GENERATION ACTION.

How to unleash the potential of children and young people to take positive action and create a better world for all.

White Paper

[Brand logo]

global action plan

DIRT IS GOOD PROJECT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The world around us is changing faster than ever. The ways we have been living have led to major threats to our natural world upon which we depend. Alongside the ecological crisis we are also living through rising social division and inequality which is taking its toll on our well-being. We have it within our power to create a fairer, kinder society and to repair and restore our natural world. We must come together to take more action, or it is the young generation who will experience the most serious consequences of inaction. The question is – how?

{The brand] has always been about supporting parents to unleash their children's potential. We have long stood for the power of dirt and messy play in helping children learn and grow. In this changing context and faced with rising challenges, we want to continue to understand how to act as an ally to parents and credibly support young people's development and well-being. That's why [the brand] has been working with environmental charity Global Action Plan to conduct new research in the United Kingdom and Turkey to explore young people's values, how they perceive the values of others, how this affects their well-being, and the action they take on causes they care about. This research was conducted with children and young people aged 7 to 18. For the rest of this paper we will refer to this group as young people.

Research was also conducted by research and analytics firm, Edelman Data & Intelligence, to understand the effects of this changing landscape on parents. Exploring their hopes and concerns for the role their children can play in creating positive change and understanding where they need support in equipping their children to get stuck into the issues that matter to them – no matter how big or challenging they may seem. Both studies are reported in this white paper and provide valuable insights for designers of social and environmental action programmes for young people.

What we found

Parents care about the world around them but can sometimes feel overwhelmed and anxious with only one in four feeling optimistic when thinking about the world their child will grow up in. Three in five are feeling that the turbulent world we live in today is negatively affecting their child's well-being and consequently, they want to protect their children from major global issues. In the absence of better options, many parents understandably adopt an apparent 'shielding' strategy in an attempt to insulate their children from the realities of today.

But despite the shielding strategies of the parents and adults around them, young people are all too aware of the realities of the social and environmental changes we are facing. They perceive the lack of engagement from adults around them as a lack of concern, with almost half of the young people we surveyed telling us that they did not think it was important to adults to care for nature.

Children and young people care deeply about the planet and other people and they feel worried about their futures. Almost all the young people we surveyed said that caring for nature (89% in the UK, 96% in Turkey) and other people (96% in the UK, 94% in Turkey) is important to them. Benevolence (kindness) is their most highly prioritised value, but they don't think others share their compassionate values. Fears about not fitting in and being labelled with unhelpful stereotypes prevent them from expressing their true values to their peers. This then perpetuates the myth that other young people don't care, which limits the amount of social and environmental action they are prepared to take.

We found that children and young people want to take action, but they are frustrated at the apparent lack of concern they see around them. They feel isolated in their concerns and when they don't feel, see, and believe that others care too, they don't take as much action as they would like to.

This misperception that most others don't care when they actually do is known as the **'values-perception gap'.** It has been identified before in adults, and this is the first study that has found it to exist in children and young people. Our research has shown that the values-perception gap is present in children as young as 11 but significantly widens as young people get older. By age 14-16 they start to believe that other young people are more self-interested than they are compassionate. But we also found that this simply isn't true; most young people are compassionate and this misperception has damaging consequences.

Results from Global Action Plans survey with 916 young people and focus groups with 74 young people found that:

85%*

of young people prioritised **compassionate values over self-interested values** but the percentage of young people who believed others would prioritise compassionate values decreased as they got older.

By age 16-18

67%**

of young people **thought other young people** would prioritise **self-interested values over compassionate values**

When young people have a "values-perception gap", they were found to:

1. **Have lower emotional well-being.**
2. **Feel more worried about the future.**
3. **Be less likely to act on the issues they care about.**

This limits them from reaching their potential as Changemakers and as responsible citizens.

*86% in the UK and 84% in Turkey. **48% in the UK and 86% in Turkey.

[The brand] and Global Action Plan's hypothesis is that when young people take an active role, alongside others, to improve the world around them, their compassion as individuals and as a group grows. This normalises taking action, helps the values-perception gap to narrow, and reinforces the normality of caring. This benefits young people's wellbeing and agency, which inspires further action to improve the well-being of society and the planet.

Through the Dirt Is Good Project, we want to support young people to take action and in doing so, we want to unleash their long-term potential to do good. [The brand] has always advocated for the 'power of dirt' in benefitting children's development. This new research shows that getting stuck in together and showing how much they care, has even more potential to unleash positive impact – on children, their communities and the planet.

Our solution

Preventing the values-perception gap from widening, and working to close it when it has, may be the key to unleashing the potential of young people to do good and to promoting well-being in a changing world.

We hypothesize that **collective action, grounded in compassionate values**, is key to narrowing the values-perception gap. This narrowing will unlock more action, by more people, on the social and environmental challenges we face.

Collective action is a reinforcing behaviour: Once young people start taking action together, they see how united in compassion they are with others, which increases how normal and habitual it feels to take action. Collective action, when grounded in compassionate values, can, we believe, snowball fast.

Through the Dirt Is Good Project, we will give young people the opportunities, skills and confidence to take action on the things they care about, giving them the freedom to drive the changes they want to see. As a result, young people will be better equipped to live in a world in flux and better able to cope with the challenges that lie ahead.
They will be powered up to take action – together – to create a better world.

The Dirt Is Good Way is an approach to youth social and environmental action that champions compassionate values, normalises collective action and aims to close the values-perception gap. It brings together the insights from this new research with the best of current practice to develop the Changemakers of the future. It sets out the principles that underpin **how** we will power up young people to take collective action and create a better world for all.

The Dirt Is Good Project is a global programme of initiatives underpinned by **The Dirt Is Good Way**. The Dirt Is Good Project sets out **what** we will be doing to support young people to take action together on the social and environmental causes they care about.

The Dirt Is Good Way is built on four principles that any practitioner working with young people can use to create activities:

Principle 1: UNITED IN COMPASSION

helping young people to feel that they are **not alone** in caring and wanting to act.

Principle 2: GET STUCK IN

recognising that **actions speak louder** than words and that getting active on a cause is fun.

Principle 3: EVERYONE HAS A ROLE TO PLAY

ensuring young people can **find a changemaking role** that allows them to fulfil their potential.

Principle 4: ON A JOURNEY

acknowledging that change doesn't always happen fast, that it is OK to make mistakes and that **reflection is an important part of taking action.**

Our ambition is to help young people take positive action on the social and environmental issues they care about. **Our objective** is to support the long-term development of the next generation to reach their potential to do good.

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INTRODUCTION

The issues that young people care about require us to come together now to solve them. They are concerned about climate change and feeling anxious about their futures. They care about economic, racial and gender inequality and feel angry about the lack of progress on these issues.[1] They have grown up at a time when society has become increasingly polarised and divided and now, they are living through a global pandemic.

Our rapidly changing world is taking its toll on children and young people's mental well-being. Data from the World Health Organization shows that, for a variety of reasons, adolescent mental health has been declining in many countries between 2014 and 2018.[2] Globally, anxiety and depression are now among the leading causes of illness and disability among adolescents;[3] one in four adolescents report some form of mental distress[4] and young people are now the loneliest of all age groups in some countries.[5]

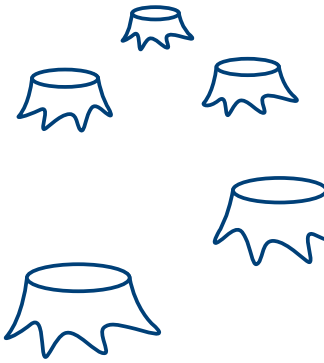
Research shows that when it comes to helping young people to cope with the social and environmental issues around them, the best antidote to anxiety is action.[6] To build young people's hope, agency and belief that change can happen, we need to help them to take action – together – on the causes they are concerned about. And we need to do it now. The COVID-19 pandemic has, if anything, reinforced their desire to help drive positive change in their communities and around the world.[7] They have seen how quickly change can happen; they have experienced cleaner air, lower carbon emissions and wildlife returning. They have seen how kind and cooperative people can be. They know that a post-pandemic society can be better than the one that preceded it and they want to help create it.

It is vital that we respond to young people's demands to act, to show we are addressing their concerns and setting them up to continue to act on them in the future.

Tackling climate change and protecting the environment remains young people's top concern, and with good reason.[8] Ecological and climate breakdown are not future threats, they are in progress. All parts of the world now endure more extreme weather events and natural disasters that hit harder and more often than ever before. The International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) have warned that in order to avoid the worst consequences of climate change, we need to halve greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 and reach net zero emissions by 2050.[9] In addition, we need to re-think our relationship with the natural world. Our over-use of resources over the last 50 years have contributed to over 1 million species now being at risk of extinction[10] and our destructive relationship with nature has been linked to the emergence of COVID-19 and an increasing risk of future pandemics.[11]

Young people are frustrated and anxious about what is happening to our natural world and the lack of action to protect it.[12] It is young people who will feel the harshest consequences in their lives if action does not happen quickly enough. Some impacts are already inevitable[13] and they will likely face more resource shortages, food shortages and refugee crises which will also create political instability and challenges to social cohesion. Their average carbon emissions will need to be 8 times less than their grandparents[14] and the transformations required to mitigate the worst environmental impacts will reach every aspect of how they will live and work. From how they eat, travel, and consume goods to how their entire global economy will be organised. They are worried and scared about their futures and we need to work with them to protect our one and only planet.

