

Your Voice Matters Survey of Children in Care May 2014



Your Voice Matters



Executive Summary

A survey of children in care in Kent, which had been co-designed and tested by the children themselves, was undertaken in the spring of 2014. The survey was responded to by 326 children across the age ranges of 7 to 16+.

Positive feedback:

- Most children know who their social worker is and can talk to them about their problems, but some (particularly those aged 16+) do not feel able to contact them.
- The majority of children feel they can speak to a caring adult if they are unhappy or have a problem, usually this is a carer or parent, but teachers and social workers/case workers are also important.
- The majority of younger children reported that they get help from their teacher to learn and have friends to play with all or some of the time.

Areas of concern:

- Access to Looked after Children (LAC) nurses can be a problem, particularly for the 16+ age group, where 18% report not knowing how to speak to a nurse.
- There was a low awareness amongst the 11 to 15 year olds of the role of the independent reviewing officer (IRO) and also nearly one third of these children did not know how to speak to their IRO.
- Similarly, over a quarter of care leavers did not know how to contact their support worker.
- Over a quarter of care leavers did not have trust and confidence in their social worker.
- Around half of children did not have a copy of their care plan, and many felt they do not have a say in what goes into their care plan.
- Around 17% of care leavers did not feel safe or only sometimes felt safe where they live.
- A number of children told us that they do not like completing surveys and they feel that they are asked too many questions.

“Being in care would be better for me if...”

Don't like surveys:

Why is this survey

Don't like surveys:

...I didn't have any silly forms to fill in like this one. I am Happy, happy, happy now leave me alone.

Don't like surveys:

...I didn't get forms to fill out like this one they are boring thank you :)

Don't like surveys:

Can we stop having forms to fill out.

Want to see more of/live with siblings/parents:

...I knew my mum and dad were ok. I know they don't come to contact but I wish I knew they were ok. I see my other family a few times a year which is good.

Want to see more of/live with siblings/parents:

...I could have a sibling to play with and do everything with. I used to live with my brother when I got put in to care. But now I feel that he should still be with me. It was nice to have someone to play with and talk to.

Want to see more of/live with siblings/parents:

...I could stay with my brother. At first I was with my brother, but now we are split up. He lives in Margate and I live in Maidstone.

Want to see more of/live with siblings/parents:

...I could see my mum and dad more and my sisters.

No/Less meetings:

...We didn't have so many extra meetings.
...We didn't keep being asked to do surveys about being in care.

No/Less meetings:

Meetings need to be shorter. Less things need to be mentioned. Social workers need to arrive to meetings on time.

No/Less meetings:

...Social workers would stop interfering so much, there were less meetings, if I had the same social worker (instead of them keep on changing)

No/Less meetings:

...I had contact only when I want and my social worker only stayed for a short time and no meetings.

Too few friends/activities:

...I got to do more activities.

Too few friends/activities:

Having new friends who are in foster care.

Other issues with key worker:

I think 16 plus staff meaning social/case workers need more training. Most of them don't understand the children or young adults. I think you need to employ people that have been in care, that have been through the same stuff as us kids have, instead of employing text book social workers that don't have kids and just read out of a book!

Other issues with key worker:

...I knew who my reviewing officer is.

Other issues with key worker:

...I had a SW that's stuck with me. Mine had just left and we have been told by a phone call not by him and he has left.

People didn't have to write everything I do down.

Other issues with key worker:

I feel let down when my Social worker doesn't turn up or changes her appointments too much.

More privacy/anonymity:

...I didn't have so many restrictions and I could have passwords on my computer and phones.

More privacy/anonymity:

I would like to keep my conversation private with other people who I talk to.

Was told if I am changing carer/social worker:

...I know everything that was happening and chose my social worker and carer if they are changed.

Issues with school:

...I could change school.

Issues with school:

...I got 1 to 1 tutoring at school.

Was told if I am changing carer/social worker:

...I chose my carer/social worker and get told when I'm moving or changing carer/social worker.

Issues with school:

...We had another child and people understood me at school.

Help/Support with life:

...People helped me more.

Help/Support with life:

I sometimes feel that people do not give kids a chance.

Help/Support with life:

Cut out all the rules like no touching, going in other people's rooms and no shouting I just want help getting through my life and cut out all the rules.

Help/Support with life:

...My Mum not making me worried that she is going to take me away.

Social worker didn't keep changing:

I have called three times asking same thing and been told they will get back to me each time. My worker was ***** I could always ask her and get answers but was told she isn't my caseworker anymore so no idea who to go to.

Social worker didn't keep changing:

...I had a long term social worker as I have had a lot over the past 6 years. I found this survey difficult because I have only had my new worker for less than 2 weeks so I answered this survey on my old worker.

Social worker didn't keep changing:

...I could keep social workers longer.

Social worker didn't keep changing:

...I had the same social worker, it always changes.

Want more independence:

...I can have my name as *****.

Want more independence:

...I got to keep my phone on me (not hand it in) and I got a say in what I have to do (being told what activity I have to do with ...)

Want more independence:

...I was allowed to go out to town and with my friends and no adults.

Prefer to remain in care:

I would like to stay where I am because I feel safe where I am and I'm not ready to move on.

Prefer to remain in care:

...I stayed in care.

Prefer to remain in care:

...I can stay for ever how long I can with *** and ***.

Less/No contact with social worker:

...Social workers left me alone, like mine does.

Less/No contact with social worker:

...I did not have to have a social worker, I'm happy in my foster home for ever.

Less/No contact with social worker:

I only want the social worker to come to our house a few times a year

Less/No contact with social worker:

...I had no social workers to see and to be left.

Background & Objectives

The Social Care, Health and Wellbeing service along with the Business Intelligence team were commissioned to undertake an independent, non-service driven, review of children in care. The research aimed to capture the views of children in care and give them an open platform to share their experiences and what matters to them. It was decided a survey would be the best way to capture these views.

The Young Lives Foundation (YLF), a Kent based children's charity, was asked to provide some independent consultancy to help inform the setup of the new survey. They conducted focus groups and interviews with children in care to find out what they wanted to tell us (the corporate parent) about their experiences of being in care. This information was used to inform the design of the survey questions. The YLF also sought feedback on survey formats and designs and found that, unsurprisingly, most children dislike dull surveys that have a corporate feel; a common theme among other surveys they are asked to complete. Another crucial finding from this preliminary work was that children feel they are surveyed too often and see little action resulting. The YLF used their preliminary work to produce some draft surveys which were then further developed by the Research and Evaluation survey team at KCC in order to produce sound research questions while maintaining the integrity of the YLF's work.

