

Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment

The national survey on people and the
natural environment

Children and Young People report

Analysis of data collected between March 2018 and
February 2019.

September 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 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, and;
- 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 2019 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/>

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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) for the year from March 2018 to February 2019. Analysis of historic children survey data (since 2013/14) and comparisons with the adults (over 16) MENE dataset are included as appropriate.

Findings presented in this report arise from analysis of data on children's and young people's attitudes and experiences of nature in MENE collected via two different approaches:

1. Since 2013/14, adults with children (under 16) living in their household were 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. Questions were included in MENE on a monthly basis generating a total sample size of 26,670 since 2013/14, including 4,266 in the year from March 2017 to February 2018. With at least 200 children in each individual age group it has been possible to analyse the annual results at this detailed level and for larger combined age groups.
2. This analysis includes results from the MENE adult survey from 2018/19, including a sample of young adults aged 16-24 (5,564) and a sample of adults who had taken outdoor visits accompanied by children aged under 16 (520). These respondents were asked directly about the time they had spent outdoors.

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

Please note that any trends or variations between results highlighted in the text are statistically significant 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 were consistent between methods for children, young people and older 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.

Note on comparability of 2016/17 children's results

Since 2013/14, questions regarding children's leisure time have been asked on a monthly basis, providing measurements which take account of seasonal variations. The exception to this is during 2016/17 children's questions were only included for 4 months of the year. As such annual results for this period should be treated with some caution and have been omitted from the analysis of trends.

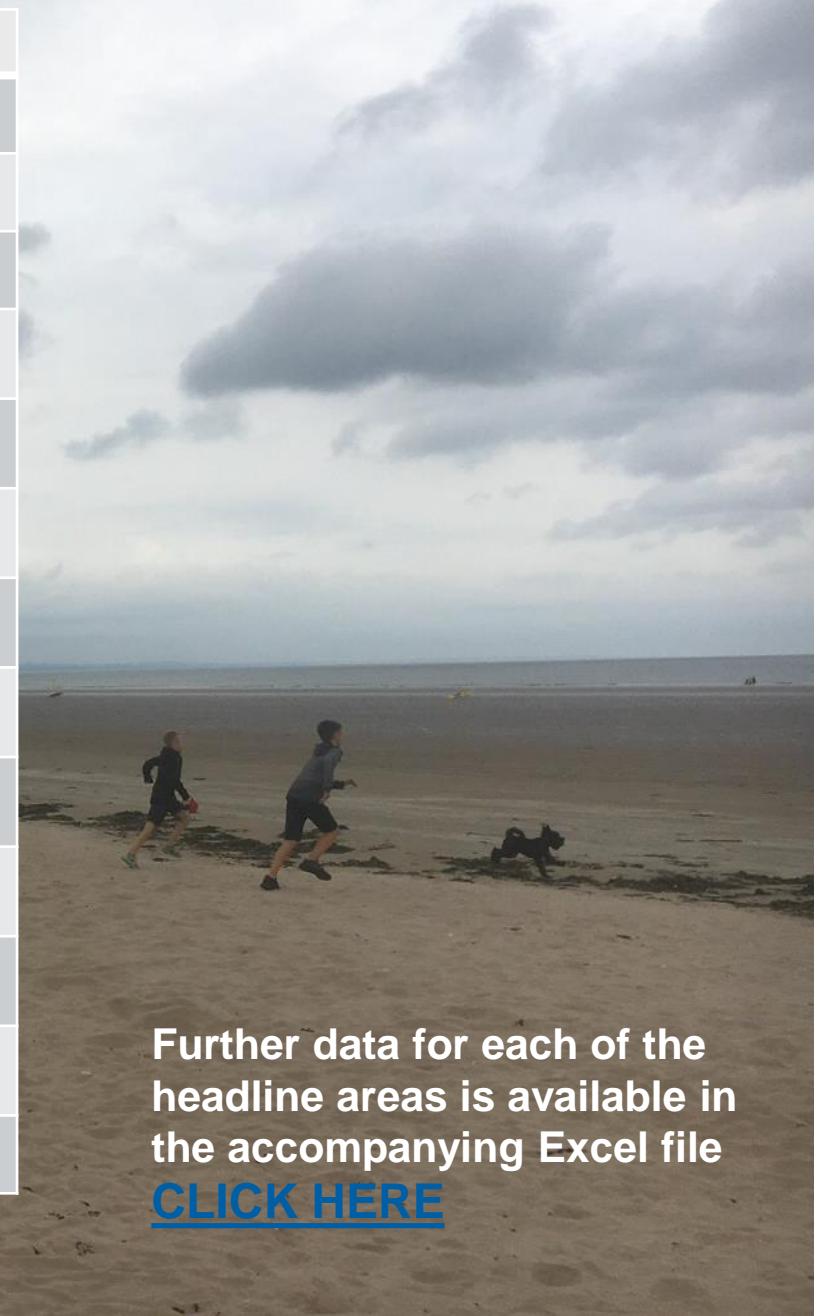
Omission of questions in December 2019

During the period March 2018 to February 2019 a survey scripting error meant that the children's survey questions were not fielded as scheduled during December 2018.

This resulted in a reduction in the final annual sample size. The results presented in this report include an additional weighting to enable comparability of data with previous years. Further details on this issue, its impact and the corrective weighting approach are described in Appendix 5 of the MENE Technical Report (see <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/monitor-of-engagement-with-the-natural-environment-headline-report-and-technical-reports-2018-to-2019>).

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

Summary of key statistics from 2018/19

During 2018/19 around two-thirds of children (67%), spent leisure time outdoors at least once a week. Figure 1 shows that the proportions visiting highest when children were aged between 6 and 12.

Frequency of visit taking declined into teenage years while a larger proportion of those aged 16 to 24 spent time outdoors once or twice a month (29%).

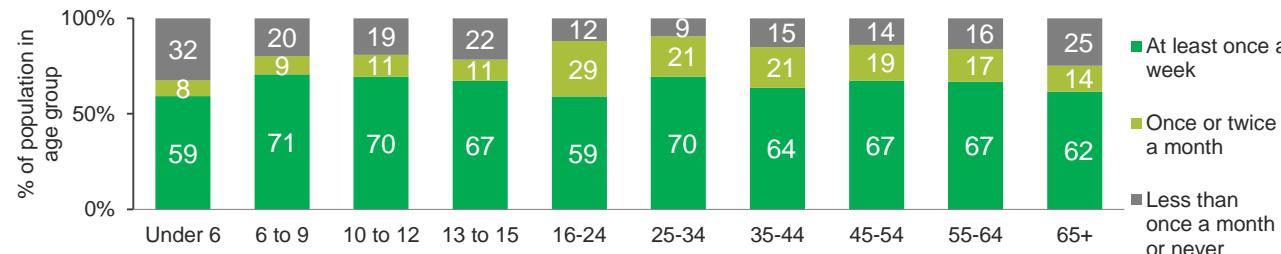
Most children (69%) had visited urban greenspaces in the last month while around a third had visited the countryside (35%) and 16% visited the coast (Figure 2).

