

THE THINGS THAT MATTER TO CHILDREN

What SA Children say about Grownups

- ✓ Adults need to listen to children more
- ✓ Adults need to know more about them
- ✓ Children know more than adults think they do
- ✓ Children love what adults do for them
- ✓ Adults need to do the right thing too

Across government, business, and community, the views, perspectives, and experiences of primary school aged children need to be included. This snapshot is designed to support the capacity for this to occur.

The findings are drawn directly from consultation undertaken with South Australian children in 2021. It is presented in this snapshot format to inform decision makers, researchers, policy makers, and others who have an interest in understanding what children aged 8 to 12 years think and need.

Regardless of where they live, South Australian children aged 8 to 12 years share many of the same interests, passions, aspirations, and ideas for how to build a better world. Children from across the State want to be taken seriously and to be provided with more opportunities to have a say at every level of decision-making – in their homes, schools, and local community, as well as at all levels of government, with opportunities to have input into the service systems being designed for them including how they're being delivered.

Children were clear that adults listening to their unique imaginations, creative perspectives and big ideas not only improves their own wellbeing, self-confidence and trust in adults, it also benefits the whole school and community.



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From metropolitan Adelaide to regional and remote communities, children wanted grownups to know more about them, their lives, and their interests. Those in metropolitan areas wanted grownups to know more about what they are good at as well as what their aspirations are for the future. Those in regional towns and communities focused on grownups knowing more about the kind of person they are, how they feel, and when they do and don't need support.

Climate change, natural disasters, mental health and a global pandemic are just some of the complex issues that permeate the lives of children in our primary schools today. While new and emerging trends have always shaped children's lives, the differences between the responses received on the 2021 postcards and those received in 2019 and 2020 reveal just how much the fast pace of technological, cultural, political, and environmental change is impacting children's lives in the twenty-first century.

If we fail to listen to what children in this age group are telling us about their experiences, we risk alienating them at a time in their lives when they seek reassurance that they can trust the adults around them. By listening, empathising and validating their experiences, we help build enduring relationships grounded in trust and full of hope for the future, reinforcing the message that children are valuable stakeholders and important citizens who have a right to have their ideas heard and acted upon.

What do 8-12 year olds want grownups to know?

- More about who they are, what they care about, their feelings and aspirations.
- That kids have ideas and rights, can be trusted and should be taken seriously.
- That kids love and appreciate what grownups do for them.
- That grownups need to look after the environment, children, and each other better.
- That sometimes kids need more help and at other times they need their independence and privacy.
- More about what happens at school.
- What it's like being a kid in the 21st century.
- The importance of playing and spending time with other children.
- How the COVID-19 pandemic continues to impact their lives.



“ That we may be small, but we have big ideas and ways to make them work.”
– 12 year old, female, Yorke and Mid North

“ Kids aren’t just for show. We have so much to do in this world.” – 10 year old, female, Northern Adelaide

Across regions, ages and genders, children want grownups to know more about them individually and to show more interest in their lives. Common responses included knowing ‘who I am’, ‘what I can do’, ‘what I love’ and ‘what is going on in my life’ at school and at home. Kids want grownups to know and value children’s interests, hobbies and ‘favourite things’ as well as what they’re good at and what they care most about.

Children also want grownups to know more about the kind of person they are with many 8 to 12 year olds, describing themselves as caring, kind, funny, powerful, strong and brave. They highlighted their roles as good friends and caring siblings too and emphasised how much smarter they are than grownups think and that they ‘can be trusted’ and are ‘always willing to help’.

“ That I’m more than a little girl. I’m not only a girl. I’m a sister, a daughter, and a friendly friend.” – 10 year old, female, Adelaide Hills

“ That I’m good at sports. I like to create things, read books and that I like nature. I really want parents to know it’s not good to litter.” – 9 year old, female, Yorke and Mid North

“ that I will help anyone in need and you can trust me.” – 12 year old, male, Northern Adelaide

They also wanted grownups to know more about ‘who their friends are’ and who the other important people in their life are, such as family members and teachers. Others wanted grownups to know their

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birthday and how old they are. Some spoke about grownups knowing more about their gender identity and preferring pronouns when they're being addressed by adults. There were some who wanted grownups to understand the importance of their culture and languages, particularly when English is not their first language and they wanted grownups to spell and pronounce their name correctly.

