



Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment

The national survey on people and the
natural environment

Children and Young People report

Analysis of latest results
March 2017 to February 2018

5th March 2019

For further information see:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/monitor-of-engagement-with-the-natural-environment-survey-purpose-and-results>



Foreword

Natural England produces a range of reports providing evidence and advice to assist us in delivering our duties.

Since 2009, Natural England has commissioned Kantar TNS to undertake the Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment (MENE) survey. It enables Natural England and our partners including the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) and other data users to:

- Understand how people use, enjoy and are motivated to protect the natural environment;
- Monitor changes in use of the natural environment over time, at a range of different spatial scales and for key groups within the population;
- Inform on-the-ground initiatives to help them link more closely to people's needs;
- Evaluate the impact and effectiveness of related policy initiatives.

Further publications from the MENE survey

This report forms one part of a larger family of outputs from the survey.

Published alongside this report are:

- A Headline Report presenting the 2018 results for adults;
- Technical Report providing full details of the survey methodology;
- Data tables in Excel providing more detailed survey results;
- SPSS, .CSV and Excel raw data files of adults and children datasets that allow detailed analysis of the MENE dataset.

Please see GOV.UK for these and other outputs from the survey:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/monitor-of-engagement-with-the-natural-environment-headline-reports-and-technical-reports-2016-2017-to-2017-2018>

Official Statistics

This Mene children's report and associated data comprise official statistics produced in accordance with the Code of Practice for Statistics and its key principles of:

- Value - statistics that support society's needs for information
- Quality - data and methods that produce assured statistics
- Trust – users of statistics and citizens have confidence in the people and organisations that produce statistics and data.

For further details please see:

<https://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/code-of-practice/>

The lead analyst for this publication is Dr Rose O'Neill

Rose.O'Neill@naturalengland.org.uk

For information on Natural England publications contact the Natural England Enquiry Service on 0845 600 3078 or e-mail MENE@naturalengland.org.uk.

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Introduction

The MENE Children and Young People report

This report presents the headline findings of the MENE survey in relation to children (aged under 16) and young people (aged 16-24) for the year from March 2017 to February 2018. Comparisons with adults over 25 years old are also included as appropriate. Trend analysis of survey data for the five year period from 2013/14 to 2017/18 has been highlighted in this report where change over time have been statistically significant.

Findings presented in this report arise from analysis of data collected via three different approaches:

1. Since 2009, young people (aged 16-24) have been asked questions directly as part of the adults MENE survey. A sample of 5,395 young people was collected between March 2017 to February 2018.
2. Since 2013, adults with children (under 16) living in their household have been asked about their children's leisure time outdoors. This included frequency of visits, party composition, places visited and motivations. In designing this element it was recognised that parents/carers would not have full knowledge of all visits taken by their children. However, it is likely that any bias resulting from this would be relatively constant so any measure of change over time would be valid. A sample relating to 4,879 children was collected between March 2017 to February 2018.
3. In 2017, children aged 7-15 were asked to directly respond to 6 attitude statements. A sample of 356 children was collected between March 2017 to February 2018.

Unless otherwise stated, findings are expressed as percentages of all children (aged under 16) or young people (aged 16-24) in England and are average figures over the reported time period.

Note that any trends or variations between results highlighted in the text are statistically significant at the 95 percent confidence level unless stated otherwise. This means that differences between results – for example comparisons of two population groups – are unlikely to be the result of sampling error or chance.

A report on development of the children's questions and analysis of previous years' data is available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/monitor-of-engagement-with-the-natural-environment-pilot-study-visits-to-the-natural-environment-by-children>.

Definition of the natural environment

The definition of time spent in, or visits to the natural environment was consistent between methods for children, young people and adults:

Leisure time out of doors, away from your home. By out of doors we mean open or green spaces in and around towns and cities, the coast and the countryside. This could be anything from a few minutes outside, to 30 minutes in the local park, to all-day. It may include time spent close to your home, further afield or while on holiday in England. However this does not include routine shopping trips or time spent in your own garden.

See the questionnaire in the [technical report](#) for full details of definitions used in the survey.

Note on comparability of 2016/17 children's results

Since 2013, adults have been asked questions regarding children's leisure time on a monthly basis in order to take account of seasonal variations. However, during the 2016/17 survey year, these questions were only included for 6 months. As such annual results for this period should be treated with some caution and have been omitted from any trend analysis in this report.

Children and Young People: Headlines from 2017/18

Summary statistics for children and young people for 2017/18. 6

Children and young people's leisure time outside.

1. Children and young people more regularly spend time outdoors than older age groups. 8

2. Children living in lower income areas are less likely to spend time outdoors than those in more affluent areas. 9

3. Children from black, Asian and other minority ethnic backgrounds are less likely to spend time outdoors than children from white backgrounds. 10

4. As children grow up they are more likely to explore the outdoors without adult supervision. But even the oldest children are more likely to spend time in nature with adults than without. 11

5. Children's time outside without adult supervision has declined since 2013. 12

The reasons children and young people spend time outside and where they go.

6. Play is the main motivation for children's time outdoors. Other reasons become more important as children grow older. 14

7. Urban greenspaces are important places for children of all ages. Fewer children spend time in more natural places such as woodland or the countryside. 15

Children and young people's attitudes towards the natural environment.

8. Children have positive attitudes towards nature with changes as children enter teenage years. 17



Further data for each of the headline areas is available in the accompanying Excel file [CLICK HERE](#)



Headline results

Summary statistics for children and young people for 2017/18

On average children and young people spend time outdoors more regularly than adults aged 25 or over (Figure 1). During 2017/18, 70% of children and 64% of young people (16-24) spent leisure time outdoors at least once a week.

