

Emotional Well-being Survey of Deaf Children and Young People (2022): National Deaf Children's Society summary of survey results

This survey aimed to understand how deaf children and young people (CYP) feel about their life, and to identify any difficulties they might have in finding someone to talk to about how they are feeling.

Key findings

- In the past year, 66.4% of deaf CYP wanted or needed help with their mental health, compared to 22.7% who did not. A total of 60.9% of deaf CYP received the help they needed, but 23.6% did not.
- 62.8% of the deaf CYP we surveyed had 'high' well-being according to an overall life satisfaction metric developed by the Good Childhood Index (The Children's Society, 2010). This is lower than the proportion of CYP (81.9%.) with 'high' well-being in The Good Childhood Report (2022).
- Deaf CYP are most happy with *family*, with 58.6% either happy or very happy with this aspect of their lives. Other aspects showing a high happiness rating in deaf CYP were *life as a whole* (57.3%), *money and things owned* (53.2%), *time use* (51.8%), and *friends* (50.9%).
- Over a quarter (26.6%) of the deaf CYP we surveyed had 'low' well-being according to the Good Childhood Index, in contrast to just 11.6% of CYP in The Good Childhood Report (2022).
- Deaf CYP are most dissatisfied with *choice in life* (33.2%), followed by *appearance* (30.5%), *health* (30.5%), and the *future* (30.0%).
- Deaf CYP and the CYP surveyed in The Good Childhood Report (2022) show a noticeable difference in their level of dissatisfaction for *choice* and *appearance*.

Background

An online survey aimed at deaf young people over 13 years of age was conducted in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Questions were organised into two key areas: 1. Young people's level of happiness in relation to different aspects of their lives; 2. if professional help was sought for mental health and well-being, and their experience of this. Some questions measuring children's subjective well-being were taken from the Good Childhood Index (The Children's Society, 2010) to enable cautious comparisons to be drawn between deaf CYP and other, predominantly hearing young people surveyed in the Good Childhood Report (2022).

Demographic characteristics

A total of 266 participants completed the survey. Four participants had to be excluded from analysis as they did not consent to their data being used, despite completing the questionnaire. Data from forty-two participants was not included as the entries appeared to be duplicates. The final sample included 220 participants. Demographic information was not submitted for some questions by some participants, and this has been indicated as 'No response' in the tables that follow. When a group total is less than 5, we have not disclosed the exact count but instead replaced it with <5 to minimise the chance of making respondents identifiable.

Participants varied in age from under 10 years to 25 years. Overall, the sample was predominantly female (52.3%), with the largest proportion of deaf CYP in the age range 16-18 (44.1%), with most residing in England (64.5%). Demographic characteristics relating to age, gender identity and residence are presented in **Table 1**.

	<i>n</i>	%
Age group (years)		
Under 10	<5	0.5
10 - 11	5	2.3
12 – 15	42	19.1

16 – 18	97	44.1
19 - 25	74	33.6
No response	<5	1.4
Gender		
Female	115	52.3
Male	84	38.2
Non-binary	13	5.9
Prefer not to say	6	2.7
Prefer to self-describe	<5	0.5
No response	<5	0.5
Residence		
East Midlands	13	5.9
East of England	9	4.1
London	30	13.6
North East	9	4.1
North West	14	6.4
Northern Ireland	9	4.1
Scotland	60	27.3
South East	19	8.6
South West	14	6.4
Wales	8	3.6
West Midlands	26	11.8
Yorkshire	8	3.6
No response	<5	0.5

Table 1: Demographic characteristics: age, gender, and residence of participating deaf CYP

Other characteristics of the sample show that most of the deaf CYP who completed the survey were White British (59.5%) and attending college (30.0%). See **Table 2** for details.

