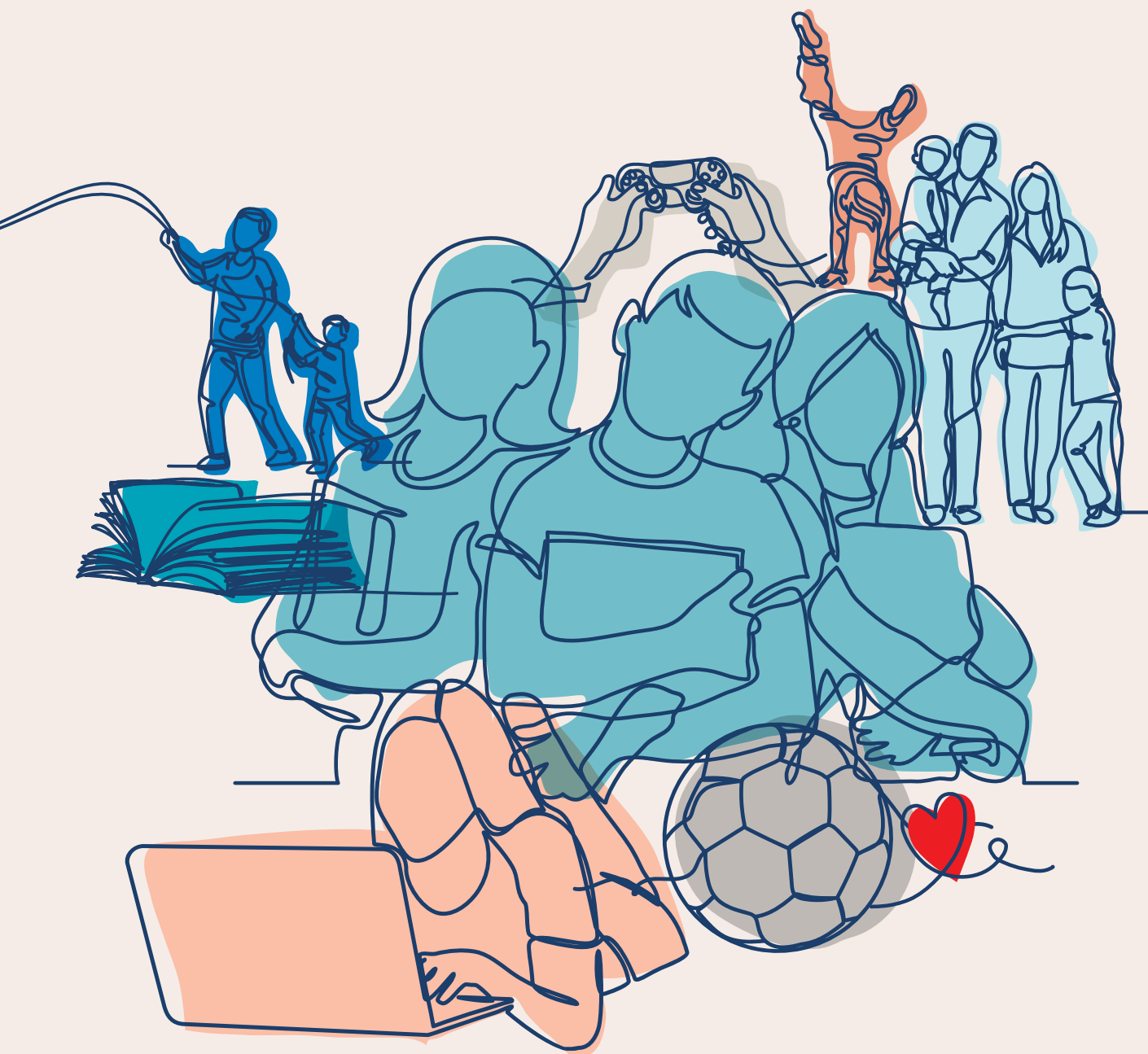


THE GOOD LIFE

– according to children





THE GOOD LIFE

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The good life – according to children

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Tænketanken Mandag Morgen

Ny Kongensgade 10, DK-1472 Copenhagen K

Tel.: +45 33 93 93 23

Web: www.taenketanken.mm.dk

The LEGO Foundation

Højmarksvej 8, DK-7190 Billund

Web: <https://www.learningthroughplay.com>

Tænketanken Mandag Morgen

Gry Nynne Thorsen Analyst

Jonas Keiding Lindholm, Managing Director

Julie Tranholm-Mikkelsen, Project Coordinator

Mathias Heilesen, Senior Analyst and Deputy Manager (Project Manager)

Pernille Skaarup, Project Coordinator

The LEGO Foundation

Anne Holme, Evidence Specialist

Charlotte Degn, Communication Specialist

Christina Witcomb, Initiatives Lead

Lena Venborg Pedersen, Initiatives Lead

Project reference group

Anne Holme, Evidence Specialist, the LEGO Foundation

Lars Geer Hammershøj, Associate Professor, Aarhus University

Nanna Strøm Rasmussen, Pedagogical Psychological Counselling Consultant,
City of Aarhus (previously with the National Council for Children, *Børnerådet*)

Pernille Hviid, Associate Professor, University of Copenhagen

Signe Korsgaard, Analysis and Project Manager, *Børns Vilkår*

Data collection

Questionnaire survey, interviews and mobile ethnography have been conducted in collaboration with Epinion.

Editing

Signe Tonsberg, Tonsberg Tekst

Design

Mette Funck, MEFU Grafisk Design

Proofreading

Ulf Houe, text editing and proofreading

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CONTENTS

Foreword	7
Reading guide	8
About the survey	9
Summary	10
Overview: Do children have a good life in Denmark?	12
Chapter 1: The good family life	15
Chapter 2: The good after-school life	31
Chapter 3: The good school life	53
Chapter 4: The role of play in children's lives	69
Chapter 5: How children view the future	81
Methodological appendix	94

“

*... and then parents should
ALWAYS listen to their children.
No matter how stupid it is.
There can be a lot behind the things
that children and young people say,
if they would just listen.”*

- CLARA, 14

Foreword

An entire generation of school children have spoken – let us listen

In Denmark and the Nordic countries we have a long-standing tradition of seeing children as resourceful and insightful agents of their own lives. Even so, their voices are often missing when politicians and experts debate the very issues that directly affect children's lives. And that is why the LEGO Foundation and the think-tank Tænketanken Mandag Morgen decided to ask children themselves how they think and feel about important aspects of their lives.

We were curious as to what matters most to children in terms of family life, school, leisure time, friends and play. What is important for thriving in the family? How does the good life look outside of school? What is the role of play – and what value does it create? What determines well-being in school? And how does the future look?

As such, *The good Life – according to children* offers a perspective on children's wellbeing, development and learning that is somewhat rare – namely that of the children themselves. And we are grateful for the unique insights the children have given us. They have shared openly their thoughts, feelings and perspectives about how they see the good life across the arenas where it unfolds: family, school, leisure time – online and offline.

We are very aware of the great differences in children's circumstances and challenges in an international context and the resources available to address these. The children's voices featured in this report are Danish, and as such they voice concerns, dreams and aspirations stemming from that reality. Hopefully, they will resonate and inspire in an international context as well.

We hope that this publication can provide both valuable insights and inspiration to establish children's voices more firmly in the debates that influence their lives.

Enjoy!

Kasper Ottosson Kanstrup, Vice President, the LEGO Foundation

Jonas Keiding Lindholm, Managing Director, Tænketanken Mandag Morgen

About the LEGO Foundation

The goal of the LEGO Foundation is to inspire and develop the builders of tomorrow – a mission shared with the LEGO Group. The LEGO Foundation wants to create a future where learning through play helps children to be creative, engaged and to become lifelong learners. The work of the LEGO Foundation is about highlighting the importance of play in children's development and rethinking the framework for learning. In collaboration with leading experts, influential players, educators and parents, the LEGO Foundation will equip, inspire and activate champions of play.

About Tænketanken Mandag Morgen

Tænketanken Mandag Morgen is one of the leading politically independent think-tanks in Denmark. We put the big issues and challenges of our welfare state on the agenda, and bring people together to inspire new solutions, including welfare, the green transition, digitalisation, governance and democracy. Our partners are public, private, professional and voluntary organisations working to understand and contribute to the development of society. Together, we create and disseminate new knowledge. We hold conferences and workshops, and operate networks. We develop and test new initiatives and find new paths towards better and more citizen-oriented welfare. Our work is always based on solid analyses, broad player involvement, innovation and sharp communication.

Reading guide

The report paints a picture of what children regard as being a good life, and is the first of its kind in Denmark to have asked children across all school grades, from grades 0-10.

The report is divided into five chapters. The first three chapters focus on the main arenas in children's lives – family, leisure and school. Chapter 4 takes a close look at the role of play in children's lives, while Chapter 5 provides an insight into how children view the future.

The report focuses in particular on play and the importance of play in children's lives. Therefore, there is a separate chapter about play (Chapter 4), just as each of the other chapters zooms in on the subject of play within the theme of the respective chapter.

The report has two further cross-cutting themes, which are addressed in each of the five chapters:

The dark side of childhood: The main focus of the survey has been to learn more about what children consider a good child life, but in order to create as nuanced an analysis as possible, each chapter has a separate focus on the darker side of childhood and low well-being.

Corona: The purpose of the survey is not to shed light on the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on children's lives, but as the quantitative data was collected during the second major lockdown in Denmark in December 2020 and January 2021, it is important to be aware of any corona bias. Therefore, the survey has continually been compared to other surveys that have shed light on the effect of the coronavirus pandemic on children's daily lives during 2020 and 2021.

The report looks at children's views on what constitutes a good life for children across three age groups: Children in grades 0-3 (approx. 5-9 years old), grades 4-6 (approx. 9-12 years old) and grades 7-10 (approx. 12-16 years old). To make it clear which age groups the figures in the report concern, the following icons have been used to distinguish between the three age groups:



The report begins with a summary of the main findings and conclusions as well as key figures on child well-being in Denmark anno 2021. The summary is followed by the five chapters that make up the bulk of the report.

Chapter 1: THE GOOD FAMILY LIFE:

Children's family well-being, their views on what constitutes a good family life, the most important family values and family activities.

Chapter 2: THE GOOD AFTER-SCHOOL LIFE:

Children's views on what constitutes a good after-school life, the value of friendships, the children's attitudes towards digital technologies and their participation in organised after-school activities.

Chapter 3: THE GOOD SCHOOL LIFE:

Children's well-being at school, children's views on what constitutes a good life at school, the most important school values and the children's attitudes to exciting teaching.

Chapter 4: THE ROLE OF PLAY IN CHILDREN'S LIVES:

Children's perceptions and attitudes towards play and the role of play in children's lives.

Chapter 5: HOW CHILDREN VIEW THE FUTURE:

Children's views about the future, and what they are looking forward to and concerned about.

At the end of the report is a methodological appendix that discusses in more detail how the survey and analysis came about.

About the survey

The good life – according to children provides a broad insight into Danish children's experience of and views on what constitutes a good life for children. The survey focuses on the children's responses and takes a close look at the children's own perspectives, attitudes and experiences.

The survey focuses on Danish children in general. It obviously embraces children in disadvantaged situations, but it does not focus in particular on disadvantaged children as such.

The aim of the survey has been to involve *all school-age* children – from grades 0 to 10. To carefully consider what all the different children have to say, the survey is designed according to the children's different premises and the level of abstraction at the respective grade levels. This means, among other things, that the questionnaires and interview questions are different for children in grades 0-3, 4-6 and 7-10.

What we have done

The good life – according to children is based on extensive quantitative and qualitative data material. The quantitative data consists of a questionnaire survey with a representative cross-section of children in grades 0-10. The data collection was carried out in collaboration with the market research company Epinion, and the children's responses were collected via their parents in Norstat's online panel. In this way, the children's parents were able to give their consent and at the same time answer initial background questions which are also part of the analyses.

1,702 responses were collected between 18 December 2020 and 22 January 2021. Account was taken of the children's different ages, in that the electronic questionnaire was adapted in terms of the choice of words, length, complexity/abstraction level and the functionality of the questionnaire. For the youngest children, for example, the questionnaire was read out automatically, and the response options were illustrated with pictograms.

Prior to the survey, a literature study on children's play and well-being was prepared, and six children's interviews were conducted to identify key themes and to adapt the language of the questions and response options to the children's ages.

The quantitative results were elaborated on and nuanced with the insights from the qualitative part of the survey. The qualitative data consists of 22 in-depth children's interviews and a mobile ethnographic study, in which 22 children from grades 4-10 answered questions using their mobile phone over a three-week period.

The survey was conducted by the LEGO Foundation and Tænketanken Mandag Morgen, which has full responsibility for the text.

For more information about the design of the survey and the methodology, please refer to page 94.

CONTRIBUTORS

Throughout the survey, we have received valuable input from a number of child experts. Our thanks to:

Lars Geer Hammershøj,
Associate Professor,
Danish School of
Education, Aarhus
University

Pernille Hviid,
Associate Professor,
Department of
Psychology, University
of Copenhagen

Signe Korsgaard,
project and analysis
manager, Borns Vilkår

Anne Holme, evidence
specialist, The LEGO
Foundation

Nanna Strom Rasmussen, analysis
consultant, pedagogical
psychological
counselling consultant,
City of Aarhus
(previously with the
National Council for
Children)

75%

of the children in grades 4-6 and 7-10 say that, the most important thing for feeling good at home is “that my family loves me”.

25%

of the children in grades 4-6 and 7-10 agree with the statement : “I worry when I think about the future”.



My family is, of course, important to me. They support me at home, and I can always count on them”. - IDA, 14

Summary

The basic message about children's lives in Denmark in 2021 is positive. Most children in Denmark are happy, feel secure and get on well with their friends and family. 83% of children in grades 0-3 state that they have a high level of well-being, while 88% of children in grades 4-6 and 7-10 have a medium or high level of well-being. A large majority of children of all ages (84%) also say that they get on well with their families. However, even though Denmark is a good country in many respects for children, it is not all roses: A small group of children (4%) often feel lonely, and about 12% of children in grades 4-6 and 7-10 have a low level of well-being.

A loving and secure family is essential

According to the children, a good life depends on many different factors – the most important being their family. Parents top the list as the most important people in their lives. And when asking about their family values, the children generally agree that family love and feeling secure are the most important.

However, the children's relationship with their family changes with age. The oldest children focus more on spending time with their friends, talk less with their family and experience more conflicts at home. This is also clear when older children are asked to prioritise their family values. For example, it is more important that “my family listens to what I have to say” for children in grades 7-10 (47%) compared to children in grades 4-6 (36%).

Friends are important – in and out of school

Another decisive factor for children having a good life is friends. This becomes clear, for example, when children in grades 4-6 and 7-10 are asked what they enjoy doing most in their spare time. The majority (50%) say that spending time with their friends is what they like doing most. The children also mention friends and the sense of community as being among

the most important reasons for participating in organised after-school activities.

However, friends don't just play an important role in children's spare time; they are also crucial for their well-being at school. In grades 0-3, most children (46%) say that the best thing about school is being with their classmates, and the same pattern transpires for children in grades 4-6 and 7-10. When asked “What is most important for your well-being at school?”, most (56%) answer, “that I'm in a good class where no one is excluded”.

The children state that friends are important for many different reasons. They are good for sharing experiences, and for laughing and having fun with – but they are also the children's confidants. 74% of children in grades 4-6 and 7-10 say that it is “very important” for their well-being that they can count on their friends.

Children like technology – but also understand the downsides

Digital technologies and social media play a key role in the life of children today. Computer games are the second-most popular activity in children's spare time, and many children spend several hours a day using their computer or their mobile phone. Children are also generally positive about technology. When asked: “What is the worst thing about having a mobile phone, computer etc.?”, 29% of children in grades 4-6 and 7-10 say there is nothing bad about them.

Children see digital technologies and social media as having many positive aspects. For example, 83% of children in grades 4-6 and 7-10 state that “I can talk and spend time together with my friends” as one of the three best things about having a mobile phone or computer. Several children also use their screens and the new media for entertainment. 64% reply “I can have fun, like watching funny videos or memes”, while 54% respond “I can play games and rise in levels”.

74%

of children in grades 4-6 and 7-10 say that being able to count on their friends is “very important” for their well-being.

93%

of children in grades 0-3 say that play is important for them.



A good friend is someone who wants to listen to you and play with you and someone you can have fun with.” - EBBE, 11

Even though children are positive about digital technologies and social media, many children in the survey – especially the girls – are also aware of the disadvantages. For example, among girls in grades 7-10, one in three (34%) mentions that you are “always logged on” as a negative aspect.

Play is important – for most children, and particularly for the youngest

Play is an essential part of children's lives, and is crucial for children being able to develop social skills as well as their imagination and creativity. And children recognise the value of play. For example, 93% of children in grades 0-3 and 66% in grades 4-6 say it is “fairly” or “very” important for them to play. In grades 7-10, the figure has fallen to 27%. Here, the majority (52%) say, however, that they still play to some extent. According to the children who stop playing, it happens at around the age of 12.

Children offer many reasons for why play is important for them. In grades 0-3, most children (37%) say that the best thing about play is laughing together. Among the children in grades 4-6 and 7-10, 83% and 74%, respectively, say that the best thing about play is laughing and having fun. However, the children also make a point of mentioning that play stimulates their imagination and creativity. For example, the children in grades 4-6 think that the second-most important aspect of play is “being able to invent your own rules or play together”.

But even though play is important for many children, it is under pressure in certain areas. Among children who spend time playing, 10% to 17% say that they don't have enough time to play.

Teaching must be experimental and relevant

Children spend many of their waking hours at school, and fortunately most children enjoy going to school. 46% of children have a high level of well-being at school, while 12% have a low level. However, older children are not as happy going to school, and in grades 7-10, as many as 18% of children have a low level of well-being at school.

Almost four out of 10 children (38%) think that exciting lessons are crucial for their well-being at school. However, children's views on what makes teaching exciting varies according to age. In grades 4-6, most (48%) children answer that the teaching is exciting “when we experiment and try out new things”. For children in grades 7-10, the teaching is particularly exciting “when I learn something useful”. This response option was selected by 54% of children.

Although pupils in Denmark have quite a big democratic say in what happens at school compared to schoolchildren in other countries, there is still room for improvement when it comes to involving the pupils. At any rate, almost one in three children (29%) say they would like to decide more at school.

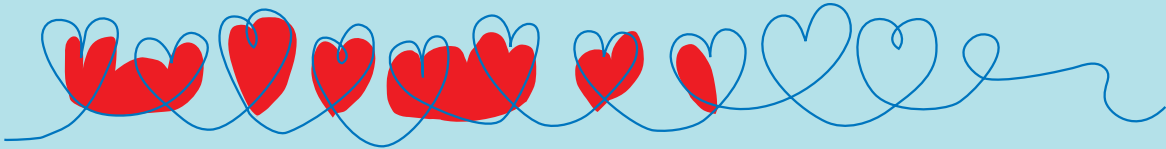
The future is (mostly) bright

The future belongs to our children – and fortunately most children are positive about what awaits them. 57% of the children in grades 4-6 and 7-10 say that thinking about the future makes them feel positive, while 25% feel worried.

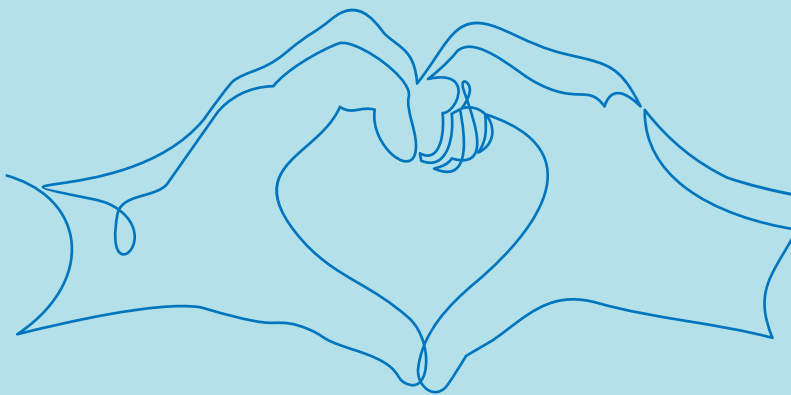
Children look forward to many different things related to adulthood – with most of them looking forward to starting an education or a job. On the other hand, many children – especially the oldest girls – worry about whether they are capable of living up to all the expectations that are associated with growing up.

Overview: Do children have a good life in Denmark?

Most Danish children have a high level of well-being ...



On a scale of 0-10, children in grades 4-6 and 7-10 give their well-being a score of **7.5**

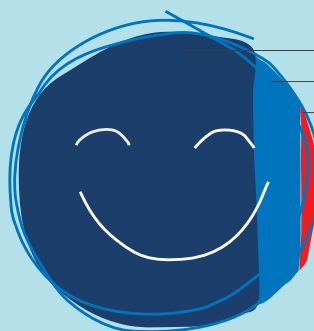


57%

of children in grades 4-6
and 7-10 are positive
about the future.

84%
of children
across all school
grades feel they
“get on very
well” with their
families.

**83% of children in grades 0-3 consider
their lives to be good**



- 83% My life is good right now
- 16% My life is OK right now
- 1% My life is bad right now

... but there is room for improvement

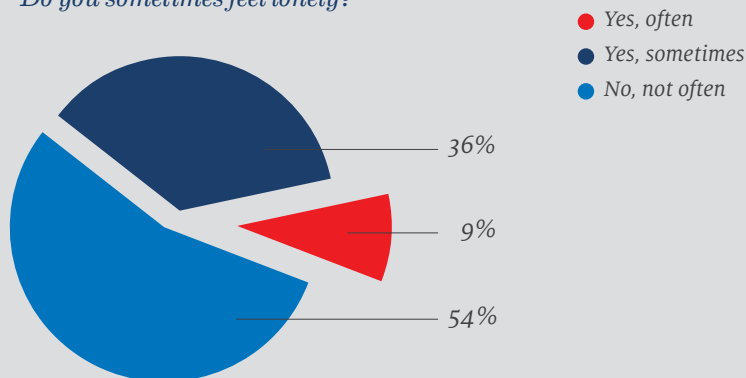
18%

*of children in grades 7-10
do not enjoy school.*



Almost one in 10 girls in grades 7-10 often feel lonely

"Do you sometimes feel lonely?"

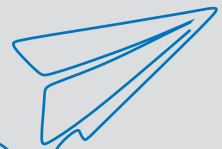
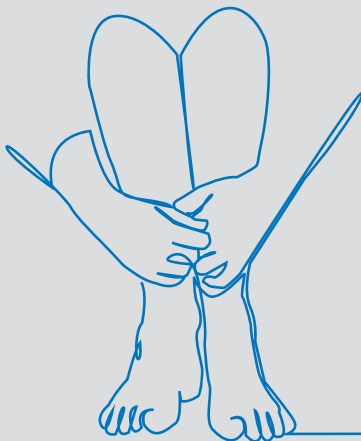


Children with low life satisfaction ...

- ... feel lonely more often
- ... do not get on as well with their families
- ... are unhappy at school
- ... worry more about the future

18%

**of children in grades
0-3 don't think they have
enough time to play.**



***One in four children in grades 4-6 and 7-10 feel
worried when thinking about the future.***



1

THE GOOD FAMILY LIFE

“

I really like having a loving family that is always there for us if we're feeling upset or angry.

And that they will always help. And that they're not the sort of parents that say 'you can only have oats for breakfast, and spinach for supper'.

Which is nice, because there are other families who don't have any time for their children at all.”

- FIE, 11

THE GOOD FAMILY LIFE

SUMMARY

A loving and secure family is key to children having a good life as children. Much of what we often take for granted is what the children in the survey stress as being the most important elements for a good family life. A child's parents are the most important people in their lives – also for older children in grades 7-10. According to the children, being loved by and the sense of security they derive from their families are what count most for feeling happy at home.

Children who are comfortable at home with their family are generally more content with their lives. The same goes for children who have parents that take an interest in their lives.

However, children focus differently on family well-being and family values. The older the children, the less preoccupied they are with their family, just as family well-being tends to decline slightly with age. It is less important for children in grades 7-10 to have a grown-up who can help them, and they don't have as much fun with their family. On the other hand, it is more important for these older children that their family takes an interest in what they have to say.

Most children are happy at home

A good family is often a prerequisite for a happy childhood – and fortunately, most children in Denmark are happy with their families. Of the children surveyed, 84% say they get on very well with their family at home. Children in grades 0-3 in particular experience a high level of family well-being¹. Of these younger children, 87% respond that they get on very well with their families. In grades 7-10, family well-being is slightly lower, but still high – 79% respond that they get on very well with their families at home. See Figure 1.

Children who get on well with their families are generally happier with their lives overall. Among children who experience a high level of family well-being, 30% are generally satisfied with their

lives, while just 8% generally have a low level of life satisfaction². However, it is different for children who experience a low or average level of family well-being. Here, just 7% of children generally have a high level of life satisfaction, while as many as 31% generally have a low level of life satisfaction. See Figure 2.

Familial love and feeling secure most important

We often take the most important things in life for granted. Still, the children in the study emphasise several of the basic – and sometimes overlooked – values and people when asked to point out what or who is important for their well-being.

In the survey, 99% of the children in grades 4-6 and 7-10 believe their parents are “important” or “very important” for their well-being, while for children in grades 0-3 the figure is 100%.

¹ Family well-being is measured on the basis of the question “Do you get on well with your family at home?” Low family well-being = “No, not that well”, medium family well-being = “Yes, quite well”, and high family well-being = “Yes, very well”.

² Life satisfaction is measured by using ‘Cantril's Ladder’, which has also been used in other Danish and international studies of children's well-being. The measurement consists of a questionnaire that asks about life satisfaction on a scale of 0 to 10. The answers are then categorised as low (responses of 0-5), medium (responses of 6-8) and high (responses of 9-10) life satisfaction in line with other studies.

High family well-being – but declines slightly with age

“Do you get on well with your family at home?” Proportion answering “Yes, very well”.

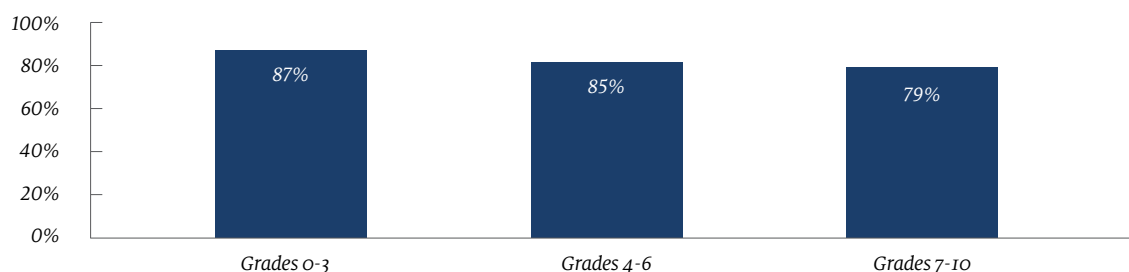


Figure 1. Family well-being across age groups.

Note: n=1,702. Answered by all children. Other response options were “Yes, quite well”, “No, not that well” and “Don’t know”. “Don’t know”=1-2%.
Source: Epinion for the LEGO Foundation and Tænketanken Mandag Morgen.

Life satisfaction and family well-being go hand in hand

“State life satisfaction on a scale from 0 to 10, where 10 means ‘The best possible life’ and 0 means ‘The worst possible life’.”

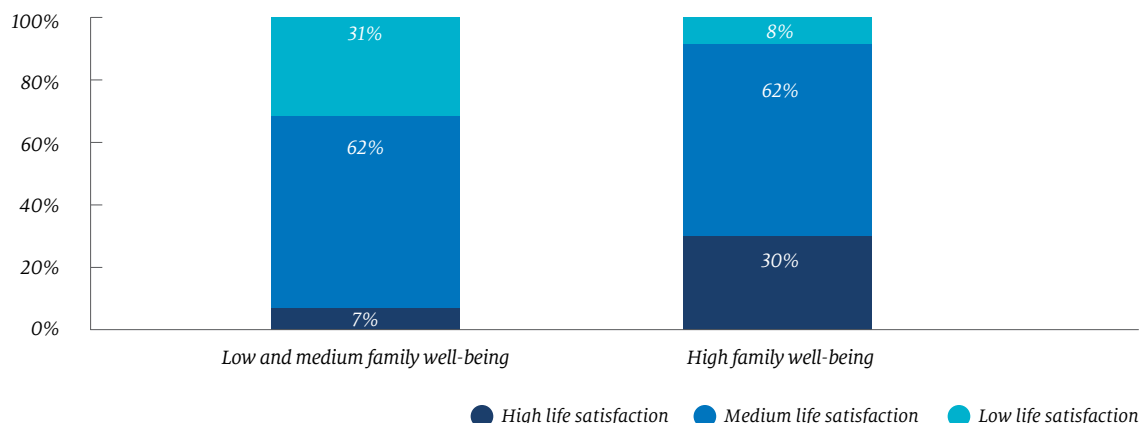
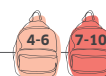


Figure 2. Life satisfaction across family well-being.

Note: n=1,013. Answered by children in grades 4-6 and 7-10.
Source: Epinion for the LEGO Foundation and Tænketanken Mandag Morgen.

