



Valuing Children

INITIATIVE

Australian's Attitudes to Children

A SYNOPSIS OF THE VALUING
CHILDREN INITIATIVE
BENCHMARK SURVEY: 2016

The Valuing Children Initiative was established by Centrecare (Inc.) and Parkerville Children and Youth Care (Inc.) in January 2016.

This report was compiled by the Convenor of The Valuing Children Initiative Linda Savage and Deputy Convenor Emma King, with the assistance of Dr Mark Liddiard, Senior Lecturer in Social Policy at Curtin University.

For more information about the Valuing Children Initiative please visit:
www.valuingchildreninitiative.com.au or email info@valuingchildreninitiative.com.au.

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INTRODUCTION

The ambitious vision of the Valuing Children Initiative is to inspire Australians to value all children, promote understanding that a child's wellbeing is the shared responsibility of the entire community, and ensure children are at the forefront of our considerations.

It is a vision shared by hundreds of organisations, thousands of individuals and all levels of government in Australia, who are committed to the wellbeing of children. Despite that commitment and what we know makes for a healthy, safe and supportive childhood, far too many children on a diverse range of indicators, are not faring as well as they should be.

The Valuing Children Initiative believes that in looking for better outcomes for all children, far more attention must be given to our attitudes towards children and the priority we give their needs.

In May 2016, the Valuing Children Initiative commissioned a baseline survey by Essential Research to better understand attitudes to children in Australia.

PART A - ARE CHILDREN AT THE FOREFRONT OF OUR CONSIDERATION?

A synopsis of the Valuing Children Initiative Benchmark Survey: 2016 Part A considers the data relevant to the vision of ensuring children are at the forefront of considerations.

Are children at the forefront of our considerations?

Survey Highlights

86% of Australians considered looking after the interests of children to be important to them personally.

80% of Australians say they are concerned about the health and happiness of future generations of Australians.

Only 48% believe that children in Australia all have a fair and equal opportunity to flourish, and to maximise their potential.

Almost half (48%) of Australians believe that it is more challenging to be a child today than when they were a child.

A significant proportion (38%) described children as 'vulnerable'.

Less than one in five (16%), believe that Australia is a safer place today than when they grew up.

Almost half (46%) believe that governments give too little consideration to children.

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Are children at the forefront of our considerations?

The Valuing Children Initiative Benchmark Survey: 2016 (the survey) asked Australians a range of questions about their perception of childhood today, how important the interests of children were to them personally, and if they believed childrens' interests were given enough consideration.

86% of Australians said that looking after the interests of children is important to them.

Among adults nationwide, the overwhelming majority (86%) agreed that looking after the interests of children was an issue of personal importance to them.

This encouraging personal commitment to the interests of children came with considerable pessimism about life for children in Australia today. Almost half of those surveyed (48%), expressed the view that it is more challenging to be a child today than when they were growing up. Less than half of those surveyed (48%), believe that children in Australia have fair and equal opportunities to flourish and maximise their potential.

When asked to choose words to describe children today, 38% described children as 'vulnerable'. Significantly, less than one in five (16%) believe that Australia is a safer place today than when they grew up.

Pessimism about childrens' lives today appears to be even greater for future generations of Australian children, with 80% of those surveyed expressing concern about the health and happiness of future generations.

When asked about the role of Government in protecting children's interests, nearly half (46%), believe that governments give 'too little' consideration to children. 43% believe that Governments should consider not only the needs of the current population in decision and policy making, but also those of Future Generations.

A majority (55%) of Australians supported the appointment of a Federal Minister for Children and Future Generations.

Only 48% believe that children in Australia all have a fair and equal opportunity to flourish, and to maximise their potential.

The majority (55%) of Australians said they would support the appointment of a Minister for Children and Future Generations.



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Survey respondents highlighted health issues such as child obesity and mental health, as being areas of concern for the health and happiness of future generations. Less than one in three (30%) of those surveyed said they would describe children today as 'happy'.

Respondents expressed their concerns about the high expectations placed on children today, and pressure from society and peers. Too much access to technology was also raised as a challenge faced by the present generation of children, with social media being singled out as a key issue.