	<i>n</i>	%
Ethnicity		
Arab	<5	0.5
Bangladeshi	<5	1.4
Black British	<5	0.5
Don't know	<5	0.5
Indian	<5	1.8
Other Asian Background	<5	0.9
Pakistani	11	5.0
White and Asian	<5	0.5
White and Black African	12	5.5
White and Black Caribbean	<5	0.9
White British	131	59.5
White Gypsy or Traveller	14	6.4
White Irish	21	9.5

White Other	15	6.8
No Response	<5	0.5
Education		
College	66	30.0
Don't know	<5	0.9
Independent School	22	10.0
Other	40	18.2
Primary School	<5	0.5
Secondary School	53	24.1
Sixth Form	32	14.5
No response	<5	1.8

Table 2: Demographic characteristics: ethnicity and education of participating deaf CYP

In terms of level of deafness, most deaf CYP taking part in the study had moderate (31.4%) to severe (27.3%) hearing loss and when questioned about communication preferences, the option used by the largest proportion of deaf CYP in the sample was spoken language (39.1%), followed by British Sign Language (29.5%) and a combination of speech and sign language (20.5%). **Table 3** shows the breakdown of level of deafness and communication types in all respondents.

	<i>n</i>	%
Level of deafness		
I don't know	5	2.3
Mild	33	15.0
Moderate	69	31.4
Profound	45	20.5
Severe	60	27.3
Temporary	5	2.3
No response	<5	1.4
Communication preference		
A combination of speech and sign language	45	20.5
British Sign Language (BSL)	65	29.5
Irish Sign Language (ISL)	14	6.4
Sign language from a different country	7	3.2
Sign Supported English (SSE)	<5	0.9
Using speech	86	39.1
No response	<5	0.5

Table 3: Demographic characteristics: level of deafness and communication preferences of participating deaf CYP

How do deaf CYP feel overall?

Using questions from the Good Childhood Index (GCI), developed by The Children’s Society (2010), we asked deaf CYP about how they felt. In the first set of questions, we asked respondents to indicate their level of agreement (strongly agree – strongly disagree) for a series of statements to explore overall well-being. The questions were not mandatory, which is reflected in the variable response rate per question (No response range: 19-22). The number of participants (*n*) and proportion (%) responding to each level of agreement for the five statements can be found in **Table 4**.

Statement	Strongly agree		Agree		I don't agree or disagree		Disagree		Strongly disagree		No response	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
My life is going well	34	15.5%	80	36.4%	49	22.3%	34	15.5%	<5	1.8%	19	8.6%
My life is just right	31	14.1%	78	35.5%	48	21.8%	42	19.1%	<5	0.9%	19	8.6%
I have a good life	43	19.6%	76	34.6%	47	21.4%	32	14.6%	0	0.0%	22	10.0%
I have what I want in life	29	13.2%	73	33.2%	54	24.6%	40	18.2%	<5	1.8%	20	9.1%
I wish I had a different kind of life	22	10.0%	77	35.0%	54	24.6%	35	15.9%	12	5.5%	20	9.1%

Table 4: Overall well-being measure: Deaf CYP’s level of agreement to statements from the Good Childhood Index (2010)

For the statement “My life is going well”, around a half of deaf CYP (51.9%) either agreed or strongly agreed, in contrast to under a fifth (17.3%) who either disagreed or strongly disagreed. A similar pattern of findings was true for the statements: “My life is just right” (Agreement= 49.6%, Disagreement= 20.0%); “I have a good life” (Agreement= 54.2%, Disagreement: 14.6%); and “I have what I want in life” (Agreement= 46.4%, Disagreement= 20.0%). A similar proportion of deaf CYP neither agreed nor disagreed with each statement (Range= 21.4%-24.6%). Taken together, this suggests that approximately half of the deaf CYP we surveyed were positive about their lives and about a fifth were not.

Despite a generally positive finding for the four statements mentioned above, for the statement “I wish I had a different kind of life”, almost half of deaf CYP (45.0%) either agree or strongly agree, compared to those that disagree or strongly disagree (21.4%) with this statement. This suggests that although half of the deaf CYP we questioned were generally satisfied with their lives according to four of the statements, for almost half, there is an aspiration for a different kind of life.

It is also important to note that around a fifth to almost a quarter (Range= 21.4% - 24.6%) of deaf CYP did not indicate a strong feeling in either direction (“I don’t agree or disagree”) which could be a true reflection of how they feel, or indicate this group is not sure about how they feel, or do not want to disclose this information.

To calculate the overall life satisfaction score devised by the GCI (The Children’s Society, 2010)¹, we excluded any deaf CYP not providing a score for each of the five statements. This left 198 respondents. The life satisfaction score is calculated by totalling the scores² for each of the five statements, per respondent, to arrive at a score out of 20. The average life satisfaction score for deaf CYP was 11.7 (Range= 3 – 20). The distribution (%) of scores is shown in **Figure 1**. According to the GCI (The Children’s Society, 2010), scores falling below 10 indicate low well-being (highlighted in orange in **Figure 1**, with green indicating above

¹ The scale is based on Huebner’s Student Life Satisfaction Scale (Huebner, 1991) using a scale from 0 to 20.