However, the survey also showed that 13% of children and 5% of young people typically never spent any of their leisure time outdoors (Figure 1).

The majority of children (72%) had visited urban greenspaces in the last month while just over a third had visited the countryside (36%) and 17% visited a coastal location (Figure 2).

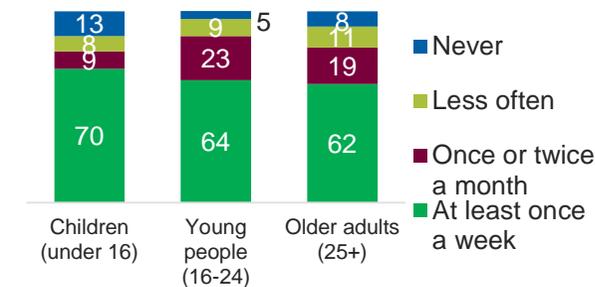
The results for young people show a similar pattern: the majority of visits taken by 16 to 24 year olds were to urban greenspaces (62% of visits), with smaller proportions to the countryside (28%) or coast (11%).

Seventy six per cent of children had visited the natural environment with adults during the last month (Figure 3), while just 18% had spent leisure time outdoor unaccompanied by an adult. This suggests adults are an important mediator of children's visits.

Children and young people report positive feelings towards nature, (Figure 4) with 67% of children and 56% of young people agreeing strongly with the statement 'being in nature makes me happy' (a response of 6 or more out of 7 on rating scale).

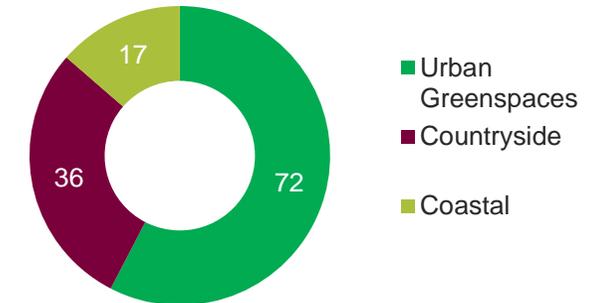
For a summary of key results by region, see the supporting Excel file [here](#).

FIGURE 1 Frequency of time spent outside (% by age group, 2017/18)



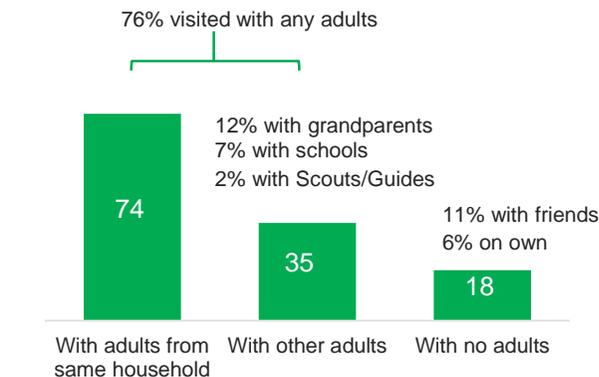
Q17/NE1 Over the last 12 months, how often, on average, have [you / this child] spent leisure time outdoors? (Base: 4,879 children, 5,395 young people, 42,082 older adults).

FIGURE 2 Natural places visited by children (% of children under 16, 2017/18)



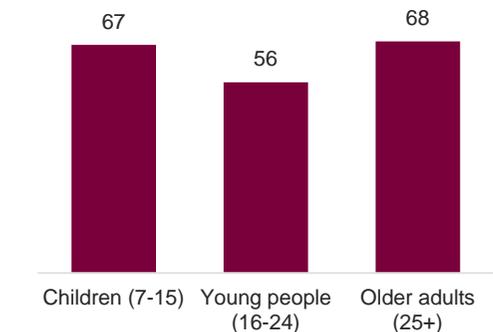
NE3/7/11 Which of the following type(s) of places were visited by this child (percentages total over 100% as children may have visited more than one type of place).

FIGURE 3 Who took part in children's visits (% of children under 16, 2017/18)



NE3/7/11 Which of the following best describes who took part in these visits? (percentages total over 100% as children may have visited more than one type of place).

FIGURE 4 Proportion who strongly agree that 'being in nature makes me very happy' (% of population by age group, 6 or 7 rating on a 7 point scale, 2017/18)





Children and young people's leisure time outside

1.

Children and young people more regularly spend time outdoors than older age groups.

Figure 5 illustrates how often children, young people and older adults spend their leisure time outside.

Children aged between 6 and 12 are the most likely to spend time outdoors at least once a week.

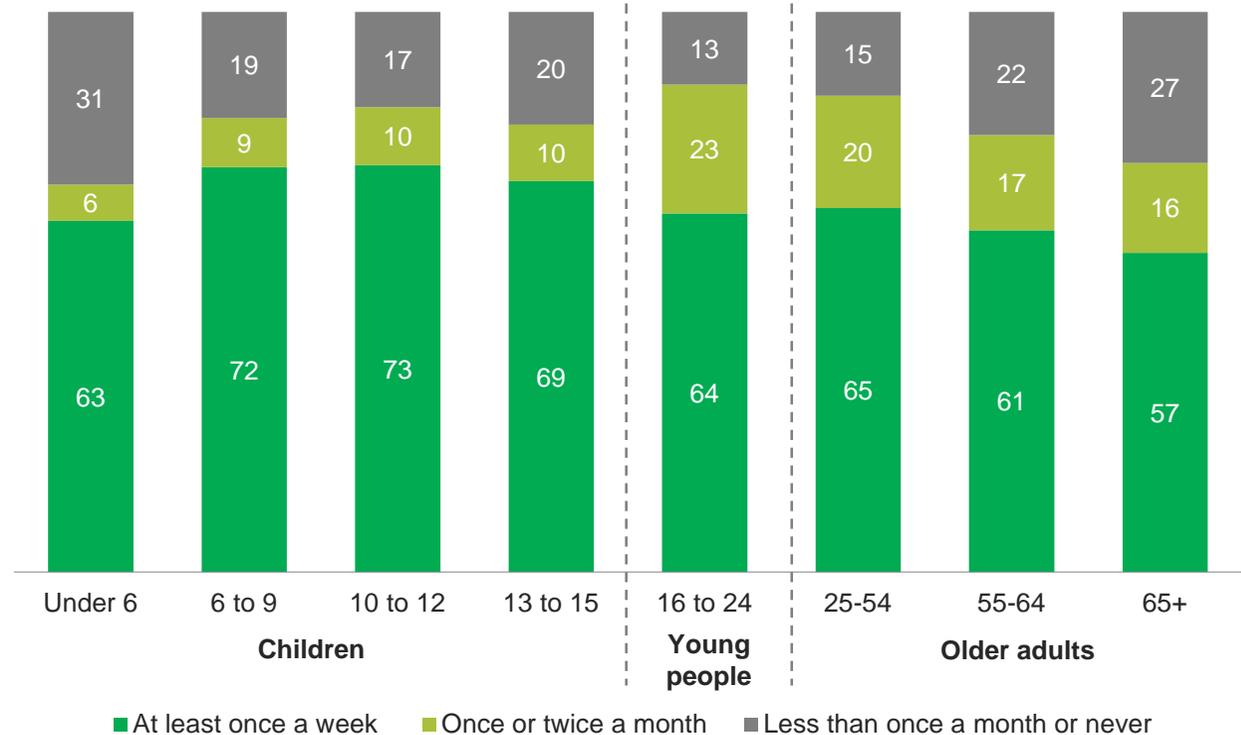
Young people (16-24) are the age group least likely to spend time outside infrequently (less than once a month or never).

While there is growing concern about the decreasing amount of time spent by children in nature, as other indoor activities such as ‘screen time’ become more prevalent^{1,2}, these results suggest that children and young people have more frequent exposure to nature than adults.

More research is needed to understand the reasons for this. It may relate to overall leisure time given:

- Young people have more leisure time overall than people aged between 25 and 64³.
- Children aged 10 to 12 benefit from the most opportunities to visit: with adults in the home, visits with other adults including grandparents, with school and with other groups; and many have begun to explore nature on their own (see page 11).

FIGURE 5 Frequency of time spent outside by age group – children, young people and older adults
(% by age group – 2017/18)



Q17/NE1 Over the last 12 months, how often, on average, have [you / this child] spent leisure time outdoors? (Base: 4,879 children, 5,395 young people, 42,082 older adults).

2.

Children living in lower income areas are less likely to spend time outdoors than those in more affluent areas.

This reflects variations seen in the adult MENE survey and the children's results from previous years (see link on pages 2 and 3).

Figure 6 shows the proportion of children spending time outdoors at least once a week is 75% in the least deprived areas (according to the Index of Multiple Deprivation), compared to 65% children living in the most deprived areas.

Eighteen per cent of children living in the most deprived areas never visit the natural environment, compared to 13% children overall. Children living in deprived areas are especially unlikely to spend time in countryside and coastal areas (Figure 7).

These inequalities are more marked when children spend time with adults (Figure 8) than when they spend time independently (Figure 9). More research is needed to explore why this is. It may in part reflect more limited leisure time available to parents on lower incomes as they are more likely to work longer hours, shift work, and at weekends³.

There is little difference between girls and boys in terms of the frequency and places where they spend time outside. However, there is significant difference in terms of who spend time outside with, which is explored on page 12.

FIGURE 6 Children spending time outdoors once a week by key demographics (% under 16, 2017/18)

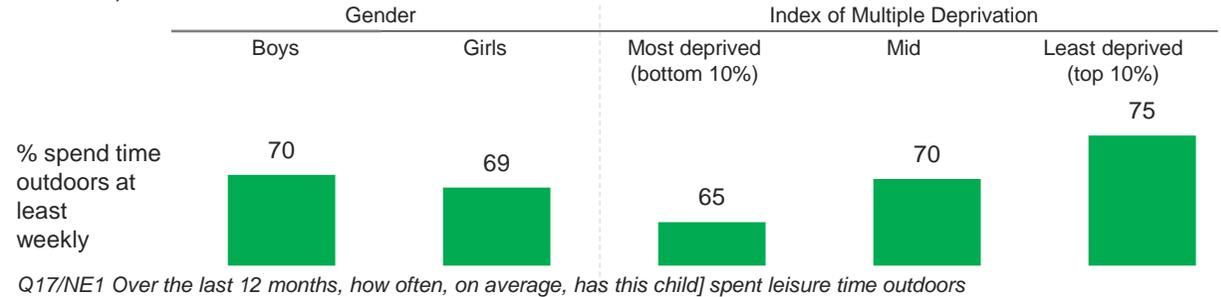


FIGURE 7 Types of greenspace children visit by key demographics (% under 16, 2017/18)

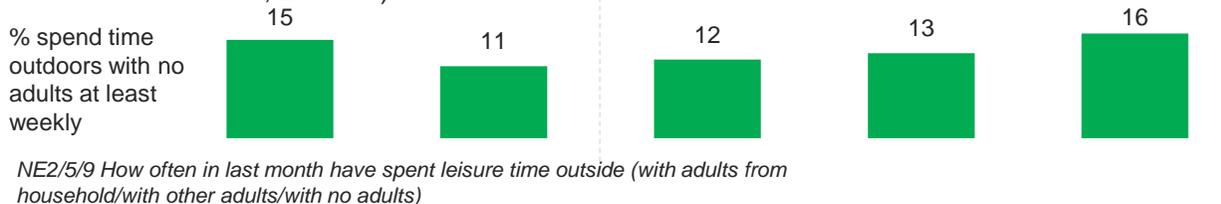
	Urban	Countryside	Coastal
Boys	72	36	18
Girls	71	35	16
Most deprived (bottom 10%)	67	24	11
Mid	72	37	17
Least deprived (top 10%)	80	53	19

NE3/7/11 Which of the following type(s) of places were visited by this child (percentages total over 100% as children may have visited more than one type of place).

FIGURE 8 Children spending time outdoors with adults by key demographics (% under 16, 2017/18)



FIGURE 9 Children spending time outdoors with no adults present by key demographics (% of children under 16, 2017/18)



3.

Children from black, Asian and other minority ethnic backgrounds are less likely to spend time outdoors than children from white backgrounds.

Figure 10 shows that 57% of children with black, Asian and minority ethnic family backgrounds spend time outdoors at least once a week, compared with 73% of children from white family backgrounds.

Figures 10-13 shows that there is significant variation between different minority ethnic groups in relation to the frequency that children spend time outdoors, likelihood of children visiting the countryside and coast and the time children spend outdoors with no adults present.

Where minority ethnic populations have been grouped, this does not imply any one group is more or less important than another or that experiences of these groups are uniform. Grouping has been carried out for practical purposes only to ensure sample sizes are sufficient to support robust analysis.

Previous Natural England research has shown time spent in natural environment is shaped by a range of social and cultural factors, inequalities in access and barriers of exclusion⁴. Further research is needed to explore these factors amongst children and young people, including understanding variations between minority ethnic groups.

FIGURE 10 Children spending time outdoors once a week by family cultural background (% under 16, 2017/18)

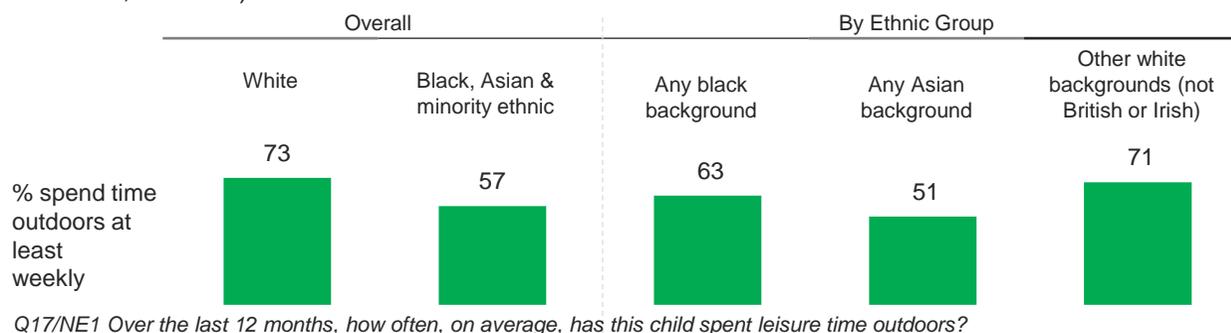


FIGURE 11 Types of greenspace children visit by family cultural background (% under 16, 2017/18)

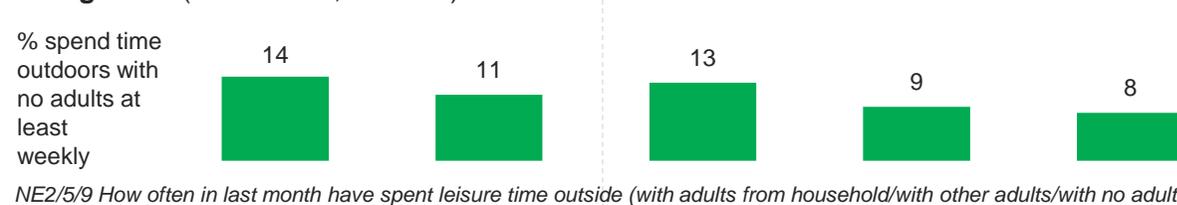
	White	Black, Asian & minority ethnic	Any black background	Any Asian background	Other white backgrounds (not British or Irish)
Urban	73	67	67	62	70
Countryside	40	20	13	19	27
Coastal	20	6	3	7	12

NE3/7/11 Which of the following type(s) of places were visited by this child? Percentages total over 100% as children may have visited more than one type of place.

FIGURE 12 Children spending time outdoors with adults by family cultural background (% under 16, 2017/18)



FIGURE 13 Children spending time outdoors with no adults present by family cultural background (% under 16, 2017/18)



4.

As children grow up they are more likely to explore the outdoors without adult supervision. But even the oldest children are more likely to spend time in nature with adults than without.

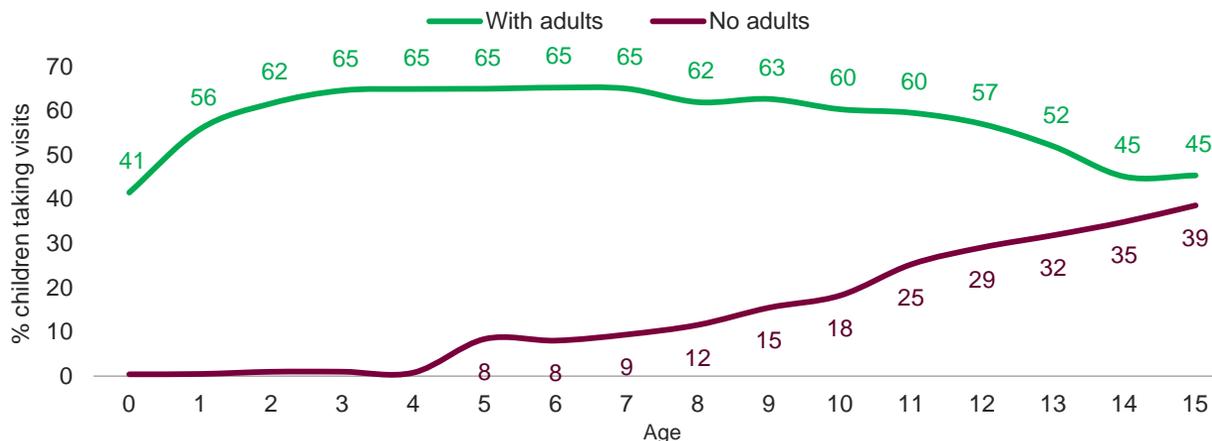
Figure 14 shows that from age 5, the proportion of children regularly spending time in nature without adults present (i.e. on their own or with others under 16) begins to increase.

As children approach secondary school age, time spent outside without adult supervision steadily increases, largely driven by increased time spent outside with friends (Figure 15). But even by age 15, children are more likely to spend time outside with adults (45% visits taken), than independently (39%).

While this may in part reflect the survey method (asking adults about their children), it does reflect other research^{5,6} that shows: low levels of children's independent play are widespread and have declined over the last 40 years, restrictions tend to be greatest for children under 11 but commonly apply to the oldest children, parents cite significant concerns about letting their children go out alone, with traffic safety the strongest factor.

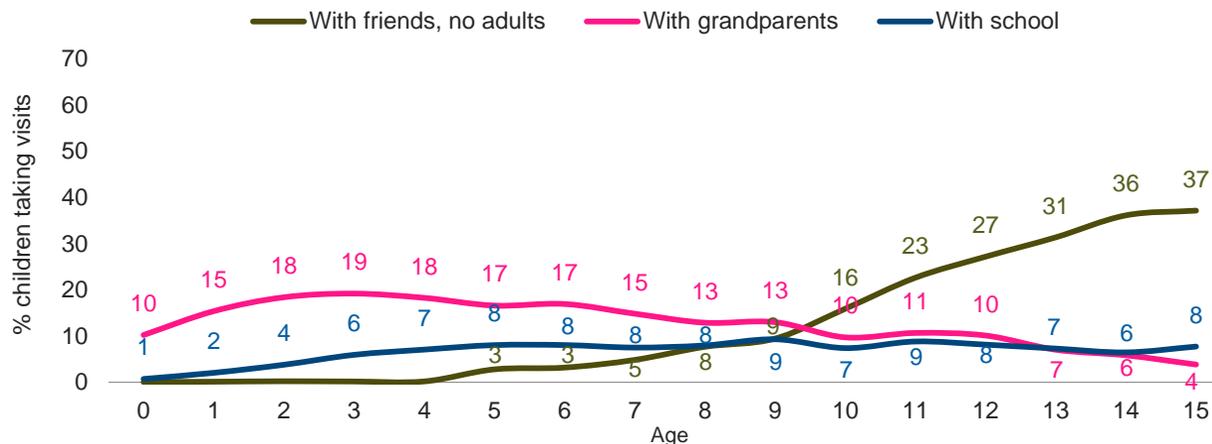
Figure 15 shows levels of visit taking with schools are fairly consistent across age groups, including visits taken in pre-school, nursery groups, etc. There was no significant change in the proportion of children taking visits with schools over the last 5 years, staying between 6-7%.

FIGURE 14 Children's visits outdoors, with and without adults and by age (% , 2013/14 to 2017/18 cumulative, visits taken at least weekly)



NE2/5/9 How often in last month have spent leisure time outside (with adults from household/with other adults/with no adults)

FIGURE 15 Children's visits outdoors by common group compositions and age (% , 2013/14 to 2017/18 cumulative)



NE6/10 Which of the following best describes who took part in these visits?

5.

Children's time outside without adult supervision has declined since 2013.

In 2017/18, 18% of all children had spent time outside with no adults present during the previous month, rising to an average of 39% of those aged 10 or more.

Figure 16 shows that boys are more likely than girls to spend time outside independently, with the gap increasing with age. Older boys are more likely than older girls to spend time outside independently with friends (34% boys vs 27% of girls), and are more likely to spend time outside 'to do something physically active' (21% boys vs 15% girls).

This reflects other research which shows that boys are more likely than girls to rate physical activity as an important part of their life, with differences increasing with age⁷.

Children's time outside without adults has decreased over time, from 45% of children age 10-15 spending time outside independently in 2013/14 to 39% in 2017/18 (Figure 19). Other studies suggest that an increase in time spent undertaking indoor leisure activities, such as online media and gaming may be a factor in this trend⁸.

Factors associated with children's independent time outside include having a dog in the household (Figure 17) and parental perceptions of local greenspace being within easy walking distance (Figure 18). More work is needed to take account of confounding factors to understand significance.

FIGURE 16 Children's time outdoors without adult supervision by gender and age (% under 16, 2013/14 to 2017/18 cumulative)

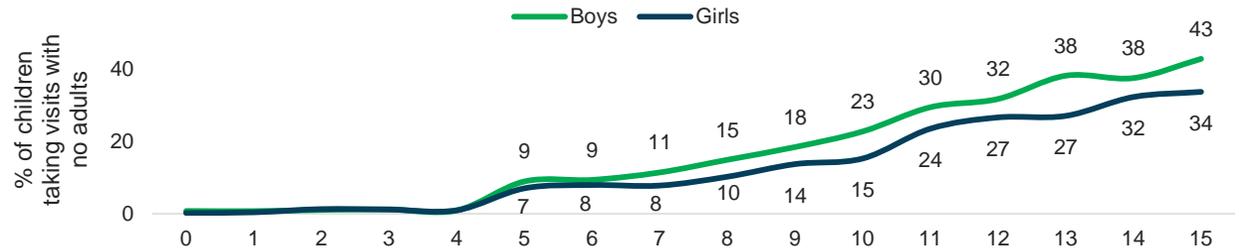


FIGURE 17 Children's time outdoors without adult supervision by age and dog ownership (% under 16, 2013/14 to 2017/18 cumulative)

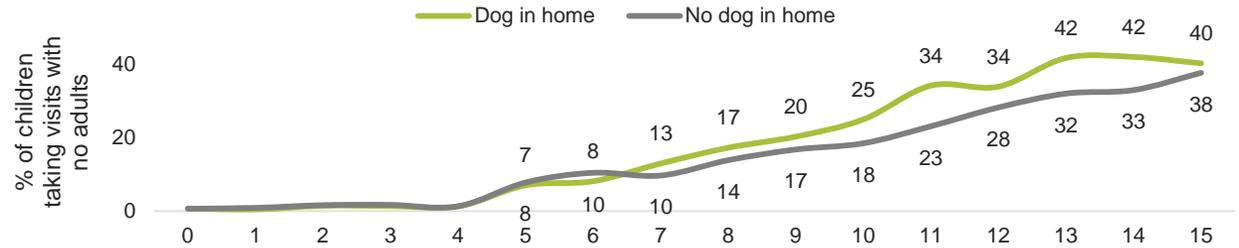


FIGURE 18 Children's time outdoors without adult supervision by parents perceptions of local greenspace (% under 16, 2013/14 to 2017/18 cumulative)

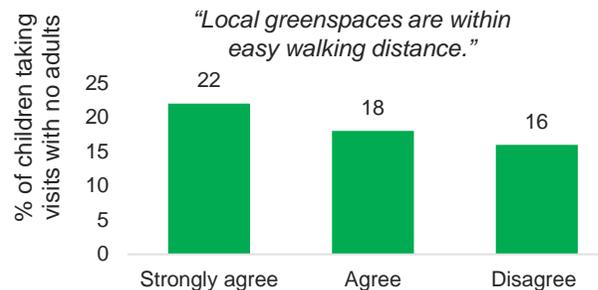


FIGURE 19 Older children's time outdoors without adult supervision: 2017/18 compared to 2013/14 (% aged 10-15)

	2013/14	2017/18	Change
Visits with no adults	45%	39%	-6
Visits with friends	32%	26%	-6



NE9 How often in last month have spent leisure time outside with no adults



The reasons children and young people spend time outside and where they go

6.

Play is the main motivation for children’s time outdoors. Other reasons become more important as children grow older.

Figure 20 shows that the primary motivation reported by adults for their children’s time spent outside was play. This is the main reason regardless of whether adults were present. Other reasons frequently reported include getting fresh air, spending time together as a family, relaxation and physical activity.

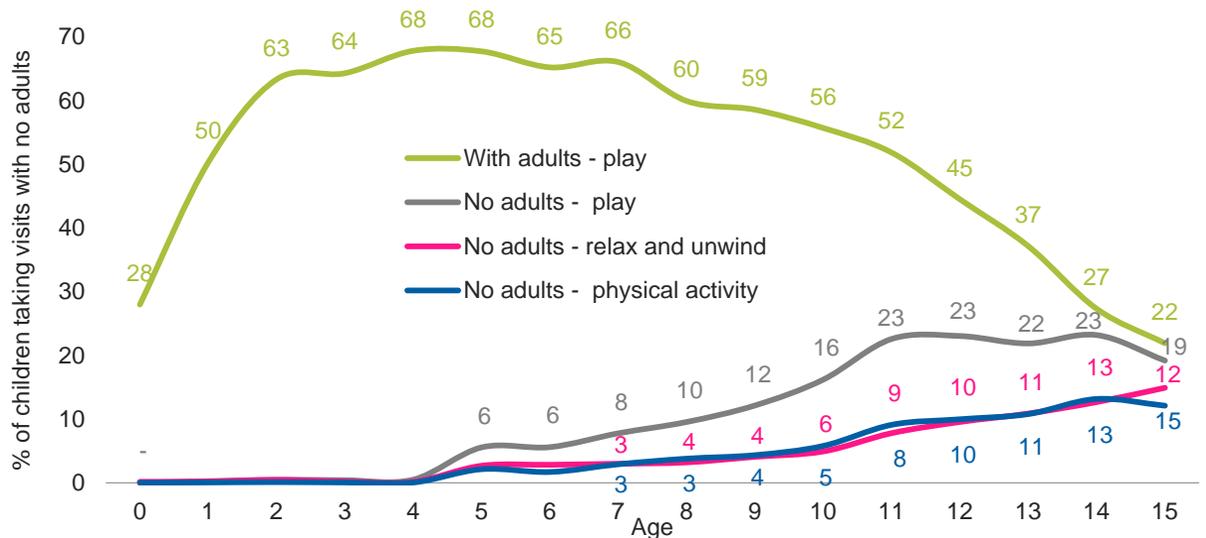
The reported motivations for spending time outside changes as children get older (Figure 21). For the youngest age groups, parents report that play is the most important. However as children grow up and become more independent, parents increasingly report other reasons – in particular time spent with friends, relaxing and unwinding and doing physical activities such as sports.