“ how to say my chinese name!”

– 7 year old, female, Eastern Adelaide

Wanting grownups to know 'how I feel' was another common response, including when kids feel safe and happy, as well as when they're scared or uncomfortable, or hurt, upset, or feeling sick.

For many 8 to 12 year olds it was important that grownups, especially those closest to them, show more interest in their day to day lives, particularly in how they're doing at school.

Children living with diverse chronic illnesses and disabilities wrote about wanting grownups to understand their illness or disability better; how it affects their education, relationships, engagement and participation in learning. They also wanted grownups to understand how their illness or disability affects their interest and capacity to participate in sport and in other activities at school, home, and across the community.

“ I have asthma and I don't like running.”

– 10 year old, female, Southern Adelaide

“ I have autism and that I need help with specific things.” – 12 year old, female, Northern Adelaide

“ That im shy unless im around people I trust, I have anxiety and autism.”

– 11 year old, female, Northern Adelaide

In addition to knowing children for who they are now, many 8 to 12 year olds said they want grownups to know 'who' and 'what' they want to be when they grow up.



These responses ranged from a general wish for adults to see their 'skills' and 'potential' to more specific aspirations for future jobs.

One of the most common things that kids wanted adults to know was that kids have ideas, 'kids have a voice', kids have rights, are 'our own people' and 'our opinions count too'. Many 8-12 year olds described often feeling 'underestimated' and that they want adults to listen to them, take them seriously and to 'let kids do things', 'know things' and 'speak for themselves'. They wanted to emphasise that they are 'trying their best' and that it can be difficult to live up to the expectations, comparisons and pressure that are placed on them by even the most well-meaning grownups.

“ that kids have a voice about things and we will try our hardest to show & express the voice we have that we get told to hide.” – 13 year old, female, Murray and Mallee

“ kids can make mistakes too, but they may also be right so you need to consider their opinions.” – 12 year old, female, Northern Adelaide

“ that they are not always right and that school is very hard for us and that we know when you talk about us and it hurts.” – 11 year old, male, Adelaide Hills

At the same time, there were many children who highlighted the need for grownups to ‘do better’, particularly when it comes to looking after the environment, children, and each other. Some 8 to 12 year olds wrote explicitly about how much kids look up to adults, seeing them powerful role models ‘for better or worse’, especially when it comes to knowing how they should treat other people and the planet.

“ that they can do anything even though they are really old.” – 8 year old, female, Northern Adelaide

They also wanted grownups to care for them and to avoid or stop doing certain things, including ‘bossing kids around’ and ‘yelling at kids’. They were also concerned about health, with some children seeking to remind adults that ‘smoking is bad for you’.

“ that when we are upset or feeling not our best. when you help that feeling still stays with us!” – 11 year old, female, Limestone Coast

“ the world is a good and fun place, not every one is bad and everyone is good at something.” – 12 year old, female, Northern Adelaide

A number of 8 to 12 year olds used this question as an opportunity to express their fears and concerns about the future, particularly that of the planet.



This included wanting grownups to know that ‘the world is dying’, that it’s ‘not good to litter’ and ‘we won’t survive’, ‘there will be no water’ and ‘ice caps will melt’.

They wanted grownups to know ‘how to save the planet’, including how to ‘save vulnerable animal species and plant species’, ‘stop pollution’ and ‘stop cutting down trees’. There was a sense that if only adults knew about these things, they would surely do more to address these issues.

For more information on *The Things That Matter To Children* see other snapshots in this series:

- **What SA Children say about COVID-19**
- **What SA Children say about Education**
- **What SA Children say about the Environment**

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