WHAT THE CHILDREN SAY – ABOUT THE EVER-PRESENT FAMILY

“My family is, of course, important to me. They support me at home, and I can always count on them. However, I don’t think about them the whole time, as I know that they’re there.”

– IDA, 14

“They help me when I don’t really know what to do. If, for example, I’m bored, they help me decide what to do. And if there’s something in school that I can’t figure out, they’ll help me with that as well.”

– KAREN, 9

And even though many children focus on spending time with their friends, it is their parents who top the list in terms of being most important for their well-being. Siblings and grandparents are also seen as being important – though slightly less so than friends and parents. See Figure 3.

When the children are asked in interviews and using mobile ethnography what makes a good family, several of them use phrases such as that parents “are always there for you”, or that parents “will do anything to make you feel happy”. It is important for children that their parents are easy to talk to, and that they are available when their children need help. For children, parental love is closely linked to feeling safe.

In the questionnaire survey, a majority of the children indicate that the most important thing for getting on well with their families is being loved. Among children in grades 4-6 and 7-10, 72% and 78%, respectively, mention familial love as the most important family value. See Figure 4.

Children in grades 0-3 usually express themselves more simply when asked what they think makes a good family. It’s all about, for example, being comforted if you have hurt yourself, or being helped if you’re feeling bored. However, the statements indicate – as for the older children – a desire that your parents are always there for you, and that they provide support and care. Mads, aged 8, describes it as follows:

“My Mum and Dad are good at saying good morning and making me feel welcome. And they’re good at comforting me if I’ve hurt myself.”

This is supported by the results of the questionnaire survey, where most of the children in grades 0-3 (35%) respond that the most important thing for feeling happy at home is feeling good and secure. See Figure 5.

Mum and Dad are the most important people in the world

“How important are these people for your well-being?”

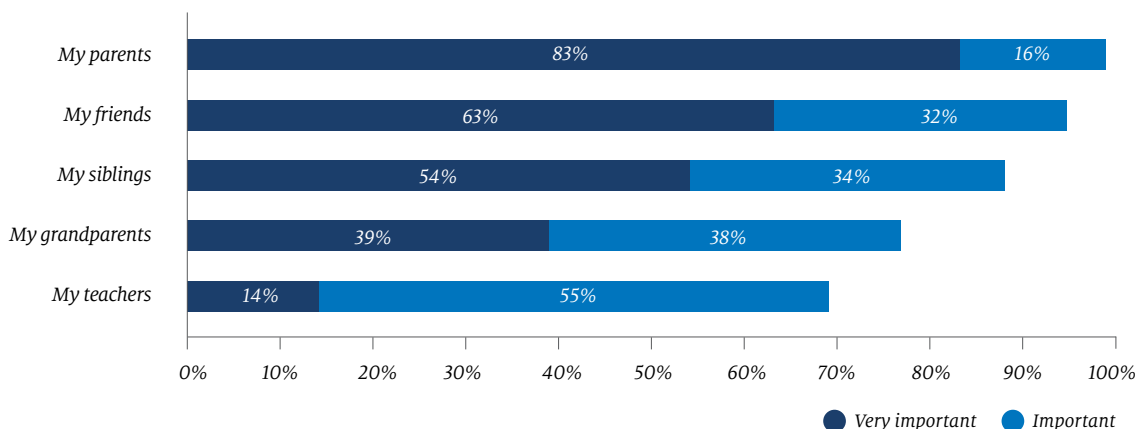
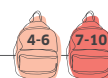


Figure 3: The importance of different people in children's lives.

Note: n=844-1,029. Answered by children in grades 4-6 and 7-10. Children without any siblings or grandparents were not asked about how important they are. The other response options were “Not that important”, “Not at all important”, and “Don’t know”. “Don’t know”=1-2%.

Source: Epinion for the LEGO Foundation and Tenketanken Mandag Morgen.

WHAT THE CHILDREN SAY – ABOUT WHAT MAKES A FAMILY GOOD

“That you can talk about anything and everything.”
– ANNE, 12

“I think a good family is one where you stick together, and where you look after each other.”
– THEA, 13

“That they are loving and are always there for us if we’re unhappy or angry. And that they will always help.”
– FIE, 11

Love is the most important family value



“What is particularly important in terms of getting on well with your family at home? Tick max. three.”

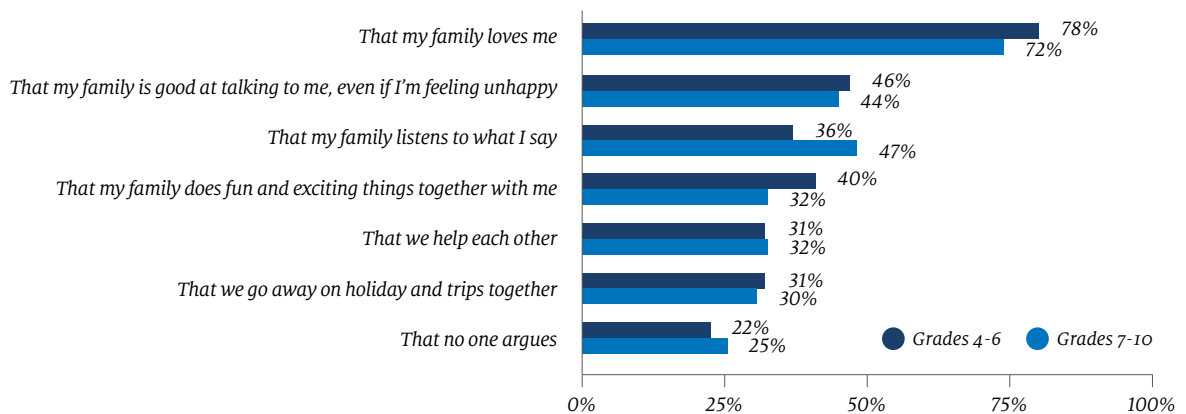


Figure 4: The most important things for getting on well with your family.

Note: n=1,029. Answered by children in grades 4-6 and 7-10. Differences across age are significant for the response options: “That my family loves me”, “That my family listens to what I say”, and “That my family does fun and exciting things together with me”. “Other”=2%. “Don’t know”=0-1%.

Source: Epinion for the LEGO Foundation and Tænketanken Mandag Morgen.

Children in grades 0-3: Feeling secure is most important



“When you’re at home, what is the most important thing for you to feel good? (Tick one).”

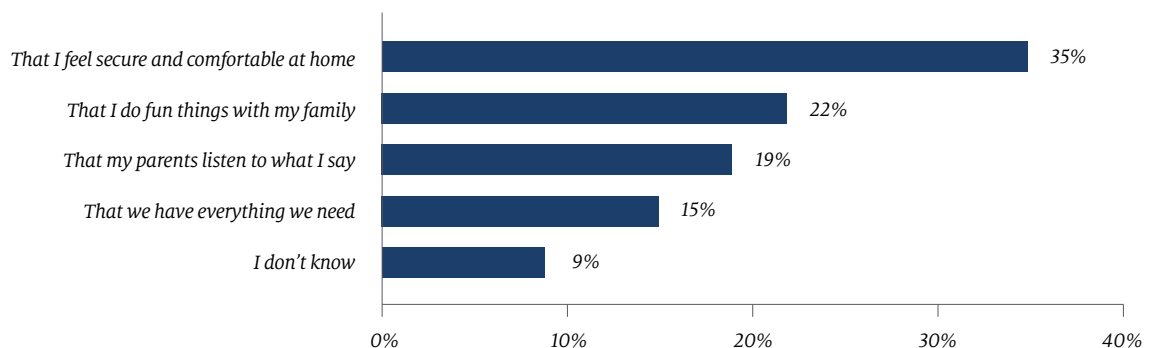


Figure 5: The most important things for feeling good at home.

Note: n=673. Answered by children in grades 0-3.

Source: Epinion for the LEGO Foundation and Tænketanken Mandag Morgen.

“

What I really like about my family is that we always have fun together, and that we're always there for each other.”

- CECILIE, 13

WHAT THE CHILDREN SAY – ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF FAMILY TIME

“Dad spends most of his time working. And sleeping. I’m not saying that he’s tired all the time, but he spends his time working. Then he comes home for four hours, and then we have to go to bed. It would be quite nice if we could spend a bit more time doing things such as going out to play, drawing, building LEGO and just doing a few more things together.”

– MARIA, 11

“I really like it when we’re all together. It doesn’t matter that much what we do. For example, going out for supper, playing a game, having a meal on the patio, or just sitting around talking about what we’ve been doing.”

– VIOLA, 11

Presence, interest and time together boost family well-being

Children get on better with their family the more time they spend engaging with their parents. There is a clear link between the children’s responses to how happy they are with their family and their parents’ responses to how often they spend time talking, playing or engaging in activities with their children. For children whose parents state that they play or participate in activities with their children “every day” or “several times a week”, 86% experience a high level of family well-being. For children whose parents indicate that they play or participate in activities with their children less often, 71% experience a high level of family well-being.

In both the interviews and the mobile ethnography, it is clear that the extent to which parents take an interest in and invest in family life is decisive for children being able to thrive at home. The children say that *what* you do is not so important – what matters is that you spend time *together*. Several children would like to spend more time with their families, with some also mentioning that their parents work too much. The time which is spent together does not have to involve spending a lot of money or require a lot of planning – it’s more about being close and having a nice time. Because when you spend time together, you are able to talk about things better, as Frederik, aged 10, explains:

“We’ve slept many times in shelters, and I think it’s really cosy. In our family, we like spending time outdoors. It’s great, because you can’t just switch on the TV or PlayStation, or look at something on YouTube – you’re together more. You talk about things, and you just spend much more time together.”

However, time is not the only factor which is important for family well-being. It is also important that parents are genuinely interested in their children’s lives. Of the children in grades 4-6 and 7-10, 60% say that their parents take an interest in their lives, and that “it’s nice”, while one in three (32%) children say their parents

What is most important in a good family?

In 2012, the National Council for Children in Denmark asked its children’s panel, comprising children in grade 6, what they thought was most important in a good family (out of 10 options). (The children could tick max. three options.)

1. That their mother and father don’t fight: 52%
2. That they went away on holiday and excursions together: 46%
3. That their mother, father and siblings all lived together: 45%
4. That you can trust one another other: 41%
5. That you respect and understand each other: 38%
6. That you can be yourself: 33%
7. That you talk together each day: 29%
8. That the household finances are OK: 26%
9. That everyone is involved in making decisions: 20%
10. That parents do not scold their children: 13%

National Council for Children (2012).
Det gode børneliv (The good child life).

³ The parents were asked: “How often do you spend time playing with your child?” and “How often do you spend time engaging in activities with your child?” Here, the two variables were combined, so that parents who answered “every day” or “several times a week” to either the question about playing or about engaging in activities are grouped together.

WHAT THE CHILDREN SAY – ABOUT PARENTS TAKING AN INTEREST IN THEIR LIVES

“Well, the only thing that I’m into – if you can put it like that – is K-pop (Korean pop music), and my mother is pretty indifferent, while my father is a bit more interested.”

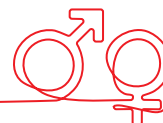
– ANNE, 11

“As parents, it’s important to understand one’s children when enquiring about what they get up to in their daily lives. It’s also a way of getting closer to your children and finding out what they are up to so that you have something to talk about. Parents need to take an interest in what their children do.”

– NIKOLAJ, 15

sometimes take “too much” interest in their lives. An additional 5% say that their parents don’t take a lot of interest in what they do, but that it suits them fine. When the children’s parents take an interest in their lives, it is clearly reflected in the children’s level of well-being. Among children who are happy that their parents take an interest in their lives, almost one in three children (29%) have a high level of life satisfaction, while just 8% have a low level of life satisfaction. Among children who find that their parents do *not* take an interest in their lives, only one in 10 (10%) have a high level of life satisfaction, while as many as 36% have low life satisfaction. See Figure 6.

According to the children, parents can express their interest in different ways. Several children say that it’s nice when their parents ask how they are, or if they accompany them to their hobbies and after-school activities (e.g. gymnastics, football etc.). Several also say that it’s nice when their parents try to familiarise themselves with their children’s interests and universes, but which the adults do not immediately understand. For example, computer games.



Good talks and fun and games: Boys and girls have a different take on families

The idea of what makes a good family differs in some ways for boys and girls. For the girls in grades 4-6 and 7-10, it’s important that their families are good at talking to them, even if they are upset. This is important for 49% of girls compared to 41% of boys. The boys, on the other hand, associate having a good family more with doing fun and exciting things together. 39% of boys highlight this as an important family value, compared to 33% of girls.

Parents must take an interest in their children’s lives

“Do your parents take an interest in your life?”

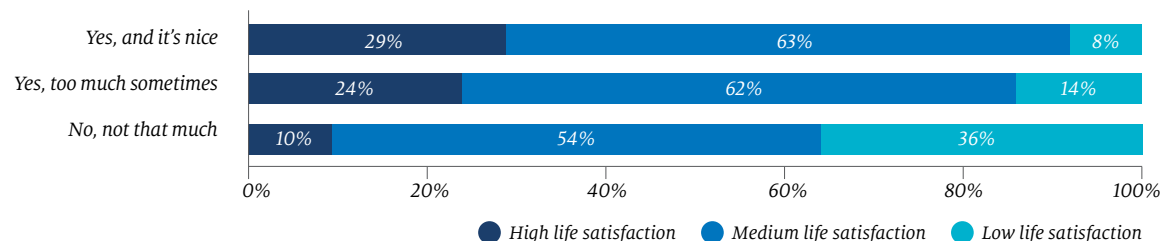
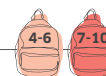


Figure 6: Life satisfaction by parental interest.

Note: n=1,003. Answered by children in grades 4-6 and 7-10. The response option “No, not that much” comprises the two response options “No, not that much, and it suits me fine” and “No, not that much, but I would like them to take more interest”, which have been merged due to the low n figure and similar distribution on the life satisfaction variable.

Source: Epinion for the LEGO Foundation and Tenketanken Mandag Morgen.

WHAT THE TEENAGERS SAY – ABOUT CHANGES IN THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH THEIR FAMILY

“My relationship with my family has changed. I can’t be bothered to spend as much time with them; I spend more time in my bedroom.”

– CECILIE, 13

“Yes, definitely [the relationship with her family is changing, ed.]. Mostly because I’m the youngest, and when the others became older, they suddenly didn’t want to spend time with me anymore. And then it was my turn, and I found other interests and spent less time with my family.”

– RIKKE, 14

But parental involvement in their children’s lives can also become excessive. The oldest children in particular say that their parents sometimes cross the line, and end up being annoying and intrusive. For example, it can be irritating when you are expected to talk about things which you feel are insignificant, says 14-year-old Salina:

“They might ask too many questions about school. Today, for example, when I had to take time off school, my mother kept asking whether she should write a note or what she should do. Whereas I just said that I would tell Ole. It often makes you feel slightly stressed when they ask so many questions, so I just end up being a bit bad-tempered or abrupt. It’s like – you’ve already answered the question. They forget, and their excuse is that they have three children to think about.”

Older children see their family in a new light

When children hit their teens, their views about what constitutes a good family life changes. Even though their parents continue to play a key role in the children’s lives, it becomes less important “that

there are adults who can help me with my problems”. While 44% of children in grades 4-6 consider it very important, it is only very important for 37% of children in grades 7-10.

The survey also shows that as the children grow older, it becomes less important for them “to do fun and exciting things with your family”. On the other hand, good communication becomes more important. Among the children in grades 4-6, about one in three (36%) think that it is important for family well-being that the family listens to what they say – among children in grades 7-10, almost half (47%) think it is one of the most important factors for family well-being. See Figure 7.

The eldest children describe, among other things, how they have grown apart a little from their parents. They spend less time talking to their parents and more to their friends. It can also be difficult because they develop different views and opinions to their parents. On top of which, several teenagers say that their parents are not always good enough at admitting when they’re wrong, for example 13-year-old Julie:

Different family values in grades 4-6 and in grades 7-10

“What is particularly important in terms of getting on well with your family at home? Tick max. three.”

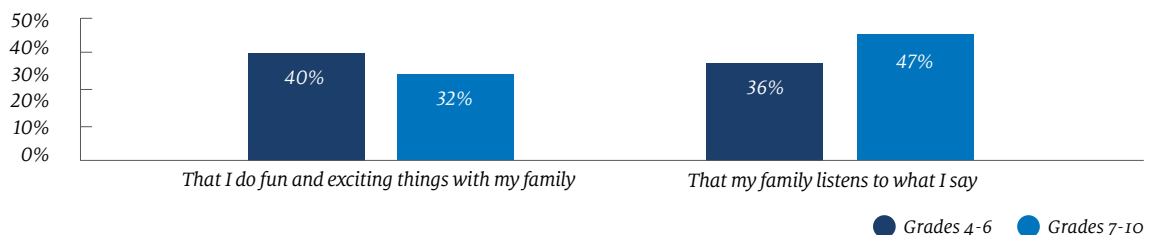
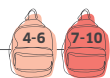


Figure 7: Differences between what children in grades 4-6 and 7-10 deem what is most important for getting on well with their family.

Note: n=1,029. Answered by children in grades 4-6 and 7-10. In addition to the above response options, there were seven others, including “Other” and “Don’t know”.

Source: Epinion for the LEGO Foundation and Tænketanken Mandag Morgen.

WHAT THE CHILDREN SAY – ABOUT CO-DETERMINATION AT HOME

“ I am usually allowed gaming until 11 pm. Mostly it is up to me, but sometimes when I am up a little later, my parents will come up and say, ‘time for bed’. That’s ok. I remember, I used to get really mad before, but now I understand why it makes sense to go to bed. Probably because I am more mature now.
– RASMUS, 14

“ Yes, on a scale from 1 to 100, they probably hear 50%, and the other 50% they don’t hear.”
– SIMON, 7

“They often don’t listen, especially if they know that they’ve made a mistake. In other words, if they know they’ve done something wrong, they won’t listen if I explain it to them, or tell them that it’s upset me.”

Parents and children also spend less time together as the children get older. The older the children, the less often their parents say that they help with homework, talk, play or participate in activities with their children. Among parents of children in grades 0-3, for example, 31% report engaging in activities with their child every day, while the figure for parents of children in grades 7-10 is 15%.

Some children also say that the relationship with their parents has changed because they no longer share the same interests. It can cause friction when parents, for example, don’t understand why their child, as a young person, prioritises things in the way they do. Some children say that they no longer have as

much fun with their parents, and are therefore much less inclined to spend time together. As 14-year-old Rasmus puts it:

“Well, since I became older, I don’t think it’s quite as much fun, and now I want to spend time with my friends. I’ve started doing fewer things together with my parents.”

More co-determination at home?

In Denmark, we pride ourselves on the extent to which children participate in decision-making and their ability to influence their own lives and their surroundings. However, the question is how do children actually perceive their co-determination at home.

The survey suggests that a significant group of children would like more of a say. On the face of it, it is the children in grades 7-10 who are most satisfied with how much they are able to decide at home. Here, 73% think the situation at home is OK as it is in terms

Almost every other child in grades 0-3 would like more of a say at home

“Would you like to have more of a say at home?”

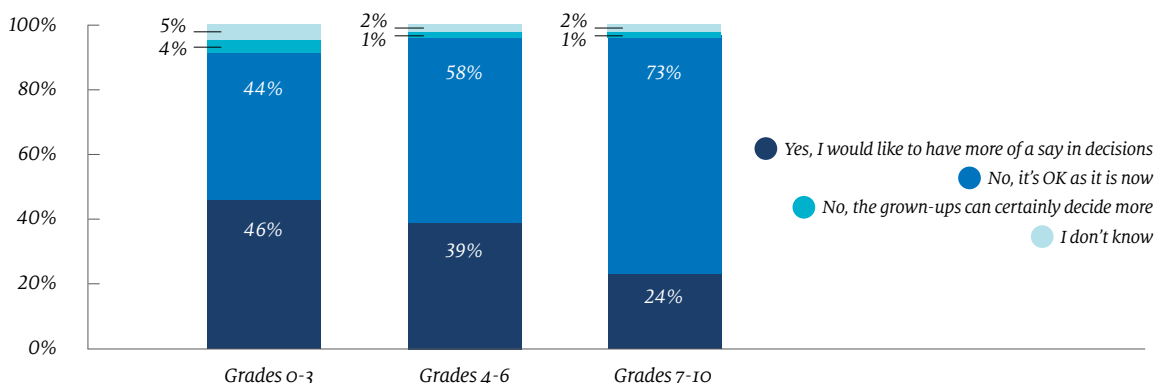


Figure 8: Desire for co-determination in the home by age group.

Note: n=1,702. Answered by all children.

Source: *Epinion for the LEGO Foundation and Tænketanken Mandag Morgen.*

“ I think you could have a ‘children’s day’, where children decide what to have for supper. [...] Perhaps Mondays, for example, so you have a good start to the week, but you also need to end the week well. Friday is a good day, when you get sweets. So Monday could be ‘children’s day’, where you also start the week well.”

– OTTO, 7

“ – and parents should ALWAYS listen to their children. No matter how stupid it is. There can be a lot behind the things that children and young people say, if they would just listen instead of just letting it go in one ear and out of the other.”

– CLARA, 14

of decision-making. On the other hand, the children in grades 0-3 and in grades 4-6 would like to decide more. Just under half (46%) of children in grades 0-3 and 39% of children in grades 4-6 say that they would like to decide more at home. Among the children in all grade groups (i.e. grades 0-10), very few (1-4%) would like to see the grown-ups assuming responsibility for even more of the decision-making. See Figure 8.

What exactly the children want to decide on more varies according to their age. For the youngest children, the desire to be involved in decision-making is very concrete, down-to-earth and without them being aware of possible limitations. They want, for example, to decide how many sweets they can have, what they have to eat, how late they can stay up, or that they can have more pocket money which they can spend as they wish. Thus, they do not really think about the consequences of being allowed to decide more.

The older children – especially the teenagers – talk about co-determination in a more nuanced way. On the one hand they want to decide because “one is no longer a child”, yet they understand that there are other important considerations: They want to spend longer playing computer games, but they understand the importance of getting to bed in good time so they are refreshed for school. They want more pocket money, but they also know that money doesn’t grow on trees.

The decisions the eldest children would like to influence are also more varied: from daily things such as what is served for supper to bigger and more complex decisions about what they can go to in their spare time, or where they live if their parents are divorced.



Family life during the coronavirus pandemic

The family and the home acquired a new role during the coronavirus pandemic. The home became a school and a workplace, and as after-school and leisure activities were put on hold temporarily, the home also became the children’s primary forum to an even greater extent.

A study by the market research firm Moos-Bjerre A/S for Save the Children Youth shows that parents acquired a new role as homework assistants during the pandemic. Approx. 90% of children in grades 0-10 who received help with their schoolwork said that their parents helped them. Approx. 60% said that they received help from their teachers.

Many families felt a stronger sense of togetherness at home during the coronavirus pandemic. The lockdown resulted in a calmer pace of life and more time for being together. However, the intense togetherness also had negative consequences, especially in vulnerable families. For example, for the first time in several years, the relationship between child and parents became the most frequent topic on Børns Vilkår’s children’s helpline. Moreover, a study by Mødrehjælpen (Mother’s Aid) revealed that domestic violence in disadvantaged homes increased significantly.

Sources: Moos-Bjerre for Save the Children Youth (2021). *Skolegang og trivsel blandt skolebørn i en coronatid* (School and well-being among schoolchildren during the coronavirus pandemic). Børns Vilkår (2021). *Samtaler om corona på BørneTelefonen 2020* (Conversations about the coronavirus pandemic on the children’s helpline 2020). Mødrehjælpen (2021). *Voldsudsatte børn under Coronakrisen* (Children exposed to violence during the coronavirus crisis).

The dark side

Low family well-being has major negative consequences

When children have a low level of well-being at home, it has a big impact on their lives. This is evident from a range of well-being indicators.

Children with low family well-being⁴ ...

- *have a lower level of well-being in general:* As many as 31% have low life satisfaction, while for children with a high level of family well-being, the figure is just 8%.
- *are lonelier:* 11% often feel lonely, while among children with a high level of family well-being, the figure is 3%.
- *are more pessimistic about the future:* 32% worry when thinking about the future, against 24% with a high level of family well-being.

- *highlight family harmony to a greater extent as being important:* 34% say that one of the most important things for feeling happy at home is that no one argues, while for children with a high level of family well-being, the figure is 21%.

Children who do not get on as well with their family also rate their family members – parents, siblings and grandparents – as being less important for their well-being. For example, just 59% of children with a low or medium level of family well-being say that their parents are important for their well-being compared to 88% of children with a high level of family well-being. See Figure 9.

Fewer important relationships among children with lower family well-being

“How important are these people for your well-being?” Proportion answering “Very important”.

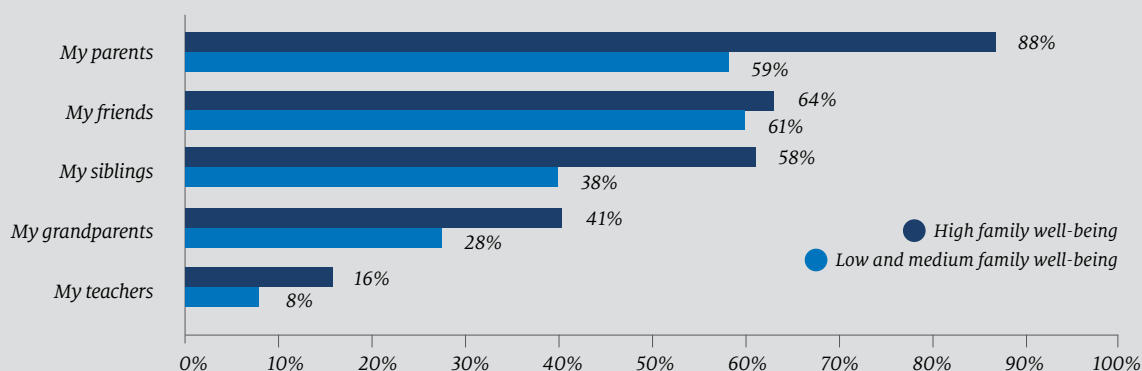
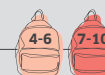


Figure 9: The importance of different people in children's lives by family well-being.

Note: n=840-1,023. Answered by children in grades 4-6 and 7-10. Children without any siblings or grandparents were not asked how important they are. The other response options were “Important”, “Not that important”, “Not at all important” and “Don't know”. “Don't know”=1-2%.

Source: Epinion for the LEGO Foundation and Tienketanken Mandag Morgen.

⁴ Low family well-being here includes children who reply that they are “quite happy” and that they are “not happy” at home. They are compared here to children who reply that they are “very happy” with their family at home. Children who answered “Don't know” (1-2%) to the question about how well they get on with their family have been excluded.

“

I know somebody, and I don't want to sound mean, but he doesn't have a father, and his mother has five children to look after. She doesn't have much money, they share a computer and bedrooms [...], and his mother doesn't have much time because she has to take as many night shifts as possible.”

- LASSE, 12

The role of play in family life

Children largely play with their friends – but many children also like to play and mess about with their family. One in three children in the survey (29%) say they often do fun things with their family. And when the parents are asked how often they spend time playing with their children, one in five (21%) say that they play with their children every day.

The activities that children engage in with their parents include playing board games, building LEGO, watching TV, going to the playground, drawing or playing hide-and-seek. Some children describe it as “just being together”, or “having a cosy time together”, and even though the family activities resemble play, it's not necessarily called that when parents are

involved. Some children – especially the youngest – also mention that they would like to play more with their parents.

A fun family life contributes to a happy child life

The survey shows that children who have fun with their families are also happier in a number of other areas. For example, they experience higher family well-being and higher overall life satisfaction. Children who often do fun things with their family also feel less lonely and are more optimistic when thinking about the future. Among the children who say that they *don't* often do fun things with their family, about half (53%) say that they get on very well with their family. Among

Getting on well and having a good time with your family go hand in hand

“Do you get on well with your family at home?” Proportion answering “Yes, very well”.

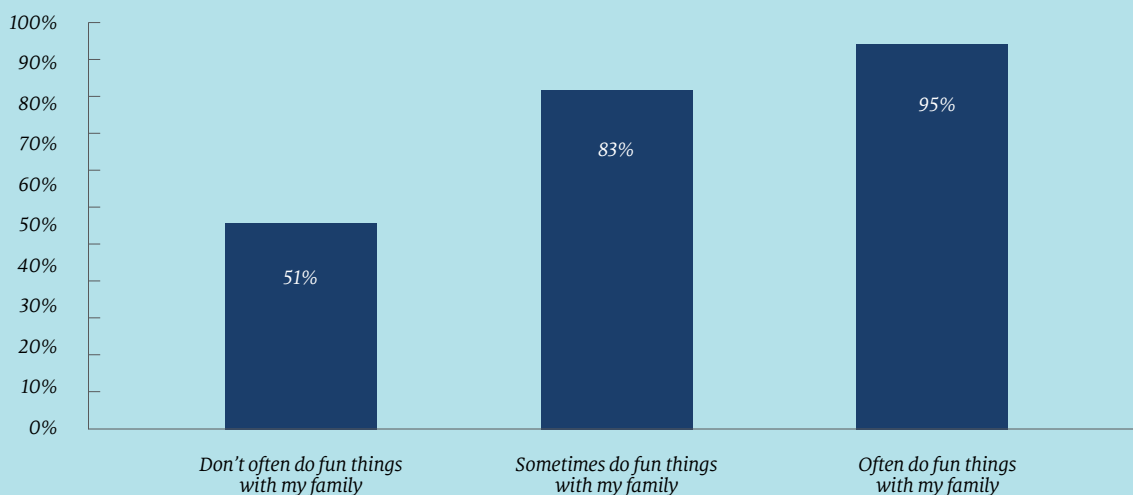


Figure 10: High family well-being by frequency of children doing fun things with their family.