² The maximum score per statement is 4. See The Good Childhood Index Guidance Document (The Children’s Society, 2023) for full details of the scoring method.

midpoint well-being). In summary, 62.8% of deaf CYP had an overall life satisfaction score above the midpoint ('high' well-being), 10.6% had a score at the midpoint, and 26.6% had a score below the midpoint (low well-being).

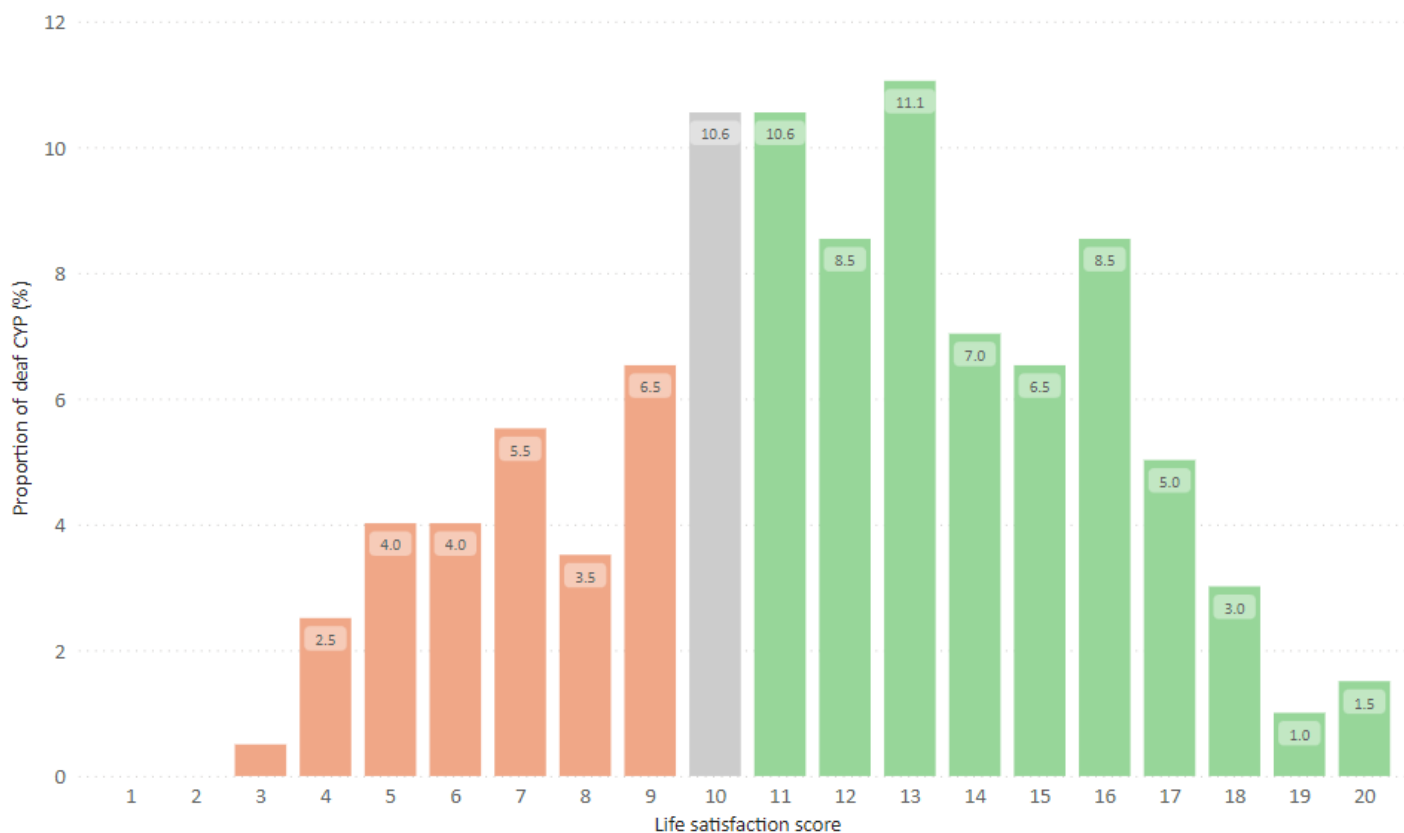


Figure 1: Distribution of life satisfaction scores in deaf CYP (%)

How happy are deaf CYP in different aspects of life?