Methodology

The survey was designed to be accessible via a number of platforms. A dedicated web site was set up to host the survey online. It was designed with a bright, engaging, identifiable theme incorporating the Your Voice Matters branding. The web survey also had a built in function to assist children with limited reading ability; a text to speech function which reads aloud the questions. The survey could also be accessed and completed in a hard copy format with the same theme and branding as the online version, but returned by email or post. There were three versions of the survey depending on the age of the child and an easy access version was also produced for those children with special educational needs who may have found it easier to complete than the age appropriate alternative. Different questions were asked in each of the three versions, which allowed the questions to be tailored to the needs of each group.

The survey was sent out to the teams who work with children in care who were asked to cascade the survey to the children. The teams included the Foster carer team, Social Workers, Asylum Seekers team and Disabled Children's service.

The survey was sent out on 12th March 2014 and respondents were initially given one month to complete the survey with weekly reminders sent via email. There were also regular reviews of response numbers. After three weeks the number of responses was lower than hoped and it was therefore decided to extend the deadline by two weeks. The invite was also sent out to designated teachers at this point, which fell around the school Easter break, therefore extra time was needed for responses. The final deadline for responses became the 27th April 2014.

Sample

All children in care were asked to complete the survey, from those aged 7 years and over up to care leavers.

Respondents

The survey returned 326 responses which are shown in Table 1 broken down by age and platform.

Table 1: Respondents by age and platform

	Age 7-10	Age 11-15	Age 16+	Easy Access	Total
Online	36	46	16	0	98
Hard Copy	72	87	53	16	228
TOTAL	108	133	69	16	326

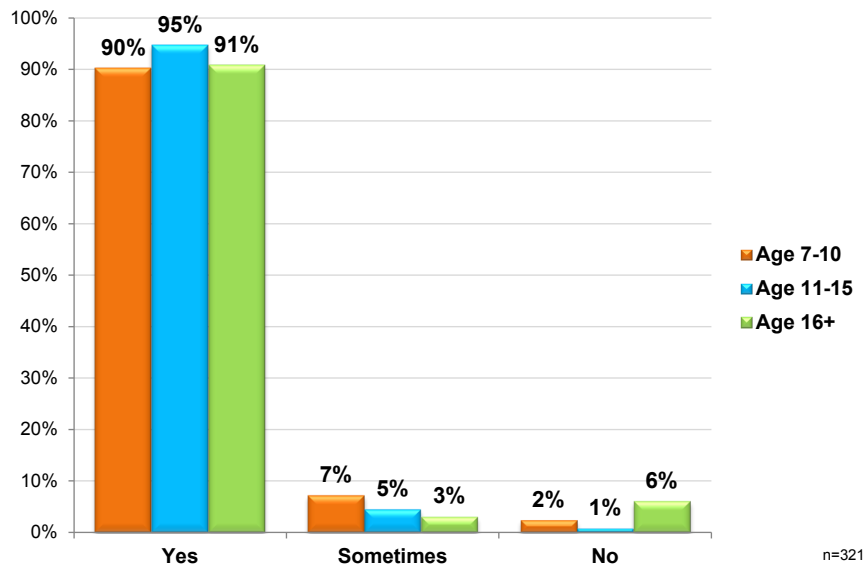
For the purposes of analysis responses to the easy access version of the survey were included in the age 7-10 category. Of these responses there were twelve aged 7-10, three aged 11-15 and one aged 16+.

Detailed findings

The following charts and comments reflect the findings from the responses to the survey. Note that as each age group received a tailored questionnaire, not all the responses can be compared across age groups. However, where this has been possible comparative results are presented.

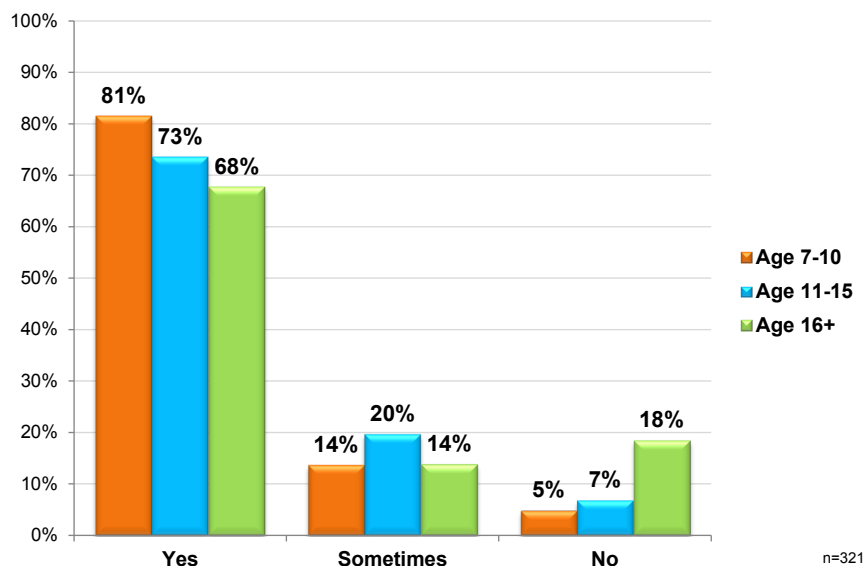
Key workers

1. Do children and young adults know the identity of their social worker?



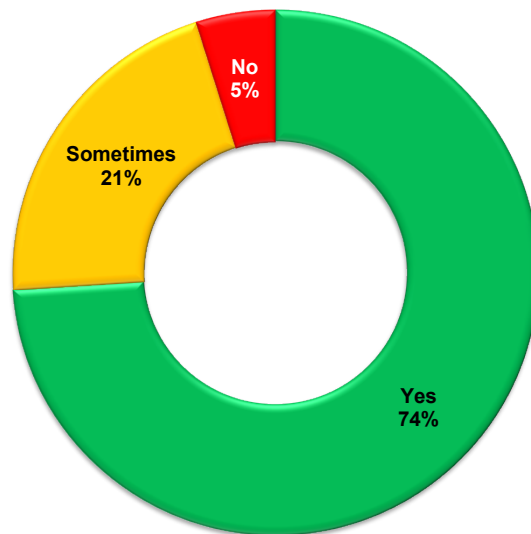
Response to this question was positive across all age groups; over 90% of each age group know who their social worker is. However, over 16s are less likely than the younger children to know the identity of their social worker.

2. Do children and young adults know how to speak to their social worker?



Whilst over 90% of the children and young adults know who their social worker is, when asked if they know how to speak to them only 75% said yes. The chart shows that the older age groups are less likely to know how to speak to their social worker when compared to the younger children, with 18% of over 16s saying they did not, and 20% of 11-15 year old children saying sometimes.

