



Highlights

The
State
of the
Kid

2009 Survey Results

State of the Kid: Introduction ▶▶

Every day, letters arrive at our editorial headquarters from kids sharing their pictures and poems and their thoughts and dreams. They also ask for advice. They write to talk about their friends, bullies, schoolwork, pets, parents, and their hopes and fears. Some write to ask how clouds make rain. Some write to tell us an idea they had for the magazine. They write, and we answer. For the sixty-three years that *Highlights* has received mail from kids, our editors have answered each and every letter and e-mail. In doing so, we've learned a lot about what kids care about and how they see the world.

At *Highlights*, we spend a lot of time thinking about what is best for kids and their families. Our focus is helping children to grow into confident, creative, curious, and caring individuals. I often say that reading the mail we get from readers is the best part of my job. That's true, not only because I love to hear their stories, jokes and questions, but also because knowing their perspective is essential in finding the best ways to serve them.

As parents, mentors, and educators, you also hear from kids about their lives. In our first State of the Kid survey, we gave kids a national platform to share their thoughts on their interests, concerns, and experiences growing up in 2009. Respondents ages 5 and up told us what is on their minds. Some of what they said will reflect what you already know. Some may surprise you, as it did me (who knew preteens would actually like more sleep?).

We are excited to share this glimpse into our readers' lives and hope that you find what kids have to say as fascinating as we did.

Christine French Clark
Editor in Chief

Commentator Biographies ▶▶

Dr. Istar Schwager, Ph.D., an educational psychologist and mother, writes about the joys and challenges of raising kids. Advisor and contributor to numerous award-winning publications and television programs, Dr. Schwager frequently conducts workshops for busy parents. She is a consulting editor of *HighlightsParents.com* and founder of *CreativeParents.com*, a site “for parents leading creative lives.”

Dr. Alanna Levine is a pediatrician in private practice at Orangetown Pediatric Associates, and on staff at Englewood Hospital and Medical Center. She is a national spokesperson for the American Academy of Pediatrics, a member of the National Association of Medical Communicators, and a member of the American Academy of Pediatrics’ Council on Communications and Media. Dr. Levine is a contributing medical expert for *momlogic.com* and frequently appears on television to discuss topics relating to the health of children.

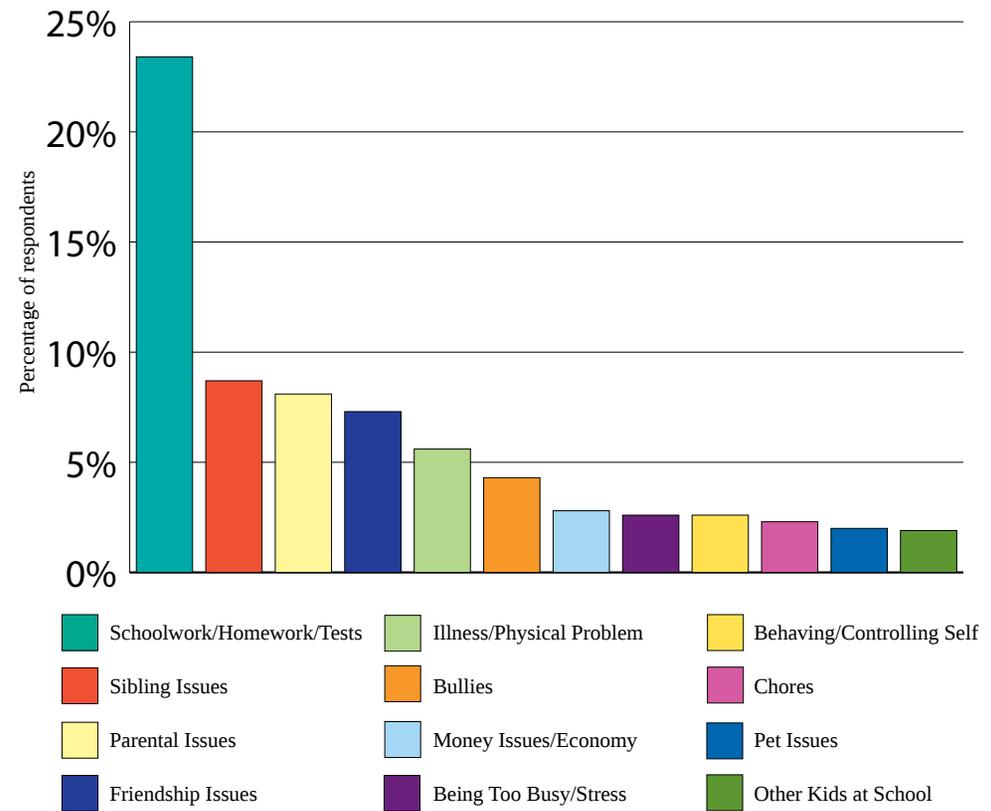
Amy Lupold Bair, *resourcefulmommymedia.com*, is a sometimes freelance writer, a former pro-blogger, a social media marketing business owner in the D.C. area, and a full-time, stay-at-home mom to a five-year-old daughter and three-year-old son. Amy has been blogging since mid-2008 at *Resourceful Mommy* where she covers a variety of topics including parenting tips, organizational strategies, and product reviews and recommendations. She is also author of the blog’s popular regular feature, “Ask Resourceful Mommy.” In addition, she writes articles for Type-A Mom Network as the Child Development Editor and for the popular online magazine *Blissfully Domestic* on their Family Channel.