WHAT RESPONDENTS SAY	WHAT CHILDREN SAY	AUSTRALIAN DATA
<p>“Children don't seem to be as active, there is also a change in diets, pollution and living conditions to previous generations.”</p>	<p>75% of overweight children report dissatisfaction with their body size.ⁱ</p>	<p>An estimated 1 in 4 Australian children (25%) are overweight or obese.ⁱⁱ For the first time children in affluent countries like Australia are predicted to have a shorter life expectancy than their parents, ‘...simply because of obesity and the chronic diseases that result from that.’ⁱⁱⁱ</p>
<p>“More and more people seem to suffer from depression especially the younger generation.”</p>	<p>It is important to raise awareness about “...Suicide and self-harm. Kids are being put under so much pressure from themselves, other students, their family and the media. Year 10 student, VIC.^{iv}</p>	<p>Almost one in seven (13.9%) 4-17 year-olds were assessed as having mental disorders in a period of 12 months. (2012-2013)^v 1 in 5 calls to Kids helpline for counselling were about mental health concerns (2015).^{vi}</p>
<p>“With social media pressures expectations are higher.”</p>	<p>“Please keep protecting children's rights and please make sure you are keeping a track on bullying and cyber bullying to help and support these kids.” Frankie, 10, TAS.^{vii}</p> <p>“When looking at like, stuff online, I see lots of pressures from other people to do what they're doing, be like them.” Teresa, 16^{viii}</p>	<p>Australian data shows victimisation rates for cyberbullying ranging from around 6 per cent to over 40 per cent of young people.^{ix}</p>
<p>“Much more is expected of children today. They are expected to excel in every aspect of their lives.”</p>	<p>“Teenagers have been described as still growing children, but sometimes adult responsibilities are expected of them. In a society that's really focused on self-image, I think it's really hard for teens to feel safe and grow up. In the future I worry about the next generation – will they have to go through a worse situation than us?” Year 12 student, VIC.^x</p>	<p>Research shows adults underestimate how worried kids are about a number of life issues, with the BtN Happiness Survey 2015 finding 43 per cent of children worry about their future most or all the time.</p> <p>Only 1 in 5 would speak to someone about their worries.^{xi}</p>

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PART B - HOW DO WE PERCEIVE CHILDREN IN AUSTRALIA TODAY?

‘Value’ can be described as the worth we assign to someone, or something. When we value someone we assume it is reflected in our attitudes and behaviour, and in our sense of responsibility and investment in that person’s wellbeing and happiness.

Few would disagree that all children should be valued, but it is far from clear what we mean when we talk about valuing children.

A Synopsis of the Valuing Children Initiative Benchmark Survey: 2016 Part B – March 2017 considers data relevant to the vision of inspiring Australians to value all children.

How do we perceive children in Australia today? Survey Highlights

Almost half of survey respondents (48%) believe it is more challenging to be a child today than in the past.

Only 16% believe that Australia is a safer society to grow up in today than in the past.

The top five most commonly chosen words chosen to describe children were:

- Spoilt
- Fortunate
- Lazy
- Selfish
- Vulnerable

78% believe that children today are more disrespectful than previous generations.

Almost half (49%) said that children today have too many rights.

Almost one in three (32%) do not believe that the opinions of children should be considered as being as important as the opinions of adults.

63% said that a child’s word is less likely to be believed than that of an adult.

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How do we perceive children and childhood in Australia today?

What we value underpins and drives the culture of a society and in turn drives conduct. How we value children therefore, although sometimes overlooked, plays a critical role in ensuring a child's safety and wellbeing, because it directly impacts on how they are treated and the priority given to their needs and rights. To better understand how children are valued, the Valuing Children Initiative Benchmark Survey: 2016 (the survey) asked Australians about their perception of children and childhood today.

The survey found that the majority of respondents (73%) believe that children are valued the same, or more today, than in the past.

Almost half believe it is more challenging to be a child today than in the past, and only 16% believe that Australia is a safer society to grow up in today than in the past.

These findings appear to reflect a society that is sympathetic towards the challenges of childhood.

In a similar vein, when faced with the antiquated notion that children should be seen and not heard, only 16% of respondents agreed that this still held true today.

However, other stereotypical views of children do not appear to have changed as significantly over recent decades. Over three quarters (78%) of respondents agreed that children today are more disrespectful than previous generations.

78% agreed that children today are more disrespectful than previous generations.

The words most commonly chosen to describe children were spoilt, fortunate, lazy and selfish.

Almost half (49%) said that children today have too many rights. Almost one in three (32%) do not believe that the opinions of children should be considered as being as important as the opinions of adults. Greater than half (59%) considered children to be less capable than adults of saying what is best for them.

It was notable and of concern that even today, 63% said that a child's word is less likely to be believed than that of an adult

When asked to describe children today from a range of descriptors, both positive and negative, the four most commonly chosen words were spoilt, fortunate, lazy and selfish.



