



# Young People and Family Separation in Scotland

2020

Survey undertaken by  
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In Consultation with Parental Alienation UK,  
Part of The Good Egg Safety CIC Group  
[www.parentalalienationuk.info](http://www.parentalalienationuk.info)

## Foreword

*“When I watched the presentation by Good Egg Safety CIC on the topic of parental alienation at the Scottish Parliament, my heart broke for the many children who are growing up in Scotland without the loving family we all deserve to have.*

*After seeing the devastating effects of parental alienation on young people's mental health, I knew I had to take some action. Given my passion for mental health and youth activism, I partnered with Good Egg Safety to carry out the "Young People and Family Separation in Scotland" survey to find out the true impact on our young people.*

*The survey was shared on the social media of many of our MSYPs, in social group chats and by **Children 1st** and **Young Scot**, to ensure that we reached as many young people from as many different perspectives as we could. The primary age group of young people that shared the survey was 12-25, although we received responses from people of many ages and backgrounds.*

*I am sure you will agree that our findings are absolutely heartbreaking. This research is a call to arms for all decision makers - we must ensure that our UNCRC right (Article 9) is upheld to the highest standard and that no young person in Scotland will ever have to endure the pain of family separation again”*

## **Personal introduction to survey by Erin Campbell MSYP: Young People and Family Separation in Scotland**

What is this project?

**\*Disclaimer:** I'm carrying out this survey in my role as an MSYP (Member of the Scottish Youth Parliament) in order to effectively reach as many young people as possible.

However, the Scottish Youth Parliament currently do not have any policy on this topic. This survey is being carried out independently from the Scottish Youth Parliament, so any views expressed when circulating this survey do not necessarily reflect the views of SYP.

If you're interested in my role as an MSYP: you can check out my twitter to see what I get up to in my role! (@syperincampbell)\*

For this survey, I am working with a community interest company, Good Egg Safety, supported by a leading Psychologist and retired Child Psychiatrist, to explore some of the impact in Scotland of family separation on our young people.

Linked to my interest in mental health, I wanted to do more about this concern after a workshop given by Jan James, CEO of Good Egg, at the Scottish Parliament.

Often a young person's feelings and views are influenced by the distress and difficulties of their parents' separation. Here's how one young person in a Scottish Youth Parliament (SYP) workshop put it:

**“Who should have a say? You. Unless your decision will negatively impact you and you can't see it.”**

You can read more about this on the following page.

## **Young People and Family Separation in Scotland**

### More Information

When parents decide to separate, sometimes their child is not always their first consideration. While most parents split up on friendly terms, or at least manage to get along, for others this is not the case. Sometimes there is a lot of anger or sadness. Because of their anger or sadness, sometimes one parent, or both, do not behave well. Sometimes children feel caught in the middle of the most important people in their lives.

Some parents may behave like this:

- stopping you seeing your mum or dad, or talking with them by Skype or telephone, or sharing text messages
- telling you your mum or dad doesn't love you, they are a nasty person, or they may cause you harm – when you feel something different
- stopping you seeing or contacting your grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins – or even other brothers and sisters
- expecting you to 'choose' between your parents, or trying to turn you against the other parent
- becoming angry or very sad when you see, or talk about, your other parent
- telling you lies or untruths about your mum or dad
- asking you to spy on, or keep secrets from, your mum or dad
- insisting you call your mum or dad by their name (such as Stuart or Morag) – stopping you calling them mum, dad, daddy, ma etc.

Sometimes, when these behaviours happen a lot, children become worried, or scared, about seeing their mum or dad. It can cause them a lot of anxiety. Sometimes children will say they don't like their mum or dad any more, or even that they hate them or don't want to see them.

This survey looks at these questions: How can you be sure your feelings and views are your own, not influenced in a difficult family situation? How can you know if your wishes will "negatively impact you and you can't see it"? Who can help work this out?

