

Children's social care questionnaires 2017

What children told us about their experiences of living in children's homes or living with foster carers



Background

We use online questionnaires to gather views about children's homes, secure children's homes, adoption services, fostering services and residential family centres, boarding schools, residential special schools and further education colleges.¹

The questionnaires are for children, learners, parents, staff, social workers and other professionals, such as independent reviewing officers.^{2,3}

These questionnaires ran from 19 June to 13 August 2017, and 31 August to 12 October. We received responses from 37,086 individuals in total.⁴

We use the responses, along with other information we have, such as previous inspection findings or any concerns, to decide when to inspect and what to focus on when we do.

Who are the children we are talking about?



over 11.5 million
children aged
0–17 years in
England



72,670
are children
looked after



74% of children
looked after live
with foster carers
(53,420)



9% of children
looked after
are in children's
homes (6,240)⁵



3,157
...children placed by 150 local
authorities told us about their
children's home or foster carers in
our 2017 questionnaires⁶

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You can view the accompanying data here:

www.gov.uk/government/publications/social-care-questionnaires-2017-what-children-and-young-people-told-ofsted

What we found in 2017

We wanted to find out if there had been many changes to what children told us in 2016.

When we compared responses, we focused on the questions that reflected these important messages from children:⁷

- Children need to understand why they came into care
- Children can find moving into a new home a difficult experience
- Children need to be able to build relationships with adults they can trust
- Children rely on the adults caring for them to help keep them safe

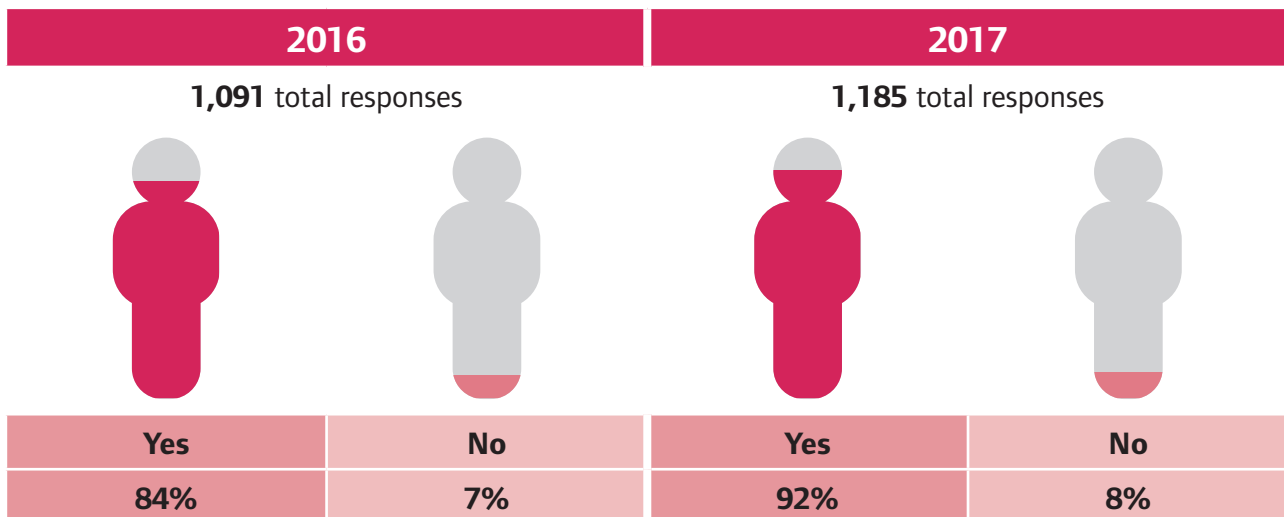
Children told us there had been some small changes since 2016.

