



**Primary School Years 5 & 6
Mental Wellbeing Survey Report
March 2021**

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Key Findings

- A total of 909 students from ten schools completed the survey between October 2019 and March 2020.
- A majority reported feeling either happy or very happy over the previous four weeks. Boys felt slightly happier than girls, and no difference existed between year 5 and year 6 pupils.
- Most commented that friends made them happy (56%), whereas students worried most about school and homework (37%).
- Girls and year 5 students were the least happy about taking school tests.
- Boys were more relaxed than girls about attending secondary school.
- A majority attended at least one club (83%), either in or outside school. Club membership was not associated with a higher mood.
- Boys reported exercising for significantly longer than girls. There was a *very weak* correlation between the amount of daily exercise and mood of the previous four weeks.
- Most pupils had access to an internet-enabled device (96%), and a majority had some form of supervision when online (77%).
- Roughly two-fifths had at least one social media account (78%), and more had been spoken to about online safety (88%). Almost all said they knew how to stay safe online (99%).
- Students said they felt significantly more listened to by adults at home than at school.

Recommendation

The Covid-19 pandemic has immensely affected primary school education. In light of this, it is likely that the mental health of pupils will have been impacted. Key stakeholders feel that while this does reflect on the potential accuracy of the current report findings in the new circumstances, it does provide the opportunity to carry out a pre and post Covid-19 comparison as the existing data creates a strong baseline comparator. As such, our recommendation is:

- To investigate the potential to repeat this survey, possibly with additional questions that reflect the pandemic's impact, in order to publish a comparative report of pupils' mental health prior to and following the Covid-19 pandemic.

Context

National

In 2016, the NHS published the 5 Year Forward View for Mental Health. Subsequently, they published Implementing the 5 Year Forward View for Mental Health. This promised:

By 2020/21, there will be a significant expansion in access to high-quality mental health care for children and young people. At least 70,000 additional children and young people each year will receive evidence-based treatment - representing an increase in access to NHS funded community services to meet the needs of at least 35% of those with diagnosable mental health conditions.

There have also been a number of recent studies looking at the mental health and wellbeing of young people in England.

Regional/local

In November 2017, South West London Health and Care Partnership published its plan called *One Year On*. This document contains commitments to improve mental health services for young people across the six South West London Boroughs.

Sutton, Merton and Wandsworth CCGs were also successful in bidding for £3m additional funding through the NHS 'Trailblazer' initiative to provide more support for young people's emotional wellbeing. This is being achieved with additional qualified mental health staff for schools.

In 2019, Sutton statutory and voluntary/community organisations published the Sutton Health and Care Plan. This committed to the following priorities over the next five years:

- Improve young people's mental health;
- Improve the support provided to parents of children with Special Educational Needs and Disability;
- Develop the universal offer to make sure all children are ready for school regardless of their socioeconomic status.

They agreed to deliver the following initiatives:

- Implement a trailblazer, enhanced mental health support pilot for children and young people in schools;
- Continue the perinatal and infant mental health network with new projects on infant mental health, patient and public engagement, and fathers and partners;
- Undertake a joint health and local authority review of our children's services by focusing on three key areas:
 1. School readiness
 2. Emotional wellbeing
 3. Early intervention for children with Special Educational Needs and Disability.
- Review and redesign the information and support offer for parents of children with Special Educational Needs and Disability.

About Healthwatch Sutton

Healthwatch Sutton is the people's champion for health and social care in the London Borough of Sutton.

We are one of a network of local Healthwatch organisations that cover England. There is a local Healthwatch for each local authority area. We were set up by the government to ensure that the voice of local people is heard in decisions that relate to health and social care. We have powers laid down in law to:

- 'Enter and View' health and social care services/premises;
- Sit on the local authority's Health and Wellbeing Board;
- Receive a response to our report from statutory organisations within 20 days of receipt.

In Sutton, we carry out projects that collect the views of local people about any subject relating to health and social care. For most projects we produce a report and formally submit this to providers or commissioners (or other relevant organisations) in order to produce actions that can improve the health and wellbeing of people who live in the London Borough of Sutton. This report is part of this work.

Rationale

Healthwatch Sutton uses a simple survey called '*What matters to you?*' to find out local people's priorities. The responses collected are used to establish the key areas of concern for local people. This data was taken to the Healthwatch Sutton Board in the form of a 'Priorities' paper so that future project themes can be agreed.

Mental Health was chosen as the fourth highest priority by local people. All the higher priority areas have not been covered by specific Healthwatch projects.

It was hard to narrow down a specific area of mental health to be investigated. We organised an event that was attended by over 50 people, however, no specific priority areas emerged. Further discussion with service commissioners and providers, and voluntary sector organisations did highlight young people as a priority area.

In addition, the Board have made a commitment, as part of the prioritisation exercise, to engage with groups that are less likely to engage with Healthwatch Sutton. Children and young people are one of these groups.

Project Delivery

Healthwatch Sutton made a commitment to carry out research into the emotional wellbeing of three groups of young people:

- Phase 1: Secondary school students
- Phase 2: Primary school students
- Phase 3: Young people with a learning disability

The secondary school is now completed. The survey was completed by over 5000 students. A report was published in 2019 and the findings have been used by commissioners, providers and other organisations to form the evidence base for planning improvements to support for young people's emotional wellbeing in the Borough.

This project is Phase 2 as outlined above.

Methodology

Healthwatch Sutton set up a Project Steering Group to develop a Primary School project. Membership included head teachers, SENCO leads, local authority commissioners and representatives of voluntary/community sector organisations that have an interest in this area.

A survey was developed for students in years 5 and 6. It was agreed that schools could complete the survey using tablet computers. To incentivise participation, schools were offered a report analysing the data for their school. Healthwatch Sutton also offered to provide cards with local support details and Childline's contact number if the school wished to give these to all participating students.

It was originally envisaged that a final report would be published in the Spring of 2021 however the Covid-19 pandemic disrupted the project's delivery plan.

Impact of Covid-19 Pandemic

Ten schools had completed collecting responses from students or were in the process of collecting responses at the time of the first lockdown in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Schools closed on 24 March 2020 to all students with the exception of children of key workers. At this point, survey response collection ceased.

Over the following months, Healthwatch Sutton monitored the easing of lockdowns and the reinstatement of restrictions in order to determine if the project could continue. A plan was put in place to relaunch in September 2020 when children returned to school, however it became apparent that the schools were under considerable strain due to the pandemic and the decision was made to stop collection at this point.

In order to develop recommendations, school staff (including head teachers), voluntary and community sector organisations, NHS and local authority stakeholders were invited to attend two workshops in December 2020. All participants were given a copy of the draft report in advance. These are some their reflections:

- There was an overall sense that the world has changed so it would be interesting to redo both the primary and secondary schools survey and compare
- Going to secondary school is a big deal and this is not necessarily reflected in the findings
- Struck by this being more positive than the secondary school survey
- Early work in the primary schools is important to give the foundations
- See a lot of families at year 5 (children with disabilities) panicking around transition from primary to secondary - just a bit extra to get through the first couple of terms would really make a big difference
- Year 4 & 5 & 6 with eating disorders & with undiagnosed autism and getting support for these families is really difficult and exacerbated by Covid-19
- Undiagnosed ASD with self-harming levels of mental distress for children confusion and not knowing what is next
- Children are scared about being at home again
- Schools currently can't see parents due to Covid-19 & this is impacting on parental Mental Health
- Parenting support during Covid-19 is not there
- Parental anxiety and the impact of this on children and young people
- Teacher burn out - academic and pastoral and managing children's anxieties in the current climate

These reflections show the immense impact that the pandemic has had on primary school education and the need for most children to be educated at home for long periods. This is term is very likely to have impacted on the mental health of the pupils in years 5 and 6.

