



The
Children's
Society

SERIOUSLY AWKWARD



WELL-BEING NOT WELL-BECOMING

Two sessions that tackle the issues
harming young people's well-being

INTRODUCTION

This two-session resource is about young people's well-being, not their well-becoming. It focuses on their flourishing in the here-and-now rather than their well-becoming at some future date.

This resource also comes with a caveat: encouraging young people to talk about how life is really going and what directly affects them (including body image and the self-esteem issues of body image) could open a can of worms.

But perhaps some cans need to be opened!

These sessions are based on The Children's Society's Good Childhood Reports, which we have published for the last 12 years. These reports are based on conversations with over 60,000 children, who have been asked how they think their lives are going. This has given us a great picture of their subjective well-being. The topics discussed were chosen because they are what matter most to young people, according to the young people themselves.

What is children's subjective well-being?

Subjective well-being is about children's own assessment of how their lives are going and consists of two key elements:

1. Life satisfaction. The cognitive evaluations that children make about their lives. Judgements about life as a whole and different aspects of life.
2. The experience of positive and negative emotions at a particular point in time.



We pray these sessions help you to open any cans sensitively and in an engaging way.

Who are these sessions for?

- * These sessions are designed for Church-based youth groups aged 11–16 years old and should take about an hour to an hour-and-a-half, depending on how chatty your group are!

Before you start:

- * We would only endorse this resource being used when there are at least two Disclosure and Barring Service certified adults present.
- * Visit childrenssociety.org.uk/goodchildhood to learn more about our reports.
- * Know and follow the golden rules:

THE GOLDEN RULES

BE YOURSELF

You don't need all the answers – it's more important to just listen. If a young person shares something, it's a sign of trust. Take them seriously, be there for them and, if necessary, act.

LOOK AFTER YOURSELF

Have all the necessary safeguarding procedures in place, for your safety and theirs. Know who to speak to if a disclosure happens, before a disclosure happens.

CREATE A SAFE PLACE

Set some ground rules with your group and explain that if they do have something they want to share outside of the sessions, they can talk to you afterwards.

ADAPT

We don't know your youth group – how chatty, mature or informed they are. Please chop and change the sessions based on how appropriate each element is.

EMPOWER OTHERS

If some young people are showing signs of leadership, let them lead!

'Well-being is more than being happy. It is the ability to cope with the challenges of life and rejoice in the goodness.

**IT IS BEING WELL
NOT BECOMING BETTER.'**



Jim Davis MBE



SESSION ONE:



WHAT IS A GOOD CHILDHOOD?

Aim

- * To encourage young people to think about their own well-being and to listen to their views. To have insight and learn about actions you and your church can take following the feedback from your young people about the local area and their well-being.

Learning outcomes

- * For you and your church to learn how to listen well to your young people and take practical actions about their well-being, not their well-becoming, following what they share.
- * To give young people an understanding of what a good childhood is.

Materials needed

- * Sticky notes, elastic bands, sheets of paper and pens for each young person involved.
- * Lots of coloured sticky dots in five different colours.
- * An object to symbolise how decisions are made in your church (eg PCC or church council meeting agenda or minutes).
- * A sheet of flipchart paper with 'If I could change something about this church/group, I would change...' written on it, and a second sheet with 'What I love about this church/group is...'
- * A copy of the 'How happy are you?' questionnaire (one per person).

- * A large map of the local area with local amenities visible or a projection of it.
- * Beforehand (if possible) invite some young people to lead the prayers of your session. Encourage them to be creative and theme them around listening.
- * You will need to allow some time to assess the answers your young people have given after the session and potentially follow up on any areas of interest or concern (see the **Takeaway** activity).

Reality today

Our latest Good Childhood Report found that:

- * One in eight young people are unhappy with their lives overall. Therefore it is highly likely that one or more people in your group are unhappy with their life.
- * In our analysis of geographical differences in children's well-being, we found no solid evidence of regional differences or links to local-level deprivation – though aspects such as gender, age and household income did explain some of the differences (around 6%).
- * However, children's perceptions of their local area was clearly linked to their well-being. The top two local problems with the strongest links to well-being were 'noisy neighbours' and 'people drinking or taking drugs'. Children are most directly affected by things closest to them, and less by detached issues and concepts.