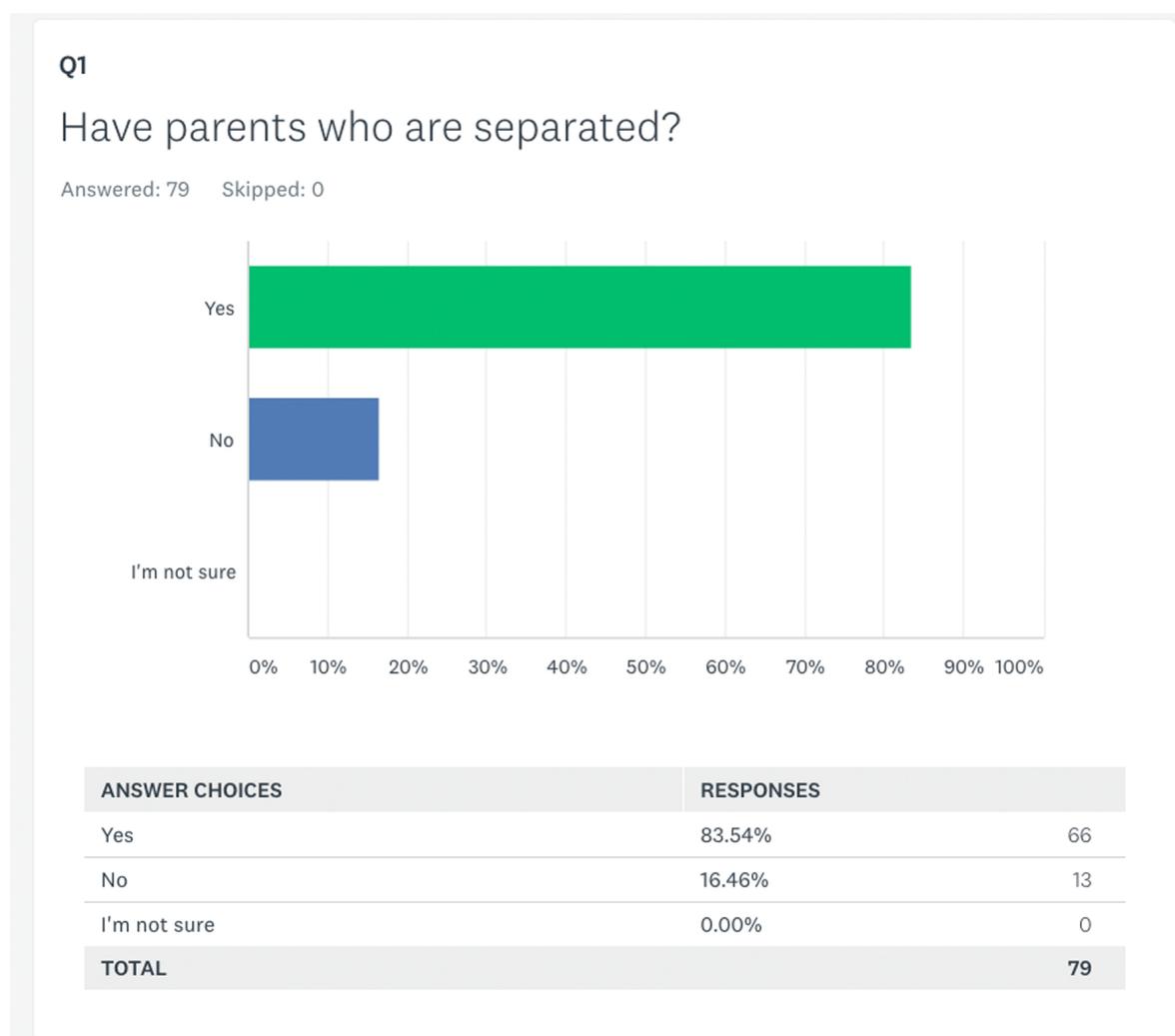
## **Young People and Family Separation in Scotland**

### **Question one – Have parents who are separated?**

**Sample size:** 79 respondents primarily between the ages of 12 to 25 years.

**Question one:** Have parents who are separated?

The majority of respondents (84%) confirmed they had parents who were separated. They were found through the Scottish Youth Parliament 'group chat' forums and their respective social media platforms. The survey was also kindly supported by **Young Scot** and **Children 1<sup>st</sup>**, and was clearly effective in reaching the target audience.