As such, only one recommendation has been developed to reflect the current circumstances

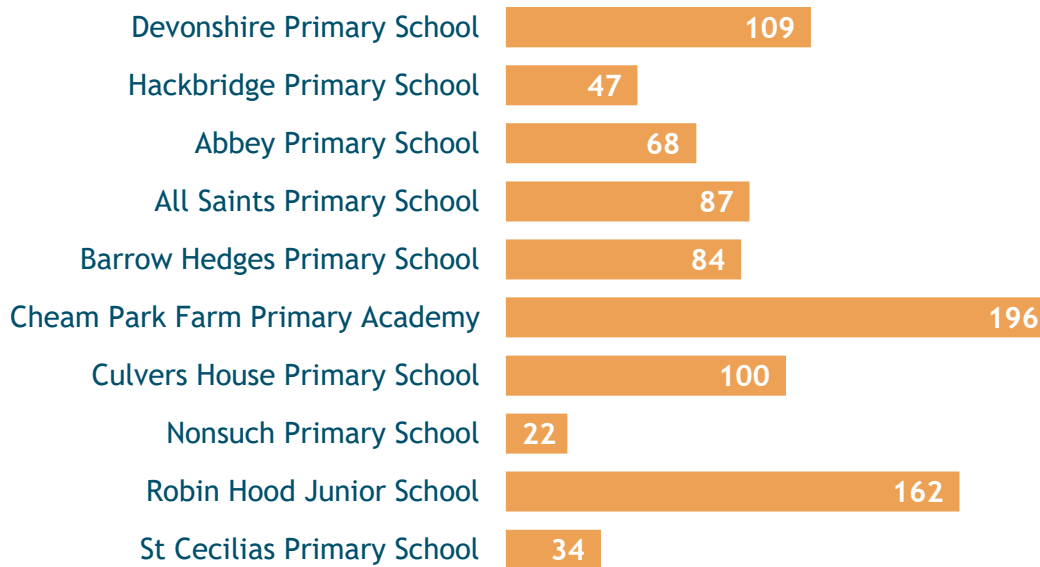
Results

A total of 909 responses were collected from the schools displayed below between 28/10/19 and 29/03/20. Percentages displayed exclude blank responses.

Question 1

Ten schools took part

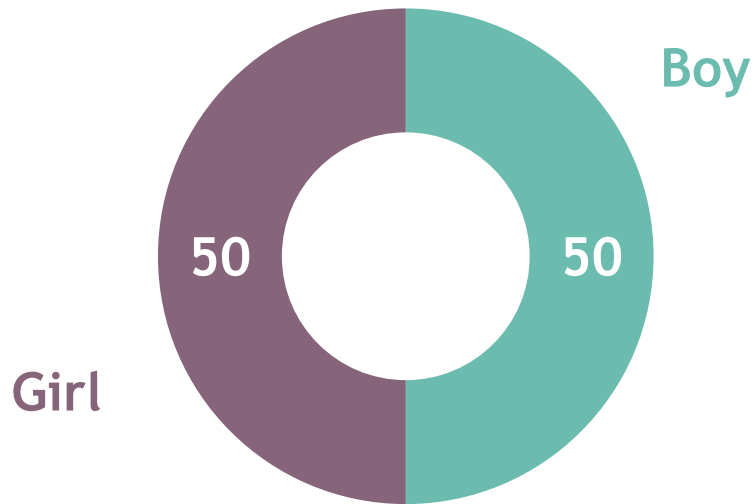
Responses per school



Question 2

The sample split evenly by gender

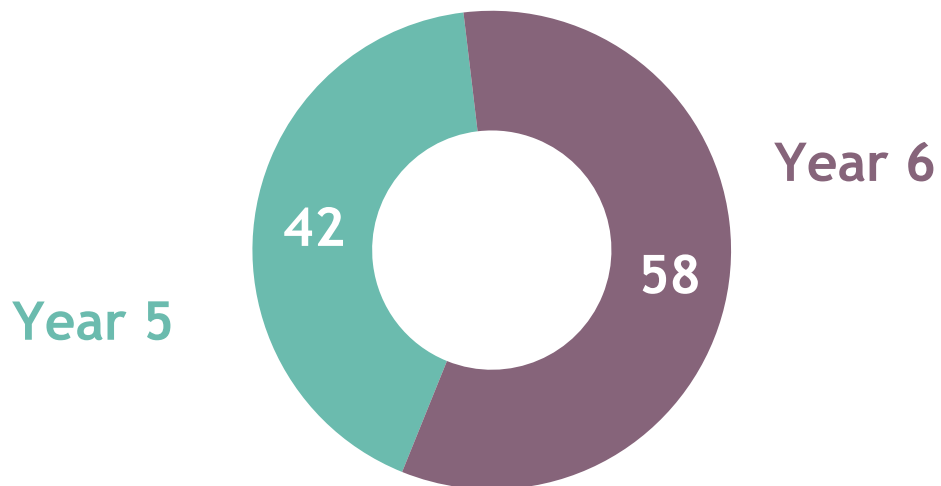
I am a... %



Question 3

The sample skewed slightly toward year 6

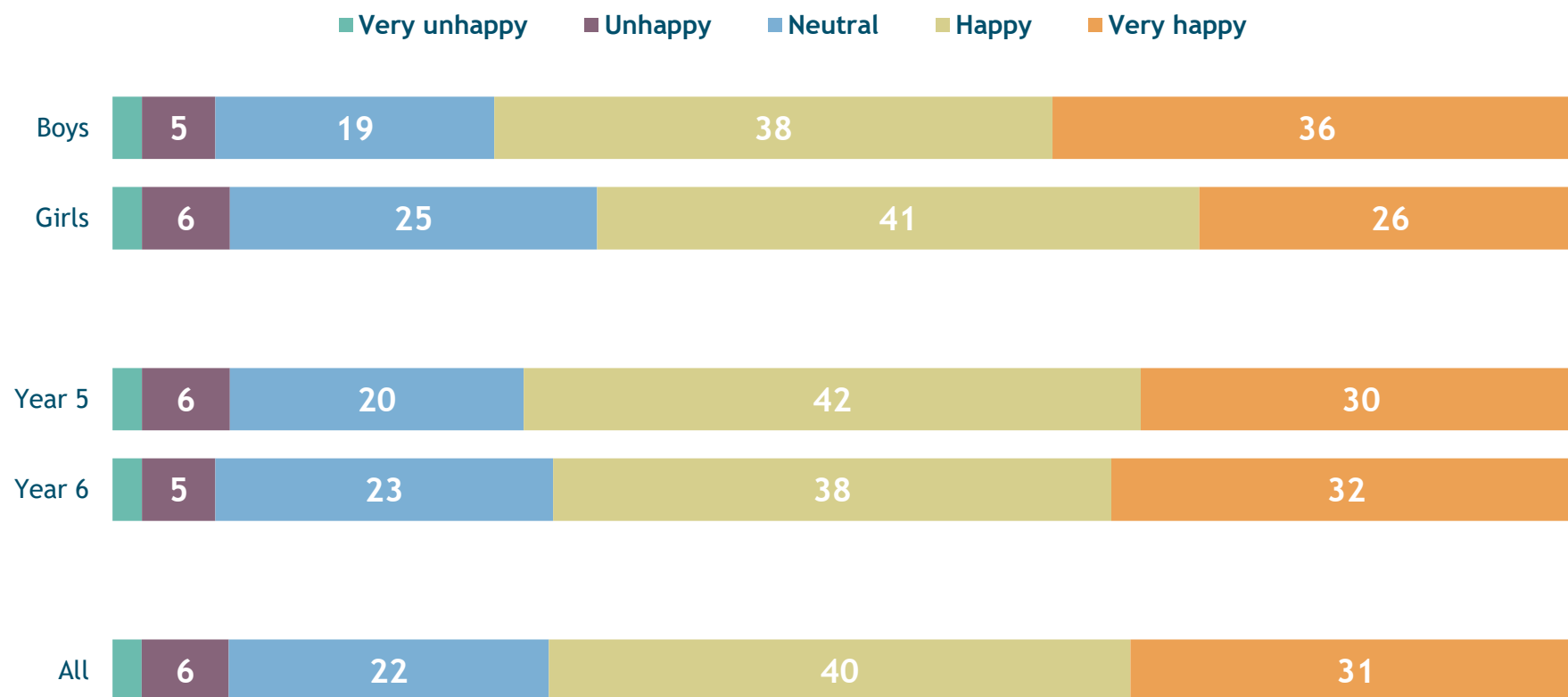
What year are you in? %



Question 4

A majority reported feeling happy

How have you felt in the last four weeks? %



Students' answers were analysed to determine if there was a difference between genders and year groups. There was a significant difference in the mood of the last four weeks between boys (Median = Happy) and girls (Mdn = Happy), $U = 115340.0$, $p = .001$. On the other hand, no significant difference existed between year 5 (Mdn = Happy) and year 6 students (Mdn = Happy), $U = 100862.0$, $p = .940$. Answers to question four were also weighted accordingly: 'Very unhappy' = 1; 'Unhappy' = 2; 'Neutral' = 3; 'Happy' = 4; 'Very happy' = 5. These were then used to produce a mean score, shown below by gender and year group. A score of 1 implies all are very unhappy, whereas a score of 5 implies the opposite. A score of 3 suggests neutrality or equally polarised responses. These scores are a fairly crude measure, and have been produced solely for the purposes of comparison.

