WHAT DOES CARE MEAN TO 16 & 17 YEAR-OLDS?

Summary research findings

23 January 2023

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Introduction

#KeepCaringTo18 is a national campaign in England which aims to ensure that every child in care receives care where they live. It was launched in 2020 following serious concerns about the safety and welfare of children in care.

It is unlawful for local authorities to house children in care aged 15 and under in accommodation where they do not receive care from those who have day-to-day responsibility for their well-being. This same legal protection has not been extended to 16 and 17 year-olds. On children's rights day[1] last year (20 November 2022), on behalf of the #KeepCaringTo18 campaign, Article 39 children's rights charity launched an online survey for 16 and 17 year-olds in England. The survey was titled 'What does care mean to you?'. Sixteen and 17 year-olds were invited to take part irrespective of their home situation. The survey ran until 1 January 2023, a period of 6 weeks.

Who took part

A total of 355 16 and 17 year-olds completed the survey, 58 of whom said they are either in care now or have previously been in care.

Home / living arrangements	Number	%
I live with both of my parents (this includes step-parents)	239	67%
I live with one of my parents	56	18%
I live with foster carers	23	6%
I live with other family members (who are not my parents)	13	4%
I live in a children's home	9	3%
I live in a hostel or a foyer with other people my own age and with adults not related to me	6	2%

[1] On 20 November 1989, the United Nations General Assembly in New York adopted the Convention on the Rights of the Child. This is celebrated internationally as children's rights day.

I live in my own flat or bedsit	3	1%
I live in a hostel or a foyer with other people my own age	2	1%
I live in a shared house with other people my own age and with adults not related to me	2	1%
Other answers	2	1%
Total answering this question	**355**	**104%[2]**

Headline results

Teenagers want to be loved, protected and valued

We gave a list of 19 different illustrations of care, and asked survey respondents to state whether they are **necessary** for 16 and 17 year-olds. They were able to answer 'yes', 'no' or 'I'm not sure'. Table 1 below shows the proportion of 16 and 17 year-olds who replied 'yes' to each element.

Table 1: ALL survey respondents aged 16 and 17

What care is necessary for 16 and 17 year-olds		**Number**	**%**
1	Having someone who is regularly around to chat and to show an interest in you	345	97%
2	Having someone who shows/tells you that you are loved	343	97%
3	Having someone to deal with emergencies connected to electricity, gas, Internet connection, and/or security (break-ins)	342	97%
4	Having someone who can protect you if you are ever in danger (at home or somewhere else)	340	96%
5	Having someone who tries to stop you doing things that could harm you	329	93%
6	Having someone who knows when you are upset or worried, and then tries to help you	329	93%
7	Having someone available during the night if you are poorly or need some other help	324	92%
8	Having someone who celebrates your birthdays	323	92%
9	Having someone who helps you get ready for university (if this is what you are planning to do)	321	91%
10	Having someone to help you with managing your money and paying bills	320	90%
11	Having someone who cooks meals for you and/or teaches you how to cook	311	88%
12	Having someone to give advice about growing up and relationships	310	88%
13	Having someone to check that you are OK when you are out at night / away from home	304	87%
14	Having someone who helps you apply for a job and attend an interview (if this is what you are planning to do)	299	84%
15	Having someone who washes your clothes and/or teaches you how to wash your clothes	291	82%
16	Having someone to go to the GP, dentist and/or hospital with you	269	76%
17	Having someone to go to parents/carers' evenings at school or college	267	76%
18	Having someone to sort out your GP, dental and/or hospital appointments	245	69%
19	Having someone who helps you with your school or college work	233	66%
	Total answering this question	**354**	

[2] Higher than 100% because of rounding up individual percentages.

Table 2 shows the proportion of **care experienced** 16 and 17 year-olds (out of the overall 58 respondents in this category) who replied 'yes' to each element.