“What is your biggest problem right now?” ▶▶

Kids don’t always view problems in the same way adults do. They are less likely to think about large challenges, and more likely to think about immediate annoyances. While we did hear from kids who are anxious about the economy or other adult concerns, most shared worries about their daily activities such as managing schoolwork and negotiating the relationships in their lives. Kids cited problems with their families—with both parents (8.1%) and siblings (8.7%), and problems with friends (7.3%) and other peers, including bullies (4.3%). Illnesses or other physical problems (5.6%) also took a top spot.

But by far the most common complaints were related to schoolwork (23.4%). Respondents said they struggled with completing homework on time, finishing projects and/or studying for tests. In part, this might be due to the timing of the survey; kids responded as they were nearing the end of their school year. But kids shared concerns about their performance in school in response to every open-ended question we asked. And we know from the letters we get from kids all year long that tests and homework do indeed occupy kids’ thoughts throughout the year.



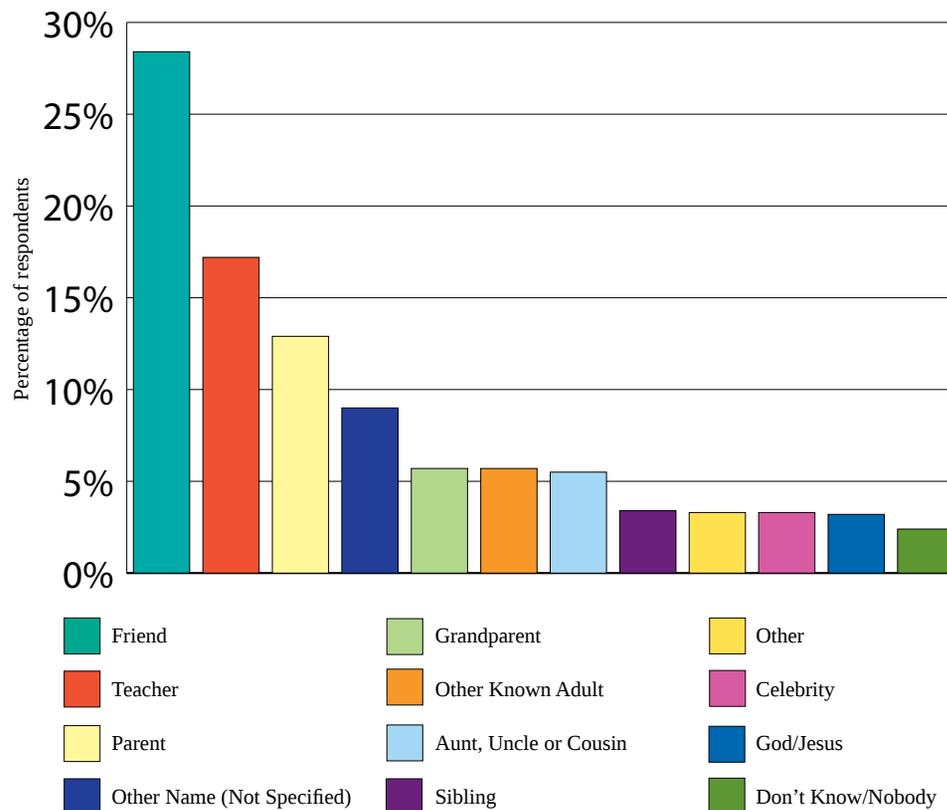
“Other than members of your own family, who is a person you admire and respect?” ▶▶