Boys were slightly happier than girls

How have you felt in the last four weeks?

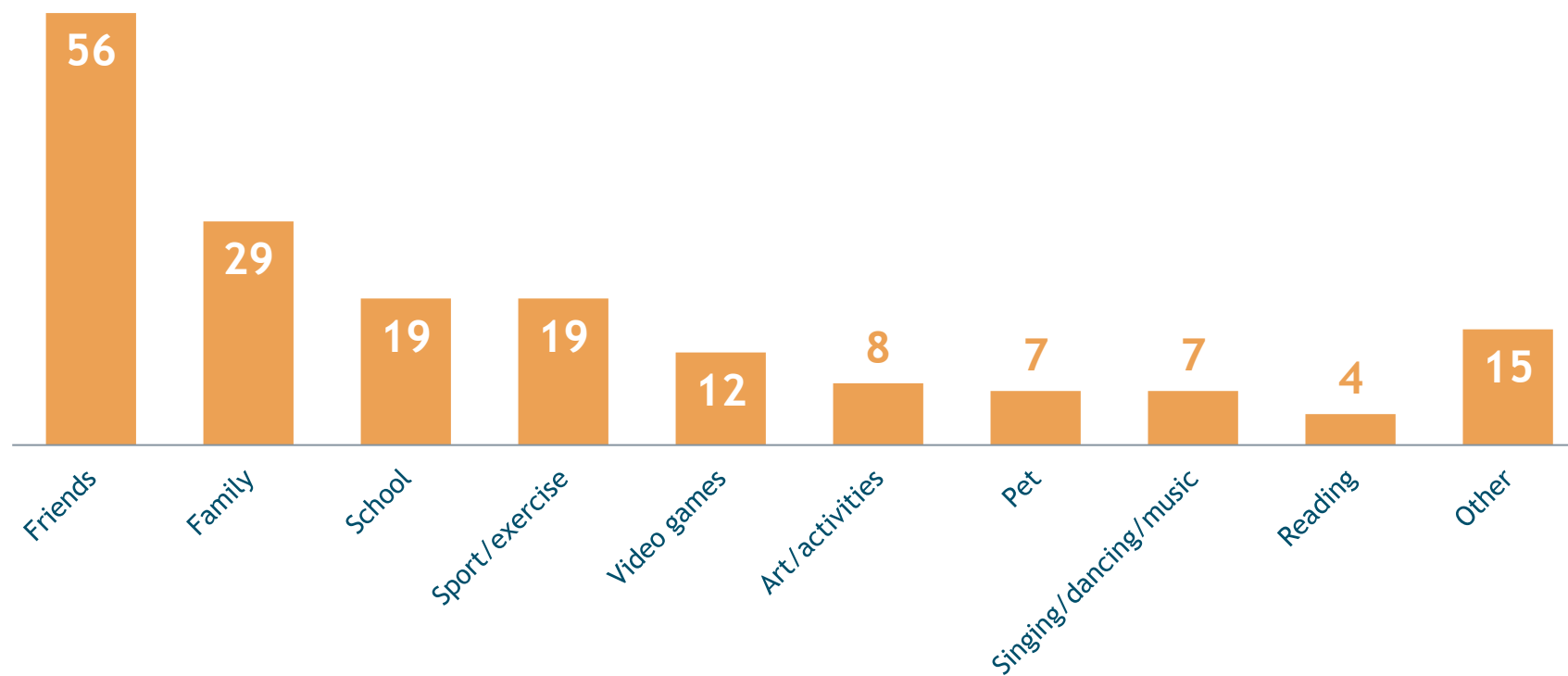


Question 5

Questions five and six were open-response questions. Students' comments were categorised into themes, displayed below. A small selection of comments is also shown.