Icebreaker (5 minutes)

- * **Divide** your young people into groups of three or four.
- * **Give** each group the same number of elastic bands.
- * **Explain** the rules:
 - Everyone has to sit down in a circle, and not move from there.
 - Everyone puts their index and middle finger inside one elastic band, making sure their fingers point towards the ground.
 - Nominate one person to try to break the band.
 - Everyone else tries to make the band as big as possible but not break it.
 - The game has to be played at tummy button height and no higher.
 - When you say 'stop' everyone has to stop. The winner will be the group with the biggest band, as well as anyone nominated who managed to break the band.
- * **Play** the game! Switch the person who tries to break the band each time.
- * **Increase** the difficulty by adding another band.

Get started (5-10 minutes)

- * **Explain** that this session and the next are all about well-being. Suggest that well-being is like an elastic band: it adapts and flexes to the different positive and negative situations we face. There are positive actions we can take to make our band stronger (you can explore these in the Seriously Awkward youth sessions¹). However, like an elastic band, everyone's well-being has a limit. We need to speak out and shout 'stop' if we ever feel that is the case.
- * **Share** this quote: 'Well-being is more than being happy. It is the ability to cope with the challenges of life and rejoice in the goodness. It is being well, not becoming better.' Jim Davis, MBE.
- * **Ask** your group:
 - Does crying mean you have low well-being? (After allowing them time to respond, you might like to suggest that crying can be a healthy response to certain situations.)
 - Do smiling and laughing mean you have good well-being? (Again, you might want to suggest that people with low well-being will also laugh and smile sometimes.)

- * **Reflect** with the group on the 'elastic band' icebreaker game, Jim's quote and the idea that well-being for young people is about flourishing in the present, not well-becoming in the future.

Faith in focus (15-20 minutes)

- * **Ask** if anyone can retell any part of the story of Jesus' birth.
 - Use Luke 1 and 2 to fill in any gaps.
- * **Ask** how old they think Mary was when Jesus was born.
 - Answer: She was a teenager. The Angel Gabriel said, 'Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favour with God.' (Luke 1.30) Mary was old enough to find favour with God and be deemed worthy of being the mother of Jesus. A pretty big responsibility!
- * **Share** that in establishing the Early Church, Paul sent a young church leader, Timothy, a letter that encouraged him to 'not let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity.' (1 Timothy 4.12)
- * Again, age wasn't an issue: character was. It's the same today: young people aren't the future of the Church – they **are** the Church, here and now.
- * Similarly well-being is about now, not about becoming better in the future.
- * **Explain** how decisions are made about running your group and church (eg through a church council, PCC or committee).
- * **Show** your group whichever object you have chosen to represent making decisions about your group/church. Ask them to pass the object around between them.
- * **Explain** you want the person holding the object to complete the sentence, 'If I could change something about this church/group, I would change...'
- * If they are happy for it to be shared with the wider church, invite the young person to write their thought down on the flipchart paper.
- * **Give** everyone the opportunity to share if they want to.
- * **Explain** that encouraging others is a Christian value. Now you want them to repeat the activity with the sentence 'What I love about this church/group is...'

¹ Visit childrenssociety.org.uk/youth-signup to access your free copy.

SESSION ONE: WHAT IS A GOOD CHILDHOOD?

- * **Give** everyone the opportunity to feedback and note it down on the flipchart paper.
- * **Suggest** that the young people think about how to feed back their thoughts to the wider church or decision-making body.

Engage (20 minutes)

- * **Explain** you are going to use the space you have to create a scale. At one end is 'strongly agree', at the other is 'strongly disagree'. (For example, by using a wall, with the words 'Strongly agree' on a piece of paper at one end and 'Strongly disagree' at the other end.) They can go anywhere on the scale. If they are happy to share, they may be asked to explain their choice of position.
- * **Play** 'agree or disagree' with these statements:
 - It is better to be good-looking than smart.
 - It is better to be physically healthy than to be emotionally healthy.
 - Family are more important than friends.
 - Teachers should be allowed to set homework.
 - Your teenage years are the best years of your life.
 - GCSEs are the most important thing you do when you're 16.
- * **Explain** that each year The Children's Society spends time listening to young people just like them. Through listening we learn about other people's perspectives.
- * **Invite** the young people to fill in the 'How happy am I?' questions below. The Children's Society has found out that asking about these 10 things can really help you to understand young people's well-being. The questionnaire is scored on a scale from 0 to 10: 0 means 'very unhappy', 10 means 'very happy'.

How happy am I?

Age:

Gender:

How happy are you:

- ... with your family?
- ... about the amount of choice you have in life?
- ... with the way you use your time?
- ... about the things you have (like money and the things you own)?
- ... with your health?
- ... with your friends?
- ... with your appearance (the way that you look)?
- ... about what may happen to you later in your life?
- ... about the home you live in?
- ... about your school, in general?