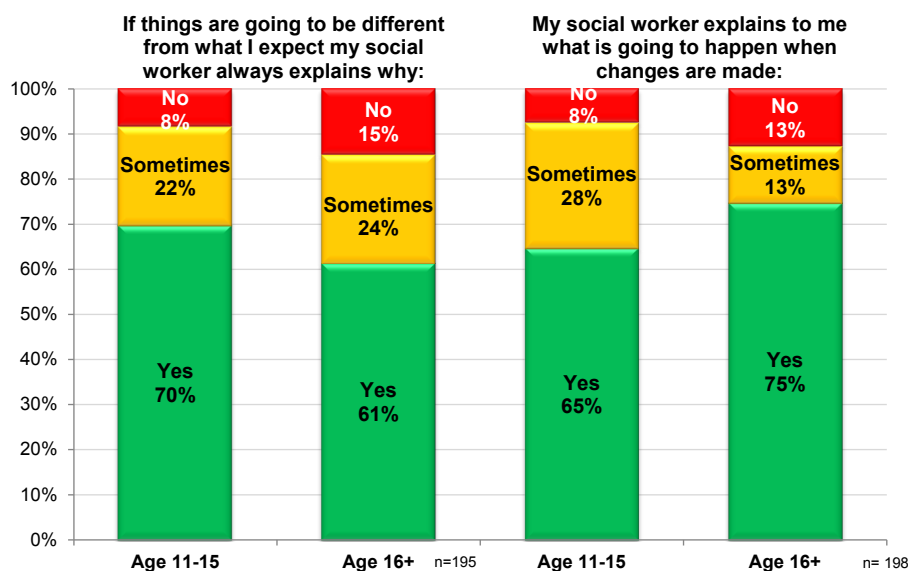
3. Do social workers tell children aged 7-10 what is happening when they talk to them?



n=123

In response to this question nearly three quarters of the children aged 7-10 feel that they are being told what is happening when they speak with their social worker.

4. Do social workers explain to children and young adults aged over 11 why things are going to be different and what is going to happen when changes are made?

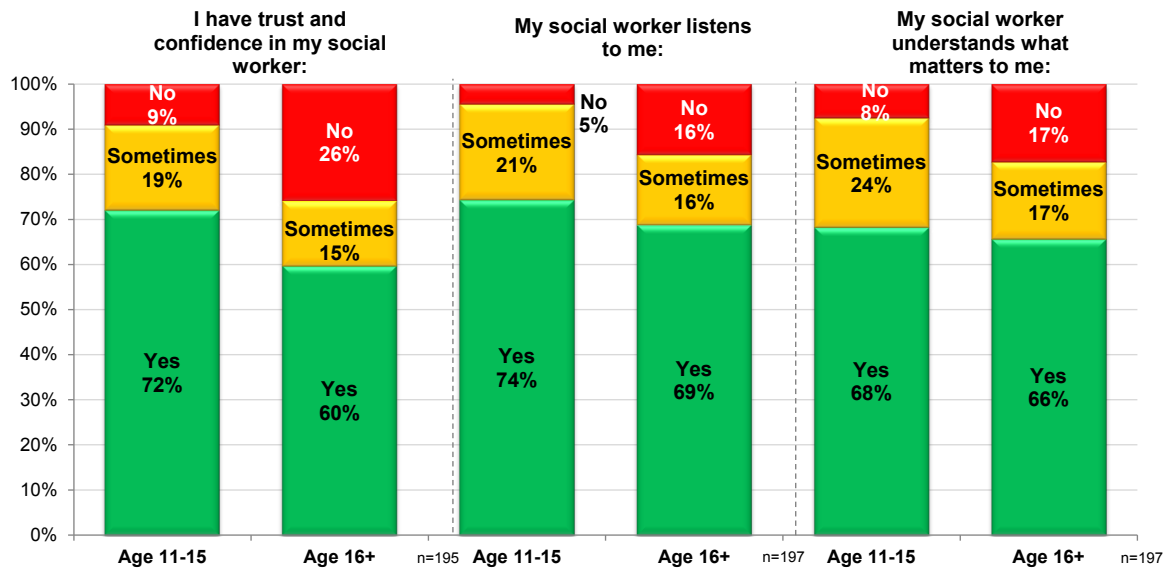


(There was one 'N/A' responses to the first question and two to the second)

Of all children aged 11 and over who answered these questions, 67% said that their social worker always explains why things are going to happen differently from what they expect and 68% agreed that their social worker always explains to them what is going to happen when changes are made.

When comparing the two age groups the chart shows that more of the over 16s felt they were not explained things by their social worker.

5. Do children and young adults aged over 11 have a positive relationship with their social worker?



(There was one 'N/A' response to each of these questions)

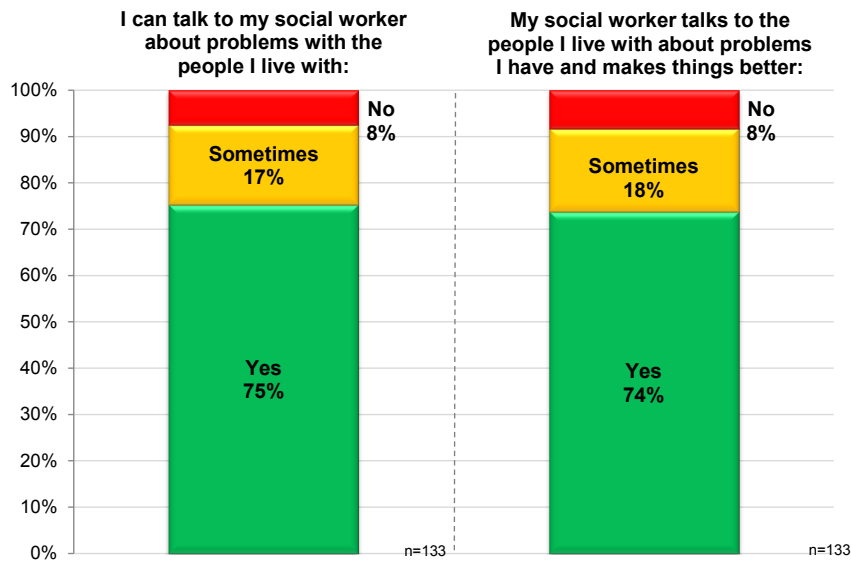
When asked if they have trust and confidence in their social worker, 68% of the children and young adults said yes, however the chart shows that children aged 11-15 had more trust and confidence when compared to the over 16s, where over a quarter (26%) of the 16+ children and young adults said no.

When asked if their social worker listens to them, 72% of the children and young adults agreed. Again the over 16s felt they were not listened to as much as the 11-15 age group, with 16% of the over 16s disagreeing.

When asked if their social worker understands what matters to them, 67% of the children and young adults agreed. More of the over 16s felt they were not understood when compared to the 11-15 age group.

