



Growing Up in New Zealand

# Now We Are Twelve

Life in early adolescence

## Supplementary material for *Now We Are 12: Relationships with Parents, Peers, and Special Adults*

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## 1. Summary

This document describes the supplementary material for Snapshot 9: Relationships, written for the 12-year data collection wave (DCW). It includes a description of each of the parent, peer, and special adult relationship tools, and includes tables showing our analyses with respect to key demographic variables (gender, ethnicity, household structure and area level deprivation).

A summary of the *Growing Up in New Zealand* study and 12-year data collection wave including collection, methodology and cohort description can be found in the [Introductory](#) & [Methodology](#) reports.

The Relationships report examines the networks of social and familial relationships of 12-year-olds in Aotearoa New Zealand. It investigates who young people interact with and how they experience aspects of their relationships with them, including trust and communication. To gain a better understanding of how young people are supported through these networks, it is crucial to investigate their impact on the health and wellbeing outcomes of young individuals. Before delving into the intricate dynamics of various means of support and their collective contribution to the wellbeing of young people, it is necessary to comprehend the patterns of relationships within the specific context of Aotearoa New Zealand.

We address four main questions:

1. How do young people experience relationships with their parent(s) (perceived levels of trust and communication with parents and guardians), and which young people are more likely to experience stronger relationships?
2. How do young people experience peer relationships (perceived levels of trust and communication with peers), and which young people are more likely to experience stronger relationships?
3. How many young people have one or more special adults in their lives (other than a parent or guardian) that they often spend time with, what are their relationships to these support people, and which young people are more likely to report having a special adult in their lives?
4. By combining 1, 2 and 3, what are the relational networks experienced by young people at 12 years of age, and are there groups of young people who experience networks in similar ways?

## 2. Description of measures

### Parent-child relationship tool

To measure young people's experiences of their relationships with their parents or guardians, we used a validated 8-item tool that comprises the Trust & Communication scales drawn from the People in My Life measure (PIML) (1). The PIML instrument was developed to obtain 10- to 12-year-old children's self-reports of their relationships to parents, peers, teachers and school, and neighbourhood (2). To the best of our knowledge, this tool has not previously been used in New Zealand, and there is little understanding of the applicability of this tool in a multi-cultural context such as New Zealand.

In the lead up to these questions, young people read: "These questions are about your parents or caregivers – the people who look after you the most. This might be one parent if you are mainly looked after by one person in your family (e.g., Dad or Aunty), or both parents if you are normally looked after by two or more people (e.g., Mum and Grandma)." Despite providing this clarity, we acknowledge that young people may have interpreted this set of questions in different ways. While they were asked to answer each item with respect to their "parent(s)", for some this will have meant their biological parent(s), for others this will have meant the caregiver who looks after them the most. Furthermore, there will inevitably be disparities in how a young person experiences their relationship with each of their parents (if they have two). However, we believe young people at 12 years of age understand the idea of a global model of trust thus can combine their answers to respond holistically about both parents.

Young people answered eight questions (Table 1), including "I trust my parent(s)" and "My parent(s) accept me as I am". Each question used a scale from 1-4, where 1 indicated "almost always true", 2 = "often true", 3 = "sometimes true", 4 = "almost never true". The Parent-child relationships score was created by summing their answers to all eight items. Lower scores therefore indicated that a young person answered more positively about their experience of the relationship.

Table 1. Description of the parent-child relationship questions.

Question Introduction	Question	Response Options
<p>These questions are about your parents or caregivers – the people who look after you the most. This might be one parent if you are mainly looked after by one person in your family (e.g. Dad or Aunt), or both parents if you are normally looked after by two or more people (e.g. Mum and Grandma).</p> <p>How much do you agree with each of these sentences?</p>	I trust my parent/s.	
	My parent/s accepts me as I am.	1. Almost always true;
	I can count on my parent/s to help me when I have a problem.	2. Often true;
	My parent/s pays attention to me.	3. Sometimes true;
	My parent/s understands me.	4. Almost never true;
	I talk with my parent/s when I have a problem.	99. I don't know
	If my parent/s knows that something is bothering me, they will ask me about it.	
	I share my thoughts and feelings with my parent/s.	