Note: n=1,691. Answered by all children. Other response options were “Yes, quite well”, “No, not that well” and “Don't know”. “Don't know”=0-4%.

Source: *Epinion for the LEGO Foundation and Tenketanken Mandag Morgen.*

WHAT THE CHILDREN SAY – ABOUT PLAY IN THE FAMILY

“Play can bring you a little closer together, as during the week you don’t tend to see as much of each other because of school and work. At weekends we spend more time together.”
– SARA, 14

“Grown-ups can sometimes be childish too. Mostly our father. It’s almost as if he’s one of us sometimes. But it’s great fun.”
– LEA, 15

“They don’t have time to play. They have to cook, they have to work and do lots of other things.”
– VIGGO, 8

the children who say that they often do fun things with their family, 95% say that they get on very well with their family. See Figure 10.

The results also suggest that having fun with your family is linked to the importance that children attach to play. The children who often do fun things with their family set great store by play in general. This is particularly clear for children in grades 0-3. Among the children in grades 0-3 who often do fun things with their family, 80% say that play is very important – while among children who “sometimes” or “not that often” do fun things with their family, the figures are 62% and 41%, respectively.

If the parents are asked how often they play with their children, there is a clear distinction between mothers and fathers. Two in three fathers (67%) play with their child daily or several times a week, while for mothers it is just over half (55%). See Figure 11.

Dad plays more often than Mum

“Do you spend time playing with your child?”

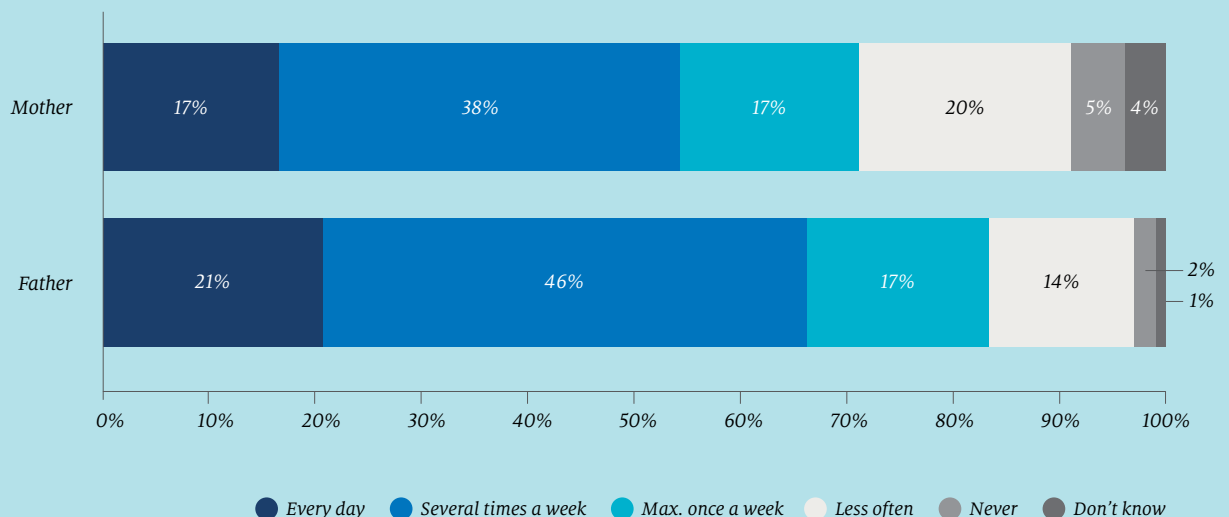
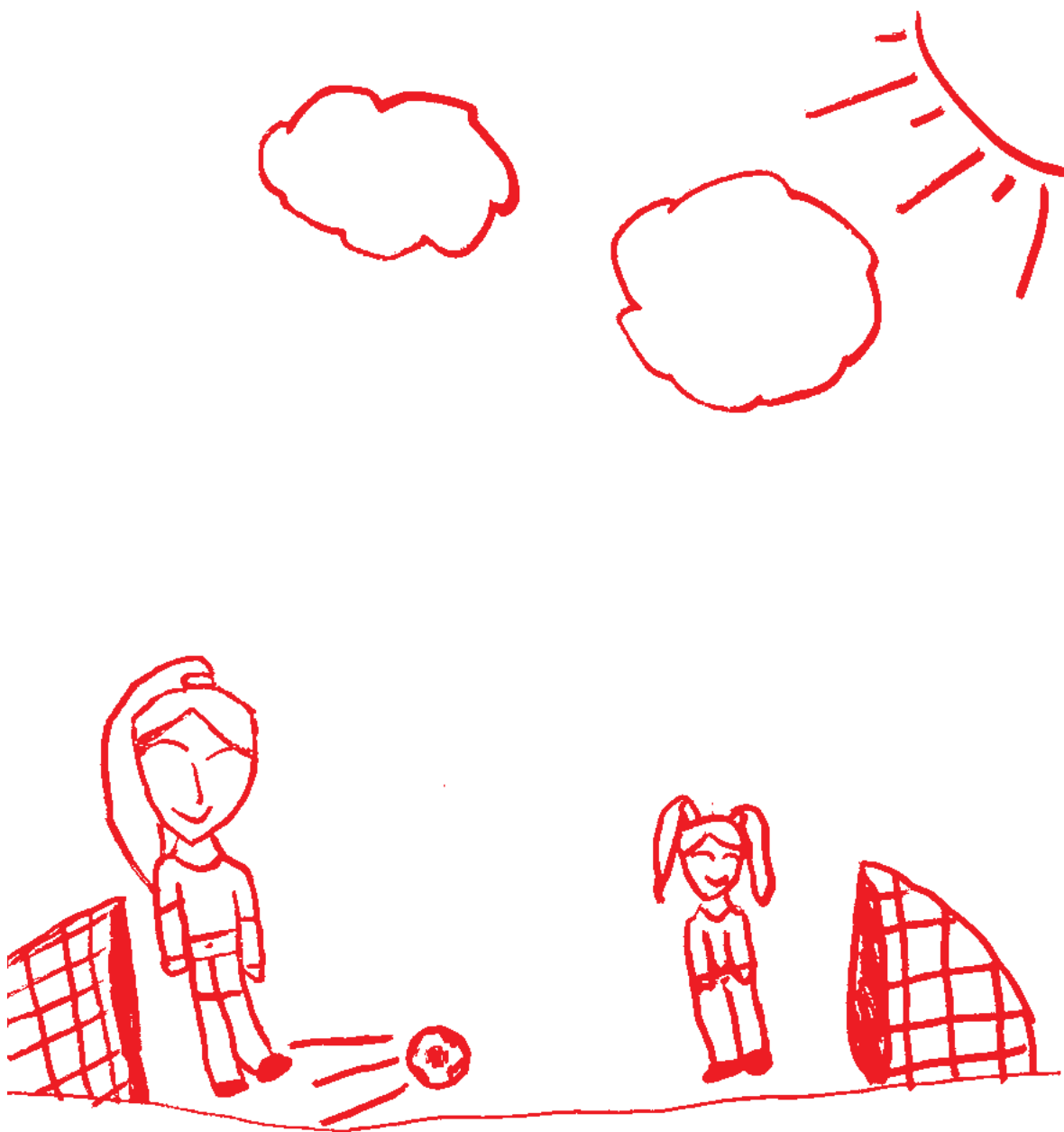


Figure 11: Frequency of playing with one's child for mothers and fathers, respectively.

Note: n=1,702. Answered by the parents of all children.

Source: Epinion for the LEGO Foundation and Tænketanken Mandag Morgen.



2

THE GOOD AFTER-SCHOOL LIFE

“

If you're feeling a bit tired of school or if you have lots of homework, then it's nice to go to gymnastics, spend time with friends and take a break.

It's nice to get out and clear your head for a while.”

- HELENE, 14

Chapter 2:

THE GOOD AFTER-SCHOOL LIFE

SUMMARY

An active after-school life is important for children's well-being. Children engage in both organised and unorganised activities in their spare time, activities which today are both analogue and – increasingly – digital, and sometimes a combination of both. Children are generally positive about technology, but they also understand the drawbacks of digital technologies and social media.

The survey shows that a good after-school life for children largely involves spending time with friends and engaging in groups. Socialising with friends permeates the children's responses to what is the best thing about going to organised after-school activities, and what is the best thing about digital technologies.

Friends and groups are key to a good after-school life

If you ask the children, having fun in their spare time is an important part of their lives. For example, 84% of the children in grades 0-3 say that it is “most important” or “important” to do fun things in their leisure life to have a high level of well-being. See *Figure 12*. Similarly, more than three out of four children (78%) in the grades 4-6 and 7-10 believe that it is important to have a hobby or interest for a good life. See *Figure 13*.

When the children are asked what they like doing in their spare time, spending time with their friends, sport and the digital universe – especially computer games – stand out. See *Figure 14*.

When the children say what they enjoy doing in their spare time, the main common denominator in many of their responses is that it takes place with their friends. For example, many children say that they enjoy doing sport together with their friends, while many – especially boys – say that they like playing computer games, with several mentioning that they do so with their friends.

It's important to have fun in your spare time

“Is it important for you to do fun things when you're off school?”

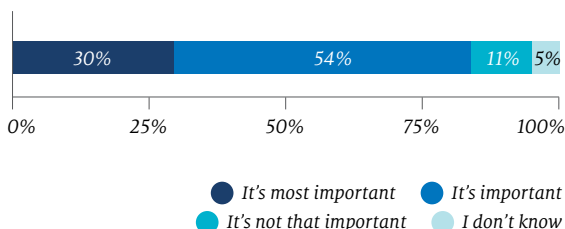


Figure 12: Importance of doing fun things.

Note: n= 673. Answered by children in grades 0-3.

Source: Epinion for the LEGO Foundation and Tienketanken Mandag Morgen.

“How important are the things on the list for you to feel that life is good? ‘That I have an interest which I pursue’.”

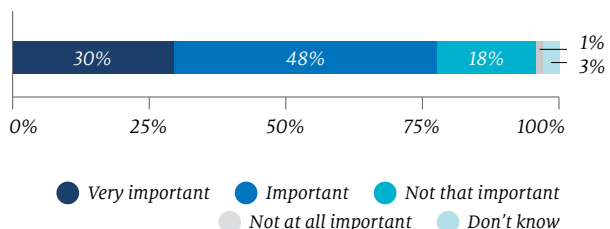


Figure 13: Importance of having an interest.

Note: n=1,029. Answered by children in grades 4-6 and 7-10.

Source: Epinion for the LEGO Foundation and Tienketanken Mandag Morgen.

Friends, physical exercise and digital activities dominate children's after-school lives

"Name up to three things that you like doing best in your spare time." (Open response option)

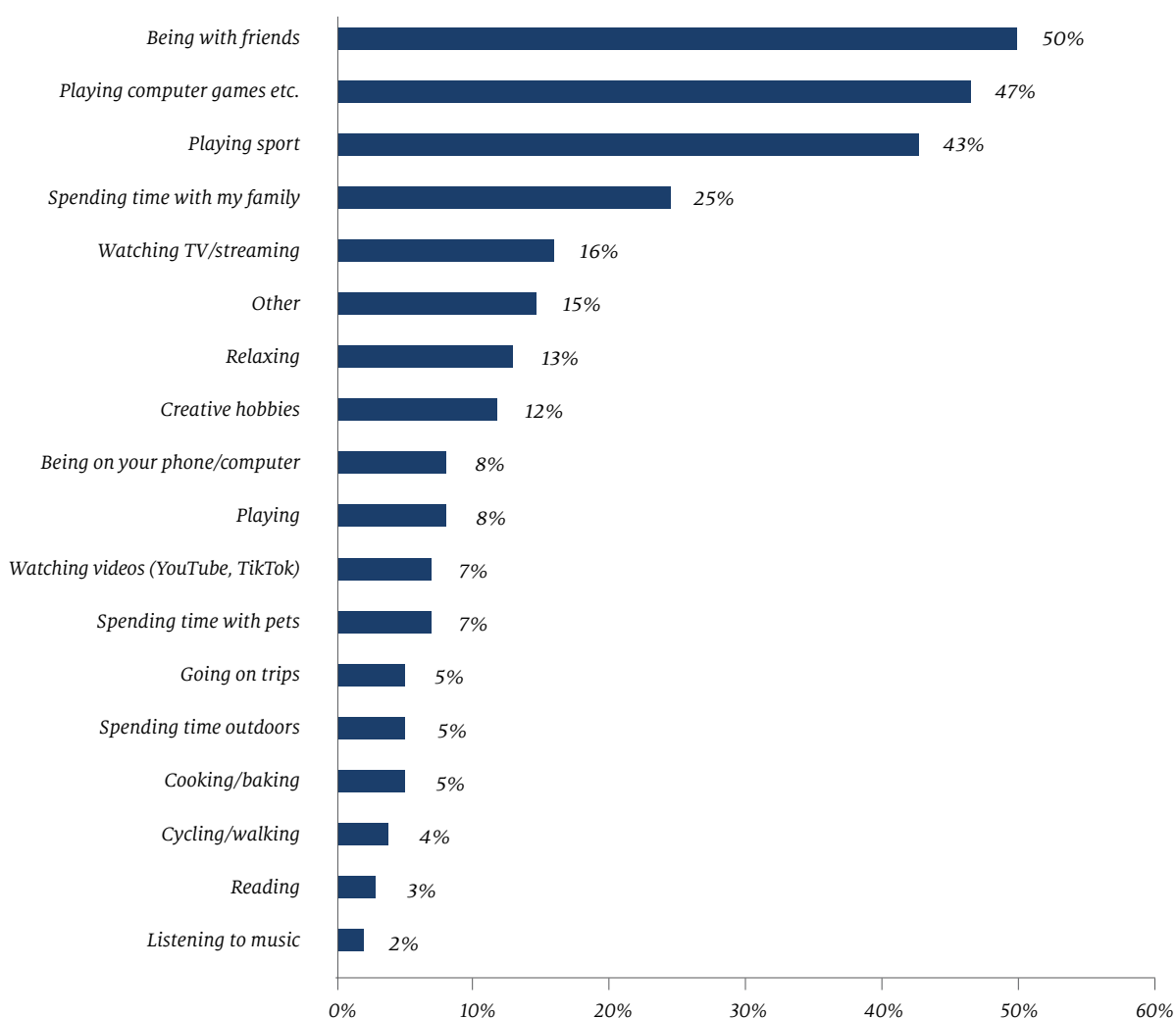
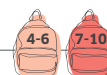


Figure 14: Children's favourite leisure activities.

Note: n= 1,015. Answered by children in grades 4-6 and 7-10. The categories are prepared by coding open responses. Unanswered=1%.

Source: Epinion for the LEGO Foundation and Tænketanken Mandag Morgen.

WHAT THE CHILDREN SAY – ABOUT THE VALUE OF FRIENDS

“ If you're upset or something, a friend will comfort you, and then you can talk it over. And if you've been a bit unhappy in the morning, you get to school where you can talk about it. And that way you get the anger or unhappiness out of your system.”

– KAREN, 9

“ I don't think there's anything about me which my best friend doesn't know. She probably knows more than my own mother :).”

– RIKKE, 14

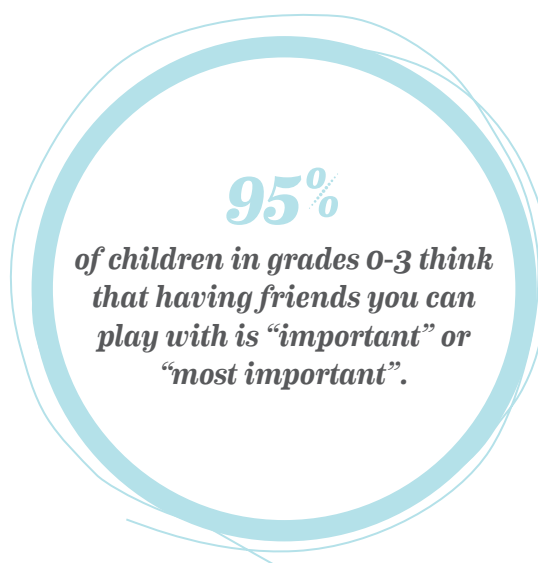
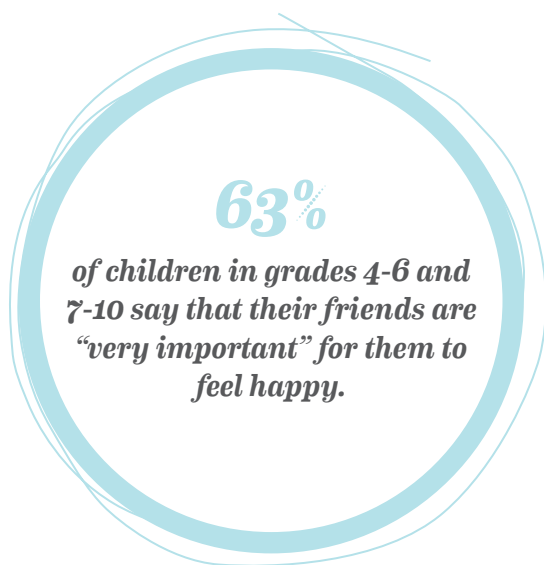
Many children (25%) also enjoy spending time with their families in their spare time, while a large group use digital technologies – for example watching TV/streaming (16%), being on their mobile phones/computer (8%) or watching videos, e.g. YouTube/TikTok (7%).

Children have fun with and share secrets with friends

The fact that spending time with friends is vital for a good after-school life is supported by several results in

the survey. For example, 63% of the children in grades 4-6 and 7-10 reply that friends are “very important”, and a further 32% state that friends are “important” for their well-being.

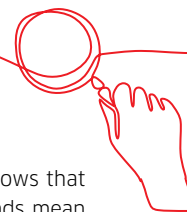
Spending time together with friends and the positive aspects of having friends also dominate the children's responses to what is generally important for a good life. For example, more than nine in 10 (98%) children in grades 4-6 and 7-10 highlight the fact that it is “very important” or “important” to have fun with friends for life to be good. See Figure 15.



“Friends are everything”

The National Council for Children's panel of children in grade 6 from 2012 also shows that friends are important for children to have a good life. When asked “What do friends mean for you?”, 56% say that “friends are everything for me”, while 42% say that “it's good to have friends”. Just 1% say that “friends don't mean that much to me” and another 1% say that “friends don't mean anything”.

National Council for Children (2012). *Det gode børneliv (The good child life)*.



WHAT THE CHILDREN SAY – ABOUT WHAT MAKES A GOOD FRIEND

“A good friend is someone who asks whether you want to spend time together, so you’re not the only one who always asks. They’re just themselves when they’re with you. They talk about themselves, and are happy to tell you everything. And they’re also kind and helpful.”

– HELENE, 14

“A good friend is someone who is happy to listen to you, who wants to play with you, and someone you can have some fun with. That’s what I’d call a good friend.”

– EBBE, 11

“If you didn’t have a good friend, you wouldn’t have anyone to play with during break times.”

– DANIEL, 7

74% of children in grades 4-6 and 7-10 say that it is “very important” to be able to count on their friends to feel happy, while a further 23% say that it is “important”. Several children say that it is good to have friends, because they are there for you in a different way to your family and other adults. For children in grades 7-10 in particular, friends are valuable because they can understand your problems, and because you can confide in them when you don’t want to involve your family. Fifteen-year-old Nikolaj explains it thus:

“You are closer to your friends, and you can talk to them about things which are close to your heart. The deepest secrets. You can do so with your family as well, but the deepest secrets sometimes involve your family, and also your private life. Friends are just a little closer – it’s just different.”

Fun and trusting friends are important for children

“How important are the things on the list for you to feel that life is good?”

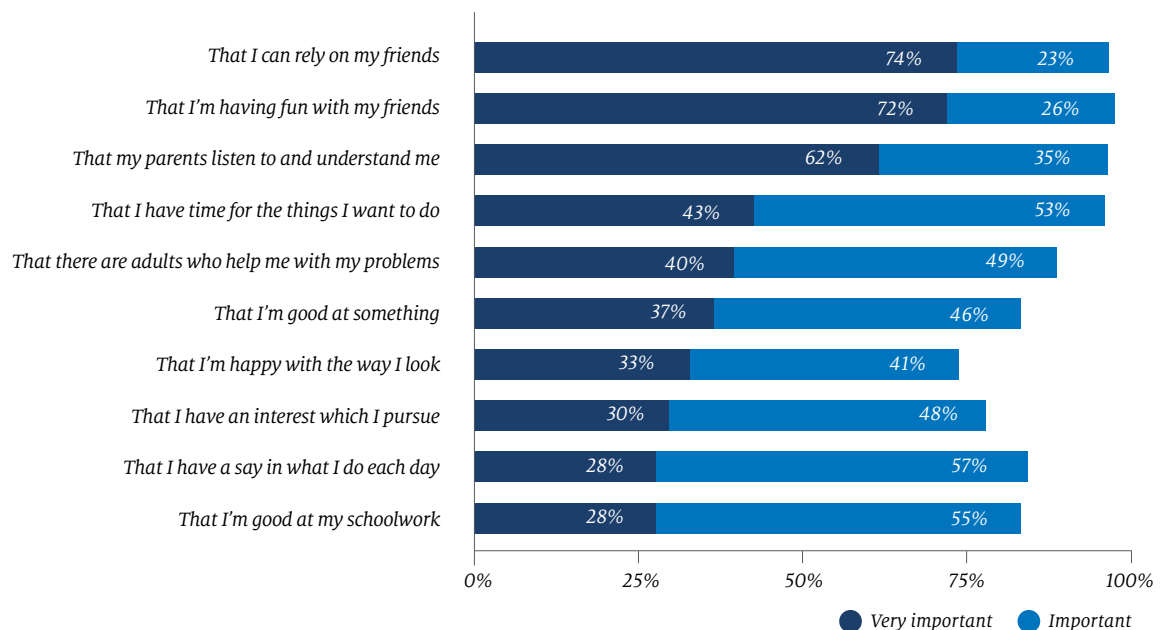


Figure 15: The importance of different things in children's lives.

Note: n=1,029. Answered by children in grades 4-6 and 7-10. The other response options were “Not that important”, “Not at all important” and “Don’t know”. “Don’t know”=0-5%.

Source: Epinion for the LEGO Foundation and Tænketanken Mandag Morgen.

“

*If you don't have a good friend,
you might not really be able to trust
anyone you tell secrets to.
But you can if you have a good
friend – then you can always
trust them.”*

– MARIA, 10

WHAT THE CHILDREN SAY – ABOUT WHAT THEY DO WITH FRIENDS

“ We just have fun. Sometimes I laugh so much that I almost wet myself because my friend Marko is so funny. He’s completely crazy.”
– NIKOLINE, 8

“ Sometimes we dress up, and put on lots of make-up. And sometimes we play computer games. And sometimes we actually practise ballet. And sometimes we play. And sometimes we draw.”
– ALMA, 9

“ You don’t have to do anything. Sometimes we’ll spend a whole day just sitting beside one another looking at our phones or watching TV and not actually doing that much.”
– SALINA, 14

Young children play with their friends – older children hang out

Friends are important for both the youngest and the oldest children– but there are differences in how children of different ages spend time with their

friends. Almost half (49%) of children in grades 4-6 play together with their friends, while this is only true for 13% of children in grades 7-10. On the other hand, many children in grades 7-10 say they talk to their friends. See Figure 16.

In grades 4-6 you play together – in grades 7-10 you talk

“What do you do when you’re together with your friends? Tick as many as you like.”

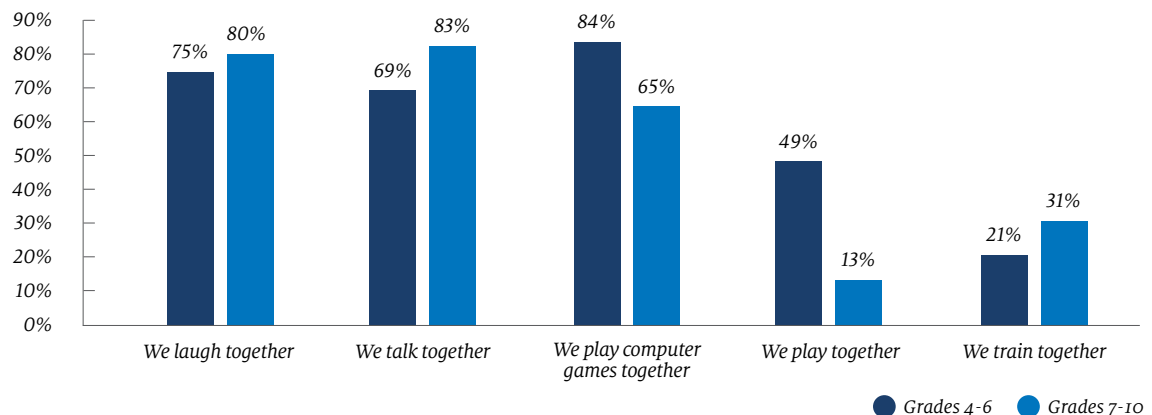
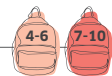
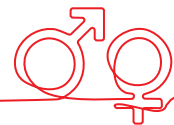


Figure 16: Activities with friends.

Note: n=1,029. Answered by children in grades 4-6 and 7-10. “Other”=8-9% and “Don’t know”=0-1%.

Source: Epinion for the LEGO Foundation and Tænketanken Mandag Morgen.



Girls laugh and talk with their friends while boys play computer games

When asked what children do with their friends, as many as 88% of the boys in grades 4-6 and 7-10 say that they “play computer games together” while the corresponding figure for girls is only 58%. On the other hand, 88% and 84% of the girls in grades 4-6 and grades 7-10, respectively, say that they laugh and talk together, while for boys the figures are 68% and 70%, respectively.

The age differences are also reflected in the interviews and mobile ethnography. For the youngest children, friendships are all about doing things together, such as playing games, building dens etc. The older children also engage in joint activities, but for them it is equally important being able to just “hang out” and spend time together – without having to do anything special. Fourteen-year-old Salina says:

“It’s largely about just being together. I recently visited Rosenborg Castle Gardens with a friend. We just took a blanket and some soft drinks. A change of scene is good. You don’t have to do anything. Sometimes we’ll spend a whole day just sitting beside one another looking at our phones or watching TV and not actually doing that much.”

Mobiles and computers are the social glue in children’s leisure lives

Today, digital technologies and social media are a staple ingredient of children’s spare time. This is confirmed by several of the survey’s results, which also show that it is the possibility of being in contact with friends that is the big attraction of the digital universe.

The older children see their mobiles and computers as a way of staying in touch. When asked what they think is the best thing about having a mobile phone or computer, 83% of children in grades 4-6 and 7-10 reply: “I can talk and spend time together with my friends”. See Figure 17.

Digital technologies are social glue in leisure life

“What’s the best thing about having a mobile phone, computer etc.? Tick max. three.”

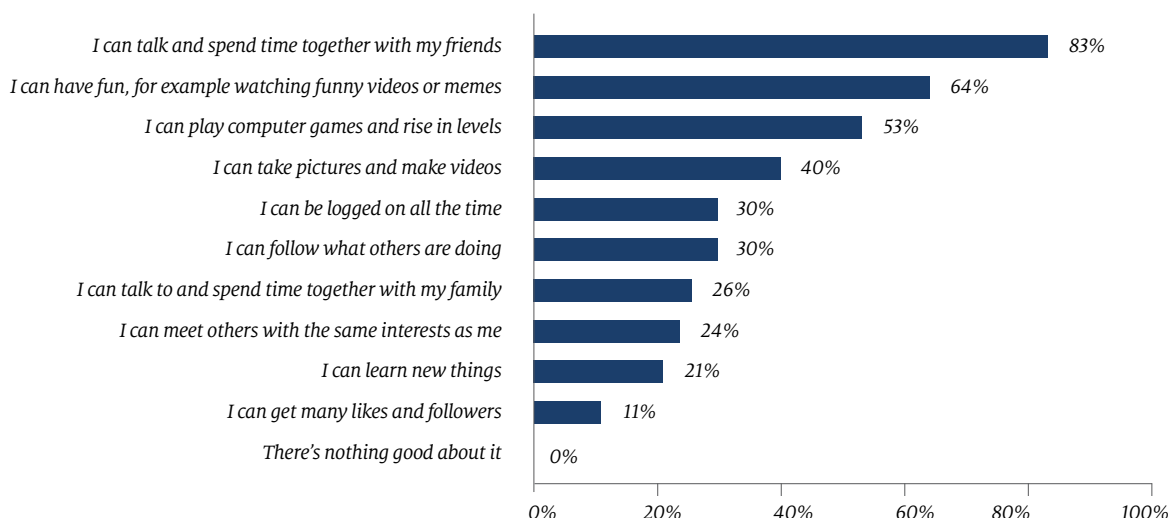
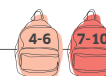


Figure 17: The best thing about having a mobile phone, computer etc.

Note: n= 1,029. Answered by children in grades 4-6 and 7-10. “Other”=2% and “Don’t know”=1%.

