



Hold My Hand Hear Me out!

**We don't just want to be told what to do.
We want to be understood.**

The Hear Me Out competition was launched by Hold My Hand to create a safe space for children and teenagers to express what's really on their minds, without judgement, fear or correction. In a world where young people are often overwhelmed but unheard, we wanted to give children and teens a moment that was about listening, really listening.



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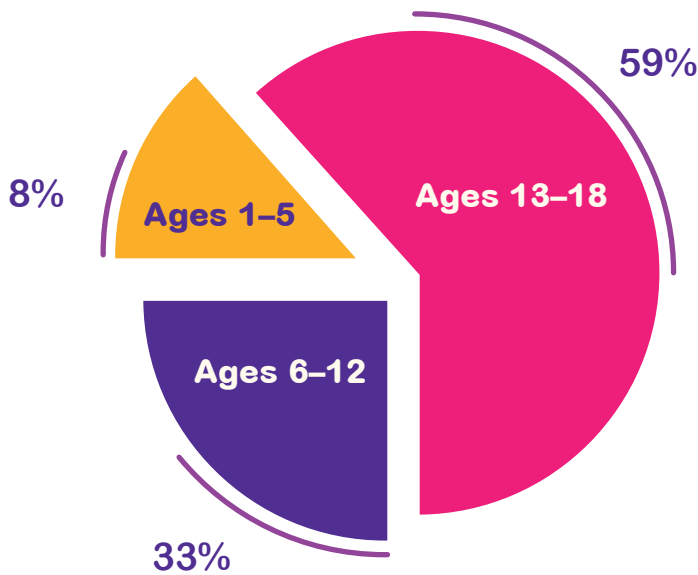
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**hold
my
hand**

Action for Children and Teens

351 Submissions



Rank	Province	% of Total
1	GP	32.6%
2	KZN	16.0%
3	WC	10.5%
4	LP	10.2%
5	MP	9.6%
6	NW	7.3%
7	EC	7.0%
8	FS	4.9%
9	NC	2.0%
Total		100%

“Hear Me Out” What South African Children and Teens Want Adults to Know

In homes, classrooms and WhatsApp chats across South Africa, young people are saying something loud and clear:

“We don’t just want to be told what to do. We want to be understood.”

In a world where young people are often overwhelmed but unheard, we wanted to give children and teens a moment that was about listening, really listening.

Their answers, shared through letters, songs, videos, poems, stories, voice notes and drawings, remind us just how urgent it is for adults to be present with care, curiosity, and consistency. We are carrying their words forward into our communities and into the rooms where decisions are made and futures are shaped. This is what they told us, in their own words:

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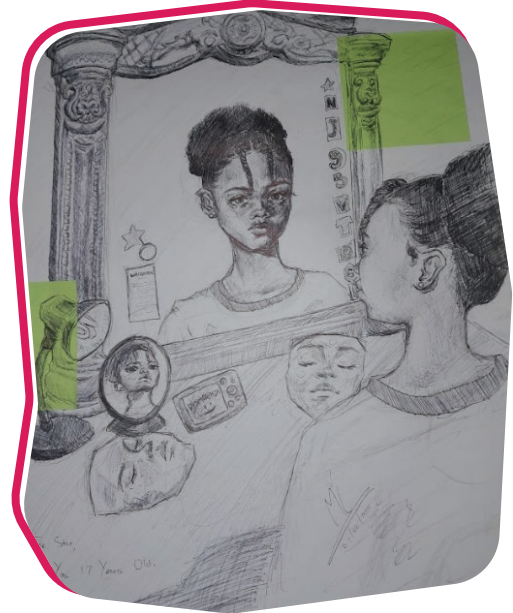
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“To be seen is to be known.”

So many entries shared this thread: to be seen by the adults around them: beyond behaviour, beyond marks, beyond their mistakes.

- * “To be seen is to be known, or so they say.” 15
- * “You’re doing better than you think,” her mom said. Liv didn’t believe her. Not yet. But she slid her phone face-down under her pillow anyway. 18
- * “Please listen to your kids and hear their side of the story.” 18
- * They aren’t asking for perfection. They’re asking for presence. 14



“We are not just moody. We’re struggling.” 14

Mental health, anxiety, depression, and trauma, featured in nearly every piece.