This tool can be used to assess two subscales: trust (questions 1-5), and communication (questions 6-8). The trust subscale score was created by summing responses to each of the questions 1-5, and the communication subscale score was created by summing responses to each of the questions 6-8.

## Peer relationships tool

To measure young people's experiences of their relationships with their peers, we chose a validated tool adapted by LSAC (Growing Up in Australia) from the Peer Attachment Scale (originally from the Inventory of Peer and Parental Attachment, 1987 (3)). This peer relationships tool again measures two subscales – levels of perceived Trust and perceived Communication between themselves and their peers. This tool has not previously been used in the *Growing Up in New Zealand* study.

In the introduction section, young people read: "These next questions are about your friends: they might be friends at school, out of school or other children you know. For each statement, choose the number that best describes you and your friends." Young people answered eight questions (Table 2), including "My friends sense when I'm upset about something" and "My friends encourage me to talk about my difficulties". They answered each question using a scale from 1-5, where 1 indicated "almost always true", 2 = "often true", 3 = "sometimes true", 4 = "seldom true", 5 = "almost never true". A peer

relationships score was created by summing their responses to each of the eight items. Lower scores indicated that a young person answered more positively about their experience of the relationship.

Like the parent-child relationship tool, the peer relationships tool can be used to assess two subscales: trust (questions 3-6), and communication (questions 1, 2, 7 & 8). The trust subscale score was created by summing responses to each of the trust questions, and the communication subscale score was created by summing responses to each of the communication questions.

Table 2. Description of the peer relationships questions.

Question Introduction	Question	Response Options
<p>These next questions are about your friends: they might be friends at school, out of school or other children you know.</p> <p>For each statement, choose the number that best describes you and your friends.</p>	My friends sense when I'm upset about something.	
	My friends encourage me to talk about my difficulties.	1. Almost always true;
	I trust my friends.	2. Often true;
	My friends listen to what I say.	3. Sometimes true;
	My friends respect my feelings.	4. Seldom true;
	I feel my friends are good friends.	5. Almost never true;
	If my friends know something is bothering me, they ask me about it.	99. I don't know
	I tell my friends about my problems and troubles.	

## Information about the “Presence of a special adult” tool

For this DCW, we also captured the presence or absence of a ‘special adult(s)’, support person or mentor. Many young people at 12 years of age have a special adult in their lives – someone who is not their parent or caregiver. This person can be a relative such as an aunt or grandmother, or a member of their wider community, such as a teacher or coach. To be able to compare our results with international research, we used a modified version of the Presence of a Very Important Adult scale (4). Exact wording of this scale can be found in Table 3.

As well as 10 initial categories, we offered young people the opportunity to answer, “some other adult, please tell us”. We then coded these answers into a new category if there were sufficient responses. In total, there were 15 categories of special adult that were selected by young people and used in the analyses. Five additional categories included ‘Stepparents’, ‘Nanny or Babysitter’, ‘Friends’, ‘Godparents’ and ‘Other’.

Table 3. Description of the special adult questions.

Question Introduction	Question	Response Options
<p>This section is all about your friends and the people that are important in your life. First, we would like to know about any special adults you might have in your life right now. A special adult is someone who does a lot of good things for you but is NOT your parent or guardian. For example someone (a) who you look up to and encourages you to do your best, (b) who really cares about what happens to you, (c) who influences what you do and the choices you make, and (d) who you can talk to about personal problems.</p>	Right now in your life, is there a special adult (not your parent or guardian) who you often spend time with?	1. Yes, I have one or more special adults 0. No 99. I don't know
	How many special adults do you have in your life right now?	Please tell us how many _____ (open text box) [Number range 1-10]
	Who are the special adults in your life right now? (Choose all that apply, but please be sure to choose only those adults who are special adults. Remember, this does NOT include your parents or guardians)	1. Grandparent 2. Aunt or Uncle 3. Brother or Sister (Adult over 18 years of age) 4. Other relative or whānau 5. Neighbour 6. Teacher 7. Counsellor 8. An adult mentor you are matched with through a program 9. My parent's friend 10. Coach or activity leader 11. My friend's parent 97. Some other adult, please tell us: _____