Many people, from celebrities to teachers to friends, can have an impact on a child’s life, but we wanted to know whom children themselves find significant. In the fictional and non-fictional stories we share with our readers, *Highlights* depicts characters who are creative, confident, curious, and caring. We believe children learn best through positive examples. So we weren’t surprised to learn that the role models kids themselves cite are found closer to home.

The majority of participants named friends (28.4%), teachers (17.2%), and family members (12.9%) as the people they most admire and respect. Figures from popular culture—sports stars, actors, authors, and pop idols—together were named less than 5% of the time. This is a reminder that while it’s important that kids have popular culture figures they can admire, children most likely model and reflect the values they see in their day-to-day lives.

“**WOW!** Kids—above all other people in their lives—respect their friends. The fact that friends top the list is a bit of a wake-up call to parents who may not realize the power their child’s peer group holds.”

~ AMY LUPOLD BAIR



Other than members of your own family, who is a person you admire and respect?
 My math teacher, my friend (who is the president of the school)

Other than members of your own family, who is a person you admire and respect?
 Our president; because of his wise decisions.

Other than members of your own family, who is a person you admire and respect?
 My friend Olivia becuas she is Always Responsible for stuff.

Other than members of your own family, who is a person you admire and respect?
 My friend Marcus

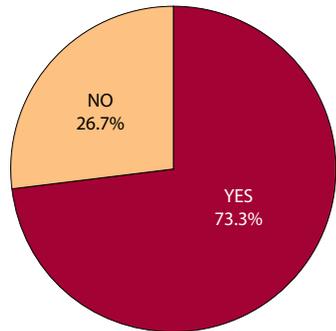
Other than members of your own family, who is a person you admire and respect?
 Kadesha is my friend and I admire her because she behaves in class. I respect her because she does her best.

Other than members of your own family, who is a person you admire and respect?
 My teachers and my friends.

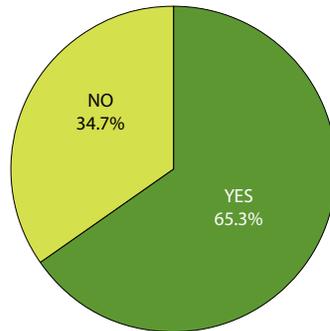
Other than members of your own family, who is a person you admire and respect?
 Chelsea my B.F.F.

“Do you have chores that you must do at your home?” ▶▶

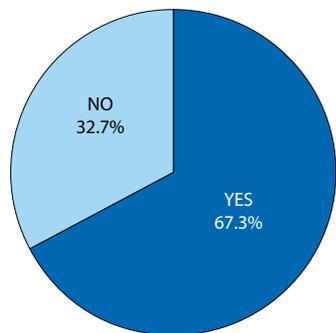
Chores were a common feature in most of our readers’ households. The majority of participants reported that they did have chores to do at home (71.9%). The proportion of those who have chores was not split equally among girls and boys, however. More girls (73.3%) than boys (65.3%) said that they had chores to do. Older children (74.7%), ages 9–12+, also were more likely to report doing chores at home than younger ones (67.3%), ages 5–8. Overall, a large number of children from a variety of ages have taken on responsibilities at home.