> "I feel worried because I think the environment and nature and forests will just disappear altogether, so you've only got pets."
>
> Hugo, age 7-11, UK participant



The solutions to the climate and ecological crisis are inextricably linked to the solutions for the other causes that young people care about. Ecological breakdown is disproportionately caused by the wealthiest countries and the wealthiest people, but its impacts are felt most severely by the most socially and economically disadvantaged.[15] For example, a rise of 2 degrees Celsius would put half of the population of Africa at risk of undernourishment.[16] It is also women who commonly face the highest burden of the impacts of climate change in the poorest communities.[17] It is clear that the climate crisis cannot be tackled without also tackling economic, racial and gender inequality. As the 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) demonstrate,[18] the solutions to our ecological crisis also require us to create a fairer, more just and equal society.

> "We are making the environment worse day by day. Everybody harms nature unconsciously"
>
> Sena, age 11-13, Turkish participant

The most important component of all programmes supporting young people to deal with the ecological crisis and global issues is agency.[19] They must be treated as active agents of change rather than victims. This helps them feel more in control, more hopeful and more resilient. Taking action to create a better world is also linked to many contributors to better well-being, both in terms of feeling good, and experiencing more meaning and purpose in life. Neurological evidence shows that helping behaviours activate the reward centres of the brain and make us feel happier.[20] Behaving in compassionate ways has been associated with a range of subjective-well-being outcomes.[21] Doing good feels good, and it can also help young people develop a sense of meaning and purpose which is strongly related to higher well-being.[22]

We must show young people that we take the causes they care about seriously and equip them with the skills and characteristics they will need in this evolving world. **We want to power up young people all over the world to work together on the things they care about – empowering them to create the world they want to see.**

> **"As a generation we're more exposed to the damage the human race has caused and what we can do to help".**
>
> Kyle, age 16-18, UK participant

In this paper we explore a new route to unlocking action in young people and helping improve their well-being: by closing the **values-perception gap.** We outline the key insights behind the new **Dirt Is Good Project** which offers recommendations to parents, educators and thought leaders with an interest in youth action. We explore not only how young people can be powered up to become **Changemakers** now, but how to nurture long-term values that will keep them acting on the issues they care about long into the future, and how doing this will also foster better mental well-being.

HOW THE VALUES-PERCEPTION GAP INFLUENCES YOUNG PEOPLE'S ACTIONS AND THEIR WELL-BEING

To power up action in young people and help them develop into lifelong Changemakers, we need to start by understanding what drives and shapes their behaviours over the long term. What makes them care about environmental and societal issues? What makes this concern transform into action? And what gets in the way? A large body of research shows that the things we care about and the ways that we behave are shaped by our values.[23]

1.1 What are values?

Values are our beliefs about what is important in life.[24] They inform our ideas about the kind of life we want to lead and the society we would like to live in. They spark our emotions and motivate all the actions we take.

In this paper we draw on a model of 10 universal human values developed by Professor Shalom Schwartz through an extensive body of research in over 70 countries.[25] This model is widely used in academic research to explore the full range of human values, but we specifically **focus on two opposing sets of values that have been consistently related to the levels of concern people show for social and environmental issues:**

- **Compassionate values**[a] demonstrate concern for the welfare and interests of others. This includes both caring about the well-being of those we know – our friends and family (benevolence) – and caring about the well-being of all people and of nature (universalism).
- **Self-interest values**[b] demonstrate concern for one's own interests and a desire to have higher social status, increased personal wealth and dominance over others. This is summarised as prioritising goals for power and achievement.

1.2 How do values motivate our actions?

We all value both self-interest and compassionate values to some degree but when people prioritise compassionate values over self-interest values, they think it is more important to look after other people and nature than to only care about one's own interests. Research shows that when people prioritise compassionate values they are more likely to be engaged in civic action,[26] to adopt environmentally sustainable attitudes and behaviours,[27] to be less prejudiced against other groups,[28] and take action on a wide range of social and environmental issues.[29] **Compassionate values are what drive us to take action to create a better world.**

Activating and reinforcing compassionate values is therefore an essential component of the Dirt Is Good approach – known as our **Dirt Is Good Way.** It will help us to unleash the long-term potential of young people to take positive action on the things they care about. In addition, recent research has found that we are more likely to act on our compassionate values when we think others are compassionate too.[30] It may therefore be fruitful to focus on reinforcing compassionate values with groups of people simultaneously, rather than one-by-one.

[a]Called 'self-transcendence values' in the academic literature.
[b]Called 'self-enhancement values' in the academic literature.

1.3 What influences our values?

Young people's values and behaviours are shaped by their parents during childhood, and parents continue to be influential through adolescence and well into young adulthood.[31] Children tend to hold similar values to their parents and they learn what is important to parents from what they say, but even more so from what they do.

The development of a child's values does not only happen in the home but it is influenced by the values of those in his or her wider society.[32] Schools play a very important role in the development of the values that young people will prioritise throughout their lives.[33] It is where children learn what is expected of them in wider society and helps form their perception of what is valued by others outside of their family. Schools will influence what the young person will see as normal, acceptable and desirable behaviours in the wider world.

The Dirt Is Good Project will work to support parents and educators to understand how they can nurture and reinforce the values they want their children and students to develop.

1.4 When compassionate values don't turn into action: The values-perception gap

But compassionate values don't always transform into compassionate action. Research now shows that the likelihood of us acting in line with our own compassionate values is influenced by our perceptions of what others value. A key study highlighting this phenomenon was conducted by the Common Cause Foundation in 2016.[34]

Common Cause conducted a survey of the values of a representative sample of the British public. They found that

74%

of people prioritised compassionate values

But when asked what values they felt other people in Britain held,

77%

believed that others would hold more self-interested values

Crucially, they then found that when individuals perceived **other people to be less compassionate**, they were **less likely to get involved as an active citizen themselves.**

The research into the values-perception gap gives us three key insights:

1. **Most people are compassionate.**
As historian Rutger Bregman has put it in his bestselling book *Humankind* (2020): [36] *"Most people, deep down, are decent. We want to look after each other, to have a fairer society and to protect nature."* This seems to be true regardless of nationality, ethnicity, gender, age or political persuasion. International research by Schwartz (2001) has demonstrated that compassionate values are consistently prioritised in the top three values in samples across 56 nations.[37]

2. **But most people don't think others are compassionate.**
We tend to think that others will act out of self-interest and that it is not important to them to look after each other and nature. Evidence for this mismatch between what people actually value and what others think they value has been found in adult populations in a range of cultures from Western individualist cultures like the United Kingdom (UK),[38] the United States[39] and Australia,[40] to Eastern collectivist cultures like Malaysia and China,[41] Eastern European cultures like Estonia[42] and Russia,[43] Middle Eastern countries like Israel,[44] and Latin American cultures like Brazil.[45]

3. **When we think others are less compassionate than they actually are, we act less compassionately ourselves.**
When we don't perceive other people to be compassionate, we are less likely to get involved as an active citizen and take action on social and environmental causes even when we hold compassionate values ourselves. Research has found that people who underestimate others compassionate values are less likely to vote, volunteer or join local meetings.[46] They are also more likely to feel alienated from their culture and to feel less responsible for their communities.[47]

1.5 Why do we think others are not compassionate?

The answer to this is complex and has deep roots in our culture. There are many factors in society that encourage us to think of others as self-interested, uncaring or even narcissistic. In an age of 24-hour news we are bombarded with stories of murder, corruption and terrorism, exposing us to the worst of humanity. The countless acts of kindness and mutual aid that take place every day don't get a look in because they are so ordinary that they're not considered "news".

Our broader media (social and otherwise) is mostly funded by advertising. Advertising can create the impression that conspicuous consumption is normal and that to be obsessed with appearances, status and possessions is just who we are.

Education institutions can also, perhaps unintentionally, reinforce the idea that people are self-interested. Research by the Common Cause Foundation[48] found that most people perceived that schools and universities encourage values of wealth, image and ambition more than they encourage the values of compassion and kindness. Education establishments communicate what is important to them by what they do (e.g. what they measure and reward) more than what they say. So if, for example, a school says that kindness is important to them, but only reward academic achievement, they are demonstrating that academic achievement is really more important to them than kindness.

The prevailing paradigm about human nature that frames human beings as primarily individualistic and self-interested has been prominent for a long time.[49] The founding principles of our economic system are grounded in the hypothesis that people act out of self-interest. We have been taught that evolution favours "survival of the fittest" which has fostered a culture of competition, of "winners" and "losers".

However, more recent evolutionary theorists[c] now hypothesise that humans are such a successful species because we are, in fact, super *co-operators*, not super *competitors*.[51] It is, perhaps, survival of the *friendliest*, rather than the fittest. A new wave of research is now revealing a different paradigm about human nature, one that recognises that deep down we are compassionate, cooperative, kind and keen to help others.[52] Researchers in history[53], philosophy[54], psychology[55], and education are proving it through peer-reviewed studies all over the world. Most people, deep down, **are** decent; they **do** want to help.