### 3. Analytic sample

To determine the analytic sample for the cross-sectional analyses at aged 12, we selected only participants who indicated that they were living in NZ at the time of the survey. This was to provide targeted insights relevant to those who were currently living in NZ.

#### Strategy to deal with missing data

To examine the mean summed scores for each of the parent-child relationship and peer relationships tools, only participants who answered all items had their score calculated (we removed all missing data, resulting  $n = 4,199$  for parent-child relationships;  $n = 3,744$  for peer relationships). This was also the case when we calculated mean scores for the Trust and Communication subscales, for each of the tools. However, when we described item-level questions, we reported the percentages of participants who answered each item and removed missing data for that item only.

When reporting the presence of a special adult, initial statistics reported how many young people answered “Yes”, “No” or “I don’t know” to this question. However, international research using this tool has not typically included the option “I don’t know” for descriptive analyses, therefore all subsequent analyses using the special adult variable considered the responses “I don’t know” as missing ( $n = 760$ ).

### 4. Reliability of the tools

#### Internal consistency of the parent-child relationship tool

In this study, the internal consistency of the parent-child relationship tool was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. The reliability coefficient for this tool was found to be  $\alpha = 0.89$  (95% CI [0.87, 0.88]), indicating acceptable internal consistency.

#### Internal consistency of the peer relationships tool

In this study, the internal consistency of the peer relationships tool was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. The reliability coefficient for this tool was found to be  $\alpha = 0.88$  (95% CI [0.86, 0.88]), indicating acceptable internal consistency.

## 5. Creating cut-off scores

To understand how parental, peer and special adult relationships were experienced together, we created a collapsed, binary ('less close'/'strong') parent-child relationship variable, and a collapsed, binary ('less close'/'strong') peer relationships variable, to explore in combination with whether they had a special adult in their lives (yes/no).

The summed scores of the parent-child relationship variable were not normally distributed, therefore we were unable to create a binary parent-child relationship variable using a cut-off score defined by one or two standard deviations from the mean. Instead, we defined our cut-off score based on the following response option combinations. We combined responses 1-3 ('almost always true', 'often true' and 'sometimes true') to indicate that the experienced relationship with a young person's parent(s) was 'strong'. To do this, we used a cut-off summed score of 23 or less to indicate 'strong'. The remaining summed scores of 24 or more – those who typically answered 'almost never true' – were categorised as having experienced 'less close' relationships with their parent(s).

Similarly, as the summed scores of the peer relationships tool were not normally distributed, we defined our cut-off based on response options. We combined responses 1-3 ('almost always true', 'often true' and 'sometimes true') to indicate that the experienced relationship with a young person's peers was 'strong'. This equalled a cut-off summed score of 23 or less to indicate 'strong'. The remaining summed scores of 24 or more – those who typically answered, 'seldom true' and 'almost never true' – were categorised as having experienced 'less close' relationships with their peers.