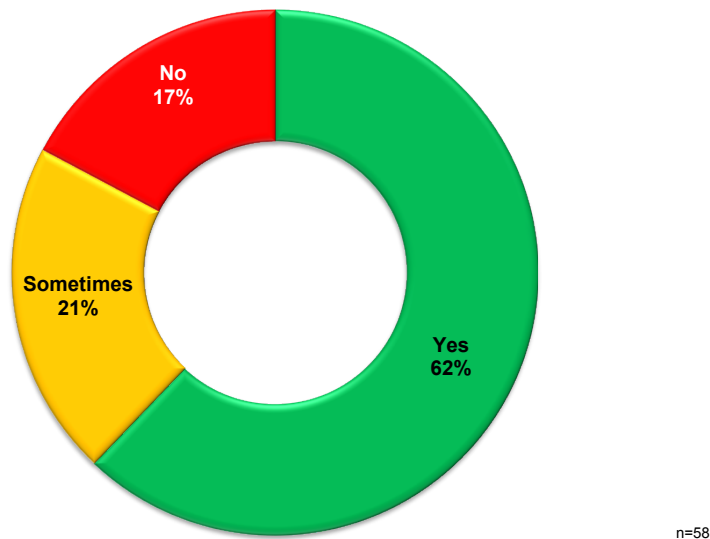
Overall over two thirds of the children and young adults felt they have a positive relationship with the social worker. More of the 11-15 age groups felt their relationship was only sometimes positive whereas more 16+ felt that they did not have a positive relationship with their social worker, especially where this relates to trust and confidence.

6. Do social workers talk to children aged 11-15 and the people they live with if there are problems at home?



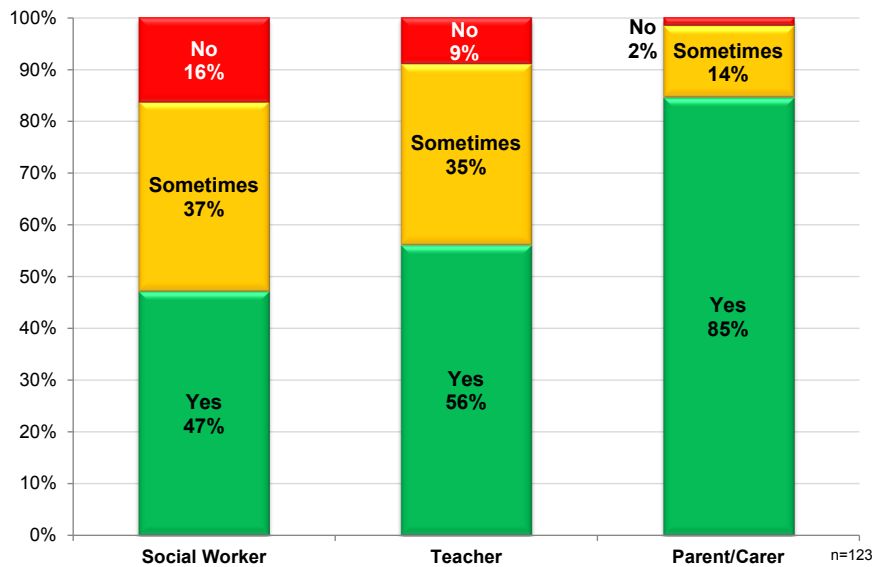
When children aged 11-15 were asked if they can talk to their social worker if they have problems with the people they live with and if their social worker would makes things better, around 75% agreed and 8% disagreed.

7. Are social workers consistent when dealing with things that matter to young adults aged over 16?



This question was only put to children aged over 16. Nearly two thirds of children and young adults over the age of 16 feel that their social worker is consistent when dealing with things that matter to them, whilst 17% disagreed.

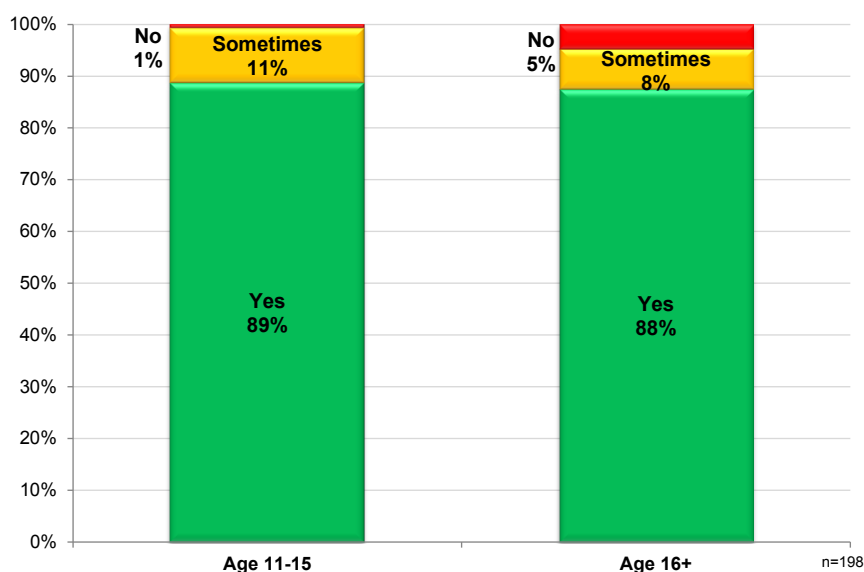
8. Who can children aged 7-10 speak to if they are unhappy?



Children aged 7-10 reported that they mostly (85%) feel that they can talk to their parent/carer when they are unhappy. A further 56% feel that they can talk to a teacher whilst 47% feel that they can talk to a social worker when they are unhappy. Sixteen percent of the children do not think that they can speak to a social worker when they are unhappy. Very few do not feel that they can speak to their carer or parent.

Of the 43 children aged 7-10 that reported that there was also someone else they could talk to, 60% said they can talk to a friend, 14% said a sibling/cousin and 9% said another adult.

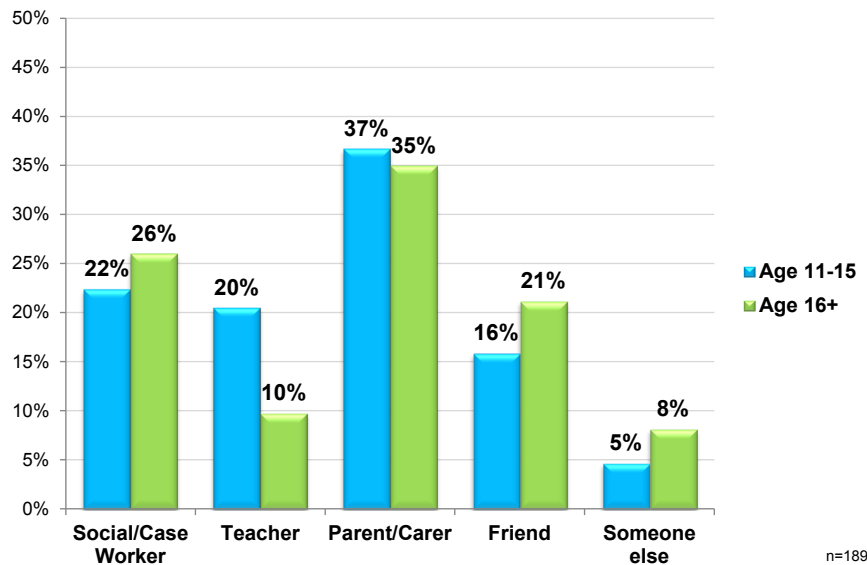
9. Can children and young adults aged over 11 talk to a caring adult if they have a problem?