The coronavirus pandemic has given us a glimpse of this kinder side of human nature. Stories of neighbours helping neighbours and mutual aid groups springing up in communities that want to look after each other have come to the surface. The truth is – and the evidence shows – that most of us are more generous, helpful and selfless than we are portrayed. But it can take a catastrophe to help us see it.

A recent UK survey of 10,000 people conducted by More in Common asked respondents if they believed that *"people look out for each other more than they are just out for themselves"*.[56] The percentage of people who believed this to be true in February 2020 (before the pandemic) was just 24%. By May 2020 (at the height of the pandemic) the percentage had leaped to 62%. This provides a powerful illustration of what happens when compassionate values are activated and reinforced in society and the media.

[c]These recent evolutionary theories are not at odds with Darwin's evolutionary theory. Darwin also emphasised the importance of cooperation in increasing our evolutionary fitness.

1.6 Why does our perception of others' compassion affect how we behave?

We are less likely to **act** in compassionate ways if we do not think that others share our compassionate values. This is because our perceptions of others tell us what is normal and we behave in ways to fit in. When we don't believe that others care, we feel we are unusual and unlike others in our society. We then act in less compassionate ways because we don't want to stand out from the crowd. This is a natural human reaction. It has long been known by psychologists that people adapt their behaviour to conform to what is perceived as normal.[57]

Humans have evolved to be incredibly sensitive to what others think and will go to great lengths to avoid shame, or exclusion from others.[58] We have developed a deep fear of ostracism through thousands of years of evolution as, for the majority of human history, being shunned from the group would mean almost certain death.

This is why we so often adapt our behaviour to act in line with what we perceive as normal, even when our actions conflict quite jarringly with our personal values.[59] This can also create a vicious cycle, because when we don't act in compassionate ways for fear of looking odd, we appear to those observing us to be self-interested, even when, deep down, we are not. This serves to perpetuate the myth that most people are more self-interested than compassionate.

This growing body of research suggests that helping people to have a more accurate perception of other people's values could therefore unleash untapped compassionate action as we adapt our behaviour to fit in with new norms that are grounded in a truer picture of human nature. The groundswell of volunteering and mutual aid that sprung up during the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic took many commentators and political leaders by surprise, perhaps it shouldn't have.

THE VALUES-PERCEPTION GAP IN YOUNG PEOPLE AND HOW IT RELATES TO THEIR WELL-BEING AND ACTION ON CAUSES THEY CARE ABOUT.

Research into the values-perception gap has previously only been conducted in adults, but we hypothesised that the values-perception gap could be an important barrier to action in young people too. Adolescents are particularly sensitive to the judgement of others.[60] As children grow up and learn to socialise more outside of their immediate families, fitting in with their peers becomes of the utmost importance.

They experience strong emotional reactions to social exclusion and heightened sensitivity to their status within their peer group. So, if young people, like adults, don't perceive their peers to be compassionate and to want to take action on social and environmental causes, they may be less likely to take action themselves for fear of standing out.

[The brand] worked with environmental charity Global Action Plan to conduct new research exploring whether the values-perception gap existed in young people. And if it did, what impact it had on the action they took on issues they cared about, and on their well-being.

2.1 Our methodology

Global Action Plan surveyed 916 young people between the ages of 7 to 18 in the UK and Turkey (499 from the UK and 417 from Turkey) asking about their values, how they perceive the values of others, how this affects their well-being, and the action they take on causes they care about. Results were analysed and interpreted with support from an expert panel of academics from the fields of psychology, sociology and education. Surveys were conducted in the UK in April and May 2020 and in Turkey in June to August 2020.

Global Action Plan also conducted 16 online focus groups with 7-18 year-olds (nine in the UK and seven in Turkey) with 74 young people (39 in the UK and 40 in Turkey). Insights were gathered about the barriers and enablers to young people taking action on the causes they care about, and reasons why a values-perception gap might exist. Thematic analysis was conducted by an academic qualitative researcher to identify themes from the focus groups in both countries.[61]

Further reading:
For a full overview of the research and analysis see: Global Action Plan (2021) *United in Compassion: bringing young people together to create a better world.* Available to download at: https://www.globalactionplan.org.uk/united-in-compassion

2.2 Six key insights from the research

1. **Most young people are compassionate.** They care about both people and nature so action on social and environmental causes is important to them. But fun and self-direction are important to them too.

2. **Compassionate values go hand in hand with compassionate action,** whereas self-interest values discourage action.

3. **There is a values-perception gap between young people and their peers** but less so in younger children. It tends to get wider as they get older, particularly from age 11+.

4. **Many young people don't think that adults, businesses, politicians or world leaders are compassionate.** They are especially pessimistic about the extent to which they care for the natural world.

5. **When young people don't feel, see and believe that others are compassionate, they act less compassionately themselves, and their well-being suffers.** Young people take more action on the issues they care about when they see others care too. They also feel less anxious about the future.

6. **Young people continue to care deeply about other people and nature** despite the Coronavirus. Coronavirus has, if anything, strengthened this importance.

2.3 Key insight 1: Most children are compassionate

When asked to prioritise Schwartz's list of 10 universal values (using a children's version of the picture values scale),[61] benevolence (caring for other people) was chosen as the most important value to young people in both countries (see Figure 1 below).

Figure 1: Values prioritised by young people in the UK and Turkey

UK young people	Rank	Turkish young people
Benevolence	1	**Benevolence**
Hedonism	2	Self-direction
Stimulation	3	**Universalism**
Security	4	Hedonism
Self-direction	5	Security
Universalism	6	Stimulation
Achievement	7	**Achievement**
Tradition	8	Tradition
Conformity	9	**Power**
Power	10	Conformity

Note: *Values highlighted in GREEN are compassionate values, those highlighted in RED are self-interest values.*

Further evidence that young people prioritise compassionate values was also found:

In the UK

86% of young people prioritised **compassionate values** over self-interest values

96% said **caring for other people** was 'quite' or 'very important' to them

89% said **caring for nature** was 'quite' or 'very important' to them

In Turkey

82% of young people prioritised **compassionate values** over self-interest values

94% said **caring for other people** was 'quite' or 'very important' to them

96% said **caring for nature** was 'quite' or 'very important' to them

These results show that most young people already have the compassionate values that drive action to do good. They care about helping other people and nature and want to create a kinder, more sustainable world.

Previous research shows this is not unique to the UK and Turkey. Cross-cultural research in Germany, Italy, Poland, Bulgaria, the United States, and New Zealand found that children consistently prioritise compassionate values.[63]

> **"I'm trying every day to do something kind for the bus drivers or for some old people, or when I go to a shop, I'm trying to be kind to the people that work there".**
>
> Valeria, age 16-18, UK participant

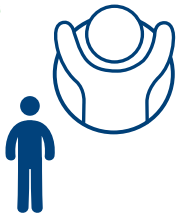
2.4 Key insight 2:
Compassionate values go hand in hand with compassionate action

In line with previous evidence, Global Action Plan's research found that compassionate values in young people were associated with compassionate action.

The more that young people prioritised compassionate values:

The more they cared for other people and nature.

The more they took action to help other people and nature.



The higher their self-efficacy that they could help people and nature (i.e. feeling they had the knowledge, skills and ability to have a positive impact, and that this impact was worthwhile)

Conversely, the more they prioritised self-interest values, the less likely they were to take action on social and environmental issues; and the less likely they were to have the knowledge skills and self-belief to act.

This finding underscores the importance of actively strengthening the compassionate values that young people already have, and being careful not to activate self-interest values that could weaken their motivation to engage in social and environmental action.