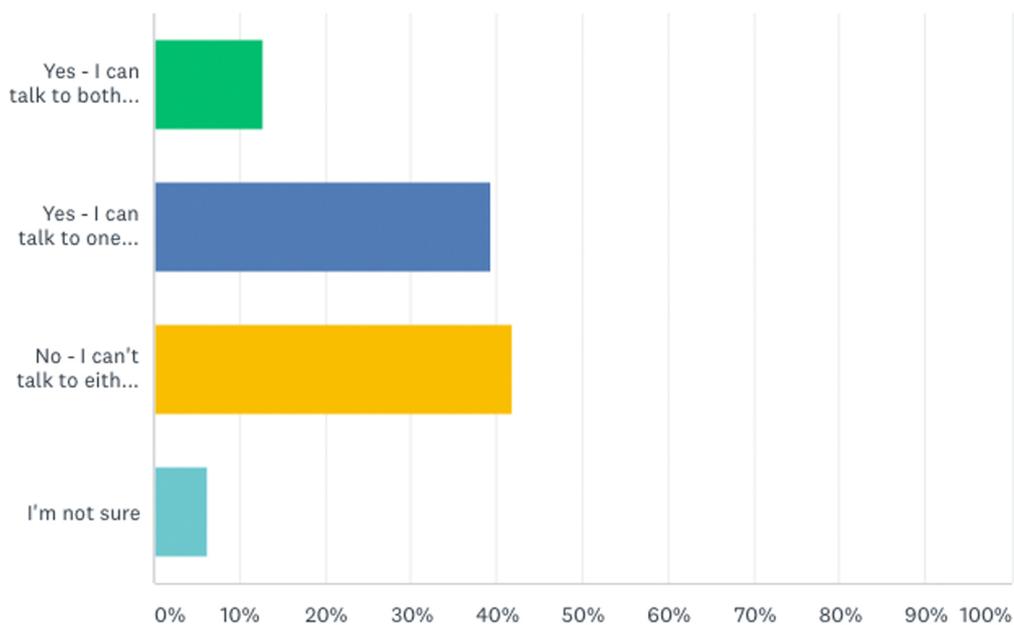
**Question Two: Ever able to talk to your parents honestly about your feelings?**

Sadly, only 13% of respondents felt able to talk with both their parents about their feelings. Just over a third (39%) felt able to talk to one parent, however the majority (42%) felt unable to speak honestly about how they felt, to either of their parents, while 6% were

Q2

Feel able to talk to your parents honestly about your feelings?

Answered: 79 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes - I can talk to both parents honestly	12.66%	10
Yes - I can talk to one parent honestly	39.24%	31
No - I can't talk to either of my parents honestly	41.77%	33
I'm not sure	6.33%	5
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>79</b>

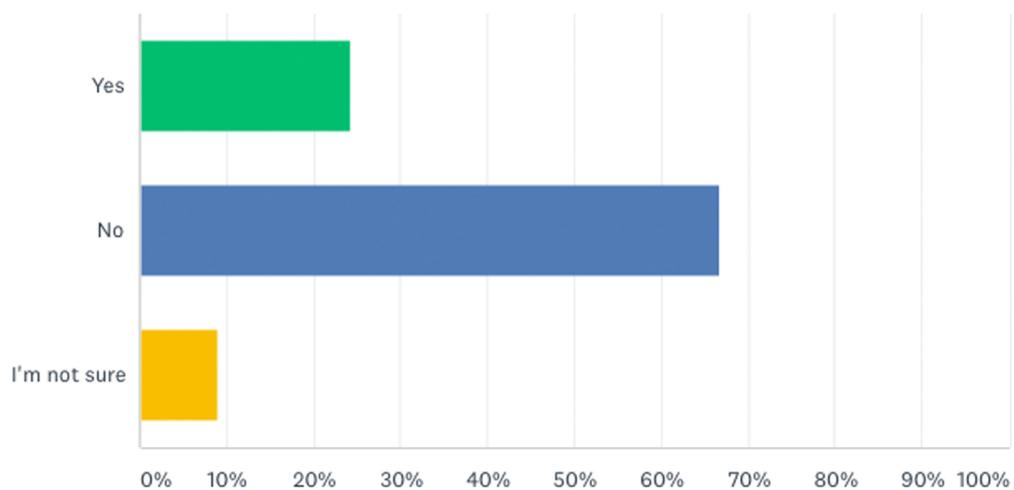
**Question Three – Ever said you don't love one parent in order to make the other one happy?**

Tragically, *a quarter of young respondents had to hide their true feelings and their love for a parent* in order to emotionally regulate the other parent and to keep them happy.

Q3

Ever said that you don't love one parent in order to make the other one happy?