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The Valuing Children Initiative Benchmark Survey: 2016 provided respondents with opportunity to provide comments on whether they believe children are valued more today than when they were children, and whether it is easier to be a child today. A sample of responses to these questions are contained below. The full report can be accessed on the VCI website: www.valuingchildreninitiative.com.au

1. In your opinion, are children in Australia today valued more, less, or the same as when you were a child?

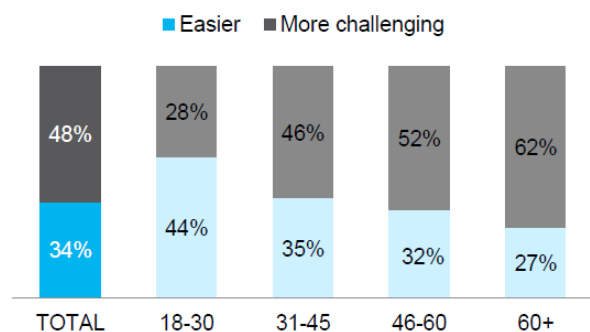
Children are more valued today than in the past. (29%)	Children are valued about the same today as in the past. (44%)	Children are less valued today than they were in the past. (16%)
There's laws FINALLY coming in to protect children and their rights.	I don't think we value children any more or less than previous generations.	Parents today don't give their children the right discipline.
When I was a child, my opinion didn't count. Children these days have a voice and are listened to a lot more.	Doesn't seem to be any increase or decrease in neglect.	Kids do not respect adults like they used to.
I think people look at children more as people now, when I was a kid there was still some of the 'seen but not heard' notion.	Why would they be more or less valued, a child is priceless always.	They have been spoiled too much.
They get given things we did not have as a child. We made our own happiness. Kids today get most things they want.	Nothing fundamentally has changed.	Kids these days have no appreciation of hard work or what older Australians have done to make their life the way it is today.
Greater outlets for children to achieve success.	Children are always valued by their parents no matter what generation.	Everyone is too busy working to spend time with kids.

2. In your opinion, is it easier to be a child today than it was when you were a child?

Just over a third of Australians believe that it is easier to be a child today than in the past.

The top five reasons for this were:

- Children get everything handed to them/Handed on a silver platter/don't have to be responsible or accountable (28%).
- Have access to technology (electronic devices, gaming consoles) (22%).
- More opportunities available for them (range of sports or other activities) (12%).
- Lack of discipline/ less discipline/ Children are disrespectful and are not punished (11%).
- Children don't work/ don't do chores/ don't work hard for what they want (9%)



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PART C - ARE YOU RESPONSIBLE FOR AUSTRALIA'S CHILDREN?

A Synopsis of the Valuing Children Initiative Benchmark Survey: 2016 Part C – April 2017 considers data relevant to the vision of ensuring that children are seen as the shared responsibility of the entire community.

Are you responsible for Australia's children? Survey Highlights

74% of survey respondents agree that the wellbeing of children is the shared responsibility of the entire community.

79% believe that parents are most responsible for protecting and promoting the wellbeing of children, and;

70% believe that children 'belong' to their parents until the age of 18 years.

Just over half (59%) believe that Australian society is committed to protecting and prioritising the needs of children.

94% described their feelings towards their own children as 'very positive'.

Just over half (54%) said they have a positive view of all children.

Almost half (46%) believe that governments give too little consideration to children.

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Are you responsible for Australia's children?

With a sizeable number of children in Australia not faring as well as they could be, the Valuing Children Initiative sought to better understand how modern, affluent 21st century Australian society tolerates a life for some children that we would never tolerate for our own. The Valuing Children Initiative Benchmark Survey: 2016 (the survey) asked Australians a range of questions about who they believe is responsible for children.

The survey found that the majority of adults nationwide agreed that the wellbeing of children is the shared responsibility of the entire community, and that all Australian adults are responsible for the best interests of children, including those who are not their own.

Whilst these responses reflect a widespread sense of shared responsibility for children's safety and wellbeing, it is still significant that almost one in five respondents rejected this notion.

There appears to be some disconnect between a professed shared societal responsibility to children and the reality, when more specific questions were asked.

70% agreed that until children are 18 they 'belong' to their parents The majority of those surveyed labelled parents as the most responsible for protecting and promoting the wellbeing of children, while only 12% of respondents saw "everyone" as being responsible for children, with just 1% allocating responsibility to the wider community.

The survey also supported a strong consensus on the traditionally subordinate place of the child in the family, with 70% agreeing that children 'belong' to their parents, until they reach the age of 18 years of age.