2.5 Key insight 3:
There is a values-perception gap between young people and their peers

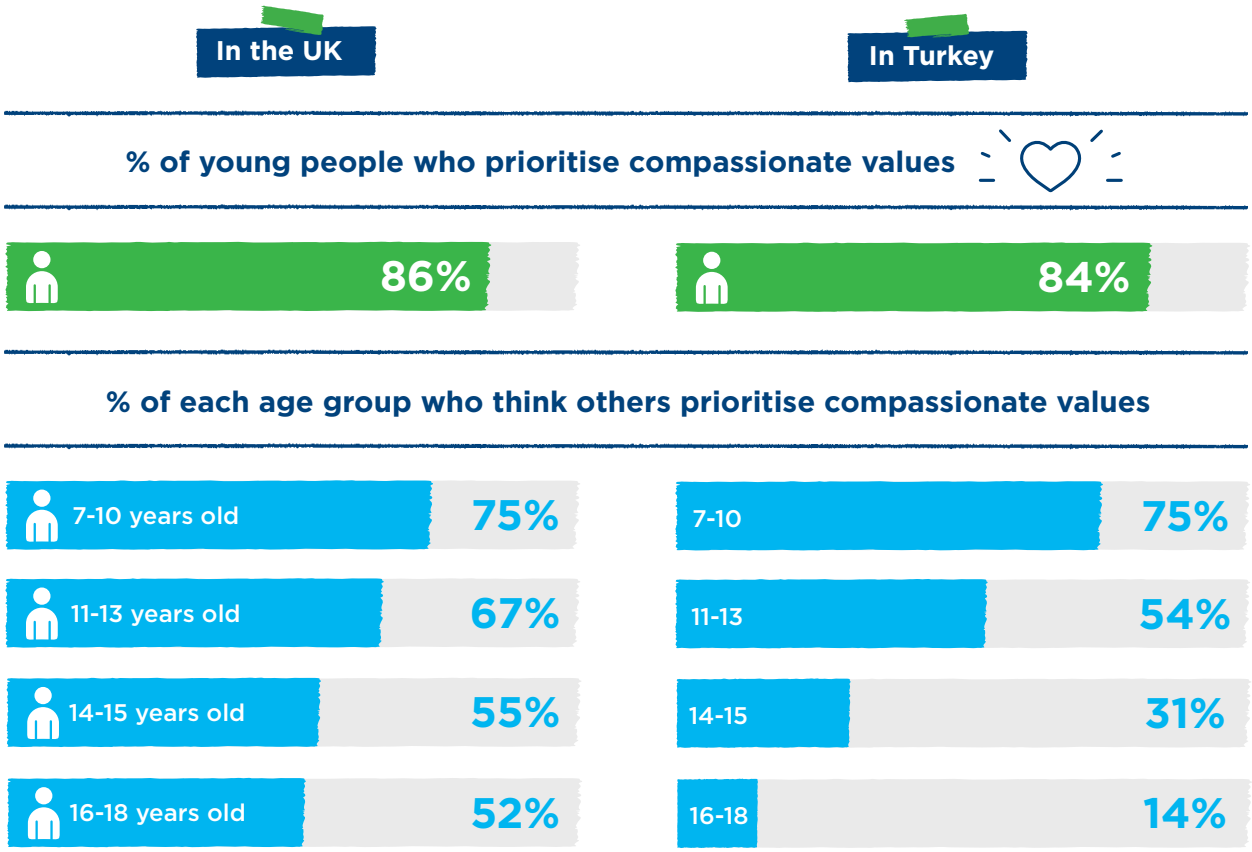
> "I've tried to persuade my friends and teach them about global warming and animals and stuff, but they don't seem to care that much".
>
> Miley, age 7-11, UK participant

To identify if there was a values-perception gap in young people, we asked participants to prioritise Schwartz's 10 values for themselves and then to do the same again as if they were another child in their country. This enabled us to compare young people's own values with their perceptions of young people's values. We looked for a values-perception gap in two ways.

First, we compared the percentage of young people who prioritise compassionate values over self-interest values to the percentage of young people who believed that other young people would prioritise compassionate values over self interest values. We found that young people of all ages under-estimated how compassionate other young people would be and that the older they got, the more they under-estimated the compassionate values of other young people.

Although 86% (UK) and 84% (Turkey) of young people actually prioritised compassionate values over self-interest values, the percentage of young people who thought others would prioritise compassionate values decreased in each age group. By age 16-18 48% of British and 86% of Turkish young people believed that other young people would prioritise self-interest values over compassionate values.

Percentage of young people who actually prioritise compassionate values over self-interest values Vs the percentage of young people who think other young people prioritise compassionate values over self-interest values.



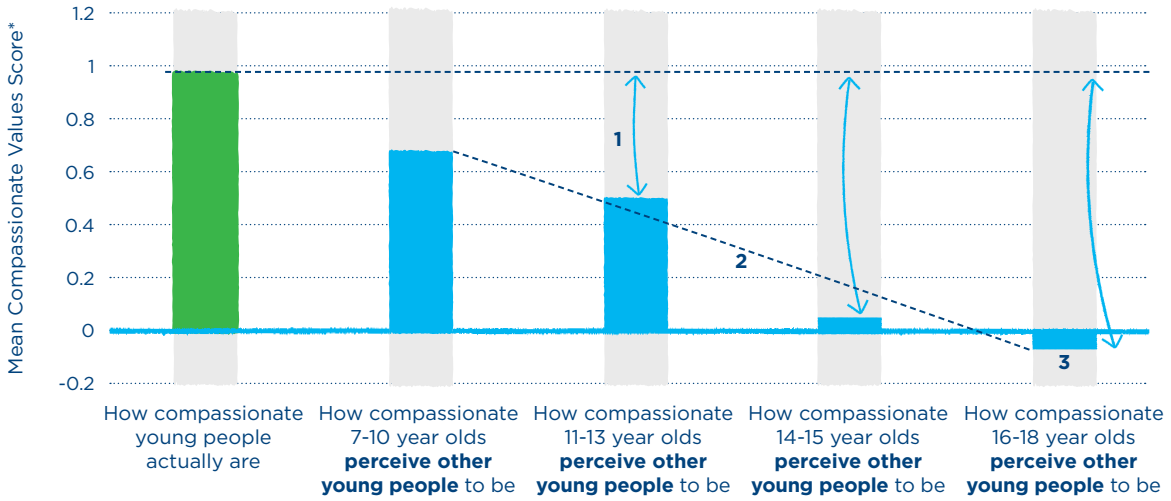
Compassionate Values Score

The second way we looked for the values-perception gap was to test if there was a statistically significant gap between young people's own compassionate values and the compassionate values they believed other young people would have (see graphs 1 and 2 on p23). To do this we calculated a mean "compassionate values score". The compassionate values score reflects the extent to which individuals prioritise compassionate values over and above self-interest values. It is calculated by subtracting their self-interest values score from their compassionate value score (as per Crompton, 2016). A positive score means they prioritise compassionate values over self-interest values and a negative score means they prioritise self-interest values over compassionate values.

A new key insight was found: A significant values-perception gap was found in childen as young as 11 and it gets wider as they get older.

The Value Perception Gap in Young People : The gap between young people's perception of other young people's compassionate values and their actual compassionate values.

In the UK Graph 1: Mean compassionate value scores for self and others in the UK



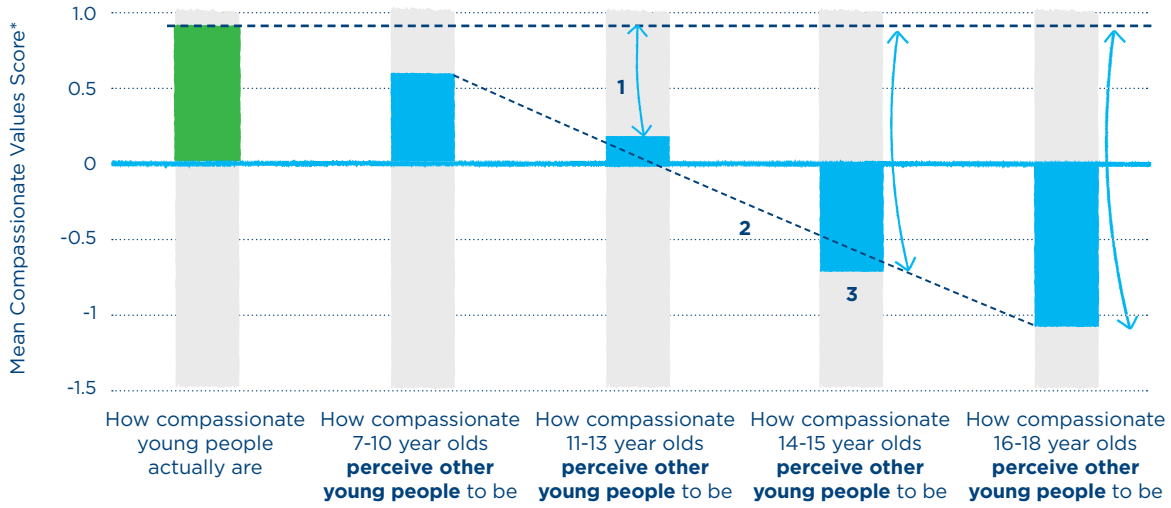
Note: *The blue arrows indicate a statistically significant value-perception gap. Scores above zero = compassionate values are prioritised above self-interest values. Scores below zero = self-interest values are prioritised above compassionate values.*

1 The value perception gap becomes significantly wide at age 11-13. It continues getting wider as young people get older.

2 There is a significant drop in how compassionate young people perceive other young people to be between ages 11-15.

3 At age 16-18 young people started to see other young people as more self-interested than compassionate.

In Turkey Graph 2: Mean compassionate value scores for self and others in Turkey



Note: *The blue arrows indicate a statistically significant value-perception gap. Scores above zero = compassionate values are prioritised above self-interest values. Scores below zero = self-interest values are prioritised above compassionate values.*

1 The value perception gap becomes significantly wide at age 11-13. It continues getting wider as young people get older.

2 There is a significant drop in how compassionate young people perceive other young people to be between ages 11-15 and again between ages of 14-18.

3 At age 14-15 young people started to see other young people as more self-interested than compassionate.

Overall we found that in both the UK and Turkey:

- The values-perception gap became significantly wide between the ages of 11-13 .
- There was a significant drop in how compassionate young people perceived other young people to be between age 11-15.
- There was a turning point at around age 14 to 16 where young people started to estimate that other children would **prioritise self-interest values more than compassionate values**.