Friends was the most widely cited

What makes you happy? %

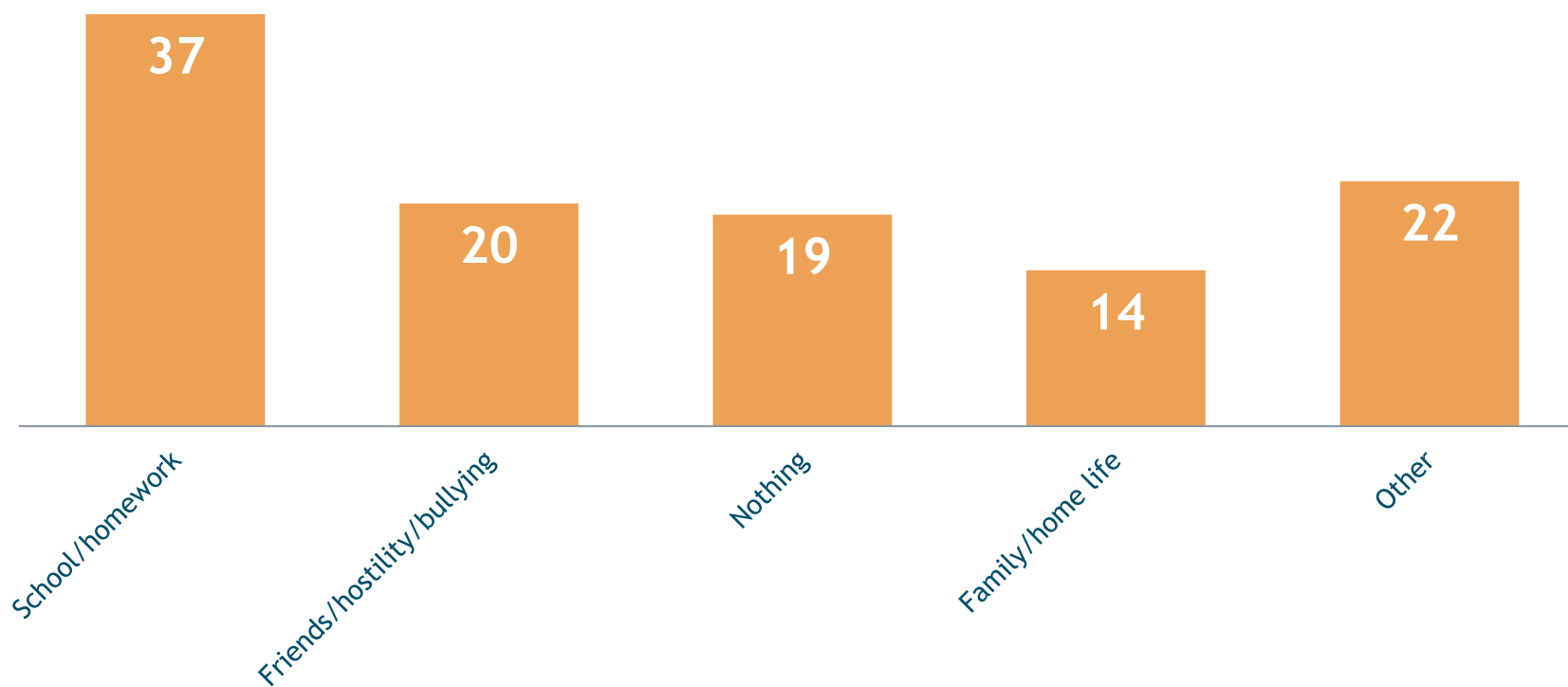




Question 6

School pressure was the predominant worry

What do you worry about? %

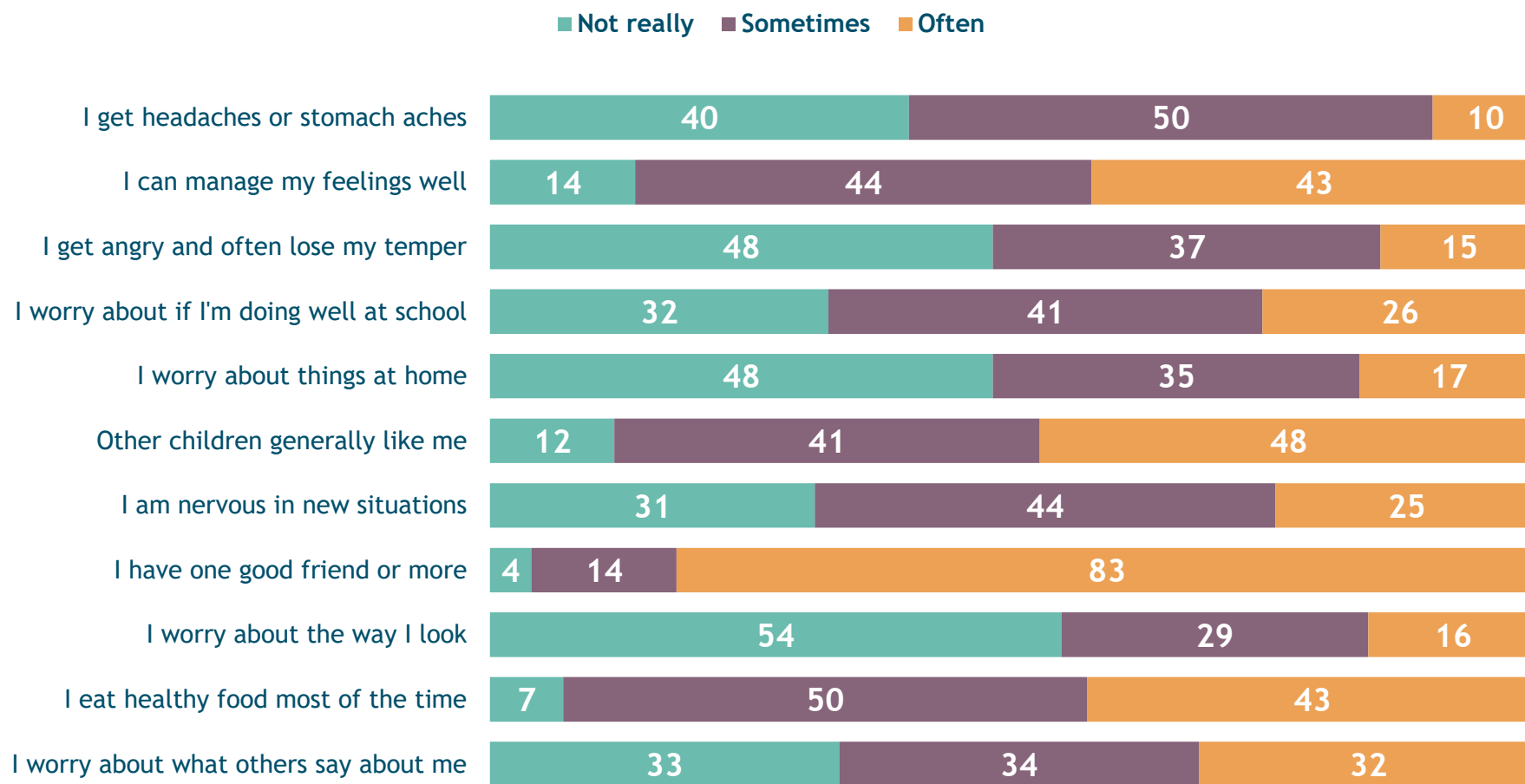




Question 7

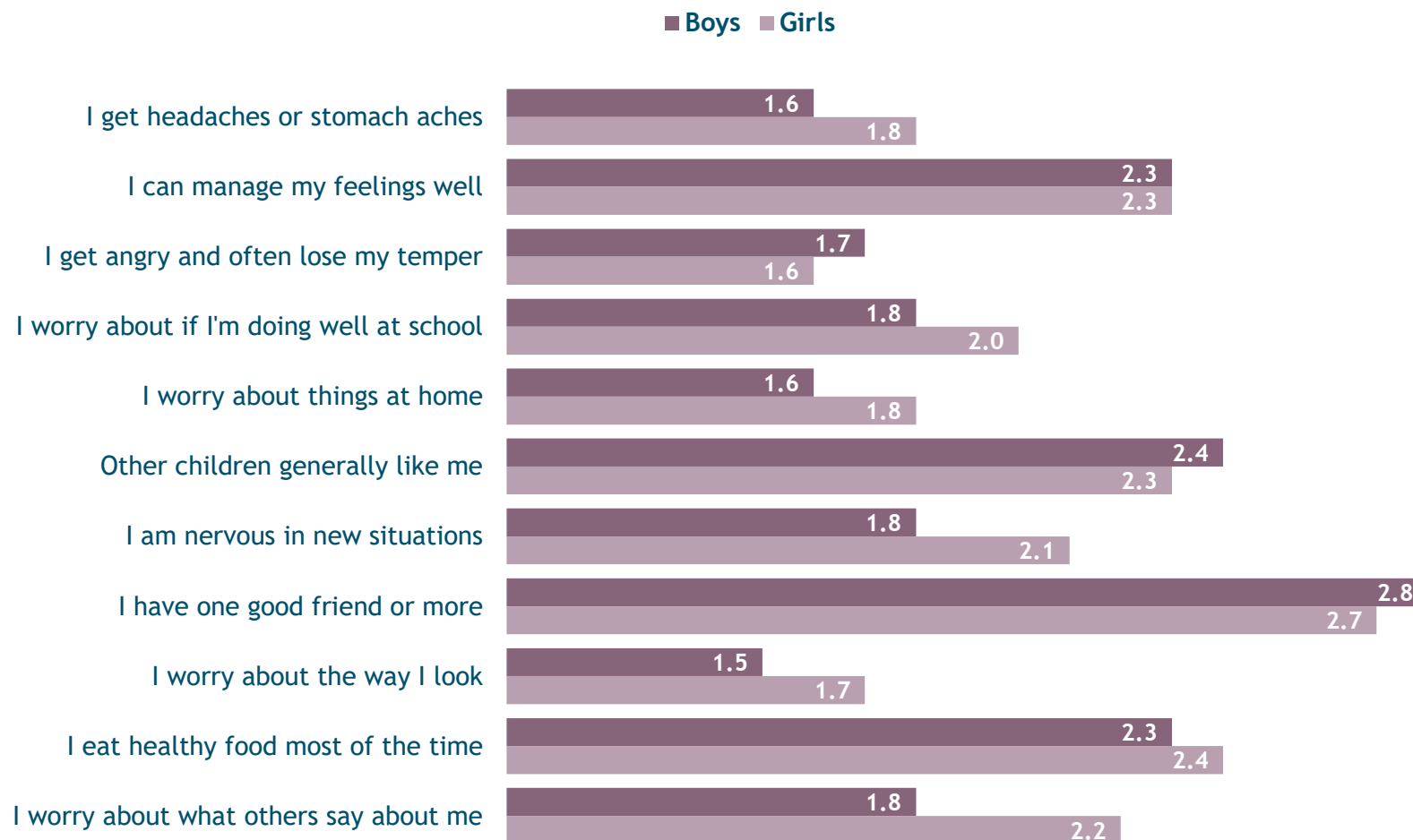
Responses to the statements were mixed

How often do you experience the following? %



Respondents' answers to the statements were weighted: 'Not really' = 1; 'Sometimes' = 2; 'Often' = 3. These were then used to produce an average score for boys and girls for each of the statements, shown below.