(There was one 'N/A' response to this question)

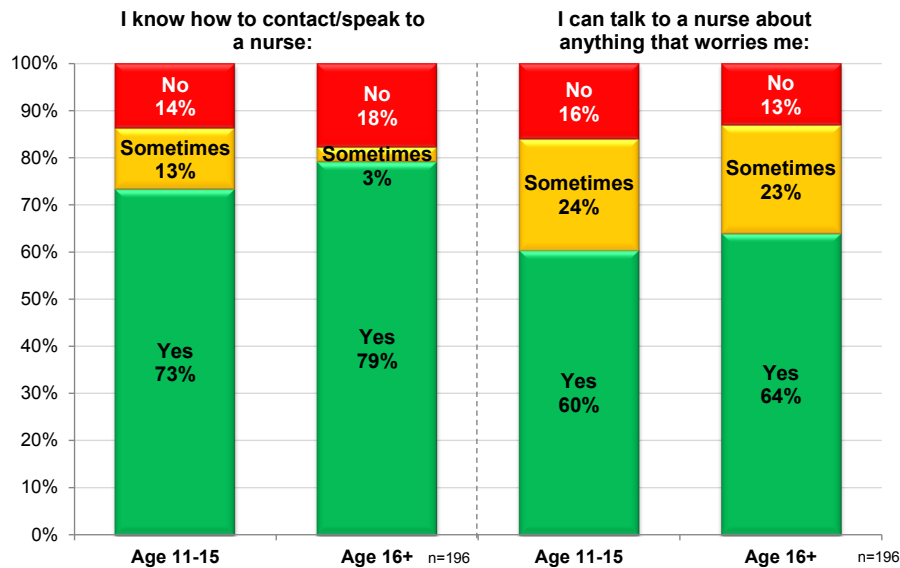
Overall 88% of children and young adults aged over 11 feel that they can talk to a caring adult if they have a problem. However 5% of the over 16s feel that they cannot speak to a caring adult if they have a problem compared to only 1% of the children in the 11-15 age group.

10. Who can children and young adults aged over 11 speak to if they have a problem?



As was the case for the children aged 7-10, children and young adults over the age of 11 are most likely to speak to a parent/carer if they have a problem, whereas speaking to a social worker was not as popular. Of children aged 11-15, 20% would choose to speak to a teacher, whereas among the over 16s only 10% would speak to teachers. Of the 16+ children, 21% told us that they would speak to a friend if they had a problem. Of those that reported speaking to someone else, the people they mentioned were sibling/cousins, grandparents, other family members and other adults.

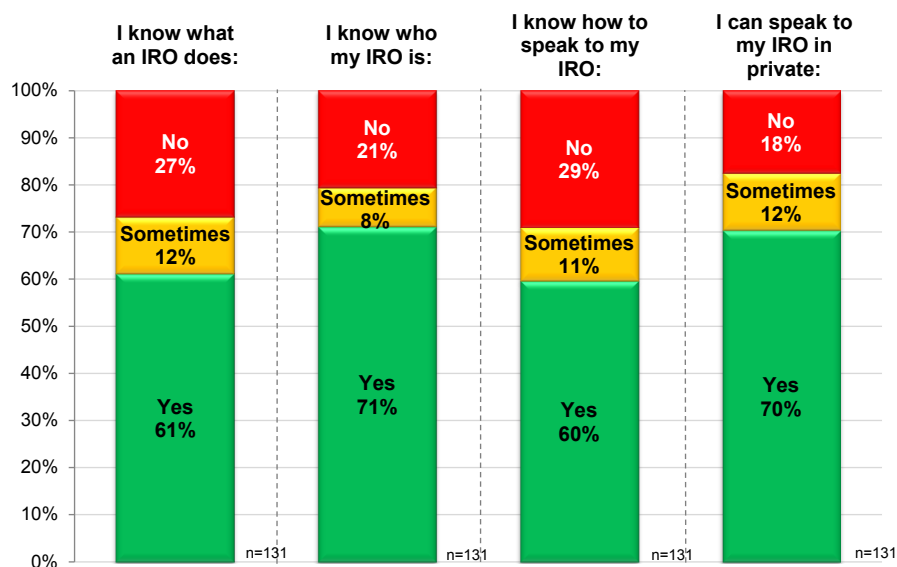
11. Do children and young adults aged over 11 know how to contact a nurse and feel they can talk to them?



(There were three 'N/A' responses to the first question and four to the second)

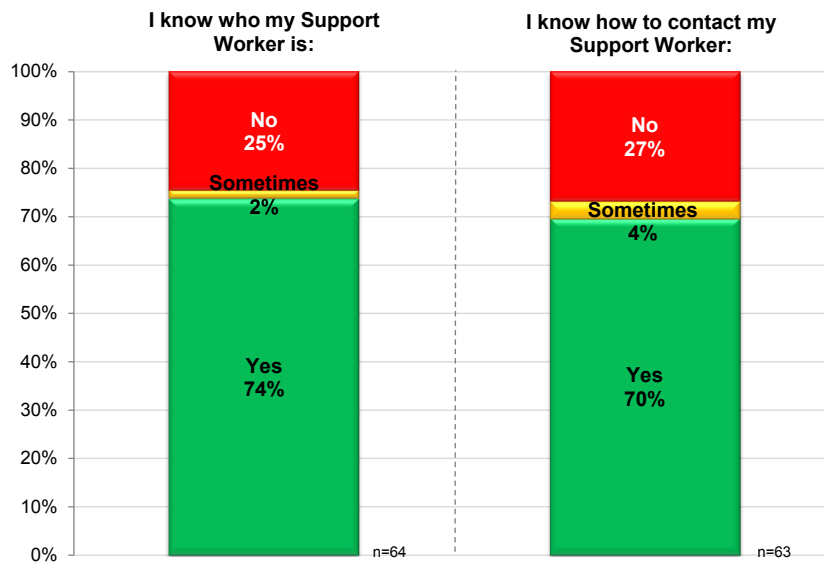
When it comes to contacting and speaking to a nurse, overall 75% of the children and young adults over the age of 11 know how to get in contact with a nurse, but only 61% said that they can talk to a nurse about anything that worries them. It is worth noting that 18% of the 16+ age group reported that they did not know how to contact a nurse.