- * **Encourage** the young people to be honest – their answers will be anonymous as only the leaders will see them. Assure the young people that they can miss out questions if they like and only answer the questions if they want to.
- * **Collect in** the questionnaires when everyone has finished. Explain that you will tally up their scores² and use this to plan future sessions.
- * **Invite** any young person to come and speak to you or another trusted adult if anything arises they want to talk about.

Go deeper (15 minutes)

Read points two and three of the Reality today section of this guide (see p.4) if you haven't already.

- * Project or get out the map of your local area.
- * **Give** out the sticky notes and pens.
- * **Invite** the young people to write down on the sticky notes (and add to the map) all the places:
 - They visit (eg the park, sports centre, church or school).
 - They'd like to have (eg a skate park, 4G football pitch or shopping centre).
 - Anything they'd like to change (eg a road where people drive too fast, a street with no lighting or where people are anti-social).
- * Give out the sticky dots, designate a colour for each of the following categories and ask the young people to add them to the sticky-notes as appropriate.
 - Categories: Love, hate, feel unsafe, feel safe, boring.
- * Allow space for discussion as they go and draw out any patterns or differences.

Pray (5 mins)

As outlined in the Materials needed section on page 4, invite your group to lead your prayers.

Takeaway activity

Explain that you'll be using the answers and ideas from both sessions to see if there are any common themes that emerge. If there are, explain that you'll come back to them to involve them in further decision-making, eg running more sessions about a particular topic, making changes to the church or group, or raising issue(s) with their school(s).

² For advice on how to assess them after the session and to compare the results to national averages, turn to page 15.

You have searched me, Lord,
and you know me.
You know when I sit and when I rise;
you perceive my thoughts from afar.
You discern my going out and my
lying down;
you are familiar with all my ways.
Before a word is on my tongue
you, Lord, know it completely.

Where can I go from your Spirit?
Where can I flee from your presence?
If I go up to the heavens, you are there;
if I make my bed in the depths,
you are there.

For you created my inmost being;
you knit me together in my
mother's womb.