There were some small differences between genders

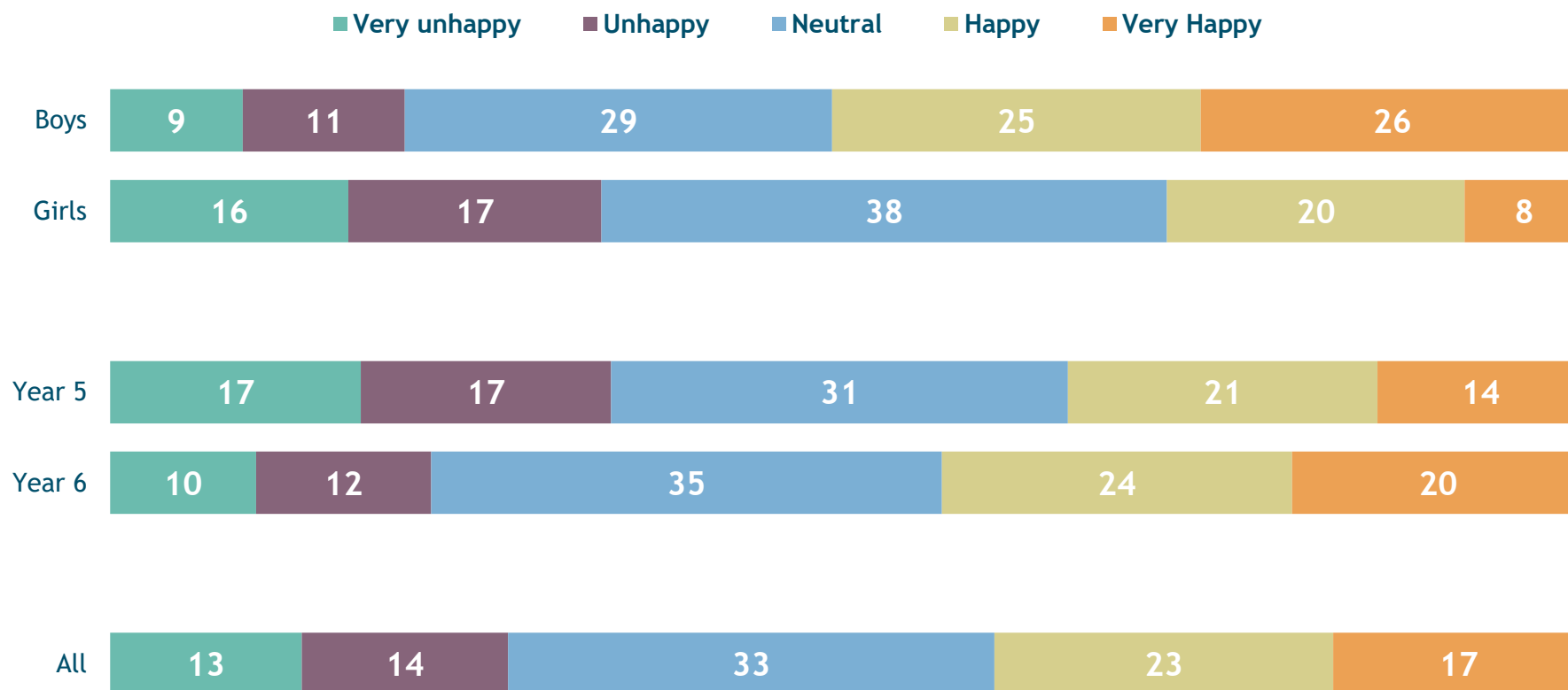


Question 8

Boys felt significantly happier (Mdn = Happy) than girls (Mdn = Neutral) about school tests, $U = 132012.5$, $p < 0.05$. Year 5 felt slightly less happy (Mdn = Neutral) than year 6 students (Mdn = Neutral) about school tests, $U = 86556.0$, $p < 0.05$.

Girls and year 5 pupils were the least happy about school tests

How do you feel about school tests like SATs and admission tests? %

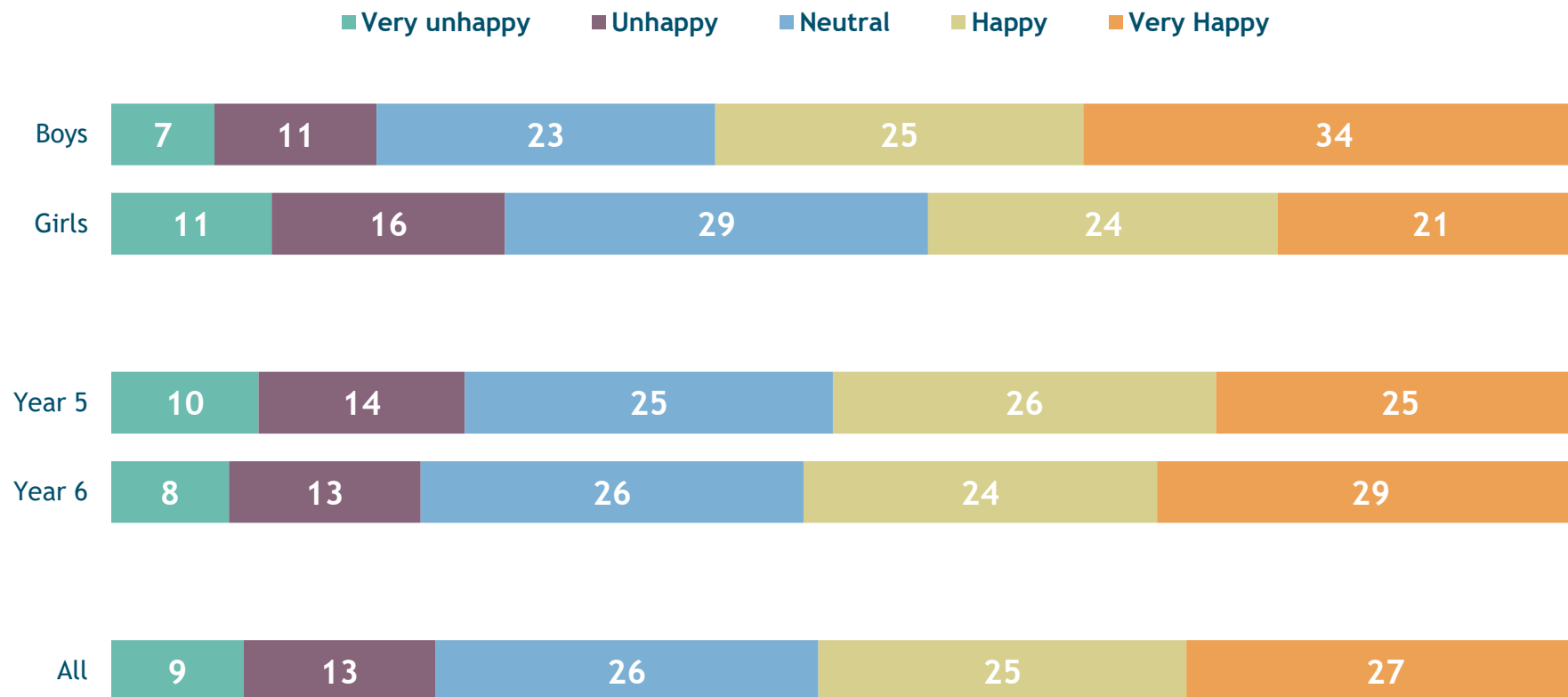


Question 9

Boys felt more relaxed (Mdn = Happy) than girls (Mdn = Neutral) about going to secondary school, $U = 122788.5$, $p < 0.05$. However, there was no significant difference between how year 5 (Mdn = Happy) and year 6 students (Mdn = Happy) felt, $U = 95729.5$, $p = .201$.