Source: *Epinion for the LEGO Foundation and Tenketanken Mandag Morgen.*



Marie meets new friends through gaming and Discord

Marie, who is 14, spends a lot of her spare time playing computer games. Through an online community for two computer games in particular, she has made several friends, who she often talks to via the Discord app.

Marie's online friends vary in age, but most of them are slightly older than she is. And they are located all over the world. There are children from Sweden, Croatia, Mongolia, the UK and Slovenia. They usually play in the evenings, so that's when it's best to be logged on. Marie therefore feels irritated when her mother or father tell her that it's bedtime.

When Marie plays computer games with the others, they usually talk about the game, but sometimes they are too tired to play. If that's the case, they end up chatting – and it can be about anything under the sun, for example how they are, or their concerns about a forthcoming exam. Marie says they sometimes have some really good late-night chats.

Marie's parents are divorced, and she doesn't have a computer she can use at her mother's. Consequently, she sometimes feels left out when she is staying with her mother because she's unable to play with her friends online. If she has been away for several days, her friends might have come up with new jokes which she hasn't heard. Therefore, she occasionally uses Discord on her mobile to just talk to the others, even though she can't join in the games.

Marie describes the other young people in the online community as good friends. She writes and talks to them every day, and they respect her for who she is.

During corona, she has also discovered that it's important that the camera is switched on when playing and talking online. It provides another way of interacting, where the others don't feel so far away.

WHAT THE CHILDREN SAY – ABOUT THE BENEFITS OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES

“ It's fun being able to play computer games with many of my friends, and when we're all in the same room, we can talk together. That's what I like about Minecraft and Roblox.”

FREDERIK, 10

“ The best thing is that you can chat with your friends and stay in contact with them outside school. And get an idea of what other people get up to outside school.”

– RIKKE, 14

In other words, digital technologies function as social glue. This point is elaborated on in both the interviews and the mobile ethnography. Several children emphasise the social aspects when explaining why they like spending time on their mobile or playing on their computer. Some children – usually the slightly younger ones – mention, for example, how much they enjoy being able to talk using Discord when playing computer games, while other children – usually the slightly older ones – emphasise being able to stay in touch and follow what everyone is doing by chatting or exchanging videos.

Sometimes, the digital and analogue universes overlap. For example, some children mention playing computer games with others online while sitting with a group of friends in the same place. Others – especially the oldest children – navigate social media while physically being with their friends.

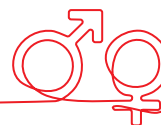
Children meet new friends online

Children use their phone and computer to keep and maintain their friendships. However, a group of older children in particular also use digital technologies

to make new friends. One in four (24%) children in grades 4-6 and 7-10 say that one of the best things about having a computer or mobile is that they can meet others with the same interests as themselves.

Several children in the interviews and mobile ethnography say they use digital platforms to meet other children, and that they have made new friends this way. It is usually a shared interest in computer games that can kick-start a new friendship, and often the friendship stays online without the children ever meeting in real life. Some of the children interviewed even consider their online friends to be better than those they know 'physically', and as friends with whom they can share their ups and downs. Fourteen-year-old Niklas reflects on his relationship with one of his online friends:

“I consider him one of my very good friends. However, you don't feel that sad if you lose an online friend. If you haven't been in contact with them for a while, but then you meet them again online, there's no problem talking to one another. But then you've never really met them. And I don't know what they're actually like in real life. I only know how they are online.”



Boys play computer games – girls take pictures and make videos

There are quite big differences between what boys and girls think is best about digital technologies and social media. Girls are more likely to say that taking photographs and making videos is the best thing, and following what others are doing. The boys on the other hand are more likely to say that the best thing is playing computer games and being able to meet others with the same interests. The differences are particularly significant for the children in grades 7-10.



Examples of children's screen time from mobile ethnography.

WHAT THE CHILDREN SAY – ABOUT THE DRAWBACKS OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES

“ I just get absorbed in playing computer games, so I end up really liking it. I know that those who designed the iPad have found ways of making sure that you constantly play on it. It's the technology that makes you want to play all the time.”

– VIGGO, 8

“ I sometimes feel that we could be better at putting our mobiles away. If I'm with friends, and one of us takes out their phone, everybody else does it. It's a bit like a chain reaction. And it's also very addictive. It's not like a bad habit, but it's something to be aware of.”

– ANNE, 14

The flip side:

Digital technologies steal time and exclude

Most children are generally positive about digital technologies. Mobile phones and computers enable children to stay in touch with friends, provide access to entertainment, and make it possible to explore new interests and groups. The survey also shows that as many as 31% of children in grades 4-6 and 27% of children in grades 7-10 think that there is nothing bad about having a computer, mobile phone etc.

However, the children are also aware of and can sense the disadvantages of digital technologies – especially the girls in grades 7-10. More than one in three of them (34%) believe that one disadvantage of having a mobile or computer is that you always have to be logged on, while only 22% of boys in grades 7-10 see this as a disadvantage. There are also more girls than boys who quickly feel excluded, who worry about being bullied and who find it hard to live up to the

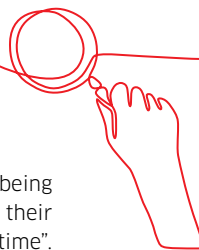
expectations on social media. Among girls in grades 7-10, as many as one in six (16%) think that one of the bad things about digital technologies is that it's hard to live up to the expectations on social media. See Figure 18.

The in-depth interviews and responses from the mobile ethnography support the fact that many children reflect on and are aware of the risks and pitfalls of digital technologies. In recent years, there has been considerable focus on developing children's digital education and helping them navigate in an increasingly digital world. And much of this work appears to have paid off. Several children – across the age groups – say that they are well aware that digital technologies can be addictive, that they need to practise becoming better at putting away their phones, and that they must be alert to who they give information to on social media.

How often are children 'on' their phones?

A survey from the National Council for Children in 2019 confirms the value of being with friends online. The survey shows that 84% of children in grade 9 interact with their friends by texting, chatting or snapping “several times a day” or “almost all the time”. The survey also shows that young people who have an active online life are more likely to enjoy the support and confidence of their friends compared to young people who rarely or never interact with their friends on social media.

Source: National Council for Children (2019). *Det gode fritidsliv er venner, tid og frihed* (The good leisure life is friends, time and freedom).



Girls experience more drawbacks with digital technologies than boys

“What’s the worst thing about having a mobile phone, computer etc.? Tick max. three.”

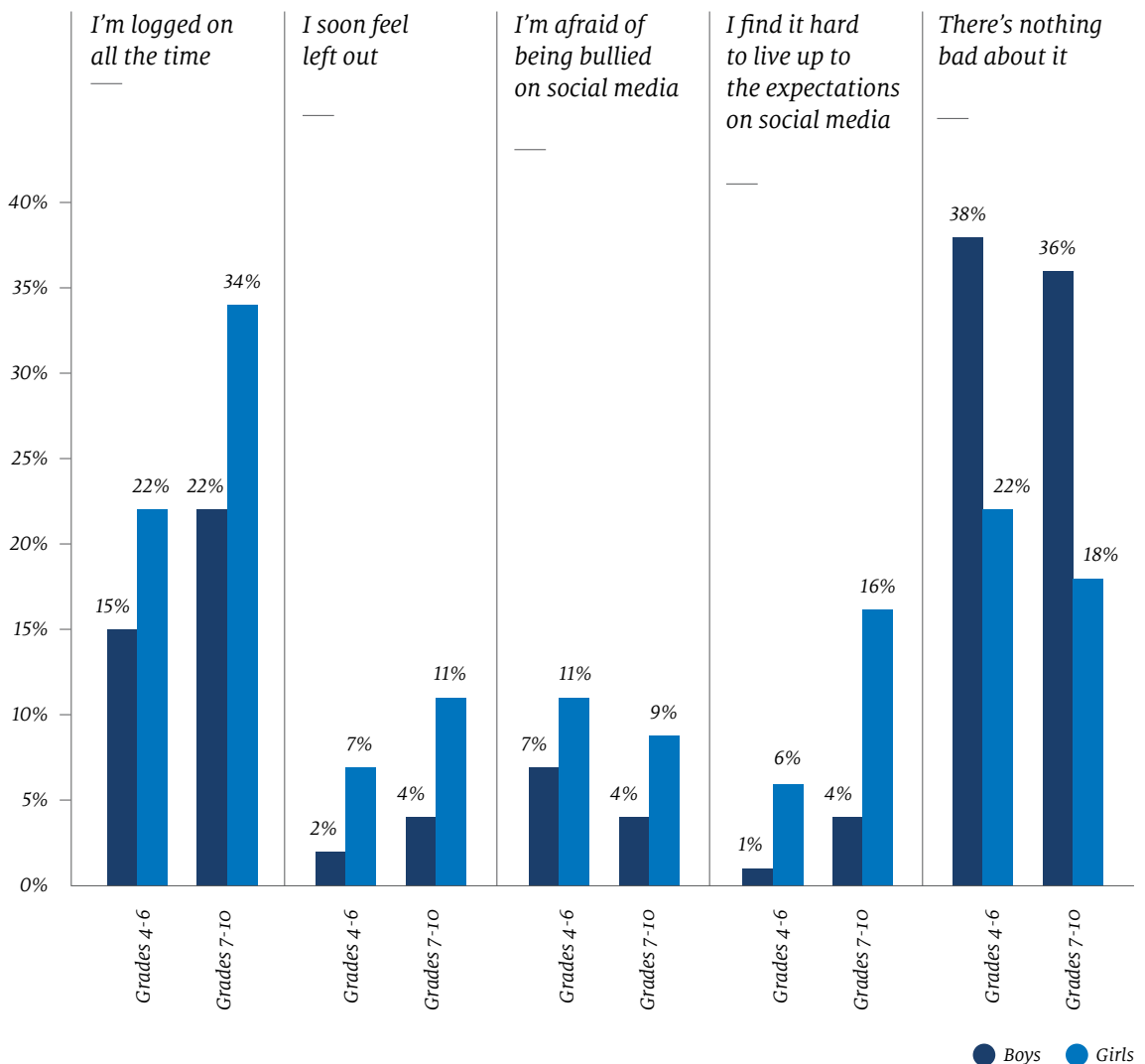
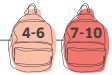


Figure 18: The worst thing about having a mobile phone, computer etc. by gender and age.

Note: n = 1,028. Answered by children in grades 4-6 and 7-10. “Other” = 2-5% and “Don’t know” = 8-14%.

Source: Epinion for the LEGO Foundation and Tænketanken Mandag Morgen.

WHAT THE CHILDREN SAY – ABOUT GOING TO AN AFTER-SCHOOL ACTIVITY

“Well, I’ve made a lot of new friends in my ballet class, and it’s nice to do something where you don’t just sit and write.”

– ALMA, 9

“It’s fun going to rugby because you’re part of a team. Everyone talks nicely to each other, and you’re asked to join in if there’s a group throwing the ball to one another. That’s what I like most about rugby. And then, of course, it’s a great sport.”

JESPER, 10

“I’m learning to do something I’m interested in. And yep, I also think it’s fun.”

– MARIA, 9

Most children (still) participate in a leisure activity

Even though children’s leisure activities are increasingly digital and take place in unorganised fora, organised after-school activities still play a key role in many children’s lives. Almost three out of four (73%) children of all school ages say that they go to an after-school activity. The proportion is highest for children in grades 2 and 3 (81%) and in grades 4-6 (79%), and declines to just over 60% for children in grades 7-10. See Figure 19.

Children have many different reasons for going to leisure activities, but the main reason is spending time together with their friends. When children in

grades 0-3 say what is the best thing about going to something, the most common answer is “I can spend time together with other children”. This reason is given by almost half the children (46%). See Figure 20.

The main reason for older children to go to something is also the sense of togetherness. 57% of children in grades 7-10 say “I like the sense of togetherness”, while for children in grades 4-6, it is almost half the children (47%). The most common reason among children in grades 4-6 is that it’s fun – this is the response given by 66% of children compared to 53% of children in grades 7-10. See Figure 21.

Most children in grades 0-3 and 4-6 attend organised after-school activities

“Do you go to an after-school activity?” Proportion answering “Yes”.

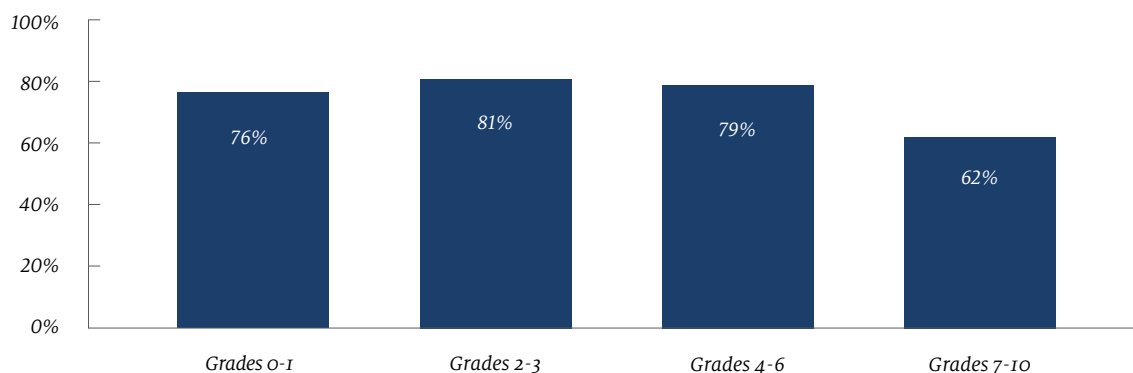
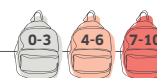


Figure 19: Proportion of children who have said they attend after-school activities.

Note: n=1,702. Answered by all children. “Don’t know”=0-1%.

Source: Epinion for the LEGO Foundation and Tenketanken Mandag Morgen.

Being together with friends is most important



"If you attend more than one after-school activity, then try to think about which you enjoy doing most. What is the best thing about going to it?"

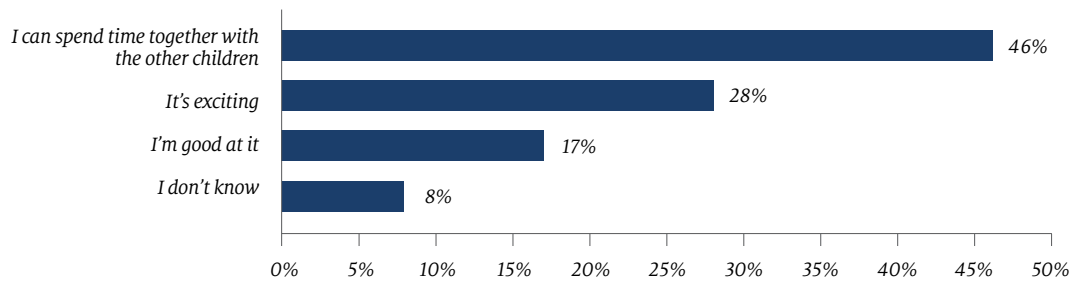
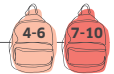


Figure 20: The best thing about going to an after-school activity.

Note: n= 529. Answered by children in grades 0-3 who attend an after-school activity.

Source: Epinion for the LEGO Foundation and Tænketanken Mandag Morgen.

Leisure activities must be fun and forge bonds



"What do you think is best thing about your after-school activity? Tick max. three."

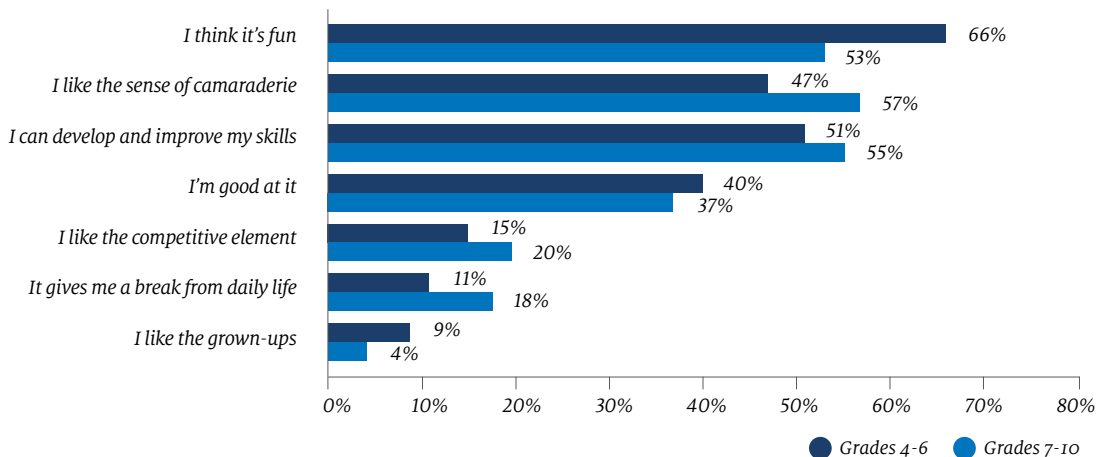


Figure 21: The best thing about going to an after-school activity.

Note: n= 723. Answered by children in grades 4-6 and 7-10 who attend an after-school activity. "Don't know"=1-2%.

Source: Epinion for the LEGO Foundation and Tænketanken Mandag Morgen.



After-school life during the coronavirus pandemic

Many children's after-school lives were severely impacted by the coronavirus crisis. At the height of the pandemic, everything from football clubs to scouting associations and role-playing clubs shut down across the country. This was clearly reflected in the membership figures for clubs and associations: There were 51,000 fewer members aged under 13 between 2019 and 2020.

The limited social contact left its mark on children's and adolescents' well-being and loneliness. Figures from the Egmont Foundation show that 90% of pupils in grades 3-9 missed their friends during the first lockdown, while almost one in five (18%) felt lonely. This is also evident in figures from *Børns Vilkår*, which show that more than one in three children (36%) in grade 6 and up to youth education were worried about losing contact with their friends.

Sources: DIF (2021). Corona stoppede flere års fremgang i idrætsforeningerne (Corona halted several years of progress in sports association). Egmont Foundation (2020). Forskning i unge og corona (Research into young people and corona). Børns Vilkår (2020). Analysenotat fra Børns Vilkår om unges bekymringer, savn og skolegang under lockdown (Survey note from Børns Vilkår on young people's worries, needs and schooling during lockdown).

In the interviews and mobile ethnography, the children explain in more detail what is good about going to an after-school activity. Several say that they regard leisure activities as an opportunity to do the things they want to do. Leisure activities provide joyful and fun shared experiences that also pave the way for new friendships. Many children also say that they can become more proficient at something, which ties in well with the fact that 51% of children in grades 4-6 and 55% in grades 7-10 say that "I can develop and improve my skills" as the best thing about going to an after-school activity.

Some – especially the oldest children – also see leisure activities as a much-needed opportunity for time on their own. In the survey, 18% of children in grades 7-10 say that the best thing about going to something is that it provides a break in their daily

lives. Among the girls in grades 9 and 10, a significant proportion – 30% – mention this. One of them is 14-year-old Helene, who explained as follows:

"If you're feeling a bit tired of school or if you have lots of homework, then it's nice to go to gymnastics, see your friends and take a break. It's nice to get out and clear your head for a while. Especially once you've got there, you just talk about gymnastics and how it's going."

Why do teenagers stop going to after-school activities?

The proportion of children taking part in organised after-school activities declines markedly from almost eight out of 10 in grades 0-3 and 4-6 to approx. six out of 10 in grades 7-10.

What do the teenagers themselves say about opting out of organised after-school activities?

“I used to play football in a club, but I stopped because I didn’t like the fact that you had to be picked for the team. It was the match I was interested in. You really had to work hard at practice to be selected for the matches, so it became a bit too competitive for me.”

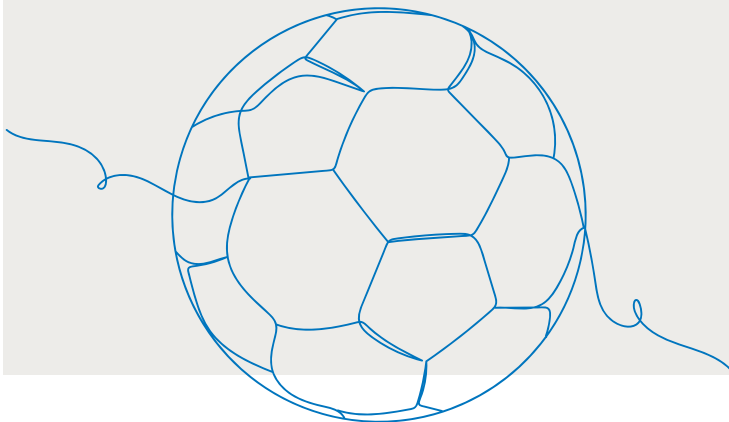
- NIKLAS, 14

“There are other things that mean that gymnastics is not as fun as it used to be. We got new instructors who had a different approach. They want us to be more professional. But we do gymnastics classes because it’s fun ... I don’t understand why we have to be professional when we don’t do competitions. It’s not as if we have to achieve anything, so I don’t feel it’s necessary.”

- HELENE, 14

“I stopped swimming because I really didn’t like the coach as he pushed us too hard. It’s more fun in small groups; there’s more play. It’s not fun with all the competition.”

- LEA, 15



Children excluded from after-school group activities

Not always enough time for free time

Having a good after-school life requires that you have enough time to do the things you want to do. However, it is by no means all children who feel they can find the time for after-school activities in their busy daily lives.

When asked “Do you have enough time to do the things you want to do?”, only about half (54%) respond “Yes, most of the time”. 5% say no, while as many as 40% say “sometimes”. The impression is reinforced by interviews and the mobile ethnography, where the girls in grades 7-10 in particular feel that what is expected of them at school, at their after-school activities and in relation to their friends is unattainable. They feel that they have to achieve a lot, and that it can be difficult to do well at school, be there for their friends, have an interesting profile on social media at the same time as spending two or three evenings participating in an after-school activity. Ida, aged 14, says:

“I go to gymnastics on Mondays and Thursdays, and teach a group of young children on Tuesdays. At one point I started feeling slightly stressed, because I was finding that I was often being asked to join my friends, and I couldn’t make it. This was because I had to train. [...] For example, there was the youth club in the evenings which I couldn’t attend because I was training.”

Unequal access to after-school group activities

There can be many reasons why children don’t participate in organised after-school activities. A growing number of children are actively opting out and engaging in leisure activities outside any organised framework. However, there are also structural reasons that are unrelated to children’s specific choices – among other things what the children’s parents can afford.

Children from deprived homes less likely to participate in after-school group activities.

“Do you go to an after-school activity?” Proportion answering “No”.

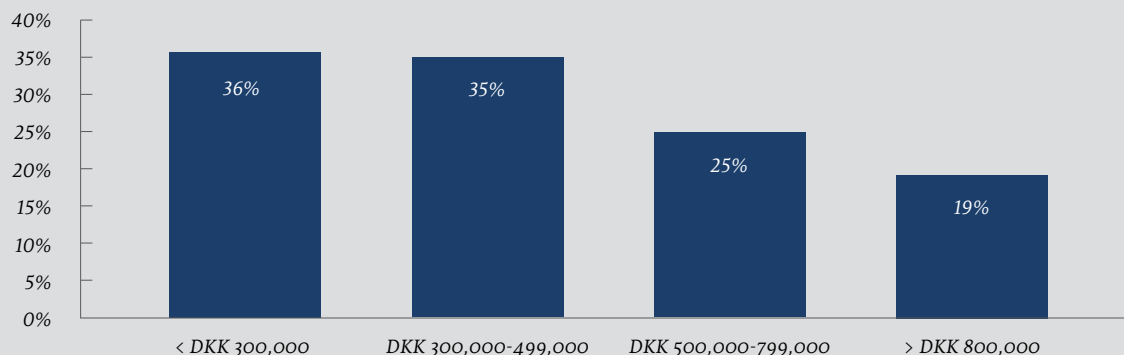
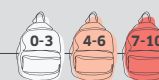


Figure 22: Proportion not participating in an after-school activity by household income.

Note: n=1,472. Answered by all children. Children whose parents have answered “Don’t know” or “Do not wish to answer” to the question about household income account for 14% and are omitted from the figure.

Source: Epinion for the LEGO Foundation and Tenketanken Mandag Morgen.

The survey shows that the proportion of children attending an after-school activity increases with parental income. The more a child's parents earn, the greater the likelihood that the child attends an after-school activity. For example, there is almost a 20% difference in children's participation in organised after-school activities between the lowest and highest income groups. For children whose parents earn less than DKK 300,000 a year, one in three (36%) do not go to an after-school activity, while for children whose parents earn more than DKK 800,000, the figure is only 19%. See Figure 22.

Link between loneliness and low participation in after-school group activities

Even though most children have friends, and even though most children consider friends important

for their well-being, there is also a small group of children who feel lonely. 3% of children in grades 4-6 and 6% of children in grades 7-10 say that they "often" feel lonely, while as many as a third of children in both age groups "sometimes" feel lonely. Among girls in grades 7-10, as many as 45% sometimes feel lonely. And there are indications that feelings of loneliness may be linked to whether or not one participates in organised after-school activities. Among children who attend after-school activities, about one in three (36%) say that they "often" or "sometimes" feel lonely, while the figure is close to half (47%) for children who do not attend after-school activities. See Figure 23.

Lonely children participate less in after-school group activities

"Do you sometimes feel lonely?"

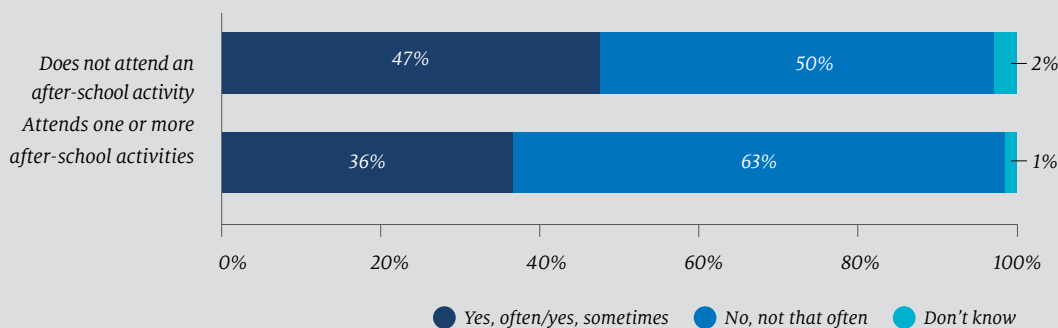
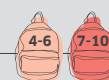


Figure 23: Feeling of loneliness by participation in after-school activities.

Note: n=1,025. Answered by children in grades 4-6 and 7-10.

Source: Epinion for the LEGO Foundation and Tænketanken Mandag Morgent.

The role of play in after-school life

Play – especially free play – takes place to a large extent in the children's free time. When children are not at school and can decide for themselves what they do, opportunities often arise for them to play and let their imagination run free.

Play and leisure activities change as children get older

The survey results show that children who attend after-school activities also play more often. Among the children who say that they often play with their friends, a large proportion attend organised after-school activities. However, this connection disappears when checking for the children's age. As mentioned earlier in the chapter, participation in organised after-school activities decreases as children get older – as do children's play activities. Children's spare time becomes something that they shape themselves with their friends to a greater extent – for example, by “hanging out” and “playing computer games”. You can read more about this in Chapter 4 'The role of play in children's lives'.

Same values in play and organised leisure activities

The results also suggest that children highlight some of the same values in play and organised leisure activities.

For example, children who like the competitive element when playing are more likely to say that one of the best things about their after-school activity is that they are good at it. On the other hand, children who think that the best thing about playing is having fun are also more likely to say that the best thing about their after-school activity is having an enjoyable time. Finally, there is a group of children who focus more on the social aspects of both play and participating in after-school activities. Children for whom the best thing about playing with friends is that it is a shared experience that will remain with you afterwards are more likely to say that the best thing about their after-school activity is the sense of comradeship.

47%

of the children who think the best thing about playing is competing also think that the best thing about their after-school activity is that they are good at it. Among the other children, the figure is 38%.

66%

of the children who think the best thing about playing is laughing also think that the best thing about their after-school activity is that it is fun. Among the other children the figure is 43%.

56%

of the children who think the best thing about playing is the shared experience also think that the best thing about their after-school activity is the sense of comradeship. Among the other children, the figure is 45%.

“

Play can bring you a little closer together, because during the week you don't tend to see as much of each other because of school and work. At weekends we spend more time together. Then we like to go to the swimming pool or something.”

- RIKKE, 14



LIVA, 9, AND OSKAR, 7

3

THE GOOD SCHOOL LIFE

“

*School can be quite tedious,
with lots of homework to do. But usually everyone
who is there makes it easier to get
through the day.”*

– NIKOLAJ, 15

THE GOOD SCHOOL LIFE

SUMMARY

Most children in Denmark enjoy going to school. It is particularly the youngest pupils – and girls across the grades – who thrive in school. However, children enjoy going to school less after the first few years in grades 0-3.

One of the most important things for having a good time at school is good classmates and good teachers. Children of all ages concur on this. Exciting lessons are also an important factor for many children. In particular, children find the teaching exciting when it's experimental, or when they feel that what they are learning can be applied in practice. Girls prefer teaching where they are able to collaborate, while experimental teaching is more popular with boys.