## 6. Additional tables for young people's experiences of relationships with their parent(s)

Table 4: Parent-child relationship scores, by gender

	<b>Mean parent-child relationship score (SD)</b>
Cisgender boy ( <i>n</i> = 1,941)	11.7 (4.0)
Cisgender girl ( <i>n</i> = 1,609)	12.3 (4.5)
Transgender/non-binary/unsure ( <i>n</i> = 649)	14.4 (5.2)

Table 5: Parent-child relationship scores, by ethnicity grouping

	<b>Mean parent-child relationship score (SD)</b>
Māori ( <i>n</i> = 899)	12.6 (4.6)
Pacific ( <i>n</i> = 651)	12.6 (4.7)
Asian ( <i>n</i> = 602)	12.9 (5.1)
MELAA/Other ( <i>n</i> = 142)	12.1 (4.3)
Sole European ( <i>n</i> = 2,170)	12.0 (4.2)

Table 6: Parent-child relationship scores, by household composition

	<b>Mean parent-child relationship score (SD)</b>
Single parent families ( <i>n</i> = 680)	12.8 (4.6)
Two or more parent families ( <i>n</i> = 3,476)	12.3 (4.4)
Other families ( <i>n</i> = 21)	12.5 (6.0)
Living with extended family ( <i>n</i> = 467)	12.9 (4.8)
Not living with extended family ( <i>n</i> = 3,710)	12.3 (4.4)
Living with non-kin ( <i>n</i> = 86)	13.6 (5.6)
Not living with non-kin ( <i>n</i> = 4,091)	12.3 (4.5)
Living in intergenerational household ( <i>n</i> = 365)	12.9 (4.8)
Not living in intergenerational household ( <i>n</i> = 3,812)	12.3 (4.4)

Table 7: Parent-child relationship scores, by area-level deprivation (NZDEP18)

Area level deprivation		Mean parent-child relationship score (SD)
	NZDEP18 Quintile 1 (n = 1,012)	11.9 (4.2)
	NZDEP18 Quintile 2 (n = 927)	12.3 (4.4)
	NZDEP18 Quintile 3 (n = 816)	12.3 (4.4)
	NZDEP18 Quintile 4 (n = 673)	12.2 (4.4)
	NZDEP18 Quintile 5 (n = 690)	13.3 (5.1)

## 7. Additional tables for young people's experiences of peer support

Table 8: Peer relationship scores, by gender

	Mean peer relationships score (SD)
Cisgender boy	17.7 (5.8)
Cisgender girl	15.3 (5.9)
Transgender/non-binary/unsure	18.0 (6.7)

Table 9: Peer relationship scores, by ethnic grouping

	Mean peer relationships score (SD)
Māori (n = 797)	17.1 (6.3)
Pacific (n = 582)	16.1 (5.9)
Asian (n = 547)	16.4 (6.0)
MELAA/Other (n = 124)	16.8 (6.3)
Sole European (n = 1,925)	16.9 (6.1)

Table 10: Peer relationship scores, by household composition

	Mean peer relationships score (SD)
Single parent families ( $n = 595$ )	17.0 (6.0)
Two or more parent families ( $n = 3,115$ )	16.8 (6.1)
Other families ( $n = 14$ )	17.4 (6.2)
Living with extended family ( $n = 418$ )	16.6 (6.1)
Not living with extended family ( $n = 3,306$ )	16.8 (6.1)
Living with non-kin ( $n = 76$ )	15.8 (5.3)
Not living with non-kin ( $n = 3,648$ )	16.8 (6.1)
Living in intergenerational household ( $n = 326$ )	16.8 (6.2)
Not living in intergenerational household ( $n = 3,398$ )	16.8 (6.1)

Table 11: Peer relationship scores, by area-level deprivation

Area level deprivation	Mean peer relationships score (SD)
NZDEP18 Quintile 1 ( $n = 937$ )	16.9 (6.2)
NZDEP18 Quintile 2 ( $n = 824$ )	16.9 (6.0)
NZDEP18 Quintile 3 ( $n = 744$ )	16.8 (6.0)
NZDEP18 Quintile 4 ( $n = 600$ )	16.5 (6.2)
NZDEP18 Quintile 5 ( $n = 573$ )	16.9 (6.2)