Boys were happier than girls about attending high school

How do you feel about going to secondary school? %

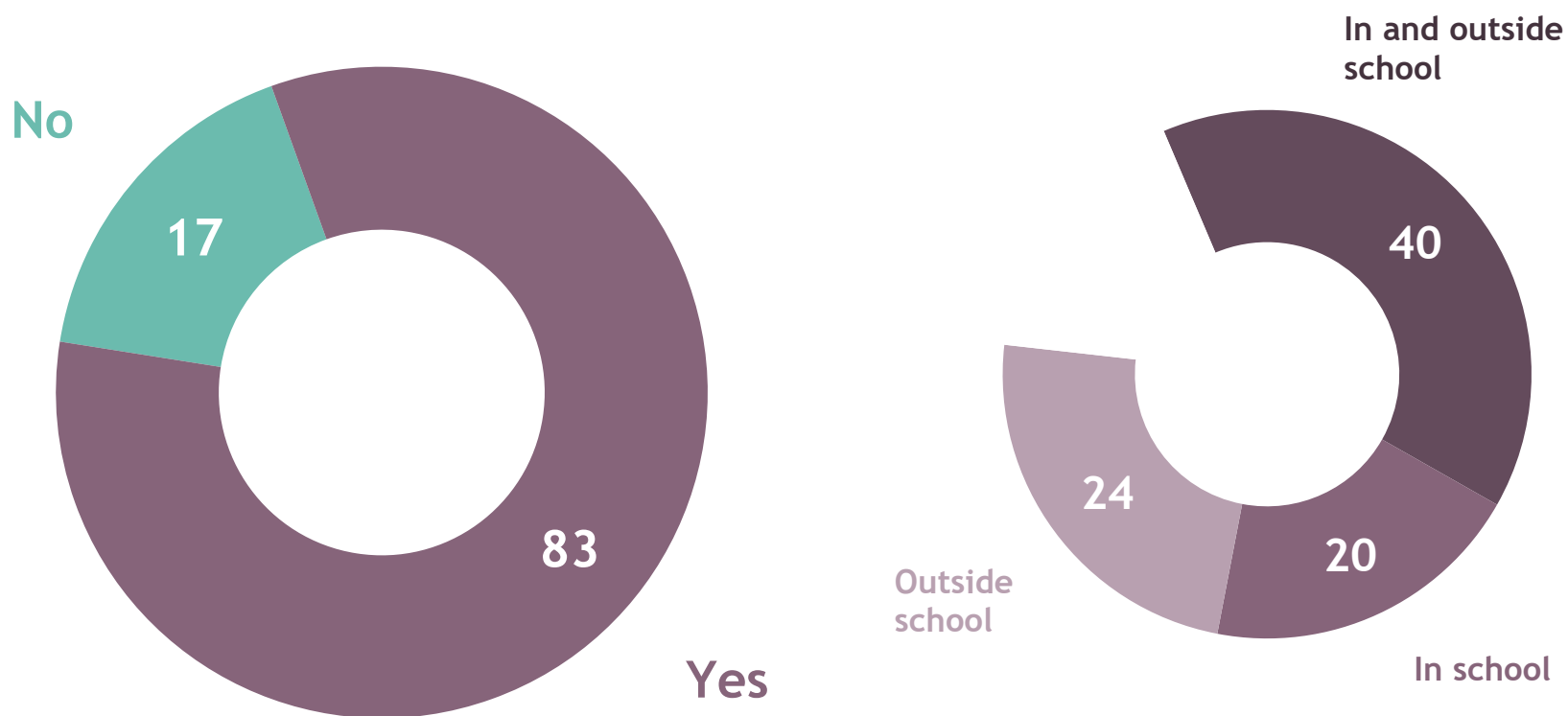


Question 10

There was no difference in mood of the last four weeks between those that were a member of at least one club (Mdn = Happy) and those that were not (Mdn = Happy), $U = 61293.5$, $p = .116$.

Club membership was not associated with better mood

Do you take part in any sports or clubs? %

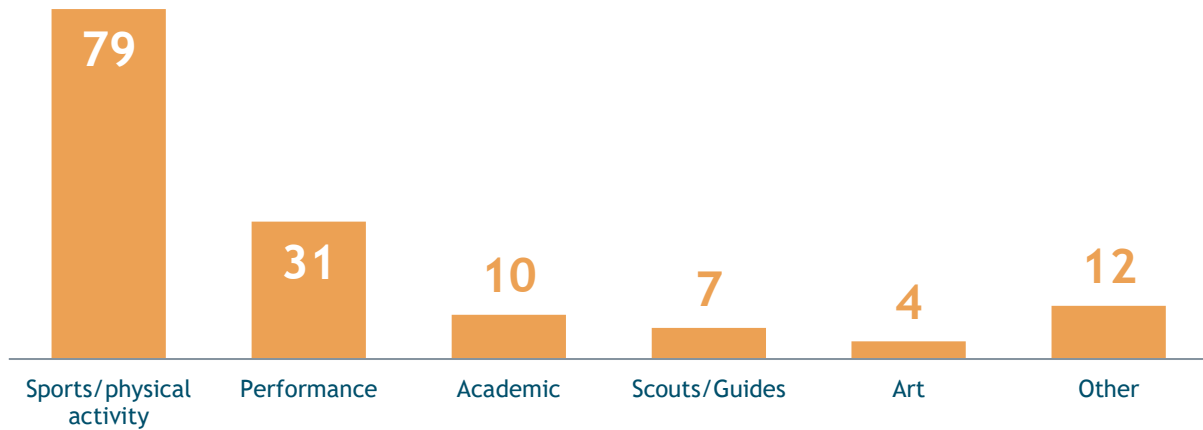


Question 11

Clubs attended by students were categorised into broad groups, displayed below. Percentages are of those who attend at least one club.

Sports clubs were the most widely attended

Which clubs do you go to? %

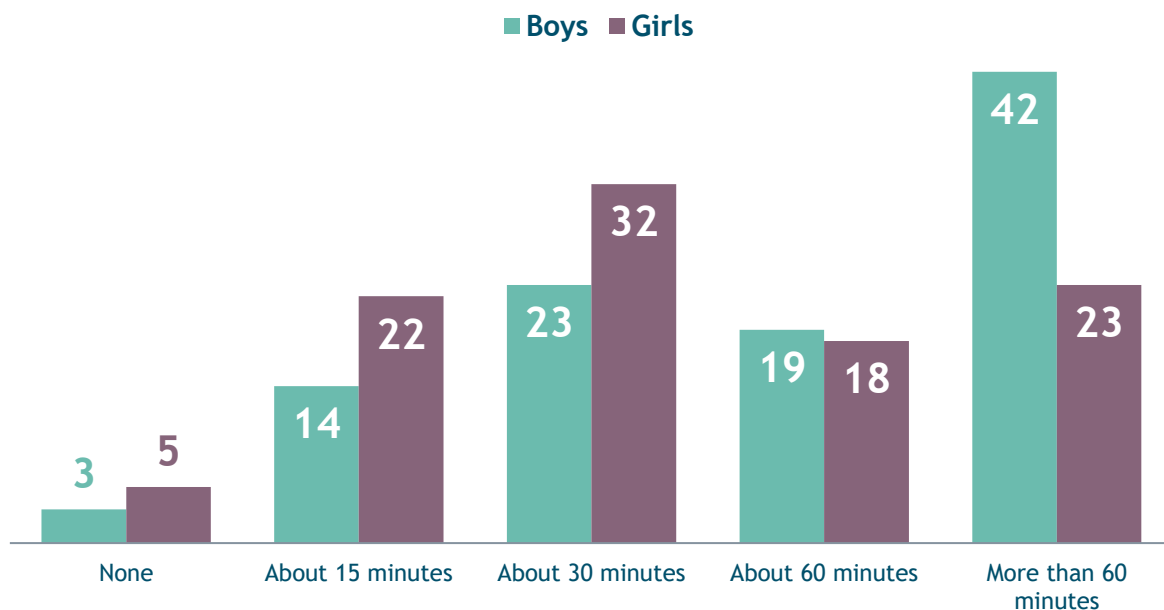


Question 12

The amount of exercise that boys (Mdn = About 60 minutes) and girls (Mdn = About 30 minutes) did every day differed significantly, $U = 126314.0$, $p < 0.05$. A *very weak* correlation existed between the amount of daily exercise and mood of the last four weeks, $r_s = .083$, $p = .013$.

Boys exercised for longer than girls

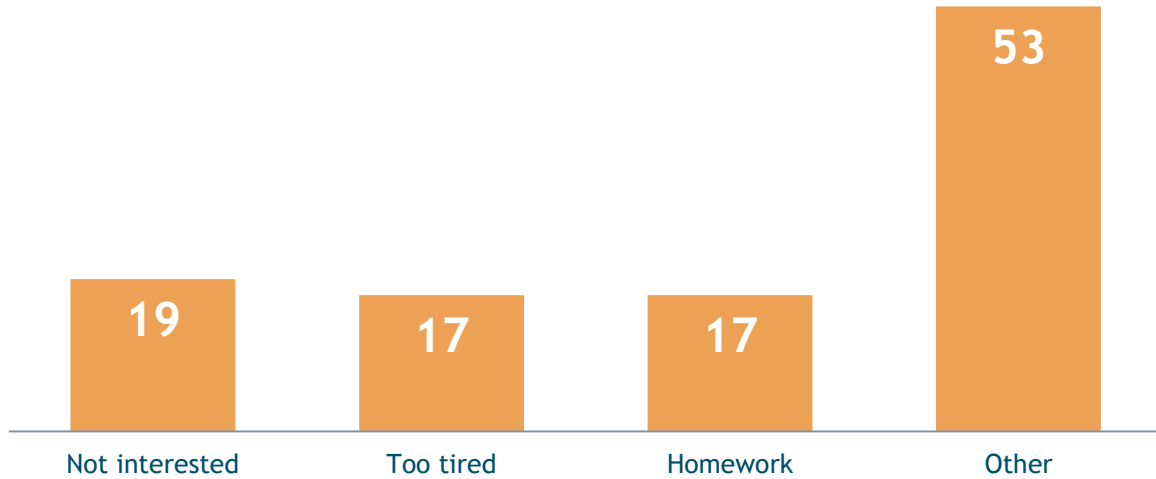
On average, how much exercise do you do everyday? %