But not all children enjoy school to the same extent. Children who have lower family well-being and lower well-being in general are also less happy going to school. In addition, almost one in three children want more of a say at school.

The youngest children enjoy school most

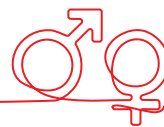
Most children in Denmark enjoy going to school. Across grades 0-10, 46% of children reply “Yes, a lot” when asked whether they enjoy going to school. 41% say “Yes, a little”, while 12% are not that happy going to school.

School well-being⁵ varies significantly according to the age of the children. Among children in grades 0-1, almost two out of three (64%) reply “Yes, a lot” when asked whether they enjoy going to school. After that, children's well-being at school decreases with age. In grades 2-3, almost half (47%) of children have a high level of well-being at school, while in grades 4-6 and 7-10 the figures are 44% and 38%, respectively. In the

same way, the proportion of children with a low level of well-being at school increases from 7% in grades 0-1 to as many as 18% in grades 7-10. See Figure 24.

The best thing about school is the community

Friends are not just an important part of children's after-school lives. The results of the survey also clearly show that friends and the school community play an important role in school life – for both the youngest and the oldest children. For almost half (46%) the children in grades 0-3, the best thing about school is being together with their classmates. Having good teachers (27%) or that school is exciting (26%) are not quite as important. See Figure 25.



Girls have a better time at school than boys

Girls are generally happier going to school than boys. Overall, for all age groups, 11% more girls than boys have a high level of school well-being. The biggest difference is in grades 4-6, where 51% of the girls have a high level of well-being at school compared to 37% of the boys.

⁵ School well-being is measured using the question “Do you enjoy going to school?” Low school well-being = “No, not particularly”, medium school well-being = “Yes, quite”, and high school well-being = “Yes, a lot”.

School well-being decreases with age

“Do you enjoy going to school?”

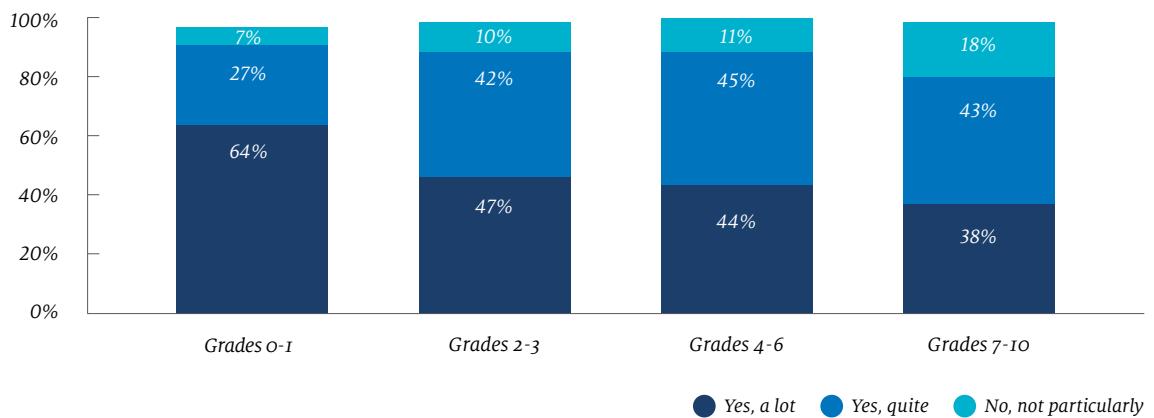


Figure 24: School well-being by age groups.

Note: n=1,702. Answered by all children. “Don’t know”=1-2%.

Source: Epinion for the LEGO Foundation and Tænketanken Mandag Morgen.

Classmates are the best for children in grades 0-3

“What is the best thing about school?”

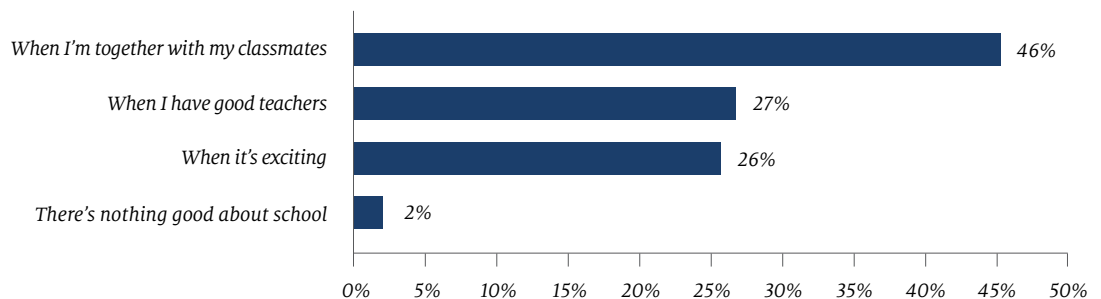


Figure 25: The best thing about school.

Note: n=673. Answered by children in grades 0-3. “Don’t know”=2%.

Source: Epinion for the LEGO Foundation and Tænketanken Mandag Morgen.

WHAT THE CHILDREN SAY – ABOUT CLASSMATES AND COMRADESHIP AT SCHOOL

“The best thing is probably all the classes that get along so well. It’s like one big community, without everyone being in the same class, and there are several ways of meeting new friends.”

– CECILIE, 13

“I also went over there [to the local primary school], but I moved because I wasn’t in a very good class. It was pretty lousy. So that’s why I moved. I didn’t go to school for a long time because I didn’t feel good; I wasn’t well at all.”

– LEA, 15

“The breaks can be quite fun. You can go out and play, and that’s great. Some of my friends are also pretty good at making up new games.”

– DANIEL, 7

The children in grades 4-6 and grades 7-10 also mention their friends and the feeling of comradeship at school as being decisive for their well-being. When asked “What is most important for your well-being at school?”, most (56%) answer “that I’m in a good class where no one is excluded”, while almost as many (54%) say “that I see my friends”. See Figure 26.

Several children in the interviews and the mobile ethnography stress how important their friends are as well as feeling part of the class. The youngest children in particular say that it’s important to have fun at school with their friends, where you can play fun games together, for example. The older children mention more generally that the sense of unity in the classroom is important for their well-being at school. Several children also point out that one of the things that makes everyone feel happy and brings everyone together is when the school day is different from normal. Replacing the usual classroom lessons with excursions, outdoor classes or lessons involving movement invariably helps to ensure a good school day.

A good teacher helps and listens

However, it’s not just friends, class camaraderie and different schooldays that are important for children’s well-being. Good teachers are also vital. 51% of the children in grades 4-6 and 7-10 say “that my teachers are good” as one of the three most important factors for being able to enjoy school. Among other things, the children describe a good teacher as someone who is helpful, takes the time to listen and clearly explains to the pupils what they need to do. In addition to which, a good teacher goes out of their way to introduce new elements to what is being taught to prevent it from becoming boring.

The girls want class comradeship and academic challenges – the boys want exciting lessons and co-determination

Boys and girls agree by and large that friends, good classmates and good teachers are essential if you are to enjoy your time at school. However, girls and boys

Classmates and good teachers make school a great place to be

“What is most important for your well-being at school? Tick max. three.”

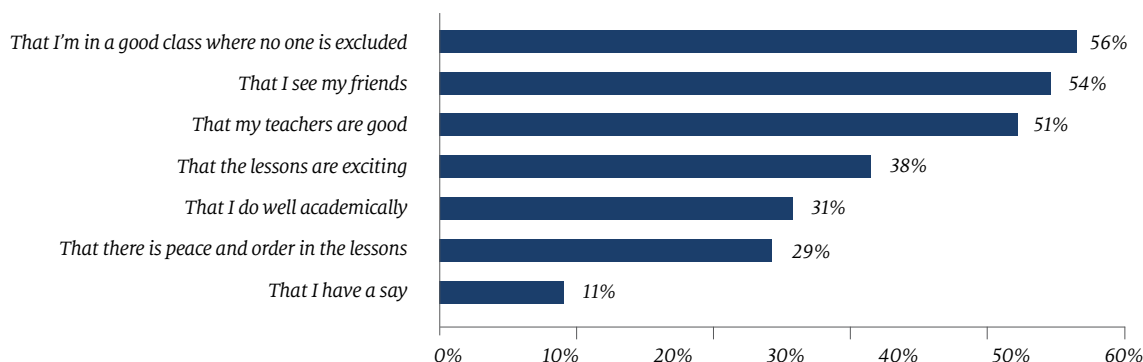
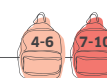


Figure 26: The most important thing for well-being at school.

Note: n=1,029. Answered by children in grades 4-6 and 7-10. “Other”=1% and “Don’t know”=1%.

Source: Epinion for the LEGO Foundation and Tenketanken Mandag Morgen.

WHAT THE CHILDREN SAY – ABOUT THE GOOD TEACHER

“A good teacher is someone who helps you, whose lessons are fun and interesting, and if anyone gets angry, the teacher helps them to become friends again.”

– EBBE, 11

“I’m very happy with my school. The best thing is that the teachers are good. [...] A good teacher is someone you can talk to easily, and who is good at teaching.”

– ANNE, 12

“A good teacher is someone who listens to their pupils, but who is also respected and doesn’t just try to be fun the whole time. Someone who teaches us useful things while making sure that it’s not completely boring.”

– HELENE, 14



also hold different views on what ensures a high level of well-being at school.

In grades 0-3, slightly more girls (49%) than boys (42%) say that the best thing about school is being together with their classmates. Likewise, the girls in grades 4-6 think that a close-knit class, where no one is excluded, is slightly more important than the boys do (67% against 51%). It is also more important for the girls in grades 4-6 that there is peace and order during the lessons (39% against 31% of the boys), while the girls in grades 7-10 think that it is slightly more important to perform well academically (41% against 34% of the boys).

On the other hand, more boys than girls – both in grades 4-6 and 7-10 – say that it is important for them to be part of the decision-making process at school. On top of which, it’s crucial for the boys that they find the lessons stimulating. 42% of the boys in grades 4-6 say that one of the most important things for their well-being at school is that the lessons are exciting. This is true for 30% of girls. See Table 1.

Boys and girls have different school values

What is most important for your well-being at school?	BOYS	GIRLS	AGE GROUP
When I’m together with my classmates	42%	49%	0-3
That I’m in a good class where no one is excluded	51%	67%	4-6
That there is peace and order in the lessons	31%	39%	4-6
That the lessons are exciting	42%	30%	4-6
That I have a say in what we do in lessons, for example	14%	8%	4-6
	16%	6%	7-10
That I do well academically	34%	41%	7-10

Table 1: Differences between what boys and girls consider most important for their well-being at school.

Note: n=527-673. Answered by children in grades 0-3, grades 4-6 and grades 7-10. “Don’t know”=1%. Possibility of selecting up to three response options for children in grades 4-6 and grades 7-10. The gender gap for “That I do well academically” is significant when children in grade 10 are not included.

Source: Epinion for the LEGO Foundation and Tænketanken Mandag Morgen.

WHAT THE CHILDREN SAY – ABOUT EXCITING TEACHING

“Last Friday we had a social studies subject which the whole class thought was really exciting. Especially as we didn’t just sit and write notes, but everyone was able to speak and contribute their views.”

– CECILIE, 13

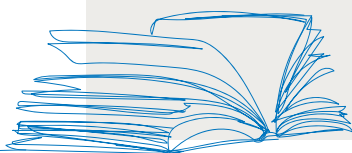
“If I’m told to prepare a presentation about the economic cycle, then I’ll learn more if I have to find the information myself. If I have to present it and show it to others, it requires that I understand it myself. [...] It also requires that you are very involved in the subject for group work. More brains work better than one.”

– NIKOLAJ, 15

How can we create a better school day – according to the children?

According to the children, school would be even better if ...

- There were better outdoor areas where you could hang out
- There was more interaction between the different classes
- There were more school trips, for example school camps
- There was more focus on good classroom unity
- There were more creative activities
- The lessons required more active involvement



In interviews and mobile ethnography, several of the boys say that it is important that the teaching is exciting. Many boys say that they soon start to feel bored in lessons, especially when they have to sit still for too long or repeat the same exercises. One of them is Simon, aged 7:

“It’s pretty boring going to school. I think we have to learn boring stuff. You keep being taught the same thing. [...] It’s boring enough as it is when you have to sit completely still and listen to what the teacher is saying. It’s really boring, and I don’t think the teacher really knows how to tell us what we’re supposed to do. Sometimes I almost fall asleep in class.”

Children want experimental teaching, and to be taught about things they can apply in practice

Children thrive best in school when the lessons are motivating and exciting. 38% of the children in grades 4-6 and 7-10 say that one of the most important things for their well-being at school is that the lessons are exciting. However, exciting teaching has many faces and looks different depending on which children you ask. See Figure 27.

Among children in grades 4-6, a majority of the pupils (48%) reply that exciting teaching is “when you experiment and try out new things”, while almost as many (41%) say “when the teaching is neither too difficult nor too easy”.

The fact that experimental teaching is important for many children is also clear from the answers in the interviews and mobile ethnography. Here, several children mention that they like it when the teaching is different. It might be when they are allowed to actively use their bodies and senses in the lessons, to take a “hands-on approach to the subject”, to try things out, make mistakes and try again. It is a different way of learning that is fun while ensuring a better grasp of the subject. Frederik, aged 10, gives an example:

“The best lessons are probably those that are held in the woods, when we get to be outside and move about instead of just sitting at our desks. And we definitely learn something about the woods. [...] We get to catch animals and study them closely for 10 minutes or so. Then you can see how they move, instead of sitting and reading about it. I think I learn better seeing the animals in the wild.”

Several children, like Frederik, say that it’s nice when you move about in class. When you can be active and not “just sit and listen”, or when you are allowed to use your creativity, for example in subjects such as music, art or food science.

When it comes to exciting teaching, the children in grades 7-10 largely agree with their grade 4-6 peers, but there are differences. Some children (40%) in grades 7-10 prefer – like the children in grades 4-6 – experimental teaching, but on the other hand, far more children in grades 7-10 think that exciting teaching is where “you learn something useful” (54% against 39% in grades 4-6).

“Physics and chemistry are probably the most exciting. You actually get to do something instead of just staying seated. You conduct experiments, such as getting a bulb to light up using a potato. It’s certainly more fun than Danish and listening to a teacher talking for 1½ hours about a single topic.”

– NIKLAS, 14

The importance of useful teaching increases with age



“What makes the teaching exciting? Tick max. three.”

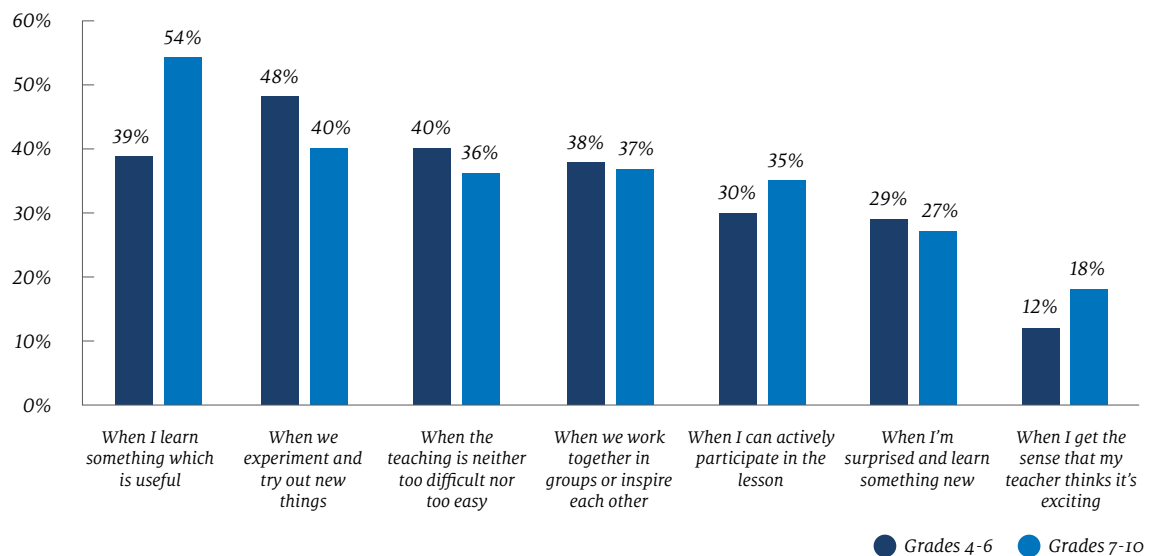
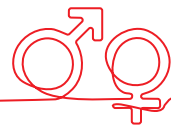


Figure 27: What children understand by exciting teaching.

Note: n=1,029. Answered by children in grades 4-6 and 7-10. “Other”=2-4% and “Don’t know”=3-4%.

Source: Epinion for the LEGO Foundation and Tænketanken Mandag Morgen.



Girls prefer group work – boys prefer experimental teaching

Girls and boys have different views on what constitutes exciting teaching. For example, more boys (33%) than girls (24%) in grades 4-6 think that it’s exciting “when you’re surprised and learn something new”. The boys in grades 7-10 are also significantly happier about experimental teaching than the girls (47% against 31%). On the other hand, more girls than boys – across all the grades – prefer teaching where you are required to collaborate and inspire each other (42% against 33%). Moreover, it’s more important for girls to be taught at an appropriate level. According to 44% of the girls, exciting teaching is when it is “neither too difficult nor too easy”, while only 33% of the boys select this response.

WHAT THE CHILDREN SAY – ABOUT EXCITING TEACHING

“ We had to choreograph a dance based on the subject of anger. It was an opportunity to use your creativity as you wished but within a specific framework, which I thought was fun.”

- THEA, 13

“ My German lesson yesterday went well because I never really could figure out how to inflect the words, but I learned that yesterday. Just being able to understand what I've found so difficult until now meant that I felt very motivated, and that was a lot more exciting.”

- ELIN, 13

Several of the oldest pupils say they “drift off” if it's not clear what the purpose of the teaching is or its learning objective. If, on the other hand, it is clear why they are learning something, and if they can relate it to daily life, then they feel more motivated. Ida, aged 14, gives an example:

“I don't know when I'll ever use cosines and sines and stuff like that. It's a little lost on me. [...] In social studies, we're studying economics – what expenses you have when you leave home etc. That's much more relevant.”



School life during the coronavirus pandemic

Many children in the survey found that they enjoyed school less during the coronavirus pandemic because they missed their friends and the usual close contact with their teachers during lessons. For example, Nadia, aged 9, talks about her experience during the lockdowns:

“I've just felt bored. I've missed my friends, and also just the break times at school. Because it's pretty boring sitting in front of a screen for home schooling.”

The online teaching created significant limitations in terms of the teaching method and content – and many children suffered from this. In a survey conducted via the *Børns Vilkår* children's telephone helpline in April 2021, 28% of young people aged 11 to 20 said that what they missed most during the lockdowns was the teaching as it used to be before corona. Almost half (48%) said they didn't like online homeschooling. In fact, only 18% said they liked online homeschooling.

However, school life during the coronavirus pandemic also highlighted a few positive discoveries – especially when children had to return to school-based classes again. Among other things, a study from the University of Southern Denmark (SDU) indicates that the possibilities for working with playful approaches to learning were better when schools reopened in April/May 2020 under new conditions and restrictions. For example, both teachers and pupils found that they worked more practically (e.g. with experimentation and movement), and that play played a bigger role in the teaching. The new pedagogical approaches to teaching were due, among other things, to the fact that there were more staff, that the school days were not divided into subject lessons, and that the school days were shorter than usual.

Sources: Børns Vilkår (2021). Analysenotat fra Børns Vilkår om unges bekymringer, savn og skolegang under lockdown (Survey note from Børns Vilkår on young people's worries, needs and schooling during lockdown). Quortrup et al. (2020). Børns socio-emotionelle tilstand under genåbningen af skoler efter COVID-19-nedlukningen (Children's socio-emotional state during school reopening after the coronavirus pandemic). University of Southern Denmark.

What is your favourite subject?

"English, because I like foreign languages, and because I watch a lot of English YouTube videos."

- EBBE, 11

"I love maths because I'm quite good at it. That's mostly why."

- HELENE, 14

"IT'S GREAT LEARNING HOW TO BUILD THINGS."

- HERMANN, 11

"I like English because my teacher makes the lessons fun and interesting."

- SALINA, 14

"ART, BECAUSE I ENJOY DRAWING."

- MALTHE, 11

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
Danish	Mathematics	English	German/ French	Art
Danish	Craftsmanship & design	English	History	Art
Mathematics	Craftsmanship & design	Nature/technology	Geography	Physics/chemistry
Breaks	Breaks	Breaks	Breaks	Breaks
PE	PE	Electives	Electives	Social studies

"WELL, THE BREAK TIMES ARE THE BEST."

- ELIN, 13

"Because sport is always fun, and I'm able to do things with my friends from the other classes too."

- CECILIE, 13

"Sport, because it feels as if you are off school"

- EBBE, 11

IN SOCIAL STUDIES, WE'RE STUDYING ECONOMICS - WHAT EXPENSES YOU HAVE WHEN YOU LEAVE HOME ETC. THAT'S MUCH MORE RELEVANT."

- IDA, 14

"I love all kinds of electives, because you get to choose the slightly unusual subjects."

- THEA, 13

"I really like physics/chemistry, as we mostly do lots of interesting experiments, and it's very academic."

- RIKKE, 14

Selected children's responses from the mobile ethnography about their favourite subjects at school

One in three children would like a bigger say at school

One of the core tasks of primary and lower secondary school is to teach children to participate in a democratic society. This is very clear from the objects clause of the Danish Folkeskole. And Denmark has officially signed up to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and its requirement that children must be able to participate in decisions about their own daily lives, for example in school, where pupils' councils formally give children the right to be heard. However, how do things actually stand with regard to children's co-determination in school?

The results of the survey show that most children are definitely satisfied with the degree of co-determination in school. 51% of the children in grades 0-3 and 63% and 64% of children in grades 4-6 and 7-10, respectively, reply "No, it's OK" when asked about the extent to which they would like to have more of a say at school.

Even though many children think they are involved in enough of the decisions, close to a third (29%)

of the children across the three grade groups say that they would like to decide more. See Figure 28.

In interviews and the mobile ethnography, the children describe in more detail which areas they would like to have more of a say in. For the youngest, the desire for co-determination is very specific. It is a question, for example, of being allowed to take their toys into school more often. The older pupils on the other hand say that they would like to be able to choose more electives in school. Salina, aged 14, says:

"I really like the food science elective that we could choose at my school. But the only thing that's a bit lousy about electives is that there are only four to choose from now, whereas my older siblings had many more options."

Several of the children also mention that they would like more subjects or courses where they can choose the content themselves. For example, they mention crafts and design as a good subject, because you are free to make decisions and work with your own project.

More co-determination across age levels

"Would you like to have more of a say at school?" Proportion who answered "Yes, I'd like to have more of a say".

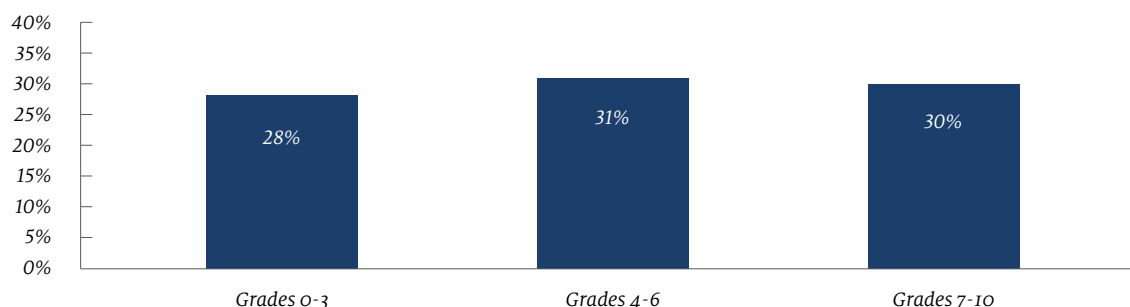
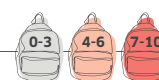


Figure 28: Desire for more co-determination in school by age group.

Note: n=1,702. Answered by all children. The other response options were "No, it's OK", "No, the adults can certainly decide more" and "Don't know". "Don't know"=4-10%.

Source: Epinion for the LEGO Foundation and Tienketanken Mandag Morgen.

After-school clubs popular with the youngest

The survey shows that after-school options are popular with many children. 90% of schoolchildren in grades 0-1 go to an after-school club, and most (75%) respond “Yes, a lot” when asked whether they enjoy it and how much. Of the children in grades 2-3, 80% attend an after-school club, with more than half (56%) saying that they are very happy doing so. The proportion of children who go to an after-school club and who say that they are very happy to do so is 39% and 17% for children in grades 4-6 and 7-10, respectively.

In the interviews, several children confirm how good it is to go to an after-school club, which they often describe as being more fun than school. Some children refer to the club as a “cool” place to be and as a great place to meet new friends outside of class. In addition, the children say that – unlike at school – the focus here is on play and being together.



“It’s so awesome. We have our very own playground. And it’s fantastic. You can go roller-skating and all sorts of stuff. And there are really cool bikes and things.”

– NIKOLINE, 8

“I long for the afternoon – I really don’t like school. The only good day is Friday. Not at school, but only in the club. We play computer games there.”

– HANS, 8

“(The good life is ... ed.) Being with the girls at the club and talking to them about their horses and riding gear.”

– ANNE, 12

Do children decide enough at school?

In its well-being survey from 2018, the Danish Centre for Educational Environment asked Danish schoolchildren whether they were involved in decision-making in classes. In grades 0-3, 9% of children say that they are often involved in decision-making, while as many as 42% said they were not. Also, there is certainly room for improvement in terms of co-determination in grades 4-6 and 7-10. Here, 15% and 12% of children, respectively, say they are involved in deciding what they are going to work with in class often or very often, while 41% and 45%, respectively, say that they seldom or never help to decide.

Source: Danish Centre of Educational Environment (2018). Resultater fra den nationale trivselsmåling 2018 (Results from the national well-being survey 2018).



Low school well-being linked to lower general well-being

Unfortunately, not all children are equally happy going to school. Unsurprisingly, the survey shows that lower school well-being is generally linked to a number of other well-being factors. For example, children with low school well-being also have lower overall life satisfaction, lower family well-being, and they are not as optimistic – but more worried – about the future. In addition, children in grades 4-6 and 7-10 who don't enjoy going to school as much say that they feel solitary or lonely more often. See Figure 29.

Surveys conducted in recent years have shown that there is a link between social well-being and

academic performance in school⁶. And the results of this survey paint a similar picture. Among children who enjoy school less, just 12% in grades 4-6 and 19% in grades 7-10 reply that it is important to perform well academically to enjoy school. Children who enjoy school a lot on the other hand focus to a greater extent on academic performance. Here, 28% and 48% in grades 4-6 and 7-10, respectively, state that it is important to do well academically in order to enjoy school. See Figure 30.

In interviews and mobile ethnography, children paint a picture of why some of them do not enjoy school that

Low school well-being linked to feeling lonely

“Do you sometimes feel lonely?” Proportion who have answered “Yes, often” or “Yes, sometimes”.

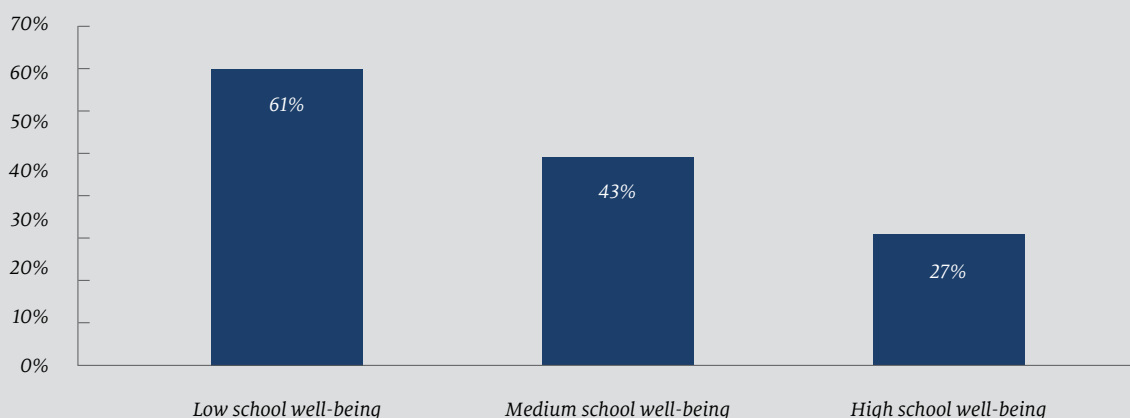
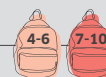


Figure 29: Feeling of loneliness by school well-being.

Note: n=1,021. Answered by children in grades 4-6 and 7-10. Other response options were “No, not that often” and “Don't know”. “Don't know”=2%.

Source: Epinion for the LEGO Foundation and Tienketanken Mandag Morgen.

⁶ For example: Danish Ministry of Children and Education (2016). *Gode faglige resultater i skolen hænger sammen med god trivsel* (Good academic results at school linked to high level of well-being).

WHAT THE CHILDREN SAY – ABOUT THE NEGATIVE ASPECTS OF SCHOOL

“Teachers are adults, so I wish they were better at explaining the difficult subjects at school. At explaining the subject in different ways. They just come along and say this and that and then move on. I wish they weren't so indifferent.”

– RIKKE, 14

“Many children think there are not enough marks on the marking scale. Seven is just average, even though it's not a bad mark.”