12. What do children aged 11-15 know about their Independent Review Officers?



When asked if they knew what an independent review officer was, just under two thirds reported that they did. Even though 27% of children did not know what an IRO was, only 21% did not know who their IRO was, whereas 71% did. When asked if they know how to speak to their IRO 71% said yes or sometimes. Out of all the children 70% agreed that they can speak to their IRO in private.

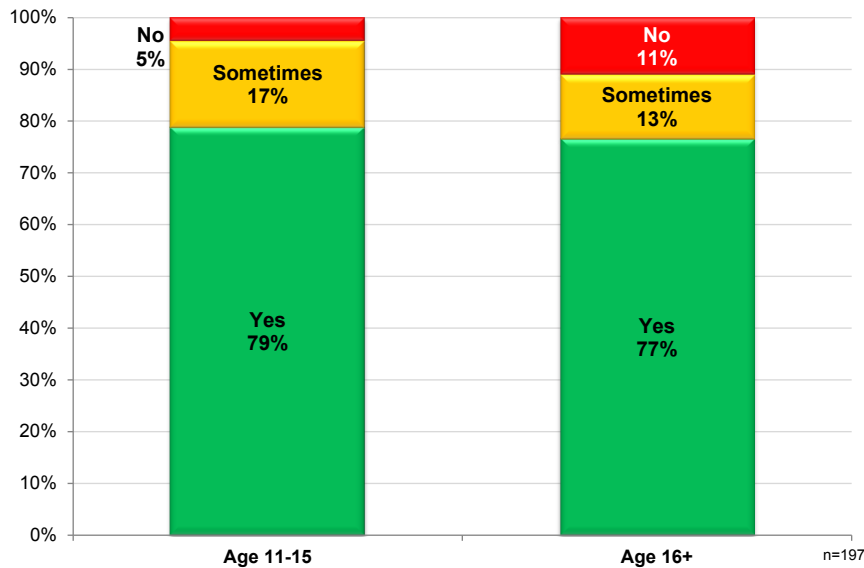
13. Do children and young adults aged over 16 know who their Support worker is and how to contact them?



(There were seven 'N/A' responses to each of these questions)

When young adults were asked if they knew who their support worker is 76% said yes or sometimes, when asked if they know how to contact them only 70% said yes.

14. Do children and young adults aged over 11 believe that their information is only shared by those who support them when it is necessary?

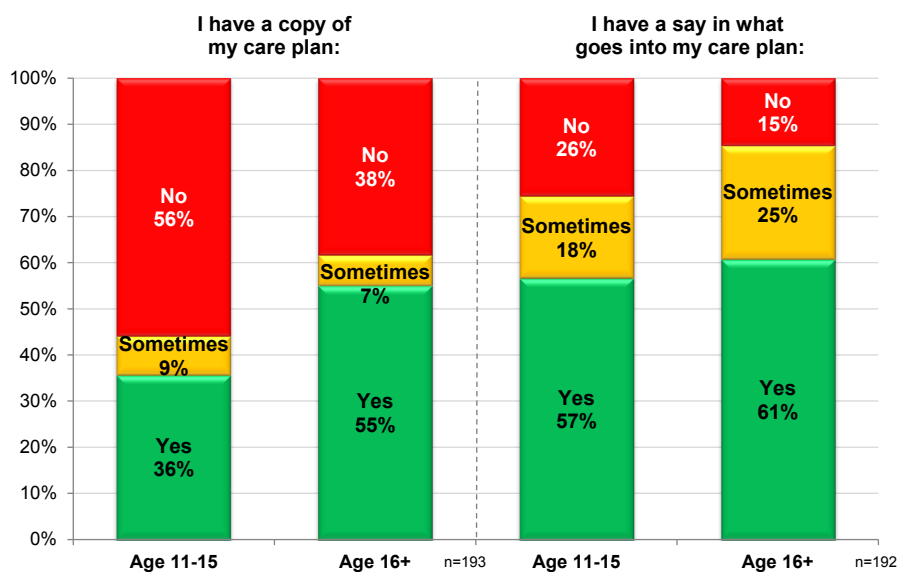


(There was one 'N/A' response to this question)

When asked if they think that information about themselves is only shared by those who support them when it is necessary, overall 78% agreed, whereas looking at the over 16s 11% disagreed.

Care Plans

15. Do children and young adults aged over 11 have a copy of their care plan and have a say in what goes into it?



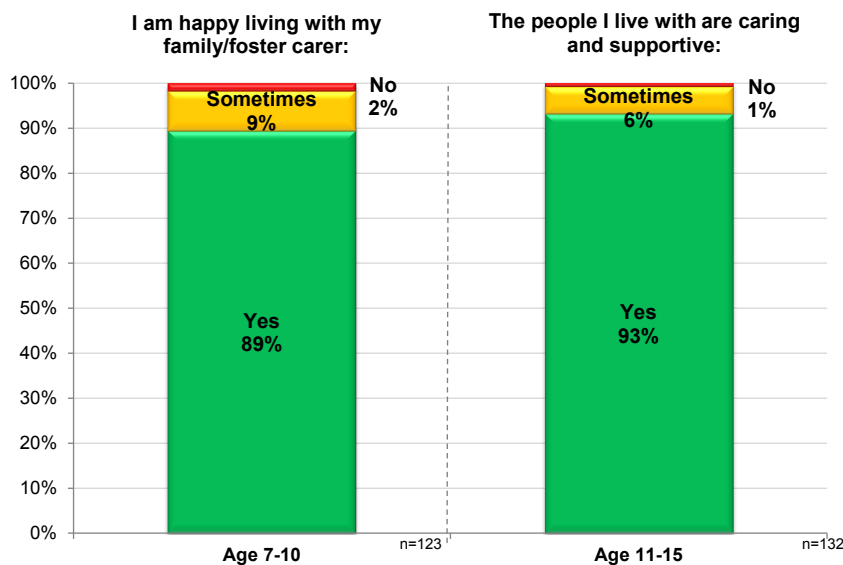
(There were four 'N/A' responses to the first question and two to the second)

Children and young adults over the age of 11 were asked about their care plan. When asked if they have a copy of their care plan, only 36% of 11-15 year olds said they did have a copy, whereas 55% of over 16s said they had a copy. However when asked if they have a say in what goes in their care plan, 26% of 11-16 said no, whereas considering the over 16s, only 15% said no.