2.6 Key insight 4: Many young people don't think that adults, businesses, politicians or world leaders are compassionate

To explore how children perceived the compassionate values and actions of adults, Global Action Plan asked them how important they thought it would be to most adults in their country to care for other people and for nature.

- Almost half (46%) of Turkish participants thought it would not be important to adults to **care for other people**. UK children were more optimistic with only 13% of them thinking they would not find it important.

- 41% British and 48% of Turkish young people thought it would not be important to adults to **care for nature**.

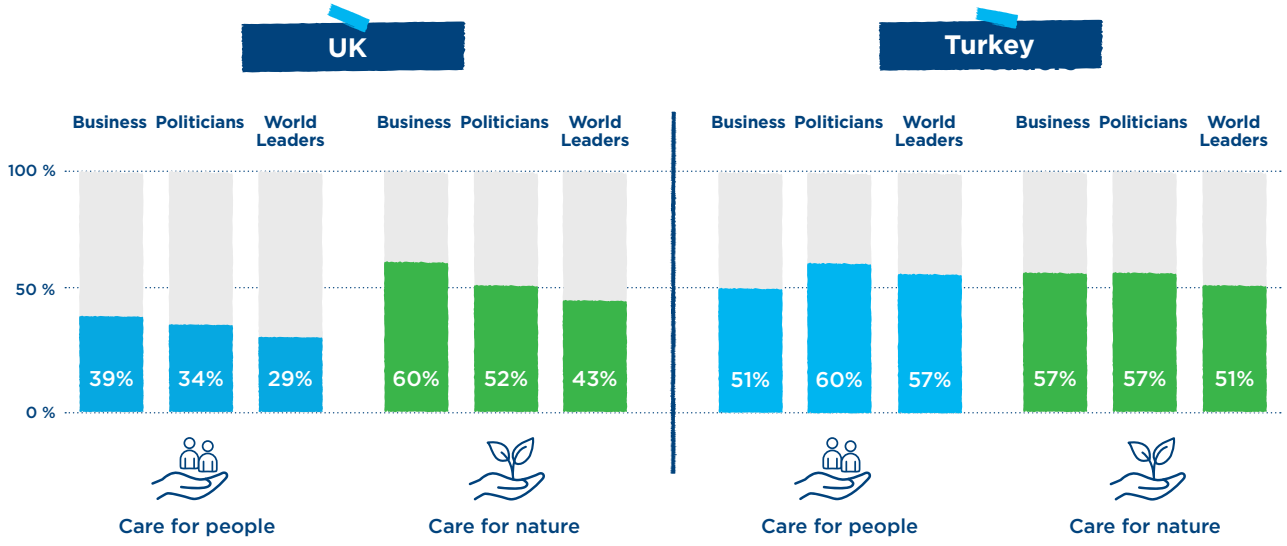
When asked about how many people where they lived **took action** to help other people and nature:

- 38% of British young people and 56% of Turkish young people thought that only a "few people" or "no one" where they lived did things to **help other people**.

- More than half of young people in the UK (59%) and Turkey (57%) thought that only a "few people" or "no one" where they lived did things to **help the natural world**.

This tells us that young people are particularly pessimistic about the extent to which adults care about nature. Almost half of the young people asked didn't think it was important to adults to care for nature and more than half did not think that people in their communities took action to look after nature. Sadly, it seems it is not normal for young people to see other people in their communities taking action to protect the natural world.

They had even less trust in businesses, politicians and world leaders to care for other people and the natural world:



% of young people who thought it would not be important to these groups to care for nature/people

Again, we can see that young people are particularly pessimistic about the extent to which other societal groups care for nature, with more than half of young people not believing it would be important to businesses or politicians to care for the natural world.

Although in some cases, they might be right, previous research has demonstrated that most adults do hold compassionate values[64] and do care about the environment.[65] It is important to help young people see the action that is being taken by adults in their communities and in wider society to create a better world. More than half of young people we surveyed (60% in the UK and 70% in Turkey) reported feeling worried about the future. We must do more to give them hope in a future they can feel excited about.

"Politicians don't really care about the environment, maybe because of their age, but I don't think they know much about it and they're not really aware of it".

Clem, age 14-16, UK participant

2.7 Key insight 5: When young people don't think others are compassionate, they act less compassionately themselves, and their well-being suffers

"It's like another battle. You're battling the problem, like climate change, but you're also battling the people that disagree or may look down on you. It's hard. You've got to be really strong to push through all the barriers".

Sophie, age 14-16, UK participant

Just as in adults, it was found that **the less**

young people perceived other children, adults and wider societal groups to be compassionate, to care about, and to take action to look after people and nature,

the less they:

Reported caring about people and nature themselves.

Took action to care for people and nature themselves.

Reported having the self-efficacy to take action (i.e. feeling they have the knowledge, skills and ability to have a positive impact).

And the more they:

Reported lower well-being
Felt worried about the future

In other words, young people are more likely to be compassionate and take action on the issues they care about when they see, feel and believe that other people around them are compassionate too. They also feel happier and less anxious about the future.

From these new insights we hypothesize that showing young people that others care about the same issues they do, and helping them take collective action together, is key to unlocking more action, more impact and better well-being.

2.8 Impact of COVID-19

As the surveys were run during May to August 2020 at a time when schools were closed and young people were living under lockdown restrictions, we wanted to check if this had impacted the extent to which they would care for other people and nature.

It would be understandable for concerns about other people and nature to be de-prioritised during a health pandemic as they may be more preoccupied with their own and their family's health. We found this not to be the case, with 66% of UK young people and 40% of Turkish young people reporting that since the onset of COVID-19, they felt they cared even more about other people. This differed slightly for care about the natural world, with 25% of UK young people and 71% of Turkish young people reporting that they cared even more about it.

Only a very small percentage said they cared less about people (3% in the UK and 18% in Turkey) and about nature (11% in UK and 3% in Turkey). This tells us that caring for people and planet is still very important for most young people and has, if anything, been strengthened by the pandemic.

In terms of whether the findings of the values-perception gap were impacted by COVID-19, we believe that our results may well have understated the problem. As previously mentioned, the research by More in Common showed that belief in the compassion of others was at its height during May 2020 in the UK when Global Action Plan's survey was carried out. Even against this background context of higher than usual activation of compassionate values, the values-perception gap still appeared during the study. This suggests that the values-perception gap could be actually be **wider**, not narrower; the problem might **more** prevalent than it appears from our research.

"I think the coronavirus shook everyone up and changed their points of view towards to world".

Selin, aged 16-18, Turkish participant

WHY DON'T YOUNG PEOPLE THINK OTHERS ARE COMPASSIONATE?

The results of Global Action Plan's survey showed that children as young as seven underestimate their peer's compassionate values and these misperceptions get stronger as children get older. They also showed pessimistic perceptions of adults' values, particularly in their concern for the natural world. In follow-up to the survey, 16 focus groups were conducted with young people to explore why they thought other children and adults weren't compassionate. The insights gathered can help us to understand some of the reasons why the values-perception gap exists, and what can be done to help close it, thereby normalising compassionate values.

3.1 Why don't young people act as compassionately as they'd like to?

Even though most young people reported holding compassionate values themselves, many told us they didn't talk about or take action on the issues they care about as much as they would like to.

Misperceptions arise when young people hold back on sharing their concern about social and environmental causes and when they don't see others taking action. Young people in the focus groups cited many reasons why they were reluctant to talk about and take action on the issues they care about in front of their peers.

Fear of being bullied:
In the UK (less so in Turkey) some feared that if you showed you cared and were trying to take action that you could be opening yourself up to bullying. They thought others might think you are trying to show that you are better than them, and so be defensive rather than supportive.

"I had this plastic pollution campaign for quite a few years, and I was fairly new to the school and people would just laugh in my face about it and chuck plastic at me and stuff. It's not very nice".
Amy, age 16-18, UK participant

Wanting to fit in/ not wanting to stand out:
It was generally seen as more normal not to be someone who actively took social and environmental action. Fitting in is a high priority to young people at school and therefore it is easier not to stand out and try to make a difference.

"You just really want to fit in when you're at school, you don't want to make a fuss".
Josita, age 14-16, UK participant.

Unhelpful stereotypes:
The feeling that activists are preachy and no fun, meant that some participants feared they might alienate themselves from friends.

"I guess also, the intensity of some people or the stereotypes might put some people off. You know ultra-vegans or that kind of thing, and then people start stereotyping activists and get put off by those intense stereotypes. You don't want to be perceived as that person who can't have fun".
Bethan, age 16-18, UK participant

"Some people seem to care about the environment because they want to show off".
Esma, age 16-18, Turkish participant

Fear of looking foolish:
It was frequently cited that other people would see any action to create a better world as pointless and make them feel foolish for trying.

"People our age regard them as pretentious. Because they overthink about these issues. So there are many people who think "why bother?" in our age group."
Selin, age 16-18, Turkish participant

Cancel culture:
It acted as a barrier to older children having conversations about the issues they cared about as they feared being shut down if they said the wrong thing.