In the second set of questions taken from the GCI (The Children’s Society, 2010), we asked deaf CYP how happy they were with different aspects of their lives. In this series of questions, respondents had to indicate how happy they felt on a scale (0 - 10) where 0 relates to feeling very unhappy, and 10 relates to feeling very happy for a series of ten statements.

In the Good Childhood Report (2022), the average happiness score was calculated for each domain and the proportion of CYP scoring below the midpoint (i.e. under 5 on the 0 - 10 scale) was calculated as a percentage. Children choosing 0 - 4 were considered to have ‘low’ well-being. We handled our data in the same way to draw comparisons between the deaf CYP in our survey, and the young people surveyed in the Good Childhood Report (2022).

For the mean calculations, we found a similar pattern of findings for all ten statements (see Table 5). The average score was concentrated around the midpoint or slightly higher (Range= 5.5 - 6.5).

		Average	No response
1	Your appearance (how you look)	5.5	22
2	With what may happen in later life (in the future)	5.5	21
3	Your health	5.7	21

4	How much choice you have in life	5.8	20
5	With the way you use your time	5.9	21
6	Your relationships and friends	6.0	20
7	With the school that you go to	6.1	29
8	Your life as a whole	6.2	21
9	With the things that you have like money and the things you own	6.2	20
10	Your relationships with your family	6.5	20

Table 5: Average happiness ratings for different aspects of life: Deaf CYP's responses to statements from the Good Childhood Index (2010)

For the proportion of deaf CYP scoring below the midpoint, nobody selected 0 (very unhappy) for any of the statements, but many selected 1 - 4. Looking at the data in this way we can see that around over a fifth up to a third (Range= 21.4% - 33.2%) of deaf CYP feel some degree of unhappiness in certain aspects of their life (see **Figure 2**). Choice in life (33.2%) ranks highest, followed by appearance (30.5%), health (30.5%), and the future (30.0%).

We also looked at the proportion of well-being scores that were at the midpoint, and above the midpoint (see **Figure 2**). Family (21.4%) shows the lowest level of unhappiness and calculating the proportion of happy scores (6 - 10) for this statement, 58.6% were happy or very happy with this aspect of their lives. Considering that family also had the highest average score (*Mean*= 6.5/10), family seems to be the aspect of life that deaf CYP are most happy with.

Other statements with more than a half of deaf CYP giving happy - very happy scores (6 - 10) were: life as a whole (57.3%), money and things owned (53.2%), time use (51.8%), and friends (50.9%).