Table 2: CARE EXPERIENCED survey respondents aged 16 and 17

What care is necessary for 16 and 17 year-olds		**Number**	**%**
1	Having someone who is regularly around to chat and to show an interest in you	57	98%
2	Having someone who can protect you if you are ever in danger (at home or somewhere else)	55	95%
3	Having someone who shows/tells you that you are loved	54	93%
4	Having someone to give advice about growing up and relationships	54	93%
5	Having someone to deal with emergencies connected to electricity, gas, Internet connection, and/or security (break-ins)	53	91%
6	Having someone who knows when you are upset or worried, and then tries to help you	51	88%
7	Having someone to help you with managing your money and paying bills	51	88%
8	Having someone available during the night if you are poorly or need some other help	50	86%
9	Having someone who celebrates your birthdays	49	86%
10	Having someone to check that you are OK when you are out at night / away from home	49	86%
11	Having someone who tries to stop you doing things that could harm you	48	83%
12	Having someone who helps you apply for a job and attend an interview (if this is what you are planning to do)	48	83%
13	Having someone who helps you get ready for university (if this is what you are planning to do)	47	81%
14	Having someone who cooks meals for you and/or teaches you how to cook	46	79%
15	Having someone who washes your clothes and/or teaches you how to wash your clothes	44	76%
16	Having someone who helps you with your school or college work	41	71%
17	Having someone to go to the GP, dentist and/or hospital with you	39	67%
18	Having someone to go to parents/carers' evenings at school or college	38	66%
19	Having someone to sort out your GP, dental and/or hospital appointments	32	55%
	Total answering this question	**58**	

Tables 1 and 2 show there are strong similarities between the illustrations of care which teenagers generally and teenagers with care experience view as **necessary**.

More than half of all survey respondents (n=354) thought that **all** of the illustrations of care are necessary. Over three-quarters of all survey respondents (n=354) stated that **17 of the 19** elements of care are necessary for 16 and 17 year-olds. More than three-quarters of teenagers with care experience (n=58) stated that **15 of the 19** elements of care are necessary for 16 and 17 year-olds.

The element of care which received the highest support from both groups was having someone who is regularly around to chat and to show an interest in you. Love was the second highest rated necessity for teenagers generally, Having someone to protect you was the second highest rated necessity for those with care experience. The third necessity for teenagers generally was having someone to deal with emergencies; for teenagers with care experience, love was the aspect of care which came third highest.

Although nearly all teenagers clearly see this as necessary, help with relationships was rated slightly higher by teenagers with care experience: 93% of care experienced teenagers answered that this help is necessary, compared with 88% of all teenagers who said it is necessary.

No clear age-based differences in need for love, care and praise

We asked survey respondents to think about 16 and 17 year-olds generally, and 14 and 15 year-olds generally, and to state whether they believe there are clear differences between these two age groups in respect of their need:

- To spend time with parents/carers.
- For love and care from parents/carers.
- For help with staying safe.
- For help with practical things like cooking and cleaning.
- For help with things like GP, dental and hospital appointments.

Table 3: ALL survey respondents aged 16 and 17 – age-based differences?

	YES, there are clear differences	NO, there are no clear differences	Not sure	No. who answered
A young person's need to spend time with parents/carers	38%	53%	9%	354
A young person's need for love and care from parents/carers	13%	84%	3%	354
A young person's need for praise and encouragement from parents/carers	18%	77%	5%	353
A young person's need for help with staying safe	30%	65%	5%	353
A young person's need for help with practical household things like cooking and cleaning	40%	52%	8%	352
A young person's need for help with things like GP, dental and hospital appointments	31%	61%	8%	353

Table 4: CARE EXPERIENCED survey respondents aged 16 and 17 – age-based differences?

	YES, there are clear differences	NO, there are no clear differences	Not sure	No. who answered
A young person's need to spend time with parents/carers	62%	33%	5%	58
A young person's need for love and care from parents/carers	29%	71%	0%	58
A young person's need for praise and encouragement from parents/carers	33%	67%	0%	58
A young person's need for help with staying safe	52%	43%	5%	58
A young person's need for help with practical household things like cooking and cleaning	55%	38%	7%	58
A young person's need for help with things like GP, dental and hospital appointments	41%	52%	7%	58

Table 3 shows that the wider group of survey respondents generally stated that there are no clear differences in the five examples given between the needs of 16 and 17 year-olds and the needs of 14 and 15 year-olds. This was most marked in teenagers' need for love, care, praise and encouragement, and spending time with parents/carers.