– HELENE, 14

much, with the oldest children enjoying school least of all. Many of the older children feel under pressure from the expectations that increase during their time at school, and which can be difficult to handle. Several of the schoolchildren in grades 7-10 explain that they feel under pressure to perform well with regard to homework and presentations, and increasingly so when they start being given marks for their work. Among the children interviewed, the girls in particular voice these concerns. As Rikke, aged 14, puts it:

“I don't think they know what's in store for them. School is much harder than you think. It's not as fun as it

was when you were younger. [...] There's more pressure. The pressure can become too much sometimes, especially if you have too much homework and other things to do, or because of your marks. You want your end-of-term marks to be as good as possible. You feel there is a lot you need to achieve. All you want is to do as well as possible. It's stressful. It was really hard when we started being given marks in grade 8. Having your work assessed and being given a number. It wasn't because what I did was bad, but because you realised that you had to improve in certain subjects. It's stressful.”

Academic well-being less important for children who enjoy school less

“What is most important for your well-being at school?” Proportion who have replied “That I do well academically”.

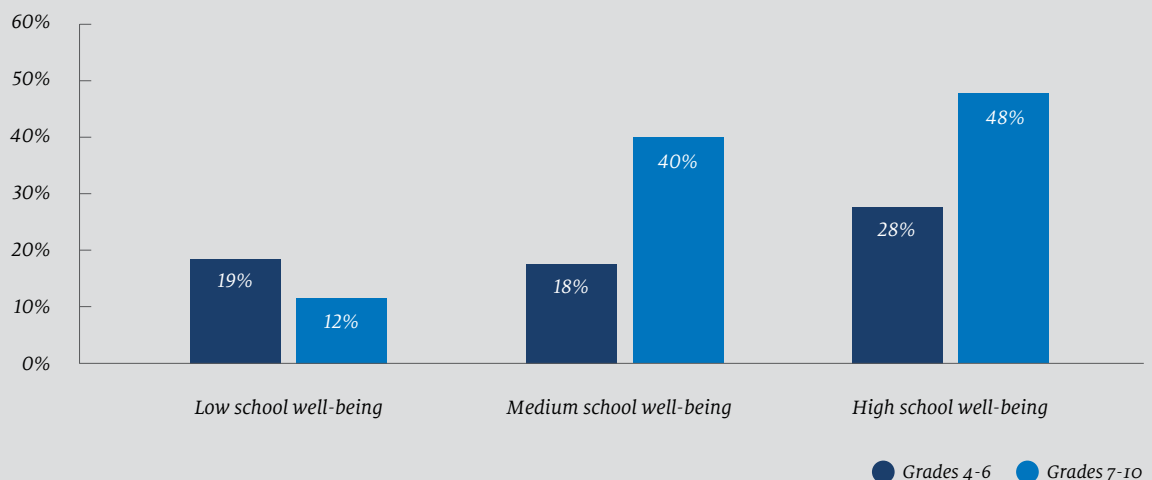
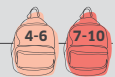


Figure 30: The importance of doing well academically by school well-being.

Note: n=1,021. Answered by children in grades 4-6 and 7-10.

Source: Epinion for the LEGO Foundation and Tænketanken Mandag Morgen.

The role of play in school life

Studies show that playful approaches to learning can, among other things, promote children's academic and developmental skills in school⁷. But how do children themselves view play at school?

In interviews and the mobile ethnography, most children appear to say that there is *no* connection between play and learning. *Either* you play at school or you learn. Among the youngest children, several mention that they like it when they are allowed to bring their toys into school. Days where they are allowed to take their toys in are a real treat, and some children say that it is used as a reward if they have, for example, been quiet in school.

The older children as well do not see play as a natural part of the school day, or as something that is incorporated in the teaching. However, many children mention, for example, courses or situations where the lessons have included play elements. Fifteen-year-old Lea says:

"It's smart if a game is linked to what you're learning, as it makes it all much more fun. So I think it might well be a good thing for some people. But it depends on what sort of game it is. We played charades the other day. It

was great fun. We also played a few geography games. That was also enjoyable."

Several children say that they combine play and learning in their after-school life. For example, some children are aware that they need to be good at languages in order to engage in a digital world. Therefore, they practise their English, for example by playing English computer games or speaking English in TikTok videos. Nine-year-old Laurits explains:

"I learned English well before I started school. I was almost the best in class at it. Sometimes I also use English words by mistake instead of Danish words because I think in English, as I only watch things in English on YouTube."

Even though the children themselves do not connect play and learning in school, the answers from the survey indicate that children who often play also find it more exciting when the teaching contains elements of a more playful character. Among children in grades 4-6 who often play, more than half (52%) reply that the teaching is exciting "when we experiment or try out new things". Among children who rarely or never play, less than one in four (24%) prefer this kind of teaching. See Figure 31.

Play and experimental teaching

"What makes the teaching exciting?" Proportion who have answered "When we experiment or try out new things".

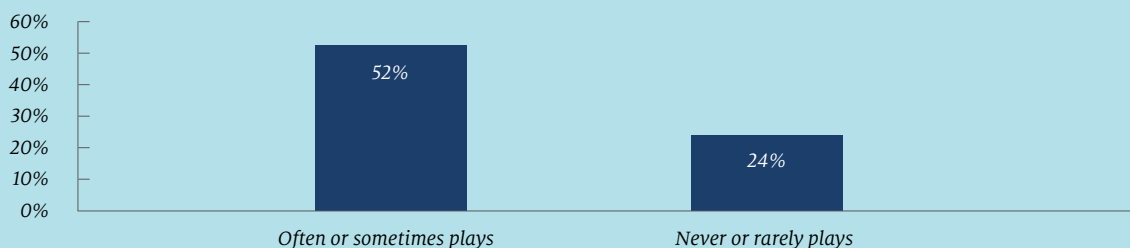


Figure 31: Proportion of children who rate experimental teaching as exciting by frequency of play.

Note: n=501. Answered by children in grades 4-6. The frequency of play category is based on the children's own indications of whether they "often", "sometimes", "rarely" or "never" play either alone or with friends.

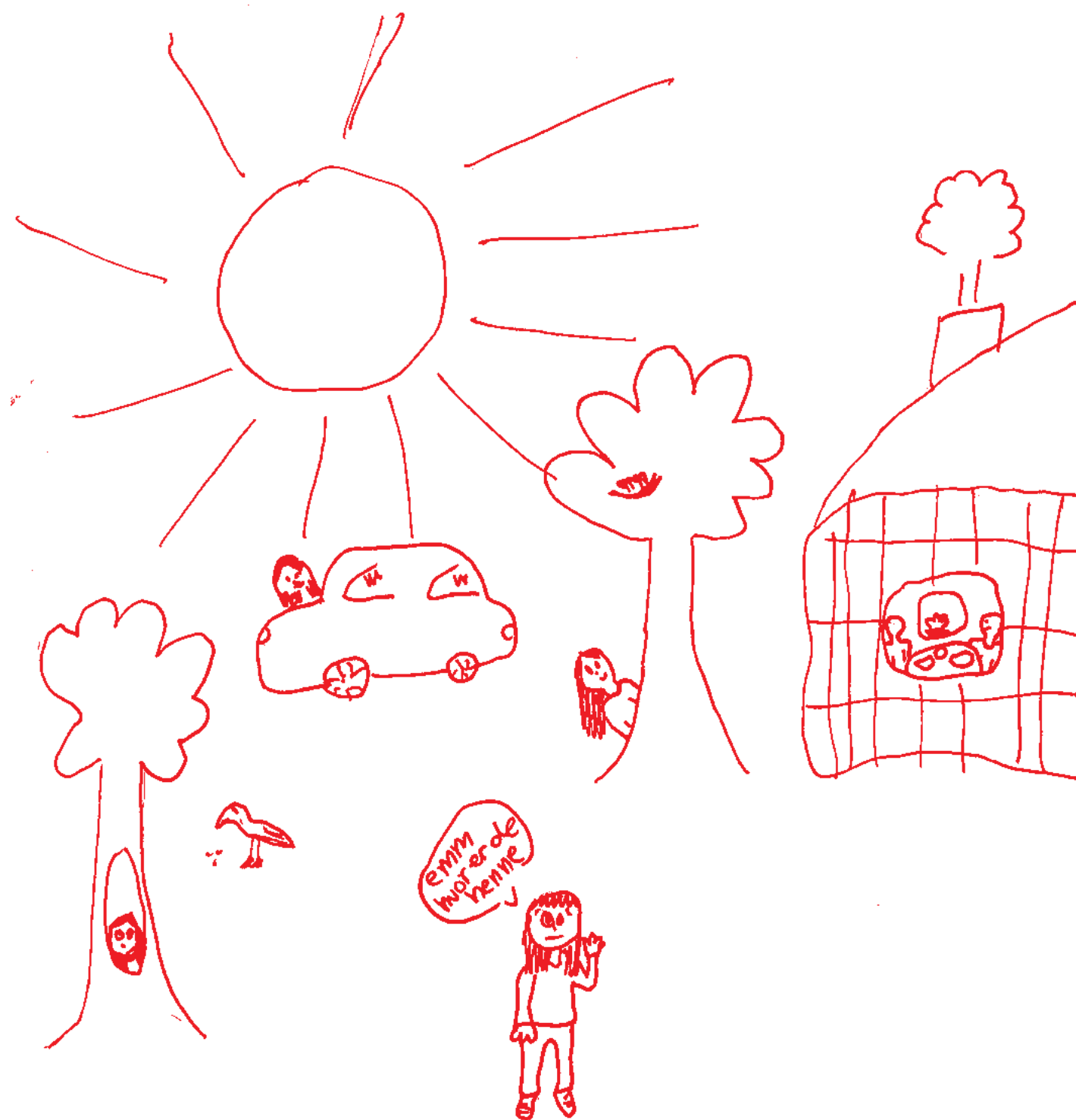
Source: Epinion for the LEGO Foundation and Tienketanken Mandag Morgen.

⁷ Robertson, N., Morrissey & E. Rouse (2018). Play-based learning can set your child up for success at school and beyond
World Bank (2018). World Development Report 2018: Learning to realise education's promise

“

Sometimes we have a subject where we can bring in something that we can spend a whole hour playing with. Or sometimes our teacher all of a sudden says that we're going to the playground.”

– JESPER, 10



4

THE ROLE OF PLAY IN CHILDREN'S LIVES

“

Playing is great fun and you have to make the most of your childhood. You also have to play to stay fit and healthy and to have a nice time. I think it's really important to play.”

– HEDY, 10

THE ROLE OF PLAY IN CHILDREN'S LIVES

SUMMARY

Play is an important part of a good child life – especially for the youngest children. Only 4% of children in grades 0-3 do not think it is that important for them to play, while one in four children in grades 4-6 think it is important.

Good play often takes place with other children, and is the starting point for laughs and fun, using your imagination and shared experiences. For children, play is different to generally spending time with friends, among other things because it allows you to use your imagination and assume different roles. Competition, on the other hand, is not something that children associate with play. In some cases, quite the opposite.

Children who no longer play usually stopped doing so on reaching the age of 12. Boys continue to play more than girls – both alone and with friends. Finally, up to 40% of children who have stopped playing miss doing so to some extent.

Play is important for most children

Play is an important part of children's lives if you ask the children. 72% and 59% of children in grades 0-1 and grades 2-3, respectively, reply "Yes, very" to the question "Is it important for you to play?". Correspondingly few (4%) in the same age group state that play is *not* really that important for them.

Even though it becomes less important for children to play as they get older, there are still many children who continue to play – and who find value in it. Among the children in grades 4-6, two out of three (67%) say it is "quite" or "very important" for them to play. And in grades 7-10, the majority (51%) reply that they still play to some extent. However, the proportion who reply that it is "quite" or "very important" to play has fallen to 27%. *See Figure 32.*

That play is of great value in children's lives is underlined, among other things, by the fact that children who often play also have higher levels of well-being. Among the children in grades 4-6 who often play, 42% say that they have a high life satisfaction, while the figure is only 24% among those who seldom play. *See Figure 33.*



It's best playing with other children

Play is most fun when it happens with other children. More than four out of five children in grades 0-3 (83%) reply that they prefer to play with other children. 5% prefer to play alone and another 5% prefer to play with adults.

Play is important – for most and for the youngest



“Is it important for you to play?”

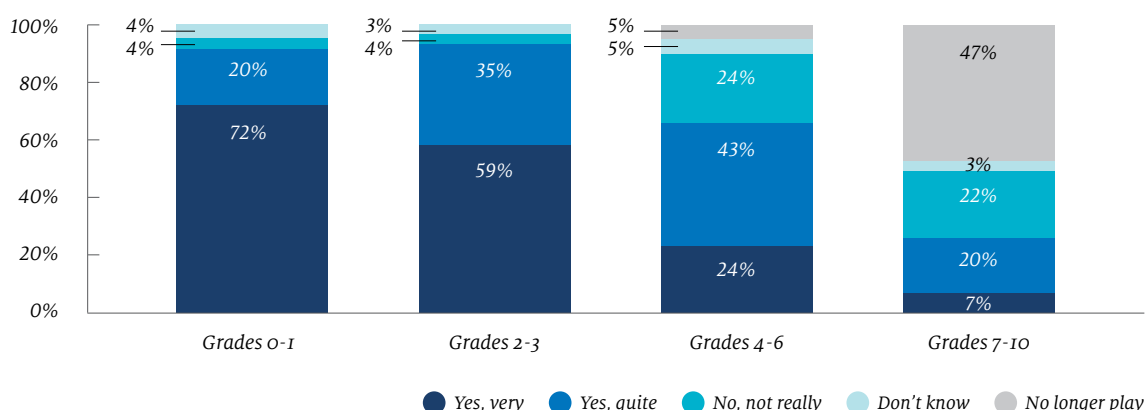


Figure 32: The importance of play by age groups.

Note: n=1,702. The question about the importance of play has been answered by all the children who have replied that they still play, either alone or with friends. (Including the “Don’t know” response.)

Source: Epinion for the LEGO Foundation and Tænketanken Mandag Morgen.

Play and well-being go hand in hand



“State life satisfaction on a scale from 0 to 10, where 10 means ‘The best possible life’ and 0 means ‘The worst possible life’.” Proportion with high life satisfaction (9-10).

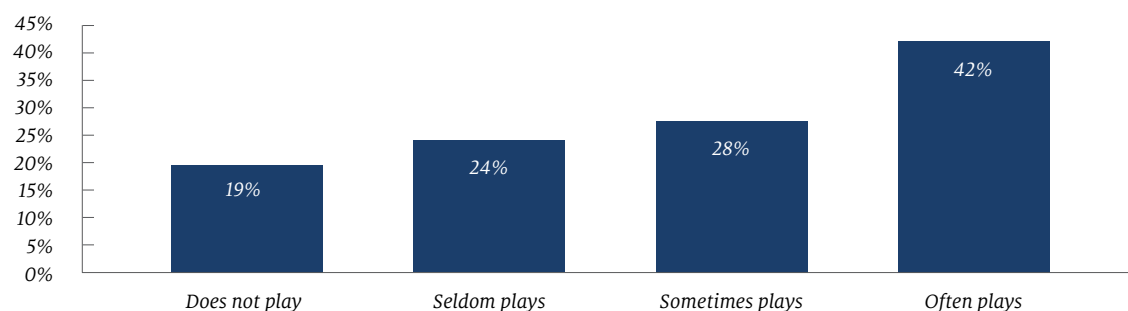


Figure 33: High life satisfaction by frequency of play.

Note: n=501. Answered by children in grades 4-6. The frequency of play category is based on the children’s own indications of whether they “often”, “sometimes”, “rarely” or “never” play either alone or with friends. (Including the “Don’t know” response.)

Source: Epinion for the LEGO Foundation and Tænketanken Mandag Morgen.

WHAT THE CHILDREN SAY – ABOUT PLAYING ALONE AND WITH OTHERS

“Of course you can play alone, but it’s a bit boring because you don’t have anyone to talk to, for example when you play Nerf Gun War, so it’s a bit more fun if you have someone to play with, and then it can become a competition.”

– HERMANN, 11

“Well, it’s calmer playing alone, and sometimes you need to play more quietly. At other times, you just need to burn off some energy and be a bit wild.”

– HANS, 8

“I like it best when there are only two of us. Because then it’s slightly easier to agree on things; if there are more of you, then it’s harder to decide what to play.”

– ALMA, 9

In the interviews and mobile ethnography, most children say that they like to play with other children best of all. When playing with others, it’s easier to find new and fun games to play, and if you want to mess about and burn off some energy, it’s more fun when there are several of you.

However, the social dynamics of play can also be a challenge. Other children can spoil the play if, for example, they do not know the rules or understand the ‘play universe’. Eight-year-old Henriette, provides an example:

“Sometimes, I think it’s annoying when other children have to be given a chance to play with the Barbie dolls. I think to myself: ‘That’s not what you should be doing – it really infuriates me!’”

Although children prefer to play with others, there are several advantages to playing on your own. The youngest children say, among other things, that it can be easier to play in a more concentrated way

alone, for example with dolls or LEGO. It can also be relaxing to play alone, because you avoid all the input from other children.

Play forges bonds – and is a good source of laughter

Play is very popular with most children, and there are many different reasons for this. When asked why it is important to play, the responses are varied – but there are also several common denominators.

For the children in grades 0-3, play is a source of fun and laughter. Here, most of the children (37%) say that the best thing about play is “laughing together”. However, almost as many (36%) say that the best thing is “coming up with new things and playing together”. See Figure 34.

Among the children in grades 4-6 and 7-10 who still play, there is general agreement that the main value of play is that you can have fun. Here, 83% and 74%, respectively, say that the best thing about play is that

Children in grades 0-3: Play is fun and imaginative

“Think of someone you like playing with. What is the best thing about playing with this particular person?”

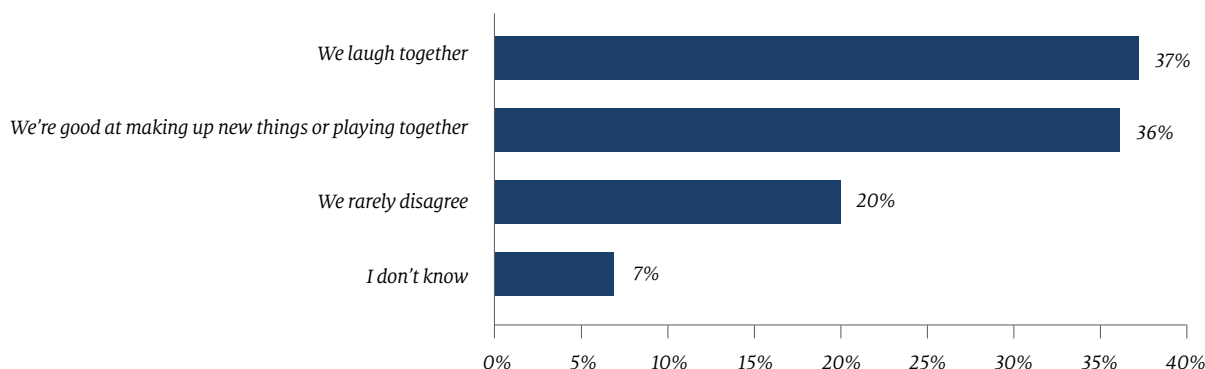


Figure 34: The best thing about playing with your best playmate.

Note: n=673. Answered by children in grades 0-3.

Source: *Epinion for the LEGO Foundation and Tenketanken Mandag Morgen.*

WHAT THE CHILDREN SAY – ABOUT THE BENEFITS OF PLAY

“Play can bring you a little closer together, because during the week you don’t tend to see as much of each other because of school and work. At weekends we spend more time together, and go to the swimming pool or something.”

– RIKKE, 14

“Yes (it feels a bit special when you play, ed.). For example, if you’re playing alone, you can let your imagination run free.”

– EBBE, 11

“When two of you play, it’s usually much more fun because you’re not playing alone. Like when you play mummies and daddies with two others or more.”

– FLORA, 6

“Play can bring you a little closer together.”

– SALINA, 14

“you laugh and have fun”. See Figure 35.

Like the children in grades 0-3, the children in grades 4-6 also emphasise the fact that play stimulates their imagination and creativity. Close to half (46%) say that the good thing about play is that “we can make up our own rules or play together”. Among the children in grades 7-10, only 21% mention this aspect. However, the children in grades 7-10 are aware of the fact that play can provide a starting point for sharing something together. Here, a third (33%) mention that “we have shared experiences that will remain with us afterwards” as one of the main qualities of play.

In the interviews and mobile ethnography, many children explain that play is important above all because it is *fun*. Play is a springboard to having a nice time and laughing together. However, many children also describe play as a completely special universe which they can step into, where they can give their imagination free rein, and where all their worries

melt away. In a way, play lives its own life, where you can sometimes completely forget all sense of time and place. Fifteen-year-old Nikolaj reflects on when he played like this:

“It was all such fun. You switched off mentally and focused on enjoying yourself. It was different.”

The interviews also indicate that children create closer social relationships through play. Play forges bonds that make it easier to get to know other children while strengthening existing friendships. As Jesper, aged 10, explains:

“When you play, you’re more together with your friends. [...] You also get to know your friends better. And you talk together more compared to when you’re sitting with your phone.”

Play also trains the children’s social skills, and teaches them to take care of each other. Several children say, for example, that it’s important that everyone has someone to play with. And even though

Children in grades 4-6 and 7-10: Play is a source of fun and laughter

“What is good about playing? Tick max. three.”

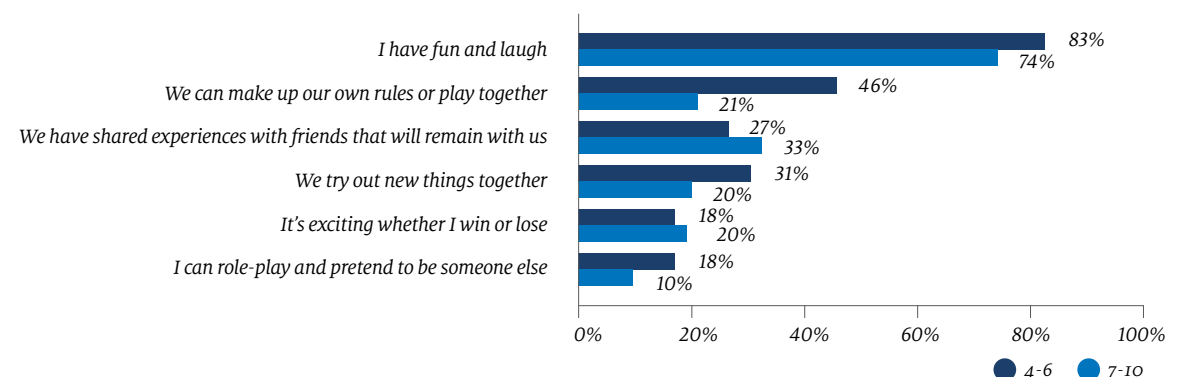
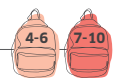


Figure 35: What is good about playing?

Note: n=711. Answered by children in grades 4-6 and 7-10 who have said that they still play to a certain extent, either alone or with friends. “Other”=4-5% and “Don’t know”=3-13%.

Source: Epinion for the LEGO Foundation and Tænketanken Mandag Morgen.

WHAT THE CHILDREN SAY – ABOUT THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN PLAY, COMPUTER GAMES AND SOCIAL MEDIA

“When you play, you’re doing something physical. You move your whole body and not just your fingers.”

– RASMUS, 14

“You could call it play when we play Hay Day (mobile farming game, ed.) at school because there are so many of us involved.”

– THEA, 13

“Some children stop playing because they start playing computer games instead. I don’t play much either because I’ve also begun to play computer games.”

– HERMANN, 11

“If you take selfies on a mobile, I’d say you’re too old to play. You can have a play phone as a child, but I wouldn’t call taking real pictures and uploading them play.”

– HELENE, 14

it can sometimes be demanding, the children who are outside the group are invited to play. For example by nine-year-old Nadia:

“Sometimes it can be annoying, but there are some children in my class who don’t have that many friends, and then you can just ask them to join in. If you think ‘Oh, I don’t want to’, you might as well say yes if they don’t have anyone else to play with.”

Is the playground also digital?

Children’s use of digital technologies and media has accelerated in recent years. A 2016 report shows that Danish schoolchildren hold the European record for hours spent sitting in front of the TV or computer. The report shows, among other things, that 68% of 11-year-old Danish children spend more than two hours a day playing computer games⁸.

However, the question is whether the use of digital technologies such as computer games has any of the same qualities as play – and whether children themselves consider, for example, digital games as play?

Several children say they get into a *flow* when they play on their computer, for example. They forget how long they have been playing for, and can feel annoyed if they are interrupted. However, the children do not usually refer to games on their computer, iPad or mobile phone as play. This is partly because most children associate play as something where you are *physically* present with each other. And partly because digital games usually have clearly defined rules which mean that imagination doesn’t play as central a role as it does in play, at least in the minds of the children. Nevertheless, some children – such as Eddie, aged 13 – say that a computer game can develop into something which is more playful:

“Computer games can be play. Because you can either focus on tactics [in the game] or have a game where you fool around. Fooling around is play, but if it involves tactics, then it’s no longer play.”

It is therefore the context that determines whether children think of computer games as play. The children

Danish children prefer digital play

In 2018, the LEGO Foundation looked at which playful activities 5-12-year-old children from nine different countries prefer. The top score for Danish children was digital play.

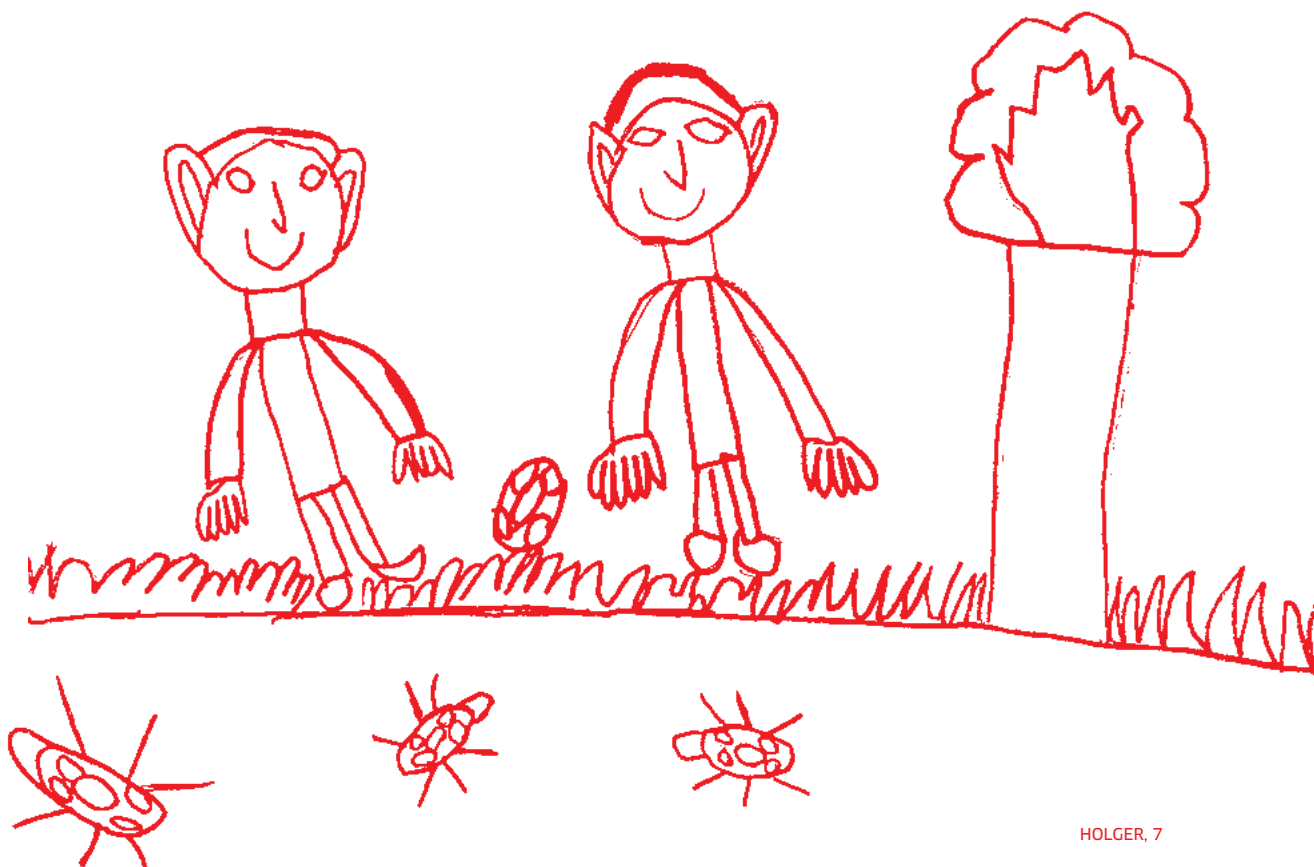
1. Digital play:	90%
2. Sports activities:	76%
3. Quiet games:	67%
4. Short excursions:	62%
5. Arts and crafts:	52%
6. Physical play:	55%
7. Food fun:	45%
8. Educational play:	40%
9. Pretend play:	35%
10. Musical games:	23%
11. Making games out of everyday life:	14%

Source: LEGO Foundation. Play Well Report 2018.

provide some examples of how digital technologies and social media sometimes help to set the framework for play. Emilie, aged 11, says she sometimes plays by *FaceTiming* with her friends, where they practise strange dances or hold make-up competitions. And Viola, 11, gives an example with TikTok:

“We’ve played another game where we have to speak English, so that we practise it and play at the same time. It’s often related to TikTok. We don’t have a TikTok, but we know the TikTok performers – the most popular live in the USA, and they speak English, and it’s those we usually play. [...] Charlie, Dixie and Addison are the most popular, especially Charlie. Then we watch their videos, and then we pretend to be them.”

