarn and needles and/or a home baked loaf of bread.



### 5. Give



**Prayer:**

Gracious God  
we are mindful of all you have given us.  
Help us to follow the example of your Son  
in emptying ourselves  
and learning to love  
our neighbours as he commanded. Amen.

**Action:**

Cook or bake for someone you know who is under pressure. Take time to listen to someone at work or at school. Knit or crochet for a charity project. Buy two coffees instead of one and give it to someone who looks like they need cheering up.

## 6. Care

**Object:** A pile of items from a domestic recycling bin and/or a pot plant or vase of flowers.



### 6. Care



**Prayer:**

Forgiving God,  
we repent of all that humanity has done  
to despoil this planet,  
extinguish species,  
and aggravate the poverty of millions.  
Remind us how to be good stewards  
of all that you have placed at our disposal,  
and to treasure the diversity of this world. Amen.

**Action:**

Take small steps to reduce your impact on the environment – reduce, re-use, recycle and repair. Limit your use of single-use plastics. Carry a reusable shopping bag with you. Re-read the creation story in Genesis chapter 1 to remind yourself that God saw that it was good.

# Youth group activities

## 1

---


Think about how your young people can be a resource to improve everybody's well-being in the church. Give them copies of the Five Ways to Well-being (page 12) and ask them to come up with action points for each aspect, which all people in the congregation could adopt. For example, for the 'Be active' aspect, what ideas do your young people have for people of all ages to be more active in their lives? Compile their ideas into a takeaway leaflet that can be given to members of the congregation after the service. Or, if you're using the prayer stations, make them into little cards for each station.

## 2

---

Help your young people's voices to be heard in church. Facilitate a discussion with them about their hopes and concerns in life. Compile these into a short presentation that the young people could give to the congregation during the service.

You might like to focus the discussion around some of the factors that The Children's Society has determined contributed to young people's well-being, and on which interviews were conducted for the Good Childhood Report. These are:

- Family
  - Friends
  - Health
  - Choice/autonomy
  - Future and how you feel about it
  - Money and things
  - School
  - Appearance
  - Time use
  - The home you live in
- 





# Suggested hymns/songs:

***Choose hymns or worship songs about wholeness  
and healing, for example:***

Beauty for brokenness (Kendrick)

Be still and know that I am God

Bless the Lord my soul (Taizé)

Brother, sister, let me serve you

Christ's is the world in which we move (Bell/Maule)

For the healing of the nations (Kaan)

Heav'n shall not wait (Bell/Maule)

Help us to help each other, Lord (Wesley)

***Choir:***

Put peace into each other's hands (Kaan)

Silent, surrendered, calm and still (Rizza)

# Resources

Copies of the full Good Childhood Report, the Executive Summary and the Youth Summary may be downloaded from **[childrenssociety.org.uk/good-childhood-report](https://childrenssociety.org.uk/good-childhood-report)**

There is also helpful video content on this site: **[childrenssociety.org.uk/good-childhood](https://childrenssociety.org.uk/good-childhood)**

A takeaway leaflet on supporting children and young people with their mental health may be downloaded from **[childrenssociety.org.uk/shop](https://childrenssociety.org.uk/shop)**

*Mental Health: The Inclusive Church Resource*, DLT, 2014.

Includes a theology of mental health by Jean Vanier and John Swinton.

John Foskett, *Meaning in Madness: The pastor and the mentally ill*, SPCK, 1984

John Swinton, *Resurrecting the Person: Friendship and the Care of People with Mental Health Problems*, Abingdon Press, 2000.

**[mindandsoulfoundation.org](https://mindandsoulfoundation.org)** – helpful resources and articles on mental health from a Christian perspective

# Next steps

We need to stop side-lining young people and use their enthusiasm, energy and hope to change society. We need to demand that those in power listen to what young people are saying and take action to change things.

Only by listening to young people can we help them overcome the challenges of modern childhood and face their future with hope, confidence and optimism.

## **Pledge your support**

It's time to show young people they matter.

Pledge your support by and let them know **#IHearYouth**

Please visit **[childrenssociety.org.uk/IHearYouth](https://childrenssociety.org.uk/IHearYouth)**

## **Take action**

Demand the Government measures young people's well-being across the country. We want to make sure young people's voices are heard. That's why we're asking the Government to measure young people's well-being on a national level. Only by listening to young people can the Government understand the issues they face and make the changes they need to see. You might like to complete this with your church congregation.

For more information about the campaign, please visit:

**[childrenssociety.org.uk/goodchildhood](https://childrenssociety.org.uk/goodchildhood)**

## **Donate**

If you'd like to donate to support our vital work supporting the mental health and well-being of children and young people, please go to **[childrenssociety.org.uk](https://childrenssociety.org.uk)**

## **Find out more**

You can find us on social media and online at:

[childrenssociety.org.uk](https://childrenssociety.org.uk)

[facebook.com/childrenssociety](https://facebook.com/childrenssociety)

[@childrensociety](https://twitter.com/childrensociety) [@ChildSocChurch](https://twitter.com/ChildSocChurch)