Children need to understand why they came into care

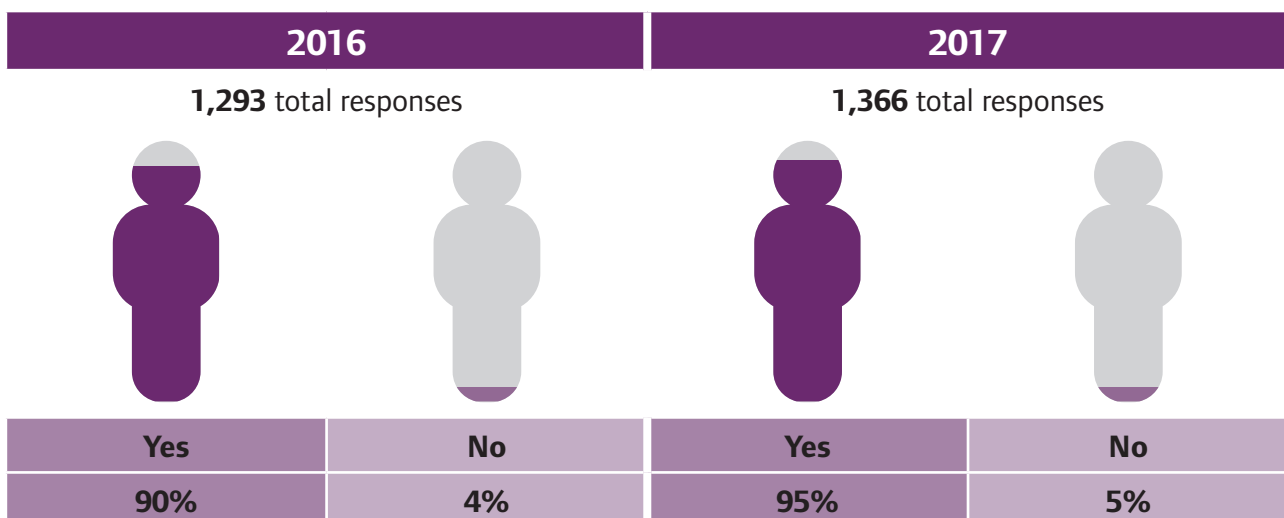
In 2017, there was an increase in the number of children telling us they had been helped to understand why they came into care. This was greater for those living in children's homes.

I have been helped to understand why I am looked after

Children's homes



Fostering



Children told us how understanding why they are looked after helps them and why this is important

“I have been helped by my placement because I had access to therapy sessions which allowed me to sort out the issues that first brought me to be in care. this has allowed me to have a opportunity at an positive future”

(aged 18, children’s home)

“staff have sat and explained reasons why I am in care and have helped me use strategies to stay calm with the topic”

(aged 16, children’s home)

“My therapist has written a mini life story book to explain what has happened. She and my foster mummy help me sort my worries. I get muddled”

(aged 5, fostering)

“My carer helped me understand my life story book because my memories were there but they were muddled. When I got brave enough my carer encouraged me to come to my CIC reviews so that I could find out more about what was happening and why I was in care and what decisions I could make”

(aged 15, fostering)

Children told us how it feels when they don’t understand

“I find it very confusing”

(aged 14, fostering)

“I still don’t feel like I belong here and I still don’t really understand why I’m here”

(aged 10, children’s home)

“I am not completely sure why I am in foster care, I have kind of been told why but its a bit confusing. I have started life story work to help me understand better”

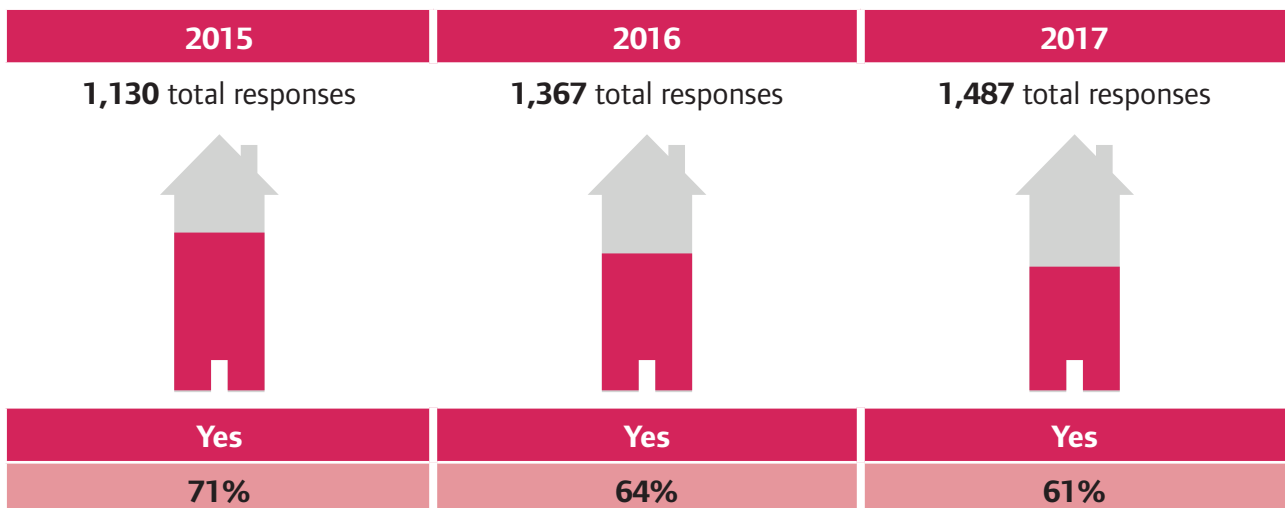
(aged 15, fostering)

Children can find moving into a new home a difficult experience

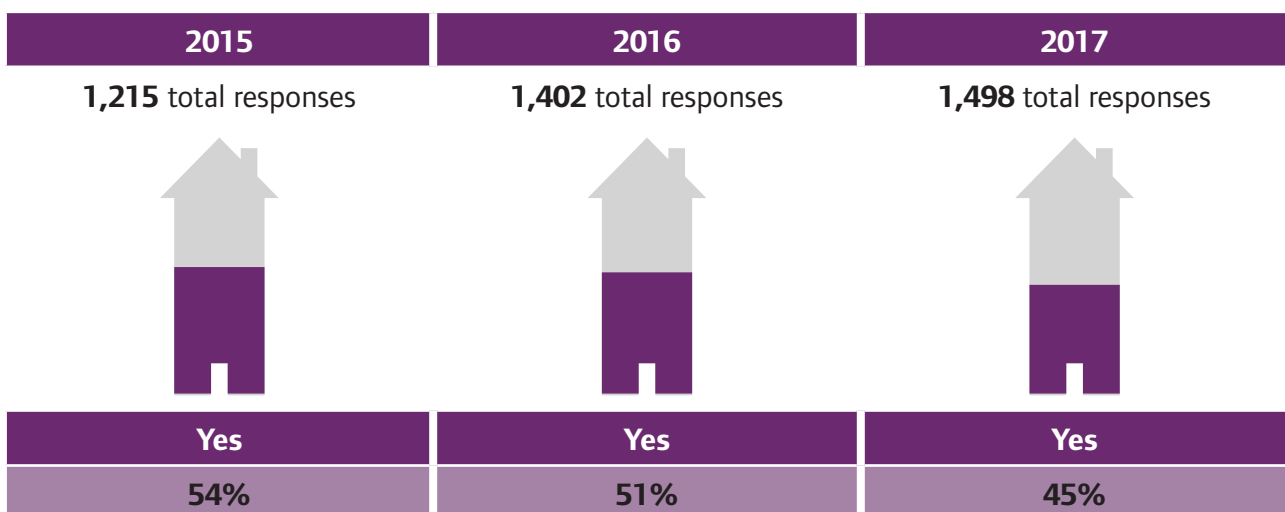
Fewer children told us they found out useful things about their children's home or foster family before moving there.

I was able to find out useful things about the children's home/foster family before I moved in or had a short break there⁹

Children's homes



Fostering



Children told us what difference it made when they had found out useful things before moving in

"I was able to meet the people beforehand and then had sleepover and given a welcome box. I was welcomed by all and had my social worker phone number which was on all weekend if I felt upset but [the home] made sure I was ok"

(aged 16, children's home)

"I visited a week before moving into [the home] and all information was provided to me which reassured me and made me feel more comfortable about my move. I also met ALL the young people who were living here at the time, which was also reassuring"

(aged 17, children's home)

"Before I moved they had created a booklet, each person had their own page with a picture of them, their name/nicknames, their age, who they were to my foster parents (sibling, nephew etc) what side of the family they were on and a few things about them and what they liked to do. Knowing a little about each family member/their close friends and what they looked like made introductions less awkward"

(aged 16, fostering)

"I was able to meet the family, and look round the home about a week prior to moving in. This helped me feel more settled on my moving day"

(aged 17, fostering)

Children told us how it felt to move to a place they didn't know very much about or to live with people they didn't know

"I would have liked to have seen the home more times before I moved in as it would of made me feel more comfortable"

(aged 10, children's home)

"We didn't get to know anything about my foster family before we moved in so it was a bit stressful meeting them"

(aged 17, fostering)

"When I first came to live where I am now, I did not get told anything about the new foster carers.....would of been nice to be told a bit more about them before I moved in with them because to me they were strangers back then"

(aged 17, fostering)

"I found out that I was moving in with [foster carer] 5 hours before I moved in. No other information was provided leaving me feeling extremely scared and confused"

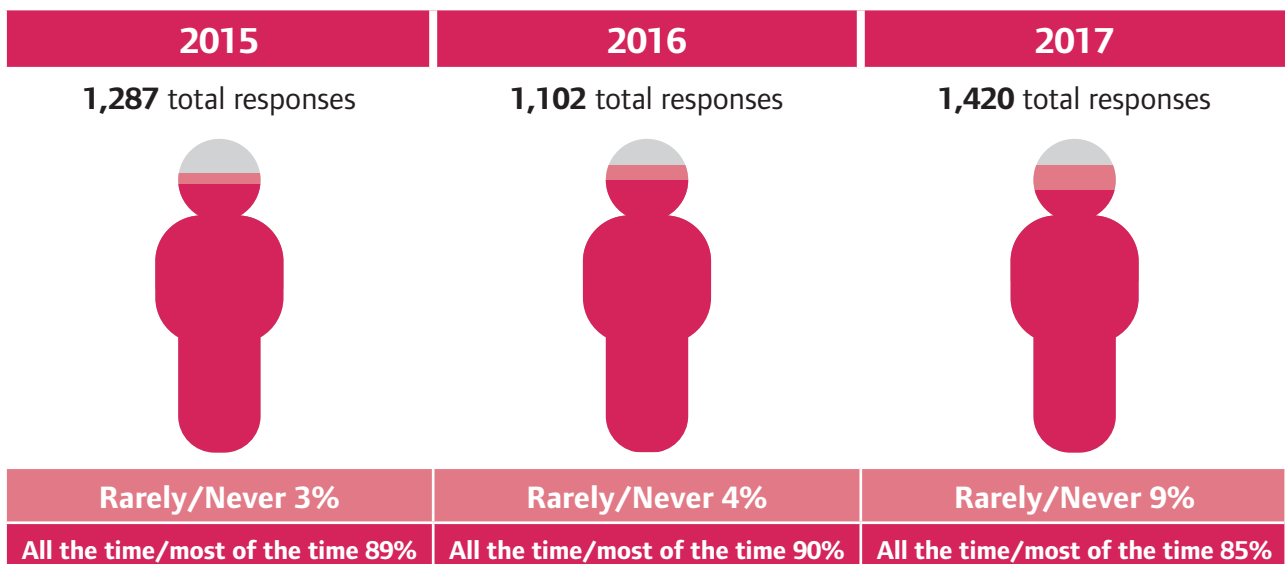
(aged 9, fostering)

Children need to be able to build relationships with adults they can trust

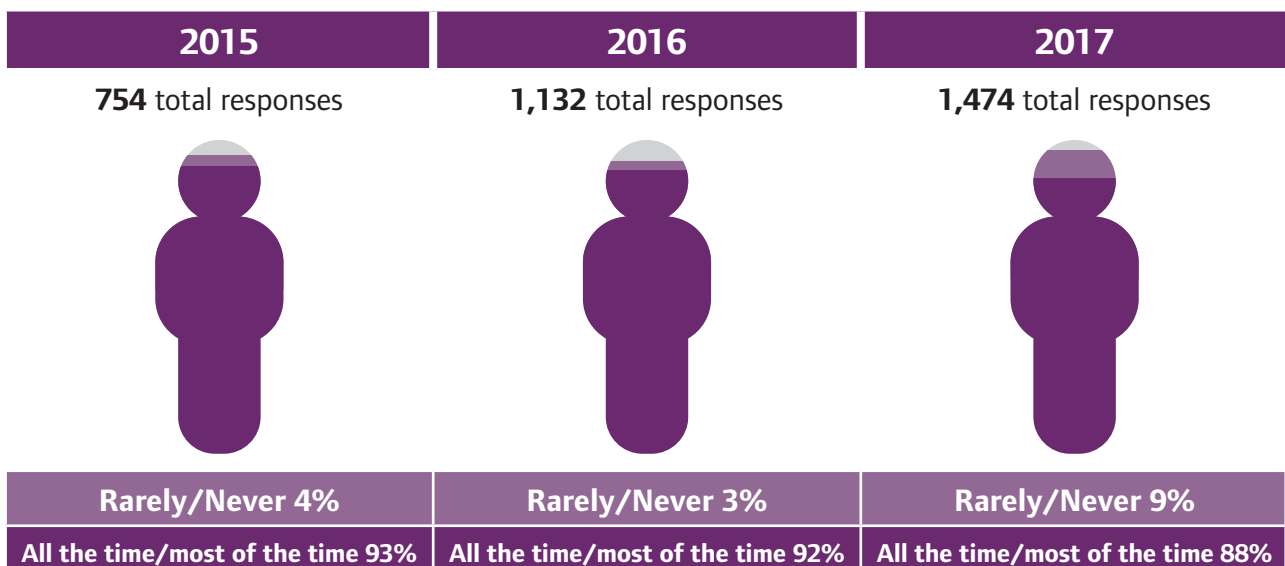
In 2017, children told us that staff or foster carers had helped them less often when they had been upset by other people. Almost 10% said that staff or foster carers rarely or never helped them.

If someone has picked on me or upset me, staff/foster carers have helped me¹⁰

Children's homes



Fostering



Children told us about how staff and foster carers helped them

"No staff member lets me feel low and they always ask me how I am feeling etc"

(aged 15, children's home)

"The staff always listen to my side of the story and get to the bottom of whatever has happened"

(aged 17, children's home)

"When someone has not been very nice to me at school the adults have been into the school and spoken to the teacher. The child has been invited to the home by the home manager and after speaking about how I feel they have apologised. This has then stopped"

(aged 11, children's home)

"Staff always try and help me if I feel pressurised into doing things I don't feel comfortable in to say no"

(aged 12, children's home)

"I was bullied last year and my carer spoke to school persistently until they took action and it has stopped now"

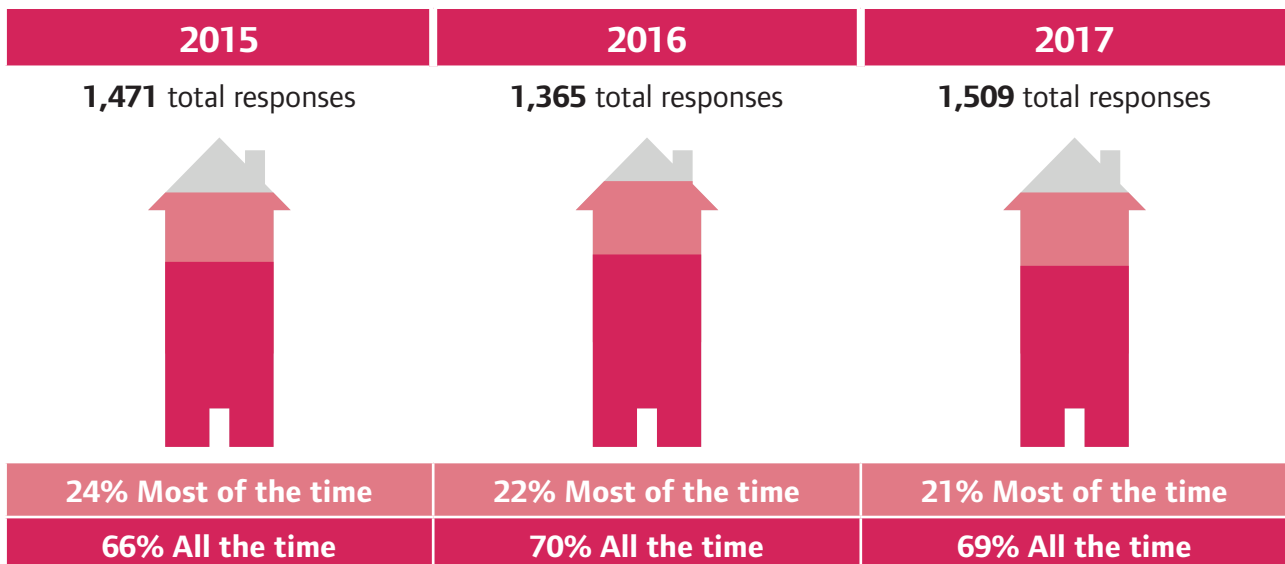
(aged 13, fostering)

Children rely on the adults caring for them to help keep them safe

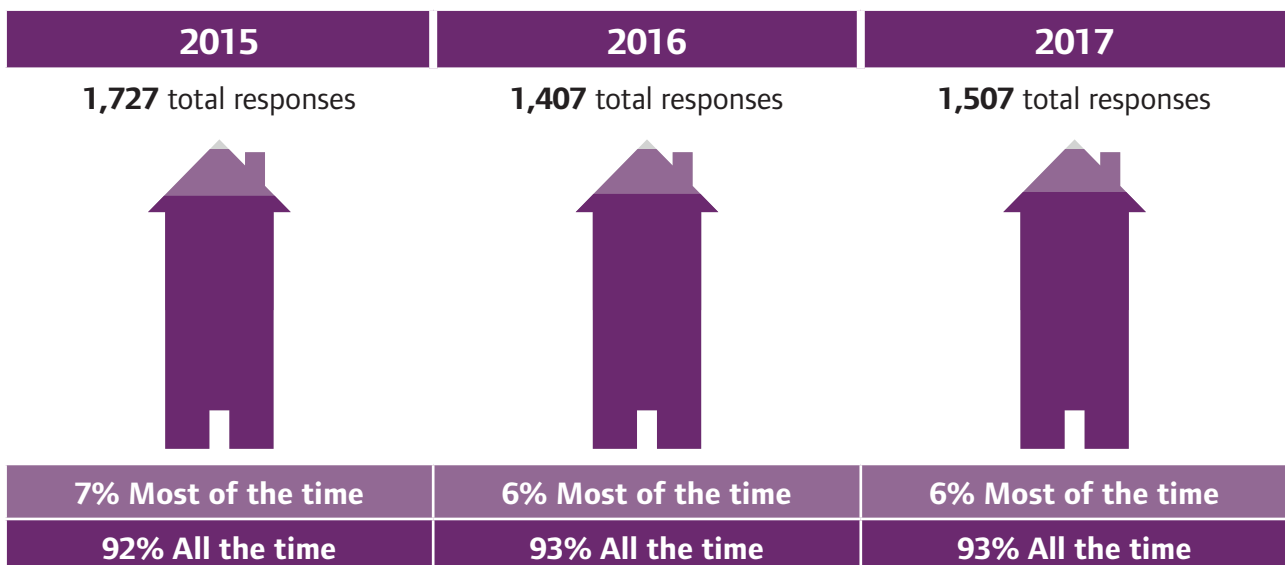
Children who live in children's homes are still telling us they feel less safe than those living in foster homes

I feel safe inside my children's home/foster home¹¹

Children's homes



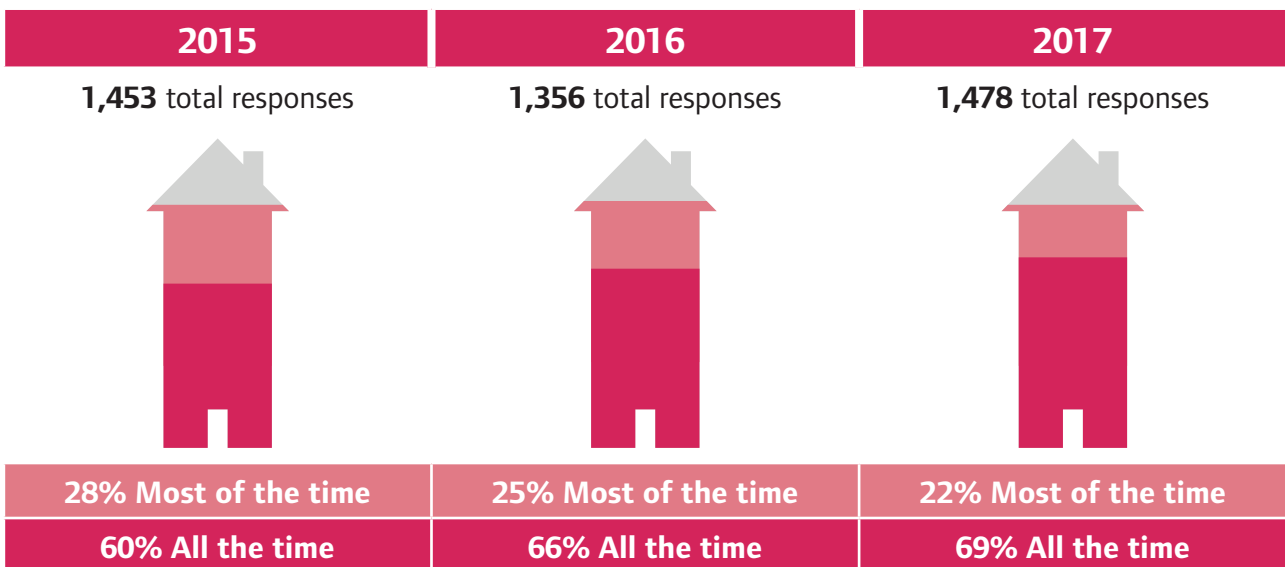
Fostering



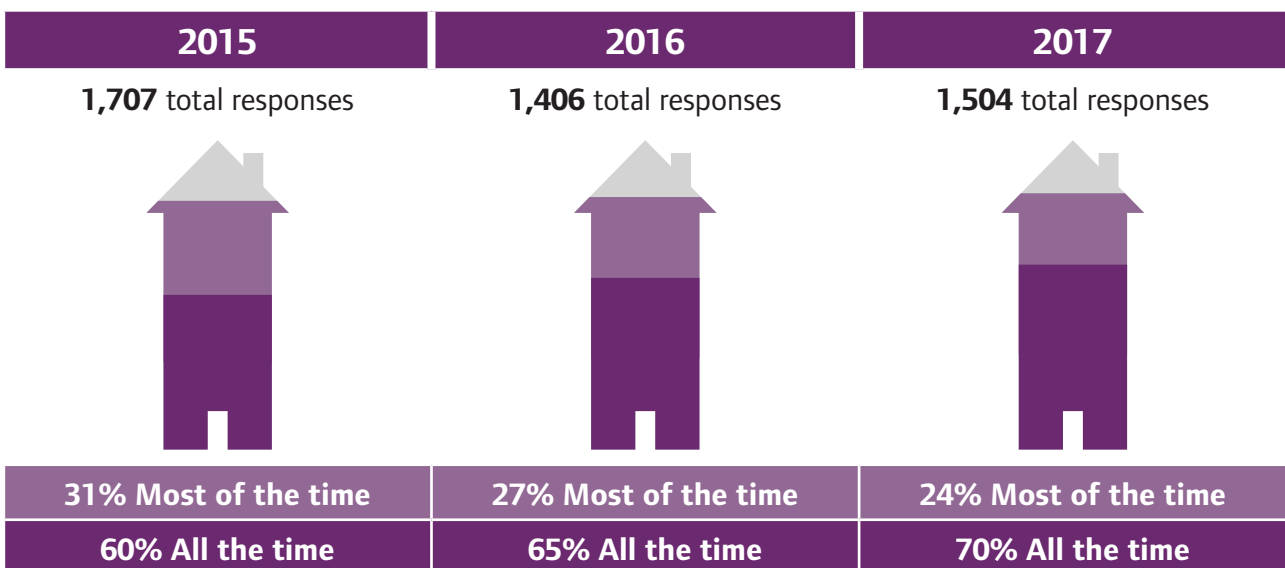
When we compare feeling safe inside the home with feeling safe outside, there is still a bigger difference for children who live in a foster home

I feel safe outside my children's home/foster home⁴

Children's homes



Fostering



Children told us what it's like when they don't feel safe

"it's scary sometimes when other children are kicking off"

(aged 10, children's home)

"If there are new staff or staff are anxious with my care I find it worrying and it makes mood bad"

(aged 16, children's home)

"I don't feel comfortable when people I don't know visit the house because I feel unsure"

(aged unknown, fostering)

"I am scared of other people outside and what they might do"

(aged 11, children's home)

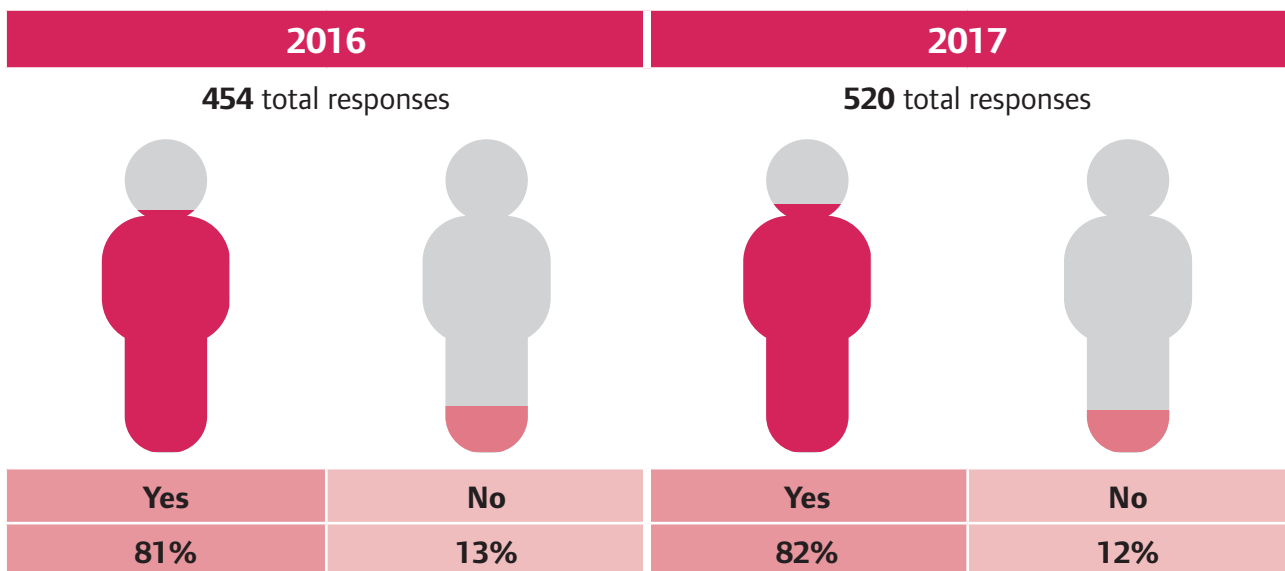
"I can become anxious around people I don't know"

(aged 12, children's home)