These findings show that whilst a relatively high proportion of the care leavers do not have a copy of their care plan they do feel they have more involvement in their care plans when compared to the younger age group.

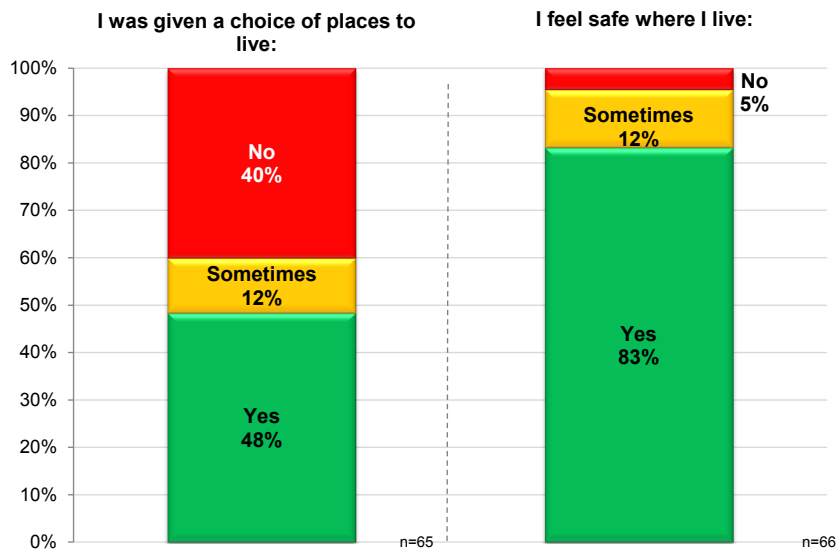
Home Life

16. Are children aged 7-15 happy at home and living with caring and supportive people?



Of the children aged between 7-10 years old, 98% are happy or sometimes happy living with their current family/foster carer. Children aged 11-15 agree that the people they live with are caring and supportive, with 93% agreeing and 6% saying sometimes.

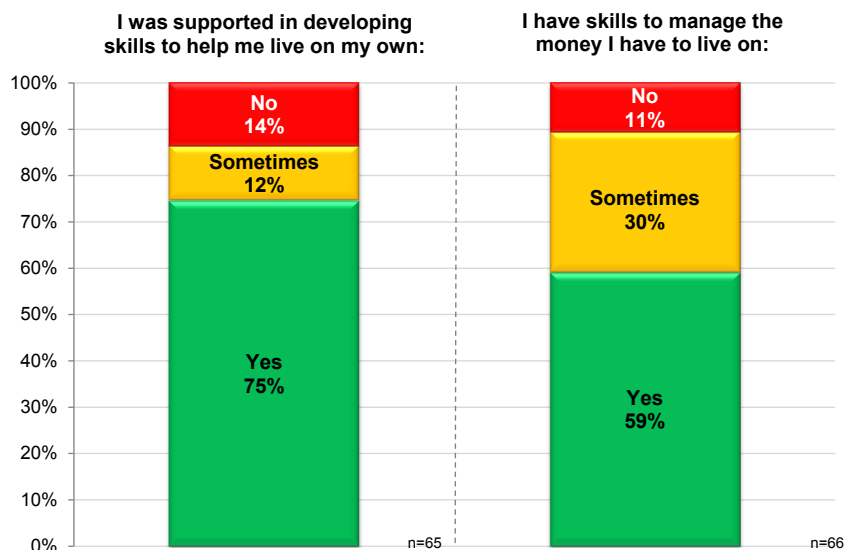
17. Were the young adults over the age of 16 given a choice of places to live and do they feel safe there?



(There were five 'N/A' responses to the first question and one for second)

When asked if they were given a choice of places to live, 40% of the children and young adults felt that they did not and 48% felt that they did. When the care leavers were asked if they felt safe where they live, 83% agreed, 12% sometimes felt safe, whereas 5% did not feel safe where they live.

18. Were the care leavers given life skills to help them live on their own?

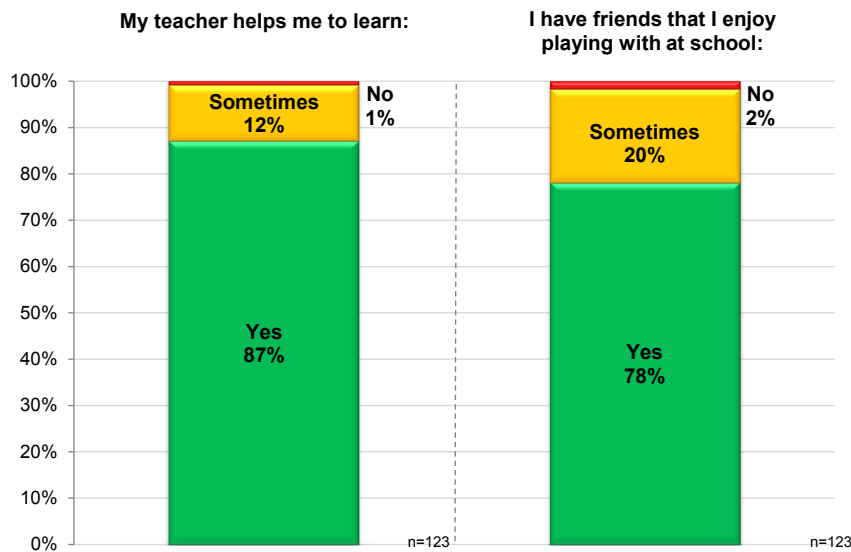


(There were six 'N/A' responses to the first question)

Care leavers were asked if they felt they were supported in developing skills to help them to live on their own. Of those asked, 75% said that they were. When asked if they have skills to manage the money they have to live on, only 59% felt they had the skills and 30% felt they sometimes have the skills.