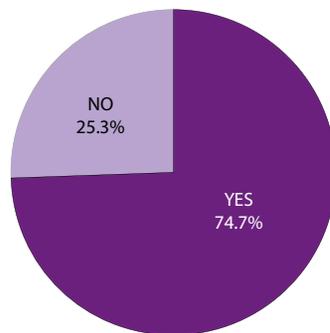
Total Girls



Total Boys



Total Ages 5 – 8



Total Ages 9 – 12



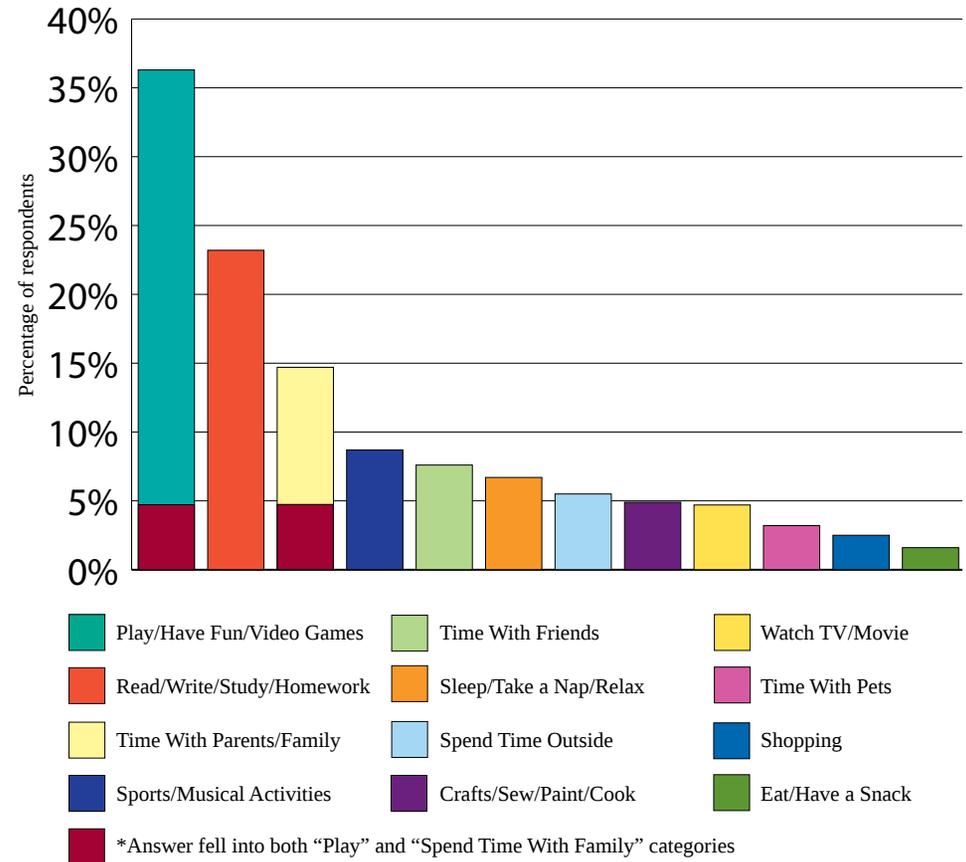
“If you had an extra hour in your day, what would you do with it?” ▶▶

Much ink has been spilled over the last few decades about the “overscheduled child.” Do children themselves agree? What would they do with a totally unscheduled hour? Not surprisingly, the majority of children said they would choose to play or have fun (36.3%). Respondents said they would spend the time playing outside, on the computer, or with friends or parents. Further showing the presence of school-related pressure in their lives, a significant number of children said they would use an extra hour to study, although others would like to read or write for fun.

Some children told us that if they had a free hour, they would get some extra sleep. While it would be typical to hear this from a teenager, to hear it from children younger than 12 was a bit of a surprise. We asked pediatrician and American Academy of Pediatrics spokesperson Dr. Alanna Levine to weigh in. She shared that sleep deprivation in preteens is a growing health concern. Wanting to squeeze in an extra hour to play, as most kids said they would, may have something to do with this problem.

“**TODAY’S** parents and kids both describe feeling stressed. Both need to be reminded that play and fun are very, very important.”

~ DR. ISTAR SCHWAGER



“**SLEEP** deprivation has a direct impact on both the physical and mental health of children. Both acute sleep deprivation and chronic sleep disorders negatively affect behavior, school performance, and family relationships.”