**I PRAISE YOU BECAUSE I AM
FEARFULLY AND WONDERFULLY MADE.**

Psalm 139

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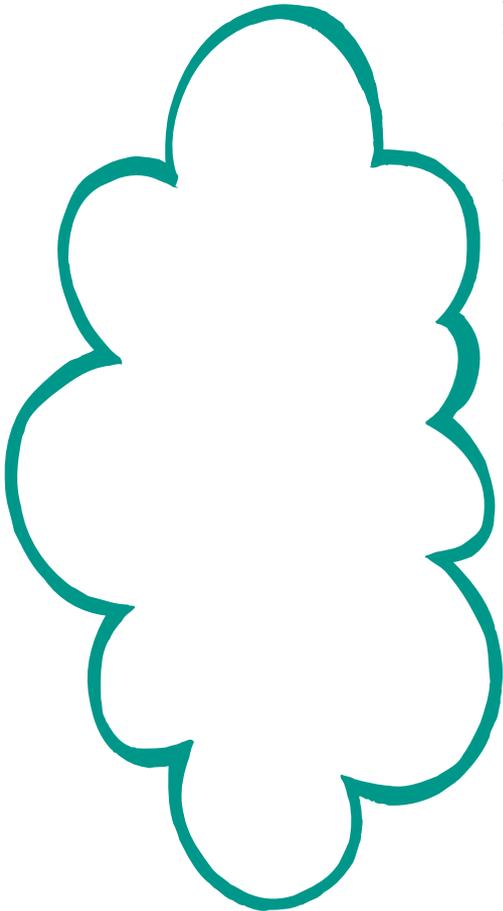
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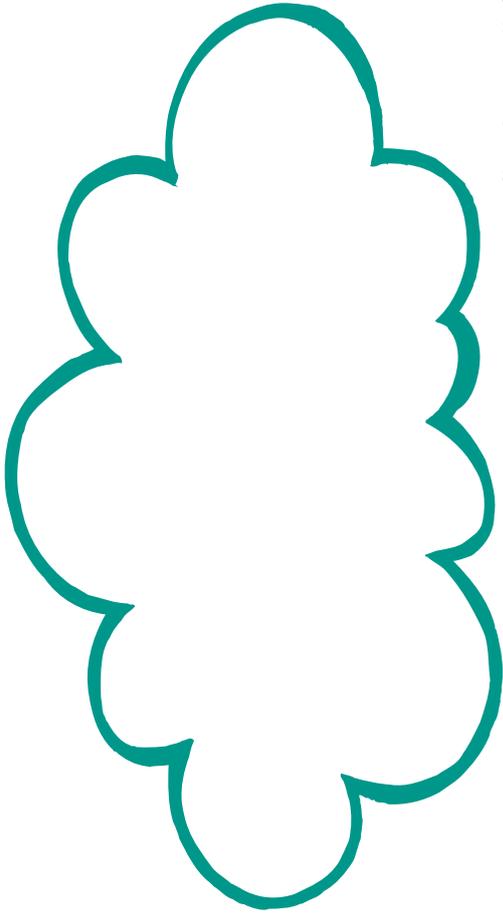
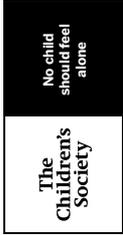
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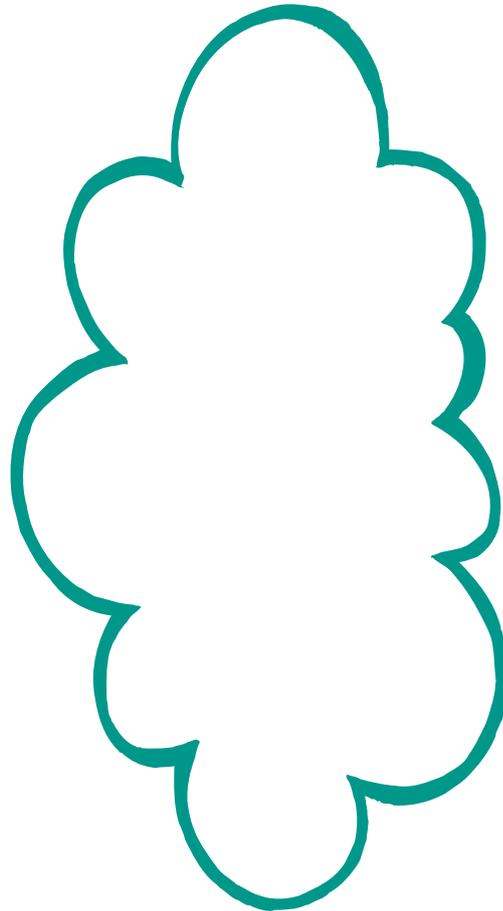
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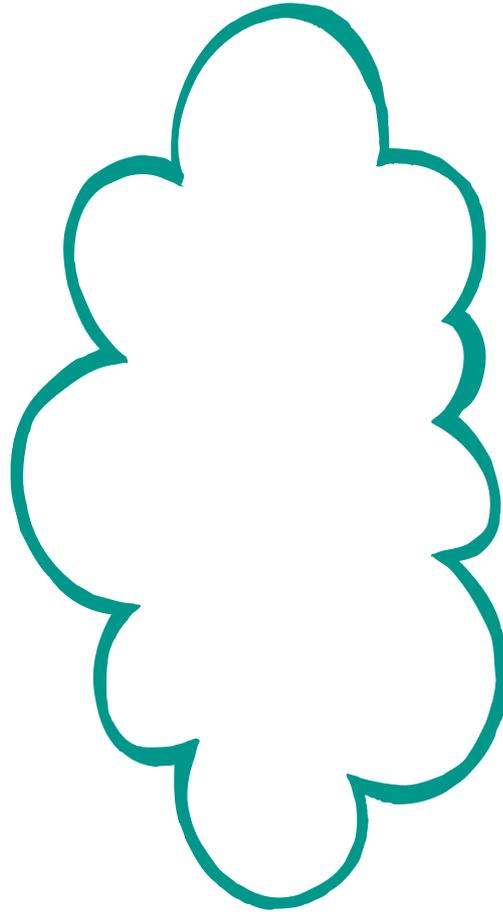