While most spent time in natural places in their local area (70%) far fewer (25%) had visited places further afield.

Just under three quarters of children (71%) had visited the natural environment with adults from their household during the last month (Figure 3), 32% took visits with other adults and 17% had spent leisure time outdoors unaccompanied by an adult.

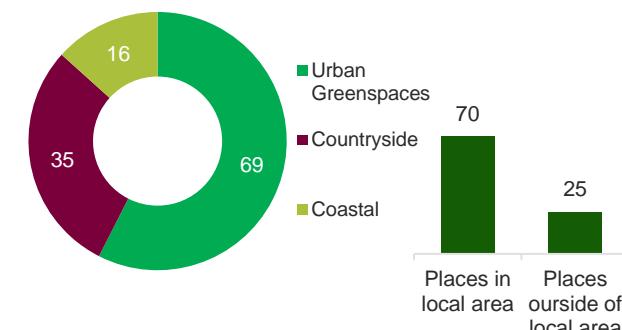
For a summary of key results by region, see the Excel file – [CLICK HERE](#).

FIGURE 1 Frequency of visits taken by children and adults
(% of all children and all adults by age group, MENE 2018/19)



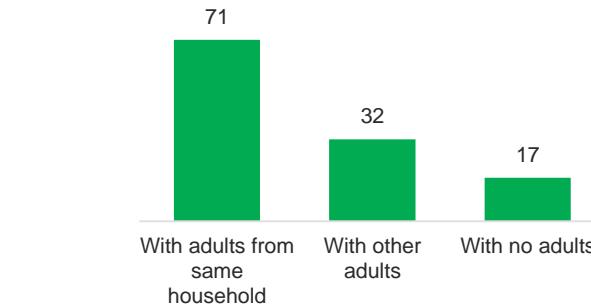
Q17/NE1 Over the last 12 months, how often, on average, have [you / this child] spent leisure time outdoors?

FIGURE 2 Places visited in last month
(% of children under 16, average March 2018 to February 2019)



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 visited with in last month
(% of children under 16, average March 2018 to February 2019)



Year	With adults from same household (%)	With other adults (%)	With no adults (%)
2013/14	76	40	22
Difference 2013/14 to 2018/19	-5	-8	-5

NE2/5/9 During the last month how often has child spent time with ...(percentages total over 100% as children may have visited more than one type of place).



Children's leisure time outside.

1.

Three quarters of children spent time outside in the average month in 2018/19.

In the month prior to the survey over the period 2018/19, 74% children spent time outside, down from 81% in 2013/14 (see Excel spreadsheet).

Figure 4 shows this broken down by proportion of children spending time outside with adults and without adults. In 2018/19, 72% of children spent time outdoors accompanied by adults. Notably, Figure 4 shows a continual decline in the proportion of children spending time outside without adults over the six year period, dropping to 17% in 2018/19.

The sharpest declines were recorded in relation to urban green spaces (Figure 5) and amongst those children in lower socio economic groups (Figure 6). In 2013/14, 71% of children in DE households visited urban greenspaces in the previous month, dropping to 61% by 2018/19.

Users should note that a corrective weight was developed to allow comparability of the 2018/19 data to correct an error. An independent review suggested that users can be relatively confident with the data presented with this weight applied. The trend showing a reduction in children's independent play outside was noted in the MENE 2018 Children and Young People report. However, more data is needed to understand whether the decline in children's visits with adults present is a trend. Further details on the corrective weighting approach are described in Appendix 5 of the MENE Technical Report.

FIGURE 4 Children spending time outside with and without adults in the month prior to the survey (% children under 16, 2013-14 to 2018-19)

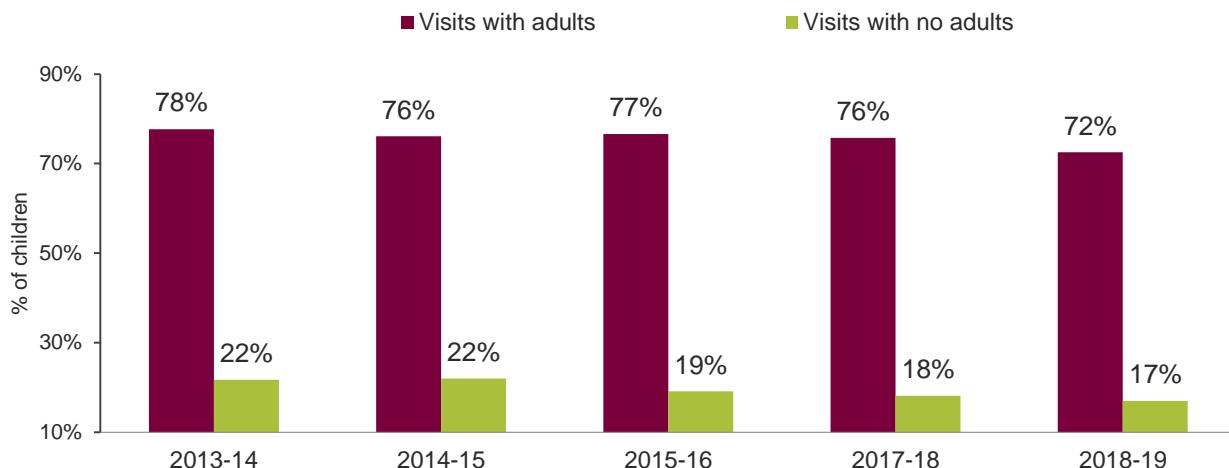


FIGURE 5 Places visited by children (% children under 16, 2013-14 and 2018-19)

	2013/ 14	2018/ 19	Change (% points)
Urban Greenspaces	74%	69%	-5
Countryside	37%	35%	-2
Coast	17%	16%	-1
Local	74%	70%	-4
Not local	31%	25%	-6

NE3/7/11 Which of the following type(s) of places were visited by this child?

FIGURE 6 Children visiting urban green space in an average month (% children under 16, 2013-14 and 2018-19)

Urban greenspace visits by social group*	2013/ 14	2018/ 19	Change
AB	79	79	-
C1	77	73	-4
C2	73	69	-4
DE	71	61	-10

*Social groups defined as: AB=Higher & intermediate managerial, administrative, professional occupations, C1=Supervisory, clerical & junior managerial, administrative, professional occupations, C2=Skilled manual occupations, DE=Semi-skilled & unskilled manual occupations or unemployed.

2.

Parks and playgrounds are the most common places where children experience the natural environment.

As shown in Figure 7, in an average month about two in three children spent time in urban green spaces (69%). Smaller proportions visited places in the countryside (35%) or the coast (16%).