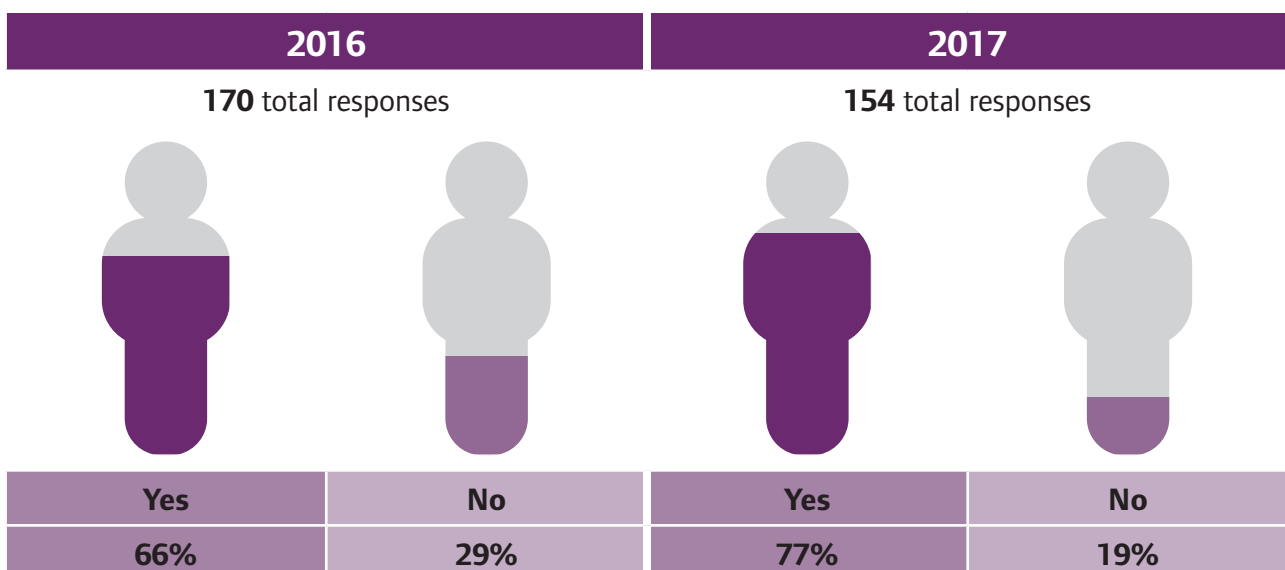
If children go missing, staff or foster carers should try to understand why, and children should have the chance to talk to someone independent

Although children who stay with foster carers told us they still had less chance to talk to do this, there was an increase compared to 2016.

Children's homes



Fostering



Some children found it helpful to talk to someone independent but not everyone felt the same about this

"I spoke to my social worker as he knows me best and new some of my concerns and he helped me get my issues get across to the staff team"

(aged 16, children's home)

"I was offered, but I don't always want to do this, I would rather speak to staff and not a stranger, if I have to"

(aged 16, children's home)

"I spoke to a police officer who made me realise I had put myself in danger. I don't want to do it again"

(aged 9, children's home)

"didn't feel the need to talk to the independent visitor as it was my own personal issue not theirs but I did have that option"

(aged 16, children's home)

"I choose not to because it was so many months later"

(aged 13, fostering)

"I have talked to a member of the fostering agency about this and I have also talked to my foster carer's social worker as well. They both have helped me a lot to make sure it never happened again"

(aged 17, fostering)

Thank you to everyone who has completed our questionnaires and shared their views with us over the previous years.

In 2018, we are changing the questions we ask children and adults. We are reducing the number and they will focus on the most important things we want to know. The questions for everyone will be more similar.

References

- 1 Adoption services include voluntary adoption agencies and local authority adoption services. Fostering services includes independent fostering agencies and local authority fostering services.
- 2 We do not inspect individual foster carers. We inspect the local authorities and agencies that recruit them.
- 3 In relation to children's homes and fostering services, the responses from children do not solely relate to children looked after. A number of children who are not looked after receive services. For example, children who receive short breaks or are placed under other arrangements. Most users of short breaks are children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities but other children in need may also receive short breaks. The breaks usually have two aims to enable the child to participate in fun, interesting and safe activities and to provide a break for parents.
- 4 The percentages for all questions don't include where multiple answer options were selected.
- 5 Data about the number of children looked after, living with foster carers or living in children's homes refers to the position as at 31 March 2017 and is taken from 'Children looked after in England including adoption: 2016 to 2017' www.gov.uk/government/statistics/children-looked-after-in-england-including-adoption-2016-to-2017 published 28 September 2017.
- 6 For this report we have focused on children living or receiving short breaks in children's homes or with foster carers. 1,527 children and young people told us about their children's home and 1,630 children and young people told us about their foster carers.
- 7 These were the important messages we heard from children in 2016 www.gov.uk/government/publications/social-care-questionnaires-2016-what-children-and-young-people-told-ofsted
- 8 In 2016 and 2017 the question was 'I was able to find out useful things about the children's home/foster family before I moved in or had a short break there'. In 2015 the question was 'I was able to find out lots of useful things about the children's home/foster family before I moved in'.
- 9 We asked a similar question in 2015 ('I was able to find out lots of useful things about the children's home before I moved in') and so we've included those responses too.
- 10 We asked a similar question in 2015 ('Staff deal well with bullying') and so we've included those responses too.
- 11 We asked the same question in 2015 and so we have included those responses too.