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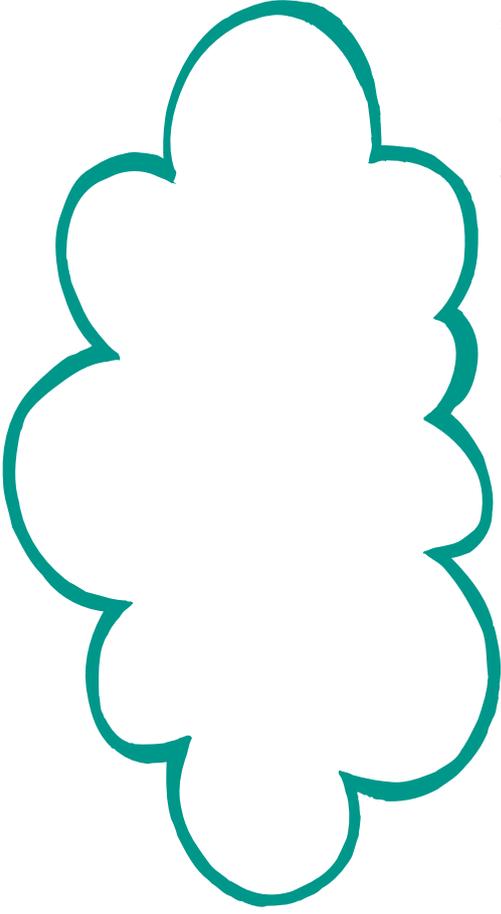
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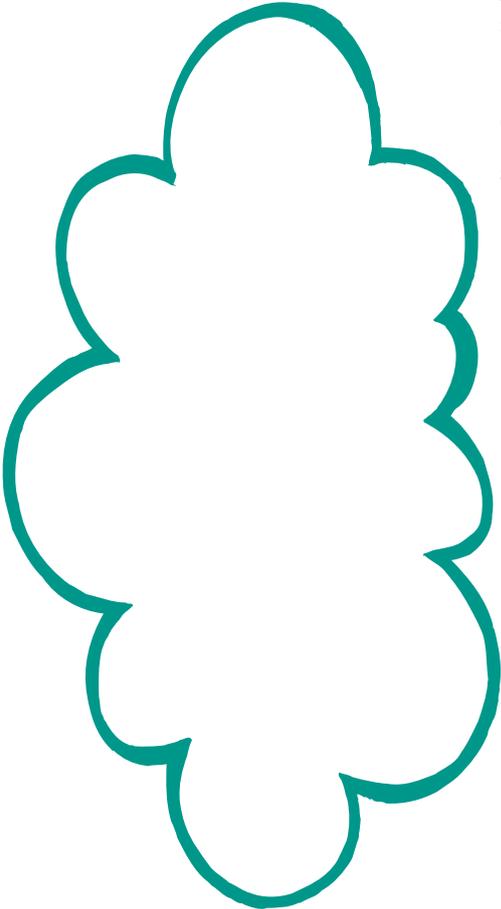
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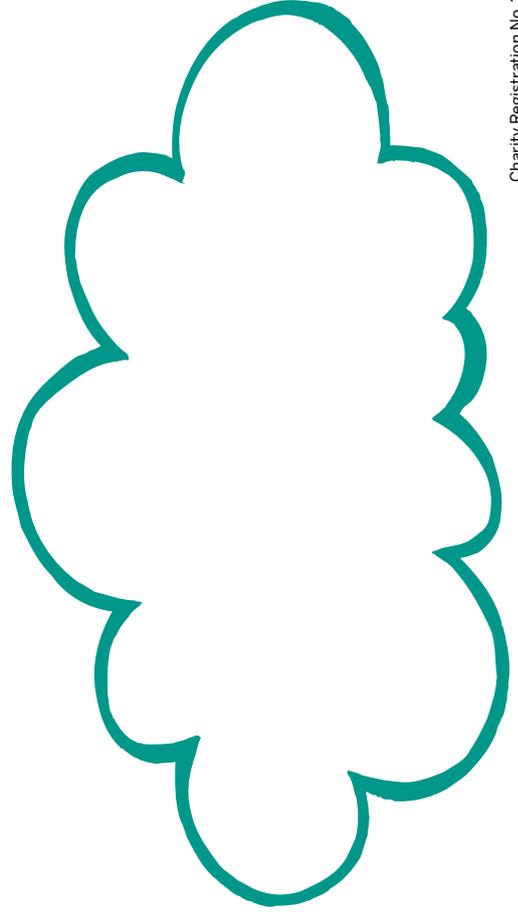
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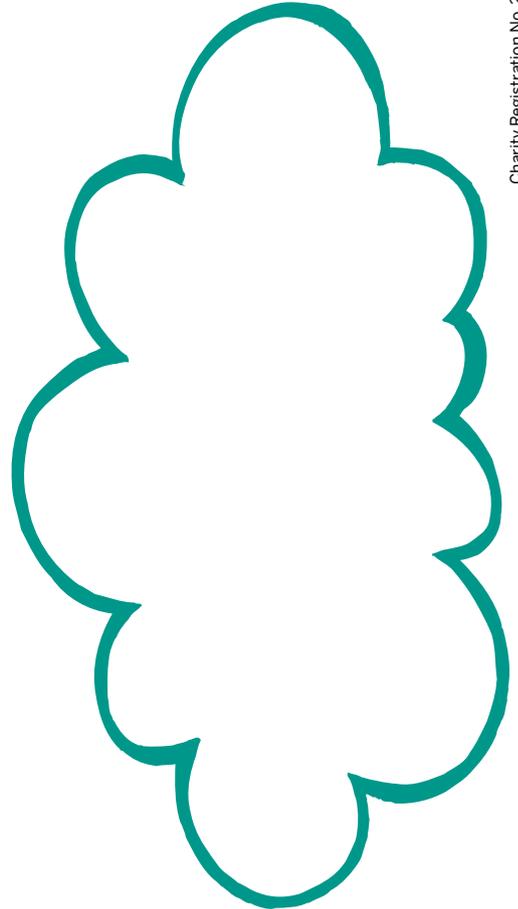
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'We're expected to
be perfect, like