Question 13

There was a variety of reasons for not exercising

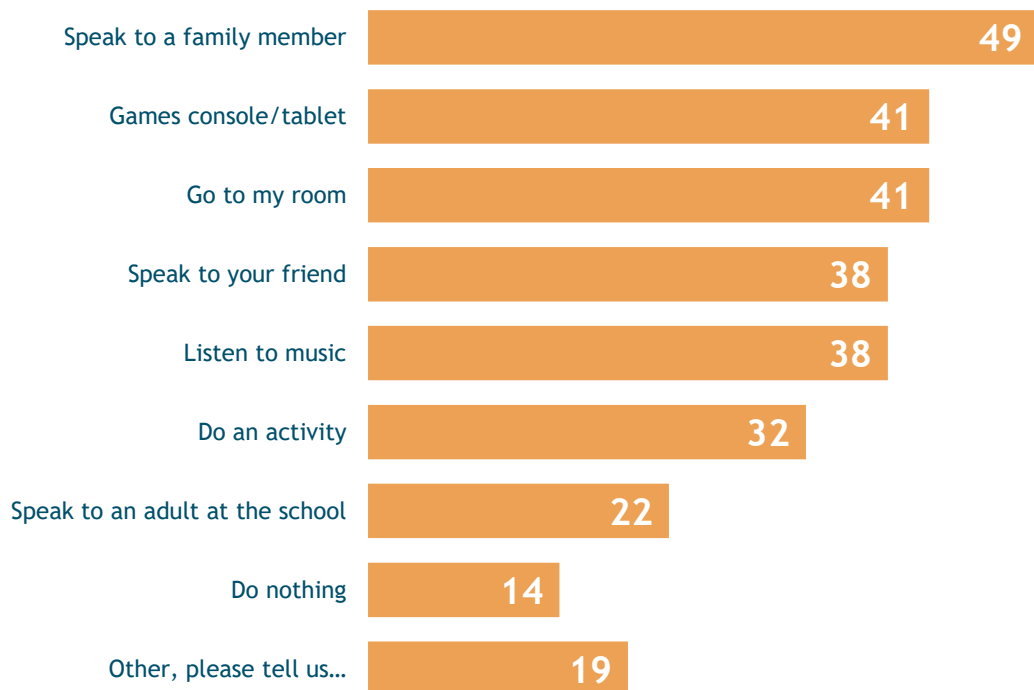
What stops you from doing exercise? %



Question 14

Most would speak to a relative if worried

What do you do if you feel worried, sad or unhappy? (tick all that apply) %



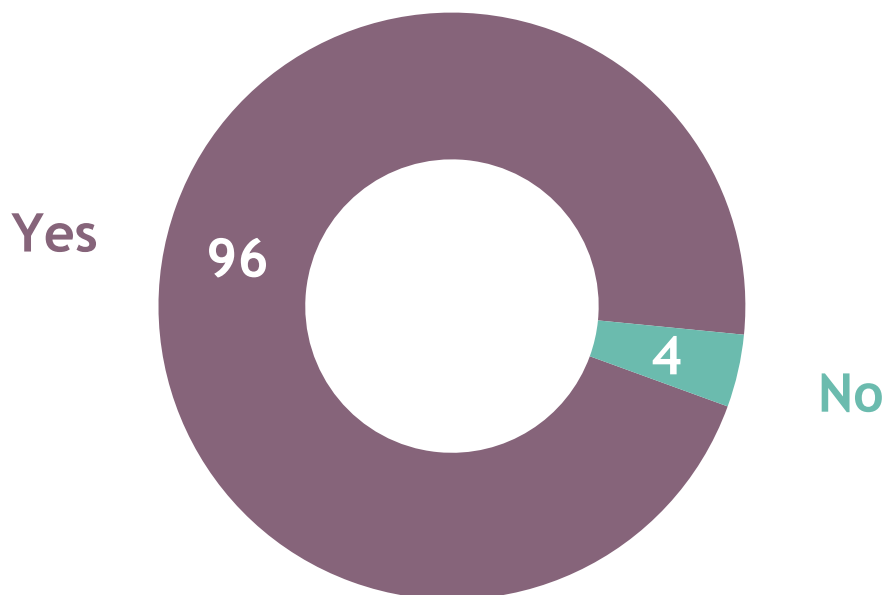
Below is a selection of comments from those who answered 'Other, please tell us...'



Question 15

Almost all said they had access to the internet

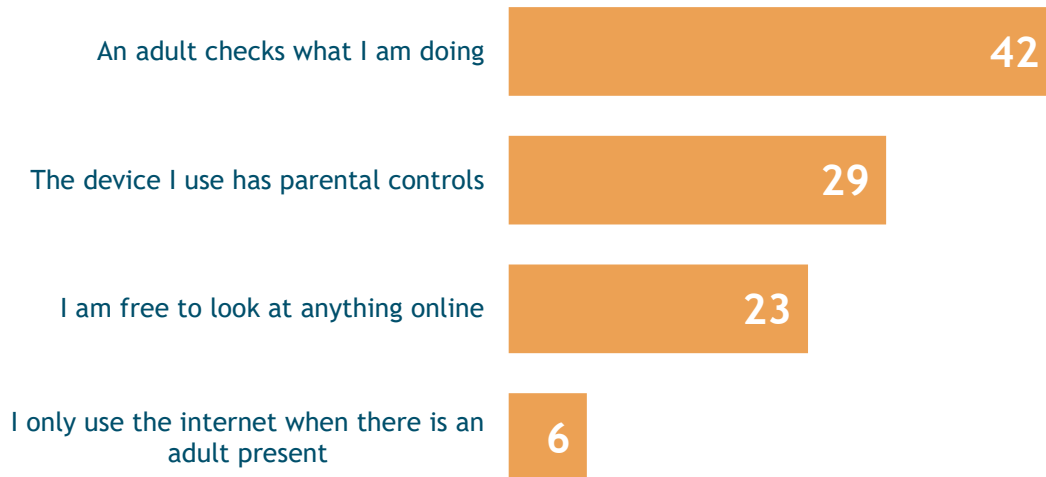
Do you use a device (phone, tablet, computer etc.) with internet access? %



Question 16

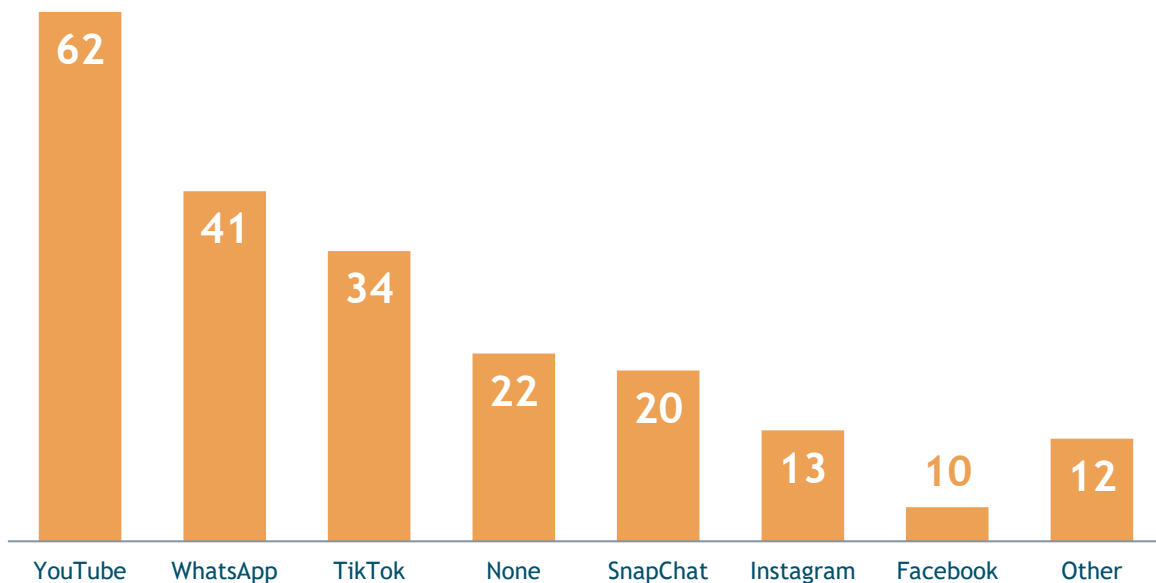
Most had some form of supervision online