Answered: 78 Skipped: 1



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	24.36%	19
No	66.67%	52
I'm not sure	8.97%	7
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>78</b>

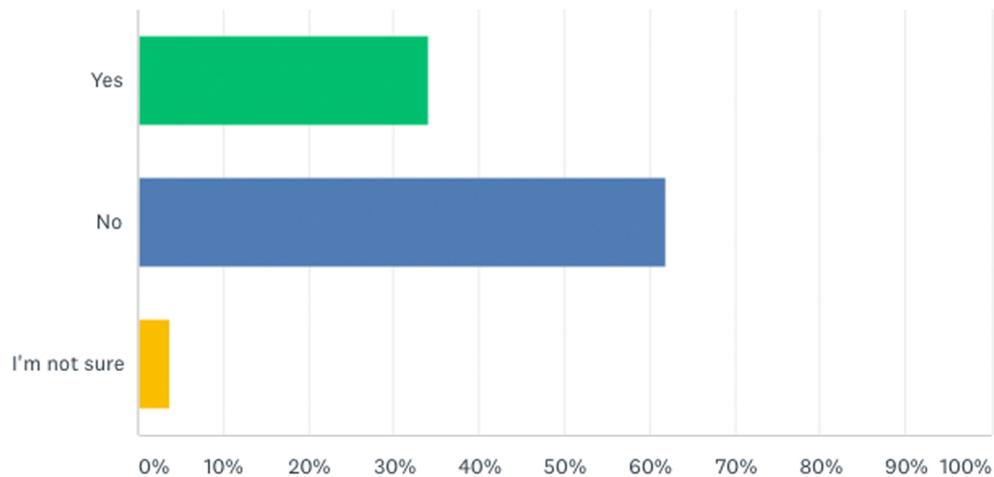
**Question Four – Ever been prevented from speaking to one of your parents?**

**Over a third of young respondents said they had been prevented from speaking with one of their own parents**, in direct contravention to UNCRC legislation which is designed to protect a child's innate and inalienable right to family life.

Q4

Ever been prevented from speaking to one of your parents?

Answered: 79 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	34.18%	27
No	62.03%	49
I'm not sure	3.80%	3
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>79</b>

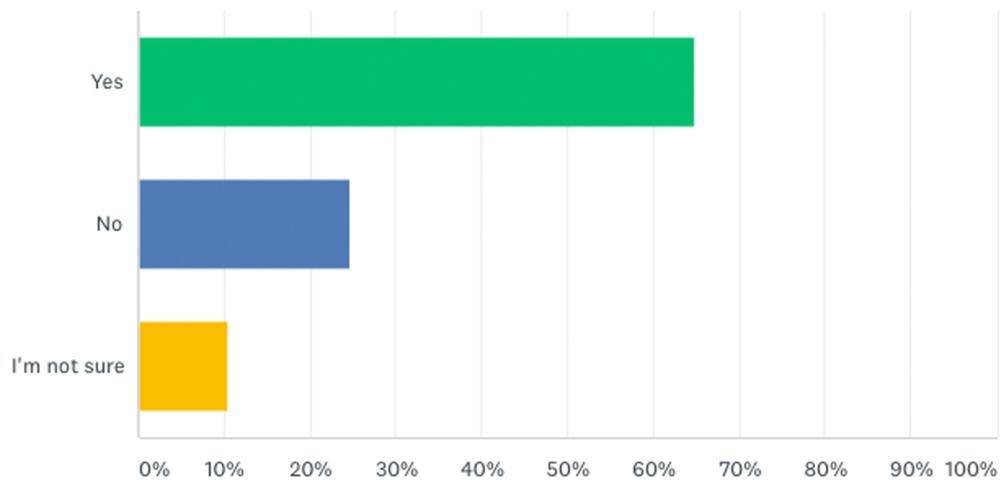
**Question Five – Ever feel that the things one parent says about the other do not match your feelings towards them, or what you know about them?**

Almost two thirds of young respondents admitted that what they had been told did NOT match their feelings or experiences (65%) which is strongly indicative of adverse undue

Q5

Ever feel that the things one parent says about the other do not match your feelings towards them, or what you know about them?