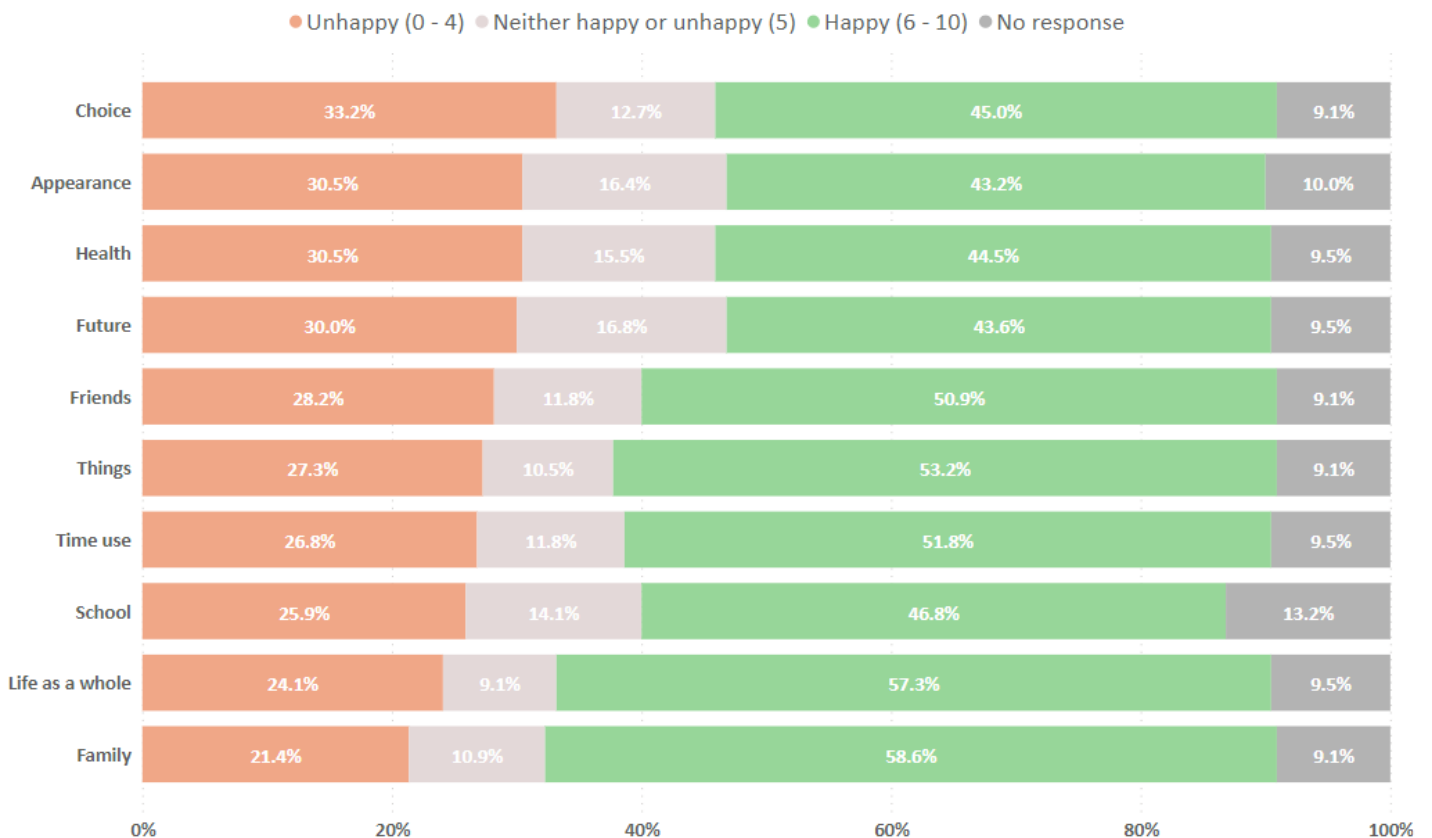


Figure 2: Proportion of deaf CYP who are happy, unhappy, or neither in relation to different aspects of their life (%)

How do well-being and happiness measures in deaf CYP compare to other young people?

The Good Childhood Report (2022) reflects the responses of over 2000 children aged 10 - 17 years who responded to The Children’s Society’s household survey in May-June 2022. While our sample size is much smaller ($n= 220$), we can cautiously³ compare the deaf CYP in our sample to the CYP surveyed in the Good Childhood Report (we refer to these young people as hearing CYP⁴ for brevity). To do this as accurately as possible, we only include responses from deaf CYP aged 10-18⁵ ($n= 145$).

By comparing the average happiness rating for each of the 10 aspects of life (or well-being domains) in deaf CYP and hearing CYP, **Figure 3** clearly shows that deaf CYP’s average happiness ratings are much lower than their peers’. Generally speaking, the difference is between 1.0 and 2.3 points on the 0 - 10 scale, with the most notable difference for the category of health (deaf CYP= 5.8, hearing CYP= 8.1).

On average, young people in the Good Childhood Report (2022) were most happy with their family, health, and friends. Deaf CYP were also most happy with family, but school and things ranked second and third for these young people. Hearing CYP were least happy about the future, compared to appearance in deaf CYP.