## 8. Additional tables for young people's relationships with special adults

Table 12: Presence of special adult, by demographic characteristics

		Does not have a special adult(s)	Has a special adult(s)	Don't know
<b>Gender</b>	Cisgender boy ( <i>n</i> = 2,047)	829 (40.5%)	910 (44.5%)	308 (15.0%)
	Cisgender girl ( <i>n</i> = 1,678)	506 (30.2%)	858 (51.1%)	314 (18.7%)
	Transgender/non-binary/unsure ( <i>n</i> = 736)	242 (32.9%)	356 (48.4%)	138 (18.8%)
<b>Ethnicity</b>	Māori ( <i>n</i> = 972)	302 (31.1)	518 (53.3%)	152 (15.6%)
	Pacific ( <i>n</i> = 722)	227 (31.4%)	400 (55.4%)	95 (13.2%)
	Asian ( <i>n</i> = 642)	260 (40.5%)	263 (41.0%)	119 (18.5%)
	MELAA/Other ( <i>n</i> = 150)	42 (28%)	73 (48.7%)	35 (23.3%)
	Sole European ( <i>n</i> = 2,258)	822 (36.4%)	1048 (46.4%)	388 (17.2%)
<b>Household Structure</b>	Sole parent families ( <i>n</i> = 744)	262 (35.2%)	373 (50.1%)	109 (14.7%)
	Two or more parent families ( <i>n</i> = 3,670)	1,301 (35.4%)	1,731 (47.2%)	638 (17.4%)
	Other families ( <i>n</i> = 24)	<10 (29.2%)	11 (45.8%)	<10 (25.0%)
	Living with extended family ( <i>n</i> = 512)	170 (33.2%)	260 (50.8%)	82 (16.0%)
	Not living with extended family ( <i>n</i> = 3,926)	1,400 (35.7%)	1,855 (47.2%)	671 (17.1%)
	Living with non-kin ( <i>n</i> = 92)	26 (28.3%)	46 (50.0%)	20 (21.7%)
	Not living with non-kin ( <i>n</i> = 4,346)	1,544 (35.5%)	2,069 (47.6%)	733 (16.9%)
	Living in intergenerational households ( <i>n</i> = 404)	141 (34.9%)	195 (48.3%)	68 (16.8%)
	Not living in intergenerational households ( <i>n</i> = 4,034)	1,429 (35.4%)	1,920 (47.6%)	685 (17.0%)

<b>Area level deprivation</b>	NZDEP18 Quintile 1 ( <i>n</i> = 1,063)	401 (37.7%)	495 (46.6%)	167 (15.7%)
	NZDEP18 Quintile 2 ( <i>n</i> = 980)	366 (37.3%)	435 (44.4%)	179 (18.3%)
	NZDEP18 Quintile 3 ( <i>n</i> = 852)	304 (35.7%)	399 (46.8%)	149 (17.5%)
	NZDEP18 Quintile 4 ( <i>n</i> = 717)	222 (31.0%)	377 (52.6%)	118 (16.5%)
	NZDEP18 Quintile 5 ( <i>n</i> = 767)	247 (32.2%)	387 (50.5%)	133 (17.3%)