Table 4 shows that the majority of care experienced teenagers also stated there are no clear age-based differences around the need for love, care and praise and encouragement.

Care where we live

We gave survey respondents four statements and asked them to indicate which one best describes their own view about being cared for.

Table 5: ALL survey respondents aged 16 and 17 – care where we live?

Statement	%	No. who answered
Everyone needs care where they live, no matter how old they are	60%	212
People are usually ready to live without any care from the age of 16	1%	5
People are usually ready to live without any care from the age of 18	18%	64
People are usually ready to live without any care from the age of 25	29%	103

Table 6: CARE EXPERIENCED survey respondents aged 16 and 17 – care where we live?

Statement	%	No. who answered
Everyone needs care where they live, no matter how old they are	55%	32
People are usually ready to live without any care from the age of 16	2%	1
People are usually ready to live without any care from the age of 18	19%	11
People are usually ready to live without any care from the age of 25	29%	17

Tables 5 and 6 above show very similar views among the wider group of teenagers and care experienced teenagers about young people's need for care, and everybody's need for care.

Top three priorities – your own words

We asked 16 and 17 year-olds to tell us what their top three priorities would be if they had the power to make sure that every 16 and 17 year-old feels they are cared for where they live. The following two pages give a selection of what 16 and 17 year-olds told us.

Survey respondents in the wider group (words shown on page 6) had different home living situations, the majority living with one or both parents and others living with foster carers, or in children's homes or other places. The words of individual care experienced respondents are shown on page 7, though they are also part of the wider group.

Top three priorities from the overall group of 16 and 17 year-olds…

"Safety, love, food."

"A loving family. Financially stable family. Parents who help you and are available to talk to."

"Emotional support. Educational support. Someone to help guide you and keep you safe."

"Feeling safe (includes knowing that you have food when you get home, a warm place, WIFI etc). Having someone there for support and advice & feeling accepted and loved by being reassured since we're so vulnerable at this age."

"Have someone to talk about their worries with. Have someone to look after them because they are still a child."

"Being shown that they matter. Having healthy meals cooked for them, or being taught how to do it. Having someone to protect them and guide them until they can be independent."

"Security: to know that they can decide whether or not to stay. A reliable, available, sensitive adult. Being close to friends."

"They lived in a home where adults cared for them. They had regular adults who knew them. They didn't have to move a lot."

"They live in a safe environment with someone who keeps them safe. Help with school and chores and routine and food. [Someone who] understands and is kind and supportive."

"A warm home, a loving carer, help with and in school."

"Supported financially and emotionally. Given a sense of importance and love. Given opportunities to develop both as an individual and academic (if at school)."

"I don't know, some 16 year-olds are mature and some still seem very young. I love family time, just sitting with my parents watching TV or live music videos & chatting or playing video games, it makes me feel valued and takes some of my worries about life in the future away."

"They know that there is someone that loves them, someone who is always there to help them out, and someone to guide them through difficult times."

"Ensuring that everyone has someone they can confide in."

"Make sure that 16-17 year-olds have somebody to talk to about their issues. Make sure 16-17 year-olds have someone to teach them things and help them through things. Make sure 16-17 year-olds feel loved."

"Having a home. Feeling valued. Having someone to help in any way needed toward becoming independent."

"Access to a proper support network. A safe place to life, and a trusted person to speak to and advocate for them."

"A kind grown up at home to talk to. Somebody who keeps an eye on you / helps you make good decisions. Not having to be the adult themselves."

Top three priorities from the care experienced 16 and 17 year-olds…

"A loving caring environment where you are not judged and confidence is built."

"That they have someone to talk to if they need it. They have a safe place to go home to. They feel safe."

"Safety, time with parents/carers, love."

"Not get dropped by social services when they turn 18. To not have to get stressed about moving out when they are 18, and for carers and social services to actually care for the child and not just the money."

"Trust. Freedom. Activity."

"Not to be pushed out. We are not ready and emotionally younger. We are surviving."

"Someone to talk to. Someone to love Someone to help with problems."

"In a family home, not residential. Taught independence skills. Given caring responsibility to live independently and support with decision-making/problem-solving."