⁸ WHO (2016). *Health Behaviour in School-aged Children*.



WHAT THE CHILDREN SAY – ABOUT NO LONGER PLAYING

“It’s like it feels boring and not fun or exciting any longer.”

– MALTHE, 11

“I was perhaps 10 or 11 (when I stopped, ed.). I stopped playing later than the others. Some children stopped playing when they were eight or nine. Then I started thinking about other things such as shoes, make-up etc. There came a point when you stopped playing – you just spent time together.”

– SALINA, 14

“I call it ‘being together’ instead of ‘playing’, because I think play is something young children do.”

– NIKOLAJ, 15

When play stops

Although play holds considerable value for most children, there are also many children who stop playing. The survey shows that the proportion of children who play declines steadily with age – and by grades 7-10, many children have stopped playing altogether. Among the children replying that they no longer play, most state that they stopped when they were about 12 years old.

The girls in particular stop playing when they hit their teens. Among the girls in grades 8 and 9, 39% and 38%, respectively, play often, sometimes or rarely. Among the boys in grades 8 and 9, 57% and 56%, respectively, still play. See Figure 36.

In the interviews and mobile ethnography, the children describe in more detail what play means for them and why they stop playing. For several of the older children, it is more a question of what you call it when you are together with your friends rather than what you actually do together. Some children even say that how they spend time together with their friends can be described as play, but that they prefer to call it “hanging out” or just “being together”. They associate play with something that younger children do, and something you put behind you. Julie, aged 13, says:

“I think that as you get older, there’s the idea that you grow up, put childish things behind you and stop using your imagination, even though I don’t really see anything wrong with it.”

Girls stop playing earlier

“Do you play with your friends?” and “Do you sometimes play alone?” Proportion that has answered “Yes, often”, “Yes, sometimes” or “Yes, but rarely” to one of the questions.

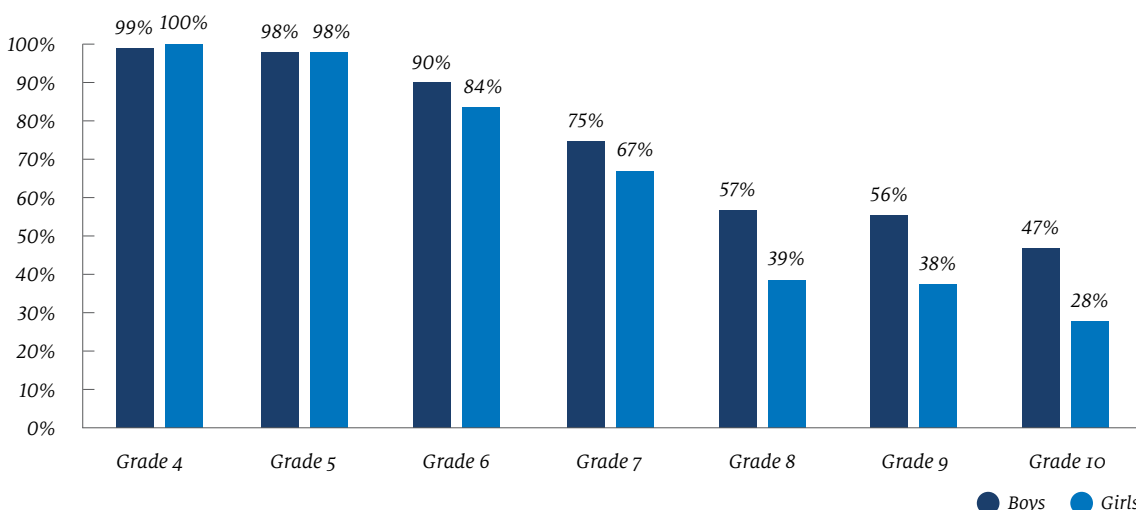
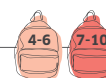


Figure 36: The proportion of boys and girls who play by gender and grade.

Note: n= 1,028. Answered by children in grades 4-6 and 7-10.

Source: Epinion for the LEGO Foundation and Tenketanken Mandag Morgen.

“ Society today has certain standards whereby at some point you have to put play on the shelf and behave like an adult. [...] It's like a phase that's out of my life now.”

- JULIE, 13

Several of the children who have stopped playing find it difficult to say exactly why it is they no longer do so. They explain that they have grown out of it, and that it is something that you naturally stop doing once you reach a certain age.

Play is associated with role-play and imagination – and is replaced by fun, games and competition

Several children in grades 4-6 and 7-10 have also turned their backs on the idea of playing. Nevertheless, most of them look back on play as a positive activity. Several of the older children who no longer play say that play was something that was worry-free, where you did

not dwell on the seriousness of life. Play was all about imagination, childishness and being in the present. As 14-year-old Salina puts it, play was something where “you were just lost in your own play universe”.

The play was replaced by “just being together”, “hanging out”, “having fun” or “playing computer games” with friends. Rasmus, 14, explains that play stops when you stop asking “do you want to play?”. Today, Rasmus asks his friends if they want to “play computer games” or “hang out” together.



Play during the coronavirus pandemic

The restrictions imposed as a result of the coronavirus pandemic meant that children were sent home to the family sphere for a period and that their usual physical play spaces were closed. The possibilities for seeing and playing with friends was limited, and the children experienced growing levels of loneliness as well as concerns about whether they would be able to stay in touch with their friends. Seven-year-old Lukas described it as follows:

“I’ve missed playing with the other classes. Like Christian from class 0.D – I’d like to play with him again. But because of corona we can’t.”

However, not all the children's play options disappeared. Digital play and computer games were used extensively by many children during the pandemic. In the interviews and mobile ethnography, it is clear that the digital universe occupied children for many hours each day during the pandemic. The children emphasised the importance of being able to combine playing computer games etc. with being social. They talked, for example, over Teams, Discord or their mobiles while they were playing on their computers. Karoline, aged 14, describes the new way of playing and spending time together during the pandemic as follows:

“We’ve now started these group calls. It works really well. We sometimes play Minecraft, and we’ll be on the same server. It’s great fun.”

Source: Egmont Foundation (2020). *Forskning i unge og corona* (Research into young people and corona). *Børns Vilkår* (2020). *Analysenotat fra Børns Vilkår om unges bekymringer, savn og skolegang under lockdown* (Survey note from Børns Vilkår on young people's worries, needs and schooling during lockdown).

WHAT THE CHILDREN SAY – ABOUT SUBSTITUTES FOR PLAY

“We’re too old – now we play more football, computer games or PlayStation.”
– MALTHE, 11

“I think children stop playing when they get a mobile phone. Perhaps if you put away your mobile, then you would have to be sociable and play.”
– HELENE, 14

“I would say that I have fun and enjoy the company of other people. I wouldn’t call computer games play. I would call it having fun. But it’s not play.”
– SALINA, 14

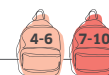
“We call it ‘being together’. For example, we don’t write whether we want to play; that was the kind of thing your parents did for you. We just text whether we want to be together. Even though we might sometimes play when we’re together.”
– IDA, 14

The children’s responses in the interviews and mobile ethnography confirm the findings of the survey. Here, the children who no longer play say what was good about playing when they did, and what is important when they are with their friends *today*. Here, the response “having fun and laughing” crops up again and again. 74% of the children think that this was an important quality of play, and 85% think it is still important when spending time together with their friends now. See Figure 37.

However, children’s views on the value of play and being together with friends also change. For example, more than six out of 10 (61%) children think that one

of the key qualities of play was “making up our own rules and playing together”, while just 5% think that it is important when they are together with their friends *today*. On the other hand, 52% of the children say it is important *today* that you have shared experiences with your friends that will remain with you afterwards, while just 23% think that it was one of the qualities of play. Finally, almost one in three children (29%) reply that excitement, games and competition are important when they are together with their friends *today*, while just 8% think these were one of the qualities of play.

The quality of play and being together with friends changes



“What was the good thing about playing?” and “What is important when you spend time with your friends today?”

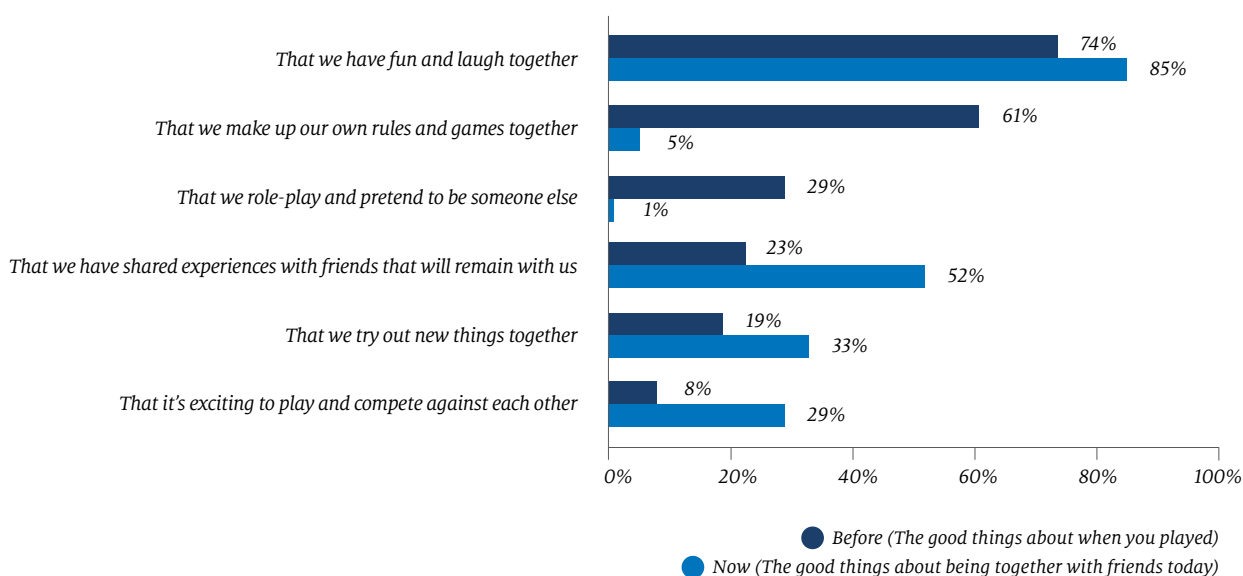


Figure 37: The good things about playing vs the good things about being with friends.

Note: n=318. Answered by children in grades 4-6 and 7-10 who have stated that they no longer play.

Source: Epinion for the LEGO Foundation and Teenketanken Mandag Morgen.

Barriers to play

Many children and adolescents miss playing

Many children stop playing as they become older. However, some of the children sometimes miss playing – especially those children who feel lonely. Among the children in grades 7-10 who reply that they often or sometimes feel lonely, as many as 57% say that they miss playing to a certain extent, while for children who do not feel lonely, the figure is 37%.

Some of the children in the interviews and mobile ethnography describe how they miss playing, for example Cecilie, aged 13:

“Sometimes you miss it a little. I mean fantasy play and not thinking about all sorts of other things. Yes, every so often I miss it.”

Or 15-year-old Mathias:

“When you were smaller, the world was one big playground, and you didn’t have so much on your mind. Life was a game – everything was easier. School takes up a lot more time now. You have to have good marks, and decide what to do afterwards, such as upper secondary school. Life is much more serious, and you have many more responsibilities.”

Shortage of time and space for play

Some children also mention that there are obligations and concerns associated with getting older – and that this may be one of the reasons why you stop playing. This suggests there is not enough time and space for play. And if you ask the children, there are actually quite a large number who feel that they don’t have enough time to play.

Among the children who play, 10-17% reply that they do not have enough time for play. In particular, it is the children with low levels of well-being who feel that they don’t have enough time. Among children in grades 0-3 who don’t have enough time to play, 22% have low/average life satisfaction, while among the children who do have time to play, only 14% have low/average life satisfaction. See Figure 38.

The same pattern applies to children in grades 4-6.

There are also children who just play alone ...

The survey shows that children who prefer to play alone ...

Are lonelier:

Children who often or sometimes feel lonely are three times more likely to state that they prefer to play alone compared to children who rarely feel lonely.

Have lower levels of family well-being:

Among children with low or average family well-being, 12% say that they prefer to play alone. Among children with high family well-being, just 4% say that they prefer to play alone.

Time for play is linked to well-being



“How do you feel your life is at the moment?”
Proportion who have answered “Not good” or “OK”.

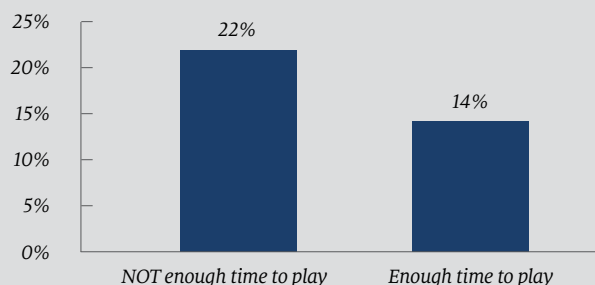


Figure 38: Low/average life satisfaction by time for play.

Note: n=579. Answered by children in grades 0-3. Other response option was “Good”. “Don’t know”=14%.

Source: Epinion for the LEGO Foundation and Tænketanken Mandag Morgen.



Rosa

5

HOW CHILDREN VIEW THE FUTURE

“

*I can't wait to start my
dream course at animation school
– assuming I get in obviously.”*

– KATRINE, 16

Chapter 5

HOW CHILDREN VIEW THE FUTURE

SUMMARY

The future belongs to the children – but what do the children think about the future? What are they looking forward to, and what are they worried about?

The survey shows that children are generally more positive than worried when thinking about the future. They look forward to getting an education, a job etc., but they also worry about whether they can live up to their own and society's expectations. A relatively large group of children are also anxious about global problems such as war and climate change.

If we handed political power in Denmark to our children, their lives would look different in certain areas. Schools would be upgraded, schooldays would be shorter, the pressure of expectations for children and young people would be eased, and there would be better and more equal opportunities for all children in Denmark.

Most children positive about the future

How children view the future reveals a lot about their general well-being and where they are in life. Fortunately, the results of the survey indicate that children in Denmark are generally more positive than worried about the future. Among the children in grades 4-6 and 7-10, 57% reply that they agree or completely agree with the statement: "When I think about the future, I look forward to it", while 25% of children are worried when thinking about the future. See Figure 39.

The results also show that looking forward to the future and worrying about the future are not mutually exclusive. One in 10 children in grades 4-6 and 7-10 (11%) are positive about the future while also being worried about it.

Children look forward to further education and work

The children's positive expectations for the future are nuanced and diverse, but there are two main themes that stand out: education and work. See Figure 40.

Every other child looks forward to the future – one in four are worried

"To what extent do you agree with the following? When I think about the future ..."

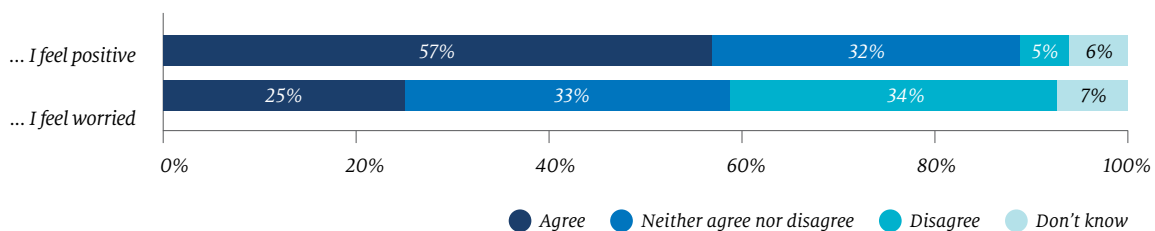
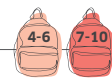


Figure 39: Positivity and worries about the future.

Note: n=1,029. Answered by children in grades 4-6 and 7-10. The "Agree" response category comprises children who have answered "Agree" and "Completely agree", while the "Disagree" response category comprises children who have answered "Disagree" and "Totally disagree".

Source: Epinion for the LEGO Foundation and Tenketanken Mandag Morgen.

Children are looking forward to ...

“What do you look forward to?”

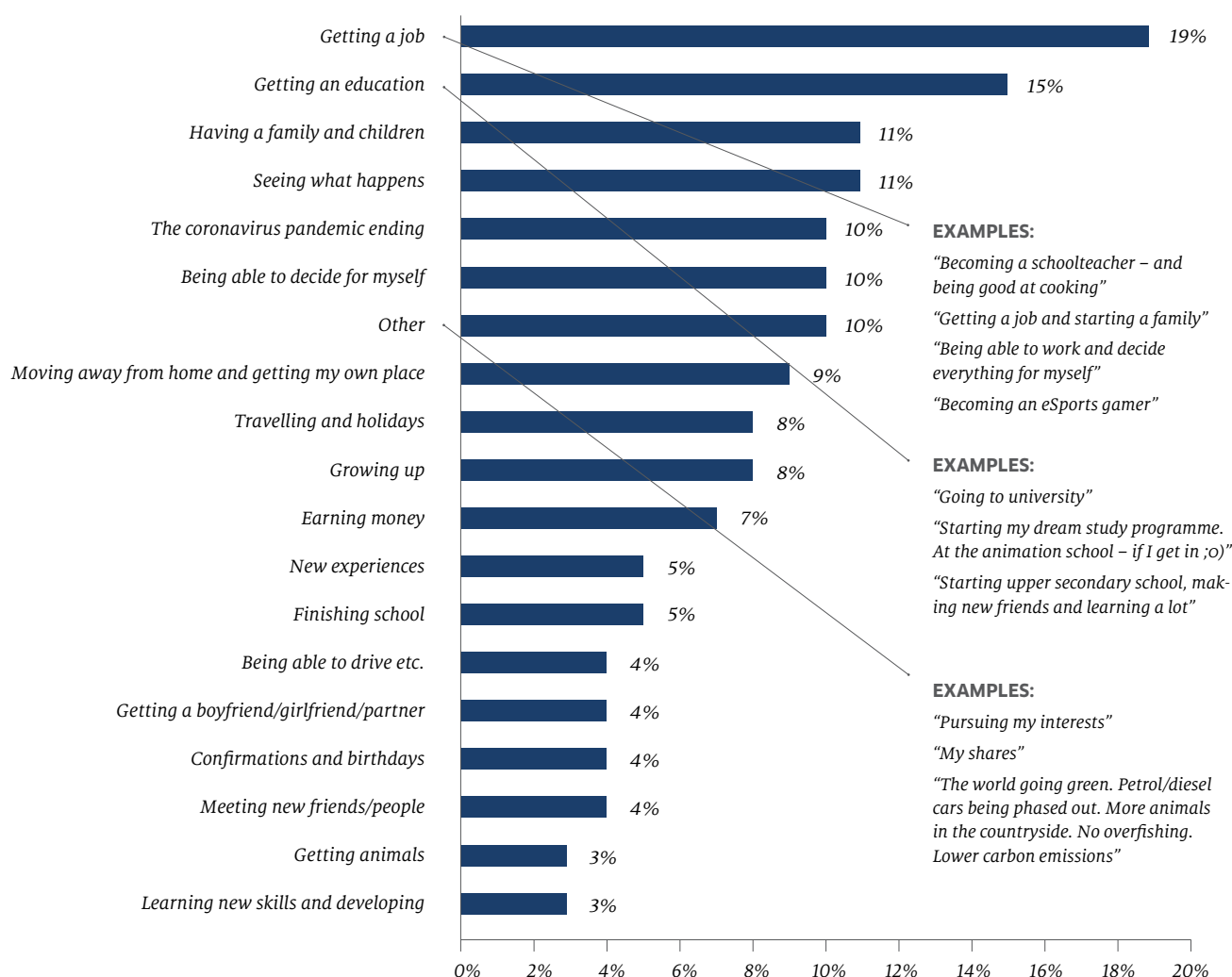
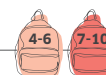


Figure 40: What children look forward to in the future.

Note: n=487. Answered by children in grades 4-6 and 7-10 who state that they feel positive when thinking about the future. The categories are prepared by coding open responses.

Source: Epinion for the LEGO Foundation and Tænketanken Mandag Morgen.

WHAT THE CHILDREN SAY – ABOUT WHAT THEY ARE LOOKING FORWARD TO IN THE FUTURE

“What’s going to happen, and where I end up in life.”

– CLARA, 11

“Being able to decide for myself, and my parents not brushing my teeth. That I can move out, and decide for myself what I want to eat.”

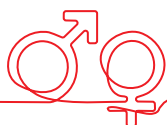
– LAURA, 10

“Testing my limits, taking a dream education, and being able to do whatever I want. Aiming for something achievable which makes me happy.”

– WILLIAM, 15

“Becoming an astrophysicist.”

– KARLA, 11

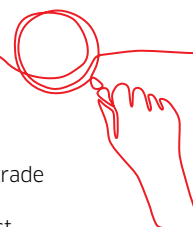


Family and work in their sights: Girls and boys have different hopes for the future

The hopes of boys and girls for the future follow a relatively gender stereotypical pattern in many respects. Girls mention that they are looking forward to having family and children more often than boys (15% of the girls, 7% of the boys) and to leaving home and getting settled (13% of the girls, 4% of the boys). On the other hand, the boys are more preoccupied with getting a job (22% of the boys, 16% of the girls) and earning money (10% of the boys, 4% of the girls).

When asking the children what they are looking forward to, almost one in five⁹ reply that they are looking forward to getting an education. Many of the children describe in general terms what they are looking forward to, such as: “Getting a job and earning money”, but several also mention specific dream jobs, such as becoming a vet, an eSports gamer, an archaeologist or a professional footballer. A smaller group of children with a slightly shorter time perspective say that they are looking forward to a job in their spare time.

15% of the children in grades 4-6 and 7-10 say that they are looking forward to getting an education. Many describe their wishes for the future in general terms, but quite a large group mention specific education/training programmes which they are looking forward to starting imminently. The children are looking forward, for example, to starting at residential school (*efterskole*), grade 10 or further education.



Work and education more of a concern now – family life less so

In 2003, the National Council for Children asked its children’s panel comprising 55 grade 7 classes what they thought were the three most important things for the future. The responses show that back then family life was the most important thing for most children. Education and work occupied second and third place, respectively:

1. A life with family and children:	72%
2. A good education:	61%
3. A steady job:	42%
4. A good place to live:	33%
5. The possibility of travelling and discovering the world:	27%
6. A sense of community with other people:	20%
7. Earning lots of money:	19%
8. A lot of free time:	11%
9. Possibilities for personal development:	9%
10. Becoming famous:	8%

Source: National Council for Children (2003). *Børn og Politik (Children and Politics)*.

⁹ Categories are based on coding open responses. Read more in the method section.

Although work and education dominate children's positive expectations for the future, the answers also vary considerably. Some children (11%) look forward to having a family and children, for example, while others are looking forward to the end of the coronavirus pandemic (10%). In addition, many children are looking forward to greater autonomy in their own lives: 10% say they are looking forward to being able to decide more about their own lives, while 9% are looking forward to leaving home and getting their own place.

The survey also shows that the positive future expectations vary quite a lot across the different age groups. For example, there are some indications that the children in grades 4-6 have been particularly weighed down by the corona lockdowns. In any case, 15% of them say that they are looking forward to the end of the pandemic compared to 6% of children in grades 7-10.

The children in grades 7-10 on the other hand focus more on the next steps for them educationally. Here, one in four (25%) say that they are looking forward to getting an education, while this is true for just 4% of children in grades 4-6.

Pressure of expectations the main concern

As with positive future expectations, children also have many different concerns about the future. Some of the children's worries relate to the surrounding community, while others relate to themselves. And here, in particular, one theme dominates: the fear of not being able to live up to everything that is expected of them. As many as 31%¹⁰ of the children's responses actually relate to expectations which the children are anxious about not being able to realise. See Figure 41.

Children are worried about ...

"What are you worried about?"

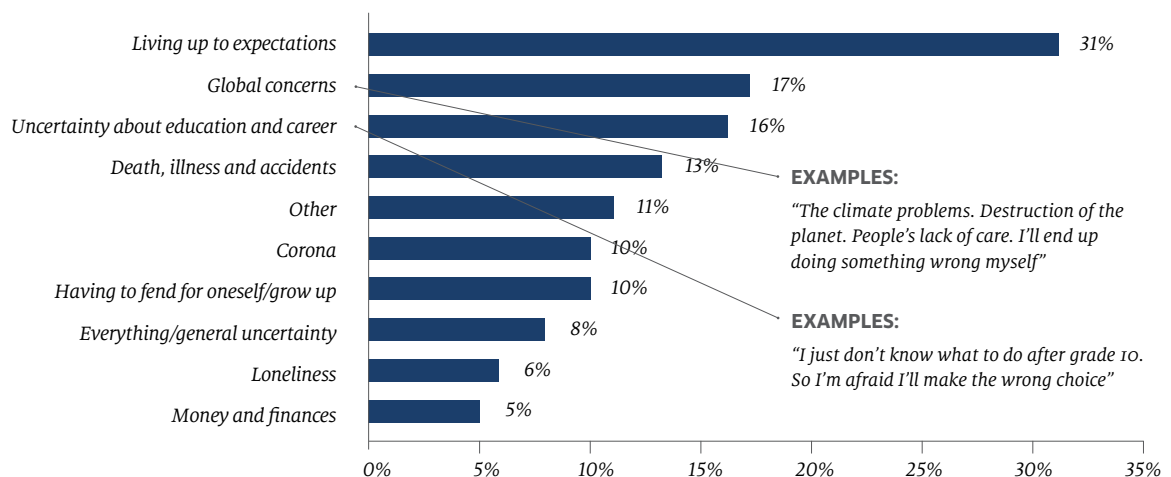


Figure 41: What the children worry about in the future.

Note: n=238. Answered by children in grades 4-6 and 7-10 who have stated that they are worried when thinking about the future. The categories are prepared by coding open responses.

Source: Epinion for the LEGO Foundation and Tenketanken Mandag Morgen.

¹⁰ Categories are based on coding open responses. Read more in the method section.

WHAT THE CHILDREN SAY – ABOUT THEIR WORRIES FOR THE FUTURE

“Many children my age are good at denigrating each other, and you end up having no self-confidence, and I’m afraid it will stay with me in future.”

– AYA, 14

“Biodiversity loss.
Climate change.”

– SOFIA, 16

“Whether I’m good enough at school, and whether I’m stressed.”

– BENJAMIN, 12

There are several dimensions to the concerns about being unable to live up to the expectations. Some children talk about expectations at a general level, and say, for example, that “so much is expected of us” or that “my plan is falling to pieces, and I’m not good enough”. Others mention more specific expectations, such as being expected to get a good job or do well at school. However, most worries about expectations stem from getting the desired education or training. Several of the children reflect on exams and marks, and the consequences they face if they do not do “well enough”. Several describe a fear of “failure”, and of making the “wrong choices”, which may prevent them from continuing their studies and at the end of the day from getting a good job. Thea, aged 13, describes it as follows:

“Sometimes I worry. I worry because if I fail and don’t get into the right school, then I’m not really sure what I’ll do”.

So worries about education are very preoccupying. The worries not only relate to the fear of disappointment, but also to uncertainty and doubt. 16% of the children say they are worried because they don’t know which direction to follow on the educational path. They are unsure which study programme or training to take, or what sort of a career they want.

The concerns also embrace the surrounding community. About one in six (17%) mention global challenges such as war, pollution, an apocalypse and – in particular – the climate crisis. Worries about

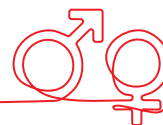
the climate are also a theme that crops up in the interviews and mobile ethnography. One of those concerned about the climate is Salina, aged 14:

“I’m mostly worried about the future because of climate change, and it would be very nice if it stopped before it was too late.”

Older children more worried

Children’s worries appear to grow as they get older. In grades 4-6, one in six children (17%) worry when thinking about the future, while in grades 7-10 the figure is one in three (33%).

The oldest children are not just more concerned. The nature of the worries also changes as the children get older. Among the children in grades 4-6, the biggest worry is that they or someone they know falls ill, dies or is involved in an accident. These concerns are voiced by 28% of the children in grades 4-6, compared to 8% of children in grades 7-10. The children in grades 7-10 are more concerned about finding a sense of direction in their lives. They write, among other things “That I don’t know what I want to do”, “If the job I choose isn’t right for me” and “I don’t know what to do with my life, and I have to decide now”. The children in grades 7-10 are also more worried when it comes to living up to expectations. The concerns about expectations are mentioned by 36% of children in grades 7-10 as opposed to 16% of children in grades 4-6.



Girls more worried about the future than boys

The results suggest that girls are more worried about the future than boys. 20% of the girls in grades 4-6 are worried about the future compared to 13% of the boys. In grades 7-10, the proportion of worried girls and boys has doubled. Here, as many as 40% of the girls state they are worried compared to 25% of the boys. And it is particularly the pressure of expectation that weighs on the oldest girls. As many as 16% of girls in grades 7-10 say they fear they will not be able to live up to what is expected of them. By comparison, this is only true for 5% of the boys.