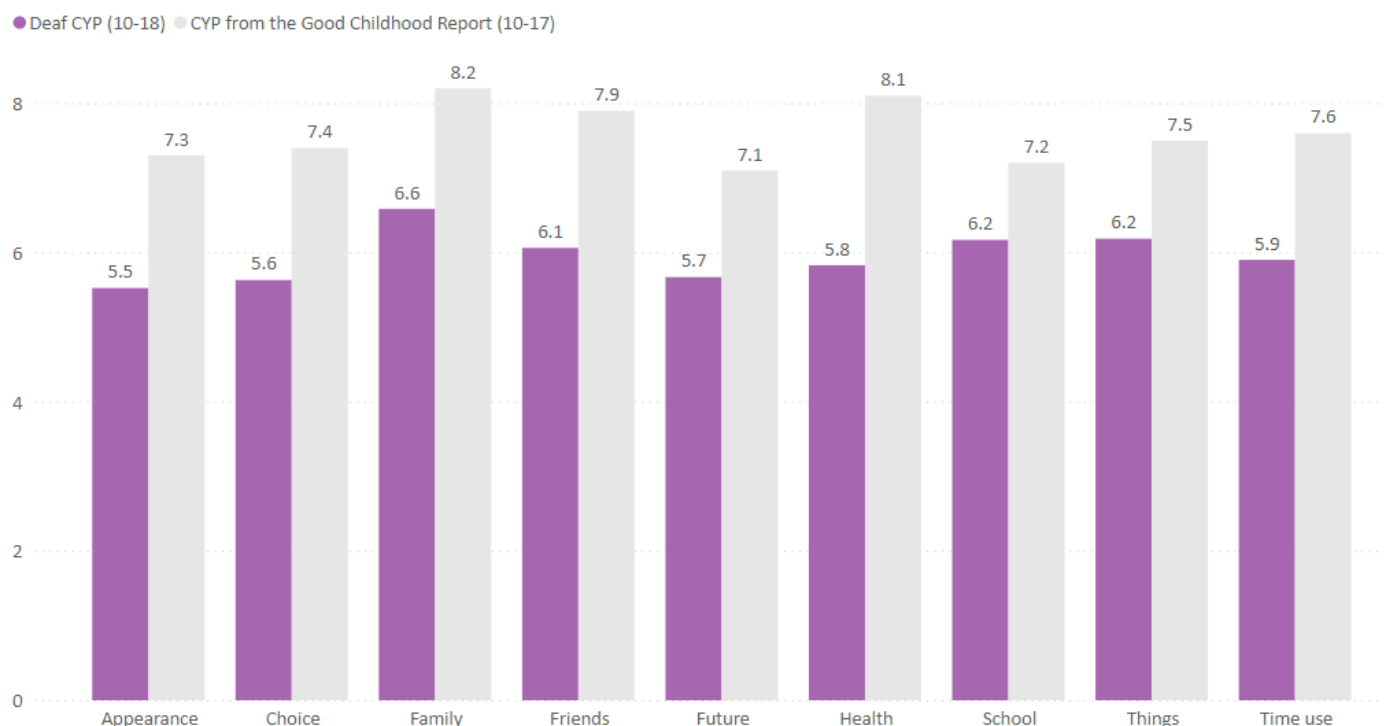


Figure 3: Average happiness score in deaf CYP and CYP surveyed in the Good Childhood Report (2022) for different aspects of life

Considering the proportion of deaf (Range= 25.8% - 34.5%) and hearing (Range= 6.5% - 14.2%) CYP choosing a happiness rating below the midpoint for each of the statements, **Figure 4** indicates a marked difference.

³ A number of variables prevent us from accurately drawing direct comparisons between the two datasets.

⁴ We do this cautiously since young people in The Good Childhood Report were not directly asked if they are deaf or not.

⁵ We asked deaf CYP to indicate their age within a range which is why we cannot limit the group to 10-17, as our range went up to 18 and it is impossible to know the exact age of participants.