 **BARBIE
DOLLS** 

or something and if
we aren't then

**WE GET
BULLIED'**



A teenage girl



SESSION TWO:



BODY IMAGE AND SELF-ESTEEM

Aim

- * To encourage greater awareness of the issues in this country around body image and the disparity between genders.
- * To provide ways for young people to have a positive body image and to encourage it in others.

Learning outcomes

- * Young people understand the disparity in genders in England, particularly around appearance and body image.
- * Young people understand that this disparity isn't inevitable or unavoidable.

Materials needed

- * A postcard of Psalm 139, one per person³, cut out from pages 7–10.
- * Some pens or felt tips.
- * You may want a map of the world (or the ability to project one) to show where different countries are.
- * The ability to project or show two videos from YouTube and either Facebook, Instagram or a similar social media site. You may also want to watch these videos beforehand as – whilst we believe it is vital young people hear the message they contain – some shots are slightly revealing.
- * You may want to run sessions one and two of the Seriously Awkward youth resources on identity and mental health before running this session. If you don't have access to them already, simply visit childrenssociety.org.uk/youth-signup to get a free copy.

Reality today

- * Recent findings from the Good Childhood Report show that girls are less happy than they used to be. One in seven (14%) of 10 to 15 year old girls are unhappy with their lives as a whole – up by over 25% in the last five years. By contrast, the proportion of boys who are unhappy with their lives as a whole has remained stable at 11%.
- * The difference is even starker when it comes to how children feel about the way they look. More than one third (34%) of girls are unhappy with their appearance. By contrast, the proportion of boys of the same age who are unhappy with their appearance has remained stable at around 20%.
- * In the last Good Childhood Report (2015) that compared happiness with appearance against other nations, England ranked last out of 15 countries and had the most pronounced gender differences.

Icebreaker (5-10 minutes)

- * As you are going to be asking people to pair up with someone else who has the same physical features to highlight everyone's differences, you should be really strict on whether or not people are the same.
- * You should also not allow people to pair up with the same person twice.
- * Remember to be sensitive to your group, eg omit the second question if someone in your group has alopecia.

* **Ask** everyone to pair up with someone else who has:

- The same size hands
- The same length hair
- The same colour of eyes
- The same size nose
- The same double jointed joint
- A mole in the same place
- The ability to roll their tongue
- Similar looking big toe
- Similar looking ears
- Similar looking finger nails

* **Ask** people to share how many times they didn't pair up. The winner is the person who paired up the least.

* **Reflect** as a group on how different and varied everyone's bodies are – none of us are quite the same.

Get started (10 minutes)

* **Ask** each young person to stand up or sit down (or a similar action) depending on whether they think children in the country you name have higher or lower satisfaction with their body and appearance than the previous country:

- Is Turkey higher or lower than Germany? (**Higher**) Germany than Romania? (**Lower**) Romania than Spain? (**Higher**) Spain than England? (**Lower**) England than Ethiopia? (**Lower**).

* **Share** that children in England ranked 13th out of 15 for health and for appearance, 14th for satisfaction with their body and 15th for self-confidence compared to countries from across the world.

* **Ask:** In general, do they think boys or girls are happier with their body?

* **Ask:** In Colombia, is girls' satisfaction with their body higher or lower than boys? (**Higher**) In Nepal? (**Higher**) In Algeria? (**Higher**) In South Africa? (**Higher**).

* **Share** that England was the country with the greatest gender disparity between the body image of girls and boys (the mean score for boys in England was around 15% higher than for girls) – but this doesn't have to be the case. Colombia, Nepal, Algeria and South Africa are all examples of how this isn't inevitable, it is cultural. This should give us hope!