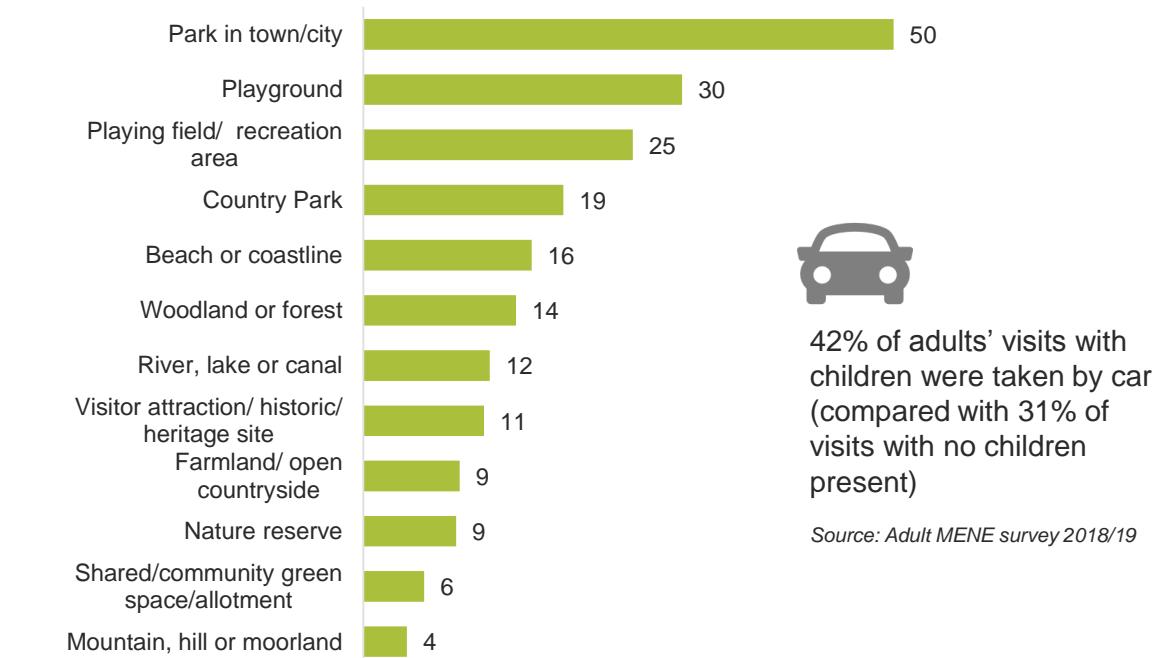
Figure 8 illustrates the specific types of place visited. Parks in towns and cities, playgrounds and playing fields were the most commonly visited places by children.

Analysis of the MENE adults' dataset showed that when adults spend time outside with children present, they tend to travel shorter distances (47% of visits with children were within a mile of home). However, adults experiencing the natural world with children were more likely to do so using their car, compared to adults without.

FIGURE 7 Where children visited in the last month
(% of children under 16, 2018/19)



FIGURE 8 Places visited in last month
(% of children under 16, 2018/19)



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).

3.

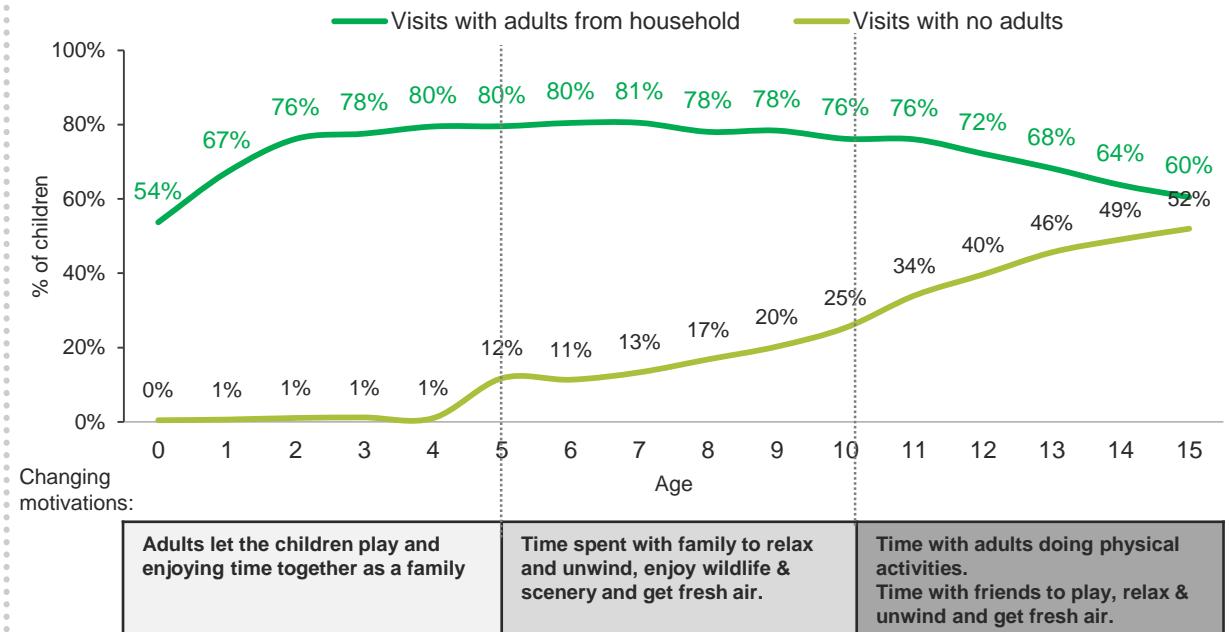
The reasons children spent time in nature were diverse and change as they get older.

Figure 9 shows that the proportion of children spending time outside with adults begins to rise as they approach school age, and then drops as they approach teenage years. The proportion of children spending time outside with no adults present increases from age 5.

The reasons reported for taking visits also change over time. For the youngest children, adults take visits to let their children play and to spend time together with family. As children reach primary school age, adults take more visits with their children to allow them to engage with nature. As children enter their teens increasing proportions take visits to do something physically active or choose to explore independently, to play, get fresh air or relax.

These results suggest that the benefits children gain from time outdoors will also change over time, moving from the health and wellbeing benefits of ‘family togetherness’^{1,2} to the cognitive benefits of physical activity in greenspace as children become more independent and spend time outdoors alone or with friends³.

FIGURE 9 Who visited outdoors with in last month and changing motivations by age of children (% of children under 16, 2018/19)



4.

Children and young people benefit from being in nature in a number of different ways.

Figure 10 illustrates the range of positive visit outcomes reported by adults who had spent time outdoors with children. While these benefits relate to the adult, they are relevant given the high proportion of outdoor visits taken by children that are moderated by parents.

The strongest levels of agreement related to enjoyment, feeling calm and relaxed and revitalised.

Learning about nature was reported as a positive outcome for over half of adults spending time outside with children (56% overall), which is much higher than the proportion of adults spending time outside without children (31%).

Adult motivations for children's time outside varied depending on the age of the child. Figure 11 shows motivations for their child to enjoy wildlife or gain an interest in nature highest while children were in the pre-teen, primary school age groups. This pattern mirrors previous MENE research asking children directly to measure connection with nature⁴.