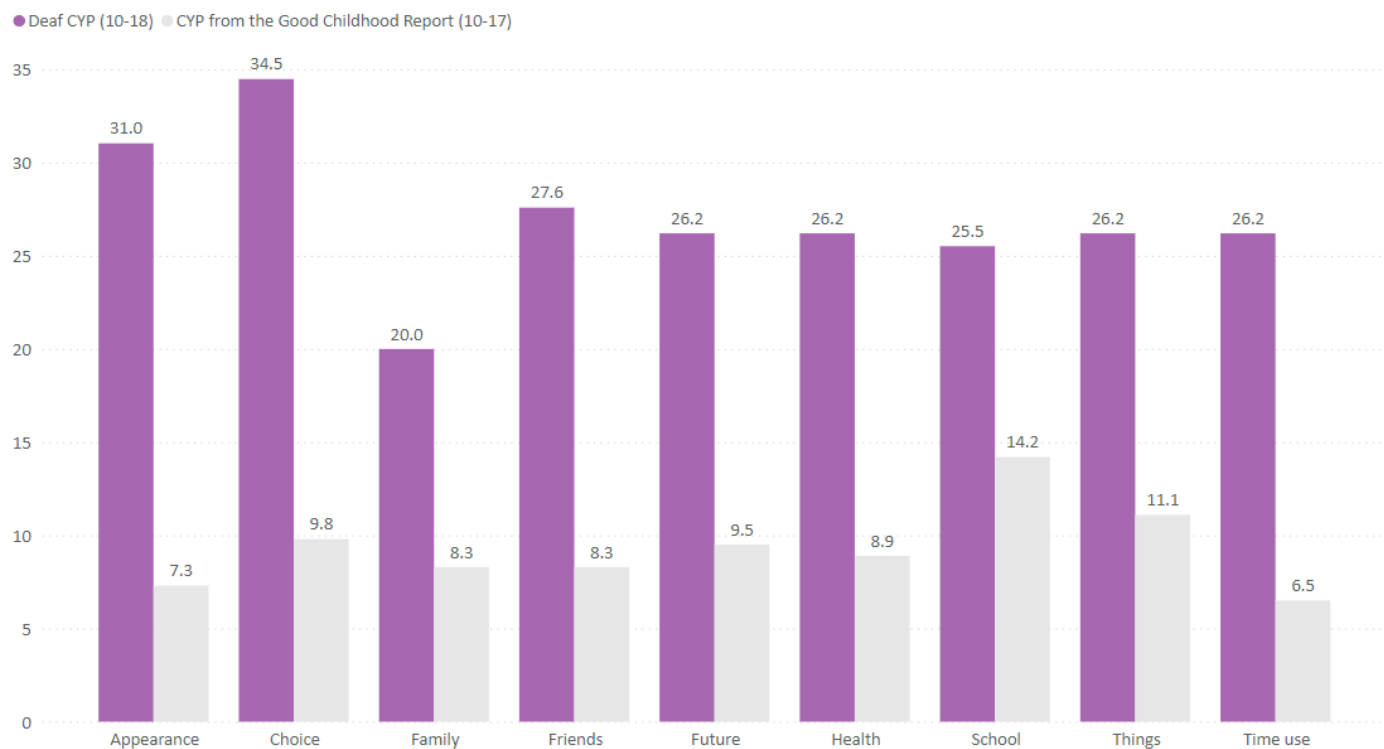


Figure 4: Proportion of deaf CYP and CYP surveyed in the Good Childhood Report (2022) scoring below the happiness midpoint for different aspects of life (%)

The largest discrepancy between deaf CYP and hearing CYP seems to be in choice (Difference= 24.7%) and appearance (Difference= 23.7%), though the difference between the two groups is large for all statements (see **Table 6**). Aspects of life which had the largest proportion of dissatisfaction in hearing CYP were school and things, compared to choice and appearance in deaf CYP.

	% Hearing CYP	% Deaf CYP	Difference
How much choice you have in life	9.8	34.5	24.7
Your appearance how you look	7.3	31	23.7
With the way you use your time	6.5	26.2	19.7
Your relationships and friends	8.3	27.6	19.3
Your health	8.9	26.2	17.3
With what may happen in later life in the future	9.5	26.2	16.7
With the things that you have like money and the things you own	11.1	26.2	15.1
Your relationships with your family	8.3	20	11.7
With the school that you go to	14.2	25.5	11.3

Table 6: Proportion (%) of deaf and hearing CYP scoring below the happiness midpoint and the difference between the 2 groups

When aggregating the data from the ten domains to calculate the overall life satisfaction score, The Good Childhood Report (2022) showed that 11.6% of CYP aged 10 to 17 had low well-being (scoring <10/20). In the sample of deaf CYP we surveyed, this proportion was more than double at 26.6% (refer back to **Figure 1**).

Someone to talk to about mental health and well-being

In the final section, we asked if deaf CYP had wanted or needed to talk to someone about their mental health and well-being; if they had tried to get help through NHS services; and whether they had received the help they needed. We developed this set of questions to understand if deaf CYP have specific challenges in accessing mental health services.