Go deeper (20 minutes)

* **Divide** your young people into groups of three or more and give them a couple of minutes to discuss what they think makes men and women beautiful.

* **Invite** the groups to share what they discussed.

* **Explain** that what is seen as physically beautiful changes all the time (eg in the past a tan wasn't fashionable as it indicated that you were a peasant who had to work outside in the sun). It is different across the world right now and has varied a lot over time. (You could gather together some images to show if you wish, or see video suggestions below).

* **Show** these two videos: tinyurl.com/GCRvideo1 and tinyurl.com/GCRvideo2

* **Ask** your young people to discuss whether they would change the answers they originally gave about what makes people beautiful.

Engage and faith in focus (20-30 minutes)

* **Ask** your young people why they think we have certain perceptions of beauty despite the historical variations, and why they think girls are much less happy than boys when it comes to body image.

* **Invite** everyone to go through any blogs, sites or feeds of social media sites they use, to see if they can spot posts, photos or videos that promote a certain way of looking.

- If they don't all have phones on which they can access social media, blogs and sites, you could do it all from the projector rather than unnecessarily excluding anyone.

* **Explain** a lot of things we see online say we should look a certain way and be a certain size (be it 'the thigh gap', waist, breast, or any other size).

* **Share** this quote from model Robyn Lawley, about measuring ourselves against certain standards:

'It is just another tool of manipulation that other people are trying to use to keep [you] from loving [your] body.'

* **Give** space for people to discuss and react to this quote.

* **Share** that God calls us to love ourselves – mind, body and soul – as part of the Greatest Commandment (Matthew 22.37-39). God never calls us to measure ourselves.

* **Give** out the postcards.

SESSION TWO: BODY IMAGE AND SELF-ESTEEM

- * **Invite** someone to read out Psalm 139.1-16. They might want to read it out a couple of times.
- * **Ask** your young people which verse they were most inspired by, and which they found hardest.
- * **Explain** that God is not fickle in the way that culture and fashion can be. It is easy and understandable to feel like we aren't fearfully and wonderfully made when everything and everyone expects us to look a certain way and shape. But the great hope, the Good News, is that God does not judge us in the way the world does.
 - God says you are wonderfully made. It doesn't mean we are perfect – after all the world, our culture and our bodies are flawed and broken.
 - It can be true for boys, but it is especially important that girls hear that it doesn't have to be this way.
- * **Ask** them to dream of how the world could be a better place in relation to how people feel about themselves and their body.
- * **Invite** them to share their dreams and write them in the cloud on the back of their postcard.
- * **Challenge** your young people to be the change that they want to see, to start with the person in the mirror (feel free to play a bit of Michael Jackson!).
- * **Invite** them to offer suggestions of how they can make their dreams a reality (making them as practical as possible) and then to write any ideas they are going to take up on the back of their postcard.

Pray (5 minutes)

- * **Explain that** one way to pray is to take a text and pray through each line or statement at a time.
 - For example, with the Lord's Prayer, you might pray by saying 'Our Father' and then praying about anything that comes to mind, eg 'Our' reminds us that we are a community of believers, whilst 'Father' may prompt you to reflect on your identity as a child of God.
 - **Pray** through Psalm 139 using this style, either individually or collectively.

Takeaway activity (3 minutes)

- **Invite** each young person to take home their postcard as a reminder of what they want to do and that no matter what they see, hear or read, they are wonderful in the eyes of the one who really matters, the God who made them and loves them.



WHAT NEXT

So, you've surveyed and spoken to your youth group. What now?

1. Discuss with your fellow leader(s) which topic(s) they felt were most pertinent.
2. Compare the young people's answers to the questionnaire in the Engage section of the first session with the table below:
 - Take each young person's scores and compare it to the score for their age and gender. Tally any areas there is significant variation from the national average, eg 1 or 2 points below, in the final two columns. If any scores are particularly concerning and you can identify the individual (remember you didn't collect their names), consider having a discreet conversation.
 - Once you've done this, you can also see if there are any of the 10 areas that are consistently low for your group as a whole or either gender.
3. Draw together points 1, 2, the map, and their thoughts on church. Did any area(s) or topic(s) stand out? If so, what do you do? Don't assume you know the solution, ask! Run a session following the principles of participation.
 - * For example, if school was an issue, is it something in particular? To find out, you could run a traffic light activity where young people write down what is good, needs adapting, or needs to stop at school. Their answers are likely to shed more light. As a group, you can then decide whether to raise any issues.