FIGURE 10 Positive outcomes for adults of spending time in nature with children
(% of visits taken with children in party, MENE adult survey 2018/19)

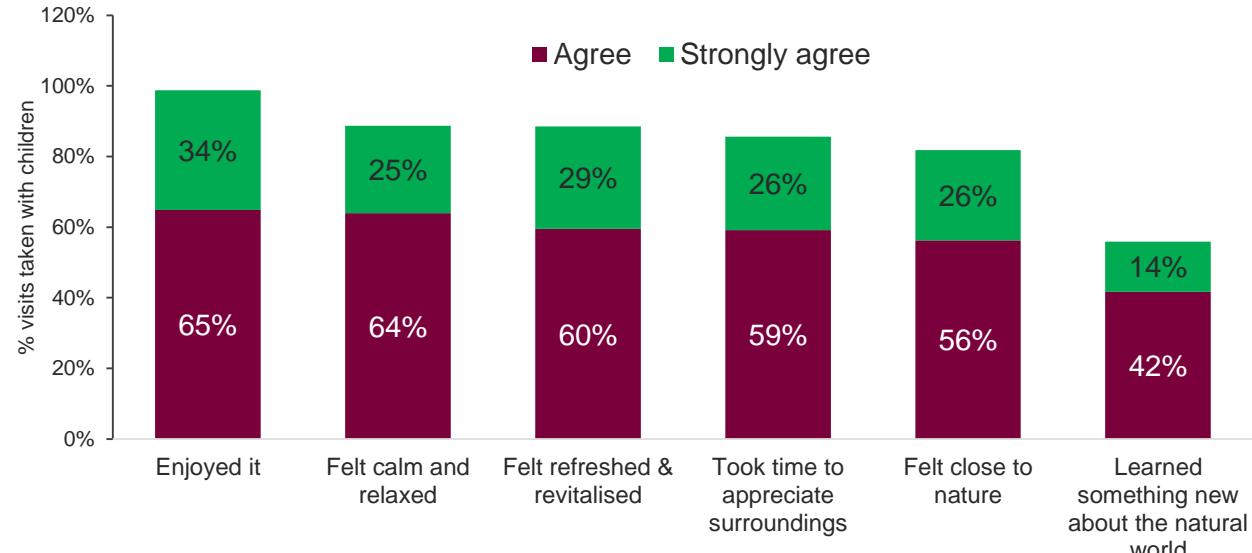
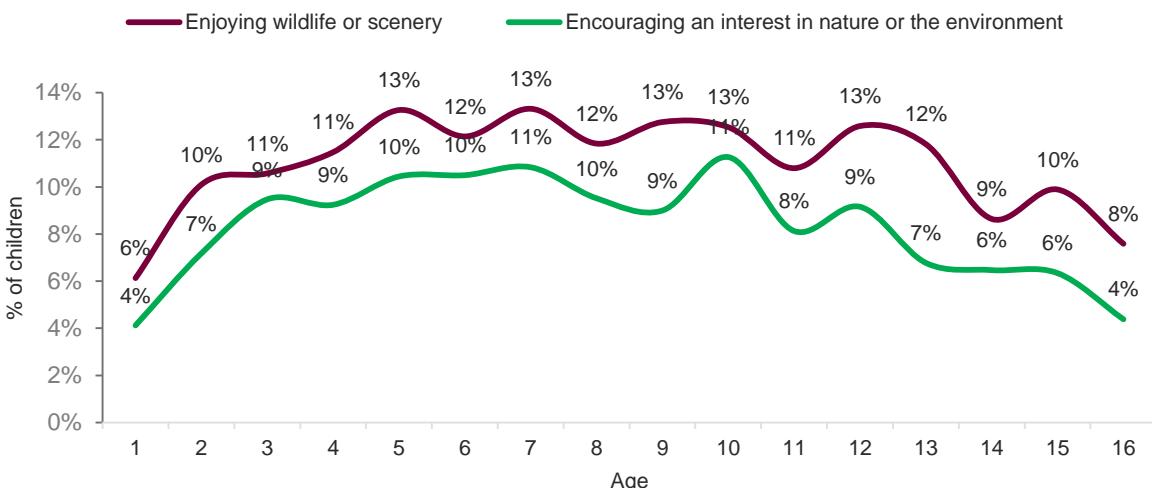


FIGURE 11 Visits taken to enjoy or encourage interest in nature or the environment
(% of children under 16, 2018/19)



5.

Since 2013/14, there has been a decline in proportion of children spending time outside without adults present.

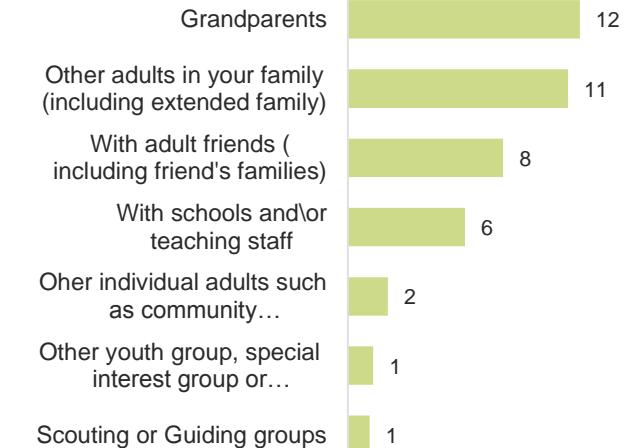
In an average month over 2018/19, a third of children (32%) had spent time outside with adults not resident in their household. Figure 12 shows these tend to be grandparents or extended family. In an average month, 6% children spent time outside with their school.

Figure 13 shows a decline over time in the proportion of children taking visits with grandparents, particularly for children aged 12 and under.

Figure 14 shows that the decline in children spending time outdoors with their friends for children aged 10 and over.

FIGURE 12 Visits taken with adults not from household and with no adults present
(% of children under 16, 2018/19)

Other adults visited with:



Who with on visits with no adults:

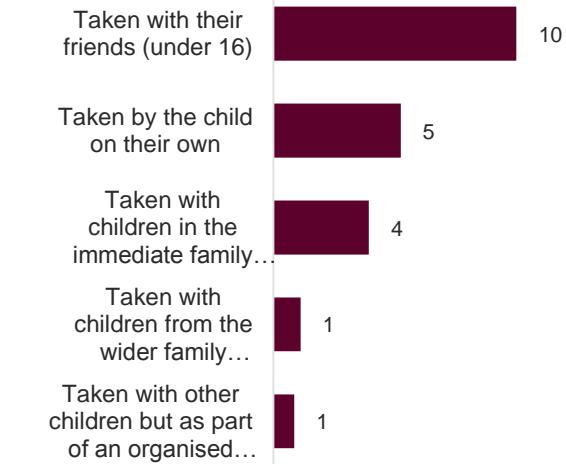
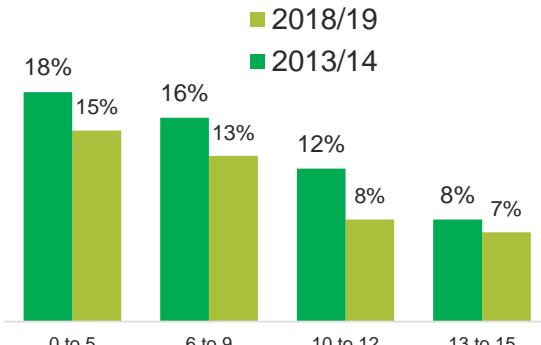
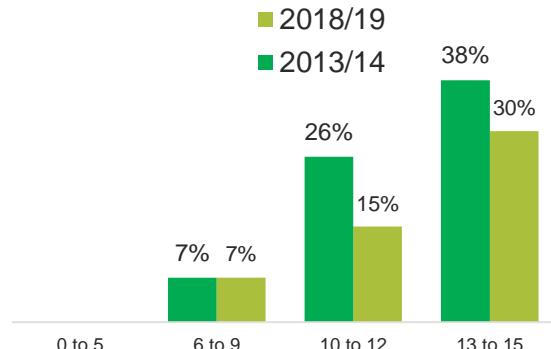


FIGURE 13 Children spending time outdoors with grandparents by age
(% children, 2013-14 to 2018-19)



NE6/10 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 14 Children spending time outdoors with friends and no adults present by age
(% children, 2013-14 to 2018-19)



6.

Parents, guardians and other family members are an important influence on children's engagement with nature.

Figure 15 shows that children's time outside is strongly moderated by adults: – where adults tend to spend time outside regularly, children in the home spend time outside regularly, and vice versa.

Figure 16 illustrates the wide range of reasons adults provided for taking visits to the outdoors with their children. The most frequently cited reasons related to play, getting fresh air and spending time together as a family.

The close relationship between the behaviours of adults and their children has a number of implications. To address the reasons for children not taking visits regularly requires a wider view of the barriers to visiting amongst the whole family including both the adults and children.

FIGURE 15 Frequency of visits by children

(% of children under 16, 2018/19)

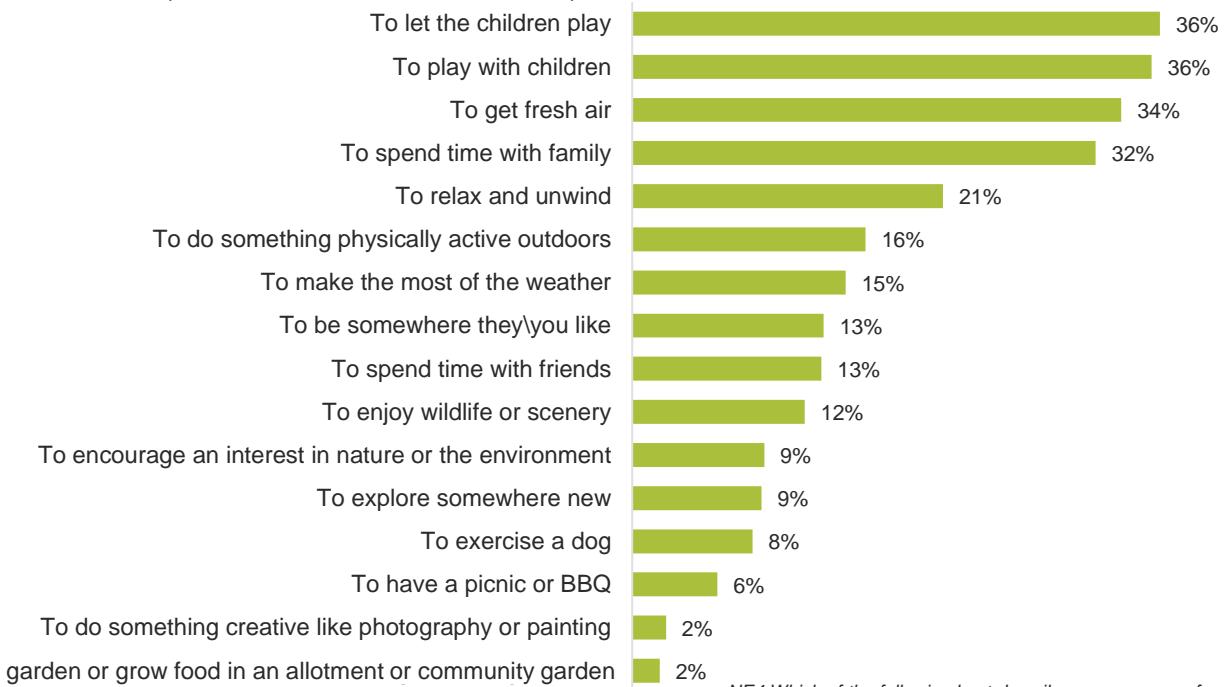


In household where adults visit the outdoors at least weekly: 80% of children also visit at least weekly



In households where adults visit the outdoors less than once a month: 61% of children also visit less than once a month

FIGURE 16 Adult's reasons spending time outdoors with the children who live in their household (% of children under 16, 2018/19)



NE4 Which of the following best describes your reasons for taking these visits? percentages total over 100% as children may have visited more than one type of place).



There's inequality in relation to children's engagement with the natural environment

7.

There's a substantial difference in the numbers of children regularly spending time outside between the most affluent and most deprived areas of the country.

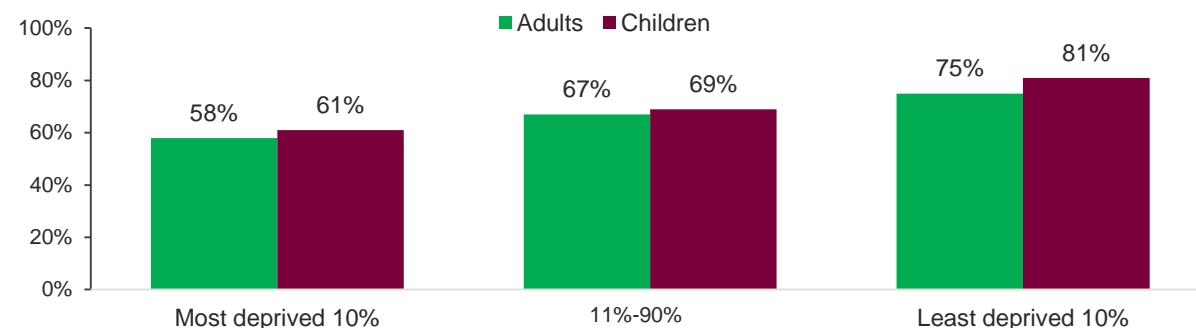
MENE responses were analysed in relation to on the basis of the Index of Multiple Deprivation⁵.

Adults and children living in the most deprived areas were less likely to spend time outside frequently than those living in more affluent areas (Figure 17). There's a 20 percentage point difference in children spending time outside every week between the most affluent and most deprived areas.