"It's quite hard to have conversations about controversial topics without really quickly being shut down".
Aidan, age 11-14, UK participant

Fear of being left out:
Some participants reported being left out for trying to live out their values.

"Your friends might not really want to hang out with you. They're not going to invite you to go on a trip to McDonalds if you're on about how you don't like plastic".
Anna, age 16-18, UK participant

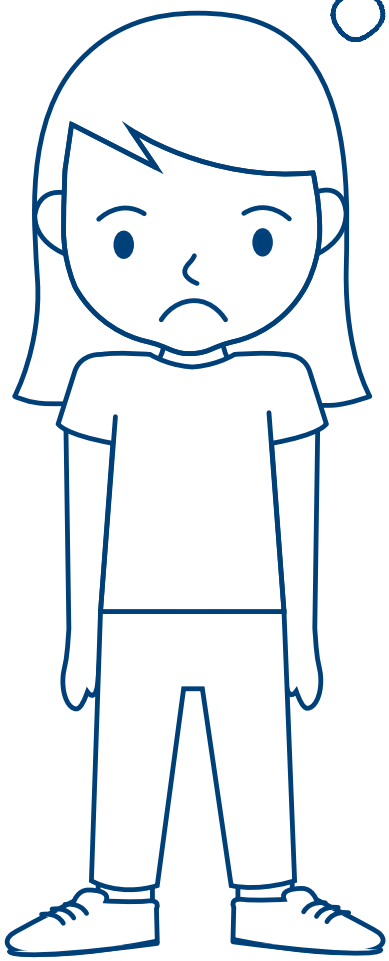
Fear of being seen as "virtue signalling":
It was cited as putting off older groups as they didn't want to be seen as inauthentic. This was particularly relevant to whether they would post content on social media about the causes they cared about. Some participants were openly critical of others that they felt were just "jumping on the bandwagon" of causes like Black Lives Matter because they thought it would make them look cool.

"If I know them personally and I know they're the kind of person that would just jump on the trend to make themselves seem virtuous, I think a lot of people do that for a reason rather than actually believing in what they put on social media".
Will, age 16-18, UK participant

Fear of failure:
It was cited as a barrier to action both because the actions needed could feel too big and overwhelming, and because of the fear that others would judge you for being a hypocrite if you started to take action then slipped up.

"I think a lot of people have put off when people start judging them for not doing everything or for any little failing. If people are encouraged to do more little things like meatless Mondays and that kind of thing rather than say if you eat any meat ever you've failed. I think that kind of thing would help".
Selin, age 16-18, Turkish participant

"Most people find doing nothing easier and therefore, it is hard for them to take an action."
Anonymous, age 15-16, Turkish participant



These findings demonstrate that the values-perception gap is a very real barrier to young people taking action on the issues they care about. It is clearly taking a toll on their well-being too. As children move into adolescence the values of their peers become ever more influential, and so it is understandable that they will be hesitant to show their compassionate values if it seems risky to do so.

We must do better to support young people to act on the compassionate values we know they have. They need to be supported to authentically connect with each other, helping them see that others care too while breaking down the negative stereotypes currently attached to being a "do-gooder". If taking compassionate action together can become normal, there is an untapped opportunity to unleash the collective compassion of young people to create a better world.

3.2 Why don't young people think adults are compassionate?

Parents and educators are powerful role models in young people's lives. What they say and do influences young people's values and behaviours during childhood and continue to be influential well into young adulthood.[67] Research has found that their perceptions of adults' values are even more influential on young people's choices and behaviours than their actual values.[68]

Results of Global Action Plan's survey showed that young people have particularly pessimistic perceptions about adults caring for nature. During the focus groups with young people, adults were frequently described as not caring as much about environmental issues as young people.

"I think young people are more conscious than adults."
Nehir, age 14-18, Turkish participant

A number of themes emerged as to why they thought this:

1. **Adults didn't grow up learning about climate change and environmental issues so they don't know as much as young people.**

"They wouldn't have been exposed to any of the materials that we've got right now when they were born and raised".
Hugo, age 11-14, UK participant

2. **Adults don't try to learn about it; they don't take young people seriously when they try to educate them and have become cynical about taking action themselves.**

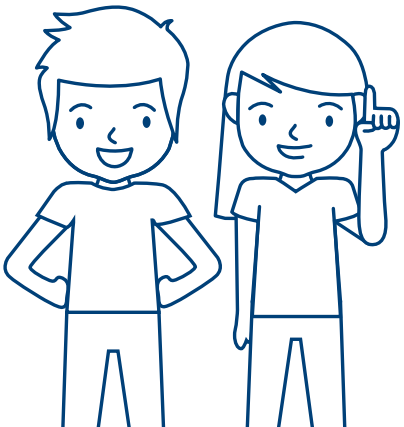
"I think that quite often adults think that young people are naïve for trying to change the world".
Anna, age 16-18, UK participant

"I think adults who are sensitive to the environment are rare".
Nas, age 14-16, Turkish participant

"I feel like a lot of adults, not all of them, by the way, but would rather pretend it's not happening and just get on with it".
Sophie, age 14-16, UK participant

3. **Adults don't have time to care because they have so many other responsibilities.**
This was sometimes also cited as a barrier to young people taking action themselves: For example, one participant mentioned their parents were annoyed when they tried to eat a vegan diet as it meant more effort to cook for them.

"Our families and people surrounding us have the responsibility of taking care of themselves and their family and they can't participate in a project for the environment. People leave their homes at 7am and come back at 7pm and they want to rest in the time remaining".
Ertuğrul, age 15-16, Turkish participant



4. They didn't see them taking action to protect nature.

Turkish young people frequently mentioned thinking that adults didn't care about nature because they saw them dropping litter. This suggests that the behaviours young people see others take is what tells them whether others care about nature.

5. Schools and parents could be unsupportive of attending protests.

Some young people felt restricted in the actions they could take due to their parents fears about their safety, particularly when it came to attending protests. Many reported schools as also being unsupportive of attending climate protests. This gave them the message that they didn't understand or care about why they wanted to protest.

"They recklessly throw their trash on the ground so that they can immediately check their phones, which leads to a much more serious environmental problem."

Sude, age 11-14, Turkish participant

"We can go out now and see that they can't even throw away their masks correctly."

Öykü, age 15-16, Turkish participant

"The school have a big thing against it. You get a week of detention so it's definitely a put off."

Saffron, age 14-16, UK participant

It was clear from the focus groups that young people formed their opinions of whether adults cared about people and nature by the way they behaved. Participants wanted parents and educators to be role models and to act in ways that showed they cared. Parents and educators can therefore have a substantial influence on young people's long-term values and behaviours by showing them they care through what they **do** more than through what they **say**.

THE PARENTS' PERSPECTIVE: WHAT DO THEY CARE ABOUT AND WHAT CHALLENGES DO THEY FACE?

We wanted to know how parents are feeling about the challenges their children face and uncover ways that parents can be better equipped with knowledge and resources to support their children to take action on issues they care about. [The brand] worked with Edelman Intelligence who surveyed 2,000 parents (1,000 in the UK and 1,000 in Turkey) of children aged 8-16. A spread across age (parents and children), region, income, education, and rural vs. urban lifestyles was ensured.

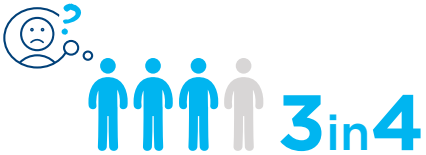
4.1 Summary of findings

The results of this survey show that the majority of parents are not optimistic about the world their child will grow up in. **They are particularly worried about how the climate and ecological crisis will impact their child's future**, and the impact that this and other issues will have on their child's well-being. They feel conflicted between wanting to support their child to act but not wanting to overwhelm them and add stress to their lives so they shield their children from the frightening truth.

But Global Action Plan's research shows that young people are already worried about these issues and they perceive adults lack of engagement with them on these issues as a lack of concern. **Parents need help to talk to their children about the issues they care about and to empower them to act.** Collective action with parents and children working together and partnering up with others in their communities is an inspiring and inclusive route to create a better world for all.

4.2 How are parents feeling about the future?

Parents **are feeling overwhelmed** by the changes in the world with



feeling that the world is changing significantly and half feeling overwhelmed by how quickly it is changing. **They feel pessimistic about the world their child will grow up in**, worrying they are likely to face more economic uncertainty and more environmental challenges than they have in their lifetime.

are feeling optimistic when thinking about the world their child will grow up in, and half believe that the world is changing for the worse, believing that their child will have more to worry about than they did themselves.

They were particularly concerned that their children would face more environmental and economic challenges in their futures.
Depletion of natural resources, air pollution, sea levels rising and species extinction were all of great concern for their children's future alongside a lack of jobs and unemployment.

Perhaps unsurprisingly,

Most 3in5

are feeling that the turbulent world we live in today is **negatively affecting their child's wellbeing.**

Over 50%

of parents were also were concerned that their child would face rising **income inequality** (59%) and a **lack of access to quality education** (58%).

66-73%

But most are also **optimistic** that taking action on these issues will help children to feel less anxious (66%) and be better equipped to cope with the changing world (73%).