If you haven't already, why not use our award-winning Seriously Awkward resource on identity, mental health, sexting, relationships and other tough topics.

Visit childrenssociety.org.uk/youth-signup for a free copy.

| QUESTION | 11-YEAR-OLD BOYS | 11-YEAR-OLD GIRLS | 12-YEAR-OLD BOYS | 12-YEAR-OLD GIRLS | 13-YEAR-OLD BOYS | 13-YEAR-OLD GIRLS | 14-YEAR-OLD BOYS | 14-YEAR-OLD GIRLS | 15-YEAR-OLD BOYS | 15-YEAR-OLD GIRLS | 16-YEAR-OLD BOYS | 16-YEAR-OLD GIRLS | LOW SCORE BOYS | LOW SCORE GIRLS |
|-----------------------|------------------|-------------------|------------------|-------------------|------------------|-------------------|------------------|-------------------|------------------|-------------------|------------------|-------------------|----------------|-----------------|
| FAMILY | 8.6 | 8.7 | 8.4 | 8.4 | 8.3 | 8.2 | 8.2 | 8 | 8.1 | 8 | 8.3 | 7.9 | | |
| CHOICE | 7.1 | 7.2 | 7 | 7 | 6.9 | 6.8 | 6.8 | 6.7 | 6.8 | 6.7 | 6.9 | 6.7 | | |
| TIME USE | 7.6 | 7.6 | 7.6 | 7.4 | 7.5 | 7.3 | 7.5 | 7.1 | 7.4 | 6.9 | 7.4 | 6.9 | | |
| MONEY AND POSSESSIONS | 7.6 | 7.6 | 7.4 | 7.3 | 7.3 | 7.1 | 7.2 | 6.9 | 7 | 6.8 | 7 | 6.8 | | |
| HEALTH | 8.3 | 8.4 | 8.2 | 8.2 | 8.1 | 8 | 8.1 | 7.9 | 8.2 | 7.7 | 8.2 | 7.5 | | |
| FRIENDS | 8.1 | 8 | 8 | 7.9 | 8 | 7.9 | 8 | 7.8 | 8.1 | 7.7 | 8.1 | 7.6 | | |
| APPEARANCE | 7.4 | 7.1 | 7.2 | 6.7 | 7 | 6.5 | 6.9 | 6.4 | 7 | 6.3 | 7 | 6.3 | | |
| FUTURE | 6.8 | 6.9 | 6.7 | 6.7 | 6.6 | 6.6 | 6.5 | 6.5 | 6.4 | 6.3 | 6.4 | 6.4 | | |
| HOME | 8.2 | 8.3 | 8.1 | 8 | 8.1 | 7.9 | 8 | 7.8 | 7.9 | 7.8 | 7.9 | 7.6 | | |
| SCHOOL | 7.4 | 7.8 | 7.1 | 7.3 | 6.9 | 7 | 6.8 | 6.8 | 6.7 | 6.6 | 6.7 | 6.7 | | |

For further guidance, simply email us: church@childrenssociety.org.uk

PRINCIPLES OF PARTICIPATION:

Participation is a process that uses dialogue to bring about change based on the opinions and ideas of young people. It's a right, and one of the three cornerstones of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989. The process enables adults and young people to learn and develop.

1. Avoid tokenism. Only ask for feedback on things that young people can actually influence or change, eg don't offer the young people a £10,000 budget or to run every service when they could decide how your £x youth budget is spent, or could run one element of each Sunday service.

- 2. Allow self-expression.** It's all part of knowing what people really think.
- 3. Respect everyone and every idea.** No idea is a bad one. No one should be discriminated against.
- 4. Acknowledge contributions** that young people have made.
- 5. Feedback** how and why a certain decision has been made.
- 6. Do it safely.** Follow the advice on page 2.



Right now, in Britain today, there are children and young people who feel scared, unloved and unable to cope. These are the children and young people we work with.

We listen. We support. We act. We help make small changes that make a big difference.

There are no simple answers – often it is complex – so we work with others to help tackle these problems. Only together can we make a difference, not just to individual lives but to the lives of millions of children both now and in the future.

Because no child should feel alone.

We are proud of our close partnership with the Church, who play a vital role in our work. We want to work with every church in the country so that, together, we can change the lives of many, many more children.

For more information on this resource, please contact:

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The statistics given in each session are taken from our Good Childhood Reports. For the 2017 and 2016 reports, visit:
www.childrenssociety.org.uk/the-good-childhood-report-2017

Bible quotations are from the New International Version of the Bible (NIV).

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