"Carers who are good role models and caring, warm safe and loving environment, a motherly/fatherly figure who can give advice and help."

"Kindness, love and respect."

"Making sure they feel safe. Making sure they have food. A warm house with clothes, food and electricity and access to education. Making them feel loved also."

"Someone to love you. Someone who always gives advice. Someone to talk to when you're feeling low."

"Making sure that they feel comfortable and safe within where they are living. Making sure they get the support that they need and that it's what suits each individual's needs. Also making sure that the people are supporting the young person in their own way not trying to give out the same support and advice to each young person (if more than one). Making sure that the placement that they're being cared for is suited to them and it is genuinely going to meet all of the young person's needs."

"Somewhere to live. Someone who cares. Someone who wants to listen to you and not judge."

"A safe place to live, someone who loves them and opportunities to explore their personality."

"Being listened to. Treated like they are part of the family. Having similar restrictions to 'normal kids'."

"A family home (whether that's biological, friends or foster care). Easier access to the benefits & support available without having to jump through lots of hoops to get it. Someone to support in the later years as well, like in most normal families."

"Making sure they know they are loved, safe and well looked after."

"Consistent support. Not being abandoned at 16. Support to develop life skills/ support network."

"Know that someone is there for them especially for the first couple of weeks. If they are in care, make sure they have the right amount of necessities when they move [and] if they're not comfortable with where they're [living] they can express that with whoever and they know they won't get in trouble."

Care for every child in care

We hope our survey results will help persuade the government to make decisions about the law and rules for local authorities with children and young people's best interests as the top priority.

When local authorities have responsibility for looking after children, the Children Act 1989 requires them to give priority to children living with their parents and, if this is not possible, to then find suitable homes with foster carers (preferably within a child's family or friendship circle) and children's homes. If none of these homes are available, or suitable, local authorities can make what's called 'other arrangements'. In practice, this means councils using unregulated accommodation. This is accommodation which does not follow the nine quality standards that are in law for children's homes. Bedsits, flats, shared housing and hostels are common forms of unregulated accommodation. Caravans and holiday rentals are used too.

In February 2021, against the backdrop of very serious child protection concerns, and investigations by the media, children's charities and the Children's Commissioner for England, the government introduced legislation which lists the 'other arrangements' which can be used for children in care aged 15 and under. This legislation came into force in September 2021. It has the effect of banning the use of non-care settings for children in care aged 15 and under.

For children in care aged 16 and 17, the government is planning to make those who run unregulated accommodation register as a 'supported accommodation undertaking' with Ofsted. A new set of four quality standards have been written for this kind of accommodation. But the standards deliberately leave out any requirement to provide care where older children live. The government and local authorities state that there are 'some' 16 and 17 year-olds in care who need support only, not care. Official statistics show that on 31 March 2022, 7,470 children in care were living in unregulated non-care accommodation – that's 4 in 10 (37%) of all 16 and 17 year-olds in care.

Between 2021 and 2022, a national review was carried out into children's social care. The final report from this review was published in May 2022. It recommended that every child in care receives care where they live, and that this should start to happen from 2025.

What next?

The #KeepCaringTo18 campaign is extremely grateful to everyone who completed our survey. We plan to publish a longer document later in 2023 which further analyses the survey results and brings together children and young people's views and experiences from other research. You can find out more about the #KeepCaringTo18 campaign on Article 39's website (click here).

Carolyne Willow, Dr Jim Goddard and Lucy Croxton led this project for the #KeepCaringTo18 campaign, and Rebekah Pierre piloted the survey with 16 and 17 year-olds.

Carolyne Willow is a registered social worker (qualified in 1988). She is the Founder Director of Article 39 children's rights charity, and has led and supported many different children's research projects over the past 30 years including for government. **Dr Jim Goddard** is Chair of the Board of Trustees of The Care Leavers Association. He is a retired academic, having spent 27 years working in the university sector in England. He also spent 14 years living in children's homes as a child. **Lucy Croxton** is the Policy, Public Affairs and Campaigns Manager of Together Trust and has worked in a variety of policy roles related to supporting children in care for charities and local government. **Rebekah Pierre** is a care-experienced social worker with a background in child protection. She currently works at the British Association of Social Workers.