4.3 What values do parents think their children prioritise and which values do they think are promoted in our culture?

Figure 2: Values that parents thought their children would prioritise and that they believe to be most strongly promoted in our culture.

Which of these values do you think your children most want to uphold?	Rank	In your experience, which of these values sets do you think are most strongly promoted to children and young people in our culture today?
Hedonism	1	Security
Security	2	**Achievement**
Self-direction	3	**Power & Hedonism (=3rd)**
Stimulation	4	
Benevolence	5	Stimulation
Achievement	6	Self-direction
Universalism	7	Conformity
Power	8	**Benevolence**
Tradition	9	**Universalism**
Conformity	10	Tradition

Note: *Benevolence and Universalism = compassionate values; Power and Achievement = self-interest values*

Parents underestimated children's compassionate values. They thought that hedonism (fun), security, self-direction and stimulation would all be more important to their children than benevolence (kindness) when children actually prioritised kindness as their number 1 value. They also underestimated children's compassionate values by thinking that they would prioritise achievement (a self-interest value) above the universalism (a compassionate value) when children actually prioritised both compassionate values over both self-interest values.

They feel the wrong values are being promoted to children in society to create a better world. When asked which values they believed to be most strongly promoted to children and young people in our culture today, parents ranked achievement as number 1 with power and hedonism as equal 2nd. Benevolence and Universalism were only in the bottom three values. This was reflected in their pessimistic perceptions of other people in society, with 70% of parents feeling upset by the lack of compassion that people have towards each other.

4.4 How do parents feel about taking action to create a better world?

Parents acknowledge the importance of taking action on the issues facing the world, with

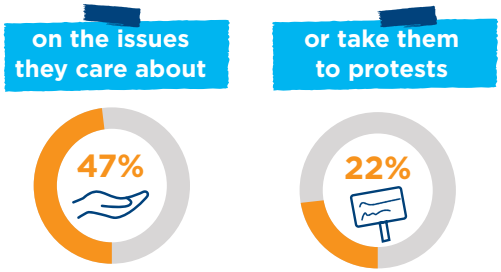
agreeing that they will not be solved unless people act. Most (62%) are frustrated at the lack of action currently happening and say it is important to them to act on the issues they care about, but just as many (60%) also acknowledge that they themselves are not doing enough. Their apathy may be fuelled by a lack of belief in their own ability to have a positive impact, with only half of parents believing that their actions will make a difference.

They are more optimistic about the potential of the younger generation to bring about positive change, with

of parents believing that children have the chance to shape the future and 73% believing their child can make the changes their generation weren't able to make. They feel their children are willing and able to make a difference, as two in three believe their child is eager to act on the issues they care about and that they can make a difference.

Parents want to empower their children and can see the benefits of teaching their children to take action, with the majority saying they want to empower their children to feel like they can make a difference (78%), they want their children to get involved in issues they care about (76%) and want their children to speak up about the societal and environmental issues they care about (74%). Most parents could see the benefits of supporting their children to take action, with 81% parents feeling it would improve their children's outlook - 54% feeling they would learn important values and 53% thinking it would help them be more confident.

Most parents (66%) do commonly talk to their children about issues **but they are less likely to encourage them to take action**



There were a number of barriers that stop parents from supporting their child to act on the issues they care about.

4.5 What stops parents supporting their children to take action on the issues they care about?

The biggest barrier was that they want to protect their child from the issues of today and don't want to put too much pressure on their child to act.

55% **of parents** want to protect their child from issues affecting the world today and

68% **of parents** said they just want their child to be happy and not worry about issues.

69% **of parents** said they don't want to put pressure on their child.

They feel that the challenges facing the world today are too big to place on children's shoulders, with three in five worrying that problems are too big to expect children to solve.

Other barriers stopping them from encouraging their child to be more active included concerns about **safety**, worries that taking action could **distract children from their school work** and being **unsure how to support their child** to act on issues they care about. Some (two in five) even worried that their child would find taking action **boring**.

4.6 What can parents do to better support young people to take action on the issues they care about?

It is understandable that parents may want to protect their children from the worrying facts about global issues such as climate change. But in the age of 24-hour media, shielding them from information is just not possible, and nor is it helpful.[69] Most children already know about major societal issues such as climate change, are already expressing worry, fear, anger, sadness and are feeling powerless.

Parents are powerful role models and helping young people have a more accurate view of adults as caring and compassionate[70] will reduce the values-perception gap, help foster their own compassionate values and encourage them to take action. **The following actions, grounded in research on values transmission, can help parents show their children what they really value:**

1. **Speak openly about caring for other people and for nature and why it is important to you.**
This helps young people have a more accurate view of what adults care about and nurtures their own compassionate values.[71]

2. **Ask young people about what is important to them.**
They are likely to care about helping others and nature. Children are more likely to internalise values and take them into adulthood if they feel they have been freely chosen by themselves rather than imposed upon them.[72]

3. **Ensure that words and actions match.**
Inconsistency between what adults say and what they do can give young people confusing messages about what is really valued by adults in their life and may cause them to perceive adults as hypocritical.[73] For example, parents might tell their child that being kind is important to them but then only celebrate when they achieve a high academic grade, rather than when they display kindness to others.

4. **Show young people what you do to help people and the environment and explain why you are doing it.**
For example, if you are carefully avoiding plastic packaging at the supermarket, explain to your child why that is important to you.

5. **Take action with your child.**
Eight in 10 parents agreed that, in order to make a change, children and adults need to work together like a family. Young people told us they want parents to take action with them to make sure they were doing it safely rather than just saying no.

6. **Join with others in your community to take action together.**
Most parents (64%) said their child felt inspired when they saw their peers taking action and that it made their child want to be part of the movement. Many parents believed that now is a good time to create a collective movement, as they believe that children will be more empathetic and willing to help others following the changes they have experienced during the pandemic. **Collective action where parents and children work together could be an opportunity to create a safe and inclusive movement.**

"The other day I went on a walk and there were these frogs on the path, baby frogs, and our family tried to get as many and try and put them to the side so that they didn't get hurt or squashed. We tried to save as much as we could."

Miley, age 7-11, UK participant

"Go with them if they're not fully sure of protests. Go with them and protest with them. See what goes on and then go from there."

Ellen, age 14-16, UK participant

THE DIRT IS GOOD WAY

In response to this new research showing the values-perception gap as a barrier to young people taking action on the issues they care about, [the brand] has worked in partnership with Global Action Plan to create an approach that seeks to address this. The Dirt Is Good Way aims to help any teacher or educator working with young people to create programmes to support them to take social and environmental action while promoting their well-being.

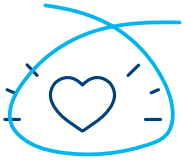
The Dirt Is Good Way underpins every element of [the brand's] Dirt Is Good Project. The Dirt Is Good Way champions compassionate values and makes them visible. It aims to normalise collective action and close the values-perception gap. This – in line with the findings of this research – should catalyse even more action while improving the mental well-being of young people and the world around them.

5.1 The Principles of the Dirt Is Good Way

The Dirt Is Good Way is built on four key principles which bring together all the insights from this new research, and builds on the best of current practice in supporting youth social and environmental action. They are also designed to promote well-being[74] and to develop the skills and characteristics identified by researchers as most needed by the next generation to adapt successfully to this changing world.[75]

These principles guide all activities within the Dirt Is Good Project. They are:

Dirt Is Good Principle 1: UNITED IN COMPASSION



We care, that is what unites us. The Dirt Is Good Way is designed around this way of understanding our fellow humans. That we are **"United in Compassion"** is a key message and the most important learning outcome a young person should take away from their Dirt Is Good Project experience. We have a tendency to think of the world's problems as a random assortment of unconnected single issues. Thinking this way prevents us from seeing how someone who wants to tackle an issue like plastic in the ocean might bond with someone who wants to tackle a very different kind of problem, like drivers who break the speed limit. It keeps us in silos and prevents individual movements from coalescing into a "movement of movements". However, while the specific issues we care about might differ, we can feel united when we recognise that we share a more fundamental, underlying, objective: **creating a better world through collective compassion.** Connecting young people together through the causes they care about also helps their well-being by strengthening their relationships with others.[76] Focusing attention on underlying values, rather than surface-level specific issues can help us identify the "common cause" that unites us: **a belief in building a more compassionate society**.

Dirt Is Good Principle 2: GET STUCK IN

There is a logic around changemaking that assumes that if people have enough information and are bought into a basic rationale, they will take action. This 'information-deficit' model has been shown to have very limited effect in motivating and sustaining anything other than 'light' action on social and environmental issues. In short, people respond to increased knowledge and a clear rationale up until the point that the recommended action feels irrational from another perspective. It might look too difficult, too painful or too much effort for too little reward – but all these perceptions might be wrong.

An alternative route is to **support young people to act first, then reflect.** Sometimes we need to do something before we can fully understand why we are doing it and how it feels. We want young people to **"Get Stuck In"**, to have a go at creating change alongside others. They will learn as they do it, be motivated by the compassion shown by others taking action alongside them and discover how much they are capable of. It might be a lot more than they thought.