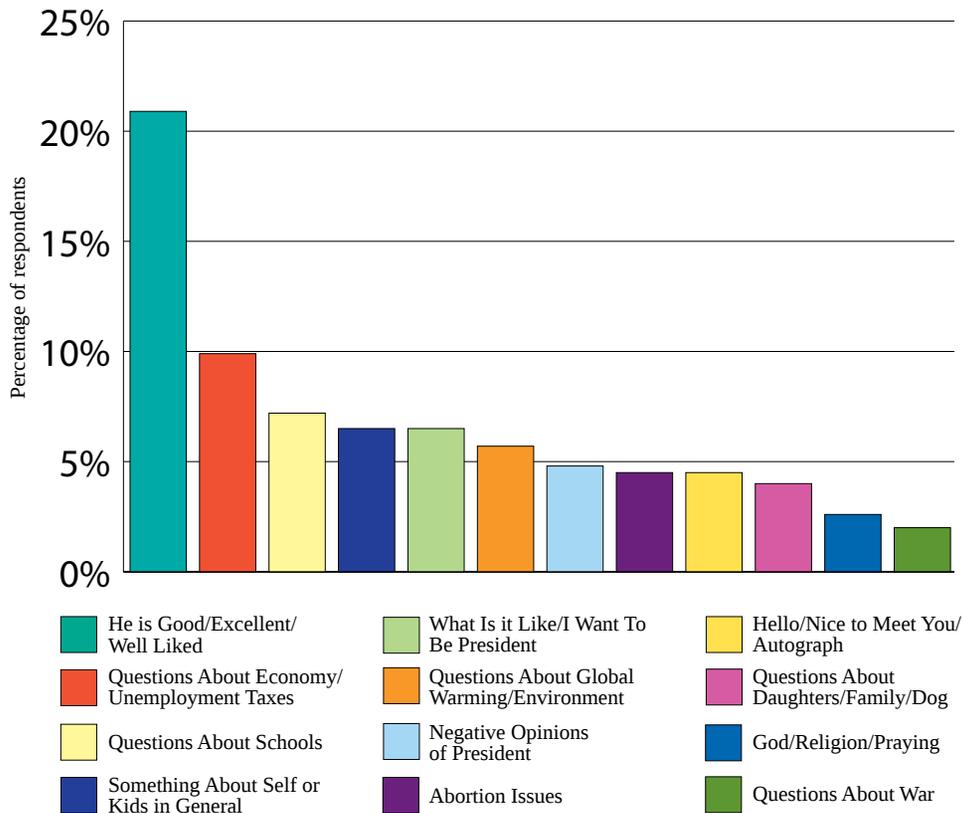
“As children get older, there is an increased demand on their time for homework and extra-curricular activities. When this is coupled with a heightened interest in television, the internet, and multimedia, children are not getting the sleep they need for their health and overall well-being.”

~ DR. ALANNA LEVINE

“If you had five minutes to talk to our new President, what would you tell him?” ▶▶

While we were interested in the global issues that our readers care about, many kids responded to our question with more personal concerns. One respondent would like to ask the President if he can borrow his limo! Indeed, kids view the world largely through their own experience, and that experience colored their responses. Some kids wanted to tell the President about their school (7.2%), or suggest an improvement (one suggestion: “close it down!”).

A large number of respondents said they would tell the President that he is good or well liked (20.9%). Some kids did worry about broader concerns, such as the economy, taxes, and gas prices (10%). Children’s concerns about the problems affecting their lives and families were a strong theme in the survey, but many seem to feel that the President is up to the task.



If you had 5 minutes to talk to our new President, what would you tell him?
I would ask him for water parks, and to invent robot maids.

If you had 5 minutes to talk to our new President, what would you tell him?
I would ask to play with Sasha and Malia.

If you had 5 minutes to talk to our new President, what would you tell him?
I love you Barack Obama. I hope you are in the newspaper.

If you had 5 minutes to talk to our new President, what would you tell him?
I would ask him if he liked fishing, and tell him stories of my best catches.

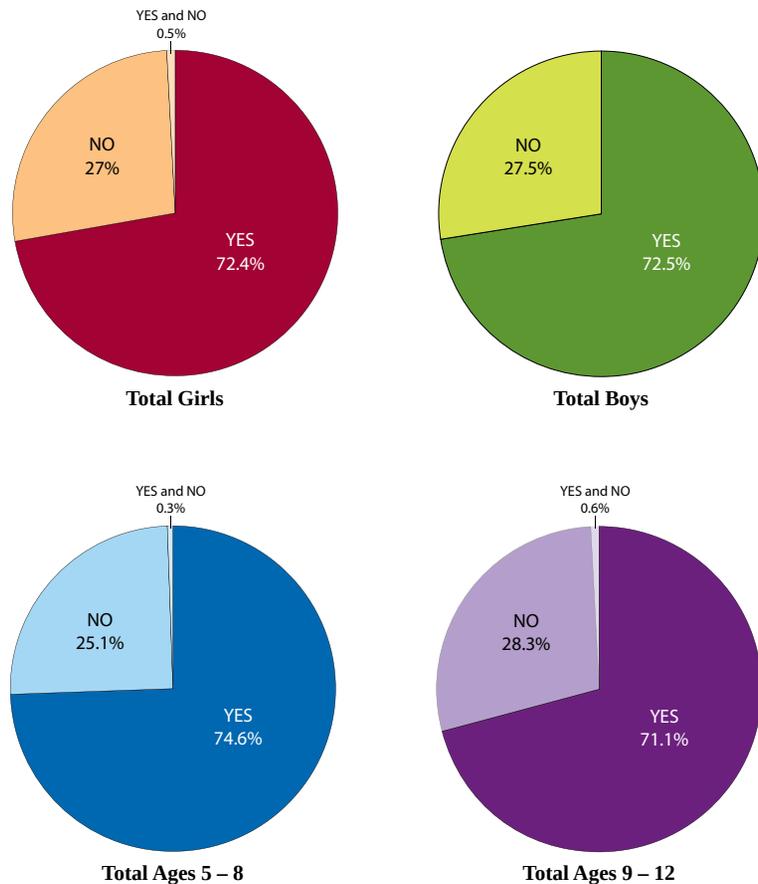
If you had 5 minutes to talk to our new President, what would you tell him?
I would tell him to make chocolate cookie stands, and lemonade fountains.

If you had 5 minutes to talk to our new President, what would you tell him?
~~We~~ We need to change the school hours, until 9:00-3:30 so I don't have to get up early.

If you had 5 minutes to talk to our new President, what would you tell him?
I Love you even if I don't act like it.

“Do you get to spend enough time with your parents?” ▶▶

Today’s parents, perhaps more than the generation before them, worry about giving their family enough time. Indeed, the world has changed a lot since *Highlights* reached its first readers in 1946, when most kids had parental care during the day. But how much is enough? We asked kids themselves. Looking at the results, most children feel they get to spend enough time with their parents (72.4%). The percentage was almost the same among girls and boys. Older children, however, were slightly more likely to say that they do not get to spend enough time with their parents (28.3%).



“AS the mother of two children with very different schedules—one in elementary school and one in pre-school—finding time to spend with each child alone and as a family is a daily struggle. The fact that children across age and gender expressed a strong interest in spending time with their parents—and a strong respect for their parents, as well—shows me that this issue needs to be addressed with renewed focus in my family.”

~ AMY LUPOLD BAIR



“What should grown-ups know about being a kid today?” ▶▶

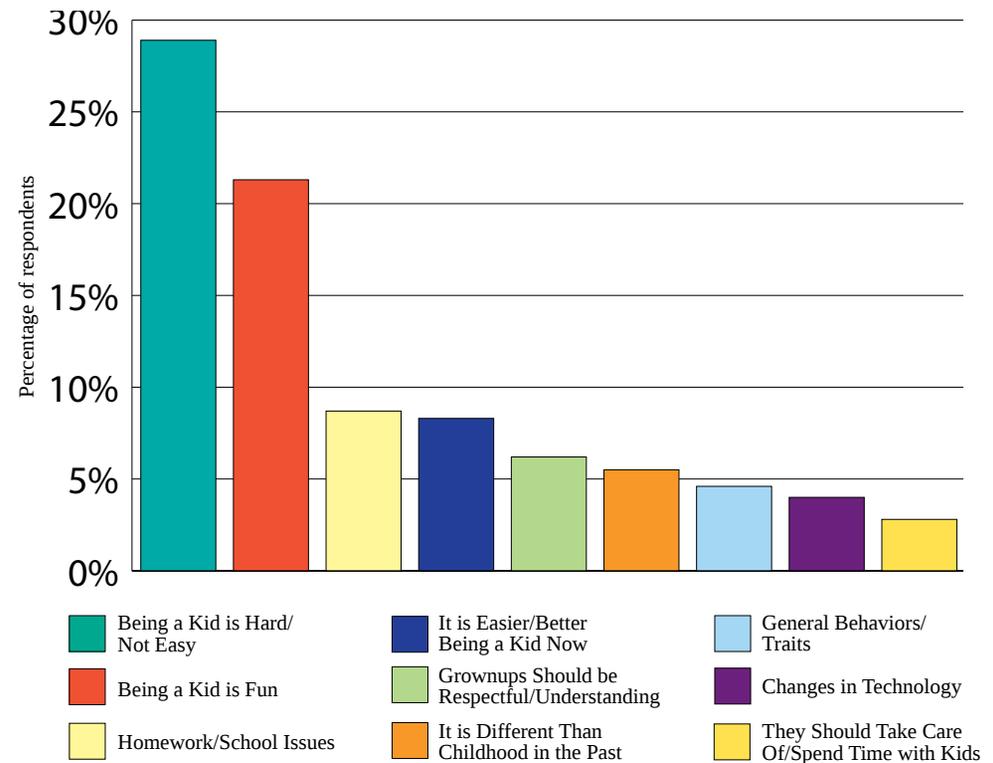
Even though every adult has by definition experienced childhood, it’s not always easy to put oneself back in those little shoes. As a publication that works every day to serve kids, we’ve found that the best way to bring back some childhood understanding is to listen. That’s what the State of the Kid survey is all about!

When asked directly what adults should know about their experience, a large portion of our readers wanted adults to know that being a kid today is hard (28.9%). Some respondents mentioned homework or school-related issues that they would like adults to recognize (8.7%). One of the most common responses, however, was that being a kid was fun (21.3%). Amidst all of the school work and stresses, many children still find their lives enjoyable but would like adults to see that it has its challenges.

What should grown-ups know about being a kid today? *That we have no rights, we have no free time and we ductally might have plans besides chores!*

What should grown-ups know about being a kid today? *We need more sleep, and chocolate!*

What should grown-ups know about being a kid today? *Kids aren't all into video games, and t.v. Most kids like to play outside and get some fresh air. Its kind of upsetting how grown-ups stereo-type kids today*

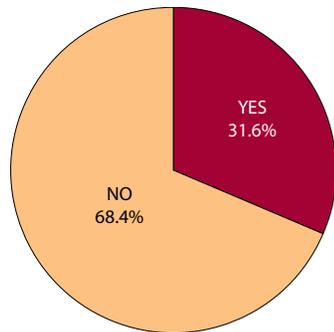


“I love that responding children for the most part believe that not only is being a kid today pretty hard, but it is also fun! I have to say, I feel the same way about motherhood. In many ways the information overload and hectic schedules of today’s families make parenting a struggle, but it is also a blast!”

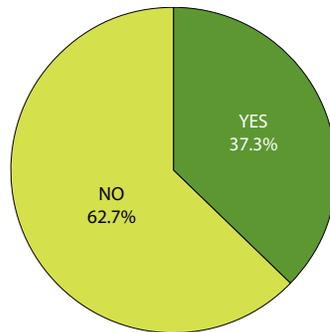
~ AMY LUPOLD BAIR

“Do you think it is harder to be a kid today than it was for your parents?” ▶▶

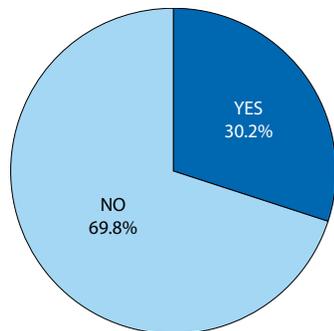
The news is filled with challenges new and old that children face, from cyber-bullying to car safety to economic hardship. We wanted to ask kids themselves if they think they have it harder than their parents did. Some respondents did feel that it is harder to be a kid today (32.7%), and boys (37.3%) were more likely to feel this way than girls (31.6%). But the majority of participants say that it is not harder to be a kid today than it was for their parents. Even as our world inevitably changes, the experience of childhood remains remarkably the same.



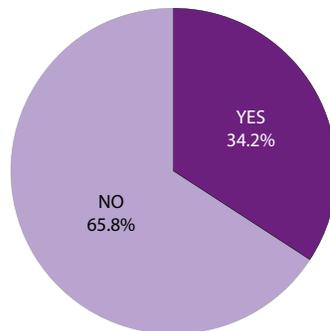
Total Girls



Total Boys



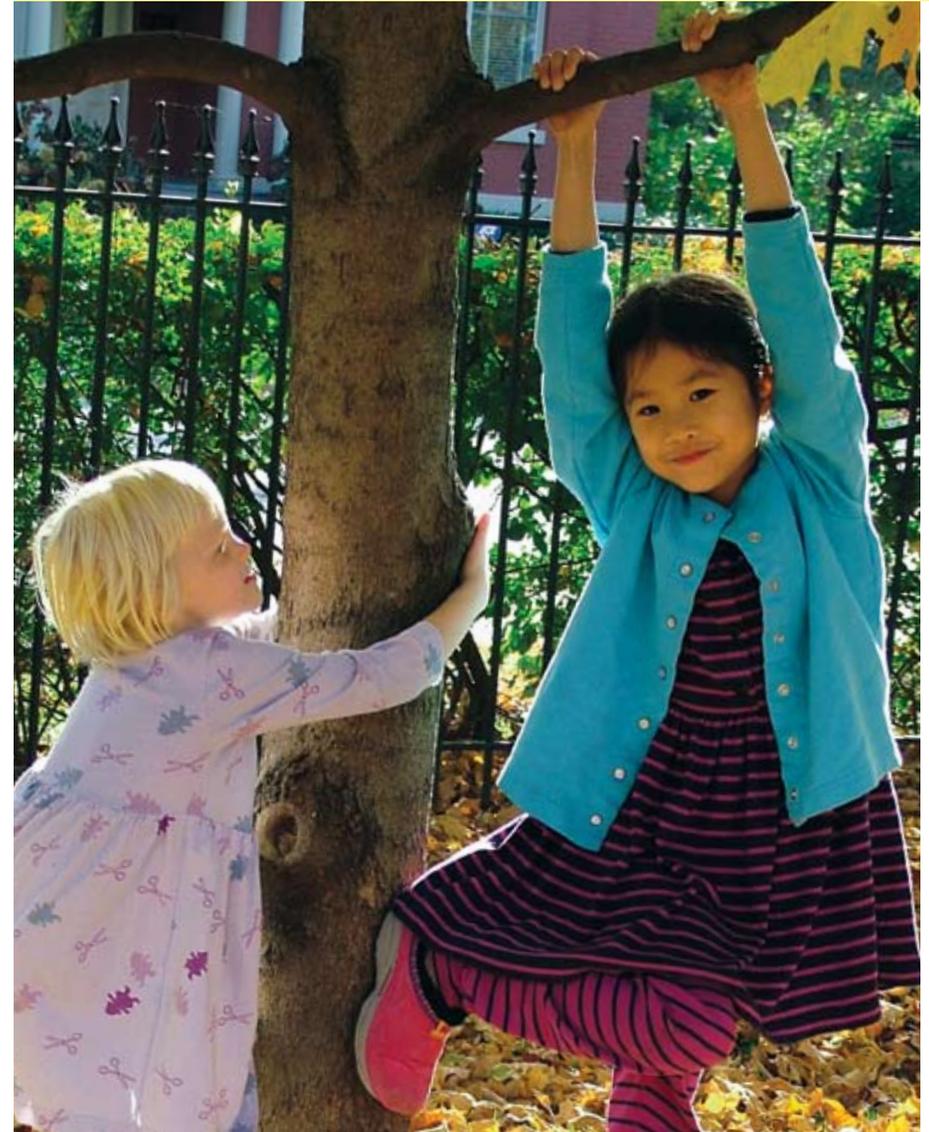
Total Ages 5 – 8



Total Ages 9 – 12

“THE State of the Kid results make me optimistic about the future. The children who responded to the poll seem to have strong ties to family, are serious about their schoolwork, and appear generally happy with their lives.”

~ DR. ISTAR SCHWAGER



Methodology ▶▶

Two methods of data collection were performed. The 10-question survey was bound into subscriber copies of the March issue of *Highlights* magazine. *Highlights* also allowed responses via an online form hosted at the magazine's website for readers, *HighlightsKids.com*.

Those files missing demographic data and/or those that appeared to contain only gibberish responses, as well as any duplicate responses, were excluded. For each of the open-ended questions in the survey, text analysis was completed to categorize the large quantity of verbatim comments.

The final data file for analysis contained 845 responses, and those responses are included in this report. A total of 845 completes gives us an ideal statistical confidence level of 99% +/- 5%. Data was collected during the month of April, 2009.

Thanks! ▶▶

Thanks to the hundreds of kids who sat down to write *Highlights* about their lives.

The State of the Kid would not have been possible without the assistance of:

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