It is important to note that these questions were answered by adults about children in their household and therefore, represent their interpretation of the child’s motivations for visiting.

FIGURE 20 Top 5 reasons for children spending leisure time outdoors in last month (% of children under 16, 2017/18)



FIGURE 21 Reasons for children spending leisure time outdoors by age (% of children, cumulative data 2013/14 to 2017/18)



NE4/8/12 Which of the following best describe the reasons for taking these visits?

7.

Urban greenspaces are important places for children of all ages. Fewer children spend time in more natural places such as woodland or the countryside.

Figure 22 shows the specific types of places children spend their leisure time outdoors. This illustrates the high use of parks in towns and cities, playgrounds and playing fields and recreation areas and the importance of greenspaces typically close to home.

Children tend to spend far less time in places typically considered as more natural: only 17% of children spent time in a woodland, 9% in farmland or countryside and 8% at a nature reserve in the month prior to the survey.

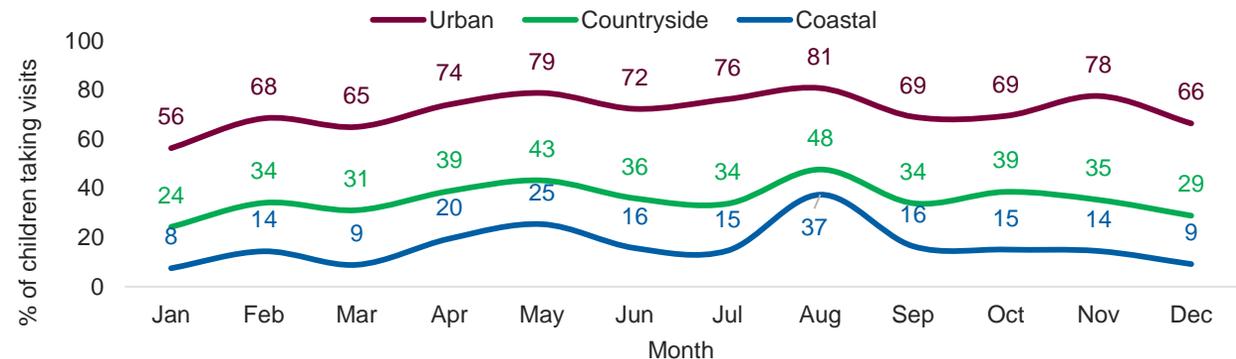
This pattern of places visited is fairly consistent across all age bands. Notable variations are: lower levels of usage of playing fields or recreation grounds amongst children under 6; use of playgrounds declines from children over 10.

Analysis of the types of place visited by month (Figure 23) shows seasonal variations, particularly for coastal and countryside visits where there is clear peak in August. Urban greenspaces are by far the most visited places all year around.

FIGURE 22 Places visited by children in last month (total)
(% under 16, 2017/18, by age cumulative)

		Variations by age group			
		0-5	6-9	10-12	13-15
Park in town/city	51	47%	54%	55%	50%
Playground	30	27%	36%	32%	26%
Playing field/ recreation area	27	19%	27%	28%	30%
Country Park	20	16%	22%	22%	18%
Woodland or forest	17	12%	19%	18%	17%
Beach or coastline	17	13%	19%	19%	16%
Visitor attraction/ historic/...	12	13%	18%	17%	13%
River, lake or canal	12	10%	12%	12%	12%
Farmland/ open countryside	9	9%	10%	9%	7%
Nature reserve	8	7%	9%	9%	8%
Shared/community green...	8	7%	8%	8%	9%
Mountain, hill or moorland	4	2%	4%	4%	5%

FIGURE 23 Places visited by children by month – visits taken with adults in household
(% under 16, 2017/18)



NE3/7/11 Which of the following type(s) of places were visited by this child (percentages total over 100% as children may have visited more than one type of place).



Children and young people's attitudes towards the natural environment

8.

Children have positive attitudes towards nature with changes as children enter teenage years.

During 2017/18 a short set of questions was added to MENE with children aged 7 and over asked to rate how much they agreed with a series of 7 point scale statements relating to nature.

As shown in Figure 24, children and young people provided strongly positive responses, with levels of agreement strongest (i.e. ratings of 6 or 7) for 'I always treat nature with respect'.

Figure 25 shows levels of strong agreement with two of the statements asked across the different age groups. This suggests a change in attitudes as children enter teenage years.

These findings are part of a partnership MENE research project to understand connection to nature in both adults and children. The research builds on a pilot that developed a method to measure nature connection⁹ and full results for both children and will be published later in 2019. For more information contact MENE@naturalengland.org.uk

FIGURE 24 **Strongest agreement with attitude statements** (% children aged 7-15 and young people aged 16-24, agreeing with responses of 6 or 7 on a 7 point scale, 2017/18.)