When I am online... %



About two-fifths had at least one social media account

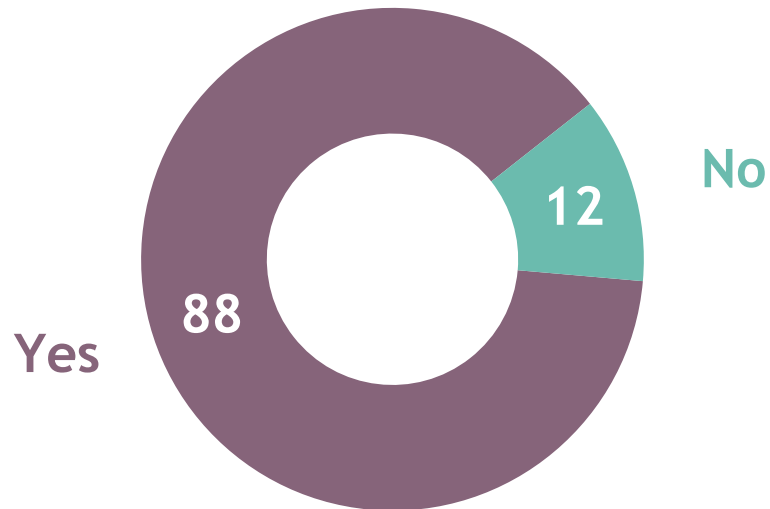
Do you have any social media accounts? Please tick all the ones you use. %



Question 18

Most had been spoken to about online safety

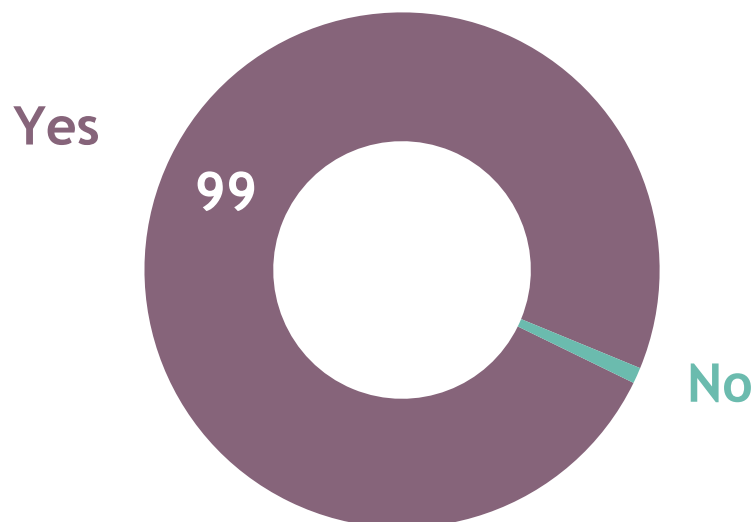
Have your parents or another adult outside school talked to you about online safety? %



Question 19

Almost all said they knew how to stay safe online

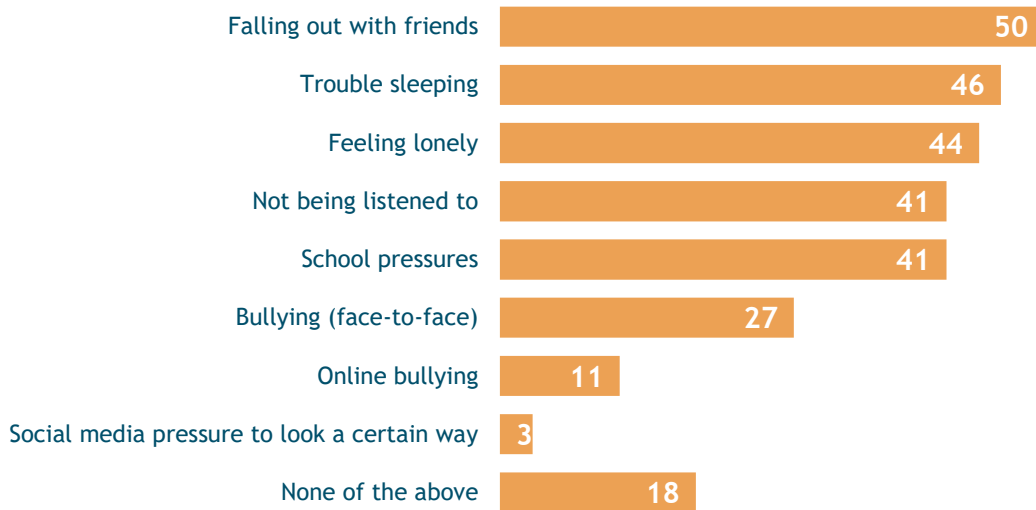
Do you know how to keep yourself safe online? %



Question 20

Falling out with friends was the most widely cited

Have you experienced any of the following? %

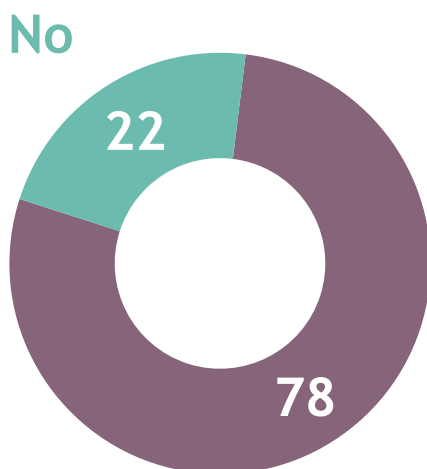


Questions 21 & 22

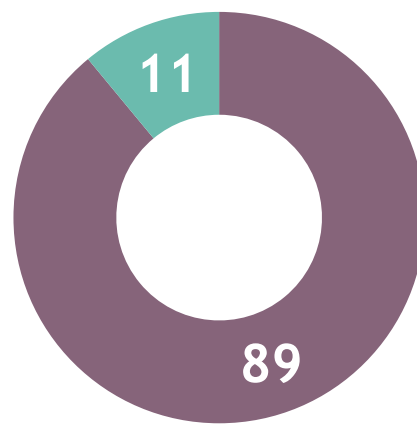
A Fisher's exact test showed no significant association between gender and the likelihood of talking to someone about a problem, $p = .283$.

Most found it helpful to talk about their experiences

Did you talk to anyone about it? %



Was it helpful? %

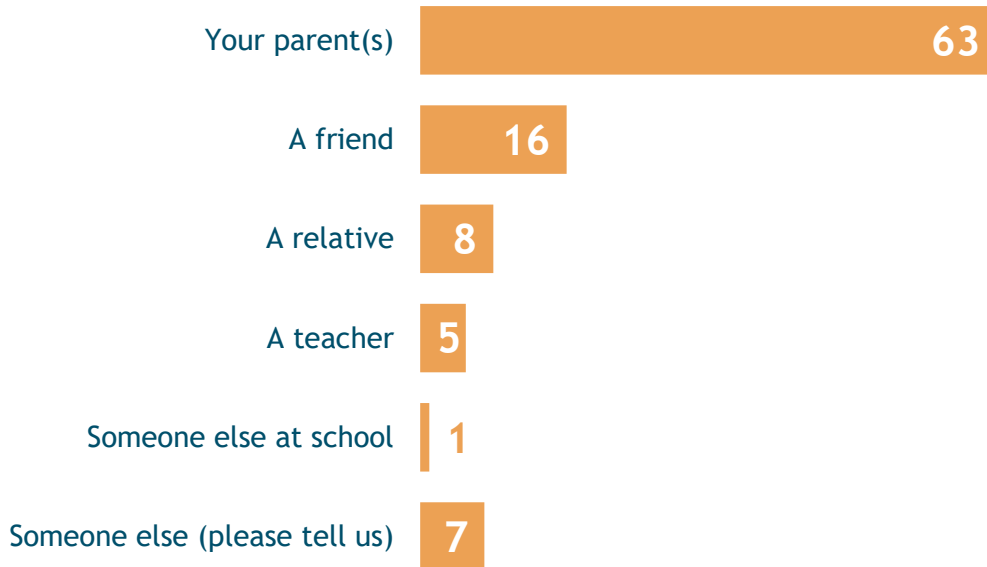


Yes

Question 23

Most preferred to talk to their parents about problems

If you had a problem, who would you go to for help? %



Questions 24 & 25

Students felt significantly more listened to when talking to adults at home (Mdn = Very happy) compared with school (Mdn = Happy), $U = 299517.5$, $p < 0.05$.

Students felt more listened to at home than at school

When you talk to adults at school and home do you feel listened to?