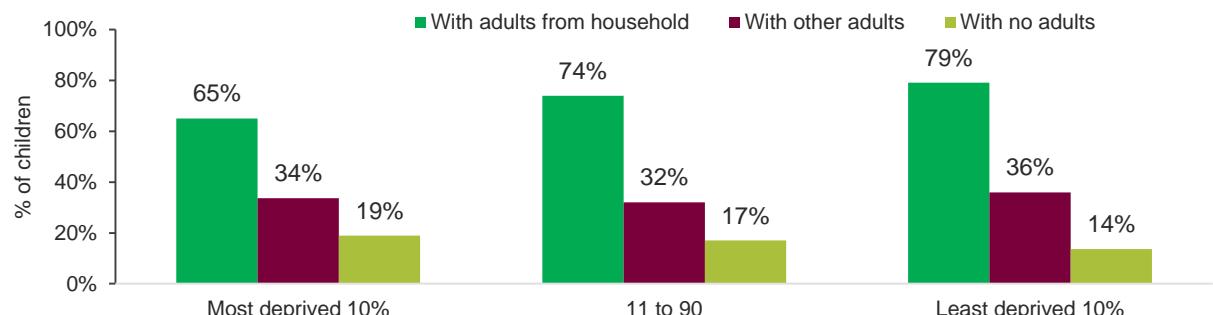
Children living in the most deprived areas were less likely to spend time outside with adults and more likely to spend time outside than those living in more affluent areas.

A lower proportion of children living in the most deprived areas visited urban greenspace, the coast and the countryside compared to more affluent areas. However, Children living in the most deprived areas were more than twice as likely to spend time in urban greenspaces than the countryside (62% versus 30%) – a much higher ratio than in more affluent areas.

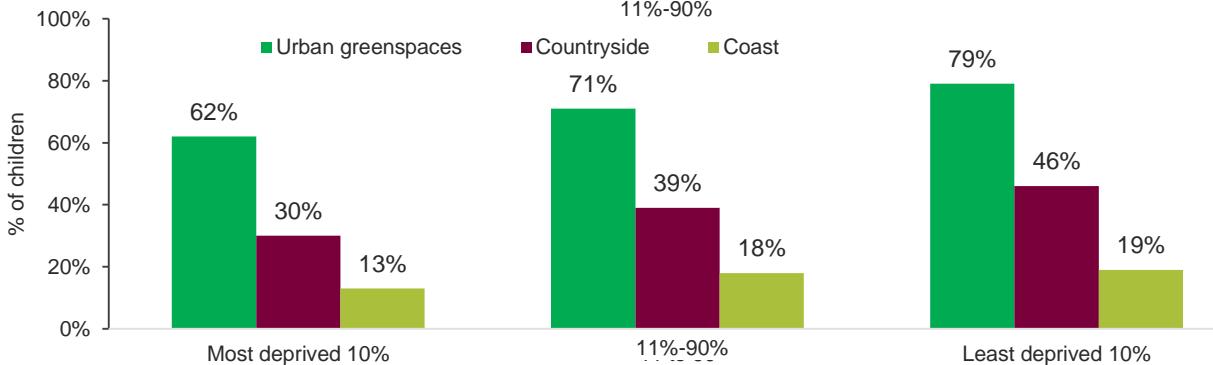
FIGURE 17 Proportion of children and adults spending time outside at least once a week by Index of Multiple Deprivation (% children and % adults, 2018/19)



Any visits in last month – who visits were taken with:



Any visits in last month- places visited:



8.

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

In 2018/19, 70% of children from a white background spent time outside once a week, compared to 56% of children from black, Asian and ethnic minority backgrounds (Figure 18).

The sample size is sufficient to support robust analysis, grouping children from all black backgrounds and all Asian backgrounds. It was insufficient for robust analysis for any other ethnic minority groups.

Figure 19 shows that the proportion of children using urban greenspaces in an average month was higher for children from black backgrounds, than white or Asian backgrounds. Children from white backgrounds were much more likely to spend time in the countryside or the coast.

Motivations for visit taking also varied with a higher proportion of children from Asian backgrounds spending time outside to spend time with family or friends. Children from black family backgrounds were more likely to take visits for reasons linked to play.

Time spent in natural environment is shaped by a range of social and cultural factors, inequalities in access and barriers of exclusion. Further research is needed to explore these factors and understand variations across different ethnicities.

Figure 18 Proportion of children spending time outside at least once a week by ethnicity (% children under 16, 2018/19)

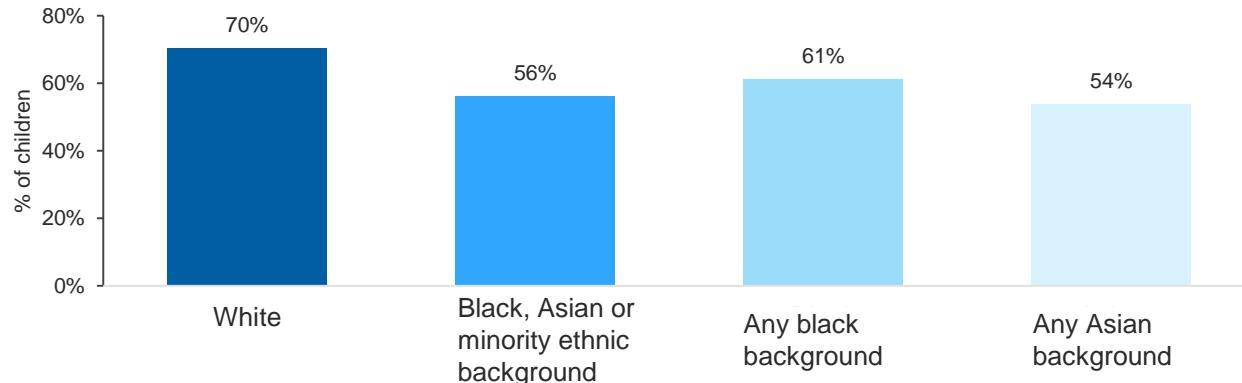
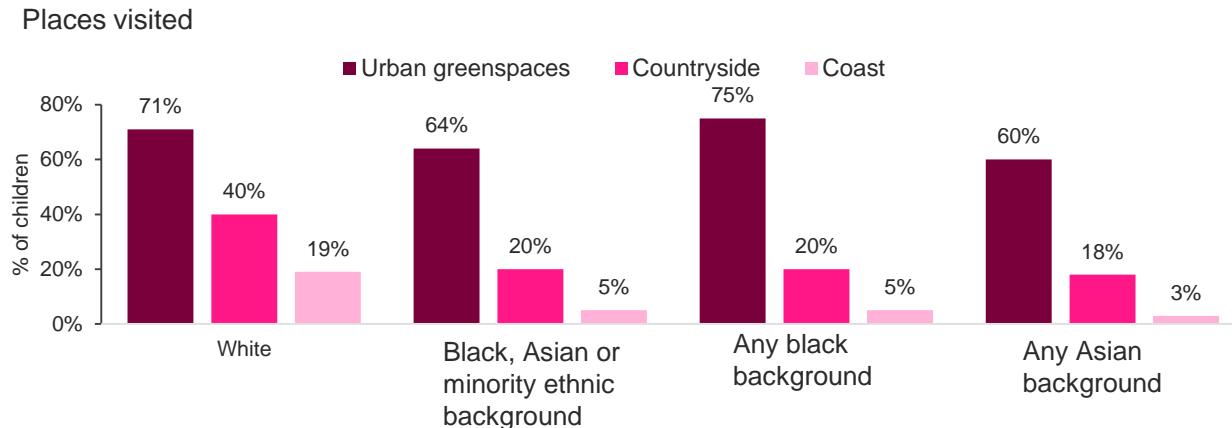


Figure 19 Places visited by children in the month prior to the survey by ethnicity (% children under 16, 2018/19)



9.