Almost one-quarter (24%) of respondents believed that Australian society is **not** committed to protecting and prioritising the needs of children, and 17% of respondents did not know whether society is committed to children.

Almost 1 in 5 do not believe that the wellbeing of children is a shared societal responsibility



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The Valuing Children Initiative Benchmark Survey: 2016 findings provided respondents with opportunity to rank their answers in order of opinion and provide comments where appropriate. The tables below contain a sample of responses to survey questions.

The full report can be accessed on the VCI website www.valuingchildreninitiative.com.au

1. Which of the following groups do you see as being responsible for protecting and promoting the wellbeing of children in Australia today?

	Rank 1 %	Parents	Non-Parents	Male	Female
Parents	79%	83%	80%	83%	80%
Everyone (including people like myself)	12%	12%	13%	10%	14%
Haven't really thought about it	4%	3%	4%	4%	2%
Governments	3%	3%	3%	4%	2%
Teachers	1%	1%	2%	1%	2%
Extended family	1%	1%	2%	2%	1%
The wider community	1%	14%	10%	1%	1%

Comments

An overwhelming 79% of Australians believed that parents are the most responsible for protecting and promoting the wellbeing of children in Australia.

As the results above demonstrate, there are only minor differences across the key segments.

2. From the scale below, please select the scale point that best describes how you feel about children.

	TOTAL Positive	TOTAL Negative	Indifferent	I've never thought about it
Your own children (parents only, n=590)	94%	2%	4%	<1%
All Australian children*	53%	9%	22%	16%

Comments

Parents had an overwhelmingly positive view of their children; 94% described their feelings towards their own children as 'very positive'.

However, parents held a significantly less favourable view of 'all Australian children'; although 65% described their feelings as positive, 8% said they had negative feelings and 25% said they were indifferent.

Just over half (53%) of Australians said they have a positive view of all Australian children

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The Valuing Children Initiative (VCI) has called for the creation of a Ministerial portfolio for Children and Future Generations to ensure children are at the forefront of considerations and that issues of concern about children, wherever they occur, are brought to the attention of the Cabinet. A dedicated Minister would play a role in countering short term and crisis driven responses, which are particularly detrimental to children, by encouraging high level engagement in futures thinking and planning. A Minister should lead the development of a plan for children, and establish and oversee a cabinet subcommittee to ensure better integration, and continuity, of policies across portfolios with responsibility for children.

The appointments of Ministers for Women in the 1970s played an important role in challenging attitudes to women, advancing gender equality and improving the lives of women. Appointing a Minister for Children and Future Generations would play a similar role and be a tangible sign about the value placed on all children's lives.



The VCI has also called for the instigation of a rigorous and transparent process to ensure that all policy, legislative and decision making processes actively considers the impact on children and future generations. This would ensure that children, who cannot vote and are excluded from influencing the political process, will have their interests explicitly considered. Consideration of the impact on children should be considered integral to sound decision making. This process should include the views of children whenever possible, risk analysis for vulnerable children and should be evaluated and reported on.

The VCI recommends the establishment of a set of measurable goals and outcomes for all children in Australia, determined by independent experts and with reference to the Sustainable Development Goals, to guide policy development, and against which outcomes are measured every two years.

The Valuing Children Initiative (VCI) believes that funding for community awareness raising activities is needed to promote a positive focus on children, raise awareness that a child's wellbeing is the shared responsibility of the entire community and that a society that is good for children is good for everyone.

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Research methodology

The Valuing Children Initiative Benchmark Survey: 2016 was an online poll of n=1002 Australians aged 18+ and was in the field from 31 May to Monday 6 June 2016. This data was weighted after quotas were placed on age, gender and location.

The target population for this research was the Australian population aged 18+. Participants were drawn from the ResearchNow online survey panel.

The survey was designed by Essential Research in conjunction with the client (The Valuing Children Initiative).

The survey fieldwork was conducted by ResearchNow and data tables were prepared by Essential Research. Weighting was prepared by ResearchNow. The analysis of this data was conducted by Essential research. SPSS and Excel and were used to analyse the results. Open-ended questions were analysed manually using a code frame developed by Essential Research.

This data was weighted to ABS for age, gender and location. Soft quotas were placed on age, gender and location.

Survey Reliability

Overall the confidence level was set at 95%.

To cite this report; A synopsis of the Valuing Children Initiative Benchmark Survey 2016.
Australians attitudes to children

Data Source

Essential Research 2016, Valuing Children Initiative Benchmark Survey: 2016

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Notes



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