“That my family catches corona, and that my father’s health deteriorates even more.”
– SIGNE, 9

“Death, and the fact that dangerous accidents can happen.”
– MOLLY, 10

“That we’ll be sitting exams soon.”
– ALBERTE, 15

If the children were prime minister ...

What would children’s lives be like if the most powerful job in the country was handed to them? This question was asked of the children in grades 7–10.

Many of the answers relate to the children’s main activity on a daily basis: school. Half of the children (52%)¹¹ say that they would improve schools in some way if they had the keys to the prime minister’s office¹².

One in three (31%) children make general suggestions for how schools could be improved. See Figure 42. The suggestions range from “more and

better teachers” to “smaller class sizes” and “different teaching” – for example more movement in classes, less screen time and more creative teaching. Some even believe the school system itself needs changing, like this 15-year-old girl:

“I would change the school system. It’s by no means all children who can learn equally well in the current rigid system. You’re not allowed to throw yourself into what interests you, which can diminish the desire to learn.”

The entire group of children: We want better schools



“If you were the children’s prime minister, what would you do to make children’s lives better?”

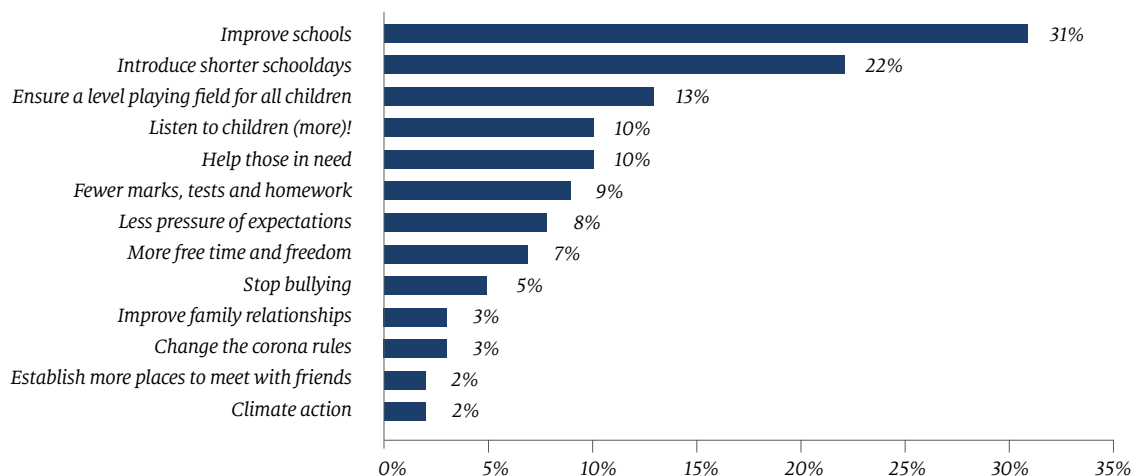


Figure 42: What the children would do if they were prime minister.

Note: n=311. Answered by children in grades 7–10. The categories are prepared by coding open responses.

Source: Epinion for the LEGO Foundation and Tænketanken Mandag Morgen.

¹¹ Categories are based on coding open responses. Read more in the method section.

¹² 52% of the children say they would either make general school improvements, introduce shorter school days, have fewer marks and less homework and stop bullying or a combination of the categorised response options.



Hopes and worries during corona

The coronavirus pandemic has preoccupied everyone in 2020 and 2021, but the children's hopes and worries for the future extend beyond corona. Just one in 10 of the children who have replied to what they are looking forward to and what worries them about the future specifically mention the coronavirus pandemic.

However, other surveys show that the lockdowns caused a lot of concern for children – especially in the short term. In a survey of grade 8 pupils in spring 2020, the Egmont Foundation asked the children to look ahead one year. Here, as many as 33% replied that they were worried about whether they would pass the school leaving examination, while another 33% were concerned about anyone in their family catching the coronavirus.

The worries were also mentioned frequently in Børns Vilkår's survey of children and young people's experiences with school and well-being during the first lockdown in 2020. To the question "What worries you most?", the majority (68%) replied "Someone in my family falling ill with coronavirus" followed by "I miss my daily routines" (67%) and "I feel under pressure because of all the school exercises we get" (58%).

Source: Egmont Foundation (2020). Forskning i unge og corona (Research into young people and corona). Børns Vilkår (2020). Analysenotat fra Børns Vilkår om unges bekymringer, savn og skolegang under lockdown (Survey note from Børns Vilkår on young people's worries, needs and schooling during lockdown).

The 2013 school reform gave Danish schoolchildren a longer school day, but not all children think it was a good idea. Almost one in four (22%) say that they would make the school day shorter if they were prime minister and were in a position to improve the lives of children. One in 10 also say they would award fewer marks, require fewer tests and give less homework as well.

However, it is not just life at school which the children believe needs improving. A large group of children mention broader social initiatives that would support *all* children in Denmark. For example, 10% would provide help for the children who need it, while 13% would ensure that there was a level playing field for all children in Denmark. Moreover, one in 10 children say they would make a point of listening more closely to the children if they occupied the prime minister's chair.

Children should also just be allowed to be children – at least according to the children themselves. 7% of children in grades 7-10 would introduce more free time if they were prime minister, while 5% would do more to counter bullying. On top of which, 8% would work to strengthen children's self-esteem and self-confidence by taking a stand against the pressure of expectation that many children feel while they are still young. As 13-year-old Ellie explains:

"I would tell them that they're fine as they are, and that Snapchat filters don't make them any better."

If I was prime minister, I would ...

"Make sure everyone lives in a climate-friendly way, so that we children and young people have a future."

- AMINA, 16

"Listen to children – the grown-ups are no good at it at all. I wouldn't just tell them that I was their prime minister, but I would actually be so."

- SIMONE, 13

"FOCUS MORE ON WELL-BEING THAN PERFORMANCE."

- OLIVER, 14

"Make school more fun and a better place to be."

- BIRK, 13

"Make the school day shorter, much shorter. The aim of the school system is for children to earn money and get an education – not their well-being. It's important that children are well, and that they don't worry, otherwise they'll enjoy school less. Prolonging the time they spend at school doesn't help – it just makes it worse. Children also need more freedom, because they're not kids forever – one day it'll be over, and then they have to work."

- RASMUS, 14

"Cut the number of tests and marks because it's really stressful."

- YOUSSEF, 15

"HELP TO ENSURE THAT EVERYONE HAS PLENTY OF SELF-RESPECT."

- CAROLINE, 13

"Make sure that everyone is friendly with one another."

- CARL, 15



Lack of well-being results in darker thoughts about the future

Although the children are generally more positive than worried about the future, there is a clear pattern in terms of which children look forward to the future and those that worry. It is the children in particular who are thriving who look forward to the future, while children with lower well-being have a gloomier outlook.

Children with low life satisfaction, low school well-being and low family well-being as well as

children who feel lonely are more worried and less positive when thinking about the future. For example, 37% of children with low life satisfaction say they look forward to the future, while as many as 40% are worried. Among children with high life satisfaction, the reverse is true. Here, 68% look forward to the future, while just 15% are worried. See Figure 43.

Children with low well-being gloomier about the future

“When I think about the future, I feel positive” and “When I think about the future, I feel worried”.
Proportion answering: “Totally agree” or “Agree” to the two statements.

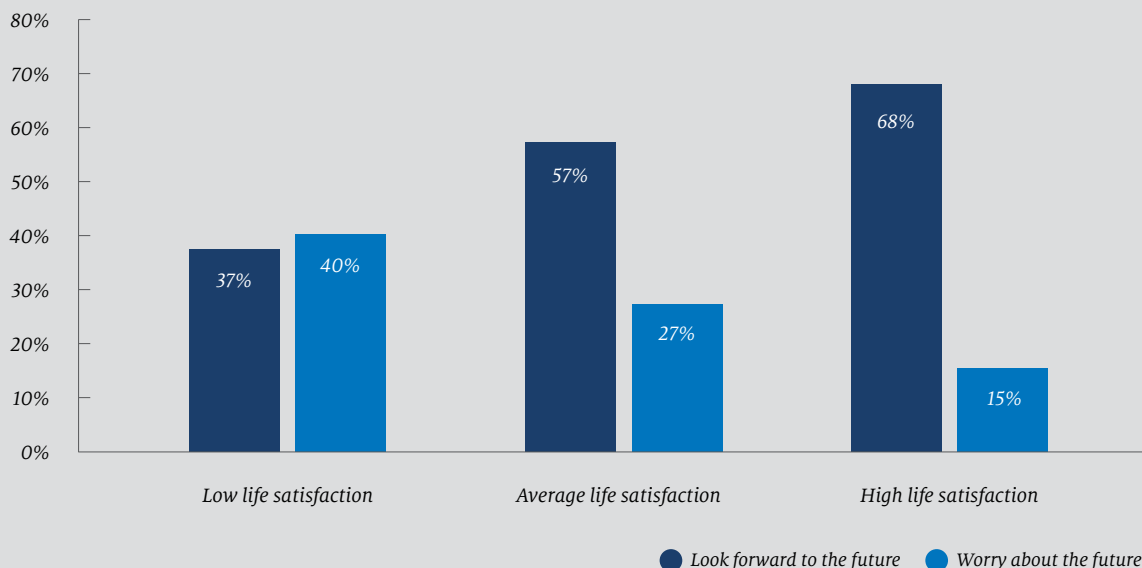


Figure 43: Positivity and worries about the future by life satisfaction.

Note: n=1,013. Answered by children in grades 4-6 and 7-10. The other response options were “Neither agree nor disagree”, “Disagree”, “Totally disagree” and “Don’t know”. “Don’t know”=5-9%.

Source: Epinion for the LEGO Foundation and Tenketanken Mandag Morgen.

The role of play in future

The children in the survey do not mention play themselves when describing what they are looking forward to or what they are worried about when thinking about the future. Play appears to be something that the children associate with childhood rather than adulthood. However, not all children feel that way. Viktoria, aged 13, doesn't think you should stop playing when you grow up:

"You might stop playing because you get older, but I don't think that's so good, because I think you should always keep playing."

The survey shows that children's views on the future are related to how often they do fun things together with their family. Children who often do fun things with their family have a more positive mindset as regards the future. The survey shows that 67% of children who often engage in fun activities look forward to the future. Among children who don't do fun things with their family as often, the figure is 41%. See Figure 44.

Family fun goes hand in hand with a positive view of the future

"To what extent do you agree with the following: 'When I think about the future, I feel positive?'"

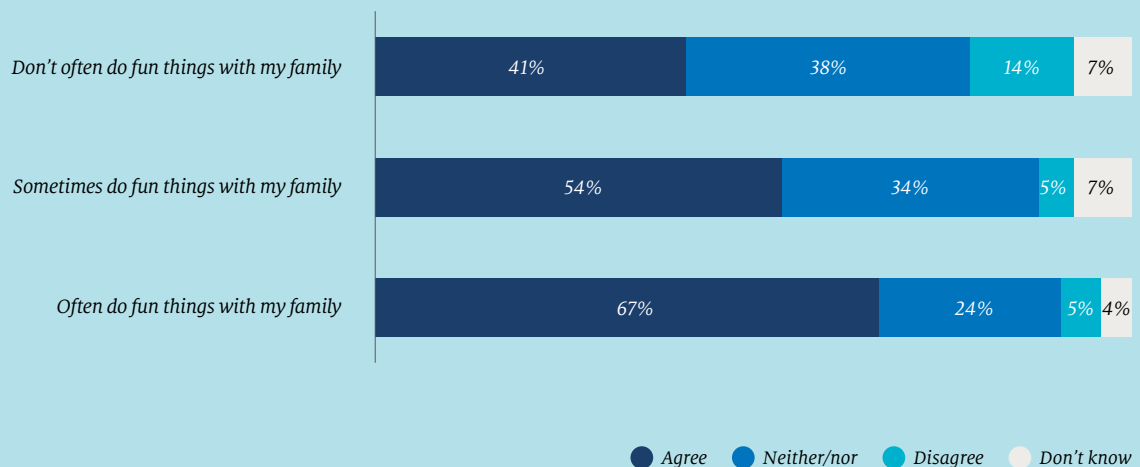


Figure 44: Positivity about the future by frequency of family fun.

Note: n=1,026. Answered by children in grades 4-6 and 7-10. The "Agree" response category comprises children who have answered "Agree" and "Completely agree", while the "Disagree" response category comprises children who have answered "Disagree" and "Totally disagree".

Source: *Epinion for the LEGO Foundation and Tænketanken Mandag Morgen.*



“

(I'm looking forward to ... ed.)

*Testing my limits by taking
a dream education, and being able
to do whatever I want. To aiming
for something that is achievable
and which makes me happy.”*

- WILLIAM, 15

Methodological appendix

The good life – according to children is based on extensive quantitative and qualitative data material. The data material has been collected in three phases. See Figure 45.

The first phase consisted of a systematic literature study on relevant child research about well-being and play⁹ as well as six qualitative interviews with children. Here, relevant themes were identified, and an initial understanding formed of children's thoughts and language. The preliminary study served as the basis for the second phase of the project, which consisted of a nationwide questionnaire survey with a representative sample of 1,702 child respondents in school grades 0-10. In the third phase of the survey, 22 qualitative children's interviews and a mobile ethnographic study with 22 participating children were conducted, which contributed in-depth perspectives, insights and narratives.

A survey at child height

The ambition of the survey – to involve children of all school ages – made it necessary to take into account children's different developmental stages. It has therefore been crucial to take into account

the children's ability to concentrate as well as their memory, susceptibility and ability for abstract thinking in order to ensure high quality in terms of both the qualitative and quantitative parts of the survey.¹⁰ The children have therefore been divided into three age groups – grades 0-3 (approx. 5-9 years), grades 4-6 (approx. 9-12 years) and grades 7-10 (approx. 12-16 years). All parts of the survey – from interview guides to the questionnaire and the mobile ethnography – have been tailored to the children's ages, abilities and backgrounds for participating in the survey.

PHASE 1: PRELIMINARY STUDY

The preliminary study consisted of a literature study and six qualitative interviews. The literature study provided a systematic overview of Scandinavian surveys from 2015 to 2020 that address children's experiences of well-being and play. The qualitative interviews provided insights into the children's language and their overall thoughts about what contributes to a good child life. Both the literature study and interviews shed light on relevant themes, and created an initial understanding of key concepts in the subsequent survey.

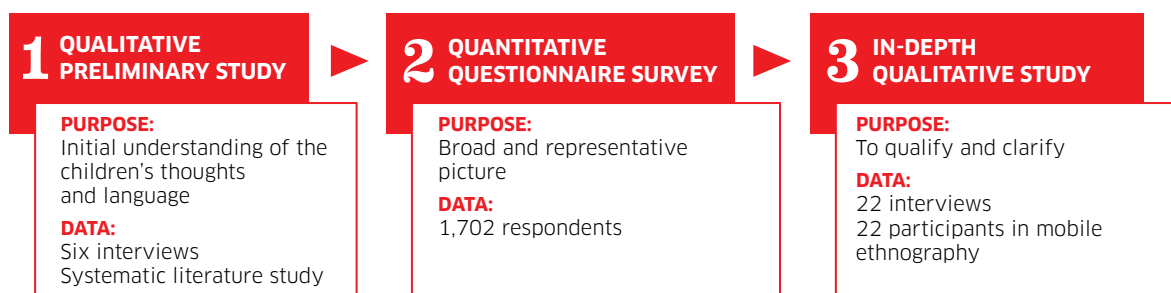


Figure 45: The project's three data collection phases.

⁹ Read the literature study here (in Danish): <http://taenketanken.mm.dk/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Trivsel-og-leg-foelge-boernene-et-systematisk-litteraturstudie-over-skandinavisk-boerneforskning-2015-2020.pdf>

¹⁰ Andersen & Ottosen. (2002). *Børn som respondenter: Om børns medvirken i survey* (Children as respondents: About children's involvement in surveys). VIVE – Danish Centre for Social Science Research.

Andersen & Kjærulff. (2003). *Hvad kan børn svare på? – om børn som respondenter i kvantitative spørgeskemaundersøgelser*. (What can children provide answers to? – About children as respondents in quantitative questionnaire surveys). VIVE – Danish Centre for Social Science Research.

Petersen, Anne. (2010). *Den lille bog om metode – Sådan undersøger du børnekultur og børns perspektiv* (The little book about method – How to study children's culture and children's perspectives). ViaSystime.

Six interviews were conducted with children aged 6-14 years in September/October 2020. The interviews were conducted in collaboration with Epinion and their experienced children's interviewers. Due to the second wave of the coronavirus pandemic in autumn 2020, the preliminary study was interrupted prematurely. It was possible to conduct four of the six interviews as home interviews, while two interviews with children in grades 7-10 were conducted as a telephone interview in one case, and as a video interview in the other.

PHASE 2: QUESTIONNAIRE

The questionnaire survey was conducted among children in grades 0-10, and contains 1,702 responses. In order to take account of the children's different ages, abilities and backgrounds for participating in the survey, the questionnaires were tailored to three age groups: grades 0-3 (approx. 5-9 years), grades 4-6 (approx. 9-12 years) and grades 7-10 (approx. 12-16 years). For the pupils in grades 0-3, the entire questionnaire was read out loud by a robot, and the questions were supplemented with graphics and icons to increase understanding and readability. It was also possible for the children in grades 4-6 and 7-10 to have the questions read out loud, just as the questions were supplemented by age-appropriate graphics. In addition, the length and wording of the questionnaires was tailored to the different age groups, so that the children in grades 4-6 had slightly fewer and less abstract questions than the children in grades 7-10.

A total of four questionnaires were prepared: one introductory form for the parents, who contributed relevant background information about the children, one form for the children in grades 0-3, one form

for the children in grades 4-6, and one form for the children in grades 7-10. The parents were sent the same background questions, irrespective of age group. In addition, there were a few questions for the children which had the same wording across the age groups. Moreover, the children in grades 0-3 had a number of age-adapted questions and fewer questions than those in grades 4-6 and 7-10. The children in grades 4-6 and 7-10 received basically the same questionnaire, the only difference being that the children in grades 7-10 had slightly more questions.

The questionnaire has been quality assured with input from the project reference group as well as Epinion's methodological experts. Prior to the data collection, the questionnaire was pilot-tested with a collection of 50 children's responses followed by nine interviews with parents of children aged 6-13 years. The pilot test and follow-up interviews ensured that the questions in the questionnaire were understandable and did not give rise to confusion among the children. The child respondents were randomly selected via Epinion's Norstat panel and recruited through their parents. Recruiting the children through their parents ensured that parental consent was obtained, while at the same time allowing parents to ask several initial questions and thus ensure valid background variables.

The data collection took place from 18 December 2020 until 22 January 2021 in the form of online web interviews (CAWI). (See Figure 46, p. 96).

Many of the responses from the children in grades 0-3 were collected over Christmas – especially on Christmas Eve. On closer examination, these responses show that the children in grades 0-3 who responded between 23 and 25 December state higher life satisfaction than those who responded at other

	Grades 0-3	Grades 4-6	Grades 7-10
Questionnaire survey	673	501	528

Table 2 – Number of respondents in the quantitative data by age group

Note: Slightly more responses were collected among the children in grades 0-3 in order to distinguish between children in grades 0-1 and in grades 2-3 in some of the analyses in the report.

times. This slight bias is not considered a challenge, as the survey has been checked for confounding (third) variables.

The full sample is representative of gender, age, region and parental educational level. Representativeness is ensured through a two-step process. First, the data collection is monitored by Epinion along the way to ensure the correct distribution across the selected background variables. After this, a post-stratification of data is carried out, in which Epinion has weighted the individual respondents in the survey. This means that the children's responses are given slightly more weight if they are part of an underrepresented group in the survey (and vice versa). During this process, the weightings are iteratively adjusted until the sample distributions align with the population distributions within each of the sub-target groups. Epinion has post-stratified the cleaned data by weighting the responses in the sub-data sets according to gender, age and region to ensure a representative net sample. Epinion has chosen not to weight the sub-datasets according to parental educational level, as this

variable increases the weight interval. However, the full sample reflects the educational level of the parents for the target group.

All differences shown in the publication are significant, with a minimum significance level of 0.05, unless otherwise mentioned. The analyses have been carried out with simple context analyses (chi², gamma or OLS). The correlations have been checked for confounding (third) variables, where there have been suspicions that the correlations were indicative of other underlying factors. The correlations thus apply across gender, age, parental income and educational levels as well as urbanisation.

The questionnaires contained a total of four open questions. The open responses have been coded with an open code approach. After analysing the open coding, a number of closed categories have been defined in a code book. Subsequently, a closed coding process has been carried out, in which the reliability of the coding has been tested with intercoding, where two different people have coded the same sample of responses. For the test, 50-100 responses per question

Number of responses by collection date for the three age groups

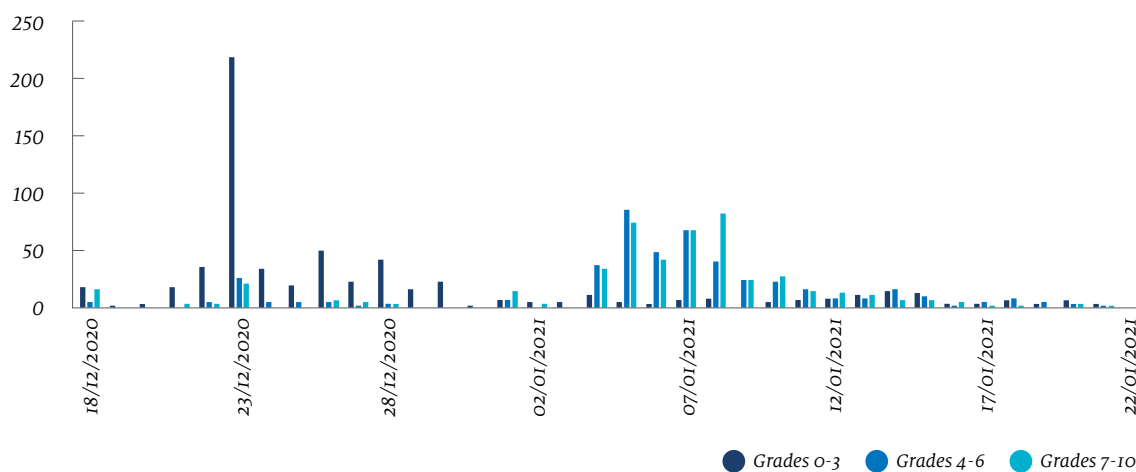


Figure 46: Data collection period.

Note: N=1,702. Grades 0-3 N=673, grades 4-6 N=501 and grades 7-10 N=528.

were randomly selected. The questions could contain several statements, for example a response could certainly contain both a worry about doing well at school and a worry about the coronavirus crisis. Thus, there was also a slight fluctuation in the agreement of the codes on the number of statements. The match between the codes was 87-90%, which we consider a high and valid target.

PHASE 3: QUALITATIVE FOLLOW-UP

Qualitative interviews

The survey's qualitative data comprises, among other things, semi-structured interviews with 22 children aged 6-15 years. The interviews were conducted by Epinion's children's interviewers between 17 May and 10 June 2021. The interviews reveal a number of themes that revolve around the important things in the children's lives and the children's views on what is a good child life. This part of the survey aims, on the one hand, to elaborate on and refine the results of the questionnaire survey and, on the other, to contribute new and in-depth insights into and perspectives on what children themselves understand as a good child life.

The interviews were conducted in the children's homes to ensure as safe an environment as possible, with each interview lasting 45-90 minutes. The interviews were based on a semi-structured interview guide tailored to the three age groups – grades 0-3, 4-6 and 7-10. For the interviews, pictogram boards and smiley boards were used to help children put their emotions and activities into words, and to make the interviews as relevant and exciting for the children as possible.

The 22 children interviewed had all participated in the questionnaire survey. The selection of interviewees was based on a desire for distribution across a range of background characteristics,

including age, gender, ethnicity, urbanity, family type and parental educational level, but also on the basis of the children's responses to questions about life satisfaction, participation in organised after-school activities, how they view the future and the extent to which the child plays. Relatively more interviews were conducted with children in grades 0-3, as this group did not participate in the mobile ethnographic study. See Table 3.

Mobile ethnographic study

In order to make the survey relevant and fun for the children, and to access a different type of data, the interviews were supplemented by a mobile ethnographic study. The method involves presenting the children with a series of tasks via their mobile phone, computer or tablet over a given period of time. This type of study is characterised by a high degree of flexibility, because the children participate via their digital devices (usually their mobile phone), and it provides a higher degree of freedom with regard to where and when children should respond. The method benefits from the children's digital familiarity, and it provides an insight into children's lives and immediate perspectives on their lives in a realistic context as the children's lives unfold.

Twenty-two children aged 10-15 years participated in the study, which took place between 17 May and 6 June 2021. It involved asking the participants to do one to three small tasks about every other day. The tasks were presented on the interactive online platform Recollective, where the children could answer the tasks independently by either uploading videos, pictures or writing text answers. Epinion's mobile ethnographic moderators subsequently followed up with in-depth questions, if necessary, and were also

	Grades 0-3	Grades 4-6	Grades 7-10
Interview	12	5	5
Mobile ethnographic study	0	9	13

Table 3 – Number of respondents in the qualitative data by age group.



Impact of the coronavirus pandemic on analysis and data collection

The purpose of the publication is not to give an account of changes in children's lives during the coronavirus pandemic. Rather, the publication sets out to clarify children's general understanding of what a good child life is. Even though life for children in 2020/2021 has been characterised by restrictions, being sent home and home schooling, the disturbances to everyday life have also been an opportunity for reflection – for adults and children alike. In this way, the coronavirus period has created a momentum for self-reflection, where it has been even more possible to address the agenda on how children characterise a good child life.

The data collection in all phases of the survey has taken place while the coronavirus pandemic has to varying degrees been making its mark on society. Therefore, here is a brief review of the coronavirus pandemic's impact on the different phases:

The preliminary study interviews were held in September-October 2020. The plan was to conduct 15 interviews. However, the number had to be reduced and the preliminary study shortened as a result of new restrictions which were introduced in Denmark during autumn 2020. Four physical interviews were held, after which two interviews were conducted by telephone.

The questionnaire survey took place from 18 December 2020 to 22 January 2021 – a period marked by new and stricter restrictions for the children. On 16 December, new restrictions were presented, which came into force on Christmas Day. In early December, all pupils in grade 5 and up were sent home in the municipalities where the coronavirus was rampant, while all schoolchildren – including children in grades 0-4 – were sent home from 21 December. In addition, the possibility of participating in organised after-school and cultural activities was further restricted. In addition to the national lockdown, several children experienced periods with local lockdowns as a result of infection at their schools or in their classes. The public authorities urged families to keep gatherings as small as possible on Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve. In January 2021, the restrictions were extended, and a stricter ban on gatherings was introduced, so that max. five people could meet at any one time.

The follow-up interviews and the mobile ethnographic study took place from 17 May to 10 June 2021, and were characterised by more normal daily lives for the children. The schools were fully reopened for all age groups, the ban on gatherings was lifted and the after-school activities reopened. In the interviews and the mobile ethnographic study, questions were asked directly about the children's experiences of how restrictions and the coronavirus affected their lives as a way of initiating a discussion about the good child life.

in regular contact with the participants who did not respond in order to assist with any challenges. Many children have responded very thoroughly and judiciously, while a few provided less than complete answers, which is quite typical for this type of study. The dropout rate in this study has been lower than it typically is in similar mobile ethnographic studies involving adults. Of the 22 participants, only four failed to solve all the tasks; of these, three solved about half of the tasks and one solved *almost* all of them.

Before the start of the mobile ethnography, all the children together with a parent were briefed in each case by phone on the background and purpose of the study. This was important – to ensure technical onboarding (downloading of app, login etc.) and also that both parents and the child were able to provide informed consent with regard to the child's participation.

Qualitative analysis

The data from the qualitative interviews and from the mobile ethnographic study has been coded by Epinion, which has read the material and found patterns in the data sources. On the basis of the qualitative analysis work, Epinion produced a results report, in which key points, analytical points and quotations have since been incorporated into this publication. The children's quotes were selected on the basis of the analysis work, so that they reflect insofar as possible the children's responses in general. The children's names have been anonymised using pseudonyms.





About the LEGO Foundation

The goal of the LEGO Foundation is to inspire and develop the builders of tomorrow – a mission shared with the LEGO Group. The LEGO Foundation wants to create a future where learning through play helps children to be creative, engaged and to become lifelong learners. The work of the LEGO Foundation is about highlighting the importance of play in children's development and rethinking the framework for learning. In collaboration with leading experts, influential players, educators and parents, the LEGO Foundation will equip, inspire and activate champions of play.

About Tænketanken Mandag Morgen

Tænketanken Mandag Morgen is one of the leading politically independent think-tanks in Denmark. We put the big issues and challenges of our welfare state on the agenda, and bring people together to inspire new solutions, including welfare, the green transition, digitalisation, governance and democracy. Our partners are public, private, professional and voluntary organisations working to understand and contribute to the development of society. Together, we create and disseminate new knowledge. We hold conferences and workshops, and operate networks. We develop and test new initiatives and find new paths towards better and more citizen-oriented welfare. Our work is always based on solid analyses, broad player involvement, innovation and sharp communication.