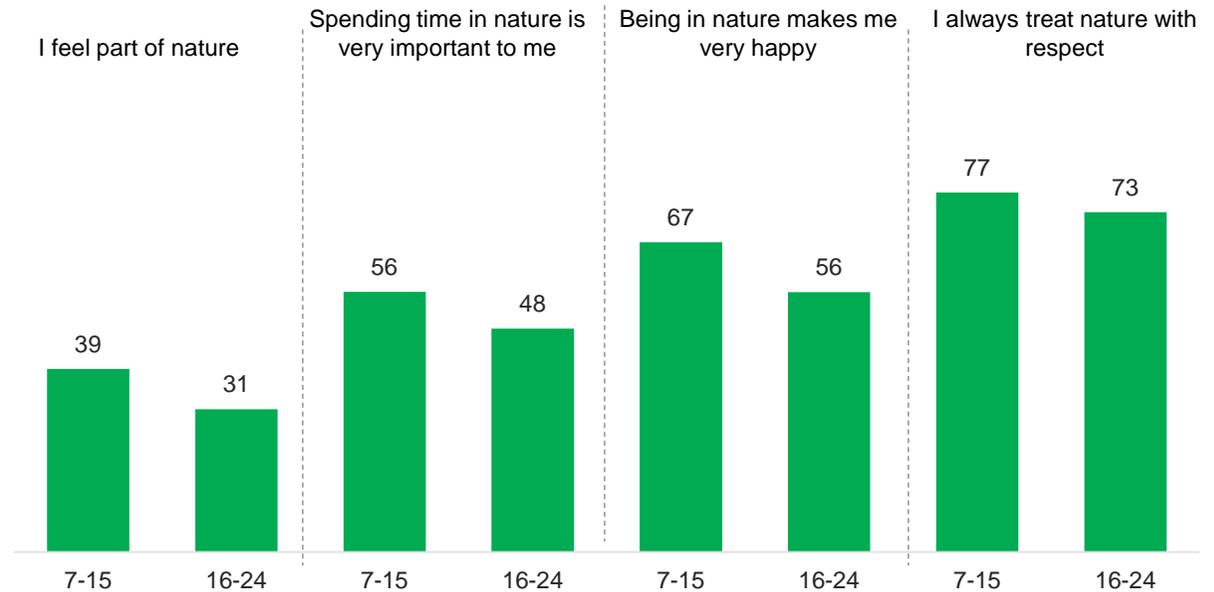
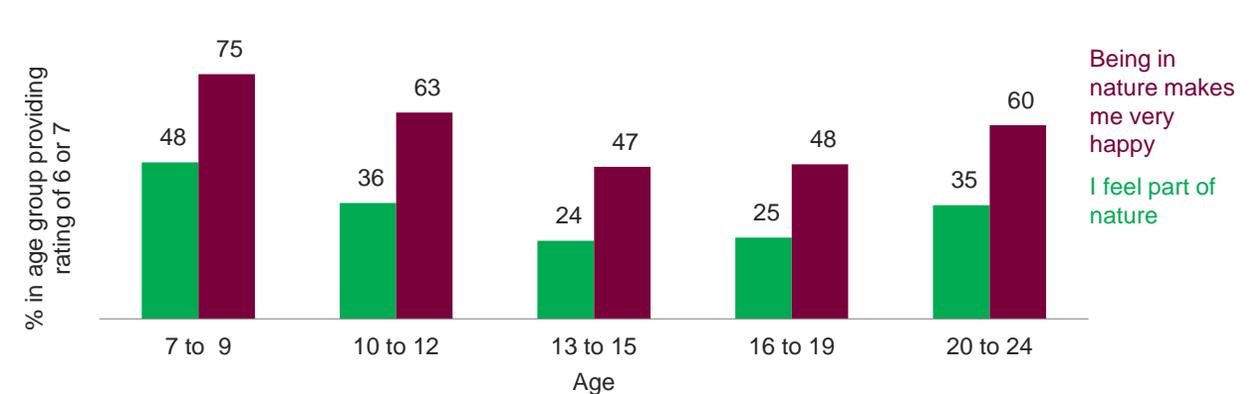


FIGURE 25 **Strongest agreement with attitude statements by age group** (% children aged 7-15 and young people aged 16-24, agreeing with responses of 6 or 7 on a 7 point scale, 2017/18.)



Source- NCI pilot dataset to be published separately

Conclusions

Children and young people more regularly spend time outdoors than any other age groups and report positive attitudes towards nature. Yet there are significant differences across the population, with children from less affluent and black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds less likely to spend leisure time outside.

Local greenspaces, including parks, recreation grounds and playgrounds are important spaces for children's play and their experience of the outdoors. For many children, across all age groups and backgrounds, they are the first and only opportunity they have experience the natural environment on a regular basis. Much smaller proportions of children spend time in what could be thought of as more natural settings, including such as woods, nature reserves and the wider countryside.

Adult supervision is an important factor influencing the amount of time children spend in nature. Even the oldest children are more likely to spend time outside in the company of adults (including parents, extended family, schools and community groups), than they are on their own or with other children.

While overall levels of children's time spent outside have remained constant over the last four years, levels of independent play outside, without adult supervision, have declined.

There is a marked change around the early teenage years, in terms of motivations and places visited, with a decrease in those reporting the strongest pro-nature attitudes. Further research is needed to better understand these changes as children move into adulthood.



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