Asking for help

For the question “In the past year, have you wanted or needed help with your mental health and wellbeing?”, the majority of deaf CYP answered ‘Yes’ ($n= 146$, 66.4%) rather than ‘No’ ($n= 50$, 22.7%) or ‘Not sure’ ($n= 16$, 7.3%). Only a small proportion did not answer this question ($n= 8$, 3.6%).

In a follow-up question, we asked which NHS services deaf CYP sought help from. The different types of support are summarised in **Table 1Table 7**. Most deaf CYP received help from a mental health professional who supports all young people ($n= 67$, 29.1%) or a professional who specifically works with deaf young people ($n= 43$, 19.5%).

	<i>n</i>	%
A mental health professional such as my counsellor or therapist (someone who supports all young people)	67	29.1
A mental health professional such as my counsellor or therapist (someone who works mainly with deaf young people)	43	19.5
GP	23	10.5
Other	12	5.5
No – didn’t seek help	72	32.7
Not sure	0	0
Don’t want to say	0	0
No response given	6	2.7

Table 7: Number and proportion (%) of deaf CYP accessing NHS services for mental health and well-being

For those answering ‘No- didn’t seek help’ ($n= 72$, 32.7%), we asked why these young people did not seek help, despite feeling they wanted or needed it. One explanation for some deaf CYP was that they had decided to talk to family and/or friends rather than pursue professional help.

Another explanation was that the act of telling someone about their mental health or well-being was too large a barrier. For some this related to a lack of confidence, to not knowing how to talk about their issue, while for others they simply didn’t want other people to know about it for fear of how another person might respond or view them. Some deaf CYP said mental health was not an area they spoke to friends or family about: “didn’t feel comfortable sharing issues with family in order to escalate situation”, while others said they were too shy, anxious, or felt embarrassed.

Others downplayed their concerns: "I didn't think my issues were serious enough to warrant seeking help" or that they did not expect much from the service they might be offered: "Didn't feel it would improve the situation". Some deaf CYP were too busy to seek help.

Another concern given was the perceived difficulty in finding someone or trusting a professional: "scared of medical gaslighting", or the belief that professional support would not help as they would not be heard or understood.

For others, communication was given as a reason ($n= 17/66$ comments) preventing them from seeking help. This included no BSL available, a lack of deaf awareness, and only phone appointments offered. In an extreme example, a deaf CYP had been previously told that having a cochlear implant "... would make their lives so much easier" which put them off seeking help again.

Waiting times were off-putting for some as well as the extra anxiety this causes: "I don't want to be stuck on a long waiting list". The prospect of being prescribed medication was also a concern.

Other deaf CYP mentioned wider mental health issues which were complex: "Also have other mental health issues I don't yet know how to explain to them." And some deaf CYP gave a combination of the above reasons.

Receiving help

When we asked deaf CYP if they had received the help they needed, most said 'Yes' ($n = 134, 60.9%$) rather than 'No' ($n = 52, 23.6%$), 'I don't know' ($n= 29, 13.2%$), or no response ($n < 5, 2.3%$).

For those answering 'no', we asked why this was the case. In some cases, when deaf CYP had asked for help, it was not always offered: "I asked the school for help, but they did nothing", "Doctors didn't provide any support".

A common reason deaf CYP gave for not getting the support they needed was that they did not feel heard or understood. This was either in a general sense: "Professionals didn't listen to me and would not take me seriously", or in relation to their deafness: "She cannot understand my experiences and makes well-meaning but ultimately incorrect or harmful comments during sessions", "People mainly focus on me being deaf and nothing else". Some believed the therapy or support they received did not help with their situation: "The therapy I received didn't help me with my issues" or that the therapists were not good.

Waiting times were given as another reason why some did not get the support they needed, while others were not able to get an appointment due to not meeting the eligibility criteria, communication difficulties, funding or resource issues.

Deaf awareness

Finally, we asked deaf CYP if there was anything else they wanted to tell us. Some explained their situation in more detail or highlighted issues they had encountered. Deaf awareness was a common theme in the comments left by deaf CYP. Feelings of isolation and a lack of friends seemed to stem from a lack of deaf awareness in friendship groups or educational settings. In the case of professionals, avenues of communication and a general lack of deaf awareness or specific advice for deaf CYP were highlighted: "The trouble is you end up being the one educating and when you're struggling that's hard."

References

The Children's Society (2010). *Good Childhood Index* [Survey].

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