Answered: 77 Skipped: 2



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	64.94%	50
No	24.68%	19
I'm not sure	10.39%	8
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>77</b>

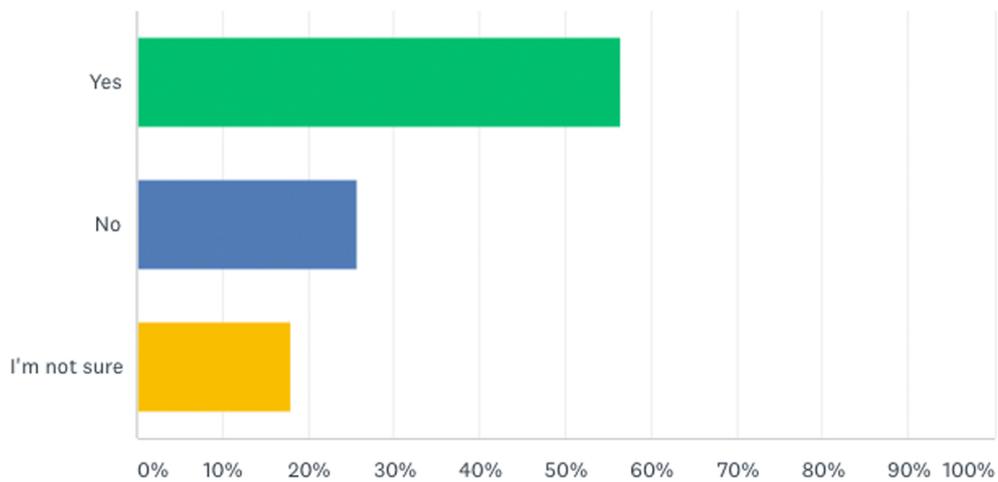
**Question Six – Ever feel that sometimes other people do not listen to, or believe you, when you tell them how you feel about a parent?**

Only a quarter of the respondents said they *did* feel listened to. More than half (56%) were clear they did not feel listened to and 18% were unsure

Q6

Ever feel that sometimes other people do not listen to, or believe you, when you tell them how you feel about a parent?

Answered: 78 Skipped: 1



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	56.41%	44
No	25.64%	20
I'm not sure	17.95%	14
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>78</b>

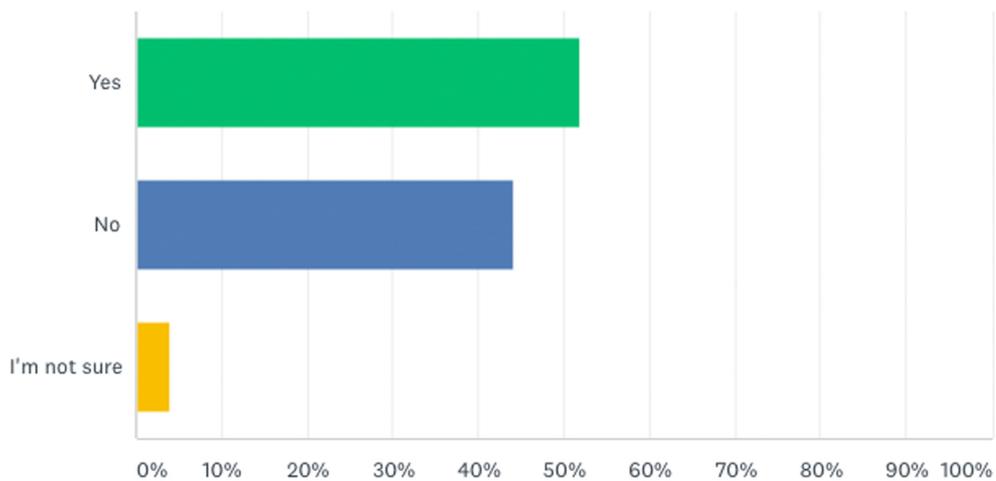
**Question Seven – Ever feel like you are expected to *choose* between both parents?**

More than half of these young Scottish respondents felt they had to choose between their own parents, post separation. A heartbreaking picture for children who have their parent-child attachment bonds distorted and potentially severed. This is not the picture of a

Q7

Ever feel like you are expected to choose between both parents?