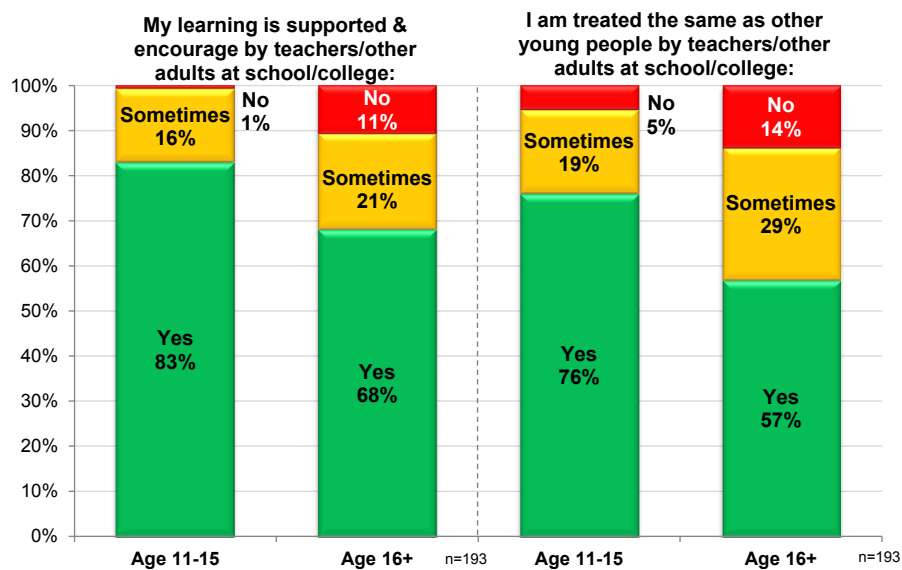
School life

19. Are children aged 7-10 getting help from their teacher to learn and have friends they enjoy playing with at school?



Young children report feeling supported by their teacher with 87% of the children asked agreeing that their teacher helps them to learn, whereas 12% felt they were supported sometimes. When asked about their friends at school, 78% said that they have friends they enjoy playing with. However 20% sometimes had friends to play with and 2% felt they did not have any friends at school.

20. Are children and young adults aged over 11 supported and treated the same at school/college?

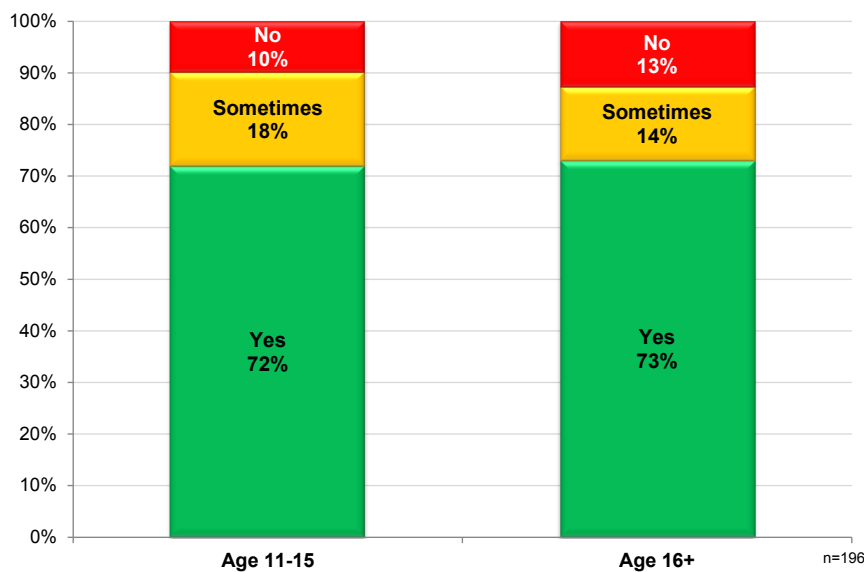


(There were seventeen 'N/A' responses to the first question and thirteen to the second)

When asked if they are supported at school/college and how they are treated, overall 79% of the children and young adults agreed that their learning is supported and encouraged, but when this is compared to the older age group a larger proportion of over 16s (11%) felt they were unsupported. Overall 71% of the children and young adults feel they are treated the same as other young people by teachers and other adults, but again amongst the over 16s a larger proportion disagree (14%) when compared to the 11-15 year olds.

Complaints, rights and having your say

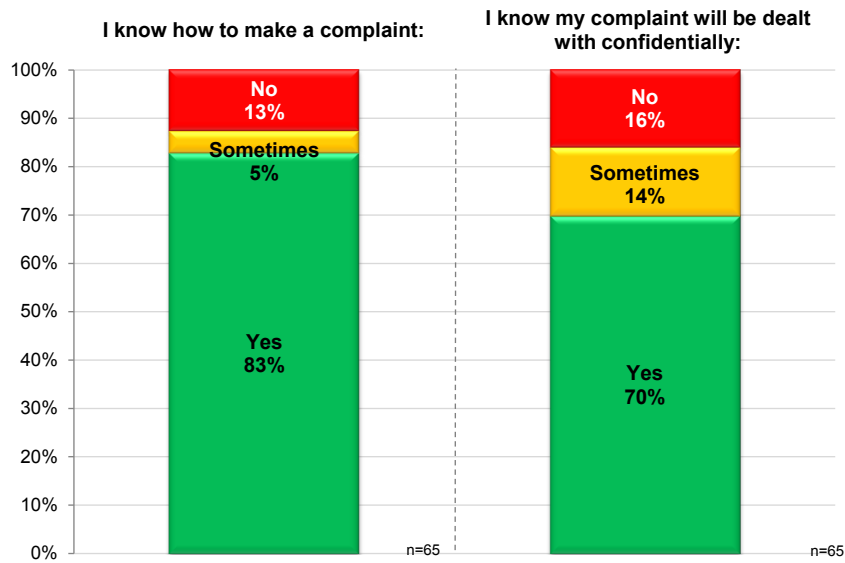
21. Do children and young adults aged over 11 understand their rights and what they are entitled to?



(There was one 'N/A' response to this question)

When asked if they know their rights and entitlements, overall 72% of the children and young people reported that they did.

22. Do young adults aged over 16 know how to make a complaint and feel confident that it will be dealt with confidentially?



(There was one 'N/A' responses to the first question and two to the second)

The young adults over the age of 16 were asked about making complaints and 83% reported that they knew how to make a complaint. However only 70% believed that it would be dealt with confidentially and 16% did not.

Table 2: How can care be improved?

	Age 7-10	Age 11-15	Age 16+	TOTAL
Want to see more of/live with siblings/parents	15	10		25
Don't like surveys	3	4	4	11
Less/no contact with social worker	2	7		9
Other issue with key worker	2	5	2	9
Social worker didn't keep changing		4	4	8
No/less meetings	1	4	1	6
Want more independence	2	3		5
Help/support with life	2	2	1	5
more privacy/anonymity	1	2	2	5
Issue with school	2	2		4
Was told if I am changing carer/social worker	2		1	3
Too few friends/activities		3		3
Prefer to remain in care	1	1	1	3
Other		2		2
TOTAL	33	49	16	98

The children and young adults were asked how they think being in care could be improved and to provide any additional feedback. From Table 2 it can be seen that the most responses were from the 11-15 year olds, followed by the 7-10 year olds. The most frequently mentioned area of concern was to be able to see their siblings and parents more often, or to be able to live with them. The table also shows that children frequently reported that they do not like filling in surveys.

Other concerns reported are general issues with their social worker. These ranged from having less or no contact with their worker, not being happy with frequent changes to their social worker and not being told about these changes. They also reported wanting to have fewer meetings.

Generally, they report wanting more independence, privacy and anonymity as well as wanting help and support.