How often children spend time outside and where they visit varies by English region.

The frequency by which children spend time outside varies across the country (Figure 20). In 2018/19, children living in the Yorkshire and Humber region were the most likely to have spent time outdoors during the previous month. Children living in the North East were the least likely.

Figure 21 shows the types of place children visited in each region. Urban greenspaces were the most common place visited by children in all regions; with the highest proportions of children in Yorkshire and the Humber and the South East. Half of all children in Yorkshire and the Humber and the South West visited the countryside in the average month. The South West and the North East had the highest proportion of children spending time at the coast.

To some extent these variations reflect the types of outdoor places ‘available’ in each region (e.g. the South West has the longest coastline⁶). Other factors such as the socio-economic profile of residents of each region may also have an effect.

Further analysis (not shown on chart) has found further variations including higher levels of visit taking with grandparents amongst children in the North of England (NW, NE and Yorkshire & Humber combined). Levels of visiting with friends but no adults was highest in the South West but lowest in London.

Figure 20 Proportion of children spending time outside with adults in last month by region (%) children under 16, 2018-19)

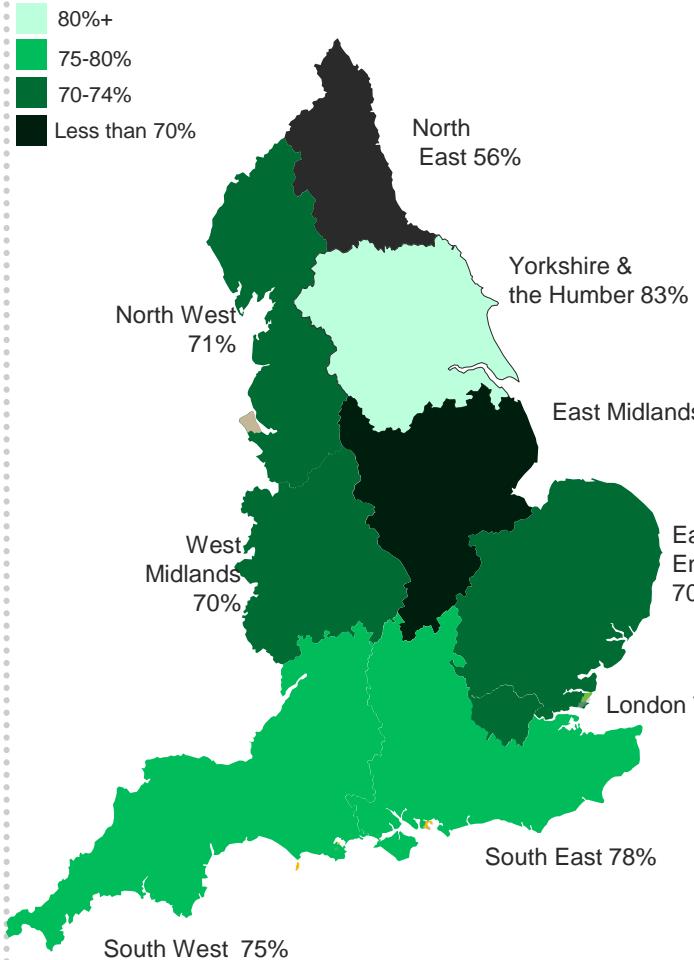


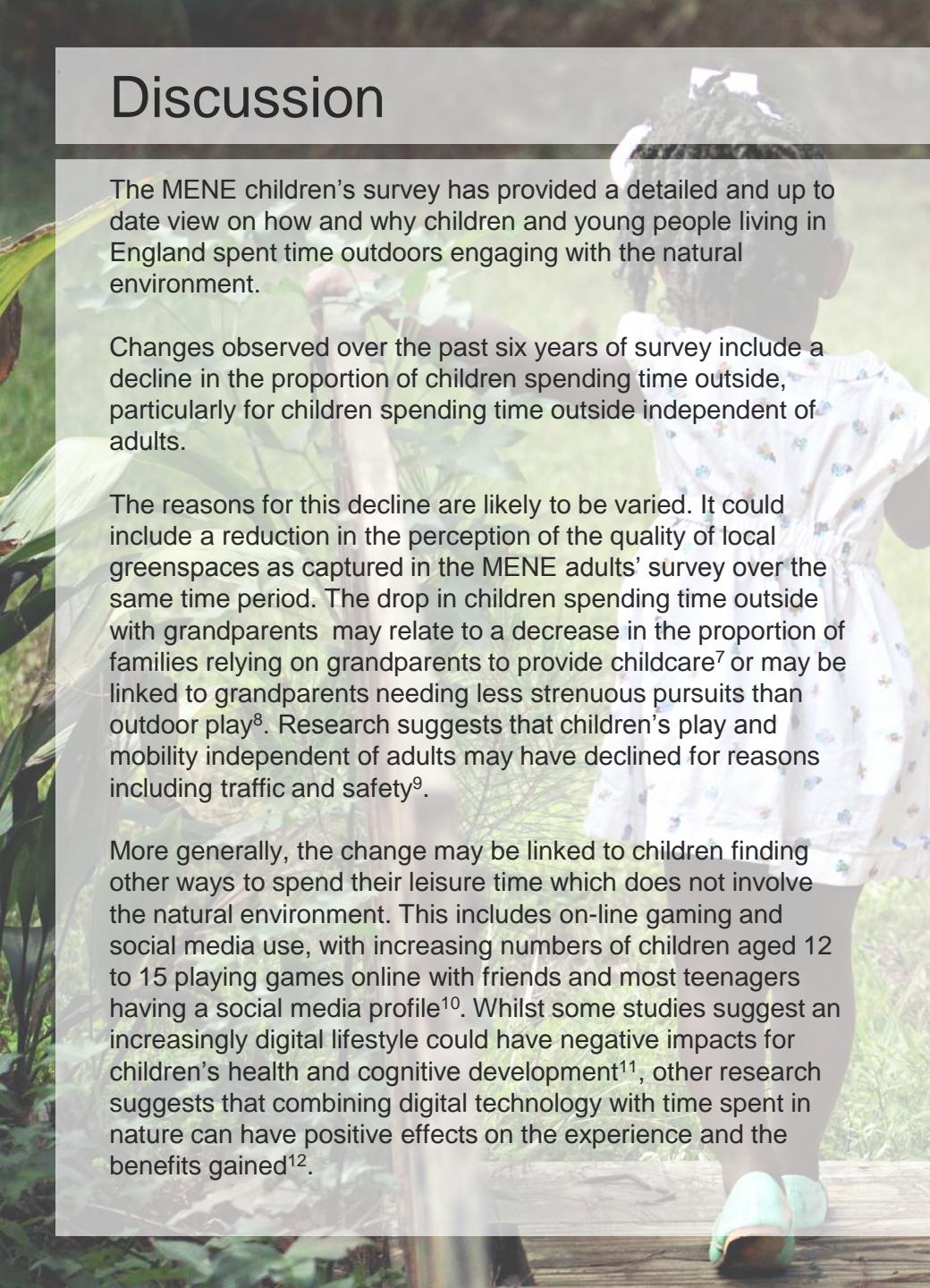
Figure 21 Places visited by children in the month prior to the survey by region (% children under 16, 2018/19)