- * “Trapped in emotions no one sees, we scream, cry, and ache while pretending we’re fine.” 15
- * “Sometimes I feel like I’m drowning... what if I’m not good enough?” 15
- * “Rarely, I ponder if I’m just like those typical teenagers in movies... It’s funny how memories twist into bad dreams.” 15
- * “She even tried to take her own life four times... Her situation affected me too – I was anxious and worried about her all the time.” 18

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“We are stuck in the middle.”

Many described being caught between expectations and exploration, especially teens feel “too old” for play, “too young” for autonomy.

- * **“We’re stuck between childhood and adulthood. It hurts each time we’re excluded because we’re ‘too old for this’ and ‘too young for that’.”** 15
- * **“Perhaps we’re not monsters, but rather a typical teenager who’s still figuring our entire life and existence out?”** 15

“We’re tired of being compared.”

Repeatedly, young people asked adults to stop comparing them to others.

- * **“Stop comparing me with other children.”** 16
- * **“Let me grow at my own pace. I’m not my cousin, I’m me.”** 16



“Social media is not a break, it’s pressure.”

Digital life came up again and again, especially from children and teens facing online anxiety, bullying, and pressure to perform.

- * **“There was no ‘break’ from school, or people, or yourself.”** 18
- * **“You carried it in your pocket, felt it every time the screen lit up or didn’t.”** 18

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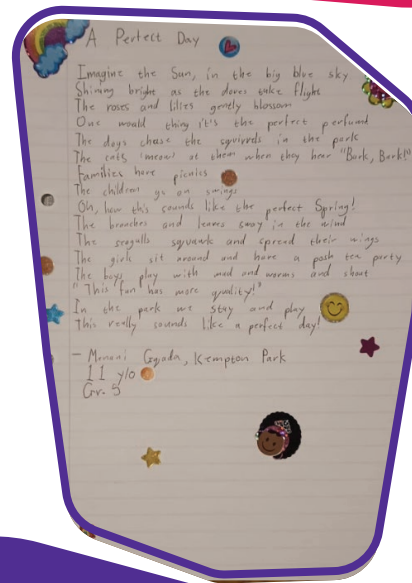
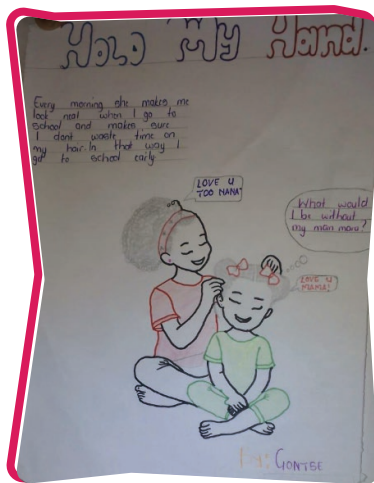
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“We’re dealing with trauma, not just mood swings.”

For some, the challenges go far beyond peer pressure or moodiness. They are living through violence, rejection, grief and more, often in silence.

- * “Her mom was super strict... She believed what others said more than what my friend said herself.” 18
- * “She got beat up for small things. She even tried to take her own life four times.” 18



“Love lives in the small things.”

Not all entries were heavy. Some celebrated love shown through little daily rituals, showing us that healing also happens through small, consistent care.

- * “My mom writes me little notes to take to school every day. The one she wrote on a star made me feel really special.” 10
- * “I drew me and my mom, and she's gently styling my hair... She's showing me love and preparing me for the day ahead.” 14
- * “If I were the president... I would say, ‘You are loved,’ every day to kids who feel a little lost.” 7

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Key Insights

The messages are clear and repeated:

- * Mental health is urgent. Children and teens are struggling silently.
- * Young people are asking to be seen, not corrected.
- * Digital life adds invisible pressure.
- * They want small acts of love more than grand speeches.
- * Expression matters. This competition gave them something many never had: permission to speak freely.

Hear Me out!

**“Don’t silence me because I’m young.
I have something to say.”**



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