Dirt Is Good Principle 3: EVERYONE HAS A ROLE TO PLAY

Too often Changemakers are seen as the exception, not the norm. They are talked about as one-of-a-kind, as special, as heroes to look up to. This can make them hard to relate to. To address the social and environmental challenges the world faces, we need a lot of people to get stuck in. But, to many, it can feel like a daunting prospect. They want to help but aren't sure how – they can't visualise a role for themselves. The message behind this principle is that **"Everyone Has a Role to Play and the Dirt Is Good Project will help you find yours."**

Children and young people will discover the role, or roles, they can play. Their idea of what a Changemaker is will expand as they are introduced to the wide variety of roles available. They might never identify as a Changemaker in the Greta Thunberg mould, but they will hopefully find a role that they enjoy and excel in, it might be very different to Greta's but an equally important part of the movement.

Dirt Is Good Principle 4: ON A JOURNEY

The focus on Changemakers highlighted in programmes and the media is often on the incredible things they have achieved – rather than the bumps and struggles they have had in getting there or that they still face. This can make things feel like they should be easy, and these role models seem perfect. It isn't always easy, or fast to turn action into real change; nothing worth doing ever truly is. **Emphasising and celebrating "the struggle" gives taking action a degree of meaning and substance.** This makes it attractive and rewarding.

When it comes to defining someone who takes action, there is never someone whom we could describe as "the finished article". We grow into the role of a being a **Changemaker**; we are in a continuous state of becoming a Changemaker. Presenting the role of a Changemaker as something we grow into makes it more accessible and less daunting. Mistakes and wrong turns are an inevitable part of going **"On a Journey"**. New experiences, discoveries and moments of wonder are too. On their Dirt Is Good Project journey children and young people will **reflect** on what happens along the way. This is how they will develop and grow.

5.2 How the Dirt Is Good Way differs

The Dirt Is Good Way is a new way of engaging children and young people in pro-social and pro-environmental action. It builds on the best of what has come before, and weaves in the latest scientific understandings on human nature and what truly motivates young people.

It aims to power up children and young people to take action to create the positive social and environmental changes they want to see.

But the objective of the Dirt Is Good Way is bigger than simply motivating action today. It aims to develop the **Changemakers** of the future.

It has long been recognised by designers and practitioners of environmental and citizenship education programmes that, at the highest level, young people need **three key things:**

1. KNOWLEDGE

They need knowledge to understand the challenges we face.[77] Although parents and educators may instinctively want to protect young people from the overwhelming truth about social and environmental problems, shielding them gives young people the message that adults don't care. When the seriousness of problems is **openly acknowledged** and they are **taught constructive actions** they can take, young people feel more hopeful and can see that the adults in their life care too.

2. SKILLS

Knowledge alone is of course not enough.[78] It needs to be combined with skills to implement positive responses.[79] Skills can be **cognitive, emotional and manual**, so include critical thinking, civic engagement, adaptability, teamwork, leadership, creativity, emotional regulation and persistence; but also, practical skills like gardening, repair, construction and cycling. These are the skills that will prepare young people for life in a turbulent world.

3. SELF-BELIEF

In addition to knowledge and skills, young people need self-belief. They need to feel that they can contribute to positive change and that their own actions matter.[80] **Development of self-belief** is critical: Knowledge and skills help it to build, but taking action – with others who care – makes an even bigger difference.

The Dirt Is Good Way adds a fourth ingredient of critical importance:

4. SHARED COMPASSIONATE VALUES

Most young people do care about the well-being of other people and nature, and want to take action. They already have the compassionate values that are the foundation upon which action to create a better world is built.[81] But when they feel alone in caring, they are less likely to act. We need to **create a shared sense of compassion** to create the conditions for compassionate action to become normal.

Most environmental and citizenship education programmes support young people to develop knowledge, skills and self-belief but fewer actively nurture compassionate values and make them visible. By championing, nurturing and reinforcing compassionate values we can bring them to the surface, normalise them and prevent children from feeling like they are the only ones who care. **Normalising shared compassionate values** could be the key to unlocking mass collective action in young people and is the cornerstone of [the brand's] Dirt Is Good Way.

5.3 Why compassionate values are the key to unlocking the potential of young people to do good

Values transcend different situations so people who care about one cause are more likely to care about another. Focusing on compassionate values can therefore be a useful means to engage with young people on all the different causes that they may care about – e.g. the environment, LGBTQ rights, race, poverty, inequality.

Values tend to be stable over time so values reinforced in youth tend to last into adulthood. Values are good predictors of long-term behaviours so it is important to nurture compassionate values alongside actions that have a positive impact on the world.[82] The best approach to nurture long-term Changemakers is to reinforce both compassionate values and compassionate behaviours as they have a mutually reinforcing impact on each other.

Nurturing compassionate values helps to weaken self-interest values.[83] They are called "opposing values" because they act like a seesaw – when compassionate values are strengthened, self-interest values weaken.[84] Self-interest values are consistently associated with engaging in fewer behaviours that benefit other people or society,[85] substantially higher ecological footprints and fewer environmentally friendly behaviours.[86] Mindfully strengthening compassionate values can also avoid unintentionally strengthening self-interest values. For example, it might be tempting to incentivise a young person to engage in compassionate behaviour by appealing to their self-interest e.g. by winning a prize for the biggest amount of litter picked. Strategies founded on appealing to self-interest may work to motivate the short-term behaviour, but they are less successful at nurturing long-lasting behaviours and are likely to weaken long-term compassionate values and behaviours.

Compassionate values foster wellbeing. People who give more priority to compassionate values are less likely to suffer with depression, anxiety, eating disorders or substance misuse. They have better relationships and feel happier.[87]

PUTTING THEORY INTO ACTION: THE DIRT IS GOOD PROJECT

Through the Dirt Is Good Project, we will support young people to take action, together, through programmes and initiatives based on the Dirt Is Good Way.

6.1 The Dirt Is Good Schools Programme

[The brand] are working with Global Action Plan UK to develop a programme for schools around the world that seeks to unlock the collective power of young people as Changemakers. Core to this will be inspiring young people to work together to normalise a culture of compassion. The Dirt Is Good Schools Programme will provide tools for teachers, as coaches and role models for young people, that equip their students with the ability to select and direct collective action towards the issues they care about; with the aim of supporting them to become **Changemakers for life**.

The programme will be launched across 15 countries over the next three years and overseen by a different local NGO in each country, creating a global community of educational practitioners championing compassion and action for people and planet. The programme aims to prevent the values-perception gap from widening and to power up young people to take action on the UN Sustainable Development Goals.[d]

Global Action Plan is a charity that helps people live more sustainable lives by connecting what is good for us and good for the planet and has years of experience running environmental programmes for schools.

Target age group: Global Action Plan's new research shows that young people are significantly under-estimating the compassionate values of their peers from as young as age 11 and by around age 14-15 they start to view others as more self-interested than compassionate. Adolescence is a time of identity development when young people can be particularly sensitive to the values of others, especially their parents and their peers.[88]

It is also a time when they develop skills and behaviours that will last the rest of their lives.[89] As a result, the Dirt Is Good Schools Programme is aimed at 7- to 14-year-olds. If we can intervene and support this age group to see that other children do care, that it is normal to be compassionate and to take action on the issues they care about, we might have a chance to prevent the widening of the values-perception gap.

Get involved in our Dirt Is Good Schools Programme:

www.[brand].com/dirtisgoodproject.html

[d] The Dirt Is Good Schools Programme has been designed to directly contribute towards SDG 4.7: "By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable." However, through the Dirt Is Good Project, young people will be given the autonomy to take action on a wide range of social and environmental issues, and so will together have impact towards a much larger number of the SDGs.

6.2 The Dirt Is Good Changemakers Academy

Our Changemaker Academy is a safe online space designed in partnership with Creature Media, brand custodians of National Geographic Kids, who specialise in communicating complex world topics to ages 6-13. The Academy is an engaging and interactive programme of missions and challenges related to topics such as people, climate, water and land. From generating their own personalised changemaker avatar to discovering stories of extraordinary Changemakers, the programme aims to reinforce the value of compassion and frames it as the key tool to becoming a Changemaker.

An adult's email address is required to sign up to the programme, and the programme hub will keep track of their progress through the various missions. As more missions become available, we will notify the registered email address to encourage further participation.

Get involved in our Changemakers Academy:
natgeokids.com/changemakers

6.3 Partnership with KidsRights

KidsRights is a non-profit organisation that works to empower children and demand global attention for children's rights through research, advocacy and action. KidsRights considers children as 'active agents of change' or 'Changemakers'. Through its Changemaker Program, KidsRights identifies young Changemakers, in other terms children who stand up for children's rights and develop initiatives with a meaningful impact in their communities. Dirt Is Good and KidsRights have established a global partnership to support Kidsrights' action and promote young Changemakers and the inspirational initiatives they have developed, thereby amplifying their voices and encourage others to see themselves as Changemakers.

Through the Dirt Is Good Project, we will show young people that others care, helping create a movement of getting stuck into issues and challenges – no matter how messy. This we believe, is key to unlocking collective action for good – improving the well-being of young people around the world and making real impact against the challenges we face.

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[Brand logo]

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