Discussion

Discussion

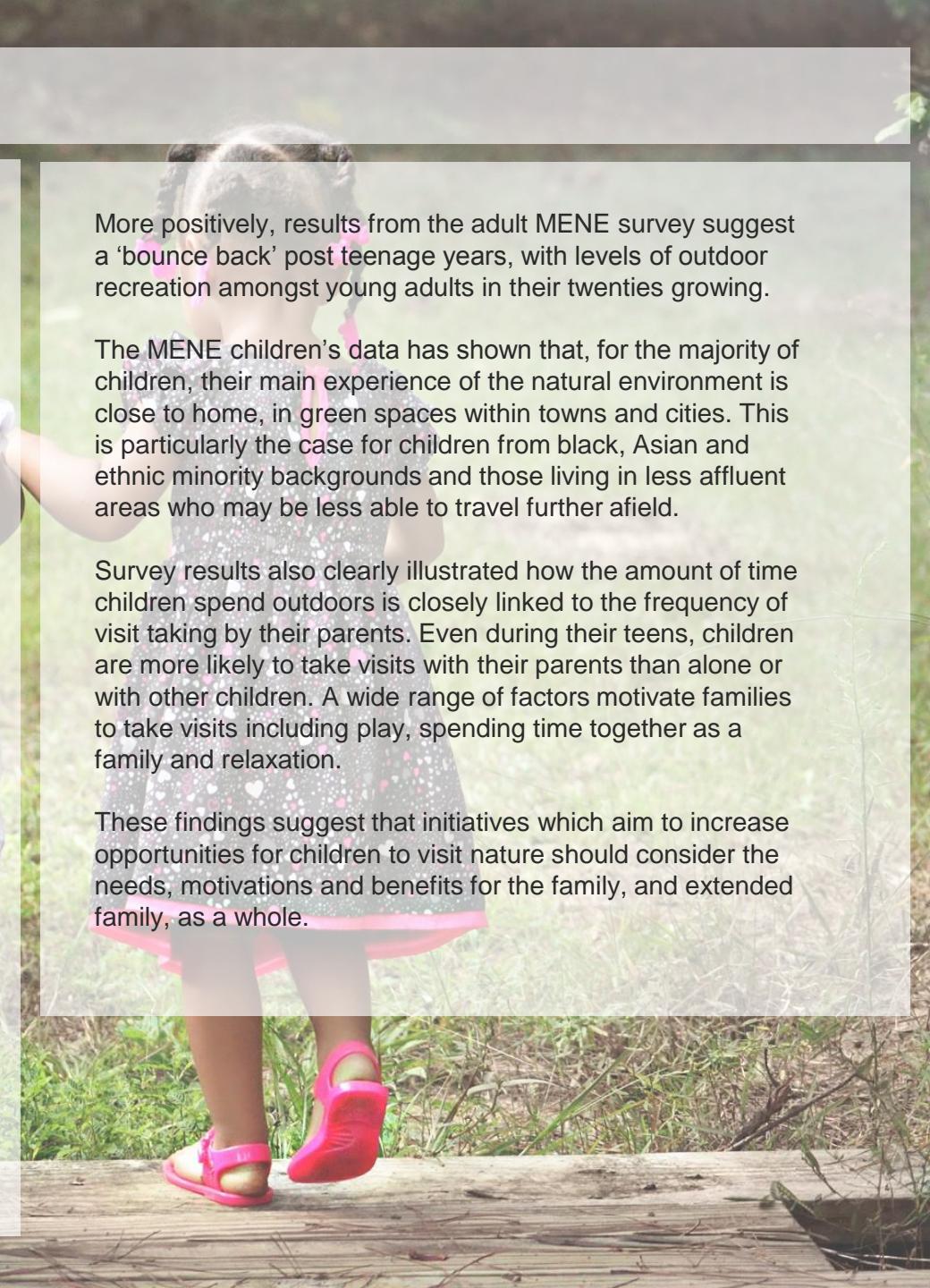


The MENE children's survey has provided a detailed and up to date view on how and why children and young people living in England spent time outdoors engaging with the natural environment.

Changes observed over the past six years of survey include a decline in the proportion of children spending time outside, particularly for children spending time outside independent of adults.

The reasons for this decline are likely to be varied. It could include a reduction in the perception of the quality of local greenspaces as captured in the MENE adults' survey over the same time period. The drop in children spending time outside with grandparents may relate to a decrease in the proportion of families relying on grandparents to provide childcare⁷ or may be linked to grandparents needing less strenuous pursuits than outdoor play⁸. Research suggests that children's play and mobility independent of adults may have declined for reasons including traffic and safety⁹.

More generally, the change may be linked to children finding other ways to spend their leisure time which does not involve the natural environment. This includes on-line gaming and social media use, with increasing numbers of children aged 12 to 15 playing games online with friends and most teenagers having a social media profile¹⁰. Whilst some studies suggest an increasingly digital lifestyle could have negative impacts for children's health and cognitive development¹¹, other research suggests that combining digital technology with time spent in nature can have positive effects on the experience and the benefits gained¹².



More positively, results from the adult MENE survey suggest a 'bounce back' post teenage years, with levels of outdoor recreation amongst young adults in their twenties growing.

The MENE children's data has shown that, for the majority of children, their main experience of the natural environment is close to home, in green spaces within towns and cities. This is particularly the case for children from black, Asian and ethnic minority backgrounds and those living in less affluent areas who may be less able to travel further afield.

Survey results also clearly illustrated how the amount of time children spend outdoors is closely linked to the frequency of visit taking by their parents. Even during their teens, children are more likely to take visits with their parents than alone or with other children. A wide range of factors motivate families to take visits including play, spending time together as a family and relaxation.

These findings suggest that initiatives which aim to increase opportunities for children to visit nature should consider the needs, motivations and benefits for the family, and extended family, as a whole.

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