Table 13: Special adult composition, by ethnic grouping

	<b>Māori</b>	<b>Pacific</b>	<b>Asian</b>	<b>MELAA/ Other</b>	<b>Sole European</b>
Grandparent ( <i>n</i> = 1,381)	368 (71.0%)	255 (63.7%)	154 (58.6%)	41 (56.2%)	692 (66.0%)
Aunt or uncle ( <i>n</i> = 1,079)	302 (58.3%)	263 (65.8%)	125 (47.5%)	39 (53.4%)	467 (44.6%)
Teacher ( <i>n</i> = 686)	162 (31.3%)	126 (31.5%)	99 (37.6%)	26 (35.6%)	334 (31.9%)
My parent's friend ( <i>n</i> = 558)	136 (26.3%)	73 (18.3%)	62 (23.6%)	25 (34.3%)	311 (29.7%)
Other relative or whānau ( <i>n</i> = 520)	158 (30.5%)	146 (36.5%)	55 (20.9%)	18 (24.7%)	208 (19.9%)
My friend's parent ( <i>n</i> = 454)	99 (19.1%)	63 (15.8%)	49 (18.6%)	19 (26.0%)	261 (24.9%)
Brother or Sister (Adult over 18 years of age) ( <i>n</i> = 419)	131 (25.3%)	137 (34.3%)	49 (18.6%)	15 (20.6%)	142 (13.6%)
Coach or activity leader ( <i>n</i> = 270)	59 (11.4%)	45 (11.3%)	35 (13.3%)	10 (13.7%)	139 (13.3%)
Neighbour ( <i>n</i> = 158)	36 (6.9%)	19 (4.8%)	17 (6.5%)	>10 (9.6%)	91 (8.7%)

## 9. Young people's networks of social and familial support

Table 14: Combined relationships

Peer relationships <i>n</i> (%)					
Special adults			'Less close'	'Strong'	Total
No special adults	Parental relationships	'Less close'	20 (0.6%)	21 (0.7%)	41 (1.3%)
		'Strong'	202 (6.6%)	1026 (33.3%)	1228 (39.9%)
Yes, I have special adult(s)	Parental relationships	'Less close'	11 (0.4%)	21 (0.6%)	32 (1.0%)
		'Strong'	201 (6.5%)	1577 (51.2%)	1778 (57.7%)
	Total cohort		434 (14.1%)	2645 (85.9%)	3079 (100%)

Red = no strong relationships

Orange = 1 strong relationship

Green = 2 or 3 strong relationships

## 10. Relevance for policy and practice

See [Snapshot 9: Relationships](#) for a discussion of the relevance of these analyses for policy and practice. Below are additional and/or related concerns that have been addressed to support policy priorities.

- *Children need to feel loved and supported – are they receiving support from significant others? (Wellbeing strategy) (5)*

**Ninety-two percent** of young people reported experiencing two or three strong relationships with significant others, including parents, peers, and special adults. A **further 7.6%** of young people are receiving support from at least one significant other.

- *Where do young children find positive, stable, genuine care and support? (Wellbeing strategy) (5)*

If we consider the three types of relationship studied in this DCW, most young people are sourcing positive relationships from both their parent(s) and peers (85%, *n* = 2,603). The single largest group of individuals in our cohort experienced strong relationships with both peers and their parent(s) and are

drawing on a relationship with one or more special adults in their lives (51%,  $n = 1,577$ ). Of those who reported having a special adult(s) in their lives, many young people reported having grandparents (65%), uncles and aunts (51%), teachers (32%), parent's friends (26%) and other relatives or whānau (24%).

- *Do young people have strong relationship with parents? (Office of the Children's Commissioner priorities)*

Overall, young people generally experience positive relationships with their parent(s). Most young people have strong relationships with their parent(s), with 96.9% of the cohort reporting that their parents accept them 'often' or 'almost always'.

- *Are young people able to trust people in their families? (Ministry of Justice priorities)*

Young people answered one question specifically about trusting their parent(s): 93.8% of young people told us that it was 'almost always true' or 'often true' that they trust their parent(s). Overall, young people experienced high levels of trust (mean = 1.4, SD = 0.5,  $n = 4,199$ ) with their parent(s). Further, many young people identified grandparents, aunts, uncles, adult siblings, and other family and whānau as special adults – people they can count on and trust.

- *Are young people able to trust people external to the family? Are they aware of support, and do they feel safe? (Ministry of Justice priorities)*

Many young people have a special, non-parental adult in their lives that they can count on for support. Amongst these adults, young people commonly identified teachers, parent's friends, friend's parents, coaches, and mentors. Just under half (47.6%) of young people said they had one or more adults in their lives who they look up to and talk to about personal problems, someone who encourages them to do their best, and cares about what happens to them and the choices they make.



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