

Children at the Table: A roadmap for putting children at the heart of the next government ^[1]

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Excerpt

Executive summary

Why we must act

A child's health, wellbeing and life chances are shaped by the circumstances of their birth and early life experiences. Yet in the UK today, around 4.2 million children are growing up in poverty, including 48% of children from Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups. One million children are living in extreme poverty and one in 12 parents have a child who has had to share a bed with them or a sibling because they cannot afford another bed.

Paediatricians are seeing worsening health outcomes in areas such as oral health, nutrition, respiratory health and mental health with the impact of growing inequalities starkly apparent. It is unacceptable that the most deprived 10% of children are nearly twice as likely to die as the most advantaged 10% of children.

The wellbeing and mental health of too many of the UK's children is in decline. Children's happiness with their life as a whole was significantly lower in 2020-21 than in 2009-10. In June 2023 fewer than four in 10 children in the UK felt positive about the future of the country and the future of the world. One in six children aged 7-16 and one in four young people aged 17-19 has a probable mental health disorder, with young people from families on the lowest incomes 4 and a half times more likely to experience severe mental health problems than those from families on the highest incomes.

More children than ever need support from children's services due to issues they may be experiencing at home or because they are at risk of abuse and exploitation from people outside their families. In 2023, more than 640,000 children were referred to children's social care. In 2022, more than 80,000 children in England were looked after by local authorities – an increase of 22% over the last 10 years⁸ – and 201 children died due to known or suspected abuse and neglect.

Babies, children and young people have been overlooked for too long. We need a positive vision for transformational change and this report sets out a roadmap to achieving that.

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