Answered: 77 Skipped: 2



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	51.95%	40
No	44.16%	34
I'm not sure	3.90%	3
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>77</b>

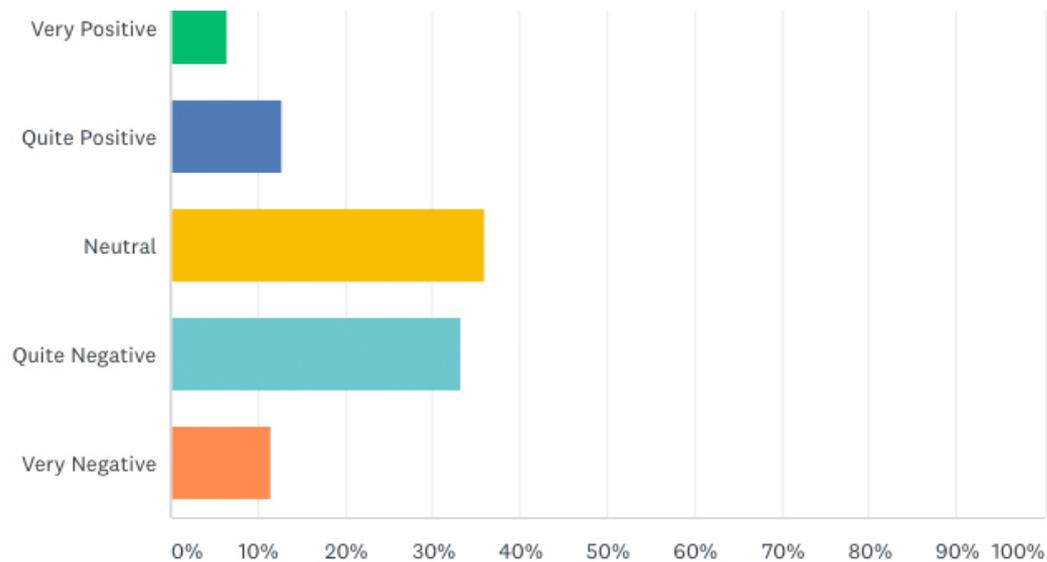
**Question Nine - Do you have any other comments you wish to make regarding this topic that has not been covered in this survey?**

One in five of respondents added further comments (below) which illustrates the depth of their concern and feelings about this central child protection issue.

Q9

Do you have any other comments you wish to make regarding this topic that has not been covered in this survey?

Answered: 15 Skipped: 64



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Very Positive	6.41%	5
Quite Positive	12.82%	10
Neutral	35.90%	28
Quite Negative	33.33%	26
Very Negative	11.54%	9
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>78</b>

### **Spontaneous comments from young Scottish respondents.**

- *“The lack of control young people often have in seeing one parent or another, when the case is not done through the courts. My parents split ‘informally’, with no involvement from the court or police etc, meaning there was no legal arrangement/requirement to see my father. I never saw my dad again. I don’t even know how many siblings I have now. The trauma this has inflicted on me was not realized until I began forming relationships at university level, almost 10 years later. As a child, I bought into everything I was told about my father and so I agreed not to see him, but now, I don’t think I will ever know the truth”.*
- *“My mum blames my Dad’s genes for any difficulty I have. She things all my good traits come from her genes. My parents are different nationalities, and my good aspects are said to come from my Canadian forebears, while my faults come from being half- Scottish”.*
- *Stepparents attitudes towards the young person or the other parent*
- *“I think it’s important to recognise that often people with separated families have ZERO contact with the other parent, e.g. single parent families. I have no contact with my Dad, and therefore have little way to hold him or my mum to account for what I’ve been told about either parent”*
- *“I think it’s maybe not just parent it can also be step- parents putting negative thoughts in your head”*
- *“Past experiences linger, and parents often expect up to have a view on it - even if it is before your lifetime”*
- *“Just a quick note on the mental health side of things- when my parents separated I found it really hard to talk to people about it because I felt I couldn’t talk to my mum or dad about it since it was their decision to separate and I didn’t want to make them feel bad. None of my friends had experienced it so I felt really alone, and it would be good if there was more information for young people to access to help them cope”.*

### **Spontaneous comments**

from young Scottish respondents.

- “Sometimes, if parents have separated when the child is younger, the events that caused the separation and cause the parents dislike towards one another (and their negative comments about each other) may have happened a very long time ago. The child may not understand or wonder if they have changed/if that other parent would act differently now”.
- “ I think it’s an important topic as I live with my dad and sometimes on occasion see my mum and really I think the way they feel about each other just impacted how me and my sister were supposed to feel and that’s not right”
- “The young children like those under the age of 6 years may find it difficult to express these feelings direct and therefore suffer in silence when a resident parent frustrate contact with the other parent.”

An older Scottish respondent aged 47 said this:

