

Two homes, one life: young people's experience of home and family when living in shared residence

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Abstract

Four million children lived in separated families in Great Britain in 2022. Whilst historically, most of these children would have lived with their mother and visited their father, changes in perceptions of parenting and working are resulting in a more equitable division of childcare. One such arrangement is shared residence, where children move between their parents' houses, spending a significant time with each parent. This study aimed to increase our understanding of how young people experience home and family when living in shared residence. The study adopted a qualitative methodology, utilising photo elicitation, family maps and advice writing within semi-structured interviews with 22 young people (11-24 years old) from sixteen families. Data from across these sources was analysed using a thematic analysis and visuo-textual analysis approach. The key findings from the study are presented within themes relating to family, time and home, and have been collected into an ecological system's model to convey shared aspects of what contributes to shared residence working well and not so well. Importantly, this study found that it is not the amount of time that children spend with parents that matters, but the amount of *available* time that they spend together. Additionally, in line with previous findings, it is the strength of relationships which have the most impact on a young person's experience of shared residence. The following five key messages were developed from the analysis: each family needs an arrangement that suits them; arrangements need to remain flexible and responsive to changing wishes and circumstances; parents should ensure good communication to remove the burden of management from young people; parents should practice an arrangement that recognises the totality of a child's life; and parents should create family spaces which allow young people to feel comfortable and that it is their space.

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Introduction

This thesis explores the experiences of young people who lived with both parents after separation or divorce. It highlights and explores how these young people experienced living in two houses, at different times, with different people, different belongings, and often different expectations.

Families are of great interest to researchers as they are the unit in which children tend to develop. In 2022 there were an estimated 19.4 million families in the United Kingdom (ons.gov.uk); these compose of a wide range of family forms with many children growing up in families other than the nuclear family. Some of these different family forms are created as a result of the separation of parents. In the UK, 42% of marriages end in divorce, with marriages and divorces both on a downward trend. Levels of cohabitation, on the other hand, have increased by 22.9% over the past decade (ONS, 2019). Figures from the Department for Work and Pensions, released at the end of the financial year in 2022, state that there were 2.5 million separated families in Great Britain, including four million children (Separated families statistics: April 2014 to March 2022 (experimental) retrieved from www.gov.uk). Given the high number of children and families that this affects, research in this area is highly relevant to many people.

Within the separated families statistics report quoted above, the government defines a separated family as one parent with care, one non-resident parent and any biological or adopted children they have between them who are either under 16 or under 20 and in full-time non-tertiary education. They define 'Parent with care' as the parent who has sole or main day to day care of the children, these statistics showed that 89% of parents with care in Great Britain

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are female. What is not shown within this definition and statistics, are those separated families who do not class themselves as having one parent with care and one non-resident parent, but instead have a more equitable share of parenting and residency. For the purposes of the 2021 census, children who lived equally between parents were counted as usually resident at the address they were staying at on census day.

Historically when heterosexual couples separated, it was commonplace for children to live solely with the mother, and for them to see the father at certain times, but not live with him. As parenting has become more equitable, this way of organising life with children after separation is giving way to alternative arrangements. As fathers have become increasingly conscious of their responsibility for childcare and involvement in parenting and mothers are increasingly involved in the workforce, a shift to a more balanced division of parenting post separation is becoming more common. One way of organising custody, is for the children to continue living with both parents, moving from one house to another in a pre-arranged routine, often spending equal amounts of time with each parent. This arrangement is referred to under many terms in the literature. In their review, Berman & Daneback (2020) included a diverse range of terms such as 'joint physical custody', 'shared physical custody', 'dual residence', 'alternating residence', 'shared residence' and 'shared parenting' to encompass the research in this area. In this thesis, I shall refer to it as shared residence, as this seemed the most child-friendly of the terms.

Shared residence is an increasing post-separation arrangement in the UK. However unlike in Australia, a recommendation of shared parenting has not been incorporated into the law. In the 2011 Family Justice Review, one of the reasons cited against legislating for 'shared parenting' was that people place

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different interpretations on the term, with some emphasising the counting of hours spent with each parent, and others on the quality of time spent. The term 'shared parenting' is also contentious as those children living in one home with both parents are not necessarily receiving shared parenting, nor are those split between two houses, but parenting could be shared in both those arrangements. For children in their study, Campo et al (2012) found that 'shared parenting' could exist – or be absent – regardless of whether parents shared a home or children spent time in different houses. Whilst shared parenting has not been incorporated into law, there is a legal presumption that it is best for children's welfare if both parents remain involved in the child's life when parents separate (The Children and Families Act ,2014 s.11). Where there is court involvement in creating child arrangement orders, the court will aim to find a way for both parents to be involved without putting that child at risk of harm.

This difference in interpretations is also present across academia, and with no official definition of shared care in the UK, it is difficult to determine its prevalence. However, estimates can be taken from research projects and surveys such as the UK Household Longitudinal Survey (HLS) which stand between 3% to 17% of child arrangements when looking at a 50/50 split of care (Haux, McKay & Cain, 2017; Peacey & Hunt, 2008). Data from the 2021 census (www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/families/articles/familiesinenglandandwales/census2021) shows that 5% of children had a second parent or guardian's address that they stayed at for more than 30 days a year, an increase from 3.2% in 2011. The highest proportion of children who had a second parent or guardian address lived within five kilometres of their second address, with 77.7% living within 15km (ons.gov.uk as above).

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Although shared residence is usually defined in terms of time spent with each parent, part of the difficulty in comparing the literature is the wide variation in the proportion of time counting as shared residence across studies and countries (Berman & Daneback, 2020). In Steinbach's 2018 review, she found that time between parents varied between 25% to 50%, with the 50/50 definition being more prevalent in studies from 2010 onwards, and from those originating from Norway, Sweden, and the UK. However, a figure of 35% appears to predominantly be the agreed amount of time in the academic literature to distinguish shared residence from sole custody (Braver & Lamb, 2018).

Papers which draw on data from the Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children (HBSC), a representative cross-national survey of adolescents (11, 13 and 15 years) in 37 European and North American countries conducted in 2002, 2006 and 2010 (N=92,886) show that the percentage of child arrangements that are equal between the parents vary widely between countries (Bjarnason & Amarsson, 2011; Steinbach, Augustijn & Corkadi, 2021). The highest prevalence is found in Sweden (20.9%), Belgium (13.5%) and Iceland (11.7%) and the lowest in Russia (0.9%), Armenia (0.8%) and Romania (3%); the UK and USA fall in the middle of the range with 6.6% and 4.9% respectively (Steinbach, Augustijn & Corkadi, 2021).

Recent reviews of the shared residence literature (Steinbach, 2018; Berman & Daneback, 2020) point out the difficulty of comparing studies which vary widely in sample, methods, outcomes, and variables. There is also difficulty in comparing studies that vary widely in cultural and legal contexts. The reviews highlight the paucity of research that comes from the UK. Half of the studies in Berman & Daneback's (2020) review from 2000-2009 came from Australia, and

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in the 2010s, most emanated from Nordic countries and North America, with just five from the UK. In their Family Policy Briefing paper, Fehlberg et al (2011:13), called for a focus on finding out more about shared in Britain, including children's experiences. As the UK differs both culturally and legally from the countries doing the majority of the shared residence research, it is important that similar research is conducted in the UK.

In England, when couples separate, a child arrangement order can be made by the court which regulates arrangements as to whom a child is to live with, spend time with and have contact with, and when this will happen (The Children & Families Act, 2014). The Children Act (1989) sets out that a court should only make an order where it is in the best interests of the child to do so. Parents are expected to organise the custody of the children, and court can be avoided if they are able to agree where the children will live, how much time they'll spend with each parent and how the children will be financially supported. If parents are unable to agree, they can access advice via charities and organisations such as Citizens Advice, and the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass). Parents can guide their decision making by making a parenting plan which asks them to consider things such as finding out the children's wishes, how parents will work together to make big parenting decisions, and how parents will communicate with each other and their children. This is not a legally binding document but could be made legally binding if taken to a solicitor to draft a consent order for the court to approve. Where parents are unable to agree, before making an application to the court, they must attend a family mediation information and assessment meeting (The Children & Families Act, 2014 s.10). This may also result in a parenting plan which again is not legally binding unless dealt with as above. In cases where parents are unable to agree, or mediation is not appropriate, for

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example in cases where there is domestic abuse, they can apply to court for a child arrangement order. Once the application has been made there will be a hearing to ascertain what can and cannot be agreed and any risks to the child/ren, after which if parents can agree and there are no child welfare concerns, a consent order will set out what has been agreed.

Enshrined within UK and international law are mechanisms which ensure the welfare and protection of children (The Children Act, 1989; The Children & Families Act, 2014; The United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)). Decisions which get made in the courts relating to a child's care must be made in their 'best interests', however as often shared residence arrangements do not make it to the courts, it is interesting to consider how these 'best interests' may be accounted for in less formal agreements. As parents are similarly expected to consider what is best for the child:

Both parents share responsibility for bringing up their child and should always consider what is best for the child. (Article 18, UNCRC)

Every child has the right to express their views, feelings and wishes in all matters affecting them, and to have their views considered and taken seriously. This right applies at all times, for example during immigration proceedings, housing decisions or the child's day-to-day home life. (Article 12, UNCRC)

Children are, and should be treated as, experts of their own lives (Prout & James, 1990). However, research findings point to the fact that despite this and the provision in law and treaty, children are often not consulted in matters concerning them. Where they are consulted, it is often as a 'tick-box' exercise rather than to give weight to those views. Only half of children in England and

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Wales were actively involved or consulted in private law proceedings starting in 2019 (Hargreaves et al, 2024). Children are often able to provide a unique and alternative viewpoint to those of adults. In their paper reviewing the extent to which children's views are heard and taken into account in care and protection matters, Cashmore, Kong & McLaine (2023) make the very important point that children should be asked as they are the ones best placed to know how decisions are likely to impact them.

Much variation exists within the everyday realities of different children and family members. As such, the view that our understandings of the world are generated through interactions and relationships is a powerful one in the study of childhood and family. Furthermore, it can be argued, that for children to be taken seriously as social actors there must be a shift in thinking (Mayall, 2000). Firstly, a shift from viewing children as objects of adult work to being competent. Secondly, consideration must be given to the extent to which children may be regarded as agents interacting with the structures surrounding them. Thirdly, a shift away from the view that it should be adult's views that define children's needs, but rather that children's own views and wishes are relevant to informing policy and practice.

As with my teaching career previously, I wanted this research to be guided by the main principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), that children should be involved, informed, consulted and heard. Throughout this research process, I am guided by Article 12. This is important in two ways, firstly as a guiding principle to social research, we are compelled by the convention to allow and encourage children to express their views and opinions, and to take them seriously. It is not enough to ask children as a 'tick-box' activity and bear no mind to what they have said, children must be

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actively listened to. Secondly, Article 12 was important within my research design as I was interested to know whether children were given the opportunity to express their views and feelings, and whether they felt that their views were taken seriously. The thesis therefore seeks to foreground the experiences of individual young people living in this way, adding their voices to the literature base.

Part of uncovering the complexity of childhood comes from viewing children as part of their family, with all the connections, development, generations, perspectives and other elements that that involves. Psychological and sociological perspectives on the family are varied and this thesis is guided by two particular theories, namely bioecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1977 & Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000) and family practices (Morgan, 1999, 2011, 2020). These theories emphasise that it is the processes and relationships that exist within a family that are of the most importance to the successful functioning of the family, rather than the structure of that family.

Whilst this thesis has been written to explore distinct themes developed through analysis, it is important to also consider the ways in which the different relational, spatial and temporal aspects are inextricably entwined.

Understanding a family through a systems theory such as Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1977, 2000) allows us to understand the range of interacting factors of wider structures and environments which impact the individual. We can look first at the individual characteristics of the child (age, gender, temperament, disability), then at their microsystems of family members and friends, the interactions between those members of the microsystem or between different microsystems (the mesosystem), the exosystem of services, neighbours, and surroundings that the child live in, the

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macrosystem of the wider society and culture, and the chronosystem which recognises changes to these systems over time. By viewing the family as a system embedded within wider systems, we are able to acknowledge the multidirectional impact of each element affecting and being affected by the other. When considering the adaptation and development of family members, and the family's functioning, it is particularly important to consider transition points (such as parental separation) as these are the times of greatest risk for family dysfunction (Cox & Paley, 1997). Parental separation causes a reorganisation of the family system, which may change again when parents form new partnerships, these changes affect the family system at each individual level, whilst also affecting the functioning of the family as a whole.

Family practices theory (Morgan, 1999, 2011, 2020) considers the importance of the actions of family members, that the everyday realities of what they do 'as family' is what is important in making them a family. This is particularly interesting in the context of families who are evolving through separation and then potentially into new blended families, as the family could contain many variations of members at different time points both across and within time.

In order to explore the experiences of young people, a participatory, qualitative methodology was deemed appropriate. The choice of methods for this study were guided by wanting to allow the young people in my research to feel that they were able to express themselves freely, Methods were chosen which allowed me to listen attentively and allowed the young people to feel that I was genuinely interested in what they had to say. The study used a mosaic approach, combining the use of photo elicitation, family map and advice writing within a semi-structured interview format to obtain the richest possible data from the young people, whilst aiming to cultivate a mutually respectful

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relationship (Alderson & Morrow, 2012). The resulting data were analysed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022) and visuo-textual analysis methods (Brown & Collins (2021).

Thesis aims

The aim of this research was to increase our understanding of how young people in England experience living with both their parents in separate houses after separation or divorce, in an arrangement often referred to as shared residence. It was hoped that through listening to children an insight would be gained into the challenges and benefits of this arrangement, enabling other families to learn from those in a similar situation to them and to inform policy and practice. As such, this research aimed to answer the question:

How do young people experience home and family when living with both parents after a separation or divorce?

Further to this, the research aimed to provide young people with the opportunity to consider and reflect on this living arrangement, where they may not have been given the opportunity previously. This study will add the child's perspective to the literature base, adding to the research evidence that professionals rely on when making decisions about children's lives.

How the literature search was carried out

In undertaking the literature search I used research published in peer reviewed sources. To identify relevant studies, I conducted searches using the UEA Library database, SCOPUS and Google Scholar. As I was new to researching in this area, I began with a broad search which became narrower as I

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progressed with the review. As this research focusses on young people's current experiences, I decided to look at literature from the last 21 years.

I began by searching the general divorce literature using the following terms:

impact AND divorce AND children OR adolescents in English between 2000-present.

contact AND "after divorce" OR "after separation"

I read abstracts to get an overview of the research area and was then able to narrow down my reading to those articles more pertinent to my research topic.

Once I had this overview of the divorce literature, I searched the shared residence literature. As discussed, there are a great many terms used in this area. To begin, I searched for

family AND "dual residency" OR "shared residency" OR "joint physical custody" OR "shared parenting" It became clear that the majority of research on shared residency came from Scandinavia and Australia, as such I also conducted searches with England and United Kingdom, to try to find research based in this country. This did not yield many results.

Once key review studies had been found these were used as a source for reading and more searching, targeted at key authors e.g. Trinder, Neilsen, Smart. Once areas were identified as being particularly interesting to this research, they were also specifically searched for e.g. Time AND shared residence / Home AND teenagers.

It was also necessary to use some grey-literature, such as The Office for National Statistics, to obtain an idea of the current picture within the United Kingdom.

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Consistent with Braun & Clarke's (2022) Thematic Analysis approach, I did not aim for a comprehensive account of the literature, but rather sought to use the literature to understand the topic and to provide a rationale for this research.

Thesis outline

The first three chapters of this thesis provide a review of the literature to put the study into the context of what is already known and to identify gaps in that knowledge. **Chapter one** aims to provide an overview of how children, childhood and family are viewed and conceptualised within legal provision and within the academic literature. **Chapter two** will consider research that shows the impact of divorce and separation on children with a focus on how viewing divorce as a process rather than as a one-off event, allows us to consider this impact more holistically. **Chapter three** considers the post-separation arrangement for children of shared residence. It considers the difficulties in defining shared residence, explores recent reviews of the literature and key themes within the literature, and concludes by considering the findings of two key studies from the UK which uncovered children's perspectives of living in shared residence. **Chapter four** provides a detailed account of the research design and process, including an in-depth discussion of the chosen methods, ethical considerations, and a reflexive examination of the effect of my own position on this research.

Chapters five, six and seven explore the findings of the research through the overarching themes of relationships, time and space. **Chapter five** considers the quality of relationships that the young people experienced across the two households. The chapter explores who the young people considered family,

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and the close bonds that existed for them both with blood-tied relatives and with new family members. The chapter considers the notion that it is not family structure, which is most important, but the relationships that exist within the family. As such it is what family members do, in particular parenting tasks, that draws them close as family. The chapter explores the strained relationships within the young people's families, and the fragility of bonds that are not blood tied. The chapter finally considers the relationship work the young people did within their families. **Chapter six** explores how young people experienced the quality of time, both in the sense of the standard of time and in its distinctive qualities. The chapter considers the ways in which time was experienced in a controlled way through set routines, how these routines evolved over time and the extent to which young people had and desired agency in adapting the routine. The chapter considers the notion that not all time is experienced in an equivalent way, but rather the experience is dependent upon factors such as day of the week and members of the household. Finally, the chapter explores how time spent together with family was important in creating and maintaining bonds. **Chapter seven** explores the experience of home for the young people in relation to the fabric of the space. The chapter considers the way that the familiarity of the space and the objects within that space contributed to a feeling of being at home. The chapter also considers the ways in which young people experienced home as being their territory, including the importance of personalisation. Lastly the chapter considers the difficulty for some young people when people invade their space.

Finally, **chapter eight** discusses the findings of the research in relation to the wider body of literature and reflects upon the strengths and limitations of the methodological approach. The chapter concludes with a consideration of the implication of these findings for families and professionals and provides key

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messages for young people, and for adults involved in making decisions about shared residence

Chapter 1: How are childhood and family understood?

1.1 How children are viewed legally: The provision for and protection of children

The conceptualisation and characterisation of childhood and the relative status, participation, and protection that they are afforded varies widely between different countries in the world, and within countries, depending on individual moral and religious views and the impact of cultural norms. As this research is taking place in the UK, this chapter will take a predominantly Western perspective on the concept of childhood and family within the literature. To begin, this chapter will briefly explore some of the legal provision that sets out the rights and protection of childhood and children before moving on to consider the notion of childhood as a social category. Prout & James' (1990) 'new paradigm' for the sociology of childhood will be discussed with a particular focus on how viewing children as experts in their own lives rather than as 'becomings' on their way to adulthood, impacts how we view and research children.

In the UK, children and childhood have a special status as a time to grow and develop, be educated, and a time where they need the protection of adults. The concept of childhood is often idealised in the media and fiction as a carefree time in which to play and have fun, however it is apparent that many children are faced with a range of adversities which impact on both their physical and mental health and their future prospects.

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In the UK, children have provision in and are protected by both domestic laws, such as The Children Act (1989) and international treaties such as the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). The Children Act (1989) was replaced by parallel legislation across the devolved nations, and as such I shall henceforth be referring to the version used in England. As legislation created to ensure the welfare and protection of children, The Children Act (1989) sets out duties and responsibilities for both courts and parents, and views children as having their own rights, separate to those of their parents and family. For example, the Act moved from viewing parents as having rights over their children to having responsibility for their children and assumes that a child will benefit from both parents being involved in their life. The UNCRC (ratified by the UK in 1991), contains articles relating to protection, participation, and provision. For example, Article 38 protects children from taking part in war, Article 13 states a child's right to freedom of expression, and Article 3 states that in all matters whether public or private, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration.

Article 1 of the UNCRC, defines a child as anyone under the age of 18. This is also the case in the UK, where with varying wording, the laws of the different countries all consider those under the age of 18 to be children. In the UK, as in many other places, the term child is often used to describe the son or daughter of a parent and can be used at any age, although in this case, 'offspring' can also be used. Generally, in terms of common usage, the term child would be used to refer to those before puberty / high school age after which the terms teenager, adolescent or young person are more likely to be used. The phrases 'minor' and 'reaching the age of majority' are used to differentiate in legal terms the state of being a child and reaching the age of legal responsibility and adulthood. In other uses though, the term minor refers to insignificance or

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unimportance. Similarly, the term child often carries with it negative connotations when being used for people above a certain, subjective, age. If someone is described as childish, this is a derogatory judgement on their behaviour, with the accuser believing that person should be acting in a more responsible or considered way. It seems, that embedded within these cultural norms, is a view that to be a child is to be less than an adult.

In each UK nation there are laws which define and separate childhood from adulthood. They focus on the protection of children, and in the case of voting laws, the protection of the sphere of adulthood. For example, those age 10 and over are classed as criminally responsible in all UK nations excepting Scotland, where it is age 12. Once a child is 16, they are able to choose to leave home or may be forced to leave home, however, the child's parent remains legally responsible for them until they are 18; and the age of sexual consent across the UK is 16.

The idea of childhood as a special time sits alongside the prevailing view of childhood in the UK as a time that children spend developing towards adulthood, a time when resources should be focussed on that development as an investment in the future (Wyness, 2018). This investment in the future is not only at an individual level, but is also thought of at a societal level, as can be seen in the green paper 'Every Child Matters' (ECM) (2003) and the subsequent changes to The Children Act (2004), which sought to prevent negative outcomes for children by bringing services together in working towards goals for children and young people, namely, being healthy, staying safe, enjoying and achieving, making a positive contribution and, economic well-being. The ECM agenda was based on the notion that supporting and nurturing children is beneficial to society as a whole; children are worth investing in because as

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adults they will be part of the work force and bringing up children of their own.

Through the Children Act (1989) and the UNCRC, a duty of care lies with adults in the UK (both those in the child's family, and those in authority) to protect children from harm and to ensure that they grow up within a provision of effective care. This emphasis in prioritising child welfare, is seen in section 1 of The Children Act (1989) which states that when a court determines any question with respect to the upbringing of a child, the child's welfare shall be the court's paramount consideration. There is a balance to be sought between adults protecting children and children being able to have a say in and influence their own lives. Article 12 of the UNCRC states that when making decisions that involve children, children's opinions should be sought, listened to, and considered. However, Lundy (2007) argues that adults' interpretations of Article 12 often do not go far enough in providing children the opportunity to have their views listened to and taken into consideration. Drawing on research conducted on behalf of the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children, she cites the problem that adults all too frequently can find persuasive reasons not to give children's views due weight. Consequently, she states that 'involving pupils in decision making should not be portrayed as an option which is in the gift of adults but a legal imperative which is the right of the child.' (Lundy, 2007: 931). Lundy suggests that Article 12 must be viewed within the context of other relevant articles (2 – non-discrimination, 3 – best interests, 5 – right to guidance from adults, 13 - right to information & 19 – right to be safe) and understood as a process. She proposes that for implementation of Article 12 to be successful and undiluted, adults must provide children with a space and opportunity to express their views, facilitate them to be able to express that view, listen to the view and act upon that view as appropriate.

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How young people experience these two aspects of the law, participation and protection, will be in part affected by how the adults around them view them in terms of their agency. Agency can be defined as being active and having the power or capability to exert some influence (APA dictionary). Agency can also be seen as acting purposefully (Valentine, 2011) and creatively participating in life. In the context of this research and changing family circumstances, viewing children as having agency can change them from being seen as passive victims, to being creative agents of change within their family (Neale & Flowerdew, 2007). How their agency is conceptualised and realised depends upon the perspectives of individuals at both the family and research level, leading to a wide variation in the level of agency that children have within the family as well as variations in terms of if and how children participate in research. How children are viewed conceptually and how this affects both their everyday experience and how they are researched, is explored next.

1.2 How are children viewed conceptually?

Children experience many different and varied childhoods, with few biological or universal features that are not varied and socially contingent (Waller & Bitou, 2011; Alderson, 2013). It can be argued that both the institution and construction of childhood is composed by adults and in each perception of childhood across history, it is only possible to understand it within its own social, economic, cultural, and religious context (Hendrick, 2015). As Corsaro (2005) states, for the child themselves, childhood is a temporary period, but for society, childhood is a permanent structure with changing members and a changing nature depending on the point in history. Researchers such as Mayall (2000;2002) and Alanen (2009), propose analysing childhood from a

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generational perspective to recognise the differing social, historical and political contexts with which child-adult relations take place. For Alanen (2009) a core idea of generation is that there exists in modern societies a system of social ordering that gives children their own social category. Children and childhood are shaped by adult's ideas of children and childhood which in turn are shaped by past events, interactions, and beliefs. As a generation, children take on board the notions and shared experience with people at differing stages of childhood, whilst all living their childhoods at a specific period of historical time in a particular society (Mayall, 2000). Mayall (2002) states that through a 'generationing process' (p35) childhood comes to have characteristics which distinguish it from adulthood. It is a universal fact of life that we begin as dependent babies, gradually acquiring the skills and abilities we need to be independent, however, how and when these skills are acquired is culturally dependent.

In the UK, the gaining of independence and responsibilities with age can be seen in the example of coming home from school: often teenagers are able to walk home from school alone, go out with friends and organise their own social lives, whereas younger children are usually accompanied by an adult, with parents taking the lead in directing what they do with their time after school. Similarly, our schooling system is an age-related pathway, based on the idea of developmental stages put forward by developmental psychologists such as Piaget, which children arrive at, at a certain age, and develop through sequentially. Often parents can become worried if their child does not reach a particular developmental milestone (e.g. speaking first words) at the 'correct' age, and children themselves will often compare themselves to their peers. Culturally, in the UK, we are preoccupied with age, with adults often asking children how old they are, and children often answering that question with

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pinpoint accuracy. A value is placed on age as a marker of a person's competency and knowing it allows them to be positioned in relation to those expectations (Woodhead, 2009:51). However, whilst many children are dependent on adults during their childhood, the universal idea of dependent children becoming independent adults obscures the wide variety of realities of childhood that exist. For some children, lines are blurred between childhood and adulthood as the differing contexts of their lives create the need to behave in a way that wouldn't usually be expected for someone of their age, for example young carers. A much-accepted paradigm put forward by Prout & James (1990), for viewing children in all their varied and complex realities is discussed next.

1.3 'New paradigm' for the sociology of childhood

In 1990, Prout & James outlined what became referred to as the 'new paradigm' for the sociology of childhood. Whilst frameworks such as traditional developmental psychology can view children as dependent 'becomings', with childhood as the transitional phase before becoming an adult, the 'new paradigm' views children as 'beings' and sought to prioritise the understanding and acceptance of children being children in the here and now, giving researchers permission to research children and childhoods in their own right. The new paradigm did not primarily aim at responding to pressing social issues, but rather was interested in acquiring knowledge and insight about children and childhood in their normality. It challenged the notion that children 'naturally' or necessarily lacked the qualities and capacity necessary for participation in research and sought to move away from the notion that children required particular methods to be studied. It can be argued that an entirely future-oriented perspective has no focus on understanding who the

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child is now because it neglects the everyday realities of being a child (Alderson, 2008). In line with this view, this research aims to illuminate what the everyday reality is for young people who live in shared residence, and as such will view the children as beings, with a focus on what their experiences are and how they view their world.

In response to the dichotomy of seeing children either as 'being' or 'becoming', Uprichard (2008) suggests that it is beneficial to our understanding of childhoods if we see the two as complementary rather than opposing. It is their belief that by doing this, children's agency will be increased. Further to this is the idea that as adults we are still learning and developing and as such, are also both being and becoming. A further problem with viewing children only as 'becoming' is to render them as incompetent and adults as competent. Competency, however, depends on a wide range of elements. In her research, Uprichard (2008) found that young people's views of their own competency were derived from relational observations between themselves and others, where the 'other' could be other adults or other children. Similarly, Uprichard argues that viewing children as only 'being' also has its drawbacks as it risks distilling childhood into a snapshot rather than a full picture. Instead, Uprichard (2008) argues that children should be viewed as knowledgeable 'being and becoming' as this highlights them as active agents. For Uprichard, children's agency is increased through perceiving them as both 'being and becoming' as their agency exists in both the present and the future. She argues that the 'being and becoming' perspective allows for a multi-disciplinary construction of the child which fits with children's own experiences of childhood.

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The notion of childhood as a construction is a key feature of Prout & James (1990) 'new paradigm', being taken on by many of the other authors within '*Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood*' and subsequently fully embraced within academic discourse within childhood studies (Tisdall & Punch, 2012). Within this paradigm, researchers seek to understand the definitions and meanings that children give to their own world and recognise that children have the competence to understand and act within their own lives (Waller & Bitou, 2011). Prout & James (1990) argue that it is essential to view childhood as a social institution that exists beyond any individual child, and therefore, theoretical space must be given both to the construction of childhood as an institution and the activity of children within the constraints and possibilities that that institution creates.

Within childhood studies, concepts such as competence are not seen as fixed but as 'shifting, contingent, social experiences, co-constructed between children and adults' (Alderson, 2013:10). They are therefore highly dependent upon the surroundings and competency of the adults as well as the child's abilities. Within this research, it is interesting to consider that who the adults are within the family will frame the way that the children are treated and understood (Wyness, 2018). There are universal elements of childhood and adulthood but defining each in relation to the differences that exist between the two, is not always useful to our understanding of children and childhood (Oswell, 2013). Similarly, Oswell (2013) argues that it is not useful to view agency as binary, either having it or not, but instead that we should investigate the fluidity of children and their agency in relation to those around them. This may be particularly relevant when a child is living their life between two households as the rules and expectations may vary between those structures,

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leading the child to experience differing amounts of agency depending on which parent they are with.

Part of Prout & James' original reasoning behind developing the 'new paradigm' was to develop a way of researching children that could rebalance the perceived inequalities of power that were thought to exist in the study of children at the time (Oswell, 2013). Who decides what is in their best interests though, is unclear; however, it will often be adults who decide this. Similarly, even though there is a shift towards recognising children's capacity and agency, children still sit within structures which may constrain them, for example often research with children involves adult gatekeepers. It is useful, when considering and researching the everyday lives of children, to consider children as social actors and childhood as a social structure where both affect the other. The next section of this chapter will explore the changing definitions of family in the UK, and the range of theoretical perspectives of the family that allow us to appreciate the diversity and complexity that exists in the UK today.

1.4 How do we understand family life?

Family is simultaneously public and private. It has been argued that the concept of 'the family' is no longer one which can fully explain and capture the variety of families in contemporary society; for Levin & Trost (2000) there is no such thing as *the* family, but rather only families, with the meaning of the term dependent upon the situation. Some go so far as to say that we must not try to define the family and that by defining it we run the risk of narrowing it down to such an extent that what falls outside of the definition is deemed as unnatural or deviant (Bernades, 1999; Levin, 1999).

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The UK government and other political parties straddle a line between creating policy which supports and protects families and being accused of creating a 'nanny state' when that protection is perceived as impinging too much on people's personal choices. According to Daly (2010), it was under the Labour governments of the late 1990s and early 2000s that the UK had increasing policy relating to family such as the introduction of tax credits, the expansion of services for young children and their families via Sure Start centres, and changes to maternity and paternity leave, and flexible working. However, Daly also argues that this was not a substantial change but rather a 'repositioning' (Daly, 2010:442) to locate families and family members more explicitly with the economic market.

Psychological and sociological perspectives on the family vary widely; family can be seen as a structure which exists to perform certain functions such as the socialisation of children (Murdock,1949; Parsons, 1955), a system which exists as part of a wider network of systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Widmer & Jalinoja, 2008), or a space where the activities of people create the family (Morgan, 1999; Finch, 2007). The concept of who belongs to a family has evolved from simple consanguinity and affinity to families of choice (Weston, 1991), deciding our own kinship ties (Mason & Tipper, 2008) and to acknowledging the fluidity of ties and interdependencies over time (Bernades,1999; Widmer & Jalinoja, 2008). These varying perspectives will be discussed in more depth below.

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Although operational definitions of family have been broadened over the years, traditional concepts of family have not disappeared (Schadler, 2016).

Golombok (2015) speaks of three types of family: the traditional nuclear family, non-traditional families (for example, those headed by a single parent, cohabiting parents and stepfamilies), and new families (for example, lesbian mother families, gay father families, families created by egg donation and surrogacy). The traditional nuclear family of two heterosexual married parents with their biologically related children 'is now in the minority'(Golombok, 2015:1) in the UK with a growing number of parents cohabiting rather than getting married. According to the ONS, the percentage of the population living in a nuclear family form fell from 52% in 1971 to 36% in 2009, whereas cohabiting families are the fastest growing family type with an increase of 30% between 2004 and 2014. Children are brought up in families with stepparents and step or half-siblings, by single parents, and by same-sex parents, and many children will experience different family structures as they grow up, with the nuclear family becoming a stage in the life cycle, with children and adults potentially moving in and out of it several times throughout their life course (Wyness, 2018).

Historically, people needed to be in a family structure to have the support that they needed to be able to survive and prosper; being part of a family was perhaps less about emotional support, and more about financial security, particularly for women. Families were an economic necessity tied together through shared efforts (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). Through industrialisation, and later the welfare state, women and children were able to exist outside of the family unit, leading towards what Beck & Beck-Gernsheim (2002) refer to as individualisation. Both women and men were better able to negotiate their life phases and relationships, as norms and institutions that

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forced them into traditional biographies, decreased (Schadler, 2016). Despite this option for negotiation, during the post-war period in the UK (and many other Western countries) many nuclear families were formed in which men and women had distinct and complementary roles; the man was the breadwinner, and the woman was the caretaker. Despite the rise in cohabitation and other non-traditional and new family forms, the nuclear family form remains the default view of the family in the UK today, and whilst social norms may be changing, it is a slow process and therefore when *the family* is referenced, this is primarily seen as a mother, father and their biological children living together:

'...the traditional nuclear family is still generally considered the best environment in which to raise children, and remains the gold standard against which all other family types are assessed' (Golombok, 2015:3).

1.5 Perspectives on conceptualising family

The pervasive nature of the nuclear family could be attributed to the view that the family exists to perform certain functions. Functionalist sociologists such as Murdock (1949) argued that the family performs four basic functions - sexual, reproductive, economic and educational (socialisation). Similarly, Parsons (1955), who studied only American families but argued the universality of his theory to all families, argued that they are performing the two "irreducible functions" of primary socialisation of children and stabilisation of the adult personalities of the population. Parsons viewed the pre-industrial family as having many functions both for its members and society as a whole and viewed the post-industrial nuclear family as having reduced but more specialised functions. Parson's theory that men and women undertook

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'complementary roles' within the family, with women as 'expressive' caretakers ready to make the 'instrumental' men feel better after a hard day out at work, is viewed by many as outdated. The view that the family exists as a way of supporting the workforce can also be found in a Marxist view of the family (Zaretsky, 1976). During the 1970s and 1980s, feminist theory critiqued functionalist theory as maintaining an ideology of the family which justified and maintained certain patterns of privilege, including legitimising the socially inferior position of women and the marginalisation of different family forms (Wyness, 2018). Another criticism of this position is that it is only applicable to a certain narrow portion of families; the male breadwinner model worked best for those privileged by class and ethnicity, a privilege that most women did not have (Smart, 1984).

Whilst a functionalist perspective can bring some insight to understanding families in the UK today, it can be argued that families are better understood from a more holistic viewpoint such as can be gained from systems theories. System theories are models in which all elements are interconnected and as such what affects one member of the system will affect every other member, the system interacts with its environment and must be considered as a whole (Dupuis, 2010). From a family systems approach, individual family members cannot be understood independent of the context of the family system as each member is influencing the others (Cox & Paley, 1997). Whilst functionalism may tell us that the family's function is to socialise the child, it does not tell us how that function is experienced within a particular family. Implicit within systems theories such as Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1977) is the notion that an individual's experience varies depending on the systems surrounding them.

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Families are diverse and as such there are many aspects that need to be understood in order to understand them. Rapoport & Rapoport (1982) argue there are five types of diversity which need to be considered.

1) Organisational diversity: different families have different ways of organising labour within and outside of the home.

2) Cultural diversity: There will be variations in behaviour, beliefs, and practices as a result of culture, ethnicity, political or religious affiliations. This diversity is present both between and within different groups.

3) Social class diversity: This diversity arises from the vast difference families have in their ability to access material and economic resources and impacts both what they have and their attitudes.

4) Life course diversity: Families differ from one another depending on where they are in their life-course. We can expect a young couple with a new-born baby to be different to a married couple in their sixties with grown-up children.

5) Cohort diversity: Families within a certain historical period will differ to those from a different period. For example, the effect of the covid pandemic and living in the climate emergency on contemporary families remains to be seen.

Certain assumptions made about families, for example that they are biologically related and that all members live in one house, risk ignoring the huge variation and diversity that exists in family life. To understand

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contemporary family, it is necessary to explore how people live in their homes and what their everyday practices are.

1.6 Family as fluid sets of relationships open to interpretation and negotiation

Who is afforded membership to a family is highly subjective and relies on a combination of factors relating to domesticity, consanguinity, conjugality, emotions, care, responsibility, and justice (Trost & Levin, 2000). Families can include those who are close to you and those who are close to those who are close to you. Each individual experiences and defines the relationships differently, with members of the same household being involved in different family subsystems or dyads. It is possible for a family to consist of just one dyad, the parent-child dyad or the spousal dyad; however, Trost & Levin (2000) argue that often a family will consist of several dyadic units often spanning multiple households. Using a dyadic explanation of family can encompass a wide variety of family systems, e.g. a dyadic explanation of a step-family would be: a social group with at least one spousal dyad and at least one child who is a member of only one parent-child dyad (Trost & Levin, 2000).

Through widening our gaze on the family from narrow roles and functions to holistic systems, we can encompass a range of relationships and interdependencies (Jamieson, 1998:77 in Gabb & Silva, 2011), that may better reflect the reality of people's perceptions of who is in their family, rather than just those which are sanctioned by consanguinity and socially recognised partnerships. Rather than simple structures of mother, father, and children; families can be full of dynamic and varied connections that are held together

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through shared histories and memories (Smart, 2007). By conceptualising families as configurations (Widmer & Jalinoja, 2008), those from the LGBTQ+ community who are in chosen families (Weston, 1991), those who become family and then are not, and those who share feelings of belonging and connectedness, are all able to be viewed as family. Additionally, it is possible when viewing family in this way, to view it as evolving over time, with interdependencies changing depending on circumstances, which is a useful way to conceptualise family when considering how young people experience adapting to a new family form after parental separation. A similarly fluid conceptualisation of family comes from Bernades (1999), who sees individuals as being on their own individual life-courses which intersect and combine with those of others to create 'family pathways'. From this perspective, family membership is open to wide range of people, with individuals continually negotiating their own pathways, and these are invariably linked to other subsystems of the community. Viewing the family in this way, enables an appreciation of the diversity and fluidity that exists both within one person's life course and between different members of society.

Many of the theories regarding how best to define and analyse family are taken from the viewpoint of an external observer, whereby who is included in the family is determined by the parameters of the situation rather than the members themselves (Levin & Trost, 2000). An alternative viewpoint, rather than kinship being solely defined by roles and positions, is to consider that people make and negotiate kinship through continued engagement with each other (Carsten, 2000; Gullov, Palludan & Winther, 2015; Mason & Tipper, 2008). Who and what constitutes a family is constructed by everyone within that particular family at that particular time, based on how they feel, act and think about those people around them within the wider social and cultural contexts

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and values that they are part of (Gullov, Palludan & Winther, 2015; Smart, 2007).

From this perspective, family membership is not fixed but rather can be negotiated under a range of circumstances, constraints and cultural understanding including the practicalities of who does what for whom, and the moral question of what is right to do (Mason & Tipper, 2008). Importantly, Mason & Tipper (2008) state that these negotiations can both draw into kinship those who are not related biologically or through marriage and exclude those that would be seen as kin by conventional definition. It is particularly interesting to consider who children will count as kin for those who have experienced their family break up and reform with different family members.

In their research with 49 children from a range of socioeconomic, cultural and ethnic backgrounds in the north of England, Mason & Tipper (2008a) recognised that children may prioritise the quality of relationships over genealogical structures in their definitions of family. As such the research looked at wider relationships than just those traditionally labelled as family, including ones with people whom the children felt a sense of relatedness, and found that the children were actively involved in creating and defining their kin relationship. The children were both able to recognise the formal, external forces on who belongs to their family, and able to 'reckon' their own kin.

Whilst previous research (Smart et al, 2001) had shown that children from separated families are adept at reckoning their kin as they navigate the new complexities of the formation of their family, Mason & Tipper (2008a) found that all children, whether from separated families or not, had relationships that

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could be considered unconventional, forcing children to think beyond a conventional nuclear family system. They argue that having such things as half-siblings, members of family in same-sex relationships, family members from different religious and ethnic backgrounds, and losing touch with family due to conflicts, constitute the “ordinary complexity of kinship, for both children and adults” (p443). From their study, Mason & Tipper identified five intersecting and overlapping ways that the children ‘reckoned’ their kin, which are set out in detail below. They highlight that within each type, it is the process of reasoning, and activities involved, that are important in understanding children’s kinship.

1) Acknowledging ‘proper’ relatives – children in the study used terms such as ‘real’ to denote and differentiate between those who were related by blood or marriage from those who felt like family. They found that children from certain cultural backgrounds and girls in general, were more confident in describing the lineage and ‘proper’ names for different relatives. In cases where the children were unsure of ‘what they are to me’, the children would defer to an adult’s knowledge. The ensuing discussions with their parents showed the negotiations involved in the acquisition of knowledge about and definitions of relatedness within a family. The ‘properness’ of relatives is defined externally and formally rather than from within the family.

2) Creating enhanced kinship with ‘proper’ relatives – The children used their own terms for relatives when they thought that the ‘proper’ term didn’t adequately convey the depth of relationship. E.g. ‘cousin-brother’ for cousins that they spend a lot of time with, and dropping the ‘step’ on ‘stepbrother’.

3) Establishing distance from ‘proper’ relatives – Mason & Tipper recognise that unlike with their friendships, children have little independence in determining the frequency of their interactions with certain family members. Whilst charting

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their kin, some children took the opportunity to place selected 'proper' kin at the outer reaches to indicate emotional distance.

4) Weighing up potential 'proper' relatives – Whilst in the main, children viewed the status of 'proper' relatives as fixed, the status of partners and 'newcomers' could be more fluid and negotiable. There was a sense that to achieve 'proper' status was a process, the status needed to be earned and verified by others over time.

5) Creating 'like-family' kinship – Sixty-five percent of the children in their study specified a relationship that was like family with someone who was not biologically related to them, for example seeing parent's friends as like Aunts or Uncles. Mason & Tipper identify this as a way of the children bringing someone close and signifying a good or close relationship. The children in the study creatively used language to include people in their kinship group. Children also drew in their pets and pets of relatives as being 'like-family'. The element of choice for the children was important and perhaps the defining feature of 'like-family' kinship. To declare someone as part of your family was a significant gesture on the part of the children in this study.

Young people playing an active role in the configuration of their family was similarly shown in Gullov, Palludan & Winther's (2015) study into siblingships. The qualitative study combining interviews with visual methods was conducted in Denmark with 93 young people between age 6 and 20, plus 23 adults. The young people were from a range of family forms, with one fifth of the children having lived with their biological mother and father all their life. Whilst sibling relationships were characterised under varying levels of friction, they found that people made an effort to maintain a balance, cope with conflict

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and avoid friction. They showed that far from being passive members of the family, the young people actively engaged in making and re-making relationships that were fundamental to their personal lives. In the current research, it will be interesting to see who the young people define as being a part of their family, and who, if anyone is excluded. It will also be interesting to see what active engagement in making and maintaining relationships the young people undertake within their family.

This section has demonstrated that families can be viewed as fluid sets of relationships that are not always based on the ties of blood and marriage. Further to this is the concept that who counts as family can be contingent on the roles and activities that take place. The concept of family as practice and display is discussed next.

1.7 Family as practices and display

Morgan (1999, 2011, 2020) developed an approach to theorising family, 'family practices', that saw family as a verb rather than a noun. Through this approach, Morgan (1999) hoped that the complexities, diversity and variation of families could be appreciated, rather than our understanding of family life being constrained by one normative model. Morgan developed his theory of family practices over the course of twenty years, but in general the term is intended to encompass a range of related themes as set out below (Morgan, 1999:17).

1. "A sense of interplay between the perspectives of the social actor, the individual whose actions are being described and accounted for, and the perspectives of the observer."

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2. "A sense of the active rather than the passive or static." The emphasis is on the 'doing', even something passive such as sleeping can be viewed as 'doing family' as it is a result of many decisions, negotiations and circumstances that lead to where, how, and the quality of sleep obtained.

3. "A focus on the everyday". The routine and trivial are as important in understanding family practices as the big life events like weddings and funerals. Capturing the mundane minutia of family life can tell us much about how the members of a family construct and understand their family.

4. "A stress on regularities". As with above, it is important to capture the regular and taken-for-granted aspects of family life that often go unexamined.

5. "A sense of fluidity" Practices are not viewed in isolation; they occur in conjunction with other practices which may also be linked to the perceptions of those involved and their memories of past occurrences and anticipations of what will come. For example, a birthday celebration will consist of family practices in conjunction with gender practices and leisure practices, whilst also combining with memories of past parties creating expectation and anticipation.

6. "An interplay between history and biography" Whilst a great deal of what we view in family practices is centred in the present moment, family practices have a historical and societal element that must also be considered.

Viewing the family through a lens of family practices and systems theory highlights the integrated role of individuals and the relationships and contexts that they find themselves in. Morgan states that different agencies are involved in the construction of family practices, including 'social actors' (parents,

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children, other kin) whose actions are linked to general notions of family which are constantly negotiated and evolving. The more abstract agencies involved in the construction of family practices, religious leaders, journalists etc. do not speak with one voice but are constantly involved in the description of family and non-family, functional and dysfunctional. Their accounts are influential in the practices of family members and in the cultural resources they are drawing on to make meaning of their activities. Morgan also highlights the involvement of the observer as the final agent involved in constructing the family. The observer will not necessarily agree with the actors but there should be some 'free flow between the two' (Morgan, 1999:19). This is of particular importance within social research, as the researcher will observe and interpret what is happening within each family.

In some families, such as blended families, a household is not necessarily synonymous with conventional notions of family, and as such the 'doing' of family may not be enough to convey family membership both to the members and to those looking in on the family. It can be argued that the persistence of the nuclear family as the ideal can lead blended and stepfamilies to feel abnormal and create a lack of clarity of role for those involved (Kumar, 2017). These families may find that family life needs active demonstration, described by Finch (2007) as 'display'. This 'display' is a way of conveying to others that their actions constitute 'doing family' and as such act as confirmation that these relationships are family relationships.

The contemporary practice of posting digital photos to social media provides an opportunity for families to display publicly activities that take place in a

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private place. It is possible for families to carefully curate this display in a way that is not as easy in real-time and seek validation that these are indeed 'family' activities and family relationships. In their study, Shannon (2019) found that sharing images of family leisure time was a way for families that considered themselves non-normative to demonstrate that they were 'doing family'. These families shared photos for a variety of reasons including communicating their family identity and creating a sense of belonging. This has interesting connotations for family research, as it may impact on what can be known about families. Goffman (1959) describes certain activities that are not things to be seen and known by others as remaining backstage, and some as being 'front stage' to be observed by others. What remains 'backstage' to be kept private and what is 'front stage' to be observed by others may differ depending on whether people view their family as requiring that extra level of active demonstration or not. It will be interesting in the current research to observe how young people display their family within the context of being researched.

1.8 Conclusion

This chapter explored the concept of childhood as time that is different to adulthood, a time when children are developing and acquiring skills and knowledge. There is tension as to whether children should be viewed as 'being' or 'becoming' and this research will take the stance that viewing them as both is advantageous as it allows children to be viewed as experts in their own lives and as having agency, whilst also acknowledging that they are at a single point in time with a past and a future. The research presented in this chapter highlights the importance of researching children and recognising them as social actors who affect their own lives and their family.

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This chapter has demonstrated the wide variety that exists in both family forms and in the conceptualisation of family. Through widening our perspective away from consanguinity and affinity it is possible to consider the fluidity that exists within families and acknowledge the impact that family members themselves have on who is afforded membership to the family. In relation to family membership, the current research will explore the central principle of family practices, that perhaps what someone does is as, or more important, than the relationship that they have to us in deciding whether they are part of our family. The next chapter will consider the impact on children that the divorce or separation of their parents has on them.

Chapter 2: The impact of divorce and separation on children

The previous chapter provided an overview of the how children, childhood and family are viewed and conceptualised within the literature. This chapter will consider research that shows the impact of divorce and separation on children (henceforth I am choosing to use the term separation throughout this chapter to encompass both divorce and separation) with a focus on how viewing separation as a process rather than as a one-off event, allows us to consider this impact more holistically. Whilst the current research is not aiming to determine a positive or negative impact of separation, it is helpful to situate it within the wider picture of the impact that parental separation has on children.

The previous chapter demonstrated the wide variety that exists within family forms, and we must not suppose that all children are growing up in one house with their biological parents (Pryor & Rodgers, 2001). However, much research does not reflect the true patterns of residence for children that exist. For a long time, research has been predominantly framed from the perspective of the nuclear family structure as being the 'gold standard' for what is best for children (Golombok, 2015). As such research tends to show what harm follows for children who are removed from this 'ideal' way of living. Whilst the profile of families in the UK is changing, the majority of research focusses on married heterosexual couples who divorce. This is in part due to the difficulty in identifying cohabiting couples and tracing any breakdown in their relationships. Reviews of literature relating to parenting in same-sex couples indicate that children develop in line with their peers with different-sex parents; as such it is reasonable to think that adjustment of children who experience

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the dissolution of their same-sex parent's relationship would be similar to children who experience separation of their heterosexual parents (Farr & Goldberg, 2018:157).

For a long time, it was the norm for research to compare those children who were in a single parent (almost always single mother) family after divorce with those who were in a nuclear family (Amato, 2012), attributing differences in adjustment primarily to the separation. Over the last two decades, research has moved to see separation as a process and seeks to explain the differences in outcomes for children experiencing that process (Cao, Fine & Zhou, 2022). Such research looks to examine the various factors (such as economic well-being and parental conflict) which exist both before, during and after divorce and which lead to some children experiencing very little negative impact from their parents' separation and to others having wider ranging and long-lasting negative effects.

2.1 Definitions of adjustment within the literature

To understand the adjustment of young people after a separation or divorce, it is useful first to understand the factors that contribute to healthy development and adjustment in young people in general. Drawing on a collection of reviews of the literature, encompassing more than one thousand studies from the past fifty years, Lamb (2012) reports a consensus that the most important factors are:

- a. The quality of parent-child relationship.

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b. The quality of the inter-parent relationship; conflict between them is associated with maladjustment while harmonious relationships between the adults support healthy adjustment.

c. The availability of adequate economic, social, and physical resources, with poverty and social isolation being associated with maladjustment, and adequate resources supporting healthy adjustment. (Lamb, 2012:99)

It is interesting that the first two of these factors are related to the processes that occur within the family, and not to do with family structure. It is possible to see how the third factor could be particularly relevant in the context of separating families who may experience changes, potentially an initial decline followed by a recovery, within their economic, social, and physical resources as a consequence of the separation.

Across the literature there are varying definitions of adjustment used to determine the impact of parental separation on children. In their review of the divorce literature, Lansford (2009) found that externalising behaviours (e.g. bullying, acting out), internalizing problems (e.g. low self-esteem, depression, anxiety), academic achievement, and quality of social relationships, are the most frequently included indicators of child adjustment. Definitions and measures vary across the literature with most research using standardised quantitative measures such as the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) (Goodman, 1997).

2.2 The effect of interrelating systems on the child

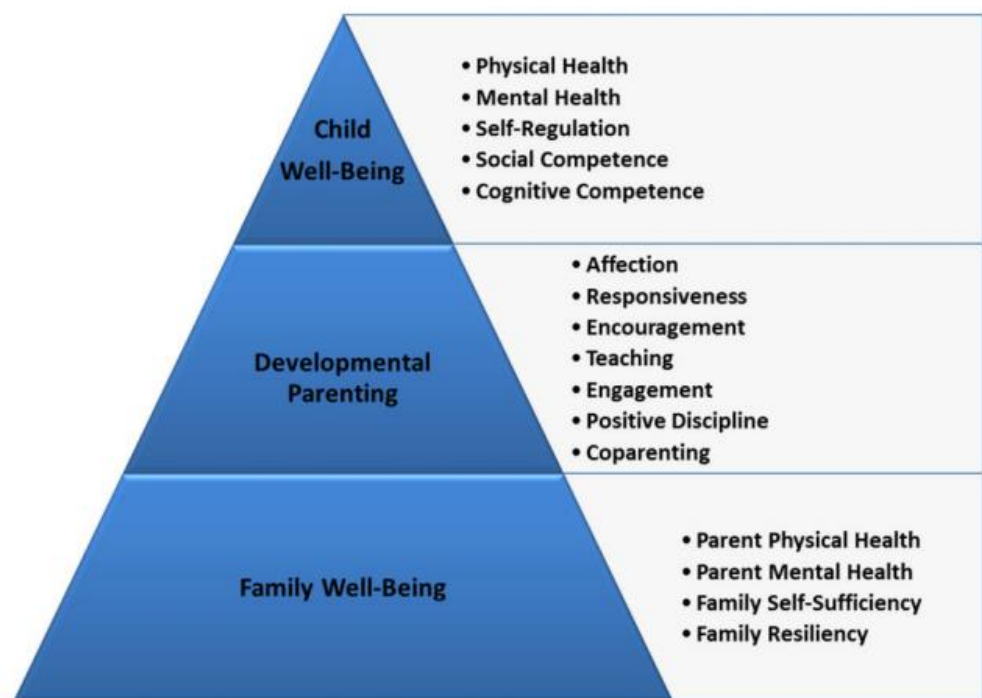
As discussed in chapter 1, a child and their family do not sit in isolation, but rather are part of many interrelated and interacting systems which all affect the overall developmental experience of the child. From an ecological systems perspective, a child is influenced by their own characteristics (e.g. age, ethnicity, temperament, gender, whether they have a disability etc.), the characteristics of those around them (their microsystem), and the interactions between the elements of their microsystems (their mesosystem), for example parents having conversations with nursery workers or grandparents being involved with childcare. The micro and meso-systems are nested within the wider context of the exosystem – school, parental workplaces, community services and mass media, and the macrosystem which encompasses the cultural values, customs, beliefs, and laws of the geographical place that the child lives (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 2000). These systems all take place within the chronosystem which considers changes over time. It is important to consider that children experiencing the separation of their parents' experience this within the context and interactions of these systems, that the processes involved are key to a child's development.

It is also useful to consider how the different characteristics of these systems may impact the child's ability to cope with changes to their microsystems. Theories of resilience, a phenomenon characterised by good outcomes despite exposure to adversity (Masten, 2001), provide a framework for adopting a strengths-based approach to understanding why some young people can develop healthily in the face of risks and others do not (Zimmerman, 2013). The key to resilience appears to come from a range of promotive and protective factors, e.g. the ability of the child to form good peer

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relationships, authoritative parenting, affordable housing and effective schools, and protective policies at a governmental level which, in line with an ecological systems approach, begin with the child and spread out to wider systems (Masten, 2001). Similarly based on an ecological systems model, Figure 1 shows the family wellbeing model (Newland, 2014) which emphasises the importance of family well-being as the foundation to effective parenting and child well-being.

Figure 1 Family wellbeing model (Newland, 2014)



From this model, it is possible to see potential repercussions to child well-being that a family experiencing a breakdown of the parental relationship will have. For example, in a family where a parent's mental health suffers due to separation, they may become less engaged with the child and with their parenting, which in turn would affect the child's well-being. A developmental

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systems approach emphasises the importance of family processes such as warmth, communication and conflict, child effects on parenting such as temperament, and wider social and cultural influences as better predictors of children's' development than family structure (Golombok, 2015; Lamb, 2012; Lansford et al, 2001). The notion that the impact of divorce on children will be dependent on the range of protective and risk factors that surround them will be further discussed within the process model section of this chapter below.

2.3 Diversity of outcomes for children

How children are impacted by their parents' separation is of particular scholarly interest, with much output from researchers such as Amato, and Hetherington, focussing on families in the United States. Divorce is not a uniform experience (Amato, 2012), with children showing a 'striking' diversity of adjustment (Hetherington, 2003:234) due to the wide variety of circumstances and factors that are interacting and often accumulating to either intensify or diminish the negative effects of divorce resulting in a variety of outcomes for the children involved. In addition to this, there are differences in measures, definitions, time, and culture within the research which also impact the outcomes of the research.

Research suggests that children whose parents divorce compared with children whose parents stay together, have higher levels of externalising behaviour and internalising problems, have lower academic grades and more problems with social relationships (Amato 2000; 2012; Amato, Kane & James, 2011; Hetherington, 2003; Kelly & Emery, 2003; Lansford, 2009; Mandemakers & Kalmijn, 2014). Key findings from Hetherington's (2003) three longitudinal

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studies involving 1400 families and 2500 children in the United States were consolidated and showed that on average, preadolescent children in divorced families, compared to children from intact families show an increase in externalised behaviours and poorer academic performance. The studies utilised similar multi-method approaches of interviews, questionnaires, standardised tests, and observations. Findings also showed that children from divorced families are at greater risk of developing internalised problems such as depression, anxiety, and lower self-esteem than children from non-divorced families. However, the link between family structure and internalising problems was found to be generally weaker and less consistent than for externalised problems and attainment (Hetherington, 2003). The findings show that timing is important, with the first two years after the divorce being the time most likely for children to experience emotional distress and behaviour problems.

Despite findings showing that children with divorced parents are at increased risk for psychological and behavioural problems, Hetherington (2003) concluded that it is resilience that is the normative outcome for children who experience marital transition. This is supported by Kelly & Emery (2003) who in their review of the literature, conclude that whilst increased risk of negative adjustment is reported for children from divorced families, the majority of those children are indistinguishable from their peers, falling within the average range of adjustment. However, they also found that some children display severe and enduring adjustment difficulties, whilst others show no problems initially but go onto show problems later. This is supported by evidence from Amato's review which shows that having divorced parents continues to have an impact into adulthood, with adults with divorced parents having lower levels of well-being and report having more problems in their own marriages (Amato, 2010), and by other research from the US which concluded that those who experience

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parental divorce are more likely to have lower parent regard, report lower relationship satisfaction, and experience relationship distress than those who did not (Roper, Fife & Seedall, 2019).

Meta-analyses have shown that more sophisticated studies with multiple measures and control groups have smaller effect sizes than those studies which are less methodologically sophisticated (Lansford, 2009). Some studies are less reliable as they do not consider pre-existing psychological pathology or pre-existing individual differences such as socio-economic status (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 2002; Rappaport, 2013). Many early studies are limited by the fact that they measured mean differences among individuals in different family structures on only one characteristic or outcome (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 2002). In looking at what happens on average to children growing up after a separation it is difficult to ascertain what is happening at an individual level (Harkonen, Bernadi & Boertien, 2017). It is possible that many of the negative outcomes seen in the results of studies are there because the studies took place in the first two years after the divorce. This is potentially the most difficult period for both parents and children, and hence children are most likely to show maladjustment whilst everyone is adjusting both to the new family structure, home environment and economic resources (Lansford, 2009; Rappaport, 2013).

This complexity is further highlighted by research which shows that siblings can experience their parent's divorce differently and therefore have variations in outcomes. O'Connor et al (2001) examined variation in behavioural and emotional problems in children from a range of family types (biological family,

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simple stepfather family, stepmother / complex stepfamilies, and single-mother families). Using a range of measures, including the Strengths & Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) (Goodman, 1997), Malaise Index (modified from Rutter et al, 1970) and Parent-Child Relationship scale (adapted from Hetherington & Clingempeel, 1992), to look at between family variation and within family variation, O'Connor et al (2001) found that differences between children in the same family were as great, and sometimes greater than differences between children from different families. Variation in child maladjustment was observed at both the individual child-level and the family-level. Findings showed that a risk at family-level (family type) could affect children in the same family differently, a risk measured at family-level may not affect everyone in the family, and risks measured at an individual level may have family-wide effects. Risks that do operate in a family-wide manner were found to be greatest in family types that appeared to be experiencing the most adverse circumstances. As with research that shows variation in outcomes dependent on the age of the child (Lansford, 2009), O'Connor et al's (2001) findings show the importance of considering the individuals within a family, and not presupposing that all children will be affected in the same way by their parents' divorce.

Whilst differences in outcomes may be due to differences at an individual, family or societal level, for example results show less impact in countries where there is less stigma and more support for separating couples (Kalmijn, 2010), variability in results may also be due to the methodological choices made by researchers. In their analysis of the inconsistency in results, Bernadi & Boertien (2017) identify three main reasons for inconsistent findings. Firstly, they state that institutional factors that differ across time and place will affect results. For example, the absence or presence of laws relating to shared

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parenting and societal characteristics that might impact the educational system will cause variation in results. Secondly, the wide range of outcomes studied, and their varying perceived importance will affect how results can be compared. Thirdly, and for Bernadi & Boertien (2017), most importantly, are the variations present in methodological and operational aspects of different studies, concluding that variation in outcomes is often due to choices made by researchers rather than actual differences in outcomes or differences due to time or culture. It is also possible for the researcher to affect the result through their own views about divorce and the impact they think it has on children. A researcher with negative views is likely to frame their questions differently and make different methodological choices to one who views it neutrally or positively (Rappaport, 2013).

An important shift in the literature over the last fifteen years has been from investigating whether there is an impact of divorce on children, to exploring how some children are able to experience divorce as a standalone stressful event with a temporary negative impact whilst others carry the chronic strain into adulthood (Cao, Fine & Zhou, 2022). This shift involves researchers moving their focus from a comparison of children from intact families and those from divorced families to the variation within children's adaptation over the process of divorce and what factors account for this variation. The following section examines the impact of divorce on children from this 'divorce as a process' perspective.

2.4 Divorce as a process

Consistent with systems approaches previously discussed, a child's life is influenced by different factors and circumstances sometimes thought about as risk factors and protective factors. Children are likely to have influences from three areas: individual (e.g., genetics, temperament), sociocultural (e.g., neighbourhood, peer group) and family (e.g., parental mental health, parenting style) (Rutter, 1987). These stresses and resources can be both positive and negative, will interact, and one will potentially compensate for the presence of another (Pryor & Rodgers, 2001). To better understand children's lives, it is important to know what stresses and what resources there are in their lives (Amato, 1993). Whilst it is not most children who experience maladjustment, it is important to discover what factors lead to a higher risk of negative outcomes for some children, and to acknowledge that in many cases there will be an intersectionality of problems causing a greater effect for some young people (Bagshaw, 2007; Lansford, 2009; Lamb, 2018).

Family processes that precede and follow the separation are an integral part of that separation. The reconceptualization of divorce as a process emphasises that both the pre-divorce and post-divorce family environment can account for the variability in children's adjustment (Cao, Fine & Zhou, 2022; Lansford, 2009). For example, transitions such as moving house, moving school, adjusting to multiple new partners and their families, can contribute to difficulties in adjustment (Amato, Kane & James, 2011). There is evidence to suggest that multiple transitions, and family transitions that occur before age six and in adolescence, have the strongest effect on children's behaviour (Sandstrom & Huerta 2013). Sandstrom & Huerta (2013) explain this as being because young children need the consistency of care that allows them to form

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secure attachments, and adolescents need parental support, role models and continuity for their wellbeing and to achieve well at school. In their review of the literature, Lansford (2009) found that links between parental divorce and children's adjustment were often attenuated or eliminated completely by controlling for predivorce adjustment. As such they recommended that to gain a more complete picture of a child's long-term adjustment to the divorce, researchers should study trajectories of adjustment that extend from before parent's divorce to a period well after. This links to Rutter's (2000) point that what can be a risk factor for one person can be a protective factor for another.

In their study, Arkes (2015) showed effects of separation were present before the separation occurred. They point out that a problem with previous studies is that they did not consider unobserved differences between families with and without marital dissolution, making it difficult to distinguish between causal effects of the dissolution and factors already present in the family. This point is supported by Amato (2010), who states that a problem with research in this area is controlling for variables that may be causes of parental divorce as well as child adjustment.

A longitudinal study by Weaver & Schofield (2015) with participants recruited in 1991 from across the USA found children from divorced families had more internalising and externalising problems at grade 6 (reported by teachers) and at age 15 (reported by mothers) than children from intact families. However, they also found that the children's post-divorce environment played a part in reducing these behaviours. A strength of this study is that the sample were not

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specifically of divorced parents, but a wide sample in which 260 eventually made up the sample of divorced families. The researchers state that it is a strength that assessments were made by multiple informants, however the voice of the father and the children is missing from this study.

Research also shows that as well as looking to variables in existence before separation, we must look at processes occurring beyond the point of separation to explain the effects of it. For example, findings from a UK based study using Millennium cohort data, showed that the BMI of children with separated parents increases significantly from that of children whose parents are together (Goisis, 2019). The study showed gradual accumulation, and effects would not have been seen if only the first two years after separation were studied. The paper considers factors for this increase such as changes in parenting routines, increase in working leading to less time to cook nutritious meals and a reduction in economic resources.

These studies highlight the importance of considering the processes involved in separation when considering the impact that separation has on children. The following sections will explore risk factors in more depth, with a particular focus on economic resources and conflict, as these have been shown to be particularly impactful.

2.4.1 Experiencing a decline in economic resources

Factors that can be associated with the absence of a parent, rather than the absence of a parent *in itself*, have been shown to be associated with psychological problems in children (Golombok, 2015). One particularly impactful factor is a decline in economic resources. Living in poverty can have

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a damaging effect on the quality of parenting that children receive, as economic hardship can lead to stress and depression (Baumrind 1994; Golombok, 2015). Evidence shows that children raised in poverty are at risk of maladjustment in several areas such as poor social skills, difficulty maintaining intimate relationships, behaviour problems at school and difficulties in obtaining and retaining jobs (Lamb, 2012).

An analysis of British cohort data (children born in 1970) found that children from economically deprived backgrounds whose parents divorce, had lower wellbeing than those who had access to more resources (Mandemakers & Kalmijn, 2014). The same study also found a link between levels of mothers' education and impact of divorce. As the level of mother's education increases, the negative impact of divorce decreases; the same was not found for fathers' education. These findings are also likely to be linked to economics: a more educated mother may be better able to continue to provide a good level of economic well-being for her children; those whose father is better educated may experience more of a loss to their level of economic wellbeing. Whilst these findings are interesting, the fact that they are taken from children who were age ten in 1980 makes them less applicable to current families in the UK.

In her study of Norwegian families after divorce, Moxnes (2013) found that for some children, the loss of financial capital is a cause of stress. Additionally, the more change children experienced, the more signs of negative effects of divorce they displayed. Parental reports of behaviour change in their children were gained through a survey of 473 divorced parents in 1992 & 1995, which

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was followed by in depth interviews with a portion of those parents and their children. A large majority of the parents reported that their children were not displaying any adverse effects from the divorce and others reported neither positive nor negative effects. However, those children who lived in households that had experienced financial decline and a change of residence, on average, did less well than those who had not experienced those changes. Interview data showed that children found having less money and having to move house, the most difficult things about the divorce to cope with.

2.4.2 Conflict

Conflict between parents can exist before, during and after separation and has been shown to have a significant impact on children's long-term outcomes. Frequent conflict that is unresolved puts children at risk of mental health issues, and behavioural, social, and academic problems (DWP 2021). Research shows that persistent parental conflict is a greater risk factor than parental separation (Tetzner, Bondu & Krahe, 2022) and that interparental conflict has more effect on child self-esteem than their living arrangement (Barumandzadeh et al, 2016). In their study using data from the Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children, Clark et al (2015) concluded that separations that end conflictual relationships can be beneficial for young adult non-cognitive outcomes.

In their review of the literature. Cao, Fine & Zhou (2022) found that the increase in internalising and externalising behaviours and lower educational attainment in children are mostly attributable to the dysfunctional family environment that exists for a child when their parents have a high conflict predivorce

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relationship. As such, the authors proposed a 'Divorce Process and Child Adaptation Trajectory Typology Model', to explain children's trajectories across their parent's whole divorce process. Divorced couples are categorised by the authors into four subgroups based on the dimensions of levels of predivorce and postdivorce interparental conflict (low-low, low-high, high-low, high-high). Highlighted by this process model is that parental divorce can have short-term or long-term consequences for children's adjustment depending on the interactions of pre- and post-divorce conflict with the trauma of divorce. For example, for children whose parents had a high conflict marriage, whilst the separation may be initially painful they are likely to perceive it as optimal or a relief, and as such their adjustment is likely characterised by slight decline as opposed to children who are in low-conflict marriages who are likely to experience the separation as more painful and therefore experience a more dramatic worsening of their adjustment (Cao, Fine & Zhou, 2022:4). The model focusses solely on conflict and does not consider other potential moderators also involved in the process. Cao, Fine & Zhou recognise this limitation and identified several mediators, such as parenting behaviours, and children's perceptions, from the literature which help to explain the complex mechanisms involved.

Evidence shows that the type of conflict and the resolution of the conflict is important in determining its impact on children. Children who are exposed to overt conflict suffer more distress than children whose parents are covert in their conflict and therefore the children are not exposed to it (Cummings & Davies, 2002 cited in Acquah et al, 2017). Children who perceive conflict occurring between parents as being frequent, intense, poorly resolved and child related are at elevated risk for multiple negative outcomes, compared to children whose parents express and manage conflict issues without animosity,

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that concern topics unrelated to the child and where conflict issues are successfully resolved (Acquah et al, 2017). A robust association has been found between levels of conflict in the inter-parental relationship and levels of conflict in the parent-child relationship (Acquah et al, 2017).

Being caught between parents, for example as a messenger, is particularly damaging for children (Yarnoz-Yaben & Garmendia, 2016). Research also shows that children's own perception of the conflict matters, the more intensely they perceive it the lower they evaluate their own quality of life (Sorek, 2019). How parents express, manage and resolve conflict, as well as the extent to which children feel at fault for or threatened by their parent's relationship arguments, may explain children's adjustment to conflict more than the actual occurrence of conflict (Grych, Harold & Miles, 2003; Francia & Milllear, 2015).

This is further supported by research which shows that conflict can influence parenting ability which in turn leads to negative outcomes for children, as conflict leads to negative mood, this can lead to harsher parenting or parents' who are emotionally drained and less available to their children (Piers & Martins, 2021; Van Dijk et al 2020). Van Dijk et al's (2020) meta-analysis showed that interparental conflicts were associated with lower levels of parental support, parental structuring, and parent-child relationship quality, and higher levels of parental hostility, intrusive parenting, parent-child conflicts, and role diffusion. Interparental conflict was significantly related to more internalising and externalising problems, as well as to lower levels of social adjustments and self-esteem in children after divorce. A limitation of this finding is the analysis was unable to consider other moderating factors.

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Further support for the notion that continued parental conflict is detrimental comes from Bell, Francia & Millea (2022). The researchers used Laumann-Billings & Emery's (2000) Painful Feelings about Divorce Scale to measure how a sample of 77 'children' aged 14-48 (85% were female) whose parents had separated, thought, felt, and remembered their parents' separation. Alongside this, participants also completed questions to measure coparenting behaviour, current levels of distress and self-efficacy. The researchers chose to measure self-efficacy as a measure of healthy development as it shows a perceived ability to assert control over one's own behaviour and environment. The study found that participants had better psychological outcomes post separation when their parent's co-parental relationship was not characterized by conflict. Results also revealed that increased post-separation co-parental conflict was associated with lower self-efficacy and higher current distress, and that cooperative parenting was associated with increased self-efficacy and decreased painful feelings of separation. This study provides interesting results as it focuses on both positive and negative outcomes. The retrospective accounts could be both an advantage and disadvantage as adults may view their parent's relationship differently to when they were children. The protective nature of coparenting is discussed in more depth later in the chapter.

A further impact of divorce, and potential point of conflict, is whether or not, and how much, a child will continue to be able to see both of their parents in a meaningful manner. Contact, whether frequent or infrequent, can be the source of high levels of conflict between parents. In their 2002 study, Trinder, Beek and Connolly sought to examine how adults and children experience and negotiate contact. They recruited 61 families (2/3 of the families had at least

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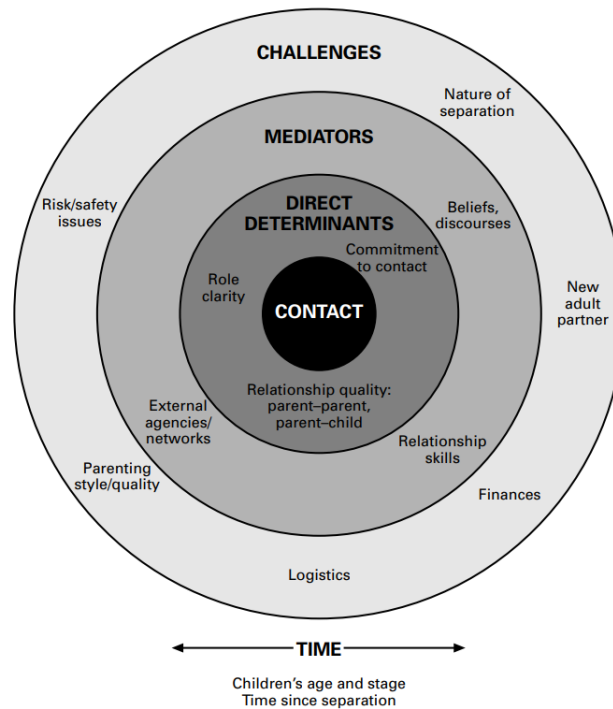
two perspectives), aiming for balance in the sample of contested and non-contested cases (33 families: no legal input, 5 families: at least one parent sought legal advice, 23 families: extensive legal involvement). The researchers found nine different types of contact, under three broad groupings:

1. Consensual committed – interparental conflict is low.
2. Faltering – Contact is irregular or has ceased, no court involvement.
3. Conflicted- Role conflict and/or perceptions of risk result in disputes.

Contact varied enormously within their sample, with schedules fitting into five types: rigid, flexibly routine, fitted in (irregular but as frequent as possible), self-servicing (contact directed by teenagers) and sporadic. There are multiple factors involved in determining the quality and quantity of contact, as shown in Trinder, Beek & Connolly's model below (see figure 2).

Figure 2 Model of the determinants of the quality and quantity of contact (Trinder, Beek & Connolly, 2002)

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Trinder, Beek & Connolly's (2002) research found a significant impact of continued conflict on the amount and quality of contact. Some young people resigned themselves to it, others were desperate for change and others were described as being numb. For some, conflict resulted in a reduction or completed cessation of contact, some responded by removing themselves away from both parents as much as possible whilst others rejected the non-resident parent, aligning themselves with the resident parent. Conversely, where conflict was low and parents were able to work together, children were given 'emotional permission' to retain relationships with both parents. Parents found ways to manage negative feelings, for example by organising contact with children to involve limited contact with one another. Where there was tension, children were aware of it but were encouraged by parents to maintain relationships.

2.4.3 Other risk factors

Whilst a decline in economic resources and parental conflict are particularly impactful factors for children when their parents separate, other factors such as parental involvement prior to separation, ability to parent effectively and whether the child is expecting their parents to separate, also play a part in determining the impact of the separation on them.

A significant impact for young people is the loss of one of their parents from their everyday life. Loss of a relationship and changing relationships have been shown to be particularly stressful for children (Moxnes, 2003). Additionally, a parent's ability to parent effectively and authoritatively is affected by the stress of separation, including task overload, anxiety, depression, and feelings of isolation, which places children at risk of adjustment problems (Hetherington, 2003).

Research shows that father involvement prior to divorce is an important factor in determining the impact of divorce on children. Comparing those whose parents divorced during childhood with those whose parents remained married, Kalmijn (2015) used survey responses from adults in the Netherlands to examine whether certain childhood circumstances influenced frequency of contact with the father and the perceived quality of their relationship after divorce. The study found that those fathers who were more involved during childhood had better relationships with their adult children, this effect was greater for divorced fathers. In a separate study, Haux, Platt & Rosenberg, (2015) also found that fathers who were more active parents prior to separation tended to have more frequent contact after separation. The

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researchers also found a clear link between the work pattern of fathers and the amount and kind of parenting activities that they undertook. A large data set (N=3694) from the Netherlands (Poortman, 2018) has shown that when children lived with the parent who was not the primary caregiver, child wellbeing was lower. Similarly in families where the father was involved in bringing up the children, the more beneficial non-resident father-child contact was found to be for children. These findings point towards a protective factor of the increase of more egalitarian gender roles in marriage, as fathers take more of an active role in parenting the negative effects of divorce may be reduced for children.

Whether or not a child is expecting their parents to separate has also been shown to influence outcomes after the separation. A study by Brand et al (2019) in the USA found a significant negative effect of parental divorce on educational attainment, particularly completion of college, among those whose parents were unlikely to divorce in their eyes. Those young people were unprepared for disruption to their relatively advantaged and stable lives, resulting in them being more likely to experience adjustment difficulties and negative outcomes than young people who expected parental separation. On the other hand, those children who were from high-risk marriages who already experienced social disadvantages may anticipate the separation or are more able to accommodate the disruption, as they are practiced in dealing with adversity. This is supported by findings from Garriga & Pennoni (2020), using the UK Millenium cohort data, which showed that the dissolution of parental units assessed as 'very good' had the most harmful effects on children, especially in conduct problems. Often families will be exposed to a combination of factors which will interact to form a cumulative disadvantage, children in these families have more to cope with and are at increased risk of

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psychological difficulties over time (Kelly & Emery, 2003; Lamb, 2012; Mandemakers & Kilmijn 2013), this is discussed next.

2.4.4 Cumulative disadvantage

For some children, the experience of their parents separating will be accompanied by other negative factors which combine to increase the risk of poor outcomes. This cumulative theory is demonstrated in the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) measure used widely in the USA and gaining popularity in the UK. ACEs are highly stressful events or situations that occur in childhood or adolescence that directly affect the child or the environment that they are growing up in and may be a one-off event or occur over a prolonged period of time. These adverse experiences are categorised into abuse and household dysfunction and include such things as psychological, physical and sexual abuse to the child, violence towards the mother, incarceration of a family member, having a parent or household member that abused drugs or alcohol and parental mental ill health (Felitti et al, 1998).

Apart from their statement that they used questions from existing published surveys, it is not clear from Felitti et al's foundational paper, what led them to choose certain types of household dysfunction over others (Hartas, 2019). For example, they include a family member going to prison in the 'criminal behaviour' section but do not include neighbourhood violence or gang culture; they include substance abuse but do not include any measure of poverty such as food insecurity. There is discrepancy as to whether parental separation and divorce is classed as an ACE. In Felitti et al's original paper, the list does not make reference to it, however, the work done in the UK by Bellis et al (2013),

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does include 'losing a parent through death or divorce'. Perhaps rather than encompassing all parental separation as being experienced in the same, high-risk way by children, for separation to constitute a high risk, a significant trauma and continued loss needs to be present. Both Felitti et al's (1998) original paper, and Bellis et al's follow up studies in the UK link exposure to multiple ACEs with poor health behaviours and outcomes in adulthood.

In line with the concept of ACEs is the concept of Early Life Stress (ELS). When a person is subjected to physical or emotional challenge beyond their ability to cope, the result is stress (Petchell & Pizzagalli, 2011). When a child is exposed to an event or a prolonged phase that exceeds their coping mechanisms, this leads to a phase of prolonged stress. Not all stress is bad, exposure to some stress, causing a brief increase in heart rate and mild elevations of stress hormone, can have a positive effect, and a serious, but temporary stress response can be made tolerable if buffered by supportive relationships. However, a prolonged activation of the stress response system, in the absence of protective relationships can fundamentally affect the development of the brain, altering a young child's nervous, hormonal and immunological system development (Petchell & Pizzagalli, 2011).

In a two-wave longitudinal study in Germany, Tetzner, Bondu & Krahe (2022) found that increases in family risk factors (e.g., parental separation, conflict and mental illness) during childhood were associated with increases in internalising and externalising problems. The higher the number of risk factors, the higher the risk of psychological problems. Parental conflict was found to be the most significant contributor to the risk, with other risk factors able to be

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overcome if they were not accompanied by parental conflict. The divorce or separation of parents was only linked to higher levels of internalising problems at the first wave of data collection, supporting the view that children are affected most during the first two years after a separation.

In line with a cumulative disadvantage stance, Moxnes (2013) found significant differences for children depending on how many changes they experienced. Thirty-nine percent of those who experienced all four of the changes studied (financial changes in the child's household; change of residence; change in relation to the non-resident parent; and change through the introduction of stepparents) showed signs of two or more negative effects of divorce, compared to 12% of those who only experienced one of the changes studied. All children experienced stress even when they adjusted to and appreciated the changes after time. However, the amount of stress experienced varied depending on the amount of support that the child received from their parent or wider kin network. So far, this chapter has discussed the impact of separation on children and explored the wide range of interacting factors that mediate that impact. Within the wide range of factors which affect the impact of divorce on children, it is widely accepted that the most important of these is the behaviour of their parents. As discussed above, those children who are subjected to continued parental conflict will suffer the most maladjustment. Those whose parents undertake cooperative coparenting are largely protected from the negative outcomes of divorce, the remainder of this chapter will consider this in detail.

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2.5 The protective nature of cooperative coparenting

In their systematic review of studies that tested association between mental health of children and coparenting after divorce, Lamela (2015) found that coparenting is a key mechanism within the family system for predicting child mental health. Coparenting occurs when individuals have shared responsibility for bringing up children and consists of the support and coordination (or lack of it) that parental figures exhibit in childrearing. It refers to the way that parents or parental figures relate to each other in the role of parent but does not imply that parenting roles are or should be equal in authority or responsibility (Feinberg, 2003:96). The focus in most definitions is on the interactive nature of coparenting.

Feinberg's (2003) ecological model of coparenting highlights the interconnectedness of the characteristics of the family, with influences of coparenting existing at the individual, family, and extra-familial level. Where parenting focuses on the vertical exchanges between the two family subsystems of parent and child, coparenting focuses on the horizontal exchanges between two adults who are responsible for the care of one or more children (Lamela, 2015).

According to Feinberg, coparenting directly influences parental adjustment, parenting, child adjustment and child development and can act as an important mediator and moderator of the influence of stresses to the family. It is therefore of particular importance when considering the effects of divorce and separation on young people as these influences are likely to continue after the separation. This variety of coparenting outcomes is apparent in Van

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Egeren & Hawkins' (2004) proposed framework of distinct coparenting dimensions outlined below.

1. Coparenting solidarity: Parents are a unified executive subsystem.
2. Coparenting support: parents employ strategies that support or extend the other parent's efforts to accomplish their parenting goals.
3. Undermining coparenting: Parents employ strategies or actions that thwart the other parent's efforts to accomplish their parenting goals. These may be overtly hostile or subtle and innocuous.
4. Shared parenting: Parents have a balanced level of involvement with the child.

In their review of the literature, Rejann, van der Valk & Branje (2021) found that the interplay between certain coparenting dimensions (communication, respect & cooperation, conflict and triangulation – the extent to which a child is caught between parents) determines the pattern of coparenting and functioning of the family. As the family system is a triadic relationship (Trinder, 2008) not simply a parent-child relationship, each parent has the potential to influence the parenting of the other in their horizontal interactions which in turn have an indirect influence on the child (Fagan & Barnett, 2003). Research into coparenting in intact heterosexual families shows that the mother undertakes a great deal of 'relationship management' work to promote and enhance the relationship between a father and his children (Seery & Crowley, 2000). This work can involve assessing the relationship, deliberately acting, or not acting to enhance the relationship, promoting joint activities, creating positive images of the father, and deploying peace keeping strategies. The mother's perception

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of influence over the father affects how much 'relationship management' she does, the 'right or power to alter Jeff's behaviour' (Seery & Crowley, 2000:111). It is interesting to consider how this management may or may not continue once parents have separated, and to what extent the fathers' behaviour and parenting will have to adapt if he no longer has access to relationship management that was previously relied upon. This notion of management of the other parent is taken further by the concept of gatekeeping.

Parental gatekeeping refers to the beliefs and behaviours of parents that affect the involvement and quality of the other parent-child relationship (Austin, 2018). Whilst gatekeeping can be undertaken by any parent, most research focusses on maternal gatekeeping with non-resident fathers. Trinder (2008) recognised that not all gatekeeping behaviours are inhibitory with some mothers seeking to facilitate father involvement, thereby distinguishing between what she refers to as 'gate-opening' and 'gate-closing' behaviours.

Trinder (2008:1319) showed that without proactive and contingent gate opening, contact between fathers and their children could be 'highly tenuous and continuously contested'. It was clear that the gate work had a relational element, with each parent responding to the others' attitudes and behaviours. What mothers did or did not do was closely related to the behaviour and attitude of the father. Similarly, what fathers did or did not do influenced what mothers believed and how they acted. In these separated families, there appeared to be a maintaining of the asymmetrical balance of parenting responsibility, with mothers taking the managerial role. However, as the resident parents in Trinder's study were mothers, it is difficult to know which

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elements of gatekeeping behaviour are specific to gender and which are specific to status.

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter has explored a range of research aiming to unpick the diversity of experience and outcomes for children after the separation of their parents. A wealth of research points to negative outcomes for children such as an increase in externalising behaviours, higher levels of internalising problems and lower academic performance. However, parental divorce does not sit in isolation and when viewed within the wider context of the stresses and resources of the family, it becomes clear that it is not divorce per se that causes negative outcomes, but an accumulation of disadvantages exacerbated by the divorce. Some of these disadvantages are present prior to the divorce and as such it is important to view divorce as a process, looking at a child's trajectory prior to, during and after the divorce to get the clearest possible picture of the impact for individual children. Economic disadvantage, particularly where it is a shock, and parental conflict appear to be the most important risk factors for children, and cooperative coparenting an important protective factor against the negative outcomes of divorce.

The next chapter will focus on a specific way of organising family life after divorce, often referred to as shared residence, where children continue to live with both of their parents, sharing their time between them. The chapter will consider what the literature says about outcomes for children who live in this way, with a particular focus on the themes of time, home, and relationships.

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The previous chapter discussed the importance of viewing divorce as a process if we are to fully understand its impact on children. It highlighted that within the wide combination of risk and protective factors that young people are exposed to, economic disadvantage and parental conflict appear to be the most impactful risk factors, and cooperative coparenting an important protective factor against the potential negative impacts of parental separation on children. This chapter considers the post-separation arrangement for children of shared residence, where children spend significant amounts of time living with each parent. Findings show that when conflict, cooperation and income are factored in, children living in shared residence have better outcomes than those in sole custody (Nielsen, 2017). There is difficulty in defining shared residence, as its name and proportions vary widely within the literature, as do the cultural and legal contexts. This chapter will discuss two main reviews of current literature; one which focusses on outcomes for children (Berman & Daneback, 2020), the other on the effects of shared residence on health and well-being for both parents and children (Steinbach, 2018). Berman & Daneback's (2020) review demonstrates the growth in research in this area over the last 15 years; their review includes 6 studies published in the 1980s, 7 in the 1990s, 19 in the 2000s and 82 from the 2010s. These reviews show a consensus that shared residence leads to positive effects on health and well-being for parents and children. However, the studies are predominantly from Scandinavia and Australia, vary widely in sample and definitions, and are therefore both difficult to compare and to generalise to other countries. Both reviews identify gaps in the literature, including the need to gather children's views and experiences. There is a consensus that 'one size

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does not fit all' and therefore research which can identify the circumstances in which shared residence can work is valuable.

This chapter will go on to discuss in turn the important themes of time, home, and family practices. Time is an important aspect of shared residence, as an equitable share is generally viewed in the literature as the fairest option, without being clear exactly who it is fair for (Smart, 2004). A question asked in the literature is whether a focus on 'clock and calendar' time is necessary, or should parents be paying greater attention to the quality of time that is being experienced between them and their child. It could be argued that shared residence will result in a comfortable situation of children living between two homes, however, a house is not necessarily a home, and this chapter will explore what is important for children in making a house a home. Closely linked to the notion of home is that of family practices. As the home is the main location for the 'doing' of family, this chapter examines how 'doing family' might change for families when living within a shared residence arrangement. This chapter concludes by looking in detail at two key studies run concurrently by Smart, Neale and Wade (2001) which aimed to uncover the perspectives of children living in the UK in a variety of post-divorce and post-separation arrangements. A key finding of the studies was that for children, the most important aspect of post-separation family life is the quality of relationships.

3.1 Legal and social context in the UK and abroad

Despite the increased pressure from fathers' rights groups amongst others for a change in the law, in 2011, the Family Justice Review in England and Wales

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concluded that shared parenting should be encouraged through parental education combined with clear and quick processes for conflict resolution rather than being set out in law. The final recommendations of the report were that the 'government should find means of strengthening the importance of a good understanding of parental responsibility in information it gives to parents', and that 'no legislation should be introduced that creates or risks creating the perception that there is a parental right to substantially shared or equal time for both parents.' The review also emphasised the importance of the involvement of both parents in the lives of children before separation, rather than on changes in the law (Family Justice Review Final Report, 2011:4). Whilst the Children & Family Act (2014) creates a presumption that it is beneficial to a child's welfare for both parents to be involved in the child's life, there is no stipulation as to the quantity or type of involvement required: 'involvement of some kind, either direct or indirect, but not any particular division of a child's time' (The Children & Family Act, 2014 s.11).

In contrast, in Australia in 2006, significant amendments were made to the Family Law Act 1975 (FLA) stating that Australian family law courts must apply a presumption of 'equal shared parental responsibility' except in cases involving violence and child abuse or where this would not be in the best interests of the child (Campo et al, 2012). The debate prior to this change in the law, and subsequent analysis of its impact, undoubtedly led to the large output of research that there has been from Australia. Scandinavia provides a unique situation for investigating the effects of family arrangements on children, as parents there are much more likely than parents in other nations to share custody of children after they separate. In Sweden, shared residence has become as common as living mostly with the mother after parents separate

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(Fransson et al, 2018). It is likely that this situation reflects the cultural norms of sharing parenting responsibilities before separation (Family Justice Review, 2011).

In addition to the cultural and legal contexts of individual countries, the sample of parents found in the current shared residence literature is homogenous and unreflective of society as a whole. It is largely a self-selected group that tends to be better educated, have a higher income and lower levels of conflict than most parents who have an arrangement of mother only custody (Steinbach, 2018). This was confirmed regardless of the country of origin of the study, in Berman & Daneback's review (2020). Some studies also showed that living close to each other, being child-centred, and having practiced equitable task division prior to separation, are also characteristic of those who practice shared residence. This raises the question of whether findings will remain consistent if and when the sample grows to be more representative. The samples across the literature tend to focus on divorced parents and are not necessarily including families who have separated but were never married, or those who were married and separate but never divorce (Steinbach, 2018). Additionally, as the samples appear to be entirely focussed on a mother-father parenting relationship they do not reflect the range of diversity which exists in society, including same-sex parents who separate.

3.2 'Best interests of the child'

It has been argued that when deciding upon shared residency, there is potential for a shift from the interests of the child to the interests of the parents,

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in particular the father (Smart, 2004; Haugen,2010). Whilst parents might have the best interests of the child in mind, they are also likely to be considering their own self-interest in avoiding conflict, saving money, or ensuring time for their own work and social activities (Haugen, 2010). Qualitative studies have drawn out a range of aspects that are important to children when living in shared residence, and overall, the message is that what is best for one child may not be best for another, including for siblings, and by focussing on the general, we risk creating norms which ignore individuals (Smart, 2001; Honneth,1995). With this in mind it is important to find out what is working and what are the challenges for families in the UK today.

Research into shared residence arrangements falls broadly into outcomes for children and outcomes for parents, with quantitative studies focussing on health and well-being as measures of whether the shared residence arrangement is 'working' for the child. Studies show that across a range of physical and mental health aspects and adjustment measures, children living in nuclear families have better health, adjustment, and well-being than those who were not (Berman & Daneback, 2020; Bergstrom et al, 2013; Steinbach, 2008). However, once a separation of parents has occurred, results showed that across the different definitions, children appeared to benefit from a shared residence arrangement if the parents are 'co-operative, communicative, low-conflict and non-violent' (Berman & Daneback, 2020:10), and if children are over four years old (It was deemed that the evidence was too scarce to draw conclusions for under fours.). This has been shown across a number of, mainly quantitative, studies with large samples using a variety of measures, including the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ), KIDSCREEN indices and Health Behaviour questionnaires (HBSC) (Bergstrom et al, 2013 & 2014;

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Bjarnason et al, 2010). The benefits in wellbeing and mental health for those living in shared residence are explained by Steinbach (2018) as a consequence of children benefiting from maintaining close contact and relationships with both parents and having access to the social, economic, and psychological resources of them both.

A potential advantage to parental wellbeing is that one parent isn't trying to do everything on their own. This shared responsibility, although potentially difficult as they are making decisions with an ex-partner, may have the benefit of sharing some of the load and burden of parenting. There is more opportunity for parents to maintain work and social commitments than those parents who have sole custody of children, giving them greater social and economic capital. The reduced stress and increased time for the parent may then feed into a better relationship with the child. This positive knock-on effect was demonstrated in a 2014 study (Bergstrom et al, 2014) which used the standardised SDQ to compare the mental health and wellbeing of 129 four to 18-year-olds living in shared residence, with those living with one parent or in a nuclear family in Sweden. Overall, they found that those living in shared residence had better mental health than children living with one parent, but not as good as children who lived in a nuclear family. Interestingly, but perhaps unsurprisingly, they found that the children's mental health in the different living arrangements was associated with the parent's satisfaction with their own health and social and economic situation. Parental satisfaction followed the same pattern as the children's mental health, with those in nuclear families being most satisfied, followed by those with shared residence arrangements and lastly those with sole custody arrangements. They also found that a child's gender, age, and family household income only made a marginal contribution

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to explaining the differences in the children's mental health, while parental satisfaction with the three aspects of life had more impact. A difficulty with this and other studies, is that there is no measure of pre-separation levels of wellbeing and satisfaction which makes it difficult to know exactly what factors are interacting with each other to result in the post-separation levels that are found.

An interesting contribution to our knowledge of outcomes for children in shared residency comes from Turunen, Fransson & Bergstrom (2017) who make the point that an absence of problems is not the same as a presence of positive factors. As such, they chose to use self-esteem as a measure of whether or not shared residency was working for their large sample (4823 children aged 10-18 years) of Swedish children. Results showed that children in shared residence did not differ in their levels of self-esteem compared to those in nuclear families, whilst those in sole custody reported lower self-esteem. Whilst this study had a very large data set and included data from both the parent and child, the authors note that as shared residency is common in Sweden, there are not the same negative connotations which may be found in countries where there is more stigma or uncertainty attached to this family arrangement. Therefore, the same results may not be found in other countries.

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3.3 Time

3.3.1 Logistics of sharing time

The notion of time for families in shared residence arrangements is viewed broadly in two ways within the literature. Firstly, and predominantly, there is 'calendar and clock time' (Smyth, 2005), the arranging of which days the children are with which parent and in what configuration. Secondly, there is the subjective experience of time, encompassing the theory that children, mothers and fathers do not experience time in the same way as each other, which can affect each person's satisfaction with the shared arrangements. For parents and the courts, calendar and clock time may be their main focus, particularly initially when plans are being made for how to parent children between two houses. However, it would seem that children are more focussed on the 'quality' of time spent with each parent rather than the 'quantity', although they do have a desire for the arrangement to remain fair (Christensen, 2002; Smart, 2004, Campo et al, 2012). Reviews of the literature conclude there is no optimal amount of time for children to spend with parents in shared residence, as much depends on pre-existing patterns and relationships prior to separation (Fehlberg et al, 2011). Additionally, findings across the literature consistently show that children are most satisfied with shared residence arrangements when parents are flexible with time and able to make changes to the arrangements which are responsive to the children's needs (Neale, Flowerdew & Smart, 2003; Campo et al, 2012; Haugen, 2010).

Analysis of interviews with children in shared residence arrangements (Haugen, 2010) uncovered three types of time-sharing: flexible, ambiguous, and rigid. As shown in the quote from Katherine, it was found that parents in

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the 'flexible' type were sensitive to the needs of the children, respected their views and were happy to change arrangements as and when their children asked.

It was my mother who told me ... 'Now that you are 12 years of age, you can make your own decisions about where to live. And we have agreed that we will not be upset or hold a grudge whatever you decide.' (Haugen, 2010:115) (Katherine had been practicing shared residence for ten years, living two weeks at each household)

The children in this type of arrangement valued being able to 'have a say' in where they were, at what time, and for how long. Similarly, Campo et al (2012) found that children who had a say about changes to the living arrangements were generally more satisfied with their new arrangements than they had been previously.

The stories from the 'ambiguous' group highlighted that children in shared residence can often put their parent's needs above their own, with children feeling torn between wanting to stay in one place and wanting to see both parents equally. As Roald said: *Because I didn't want to let my mother think that I liked my father better than her* (Haugen, 2010:116). Haugen (2010) asks whether the 'normative construct' that children will miss both parents and desire to spend time with both, is based on the needs of the parents rather than the children and wonders whether this influences and possibly limits children's agency and ability to act in their own best interests. In their study, Neale, Flowerdew & Smart (2003) found that some children understood shared

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residence as a demonstration of the love of both of their parents, however others felt that this was a 'terrible burden' because they became responsible for the emotional well-being of both of their parents. Haugen (2010) had just one child who could be categorised as 'rigid' in their arrangements. They experienced a difficult situation in being forced to live equally with their father when they would have preferred to live solely with their mother. The mother was frightened to object and so the daughter had to live in a way that from their point of view, only suited the father's needs and wishes.

Children's contentment cannot be measured or quantified in terms of the numbers of hours or days spent in each house (Smart, 2004), nor does the allotment of time have any bearing on their felt security (Sadowski & McIntosh, 2016). In a paper highlighting the effect of the father's rights movement on post-divorce and separation parenting arrangements, Smart (2004) argues that an equal time split 'ignores entirely' the lived experience of children in shared residence arrangements, and that it 'reduces children to passive objects who can have no voice in a system designed only to create equality between adults.' (Smart, 2004:484). Smart (2004) argues that as 'equal shares' is both seen to be in the best interest of the child and a way of equalising mothers and fathers, it's fairness and equality are difficult to object to. As such, Neale, Flowerdew & Smart (2003) returned to young people who had been interviewed previously (Smart, Neale & Wade, 2001) to understand how they experienced living in shared residence, asking them to reflect on how the arrangements and their feelings towards them may have changed over time. Smart (2004) found that a rigid approach to arrangements as children grew into adolescence could be problematic and identified the following core issues which impacted on the success or not of the shared residence. Firstly,

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children needed to feel as though they were partners in making decisions, particularly as they grew older, and their needs changed. The interviews showed that some children, especially pre-teens, could be very content with shared residence, but where the arrangement did not evolve over time, its positive aspects were lost as shown in the following quote from Leonie age 16 (Smart, 2004: 492).

So last Friday, I slept at Dad's 'cos I'd been seeing friends. The only way I could get her to let me stop at Dad's was to say that dad wasn't going to be in...Half and half is fine but I think that now I'm 16 I should have more of a say... If I want to go and stay with my dad on Friday, then I think I should be allowed.

Children in the sample were discontented with the arrangement if they felt that it was a compromise for the parents, as if they were a possession to be fought over, or where there was an overly intense management of their time. As with the child in the 'rigid' arrangement in Haugen's (2010) study, it was particularly difficult for these children to express their concern or argue against an equal share arrangement, as the concept of fairness is too strong a concept to argue against (Smart, 2004). Additionally, the arrangement needed to remain flexible, Smart found that in some cases, young people were having to manage their parents' emotions and feelings of rejection rather than easily being able to stay an extra night with one parent if that made sense when arranging their social lives. Smart found that whilst children in any family can come up against restraints on their time and movements which restrict their autonomy, for those in shared residence the inflexibility could have an added dimension as their lives are already heavily committed in spending time with both parents.

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In her study, Smart (2004) found that very few children, even though they wanted to, felt able to change the arrangements. Even in circumstances where the young people felt happy, it was found that they could feel too guilty or too responsible for their parents' feelings to want to try to make changes to the arrangement (Neale, Flowerdew & Smart, 2003). Similarly, in Campo et al's (2012) interviews, children spoke about shared time as being a 'fair' approach and consistent with loving their parents equally. For example, Noah said he wanted to 'make it fair' and Ethan said that an 'even' amount of time was better than his previous arrangement of living with his mother. The above researchers reason that children do not want to appear disloyal to one parent by asking for a change to the arrangement and might also worry that making a change will lead to conflict between their parents. It is interesting to find out how young people in the UK today feel about this concept of fairness and whether they are able or wish to influence the decisions that are made by their parents in relation to time spent with each parent.

3.3.2 Time as an experience

Interviews with children in nuclear families have provided detailed insight into how they experience time within their family. Christensen (2012) identified five 'qualities of time' which will be discussed below in relation to children living in shared residence.

Firstly, 'Value of family time as ordinariness and routine': Children value the routines that exist within family lives, those of mealtimes, chores and parent's work patterns that are predictable and 'ordinary'. Christensen talks of the negotiations which take place within this time, and the independence that is fostered through children being allowed to make their own choices in

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managing their own time. Young people in a shared residence arrangement will have extra routines and will need to adapt at each transition, they will potentially be negotiating with both parents and may have to contend with quite different levels of independence. Secondly, 'The value of time as someone being there for you': Knowing that their parents would be there for them was of great importance to the children. The children in the study talked of being together but not necessarily doing things together. Like Smyth's 'in the moment time', it was important for the children to feel that they could access their parent at any moment. This may be difficult to achieve in shared residence; needing parents to put the needs of the children ahead of any animosity or discomfort they may feel, to enable the children to access the other parent if they wish. Young people's agency in being able to access their other parent, how this is managed and how this potentially changes with the age of the child will be explored in this research. This is particularly interesting in the context of Sadowski & McIntosh's (2016) findings that not fulfilling a child's wish for reassuring contact with the absent parent leads to feelings of insecurity and discontent in the shared residence arrangement. Lastly, were the values of 'having a say over time', 'your own time as peace and quiet' and the 'value of being able to plan one's own time'. Christensen found that the children in the study were proactive in the creation of family time and time use, and that disputes arose due to the tension between the independence of children and parents, and the creation of 'togetherness'. Again, there are negotiations taking place around children's own time and space and family time and space, and as above, children in shared residence will be doubly negotiating and balancing these times. Christensen argues that 'quality time' as a family can be problematic if it denies children the opportunity to be by themselves, again this would appear to be a bigger problem for those children

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whose 'quality time' with their parents is reduced through only being together half of the time.

3.4 Home & family practices

The family time discussed by Christensen (2012) took place in a variety of places, but predominantly within the home. Home means different things to different people, but when experienced positively, it can be a haven - a place to belong and feel comfort. Natalier & Fehlberg (2015) suggest that by listening to what children say about the meaning of home it may be easier to support their adjustment after a separation. As discussed in previous chapters, a family can be defined by the routines and rituals of family living (Morgan, 1999; Fiese et al, 2002; Bakker & Mulder, 2015), with home and family practices interacting to cocreate each other. The young people of separated parents are not alone in living between two houses, for example students, people travelling for work and those who choose to live abroad during the English winter, all have more than one residence that they could call home. However, in these formative years of childhood, it may be more significant for young people that they are living between two houses because this is where parent-child interactions take place (Harden et al, 2013)

For children whose parents have separated, the idea of home can become a complex one as they transition from one family home to a situation where there are multiple houses of which one or more, they may consider as home. Research has shown that feeling settled and truly 'at home' in both houses contributes to children feeling positive about living in a shared residence

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arrangement (Neale, Flowerdew & Smart, 2003). However, this is not necessarily simple to achieve, and some children feel less at home and less welcome in one residence than the other (Smart, 2004). It may be the family practices which take place in the houses which help to create those homes (Morgan, 2020).

When a couple separates, it is not always straight forward for both to live in a house equivalent to the one they lived in as a family. There is often a period of adjustment whilst the parents find a new places to live, which may mean that shared residence is unable to begin immediately. Finances may not allow for a new house large enough to accommodate a family in the same way as before and children may find themselves sharing spaces in ways to which they are unaccustomed. In the UK, 'the government needs to do more to improve the welfare of separated families' (Social Security Advisory Committee, 2019). Those that need to claim social security can struggle to share care as the system assumes that there is only one main carer. One parent is entitled to child related benefits and the other parent is entitled to single-adult benefits which do not factor in the costs of caring for children. For a young non-resident parent, housing support only covers a room in shared accommodation which would make it difficult, if not impossible for their children to have overnight stays.

Drawing on retrospective interviews with 17 young people (16-27) Francia & Millear (2019) explored experiences of home following separation in Australia. The post-separation living arrangements were fluid throughout the sample's childhood years, with the majority living with a primary carer and spending one

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or more nights with the other parent on a regular basis (n = 8); five lived in a court-ordered arrangement; two lived in a parent-arranged week on/week off, or year on/ year off arrangement; and two grew up in informal arrangements (n = 2). Their findings covered two key themes as influencing the young people's sense of home – ongoing parental conflict, and parent-child relationships following parental re-partnering. They found a sense of home was primarily constituted through the emotional connection with parents and a sense of belonging, with ongoing conflict linked with poorer experiences of sense of home for the young person. Those in the sample whose parents managed to keep conflict away from their children, and co-parented co-operatively, saw children reporting growing up in two “homes”, and benefiting from quality relationships with both parents, and other members of their parents' households (Francia & Millear 2019:14). Some young people in their sample experienced traumatic transitions between houses, whilst others were negatively impacted by their parent's refusal to go to the other house, as such one young person had to carry all their belongings including their keyboard between houses by themselves. This led to them giving up the keyboard as the transitions were too difficult. Some young people in their sample struggled to feel at home in the house because they were segregated from new family members after their father had re-partnered: *We weren't allowed in the lounge room because that was their time in the lounge room, so it was that's your room, that's your part of the house [Female, 22 years]*. Francia & Millear (2019:11) tentatively concluded from this small qualitative study that it isn't the amount of time but the quality of relationship with household members that contributes to a young person's sense of home.

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Once children have experienced a move due to parental separation, part of the adjustment for them can come from how they interact with the materiality of the home. Children's bedrooms can be viewed as a way of claiming space and feeling at home (Palludan & Winther, 2017). Bedrooms allow the children to take up space, leave traces of themselves and obtain a certain weight which can impact their relationships within the sibling group and the household in general (Palludan & Winther, 2017). As shared residence tends to be an arrangement chosen by parents who have a higher income than other groups, it is likely children are used to having their own bedroom. But in a situation where they have moved to a smaller house, or where they have formed a blended family, this may no longer be the case. Where bedrooms are scarce there are different logistics at play to determine who will share and who may be allocated the 'dream' of having their own bedroom. Age and gender seem to be the most important factors when deciding who has which bedroom, however, in their study of Danish families Palludan & Winther (2017) came across many configurations, with children sharing bedrooms usually being related by blood. The amount of time that a child stays at the house also affected how much space they could claim. Children in their teens and those that were permanent residents were usually given their own room. Commuting siblings were also allocated their own room in some homes where the other siblings were there permanently but shared a bedroom. Palludan & Winther (2017) argue that the bedroom becomes a tool that contributes to continued recognition even when the child is not in the house, counteracting any tendency that there might be towards the child being invisible once they have left.

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In her research, Walker (2020) challenges the notion that living in two houses means that children have two homes. Her interviews with fifteen young people who reflected on their childhood experiences showed that whilst they felt a strong sense of home in one house, the feelings towards their second house as a home were highly varied. Some of Walker's participants recounted sleeping on the floor in the living room or on air mattresses that got put away in the morning, and as such were unable to leave the trace talked about in Palludan & Winther's (2017) study. Children in the study felt ambivalence to bedrooms that were used as multifunctional spaces. The lack of their own personalisation combined with the presence of impersonal belongings in children's bedrooms worked to construct and communicate their position as 'transient guests' even if this was not the intention of the adults living permanently at the house.

Walker (2020) found that children who lived primarily with their mother did not make the space their own in their secondary residence, even when they were allocated their own bedroom. For many of Walker's (2020) participants, the act of decorating a bedroom was a way for them to be welcomed into the new home and family. It was the collaborative process that was important to the young people, whereby they chose and helped to create their space which gave it a sense of continued homeliness. Walker's findings also show that it is not just the bedrooms that are important to children, other spaces in the house also need to reflect theirs and their parent's interests, relations, and tastes for them to feel at home there. Walker's study asked young adults to look back on their time spent living between two houses but was not specifically for those in a shared residence arrangement. She asked for participants who had spent any time between two houses and focussed specifically on how home was

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experienced for them. Walker's study was a valuable addition to the UK literature base which can be further added to by focussing specifically on those who are currently living between two houses in a regular shared arrangement.

Alongside the materiality of the home are the everyday practices which take place inside a house to make it a home. It is argued that home is created and attended to by all who reside in it through the 'everyday relationships taking place within the house's walls' (James, 2013:315). It is important to note that it isn't just parents who are the home makers (James, 2013) and as such it is important to gather children's perspectives of home, something that there is a lack of attention to in the literature (Cieraad, 2013). Research in Australia has sought to understand the perspectives of children. A 2020 study with 68 8–18-year-olds explored where they felt most at home and, who and what made them feel at home after parents' separation (Campo, 2020). Analysis of a previous study drew out four conditions that were valued by young people in their definitions of home: a sense of ease and comfort; feeling welcome; sharing meaningful, often mundane experiences with their parents; and access to personal belongings (Campo et al 2020:300). The descriptions of home given by the young people were complex and nuanced, reflecting the changing nature of their home life and the complicated interaction of both tangible and intangible dimensions. For most, as also found by James (2013), the idea of home was not one of bricks and mortar but instead entirely tied to their relationships with significant people and the activities and emotions associated with them.

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Research with children with two working parents (Harden et al, 2013) has shown that children may adopt acceptance as a coping strategy for a situation that they are not entirely happy with (in this case, not being able to go home from school but having to attend a club or go to a childminder until their parents finished work) and are able to 'absorb and make sense of the downsides and problems as well as the benefits and rewards' (Harden et al, 2013:302). As such, young people in shared residence may be accepting and try to make each house a home as a way of coping. However, as children often have little say in the routines and rituals which play an important role in building and displaying a family, it may be difficult to find out exactly what processes are taking place to create the feeling of home.

Through her content analysis of picture books written with the purpose of helping children through the separation of their parents and the subsequent living in two houses, Walsh aimed to develop our understanding of 'children's non-normative, yet ordinary, home lives' (Walsh, 2017:241). Following a family practices approach, she posits that it is the domestic tasks, playing together and eating together, which turn a house into a home, and, like Smart, Neale & Wade (2001), highlights the fact that there is much that is ordinary about homemaking in post separation and divorce life. Walsh identified four dominant themes throughout the stories: domestic disruption; the significance of the journeys themselves; the thresholds of parental residences as points of arrival/departure; and the transitional objects that children carry with them between households (Walsh, 2017). Walsh views these as negative themes believing them to reflect the pervasive cultural view that divorce is damaging and reflecting an adult viewpoint rather than portraying an accurate or empathic version of events for children (Walsh, 2017). However, she also

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highlights the fact that the family practices being carried out within the pictures across the books are dominated by ordinary routines and rituals such as bedtimes and meals together, giving family life after separation an 'on-going ordinariness' (p250) through which children's homes are seen to be constructed.

As discussed in chapter 1, in separated families a household is not necessarily synonymous with family, as such the 'doing' of family may not be enough to convey the feeling and the meaningful nature of the 'doing'. Separated families may find that family life needs active display (Finch, 2007). It may be necessary for parents and their new partners to give different displays than in pre-separation to reflect their changing roles as parents when they are the only one present, or when forging a new role as a parent. A blended family, whilst not blood kin, will be 'doing family' things and so in their display of family are indistinguishable to the outside from a family tied by blood. Research shows that rituals and routines are important to the well-being of a family (Fiese et al, 2002) and play an important role in displaying a post-separation family as a coherent unit. In their exploratory interviews with 35 separated parents living in the Netherlands, Bakker & Mulder (2015) focussed on which family practices continued after separation and in what configuration. They identified three types of post-separation family, as the first is most relevant here, only it will be discussed in detail: 'continuing family life', 'building a new life' and 'only one parent involved'. Those parents in the 'continuing family life' category prioritised the continuation of pre-separation family life, feeling 'morally obliged' to minimise the impact of the separation on the children. These families were, in the main, living in a shared residence arrangement with houses very close to each other. They had routines which took place separately for each family

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whilst also having rituals which spanned both (e.g. having Christmas dinner together). This type of family showed how new rituals can be formed after separation, such as forming a family council consisting of parents, new partners, and the children; or going on holiday to the same place so that the children have one week there with each parent. However, the findings indicated that whilst this arrangement may seem like the ideal way to minimise the disruption felt to the children, it may not suit everyone, as some children were confused and resentful, and wondered if their parents could get on well enough to live in this way, why weren't they just together? These findings also demonstrated that continuing family life may lead children to experience false hope that their parents will reunite. It was difficult to maintain this arrangement once the parents started to move on and build new relationships. For some the routines and rituals that had spanned both families were replaced with new rituals with new partners and their children. It seems that this 'continuation of family life' can act as a bridge between pre- and post-separation family life, acting as a buffer for the children, but in many cases is unlikely to be sustained long-term outside of birthday celebrations.

3.5 The changing experience of Childhood: seminal UK research from Smart, Neale & Wade

As discussed above, recent reviews of shared residence literature (Steinbach, 2018; Berman & Daneback, 2020) highlight the paucity of research that comes from the UK. In 2001, Carol Smart, Bren Neale and Amanda Wade published a book entitled 'The changing experience of Childhood: Families and Divorce', in which they discussed the findings from two qualitative projects that ran concurrently from 1997 for 30 months. The aim of their research was to uncover the perspectives of children living in a variety of post-divorce and

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post-separation arrangements (Nuffield Foundation funded), and to explore the experiences of coparented children (ESRC funded). Across the two studies, they had 117 participants aged between four and 22, from the Yorkshire region of England. The sample contained a fairly even split between married and non-married parents, and gender, was diverse in its range of SES backgrounds with siblings included where possible. Due to the combination of the two studies, the sample was weighted towards those living in a coparenting arrangement with families arrangements encompassing 35 'unevenly' shared and 38 'evenly' shared, additionally, 12 were classed as having no contact, 12 as having tenuous contact and 20 as reliable contact. The majority of the young people had at least one parent who was co-residing with a new partner. Their research will be explored in detail below, however it is worth noting that whilst the study can tell us a lot about children's views and experiences of living in shared residence, this was only one aspect of, rather than being the main focus of, the research. Furthermore, it is over 20 years old, and therefore it will be important to find out whether these views and experiences continue to be the ones held by young people, as much has changed over this time in the UK, including but not limited to access to technology which allows for much easier contact between people.

In line with the 'new paradigm' approach discussed in chapter one, their research is framed from a viewpoint of children as capable social agents, able to shape their own childhoods. Historically, in sociology, children are the defining feature of family life; the reason for the doing of family life rather than the doers. The authors argue that this submersion of children into family life means that children were rarely asked to speak for themselves about family life, as adults could speak for them, resulting in an 'impoverished

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understanding of actual children...from the child's point of view' (Smart, Neale & Wade, 2001:10). The predominant focus in the literature and society in general, towards a narrative of harm when thinking about children of divorced or separated parents led Smart, Neale & Wade to focus on children's experiences rather than outcomes. As in a 'divorce as process' approach, their research was conducted with the notion that, for children, family life does not necessarily end at divorce or separation but can endure the structural changes brought about by it. The authors were particularly interested in how the children made sense of their families after parental separation both in terms of their formal constructions and the values of family life. To understand what works for children in a post-divorce family, they first set out to discover what matters most to them.

The researchers asked the young people to draw a family picture and to complete a concentric circle drawing to understand who was and was not granted family membership, and to gain an insight into how children conceptualised the web of relationships within their families. These were analysed in conjunction with the interview transcripts. From these they found that the young people described families in terms of relationships rather than formal kinship patterns and labels, describing family members as those who are there to care for, support and love each other. They also found that the young people valued a respectful and reciprocal relationship where they felt they could talk and be listened to. The young people who felt positive about their family lives lived under a wide range of arrangements, but all had family lives characterised by care and respect. The researchers used this to explain the variation in responses to new partners, with young people regarding new partners as kin when they have been able to develop relations of mutual

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respect and trust over time. Smart, Neale and Wade found that the young people constructed the idea of their family along a spectrum of 'closed' or 'open' boundaries. Those with 'closed' boundaries had a strong sense of a tight knit family which had neither fragmented nor been extended by their parent's separation. These young people depicted their family in much the same way as they would before a separation, with everyone together, and contact was arranged in a way that preserved a strong sense of family relationships. In these families, the young people distinguished between their 'real parents' and the partners of their parents, this did not mean that the new partners were not valued, just not given kin status. Those with 'open' boundaries constructed their idea of family as far more inclusive with new partners and their kin seen as kin (and sometimes as parents). These families were extended and more complex than those in the 'closed' category, with permeable boundaries between the sides of the family. Whether a child considered their family as closed, or open, or somewhere in between was individual and the researchers found variation between siblings from the same family.

Smart, Neale & Wade suggest that young people play an active part in restructuring relationships and redefining family after a separation or divorce. The notion put forward by the authors that they are having to do this without any social norms to guide them may have changed in the time since the study. The key elements that they identified in 'doing' childhood in a post-divorce/separation family were absence, care, monitoring parent-parent relationships, new partners, and an altered sense of self, these are discussed in turn below. For these young people, being with one parent involved being away from the other, this could constitute either a loss or a gain. For those for whom it was a loss, they often found ways of coping and managing their

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situation in order to minimise those feelings. The researchers found that in many cases, the young people had an intensified appreciation of their parents, seeing the relationship as vulnerable and therefore something to give their attention and commitment. There was an element of active support found from the young people to their parents, with them making sure that their parents were okay during the difficult times. Some of the young people were also occupied with an almost continual observation of their parents, sometimes feeling conflicts of loyalty or being implicated in the negative feelings that the parents might feel towards each other. The examples from the interviews showed 'the extent to which children became fluent in...tact and sensibility' (p78). It was found that some young people considered their parents finding a new partner as a loss as they enjoyed less attention than before. There were complex emotions for the young people to negotiate: new partners could be disliked out of jealousy rather than due to their characteristics, a mother's new partner may be upsetting to the father, making it difficult for the young person to know how to feel, and the young person may be grappling with their own feelings of loss alongside a desire to see their parent happy and no longer lonely. In conjunction with changing family relationships, the researchers also found that the young people viewed themselves differently, with increased independence and an ability to establish new norms and routines.

According to the authors, changes in family structures are bringing about more 'optionality' in the parent-child relationship, with children not feeling bound to their parents in the same way as before. Through moral dilemma vignettes that the researchers gave to the young people, they found that on the whole, young people felt that they should be part of a discussion about decisions but not solely responsible for making decisions, and that the young people felt that

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they had a stake in the family and their futures. Previous research by the authors (Smart and Neale, 1999) had shown though, that children were often not consulted or even fully informed of what was going on during their parents' separation. Again it is important to see whether this has changed over the twenty plus years following these findings.

Smart, Neale and Wade found that children and adults may have different views on what constitutes co-parenting, with time not necessarily being the predominant measurement but rather quality of relationships. They found that from the perspective of the young people, coparenting was not intrinsically better or worse than living with one parent; what mattered to the young people was the quality of the relationships. The young people were concerned with the practicalities of the situation, with many stating that they found it difficult at first but got used to it, finding ways to manage and organise themselves so that things ran smoothly. Practical problems were exacerbated by hostile parent-parent relationships. The young people also reported having to adapt to two sets of rules, routines and parenting styles, with some almost becoming two different people depending on which house they were in.

Through the young people's responses, the complexities of emotions experienced by those living equally and unequally between their parents were highlighted. Young people whose parents got along amicably felt that they were experiencing life in a very similar way to before, without feelings of split loyalties or worry. Those children reported feeling loved and included in two families. For those children whose emotions were more negative, they reported feeling angry and not in control of the situation. The authors discuss

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the difficulty in predicting whether young people will experience being parented in a shared residence arrangement as an 'enlarging or diminishing' experience (p134) and recommend that shared residence is seen as one example of family practice rather than the 'proper' or desirable arrangement. By interviewing children, the authors assert that they were able to appreciate certain aspects of their lives which would be difficult to understand in any other way. Children occupy their own 'biological and sociological positions and speak from these' (p143). In their conversations with some of the unhappiest of the young people across the studies, the researchers uncovered some problematic interactions between them and their parents, further supporting that it is interactions and relationships that are the key elements to successful arrangements after a divorce or separation. Some parents treated their child as a friend, sharing more than may be considered healthy with their child and placing an unfair amount of responsibility on the child to emotionally care for their parent. Other parents attempted to turn their child against the other parent, making them take sides and be 'constant players in their parent's conflict' (p148). The balance between involving the children and safeguarding their emotions is a difficult one. The authors suggest that it is not for adults to speak for children, imagining that they know their minds because they were once a child; 'seeing an arrangement from the point of view of children quite simply changes everything' (Masson & Winn Oakley (1998) in Smart, Neale and Wade p156.)

Smart, Neale and Wade state that the 'most obvious' finding from the research is that we 'cannot assume that all children are alike or want the same things' (p167). A flexible approach to what is best for children will attend to the well-being of each child where a 'one size fits all' approach may not. The authors

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suggest that through researching children's experiences of post-divorce family life, it is possible to promote giving children a voice in important family matters. Additionally, it becomes possible to think of these collective experiences as 'cultural capital' (p168) that can be a resource beyond the individual family. It is hoped that by conducting further research in this area, the current benefits and challenges for children of living in shared residence will be uncovered, and it may be possible to use this knowledge and understanding to provide support to young people in the future.

3.6 Conclusion

In conclusion, there is a consensus in the research that once parents separate, a shared residence arrangement benefits the children if parents cooperate and have low levels of conflict. Qualitative studies have shown how nuanced and individual each experience is. Through conducting qualitative research interviews, it will be possible to uncover the detail of each young person's experience of shared residence, including how they experience it, what is important to them with regard to time allocation, and what contributes to their feeling of home. When Neale, Smart & Wade (2001) conducted their research, shared residence was viewed as a fairly recent arrangement, with no cultural norms to draw on. Over twenty years on, the UK is a different place in many ways including gender roles related to work both inside and outside of the household, digital advances, and the aftermath of a global pandemic. Additionally, as the majority of shared residence research is from countries that differ from the UK, either culturally as with Scandinavia or legally, as with Australia, it is important that research is conducted in the UK within our own cultural and legal context to get a clear understanding of what life is like for these young people in the UK today.

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There is a call in the literature for future research to capture the experiences of young people through direct engagement with them, and for research to uncover what works well in shared residence arrangements (Steinbach, 2018; Haux, McKay & Cain, 2017). Haux, McCain & Kay (2017) call for an improvement to the evidence base in order to understand the 'profile, experiences, trajectories, and outcomes' for separated families. They state that there is a need for new approaches that will help us to understand the experiences of shared residence as well as its profile, and that data needs to be collected from children in order to capture their perspective. Similarly, Steinbach (2018) states that future research must 'put more effort into identifying the circumstances in which joint physical custody works' (p385). This study aims to fill the gap in our understanding by interviewing young people in the UK living in shared residence after their parents have separated or divorced.

Chapter 4: Research approach and design

This chapter will begin by introducing my research approach, aims and research question before providing a detailed account of the research design and process. The chapter includes an in-depth discussion of the chosen methods and ethical considerations, and concludes with an examination of my own influence on this research.

4.1 Background

After completing my BSc in Psychosocial Science, I trained to be a primary school teacher, with a specialism in the early years. During my fourteen years as a teacher, I worked with a wide range of families, some struggling, some prospering and most experiencing ups and downs with family life and parenting young children. I found that as a teacher I was much more than an educator; I built strong relationships with many families and embraced the aspect of my role that included helping parents to find the best ways to deal with difficult behaviours and understand child development.

When I split from my husband and the father of my two daughters, who were aged three and five at the time, we arranged that the girls would spend equal amounts of time with each of us (Mondays and Tuesdays with their Dad, Wednesdays and Thursdays with me, and then alternate Friday night and weekends). Over the proceeding years, I noticed that children within school were also being asked to live in this way by their separating parents. Whether I noticed this more because it was more relevant to me, or whether there was an actual increase in this way of living, I was unsure. It struck me that this is a

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way of living that adults view as fair, because the children are spending equal amounts of time with each parent and wondered if anyone had asked the children, I know I didn't. I began reflecting on the apparent growth of this way of living after a separation, and on the impact that it might have on children. I wondered what conversations happen between parents and the children. Are the children comfortable with this way of living or does their loyalty towards their parents, and desire for their parents to be happy take priority over what they want? These questions led me to want to take this further and I proposed research to the UEA School of Social Work which sought to explore this way of living from the perspective of the children.

The other aspect from my years of teaching and working with children and families that feeds into this research, is the value that I place on children's agency and my respect for their views and opinions. My pedagogical values are transferable to undertaking research which prioritises the child and values their voice. As such I sought a methodology which allowed this.

4.2 Aims of the research

The aim of this research is to increase our understanding of how young people in the England experience living with both their parents in separate houses after separation or divorce. It is hoped that through listening to children an insight will be gained into the challenges and benefits of this arrangement, enabling other families to learn from those in a similar situation to them and to inform policy and practice. A further aim is that young people will have the opportunity to consider and reflect on this living arrangement, where they may not have been given the opportunity previously.

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Additionally, this research aims to highlight the 'everyday complexity' (Mason & Tipper, 2008a) of young people's lives in the UK. This is the notion that everyone's lives are complicated in some way, whether it is to do with members of the household, work patterns, disabilities, bereavements, or living in shared residence, the list goes on because it is 'ordinary' for things to be complex. This study will add the child's perspective to the literature base, adding to the research evidence that professionals rely on when making decisions about children's lives.

Taking the above into consideration, my research question is:

How do young people experience home and family when living with both parents after a separation or divorce?

4.3 Conceptual framework

As a qualitative researcher, it is my responsibility to present and shape data into something recognisable that is focused on meaning rather than measurement (Holloway & Biley, 2011). As knowledge is filtered through the theoretical standpoint of a researcher, it is important to set out my positioning early in this chapter.

It is from the theoretical standpoint of the sociology of childhood discussed in chapter one, in which children are recognised as competent social actors and experts in their own lives, that this research is undertaken.

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Alongside this theoretical standpoint, I consider myself a critical realist researcher. Critical realism (CR) separates the ontological from the epistemological (Alderson, 2017); truth and reality are independent of context and perception, but knowledge is contingent on multiple factors including historical and cultural context (Willis, 2022). As such, CR views children as physical beings separate from the sets of theories that comprise our perception of childhood. It is the viewpoint of CR that whilst individuals may experience and construct their own reality according to their perceptions (like in social constructionism) this cannot happen outside of the 'unique, real, biological, genetic, historical origins' of that child (Alderson, 2017). CR uses the concept of open and closed systems to further explain this, in an open system there are multiple factors interacting and competing to affect the individual. Therefore, whilst valuing each experience in its own right, I am also interested to find out how the systems surrounding an individual will affect that experience. As such, in deciding my research question, I wanted to keep it as broad as possible so as not to predetermine what the young people would want to talk to me about, but also focused enough to respond to previous research in this area and the individual circumstances of each participant.

4.4 Ethical considerations

This research obtained ethical approval from the School of Social Work Research Ethics Committee (SWK_REC) on the 21st June 2021.

As discussed, this research design is based on a children's rights perspective which sees children as active agents, believing them to be knowledgeable and capable experts in their own lives. Acknowledging children as 'real people' leads towards more mutually respectful ethical relationships in research

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(Alderson & Morrow, 2012). Listening to children is central to recognising and respecting their worth as human beings (Roberts, 2017). Children's engagement with research is important as it makes their perspectives visible in ways that disrupt adult-centric discourses (Lomax, 2012).

Viewing children as competent social actors brings with it ethical issues regarding protection versus participation. As discussed in chapter 1, there is a pervading discourse in society and social research of children as vulnerable, and ethical considerations for how to research children and young people tend to be based on this starting point. However, Christensen & Prout (2002) suggest that by working with ethical symmetry in social research with children, researchers can give as much consideration to the rights, feelings and interests of children as they do with adults (Christensen & Prout, 2002:493). Based on this principle, it was my aim that whilst working within the agreed parameters set by the ethics committee, I would consider each young person individually within the research process, applying the agreed procedures in context and in response to the individual needs of each young person and their family. The ethical considerations relating to recruitment, consent and the chosen methods are discussed within the sections below.

4.4.1 Recruitment

As already discussed, the pervasive discourse of children as vulnerable and incompetent has led to a culture where children are often not listened to and as such, directly recruiting young people to research can be difficult (Munford & Sanders, 2004). Research such as mine which views children as competent and wishes to enable them to be able to choose to take part in research, must

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balance the child's right to take part, with the responsibility of parents to keep their child safe and protect their well-being (Munford & Sanders, 2004). A further challenge is to allow the young people's views to be heard without the filter of an adult's perspective and views. A particular concern for me with the topic of this research was the need to protect the young people involved from any additional parental conflict that may occur because of the research. In their research, Smart, Neale & Wade (2001) identified that taking part in research into shared residence could be a potential source of conflict for parents. It was important for me to consider the possibility that parents who were still feeling the negative emotions associated with divorce may respond negatively towards the idea of their child talking about their home life and that this could cause tension between the parent and the child as well as the parents. There was also the possibility that parents would be suspicious of the research, I did not want to appear as if I was snooping or checking up on the family and their ability to parent (one headteacher did suggest that parents from his school would be unlikely to want to take part as they would be unlikely to trust my motives). I hoped parents would feel more positive towards the research if it was presented to them, rather than them finding out about it once the child had decided to take part. Therefore, after much deliberation, a research strategy which focussed on minimising harm by advertising to the parents of 11-17 years olds rather than the young people themselves, was thought to be the best option in this instance. This way parents were the first to respond and obtain information about the study and consent to their child taking part before the young person decided whether to take part.

This decision to recruit the parents rather than the children brought with it some aspects which did not align with my intention to put the voice of the child at the centre of this research. Parents would have the capacity to stop the

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young person from taking part in the research before the young person knew anything about it. It also gave parents control over the sharing of information about the research once the young person consented to take part, for example they may forget to show the young people the information sheets. To mitigate this, I explained the benefits of taking part on the information sheets. Also by having the photo elicitation task, there was a something that the young people needed to do before the interview, thereby creating a need to be informed prior to the interview. The young people needed to be fully informed about the research before the interview, thereby hopefully avoiding a situation where the young person could be signed up without their knowledge. I believe that the safeguarding benefits to the young people in having their parents find out about and agree to the research first outweighed the downsides, in this instance.

4.4.2 Recruitment Process

Young people of high school age (11-17) were chosen for the sample, with a target of 20-25 interviews. This age range seemed most appropriate for several reasons: 1) they would hopefully feel confident enough to provide detailed answers that would be rich enough for qualitative analysis. 2) They would have access to and the confidence and ability to use the technology required to provide me with photos and to be interviewed over a video-call should face to face interviews not be possible. 3) They would be independent and mature enough to make the decision as to whether they wish to be part of the study.

A staggered approach to recruitment was agreed with the ethics committee to balance ways which were considered to give more protection to the young

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people with the need to be able to recruit enough young people to the study.

The agreed strategy was as follows:

1. Create a digital flyer to advertise the research to separated/divorced parents (See Appendix A).

2. Contact high schools to request a meeting to explain the research and discuss methods for distributing the flyer to parents.

3. Alongside this, advertise the study via the UEA and organisational social media pages e.g. UEA Developmental Dynamics Laboratory.

4. If the above methods do not yield participants after six weeks, increase the scope of the advertising of the study to include personal social media in the following ways:

- i) Creation of Facebook Page and Twitter account as a researcher, including general UEA/CRCF information alongside introductory information about this particular research. Post/tweet flyer here.

- ii) Post flyer to academic Facebook pages and twitter e.g., UEA page, CFCF page, Developmental Dynamics.

- iii) If the above strategy does not yield enough participants, share the researcher page to my personal Facebook page – this will snowball through sharing amongst friends and subsequently friends of friends.

It was my aim to make the process positive, simple and unthreatening for families, and I believed that finding out about it online, either through their child's school or through social media, and then being able to message me to find out more would achieve this for the initial stage of the research.

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It was envisaged that throughout the strategy, it would be parents that found out about the research and would tell their children but there was also potential for young people to find out about it first and be the ones to tell their parents. If this had been the case, I would have asked them to ask their parents to contact me before proceeding any further, however, I was only contacted by parents, so this was not a problem.

Schools

Schools were chosen as the first way of reaching parents as they have access to many families. At the outset of the recruitment process I was very aware of how busy schools are and was concerned that they would not have the time or inclination to help with my recruitment. However, I was hopeful that as most communication high schools have with parents is digital, and my flyer could just be added to a routine communication, that this would not take much time and thought that some would be interested enough in the research to want to facilitate their students taking part. Unfortunately, despite contacting many schools, sixth forms and academy chains, the flyer was not shared by any schools and recruitment had to come from other avenues.

Social media

Using social media reaches a wide number of people quickly, it is relevant to young people and families and information can easily be passed on from one person who isn't suitable for the research to someone who is. I therefore considered that it would be beneficial to utilise social media in the recruitment process. Gelinas et al (2017) identify the most salient ethical considerations when recruiting via online methods to be respect for the privacy of social media users and researcher transparency.

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It is important to maintain a professional researcher identity whilst recruiting and communicating with families online. By setting up a researcher page on Facebook and separate Twitter account as a researcher, I was able to keep a boundary between the professional and private. I shared from this researcher page onto my own personal page, thus maintaining this boundary even when opening the recruitment up to a wider network. To maintain confidentiality for the young people, I did not recruit the children of friends or colleagues.

The people finding out about the research on social media would already have Facebook or Twitter accounts; I was not asking people to sign up for anything that they were not already part of. However, research shows that social media users often lack knowledge of how to manage privacy settings. This could lead to people making comments on my post requesting information with the belief that it would be private but is in fact public. If this had happened, I would have directed people to contact me via email, private message or phone ensuring that I did not post publicly to an individual, however, all communication came via email and direct messages apart from people asking questions to clarify who was suitable to take part in the research which did not need to be private.

Developmental Dynamics Laboratory (DD Lab)

The most successful avenue of recruitment was through the Developmental Dynamics laboratory in the School of Psychology at the UEA. They kindly added my flyer to their newsletter which was sent to 300+ parents and shared the flyer regularly on their Facebook and Twitter accounts. Table 2 shows a summary of the outcome of each recruitment strategy.

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Table 1 Summary of recruitment

Recruitment strategy	Number of respondents	Number of families that participated (number of interviewees)
Schools	0	0
Academic social media accounts e.g. CRCF, DD Lab	10	5 (9)
Word of mouth / Acquaintances / friend of friend	7	3 (5)
Personal social media	3	0

Not all correspondence converted to interviews, with six parents not responding to emails after I sent the information sheet, and two young people declined to take part.

A year into data collection, I had completed fourteen interviews and had exhausted recruitment routes. As 20-25 interviews would provide a good range of data for analysis, it was decided that I would return to the ethics committee with a request to extend my age range up to 24. It was thought that this would increase recruitment as there would be no need for parental consent as respondents were adults. This request was granted, and I began advertising to 18-24 year olds. This took place at the UEA where I am completing the PhD.

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The flyer initially went to the two schools that I was associated with (Social Work and Psychology) before being sent out to all schools with a request for it to be included in the weekly news email. Recruitment and interviews were fast paced at this point, with eleven students contacting me, and seven being interviewed within just a couple of weeks.

A limitation of this recruitment strategy was that whilst schools, sixth forms and colleges had been approached, it became predominantly reliant on the University as a source of participants, either through parents who were involved with the DD Lab in the School of Psychology or through undergraduate students taking part in the research. This will have potentially led to the sample being more skewed towards middle class families taking part than perhaps it would have been, had the research been advertised through the wider range of establishments that was hoped for.

4.4.3 Consent

Aspects relating both to the young people and their parents needed to be considered in relation to consent to take part in the study; it is the young person's perspective being sought but they will be discussing their family and taking photos of what home means to them. Therefore, consideration needed to be given to the rights of the young person to decide whether to take part, the privacy of the family, the fact that the research is about families, and I did not wish to alienate or exclude one half of the young person's shared residence, and the safety and well-being of the young people taking part.

After careful consideration and in response to advice from my supervisory team, it was decided that all young people under 18 would need both parents to agree for them to be able to take part in the study before their consent was sought. I required written consent from one parent, and the agreement of the

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other parent. It was this part of the recruitment process which I knew was likely to be the most difficult and lead to some families not being able to take part. It was also a point that I knew could cause some conflict, so I made sure that parents were fully informed on the flier of the need for both parents to agree for the young person to take part. All parents that contacted me were able to pass on the information, with three second parents declining their child to take part in the study. In all cases no reason was given for not wanting their child to take part. It is not possible to know how many parents did not make contact about the research because of this element. As such this research may have missed families who lived in this way but were experiencing a level of conflict. As the 18–24-year-olds were adults they did not require parental consent. Additionally, all were living away from home and would not be taking photos in their parents' homes, as such the risk of increased conflict due to the research was small and the above limitation was overcome.

In all cases, the parent or 18-24-year-old contacted me via email in response to seeing or being told about the flyer, at which point I sent details of the study via information sheets (Appendix B) and the consent forms (Appendix C) for the young person and parents. These were returned via email. I ensured that I went through the consent form again with the young person at the start of the interview. Up until the point of interview, if one parent changed their mind, the young person would need to withdraw from the study, however this did not occur. During the interview and for 14 days after, the young person could withdraw themselves from the study, again this did not occur.

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A central ethical consideration to the study was how to maintain confidentiality for the participants during the research and dissemination. When going through the consent form with the young person, I was sure to explain where the research might appear (the thesis, presentations, journal article) and the limits within this research to maintaining their confidentiality. Whilst pseudonyms would be used in the write up and other potentially identifying information changed, I explained that it still might be possible to identify them, especially people who knew them well. None of the young people expressed concern about this.

As a thank you for their time, all young people received a £10 voucher at the end of the interview. Offering payment for taking part in research has its own ethical considerations as it can be seen as an inducement rather than a thank you. To mitigate this, a modest amount was chosen, I ensured that the young people were fully informed about the research before taking part and made sure that they knew they could stop the interview, or not answer questions if they wanted to. I am confident that the young people did not see the voucher as a reason to take part as most had forgotten about it when I asked which email address to send it to at the end of the interview.

4.5 Sample

Table 2 shows a breakdown of the demographics of the sample, a more detailed overview of the participants can be found in Appendix D.

Table 2 Demographics of participants and their parents

Total participants (N= 22) Number of families =16

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Ethnicity: n = 21 White British n = 1 White French									
Age				Gender			Shared care time split		
11-12	13-15	16-17	18-24	M	F	Other	50/50	35%+	Less than 35%
5	7	3	7	6	12	3	11	4	7

Demographics of parents n=32	
Ethnicity	White British n=28 White other n=3 Other n=1
Sexual Orientation	Straight n=30 LGBTQ+ n=2
Employment	Full time n=26 Part time n=5 Unemployed n=1
Marital status prior to separation	Married n=20 Cohabiting n=12
New family members	Parent has new partner n=28 Parent has child since separation n= 6 Parent has stepchildren n=5

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What became quickly apparent during recruitment, is that every family and each arrangement is unique, with wide variation in time spent with each parent. Whilst the literature defines shared residence as 35% or above, I decided that I did not want to exclude those families who identified themselves to be suitable for the research. In some cases where the young person spent a small amount of time with one parent (e.g. alternate weekends) I spoke to the parent who had made contact, and asked them to ask the young person – do you consider that you have two homes? If they did, they took part in the study. Nevertheless, the majority of the sample spent at least 35% of time with each parent.

An unanticipated benefit of recruiting 18s and overs to the sample was that the participants grew up in places across the country rather than just local to where the research was being conducted. It also led to the sample including some young people who almost certainly wouldn't have been allowed to take part if they were younger and required parental consent, due to the high levels of conflict within the family, thus mitigating a limitation of the earlier recruitment strategy.

Most of the young people involved in the research were similar to me in many ways, we shared our ethnicity and the city we live in and therefore overlapped in cultural context. For many, I also shared their gender. I am significantly older, but for those attending the UEA, we also had that in common.

To maintain the anonymity of the young people, pseudonyms are used in the reporting of the findings, alongside a number to denote their age.

4.6 Methods

The choice of methods for this study were guided by wanting to allow the young people in my research to feel that they were able to express themselves

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freely, allowing me to listen attentively and the young people to feel that I was genuinely interested in what they had to say. The way that a researcher perceives the status of children influences the choice of methods used (Punch, 2002), and even when, as I did, the researcher views the young person as a capable expert, it can be difficult to create a situation where children are able to freely express themselves so that they can be understood (Spyrou, 2011). Whilst it is absolutely my priority in this research to hear young people's voices, I was mindful when designing my research that I had to balance the limitations of being an early career researcher and not overstate the children's role in this research. As with much research, this research is designed by adults and fits within an academic research culture that is designed for adults, however, with well-chosen methodology, it is possible to make visible children's perspectives and challenge what Lomax (2012) refers to as the pervasive adult-centric discourses that surround children. As such I decided to use a combination of methods: semi-structured interview, family mapping, photo elicitation and advice writing. A brief summary of the methods is given below and each will be discussed in depth later in the section.

Either in the young person's home (11-17) or a room booked on campus (18-24) interviews were conducted one-on-one in a private and confidential space. After an initial conversation to build rapport and break the ice, the consent form was read through to the young person and filled in, the audio recorder begun, and the interview started. It was explained to the participants that the interview had three sections, the creation of the family map, some questions, and talking to them about the photos that they had chosen to take. In the design phase, to be child-led, it had been my intention to use the photos earlier in the interviews, however, the questions that lead naturally from the family map activity were about people and the organisation of their way of living, so it

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flowed better to talk about these first before moving onto the photos around halfway through the interview. For most of the interviews, I then had a few more questions to ask before finishing with the short writing task.

By acknowledging children as 'real' and capable people I hoped to be able to cultivate a mutually respectful relationship within my research (Alderson & Morrow, 2012). The belief that children have a right to speak and that they have capacity to do so can be conceptualised under the notion of 'voice' (Thomson, 2008). Through choosing a child-centred methodology it was my aim to include the young people in the production of knowledge where previously their voices may not have been clearly heard (Lomax, 2021; Smart, 2004). When agreeing to listen to anyone, not just young people, researchers commit to being open to hearing all opinions, listening to what goes unsaid, and to not censoring particular views or modes of expression (Thomson, 2008), therefore I was careful not to express my own opinions during the interviews or react in an overly emotional way to what was being said.

There is a strong argument that in choosing which methods to use in research with children, there should not be a difference simply because they are children but rather that the methods employed need to be in line with the experiences, interests and competencies of the participants (Christensen & Prout, 2002; Punch, 2002). By using methods which are more sensitively attuned to individual children's competencies, but not 'dumbed down' just because they are children, it may be possible to make children more at ease with the researcher without patronising them, however this does not mean that

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children are incapable of engaging with the methods used in research with adults (Punch, 2002).

Since often children can be unfamiliar with the experience of communicating one-to-one with an unfamiliar adult, it was important to consider ways in which the methods chosen could help to make the child more comfortable and able to communicate freely. Similarly, it is often the case that children are marginalised and not listened to within their daily lives, as such they might find it strange to be asked questions on an equal footing and the methodology needed to take account of the strange situation that the young person found themselves in. I chose methods which would be most likely to elicit full responses from young people who may not be used to being asked their opinions and may not have the opportunity to speak at length to an adult about this aspect of their life. The following sections will discuss each aspect of the data collection.

4.6.1 Interviews

Qualitative interviews are frequently used in social research as they provide opportunities for explanation, discovery and understanding to occur between the interviewer and interviewee; there is a mutual construction of knowledge between the pair, with meaning created between the participant and interviewer (Tracy, 2013). In family research, interviews have the advantage of allowing the participants to 'report on' aspects of family life, and through an interactive exchange it is possible to evoke the particular contexts and practices of their family life (Mason, 2002).

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I hoped that the young people would view the opportunity to talk privately about their life, positively. In their study, Christensen found that the children 'cherished the privacy of the interview' (Christensen, 2004:171). Some parents commented during the process of setting up the interviews that they were pleased for their child to be able to take part as 'no-one had ever really spoken to them about it before' and several of the older age group said how pleased they were to be able to help with this research and commented on the importance of it.

It was important for me to consider how I would come across to the young people in my study to allow them to be comfortable enough to speak openly about their lives. As this was not an ethnography, I did not need to minimise my adult characteristics in order to fit into a child's world but was instead able to present myself as an 'unusual type of adult' (Christensen, 2004; Mayall, 2000), one who is seriously interested in understanding how the social world looks from a child's perspective but without attempting to be a child.

Throughout the interviews there were crossovers with interests that the young people and my own children or friend's children have, so I was able to engage in conversation but did not at any time try to be like them so as not to seem like an imposter (Raby, 2007). This was also the case with the language that I used during the interviews, I aimed to be clear and concise without being patronising. Through showing this genuine interest without trying to be like them, it is argued that the researcher is seen foremost as a social person and secondly as a professional with a genuine purpose (Christensen, 2004). I felt that this was particularly the case when speaking to the older age range, who all seemed immediately comfortable, open and engaged in a conversation. I

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was able to adapt my manner and language as was appropriate to each young person, depending on their age, how freely and articulately they communicated with me and whether they were upset during the interview. Whilst some young people were more reticent than others at points of the interview, there were no times when anyone refused to answer a question or needed to stop the interview.

Problems can arise when children are interviewed in adult spaces where children may feel that they have less control and may feel less comfortable with opening up to a stranger. There are certain places, for example school, where they are used to adults being in control and doing what they are told. As family life is private and personal, gaining access to the setting in which it is done can be difficult (Mason & Tipper, 2014). I opted to interview all the young people who were under 18 in their own homes as I felt this would be most comfortable for them, most convenient and would help to redress the power differential within the researcher – participant dynamic. However, I didn't ask any of the young people whether this is what they wanted, as these interviews were arranged between myself and one of the parents. On reflection, it would have been good to ask them what they would prefer, particularly in relation to which house they would like to be interviewed at as this may have influenced the interview. Often the parent suggested which room we used in the house to the young person, to which they all agreed. Most interviews took place in the lounge, with some at the kitchen table.

The parents welcomed me into their home without any noticeable apprehension, some on multiple occasions due to interviewing siblings.

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However, these are all families who were 'on board' with the research, those parents who were apprehensive or who did not want to allow access to this private world had either not contacted me or had refused consent, so it never got to that stage. In the 18 and over age group, the young people were given a choice between being interviewed in their home or in a booked room on campus. All chose to be on campus with the exception of one person who asked for a Teams interview so that they did not need to travel.

To maintain confidentiality, all interviews took place with only myself and the interviewee in the room. As I was keen to allow each voice equal space in the research, I decided to interview siblings separately. It was also important that the space was away from any 'intrusive others' who may influence or restrict what the young person said (Mannay, 2015). On some occasions other family members (usually curious younger siblings) did come into the room, affecting the flow of the interview, but only on one occasion was this prolonged and so had a more negative affect on the interviewee's ability to speak openly.

An additional benefit of being in the child's home was that they were able to show as well as tell what life is like. It happened on several occasions that the young people got up to show me something that was in the photo or made a point of saying something like 'that's where I just was', or 'it's just through there'. Mason & Tipper (2014) argue that this is more evocative for the interviewee, that when the interview is based firmly in their everyday world it can become a multi-sensory experience. Through both the photos and the setting of the interview, I hoped to be able to achieve what Mason & Tipper (2014) refer to as a closely observed and textured picture, drawing on dimensions of place,

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space, environment, physicality and the sensory. I was initially concerned that being unable to replicate this with the 18–24-year-olds would impact the content of the interview. However, they had often moved several times with each parent, as such their experience was not so tied to the place that they were currently living in the same way that the younger participants were.

To allow the young people to tell me their experience without me imposing my preconceived ideas onto them, these interviews were semi-structured. As all adults have been children, it is easy to fall into a pattern of thinking that we know about childhood, but we see the world from our own adult perspective and through the eyes of the child that we were. To overcome this issue, I kept an open mind when designing my interview questions and only used the questions as a guide (see Appendix E), allowing the young people to discuss what was relevant to them.

It is important to note that what someone says in an interview is highly dependent on the context, being able to speak about what you want in the ways that you want is dependent on what you are asked, by whom, about what, and what is expected of you (Thomson, 2008). What the participants said to me on one day may not be the same as they would have told me on a different day, or the same as they would have told someone else, and I cannot know whether their responses would have been different to differently worded questions, or if the interview had taken place somewhere different. Power relations relating to gender, class, ethnicity, age and more may limit both what is said and what is heard, therefore what was said to me in the interviews must be viewed not as a fixed truth, but as production of the time and place of the

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interview and of the interaction between myself as researcher and the young person.

It was interesting when interviewing siblings, the different aspects of their lives that they chose to tell me about. In one family, one sibling focussed heavily on the fact that screen time was a cause of conflict between their parents, but the other child didn't mention it. This doesn't mean that it isn't true or isn't important to both siblings, it might be the age difference that made it more important to the young person that told me, or that they put more importance on being allowed to use devices, either way each young person's account of whether there is conflict is valid even though it is different.

It was an ethical concern, when designing the research, that the young people may become upset when speaking to me about their lives. This happened in two of the interviews. In both instances I responded gently and asked if they would like to take a break. For one of the interviews, we changed focus and looked at their photos which allowed them to overcome the upset. In the other case, they took a few minutes and then resumed the interview. All participants were given the debrief sheet (see Appendix F) at the end of the interview which contained several suggestions for places they could obtain support if needed.

4.6.2 Family map

Taking inspiration from previous research (Levin, 1999; Mason & Tipper 2008a; Smart, Neale & Wade, 2001), I decided to use a family map activity at the start of the interview for three reasons. Firstly, as the young people were asked not

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to take photos of people, so it was important that there was a way for them to be able to display and talk to me about who is in their family. Secondly, I did not want to assume anything about the way that each young person lived. By asking them to complete the family map at the start of the session, I was able to get a clear idea of how their family was constituted and what their living arrangements were, allowing me to ask tailored questions in order to find out more about each individual's experience. Thirdly, it was my aim to use a method which, as Mason & Tipper (2014) advise, evokes the context of relationships and their interactivity. I chose to do this at the start of the interview, rather than lead with their photos for two reasons. Firstly, I felt that it instantly put the young person in control, they had something to do and could avoid eye contact if they wished. Secondly, I wanted to free myself up to listen to them through the interview and felt that by having an overview of the family at the start I would be able to concentrate without needing to ask clarifying questions about who people were or what role they had.

Each young person was asked to choose a Lego figure (figure 3) from a small selection to represent themselves. Most of the young people found this an enjoyable experience and it helped to both break the ice and to set the tone of the interview as something that could be fun and was not something to be worried about ("I love that, I'm going to go for him with the cool hat." Reece, age 21)

Figure 3 Lego figures



The young people were then asked to think about who is in their family and, using small wooden figures to represent them, to place them on the concentric circles diagram according to how close they felt to them. I emphasised that this meant how close they felt emotionally and was not to do with how close they were geographically. Unlike Levin (1999) who distinguished between males and females by using triangles and circles, I purposely chose a set of wooden people from a board game (figure 4) who had no features so that the young people could choose whichever they liked and could spend time thinking about it (like one young person who colour coded the different groups within the family), or they could just get them randomly from the box. I was also keen that the young people would be focusing on the emotional closeness aspect of this task and did not want them to be distracted or put off by not being able to find a figure that represented the appearance of the family member well enough.

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Figure 4 Wooden people used in concentric circle family map



As the young people told me who each of the people were, I wrote small labels to allow us to talk about it with ease once it was complete. The young people took varying amounts of time to complete this task, with some asking for more clarification than others. If they asked whether a certain person could be included, I answered that it was up to them – did they consider that they were family? In some cases, during the interview, they went back to the diagram to add family members such as a pet.

When designing the research, I was concerned that the young people may need a structured way to explain how their life is split between two physical locations and the people who take up space in those locations. Drawing on a toolkit produced by Real Life Methods, NCRM (Emmel 2008, Participatory Mapping), I decided to have two houses pre-drawn on a large sheet of paper to allow the young person to describe the logistics of how their time is portioned between the houses and for where the different family members and those they may not have put on their family map live. I used this in the first few interviews, but subsequently realised it was not necessary. The young people were able to talk to me about the different houses without the physical

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representation, and often the logistics came up as they were talking about the different members of their family when creating the family map. As such I did not use this part of the method for the rest of the interviews as it did not add to the ease or quality of the data collection.

4.6.3 Photo Elicitation

It is asserted that a visual approach to studying children's lives has a firm place within the social sciences, and that photos in particular can quickly and easily elicit personal stories and everyday experience (Rasmussen, 2014). Photo elicitation is the simple idea of inserting a photograph into a research interview (Harper, 2002). 'When two or more people discuss the meaning of photographs they try to figure out something together. This is, I believe, an ideal model for research.' (Harper, 2002:23). These words are echoed by Rasmussen, who stated, 'when we look at a photograph we cooperate.' (Rasmussen, 2014: 463).

Photo elicitation is argued to be effective in generating evidence that other methods cannot. Photos are particularly effective in exploring the taken-for-granted aspects of participants' lives, stimulating memory, thoughts and feelings and producing unpredictable information, and they are inherently collaborative, assisting with building a rapport between researcher and participant (Hurworth, 2003; Rasmussen, 2014; Rose 2014). By using photo elicitation alongside the family map, questions and asking the young people to write advice, it was hoped that the triangulation of methods would appeal to a wider range of participants and improve rigour (Hurworth, 2003).

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Photo elicitation can occur in a variety of ways. I chose an 'auto driven' approach, giving participants instructions as to what they should take photos of (see Appendix G), as in this type of photo elicitation, children are simultaneously given the power and the means to communicate about their everyday lives (Rasmussen, 2014). It is argued that visual materials can reveal the ordinary and taken for granted (Rose, 2014) and therefore this was an appropriate method for my research as it was likely to be exploring many taken-for-granted aspects of the young person's life. By asking them to take photos of their home and then talk about the photos, the participants were involved in a reflective process which is not common to everyday life. It can be difficult when someone asks you to talk about the everyday to know what it is that they are interested in when it seems so ordinary to you. It was my hope that the young people would be able to focus in on the mundane aspects of their home, revealing, as Sweetman (2009) states, aspects that are otherwise difficult to recognize or articulate. Rose (2014) describes photo elicitation projects such as mine which asks participants to take photos of the ordinary as 'creating a social of the ordinary rather than the extreme'.

I also hoped to benefit from what Mannay (2015) refers to as 'making the familiar strange'. This is the idea that both myself as the researcher and the participant may ignore elements of everyday life that are contained within shared understanding. Through using photos of the everyday, the participants were forced to show elements of their home environment that they would not necessarily have spoken about, and I may not have asked about. It was my hope that the young people would feel empowered during the research, part

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of how I hoped to achieve this was by making the young people the 'expert' through the taking of and explanation of their photographs.

Not all of the interviewees provided photos, four out of the twenty-two participants (all from the over 18 age group), were unable to or did not want to provide photographs. To try to replicate what the photos bring to the interview, I instead asked them to think what they might have taken photos of, or within my questioning got them to focus in on the smaller details. These interviews did contain less detail about the houses, but this was also the case because they had experienced more house moves over the course of time since their parents separated, so were often talking about several houses rather than two.

It was entirely up to the young people what they decided to photograph to show 'home' and how many were from each house. It is likely that even with those who did not give it much thought, that there was some contemplation of what would be photographed. As Packard points out, 'Photographing is an act which renders some things visible, and therefore important, and other things invisible and less important.' (Packard, 2008 p69) and therefore through taking these photos for the purpose of the research, the young people were deciding which things were important and which were less so.

Bourdieu (1990) refers to the contemplation of this as picturing. Picturing does not always result in a photograph, and we will never know the parts of rooms, objects and places that did not make it to the photographs that were sent to me. However, through asking some questions such as 'did you find it easy to decide what to photograph?' it was hoped that the participants would provide

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some insight into their contemplation and reflect upon the process. However, for the most part, this did not form part of the discussion of the photographs except where a parent had got involved with the decision making. Some of my participants struggled to know what to take photos of and their parent contacted me to ask for suggestions. It also transpired during interviews, or during the chat beforehand that parents had suggested what the young person might take a photo of e.g. "I was stuck for what else to photograph and Mum joked that I should take a photo of the shower because I spend so much time in there, I thought that was a pretty good idea, so I did!"

Picturing involves deciding what could be photographed and what is worthy of photographing. What is considered worthy of photographing is subject to social conventions and norms regarding what is important and acceptable to show (Hodgetts, Chamberlain & Radley, 2007). The young people had their instructions but had to potentially go against social expectations that the everyday and mundane are not interesting, and photograph things that they would not normally photograph. It was a concern that young people may be used to presenting a certain version of themselves on social media which may come across in this research. As there are no people in the photos, and as such the subject is a little removed (home rather than you), I hoped to get a rounded picture rather than an 'Instagram' version. I did not wish for the young person to feel any pressure to present an idealised version of themselves and hoped to minimise the potential for this through clear instructions and rationale on the information sheets.

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Rogers (2017) points out that a potential limitation of photo-elicitation could be that children only take photos of what they want to keep a photograph of. However, this does not seem to ring true with modern technology; young people are used to taking multiple photos and can easily keep all of the photos that they take for the research, including those that they decide not to send to me. It is a more likely limitation that the photographing process would focus on what they think I as a researcher may want to see rather than what they want to take photos of. They may have considered what can be shown? What is appropriate to show? Would their parent / sibling / other family member get upset if they show me a photo of that? Is that too private? Is that too boring?

A 'digital thread' runs through children's lives so it is appropriate that it also runs through social research with children (Livingstone & Blum-Ross, 2017). Using smartphone technology that they are likely to be very familiar with will help to even the balance of power between researcher and participants. A survey by Childwise, reported in The Guardian (January, 2020) stated that 90% of young people owned a phone by age eleven, and that ownership was 'almost universal' by secondary school. I was therefore happy that it would not exclude anyone from the research by asking them to take photos using a smartphone. Using a smart phone to take photos allows for easy editing and deletion and as such overcomes the limitation of photo elicitation in the past where participants were worried about their photography skills (Packard, 2008).

Photo elicitation does not empower the participant if researchers are the ones to select the photographs on behalf of the participant (Packard, 2008), it was

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therefore important to me that the young people were the only ones to decide what they took photos of (within the remit of the instructions) and which were to be sent to me. I checked with the young person at the start of the interview whether they were happy to look at the photos in the order they were sent, or if they wanted to make any changes, all the participants kept the photos in their original order suggesting that it made little difference to them.

4.6.4 Navigating the ethical challenges of undertaking visual research with young people

As we live in an age of smart phones and social media, young people are very used to both taking and sharing photos online. It was important to me when designing and carrying out this research, to be mindful that the fact that this is a commonplace activity did not overshadow the complexities of asking people to take and share photos that will be available to be viewed by the public for an unknown amount of time.

As this research is grounded in a children's rights perspective, another consideration is the balance of ensuring that the young people's voices are heard in the way that they want them to be, whilst also protecting them from future harm. What they might agree to now may not be the same as when they are a few years older, for example. To mitigate this, I was as clear as I could be, when going through the consent form with the young people, that whilst I would change the details in the transcript to ensure anonymity, that it was possible that people who are familiar with their houses or their belongings may be able to recognise them. There was only one participant, (Rachel, 20) who asked for their photos not to be included.

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As this research was concerned with experiences of home and family, whether to include people in the photos needed consideration. The question of whether the young people would be able to reflect what they wanted within the photos needed to be balanced with other family members' rights to choose whether they wanted to be included in the research. The notion of anonymising people in photos by blurring faces, or similar is a contested one with some researchers seeing it as an erasing of identity and others as a way of mitigating future harm (Lomax, 2015). There is also the problem of losing the essence of the photo, if the people within it are obscured. As the young people would potentially be including a wide range of people in their photos, I took the decision to ask them not to include people, so that those who had not consented to be in the research were not included without their knowledge or consent. In some cases, the young people did include people, or there were photos of people in the background. In these cases, I described the photos rather than include them in the transcript.

As discussed by Lomax (2015), I felt that it was important to be attentive not only to what the young people were being asked to do by way of taking part in the research, but also be attentive about to how represent their experiences in the research and its dissemination. When deciding which photos to include in this thesis, I aimed to reflect the whole sample, taking photos from across the participants whilst carefully choosing photos that illustrated their experiences.

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4.6.4 Advice writing

Once the interview was completed, and I was tidying up, I asked the young people if they would be happy to do one last thing. I presented them with strips of coloured paper and envelopes and asked them to write two pieces of advice. They were to imagine that a friend's parents were separating, and the parents were asking the friend to live with both of them: 'Please write one piece of advice to the friend, and one piece to the parents.' Some of the young people struggled to think of advice for the parents, but all wrote advice to the friend. Once they had written the advice, they put it in the envelope, I thanked them and left. I purposively didn't look at it until later.

4.7 Analysis

As one of the aims of this research is to give young people who may otherwise not have the opportunity, a chance to reflect and comment on their family arrangements, it was important to choose a method of analysis that was data driven and that would allow me to adequately demonstrate the experiences of these young people. Through the analysis of the data I aimed to provide a rich description, foregrounding the young people's voices whilst also looking across the data set to gain deeper understanding of how young people experience home and family when living in this way.

Reflexive thematic analysis (TA) was chosen as the guiding template for this analysis as it is a data driven method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within the data. The generation of these themes is a creative and active process to which the researcher is central (Braun & Clarke, 2022). In

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reflexive TA, how the data is read and made sense of depends on the position and standpoint of the researcher, therefore it is important to recognise and state explicitly that position, as has been done in this chapter. The data is read through the lens of that researcher's social, cultural, and ideological positioning, alongside many other things (Braun & Clarke, 2022); I as the researcher am responsible for the ways in which the accounts of the participants are interpreted. Willig (2012:13) positions qualitative interpretation along a continuum from empathic to suspicious, my interpretation will sit at the empathic end of that continuum as I aim to 'understand the data from within' and will not be 'squeezing it into preconceived categories'.

Care needs to be taken in research with young people not to impose inappropriate interpretations because, as Punch (2012) points out, the power lies with the adult to interpret child perspectives. This is not something unique to research with young people, through interpretation the researcher has the power to shape what is known about the person's experience (Willig, 2012). There is an ethical challenge to ensure that the young people's experiences are understood without trying to explain them or produce certainties about their experience, which is why it is appropriate to take an empathic approach here. This is why reflexive thematic analysis is useful as it highlights the role that I play in the interpretation, and whilst my knowledge and experience gave me insight, it was important to keep an open mind during analysis to the range of potential interpretations (Willig, 2012).

It is argued by Spyrou (2011) that for researchers to be able to fully interpret children's perspectives, they need to become familiar with the discourses

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which inform their voices and those that inform their analysis and interpretation. Understanding occurs at several levels, the individual, the interaction between researcher and child, and the wider world that both draw on to make sense and create meaning. There are certain discourses through the interviews which I was well placed to understand. I live in the same county, and for many of the young people, the same city as many of the participants so I have a shared understanding of the geography that they referred to when discussing the placement of the houses and distances to travel. We had a shared experience of a global pandemic and the 'lockdown' which resulted from the pandemic, terms that were not in our common vocabulary prior to 2020 are now in common use, however it is not possible to know whether they will remain so. The young people didn't tend to use slang or colloquialisms, had they done so there are some that I may have recognised and understood through my own experience with teenagers.

Through the analysis, I aim to tell a story about my data (Braun & Clarke, 2019), showing what is important and interesting. As thematic analysis it is not linked to particular theories, it can be used flexibly in a way that fits both the research question and data collected. This flexibility allows it to be used in conjunction with another method of analysis, visuo-textual analysis (Brown & Collins, 2021) which also allows the researcher to recognize patterns and contradictions within the data, with a particular focus on the photographs.

4.7.1 Visuo-textual analysis

Warren (2005) argues that there is only a small amount of meaning in the photograph, as what is actually meaningful is produced through the context

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that the photo is viewed and the discussions which occur about the image. Rasmussen (2014) argues that the stories that come from a photograph cannot be understood independently of the context of which they are a part, or independently of the decoding perspective. Therefore, I could try to analyse a photo in isolation of the words that accompany it, but I believe that to do so would prioritise the perspective of the researcher over that of the young person. Rasmussen (2014) believed that knowledge emerged through interpretation and interaction that occurred between herself, the children and the visual information contained within the photograph. I hold onto this viewpoint and believe that it is vital to consider this three-way interaction and hope that as an adult, I can effectively hear and see what the young people are showing and telling me and do so in a way that is not too far removed from their intentions and meaning (Rasmussen, 2014).

As such, I have decided to use a visuo-textual analysis framework as devised by Brown & Collins (2021). This framework complements the philosophy of reflexive thematic analysis as it is also data driven. Through concentrating first on purely noticing and describing, I was able to ground myself in the detail of the photograph, both noticing what is and what isn't there. Brown then advises a weaving back and forth between the elements and the levels to make sense and connections. Through using the framework outlined in table 3, I aimed to give the analysis rigor and robustness and stay close to the data (Brown & Collins, 2021).

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Table 3 Visuo-textual analysis framework (Brown & Collins, 2021)

	Element1	Element 2	Element 3
	Visual only	Textual only	Visuo-textual combined
Level 1 – noticing and describing	Artistic in visuals (use of colour, space, composition)	Linguistics in text (use of words, phrases, structures)	Connect the visual and the textual (structural meanings & expressions)
Level 2 - Conceptualising	Essential elements that unite artefacts	Words/phrases that capture patterns & themes	Connections between artefacts and themes.

As this was a relatively new method of analysis, I conducted it first on just two of the transcripts and discussed this with my supervisory team before moving on to conduct this for all interviews that had photos. Examples of this analytical process can be found in Appendix H. It was useful in allowing me to focus in on what the young people had chosen to photograph, and how what they told me related to those photos. Often this was not a direct relationship, with many young people using one photo to tell me tangential things. I wrote summaries (for examples, see Appendix I) for each participant from this analytical process, which went on to inform the generation of the themes related to home.

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4.7.2 Thematic Analysis

The thematic analysis involved several stages, which will be discussed below, moving back and forth between them as needed. Once each interview was completed, I transcribed it as soon as possible allowing me to become very familiar with the data. Additionally, I wrote a mini case study for each participant, collecting my initial ideas from the aspects of the interview that stood out to me.

Coding transcripts

Once all interviews were conducted and transcribed, I began coding. Initially this took place at my dining room table with coloured biros and highlighter pens. I chose to code interviews 2, 6, 11, 15 and 19 first as these were interviews that had become very familiar to me through discussions during supervision and with other colleagues. The codes flowed easily. I used an excel spreadsheet to create a list of codes, allowing me to revisit these initial codes and adjust them accordingly once I had been absorbed in all five interviews. I made small tweaks to the codes before continuing initial coding for the remaining interviews. On reflection when returning to a transcript, I found that some codes didn't capture the essence of what was being talked about and changed codes accordingly. For example, in interview #6 I thought the interviewee was talking about enjoying being with Dad at the weekend, but on reflection, I noticed that I am pressing her to think of something good about the routine that she used to have.

I found myself being concerned both that I wasn't capturing enough nuance with my coding and that I was missing the 'obvious' everyday elements of the experiences. I used my coding from the previous interviews to inform my

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coding of the next, whilst also remaining open to the differences in experience and therefore codes. For example, in the second batch of interviews for coding, I was particularly aware of looking for continuity and difference between houses. I continued to use Excel to collate the codes that I had handwritten on the transcripts (see Appendix J for examples of coding). This was time consuming but allowed me to consider the codes carefully, particularly their wording in relation to other codes. Once all the interviews had been coded, I reread the interviews, coding them for a second time. I looked for things I had missed the first time and checked that I was interpreting what was said correctly. I chose to read the interviews in the order I had conducted them this time. Again, I made notes relating to aspects that particularly stood out from each interview and across the interviews. At this point I felt that I knew my data set very well, I created an overview grid containing the most pertinent information for each participant. At this point I moved my coding to NVivo, revisiting each transcript to ensure that my coding was both descriptive and interpretive. I made headings that could be themes and considered codes within these: Transitions / Conflict / Separation / Time / Two lives / Space / Children's active role / Family is.

Finally, I returned to each code and considered the sections of transcript allocated to that code. I considered whether this was the best code to reflect the experience in that section of the transcript and made changes where needed. I also looked across the data set to ensure that codes were distinct. Where several codes existed that essentially meant the same thing, they were combined into one. For example, where some sections had been coded 'being around someone you don't like' these were recoded into 'strained relationships', a code that had been used extensively across transcripts.

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Theme generation

Up until this point, I had been considering my codes within certain topics such as time, conflict, and space. To create themes that captured a wide range of data, I needed to move from these topics to thinking about broad patterns that existed in the data. To aid this process, I created a mind map of candidate themes (see Appendix K). Once I had been through the codes and allocated them to a theme, I realised that some needed further adjustment to ensure that they were specific enough, for example, Family dynamics was deleted, and the data recoded with a new code: New family member brings positive change to family dynamics; Guilt was deleted, and data recoded as appropriate to new codes: Parents feel guilty or Young people shouldn't feel guilty. This further allowed me to consider what was happening for these young people, and create themes which accurately captured their experience.

The final phase of the analysis was writing up the findings, during this process the themes were further refined. I carefully selected data extracts to provide compelling examples from across the data set for the findings section of this report.

4.8 Reflexive account

Having worked for a long time with children and their families, and as a mother to a teenager and a tween, I came to this research confident that I would be able to interact with the parents and the young people in a respectful and compassionate way without being patronising and am pleased that this was

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the case. Each interview felt comfortable with most young people keen to tell me about their lives.

Whilst my own experiences of teaching, parenthood and separation brought me insights, I was also aware that I was not really an insider in this research. We have all been children, but as adults we need to take care not to assume that we know what it is like to be a child now (Punch, 2002). As I had some shared knowledge and understanding of the situation that the young people were in but was not a young person myself, I think that my position is best captured through Mannay's (2015) phrase 'researcher near'. I was unable to gain the benefit of the young people being more likely to open up to me, as I did not disclose that I had children who lived between myself and their father, however in some instances within the conversation, often to try to get the young person to open up more, I did mention my own children. For example, when one young person showed me the photo of their bookcase, we chatted for a short time about the books they liked and the books my own daughter enjoys. Mannay also references the advantages of having a shared culture and language. This was the case generally, as the young people I interviewed predominantly lived in the same city as me and all had English as their first language. I didn't encounter any barriers to my understanding in the language or phrases that the young people used, but I did have to clarify what I meant to them occasionally.

I wonder if I had disclosed my position as a parent with children who live at both houses whether the young people would have acknowledged the shared understanding, or whether through my questioning and interactions I managed to show some of that shared knowledge and understanding without needing to be explicit. I didn't want to derail the interview and take away time

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through the young people asking me things, or through me telling them about my life. However, even though the young people were not aware, I did still have that element of shared knowledge and understanding of children living with both parents after a divorce and as such, I had to be careful not to enter the interview with preconceptions about the topic and also had to be mindful not to overlook aspects relating to the everyday realities of life that could often be taken for granted (Mannay, 2015). This became even more relevant when interviewing siblings; I had to behave as though the second sibling was telling me fresh information and ensure that I asked all the same questions even though for the logistics and who lives where questions, I knew from initial conversations with the parents that the answers would be the same. Most sibling interviews occurred one straight after the other, so the young people had not had a chance to chat with each other so were unaware of what their sibling had been asked and didn't know the details of what their sibling had told me, they did not mention that I might already know these things.

I was mindful at all points of this research that I needed to be open minded about what I would find. As a parent to children living in this way it was difficult to read papers that indicated difficulty or harm related to divorce and at times I wondered if researching something so close to home was a sensible decision. However, I wonder if this was made easier by interviewing the young people rather than the parents, had I interviewed parents the shared experience would have been much greater and perhaps harder to maintain objectivity and an open mind. I also think that as the interviews progressed and I became absorbed by the analysis, the research took on it's own identity that was separate from my experience; this was the experience of the twenty-two young people who generously gave their time to talk to me. This was also made easier by the fact that the majority of the young people that I spoke to

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presented their situation as normal with an 'everything is fine' approach, and that my own children manage well with shared residence, as such I wasn't searching for an answer to a problem but instead genuinely interested in the young people's experiences. I found interviewing Reece difficult though. His reliance on alcohol and his many difficult and strained relationships with the adults in his life were upsetting to hear. Fortunately, for the most part, he was reflecting on these experiences rather than living through them, and I was reassured by his positive reflection on his time at university. Similarly, it was difficult to hear how much Amy struggled to live in a 50/50 arrangement when her mother's mental health was suffering. That interview reassured me that the research was worthwhile, in that listening to children is something that adults often do not do, but that many children desire. Supervision and discussion with other colleagues provided me with opportunities to be challenged in my thinking and in the framing of my analysis, and I hope that I have let the young people's experiences stand out in the following findings chapters. To ensure that their voice remains central to the reading of the findings, I have chosen to write the quotes from the interviewees in a different colour to my voice.

Chapter 5: The quality of family relationships

This chapter presents findings from the analysis relating to the young people's experience of family. Relationships were inextricably linked to the young person's experience of home and time. As such, understanding the quality of relationships, both in terms of the characteristics of family, and the dynamics of those relationships is key in understanding how these young people experienced shared residence. The quality of relationships in the households varied widely for the young people both in who they counted as family, who lived in the house with them and how close or not those relationships were. The young people's families were defined more by the quality of the relationships that they experienced than by who was living in each home. Close connections continued no matter which day or which house they were in, and strained relationships and conflict influenced where they wanted to spend their time. This chapter brings together the analysis of how the young people spoke about relationships into two themes: ***Strong family bonds: Blood ties and beyond*** and ***Fragile family ties: Strain and relationship work***.

The first theme, ***Strong family bonds: Blood ties and beyond***, explores what was happening for young people when relationships were going well, encompassing both blood relatives and those relationships that occurred once parents had separated. The theme considers how young people saw some relationships with parents and siblings as unconditional and duty bound, and as such these could be strong bonds even when not experienced positively. This theme also considers the dynamics of blended families, including the

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benefits of seeing someone in a recognised role as a parent in helping to build strong family ties.

The second theme, *Fragile family ties: Strain and relationship work*, explores what was happening for young people when relationships were not going so well, in particular the barriers that existed to prevent relationships from being strong. This theme looks at the lack of agency which young people had in familial relationships, particularly in step relationships, before exploring the strained and conflictual relationships that existed in some households. Finally, this theme will consider the work that the young people did to manage family relationships.

5.1 Family maps

The interviews began with the young person telling me who was in their family, similarly before exploring the themes in this chapter, I will set out who the young people put on their family maps. Who was considered part of the family and who was close to the young person or not, was personal and subjective, as was shown by the wide variety of who was included on the young peoples' family maps (see figure 5 and Appendix L). The number of family members included on the map ranged from two to more than 20. In terms of who was included in the centre with the young person: 14 put both parents in, three put only one parent in, six included a stepparent, nine put siblings in, three included friends, and one included their dog. Two young people had very full inner circles that included most of their family members. Whilst some young people filled the circles closest to them, others spread their family out across the diagram. Six of the young people used the outer part: Reece put his dad

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there, Leah put her stepdad and his family there, and for others it was a place for grandparents, cousins, parent's partners, and stepdad's relatives.

Figure 5 Examples of family maps



Whilst many of the young people did this activity quickly, others took time to consider who went where. As described in chapter one, nuclear families are

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the default view of family in the UK and as such it was not immediately obvious to some of the young people whether the people in their lives counted as family or not. Rather than it being a straightforward task, they looked to me for direction: 'Are they just blood relations, or could they be?' (Imogen, 18), as to whether they should keep adding people, and for whether certain people were 'allowed' to be on there: 'My Dad's girlfriend, would that count?' (Ryan, 13), to which I replied that it was up to them who they included as family members. It is hard to know whether they would have given it this much thought outside of a research context. Some young people were perhaps influenced by the context of the research, and rather than including wider family spoken about during the interview, only included the family members who were directly involved with the living situation that I had come to talk to them about. As demonstrated by Amy in the following quote and her family map in figure 6:

Amy: It's going to be pretty small. I'll put my Dad...and Mum. Can I put them between them, on the lines?

You can put them wherever you like.

Amy: Lets pop her over here. I haven't got siblings. I've got Grandparents.

Put whoever you want to put on.

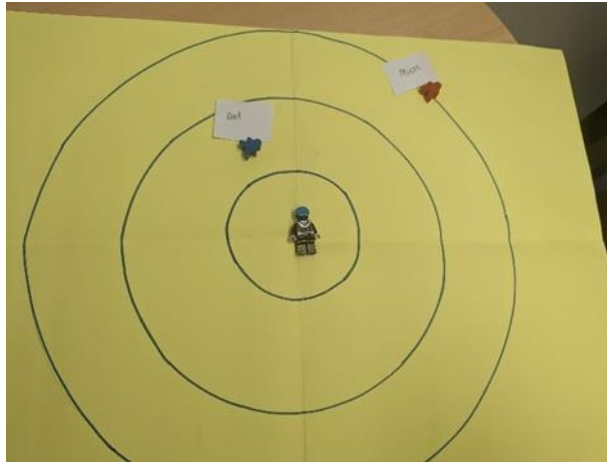
Amy: Um...

Or that can be it if you want that to be it.

Amy: I think perhaps, because I've never really lived with my Grandparent's, I don't think.

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Figure 6 Amy's family map



It was also clear from this activity that the young people viewed their families as being limited by number, as once it got to a certain point for some of the young people, individuals were collected into groups: 'I guess there's the whole, couple hundred cousins' (River, 14).

Whilst these young people lived in two houses, their connections to the other people that lived in both those houses were maintained whilst in each house. As can be seen from the family maps (Appendix L) the young people had a range of people in their households, some had one house with a parent and siblings and another with their parent, parent's partner and stepsiblings, others had blended families on both sides, and some had one parent who lives alone when they are not with them.

5.2 How young people feel about reconfiguring relationships

At the point of separation, these young people along with their parents and siblings, experienced a reconfiguration of the family in their household. Where

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before, everyone lived in the same house, now their parents lived in separate houses, and they and for the most part their siblings, saw them for portions of time rather than all of the time. There was a general sense across the sample that whilst this reconfiguration was difficult and confusing and upsetting to begin with, it became easier overtime and eventually was '[...just two different types of normal that you just get used to really...](#)' (Ava, 17). This research did not focus on the point in time of separation, but instead sought to explore how the young people experienced living in a shared residence arrangement, as such the subject of the process of their parents separating was something only touched on quite briefly in most interviews. The interviews focussed on what was happening in the here and now, with some reflection on the past especially from the older participants. The advice (which can be read in full in Appendix M) that the young people wrote, however, allows us an insight into how the young people may have felt about their family changing, as this asked them to advise a friend and their parents who were *currently* going through separation and opting for shared residence.

The advice written to the young people fell into two main areas: That things are hard at first but get better over time: '[It isn't as bad as it seems right now and eventually it will become the new normal for you](#)' (Chloe, 15), and, that communication between parents and children is important: '[I think that it is most important that you make sure you speak to people and don't leave anything out and tell people close to you how you feel](#)' (Ryan, 13). Whilst, as discussed later in the chapter, most young people did not speak much about communication within their interview, the majority did emphasise its importance through the advice. They thought it important that young people were open with their parents and shared their feelings, and that they spoke to others about the changes they were experiencing to their family.

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The advice to friends also touched on the sustaining nature of relationships:

'They'll always care for you and be there' (Rebecca, 15), the routines: 'You can arrange to see the other parent every week/weekend' (Ashley, 11), and the positives of the situation: '...two Christmases and two birthdays!' (Ivy, 17).

Several also highlighted that separation is not the fault of the children: 'Don't take what is happening personally, and don't believe for a minute that it is your fault' (Violet, 22).

The advice written to parents centres around protecting and supporting the

young people. This is predominantly conveyed through advice that tells

parents to ensure they are considering and prioritising the young person's

feelings: 'Your child is going through a lot so please be there no matter what.'

(Lauren, 14). This is also conveyed through advice which encourages parents

to keep the children out of any conflict that may be occurring between the

parents: 'Don't use your children as emotional soundboards while you're going

through family issues' (Alex, 24), and that again highlights the importance of

communication between the parent and child: 'Always ask how they are

feeling' (Olivia, 12).

As will be discussed at various points in these findings, these young people

consistently demonstrated that they care for, think about, and behave in ways

to manage the emotions of their family members. This was evident within the

advice to parents, which encouraged parents to make sure that they were ok

too: 'don't force yourself into a situation which will just make you

uncomfortable' (Gavin, 21).

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This section has sought to provide additional context to the findings which follow. The interviews gave the general sense that everything was fine, which contrasts with the advice from the young people which highlighted amongst other things, that young people need supporting through the separation of their parents and in adjusting to this new way of living. This chapter will now explore the first theme: *Strong family bonds: Blood ties and beyond*, which considers the strong relationships that the young people have with their family members and considers the differences that exist in the ties with existing and new family members.

5.3 Strong family bonds: Blood ties and beyond

5.3.1 Blood ties can be effortless and unconditional

For some young people, the bonds that they had with those blood relatives that they felt closest to were so strong that they could not imagine them being any other way: 'I've always been quite close to my brother' (Violet, 22). These blood ties had a unique status as being almost undefinable, they felt so familiar to the young person, and such an ordinary part of life, that they were close without having to give it any thought or effort: 'I feel like I'm always close to my parents, I just, like they're my parents, so I feel like I'm really close to them' (Liam, 13). These were relationships that the young people had known for their entire lives. Within these relationships that they had always known, it was apparent that many young people viewed family in a hierarchical way; there were family members that had a higher status than others because they played more of a part in the young person's life in comparison to other family members. Terms like 'immediate' were used by several young people to

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convey a sense of being the nearest, the closest, where others were more distant and not as involved: 'I would say they are my key, like, my key parts of my family' (Olivia, 12). As shown in the following quote from Ivy though, it was possible to consider different people as close family but for that to mean quite different things depending on who the family member was:

...Oh, so like Aunties and Uncles are probably like there, just because we are close, or like all our family's close but not as close as like Mum and things like that just 'cos we don't see each other loads. Um, cousins, I'd say we're quite close with, like we see them quite a bit and we've always been close with them, so. (Ivy, 17)

The young people's relationships with their parents were a key feature of how they experienced family and home. Half of the young people in the study experienced relationships of equal status and closeness between themselves and each of their parents. Of these, three spent equal amounts of time with both parents, and the others varied from several nights a week to alternate weekends, indicating that there was more influencing the quality of the parent-child relationship than simply how much time was spent together. For some, trust was the key to a parent being held close. For others, it was about how a parent responded when the young person brought them a problem; where parents overreacted or were too emotional, the young person felt less inclined to share their problems and felt less close with them consequently. The closeness of relationship between the parent and young person affected the young person's experience of home. Young people who experienced close relationships with both parents considered both houses home and felt able to confide in whomever they happened to be with at the time:

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I mean, like, I think of them as both home because like, if my parents are there, I call it home because like, my parents live there. So, my Mum's house is home, my Dad's house is home, I just feel they're the same (Liam, 13).

The fact that both parents would still be available and equally there for them formed part of Jack and Rebecca's advice to other young people. Their reassurance to others that their relationship with their parents would remain relatively unchanged reflects their own positive experience.

It's okay to be sad that your parents are splitting up, just be calm and you are still as close to both your parents so talk to them if you have a problem (Jack, 11).

I would tell them not to worry, because both their parents still love them and you'll get to see them both a lot. And, that they'll always care for you and be there (Rebecca, 15).

Unfortunately, being equally close to both parents meant that for some they experienced a constant longing: 'Yeah, I always miss both of them when I'm not with one or the other' (Liam, 13).

How a parent was viewed did not necessarily equate to how involved they were in the young person's life. Siblings River and Ashley both placed their Mum, Dad and Stepdad in the centre circle, but when talking about their dad during their interviews there was a definite sense that they did not rely on him in the same way that they relied on their mum and stepdad. So, whilst they afforded him equal status, he did not have an equal role in their lives:

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Yeah, I don't see him as like a, like an actual parent, that doesn't make, I see him as like a parent but not a parent, but he is a parent, I see him as a parent but not like doing parental stuff. There, that works. (River, 14)

Whilst 'immediate' family such as parents were viewed by most of the young people as close emotionally, this was not always the case. For some young people, what Alex (24) referred to as 'unconditional bonds'; were not experienced positively, but rather there were certain family relationships where there was no choice because they were an 'immediate' blood relation. Alex (24) spoke a lot in his interview about going to see his Mum 'out of duty', this strained relationship was maintained because he felt an obligation to see her because she was his mum. This is further illustrated by Reece (21), for whom love for a parent was something that always existed even when he did not like a parent or particularly want to spend time with them:

There's a lot more...love there, because like I said with my Dad it's a lot of forced, we still love everyone and that like you know, I don't think in the past I've loved him any less but it's very much I want to go and spend time with my Mum, I had to spend time with my Dad and there was a big difference there in terms of enjoyment. (Reece, 21)

When asked what it takes to consider someone part of their family, Leah encapsulated the complicated nature of who 'counts' as family:

...I think it should be if you can talk to them. But I think for me it's just if they're related to you by blood or something like that. And if you have like a strong connection with them, or you used to be like close with them, I think that's quite, that's what makes it family (Leah, 14).

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For her, family should be about connections built on trust, but she recognised that connections through blood and marriage have a major role in how people identify family. Leah's description is interesting in the context of her own family as she had a range of bonds with different family members. She had lived with her stepdad for over ten years but only intermittently got along with him and put him at the edge of her family map. She put her half-brother, Aunt and Grandma closer to the middle of the map than her two full siblings who she did not get on particularly well with. She put both Mum and Dad in the middle with her but felt slightly closer to her dad and would like to be with him more. The fact that she got to spend time with her dad outside of the routine, as he often joined them on Sundays for family walks or boardgames, perhaps contributed to Leah to developing the sense that once people are connected, they stay that way.

In the following quote from Ivy, she is explaining who she put in the middle of her family map, and it shows the multiplicity of relationships and connections that exist within families. Both Ivy and her twin Ava, put Mum and their twin in the middle with them, and from their interviews it was clear that these were the closest bonds. However, their very close bond with their mum was not to the exclusion of other relationships; there was plenty of space for a variety of connections to be made, but these were primarily within Mum's side of the family as the quality of their relationship with their dad was very different and far less close:

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Mum, we're really really close with, we just tell her, go to her about anything, we like got a really good bond. Um, so yeah, there's no like, we don't really keep, like no secrets to her just tell her everything. Um, and we'll like laugh together and stuff and obviously the same with Ava, we're like really close...Obviously, Ben [Stepdad] we're quite close with as well, like we'd tell him a lot, we'd probably tell Mum first and then obviously tell him but we're quite close with like feel comfortable talking to him. Step siblings, obviously our oldest stepsister and her girlfriend still live here so, we're like close with them, so we kinda go to them and talk to them as well. Grandparents we try and see like at least once or twice a week...Cousins, we don't see as often, but when we do we're really close and we message all the time and stuff (Ivy, 17).

For some young people, grandparents played an important part in their daily lives, with close bonds often being facilitated by living in close proximity. For example, Ashley and River lived near to their maternal grandmother and often went for walks with her, and Olivia lived next door to her grandparents when at her mum's, and as such was free to go between the gardens as she pleased and often popped in for a cup of tea. Those grandparents who often looked after the young people were particularly close. Violet (22) described her grandparents as 'almost second parents that are slightly less strict', and Rachel talked about seeing her Grandad more than her Mum, as Grandad 'helped out' when her mum was working. Conversely, those young people who lived further away from their grandparents, felt less close to them as they did not spend frequent time together.

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So far this theme has explored the close bonds that young people feel to those who are their closest consanguineous relations, but it was also clear from the interviews that family encompasses much more than just being related by blood. Elements such as taking on parenting and caring responsibilities, trust, and living together all played a part in drawing someone into the young people's families, this will be discussed next.

5.3.2 Beyond blood ties: Families are what families do

When asked 'what do you think it takes to class someone as being part of your family?' Jack (11) said 'get married, probably' despite his own parents not being married. Despite many of the young people considering their blood -tied relatives as unconditionally close family, most did not draw on the norms of blood ties and marriage to explain their family bonds. Instead, they defined family based on what those people did. It was sharing a life, sharing a home, and fulfilling certain roles within the home that created a family for these young people. As Ashely (11) said: 'Er, they're kind. They care about me. They trust me. Erm, I can't think of anything else.'

Fourteen of the young people in the sample lived with family members, either in one or both houses, who were not related to them by blood. Ivy and Ava were unusual in the sample in that both parents remarried soon after the separation, creating two blended families. They also have an eight-year-old half-brother (Jude) on dad's side. Although this was, in their own words, complicated, they considered all members of their households as family. Many of the young people spoke about getting on well with their parent's partner but did not include them in the inner circle of family, indicating that there was a

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difference between feeling close to someone and considering someone close family. It was interesting in Rebecca's (15) interview that she stopped herself from saying 'like a family': 'We get on really well. Really well. We watch films as a fam...like we'll come in here and put a series on, watch a film.' Perhaps she was unsure who counted or wanted to maintain a certain distance. The power of labels to bring people closer or distance them, is discussed later in this section.

The importance of stepparents in these young people's lives is shown by the fact that eight of them put a stepparent in the centre of their family diagram. However, seeing a parent's partner as a parental figure did not come automatically to the young people in this study. As expressed by Olivia (12), it was often through living together that an opportunity for those roles and responsibilities that the young people associated with parenting were created: 'then she started living with us and that kind of thing. Probably a few weeks after that I considered her a part of my family.' Those that had strong bonds with their stepparent had built them over time and some had never known any different. In the more strained relationships talked about later in the chapter, it was abrupt introductions into family life that created a barrier to bonding. Lauren (14) talked about the gradual introduction that she experienced:

Yeah, um, John, we met John a while ago, Mum's known him for ages, but we met him a while ago, um, when Mum introduced him as a friend and then, I don't know, maybe halfway through Covid, he started coming and staying with us and he's here full time now. Which is cool.

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Parenting was a recognised role for the young people and as such an important aspect of considering someone as family, and in forming close bonds. Parenting was experienced by the young person, both directly and indirectly. Robyn (12) spoke about her Stepdad doing things like taking her to school, to the shops and checking up on her homework 'a bit less than my Mum and a bit less than my Dad mainly, but yeah he, only by a close amount.'. Whereas Gavin (19) spoke about the difference he experienced in the relationship between his stepmum and his mum's partners due to there being 'always that parental air about', due to the fact that his dad and stepmum got together when she had a very young son. This meant that he saw her parenting and saw his dad looking after the baby, which gave the relationship a different, more serious status in his eyes compared to the relationships that his mum had. Rachel (22) was always close to her stepmum, but the birth of her half-brother cemented her as part of Rachel's family. This was both because she saw her as a parent and because they were both now related by blood to the same person:

I'm very glad he [my half-brother] actually came along because in regard to my Step Mum, she was part of the family, she is part of the family, but I think until, when he actually came along it was very much like, that solidified everything, so, yes, he is great and hilarious, so!

River (14) wanted to ensure that her Stepdad Steve had sufficient prominence in their interview, asking to talk more about him at the end. As shown in the quotes below, River had an interesting relationship with their Stepdad. They saw him as central to their family but got confused as to his parenting role. Perhaps this confusion came through him being related by blood to their half-brothers but not to them and their sister. The friendship that they describe is

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very fatherly in its nature and, it is apparent that family traits and characteristics can be inherited through spending time together as well as through genetics:

...because he's [Steve] a parent, well not a parent, he is a parent...

Cos like Steve jokes a lot about that, we have, I have a weird friendship with Steve, so he jokes a lot about how annoying he's going to be or how embarrassing he's going to be if I ever do get like a partner....

Mum says I am turning more into him every day. (River, 14)

In some families, the young person's bond with their parent was affected by the change in role for their parent after separation. In contrast to the positive experience of parent's partners who were seen in a parenting role because they took on parenting tasks, some young people experienced the change in their parent's role negatively. For example, Imogen and Violet both found it hard to get close to a dad who hadn't been very involved in the parenting and housekeeping prior to the separation and was subsequently having to learn a new role. These young people and the parents were used to certain ways of spending their time that was unable to continue once they were in separate houses:

Dad's a bit further away because, he -eee, just is, just not as close. Life happens, all that stuff. I never saw Dad much before the separation. Well, we did see him, but it was more, he'd go off to work, Mum was primary caregiver, so you know, when they split up and we had to actually live there, and he had to do all the washing...it was more difficult for him. (Imogen, 18)

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Further to the idea that people who live with us become family, is the notion that time creates opportunities for close bonds to develop. Several of the young people spoke about knowing the person they were talking about for a long time, this duration of relationship was an important factor in someone feeling like family when they were not related by blood: '*...my Step Mum, she's been in my life pretty much since my parents divorced, yeah, so she's been in my life more than she hasn't*' (Rachel, 22). It was evident from many of the interviews, particularly with the older young people, that how close family relationships were could vary over time. Often these changes in how close the young people felt were a result of a change in circumstance, with some relationships improving when the young person was able to gain some distance from their parent, and others improving due to time spent together becoming more about quality than quantity:

And I think as I've got older, I, it's like if I'd done this [the family diagram] like before I came to Uni, I'd have maybe even had Mum right on the outer ring or something, but we've definitely, I think we had our differences a bit more when I was growing up, um, and we've got closer as I've got older, I think. (Gavin, 21)

In some cases, new family members added a new perspective or positive dimension to the family and to family life which contributed to the creation of a close bond. For Gavin, it seemed that the emotional distance that his Stepmum had, allowed her to see different solutions or different ways of managing a situation. For Alex, it was the different personality of his stepparents that brought a positive change in the dynamics that existed within his relationship

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with his mum. For Lauren it was the change that she experienced in her mum's stress levels that meant she felt particularly comfortable with her mum's partner being part of the family:

Like, before John, it was like stress up here, like really high, panicking in the mornings because she has to get to the city to get us to school and then drive all the way back to somewhere further away, um to get to work, and yeah, when John turned up, because he can do the school run for us and he can help cook things, and stuff and um, yeah, so I think it was the change in Mum's stress levels that made it click. (Lauren, 14)

In their respective families, Reece and Gavin were provided with the opportunity to have a different sort of sibling relationship through the addition of step siblings. It was a chance to reinvent themselves and escape the entrenched ways of behaving that they had with their consanguineous siblings: 'I still had that sibling relationship with them and that did me a lot of good, just having people to be a kid with and that was all' (Reece, 21).

Interestingly, for Gavin, it was not whether he was related to siblings by blood that created a close bond, but rather, how he experienced that relationship, meaning that he was closer to his half, and some stepsiblings, than he was his full siblings:

it's like they see me as more like the one they'll take the mick out of and it's a lot more of a friendly, like banter that we have, so I'd say with Leo and Lily, it's more we're starting to get what I've had with my step siblings pretty much from the start and with the step siblings it's just, I'll

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say something rude to them and they'll say something rude back...

(Gavin, 21)

For some, having a family identity was a way to create and maintain close bonds between the members of the household, particularly between full and half-siblings; there was a sense that 'this is us' and this is how we do things, as shown by this quote from Paige (12): 'We normally have spaghetti Bolognese, which is all of our favourite, we all like that which is quite nice to have.' Paige's paternal grandparents played a special role in her life, providing love and plentiful time to spend together. They also played a crucial role in maintaining family relationships, as she often saw other members of Dad's side of the family when with them. In particular, Paige loved that her grandparents drew her half-siblings into their family by including them in the things that they did together: 'We'd get the water guns out and my Gran & Grandad, me and my Mum and brother and sisters, we go out in my Gran & Grandad's garden and have a massive water fight with their sprinklers.' Where there were permeable boundaries between the two households like this, relationships could be created and continued outside of the prescribed routine.

In some cases, despite the young person seeing their parent's partner as someone that cared for and parented them, it was still not enough for them to see them as a parent. This was the case for Alex (24), who despite seeing his stepfather as an important part of the family and speaking fondly of him during the interview, he viewed the label 'father' as something that only one person in his family could have:

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Yeah, that is a label I would generally give them, but more out of convenience, it's easier to say Stepmother and Stepfather, um, I don't see either of them as, I don't associate the words mother and father with them. (Alex, 24)

Outside of marriage, there are no rules to state at what point someone becomes a step-relative, leading to ambiguity for many of the young people. As with Alex, often the 'step' label was used for convenience, it was a quick way to let other people know, including myself as researcher, the situation in the family without having to provide much detail. Additionally, certain labels (e.g. mum, stepdad, cousin) encompass different roles and expectations and there exists within them a certain hierarchy, therefore by using certain labels (e.g. Dad), the young people were able to bring people closer, and by not using them, the young person indicated an emotional distance that existed between them: 'So we get on well but I think of him [Stepbrother] more as like a cousin than a sibling, I just don't see him that much, so that's why I'd say I'm like less close with him' (Gavin, 21). There was an emotional juggling act taking place for some of the young people when deciding to use certain labels, as shown by River (14): 'I call them both Dad because, I don't want to like offend them or anything...'. In some cases, it appeared that the use of a label such as stepmum was genuinely because the young person wanted to use it, however in more cases it was a way that the young person had of protecting an adult's emotions. As certain labels drew family members closer, they also had the power to cause upset, as with Reece (21) who was unable to call his dad's partner Mum because it would upset the person who had held that role since he was born. Implicit in what he said is the hierarchy of family labels, that 'stepmum' is a lower ranking term than 'mum':

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...we said about like calling her Mum as well like, you know, we said to me actual Mum like, you know, it's just a name 'cos we love her, she's still our Stepmum and she kind of like, she hated that. And she said 'if you loved me, you would not do this'. (Reece, 21)

Finally in this theme, it is interesting to consider how much these young people and their family members actively maintain the bonds between themselves and their closest family when not with them.

5.3.3 Communicating to maintain relationships

Keeping in touch with the parent and siblings when spending time in the 'other' household, was an aspect of communicating particular to these young people who were apart from close family on a regular basis. Keeping in touch with the parent that they were not currently with, usually by mobile phone, was a way for the young person to be in some control. They could, for the most part, choose whether to compartmentalise their life with parents sitting in their respective section of the week, or they could use communication via texts, calls and gaming, to create more permeable boundaries between the time spent with each parent. The amount that the young people communicated was affected by the parents' relationship with each other, the routine, and how well adjusted to the living arrangement the young person was. Generally, the young people didn't communicate much with their parents when they weren't in the house with them, but that isn't to say that they were not thinking about them, as many things that the young people said in the interviews indicated that they kept the other parent in mind when at the other house.

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When there was communication, it originated both from the parent and young people, but was primarily logistical, for example, when were they being picked up, did they leave their shoes there, was it ok to come home later so that they could see a friend? Liam was one of the only young people to talk about keeping in touch as a way of managing his distress at being away from each parent. Being able to talk to his dad as much as he wanted eased his transition to spending less time with him: *'Do you keep in contact with him?'* *'Yeah, it really helps. I used to talk to him every day for like the entire week until I got used to it and now it's like, every other day or sometimes every day'* (Liam, 13).

In the case of River & Ashley, keeping in touch came in the form of inviting Dad to play online games with them when they were at Mum's; being able to hang out virtually allowed them to still have time together when they were apart. When with one parent, Jack didn't see the need to contact his other parent. He told me that his mum saw him often so didn't tend to contact him when he was at dad's. But his dad, who saw him less, did call him to find out things like how his school day had been or to wish him luck for football matches. It struck me as a low-key activity for Jack, he chatted to his dad whilst playing PlayStation, as you would imagine he would if his dad came home from work and asked him how his day had been. Some young people communicated more with one parent than the other which reflected the type of relationship that they had:

...it's nice because you know, I like keeping in contact with her [Mum] and then yeah, I don't have as much texts with Dad, as there isn't really anything to say, I guess. Cos you've got a lot of work stuff going on and

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I've got my school stuff going on, whereas with Mum it's more like all the gossipy things and what's happened during the day. (Lauren, 14)

Similarly with Reece's parents, the level of communication reflected the quality of the relationships. However, this was more about the continued conflictual relationship that his parents had with each other, and how his mum struggled to cope with being apart from her children. There was an indication from some young people that they perceived that their parent considered that communication may be an encroachment into the other parent's territory. This idea of time with the child being something to own is discussed in chapter six.

My Dad, he's never been one for like texting when, like when we were with my Mum, he never texted or that, because that's her time. When we were with him, she texted us constantly because she wanted to know how we were doing, get updates, see how our day was and that. He hated that. (Reece, 21)

Like Jack above, quite a few of the young people didn't see the value of staying in touch when at the other house, stating there was nothing to talk about, so just communicated if they needed to know something. Again, you can see how this would mirror how things would work if the young person and parent were in the same house. A teenager in their room not feeling the need to chat to the rest of the family, sending text messages from their bedroom to the kitchen. Whilst the majority of the young people downplayed communicating with their parents during the interview, as discussed in section 5.2, many focussed on it as part of their advice to parents: 'Keep communicating' (Violet, 22), recognising that when parents communicate with each other and the children,

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it is easier for relationships to be maintained: 'Tell your child your plans and see how they feel about the divorce. Maybe try and help by talking to them' (Robin, 12). In those families which lacked any communication between parents, such as Reece's and Gavin's, the relationships between parents and between parents and children were strained, this will be discussed further in the next theme.

This theme has considered the strong bonds that exist with the closest family members, both those related by blood and those in blended families, it has also considered the role of communication in maintaining relationships. Next, this chapter will explore the theme: **Fragile family bonds: Strain and relationship work.**

5.4 Fragile family bonds: Strain and relationship work

The previous theme, *Strong family bonds: Blood ties and beyond*, explored the notion that blood ties can be effortless and unconditional and that within many families what family members do is more important than the structure of the family. This theme will continue the exploration of the dynamics of these complicated families by considering the relationships that were fragile. In some cases, lack of time together prevented strong bonds from forming. This will be explored before considering the strained and conflictual relationships that existed in some of these young people's lives, and the relationship work that the young people did to keep things running smoothly.

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5.4.1 Relationships need time

As will be discussed in depth in chapter 6, spending time together created and maintained bonds in these families, therefore if there wasn't the opportunity to spend time with someone, it was difficult both for meaningful bonds to form and for existing bonds to be maintained. A frequent barrier to bonding for the young people, was a lack of opportunity to spend time with someone. This was the case for River (14), who explained why she put her dad's girlfriend on the outside circle on her family map: 'I guess that's just cos I don't see her as much. Like, I don't see Dave [dad] a lot and we don't see her like nearly as much.'

Twins Ivy & Ava (17) are a strong example of it being difficult to form and maintain meaningful bonds if you do not spend time together. They had lived 50/50 between their parents since they were three and were significantly closer with Mum than with Dad. As mentioned above they lived in blended families in both houses and had close relationships with a range of family members. Mum was very busy with work but there were times carved out and protected for them to spend time together. They talked and laughed with Mum, so all the incidental times added up to being important in maintaining the bond. In contrast, when at Dad's (before he separated from his second wife, when it was 50/50) Ava says they: '...didn't really like see Dad a lot, like even though he was in the house we didn't see him... like I didn't even speak to him really.' Their time with Dad was devoid of activity, they were often bored and spent a lot of time being frustrated at missing out on the things that were happening with the other side of the family, the people that they classed as close family. However, when the twins were 15 their dad and stepmum

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(Susan) separated and since living on his own, they became closer to him, Ava explains why this may be:

I think it's because when we went to Susan and Dad's when they were together we kind of just went there as part of our routine, there weren't really like effort put in but then obviously because, we're going to just Dad's, he lives on his own, we have to like see him, talk to him, do things, um that obviously made us a lot closer cos we're going there to see him and like Jude. (Ava, 17)

A cycle of spending time together building bonds and creating a desire to spend time together was apparent across the sample, but most starkly seen in those families where the young person had a closer relationship with one parent than the other. Reece (21) was unique in the sample in that the centre of his family map contained only friends, his mum and sister were in the next ring and his dad on the outer edge. He spoke throughout the interview about his challenging relationships with all the adults in his life, both parents and stepparents. His quote below illustrates the interrelated nature of wanting to spend time together with people that you are close to and this in turn providing a sense of belonging and family membership, which creates more desire to spend time together. Conversely, where bonds are weak and there is no desire to spend time together as a family it is difficult to create and maintain strong bonds:

...even though my Dad's always had money, it's been strict at his house, all that he does is work and watch tv...They wanted us to spend time together by sitting in front of the tv, which, as you can imagine, after like, six years of that, in that town, you'll get really bored of it...

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(Compared to at mum's)

Um, every Saturday night we'll go to Tesco, like all six of us together, me, Stepdad, Stepbrothers, Mam, Molly. And we'll go and get like something for tea each, get home, cook it, while we eat, we'll split up so parent's will be in the back room, us kids'll be in the front watching um a comedy...later on we'll all go in the back and put on the karaoke...we'll start singing all together and that and it was brilliant, yeah. Because we want to spend that time together and we enjoy doing it. (Reece, 21)

Some of the young people reported growing apart from siblings who didn't follow the same pattern as them as it resulted in them spending less time together. In contrast, Chloe (15) found that being apart from her siblings didn't make a lot of difference. This was perhaps because she spent most time alone in her room occupying herself rather than engaged in family activities and therefore it didn't make a difference to her if her siblings were home or not.

5.4.2 Lack of agency for young people – disappearing family members

It was apparent from the data that for some young people, family-like bonds did not necessarily endure across time, and where circumstances changed considerably, the young person lost contact with that person often regardless of their wishes. The sense of duty in continuing relationships that existed with blood relatives did not exist in the same way for step-relatives. When parents separated and later began new relationships, some young people found themselves in a situation where family members came and went from their

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lives. This was something that they had very little control over, often finding that they experienced family according to their parent's relationships rather than based on their own emotions and desire to continue relationships.

Parts of a blended family that did not live together could come and go from each other's lives as circumstances changed; when Covid hit and it was too stressful for all the children to be in the same place, Lauren's dad's girlfriend and her daughter didn't see them for a while. The fragility of step relationships was particularly apparent in the case of Ivy & Ava who spent a lot of time with their stepsisters and Step mum when living together 50% of the time. But once Dad and their step mum split, they only went to dinner occasionally with their Step mum and no longer thought of her in a parental role. This highlights the importance for the young people in seeing people in a certain role, and the importance of spending time together. There were also logistics involved in the fact that there was emotional upset to contend with and they already split their time between two parents, their friends, grandparents and cousins, so to add in another aspect of family was difficult for them. Their time with their half-brother Jude was also impacted by the separation, something that they wish was different:

I think it would be nicer to see Jude a lot more, like that's our little brother and we used to see, we went from seeing him literally like um, like the equal amount of time like, growing up with him and things like that, went from only seeing him then two days a week which is quite hard, so probably a thing that I'd change is to see Jude more, yeah.

(Ava, 17)

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Whilst many of the young people talked about relationships with their stepparents and parents that were close and unproblematic, others spoke of strained relationships, living with ongoing conflict between parents and experiencing an atmosphere of heightened emotions within their families. Many of the young people were aware that whilst shared residence was a sometimes complicated way to live, it was preferable to living with parents who were together but not getting along. Initially the sample did not reflect much conflict between parents, with the young people conveying that their parents got on and any conflict that did exist had been sorted out and so was a thing of the past. However, as the sample expanded to include older participants who were able to consent for themselves, there was more experience of ongoing conflict and more reflection by the young people on how this affected them. Difficulty in relationships fell into several areas – strained relationships between the stepparent and the young person, conflict between the parents, and strained relationships between the young person and their parent, these will be discussed in turn below before moving on to consider the relationship work that the young people do in their families to minimise strain and conflict.

5.4.3 Strained relationships & conflict

Siblings Parker (16), Leah (14) & Robin (12) all talked about their Stepdad in a way that indicated ongoing tension and that if given the choice, they would perhaps rather that he wasn't a part of their family. Parker spoke to me in hushed tones about the fact that their mum left their dad for him, and although this was over ten years ago, they conveyed that this remained as a barrier in

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them bonding completely with their Stepdad. Leah also spoke of being distant from him, finding it difficult to take his direction or criticism, and when she and her Stepdad argued, Leah reached out to her dad for support. Robin also spoke about arguing with him, she played this down, but the relationship that they had with him noticeably contrasted with the amenable and uncomplicated relationships that Robin reported having with their parents. The quote from Robin shows the effect that their stepdad had on their life:

I think, well if I chose my family, I don't think he'd be in it. But also, he is kind of a part of me if that makes sense, he is some of the reasons why I feel how I'm feeling. Um and yeah...Like sometimes he makes me happy, sometimes he makes me sad. I feel like I'd be a different person if I didn't have those feelings. (Robin, 12)

Rachel also struggled to have a close relationship with her stepdad, explaining that his own problems and the fact that he had a child of his own served to put a distance between them. This was in comparison to the strong bond that she had with her stepmum whom she built a relationship with over the course of her childhood. There seemed to be multiple aspects interacting here, stepdad's personality compared with stepmum's, duration of relationship, and perhaps by entering her life in the teenage years it was harder for her stepdad to create a close bond.

Sometimes problems arose through the parent's reaction to having a new partner in their life. Alex (24), Reece (21) and Amy (20) all talked about feeling like they took second place to their Mum's new partner, creating a rift in the parent-child relationship. For Alex, this rift was never really repaired, he

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distanced himself from his Mum, only seeing her out of a 'sense of duty' whilst the partner was living with Mum. Once mum and her partner had separated, Alex spent more time with his Mum, but things remain strained to this day:

'um...then it took a while to repair my relationship with my Mum, really, probably sort of two or three years for me to feel completely comfortable in that home again really' (Alex, 24).

For Reece, his struggle with his stepdad was part of a wider web of complex struggles with his parents and stepparents; he found them all unreliable, untrustworthy, and self-serving, but loved them and in the case of his parents, felt bound to them. His anger with his parents over the separation, particularly his Mum, was channelled into aggression and anger with his stepdad: 'Not scared, in so much as angry at him [Stepdad] all the time because as I say, I blamed him for it...'. Reece had spent a significant part of his childhood with a stepdad that he hated, often erupting into arguments with him and feeling only a small amount of support from his mum, something that he spoke about at length during the interview:

He saying shit about my Dad and I was like, and he'd been saying the same thing for years, so I was like... I literally got up and said 'if you say that again I'm going to push you off this hill and break your neck' and then I pushed him, but we were inside the tent so he was fine.

Some young people spoke about conflict between their parents as a thing of the past, something that dictated life before the separation but was no longer something that affected them. For some, any arguing or upset was something that they either couldn't remember or were shielded from, however, for others it

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was a continuing reality of family and home life. Ivy and Ava compared the separation of their parents with the separation of their dad and stepmum. They were very young at the time of their parents' separation and had no memory of any conflict. This contrasted with their experience later in their life, where they witnessed a lot of arguing when dad's second marriage ended. They found this difficult for themselves but were more concerned for the welfare of their half-brother: '[...just because it wasn't a nice way to do it in front of him, so, 'cos he saw a lot of like arguing...](#)' (Ivy, 17). The way that Ivy distanced herself from the upset was surprising as this was a relationship that she had known for most of her life. It was as if she felt that she wasn't entitled to feel the same level of upset as Jude because they were not both her parents. Additionally, despite the separation being sad because it meant that she did not see her half-brother as much, she welcomed it because it resulted in her spending most of her time with Mum, which was what she had always wanted.

For Amy (20), the separation of her parents was a relief from conflict that, as an only child, was isolating for her: '[I always wanted them to separate... It upset me but also I was looking forward to it...](#)'. For some of the young people, separation was not the end to conflict and the continued effects of this were apparent in the sample. Gavin, Reece, and Rachel's parents were all unable to communicate with each other, leaving the young people in difficult situations:

[So I think, it was the decision of the court as in like, they couldn't communicate together so the courts got involved and then I think the court kind of encouraged them to try to communicate, via a notebook, which went on for a couple of years as well.](#) (Rachel, 20)

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For some, lack of parental communication was a lose-lose situation, when their parents did communicate, there was conflict, but without the ability to communicate a lot of responsibility and tension fell on the young person's shoulders. Being stuck in the middle of parents who were in conflict will be discussed below. Reece (21) stood out in the sample as someone for whom his parent's continued conflict had far reaching effects on his life, including wanting to move as far as possible from them. His experience of the conflict continued to be traumatic for him and the thought of his parents arguing in public was all consuming, affecting many of the decisions that he made. His parents' lack of communication also led to Reece entering into risk-taking, dangerous, and secretive behaviours that went unnoticed because he was able to lie knowing that his parent's wouldn't communicate with each other:

Cos my plan is, once I finish, to move abroad, I wanna travel for a living, but even if I didn't, I don't want to be in England, like after it. Like I said, it's very much to remove myself from this situation, and I've said that since being like nine. (Reece, 21)

Moreover, several of the young people considered the effect on their mental health of having parental conflict in their lives. Alex (24) spoke about having depression as a teenager and the negative effect that not having parents as good relationship role models has had on him: 'cos I don't have an idea of what two parents together is, and um, what a sort of good relationship is, I've had to very much figure that out for myself.' Amy (20) developed stress disorders that were triggered in high stress environments like returning home or when her Mum argued with a partner. In the following quote she speaks about this in relation to being at her Mum's partners' house when they were on holiday:

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And I think I started developing my verbal tick, or one of my ticks, because I was having a few physical ones, I started developing them at his house because that was a very high stress environment for me... But there was a lot of 'get up Amy!' in the middle of the night, my Mum shaking me awake at three in the morning 'we're leaving, ra, ra, ra' and carrying me out and packing a bag, and we'd be back the next day.
(Amy, 20)

For other young people the effect of conflict was more subtle. For example, Lauren (14) didn't talk much about any conflict in the family, but seemed very affected by conflict, referencing it in her advice and telling me that she felt guilty if she heard people arguing at school, even if she didn't know the people. Similarly, Reece spoke about his sister being 'brought back' to their parents arguing when she heard her dad arguing with her stepmum.

Where children who live with both parents all the time might go to a friend's house, or another relative to take a break or cool off after an argument, some of these young people were able to escape to their other parent when there was an argument or a problem. It was a way of gaining a different perspective on the situation, a calm ear, or a refuge away from someone that they didn't like being with. Having parents that live in separate houses opened the opportunity to have time away from one parent that they did not get on as well with. Gavin found that he 'clashed horns' with his mum when he was younger and so felt more relaxed at Dad's house, and Rebecca used time at her dad's as a cool-off period if she had arguments with her mum. There was also a sense in some of the families (Alex & his Mum, Amy & her Mum, Chloe & her

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Dad, Violet & her Dad) that without one parent there to calm or balance the other one out, things were more difficult, resulting in one place that felt unstable compared to the other: 'I always felt like he'd listen to her [Mum] more than, like if she was like trying to make him be more reasonable, like he doesn't hear it from me when I'm a child. Like he just won't listen' (Chloe, 15). Finally, this chapter will consider the relationship work that the young people undertook in their families to keep the peace.

5.4.4 Young people's relationship work

Whilst many relationships were maintained with ease, some young people acknowledged the effort that was involved in maintaining some bonds. It may be that there needed to be a concerted effort made to see family members: 'Grandparents, we try and see like at least once or twice a week. We go round there like most Wednesdays and have dinner, so we see them quite a bit.' (Ivy, 17). Or ensuring that the time spent together was well spent, for example, where there are half-siblings in one of the houses, the older siblings often made an extra effort to do things with them in the time that they were together, and as the young people got older and had more choice over where they lived, having half-siblings was a reason to choose one house over the other: 'I live at my Dad's... I want to be there for my little brother, as well, so, there's a lot of draws to living with him' (Rachel, 22). There was a strong sense across the data that these young people were aware of their parents' feelings and potential conflict. There was also a sense from some, of an underlying tension, that there could be conflict if the status quo were to be messed with. In these cases, the young person felt a heightened responsibility to keep things running smoothly. This sense of potential conflict is illustrated in the quote below

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where River talked to me about how they felt when routines were changed during the pandemic:

I felt bad because all he (Dad) wanted was to see us, and Mum was like 'can you tell him that he can't' and I was like 'but I kinda want to see him too', and yeah. So that, like most of the time, it's feeling bad, or like, if I know they've had like an argument, not an argument, like a something over WhatsApp or something, I will like feel like 'yeah, what's going to happen now?' but nothing does. (River, 14)

Within the interviews, there was an awareness for some of the young people that the parental separation was for the best, that both parents might be happier now and that it resulted in a happier environment for the children. However, it was also clear that some of the young people took on responsibility for making sure that everyone was okay by taking an active role in the management of the family. The young people were mindful of how certain decisions may affect one or both of their parents, sometimes avoiding doing something that they wanted to do to 'keep the peace'. Ivy and Ava were a particularly strong example of young people who lived their life in a way that avoided any conflict. They would endure being with their dad more than they would like and missed out on time with friends and Mum's side of the family, so that there wasn't any upset with Dad:

Yeah, they, basically yeah, so like to keep the peace we'd just kind of go with it. To make sure there weren't arguments and stuff, we'd just rather miss out on a day out just to like have no arguments if you know what I mean. Not that there was like loads, but like sometimes Dad would kick off if like something wasn't right or to plan. (Ava, 17)

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Some young people avoided asking for a change to the arrangement because they worried less time with a parent would be upsetting for that parent, putting their own wishes and desires behind their perception of those of their parents: 'I feel like I probably could [change the routine to spend more time with dad] but that they'd be a bit offended' (Robin, 12). Some young people incorporated a sense of fairness into their decisions – this is how things work, so this must be what's fair for everyone. Ultimately what was considered fair by the young people was what was prearranged by their parents. On the face of it, Alex (24) being told that he could decide his own routine, seemed like a fair way to put him in control and give him increased agency as he got older. In reality, this way of living was an illusion of choice as it put him under a lot of emotional strain:

...you know it wasn't really my choice completely to go between I had to like, read whether my Mum was sad I wasn't with her and therefore did I feel dutiful to be with my Mum or the other way round. (Alex, 24)

Being caught in the middle like this was a feature of several of the young people's family lives, as reflected in Ava's (17) advice to parents: 'Try not to involve the kids as much as possible', and Alex's (24) reflection: 'I sort of felt they were both, these two homes were sort of pitted against each other'. It was a source of emotional turmoil for Reece that he acted as a messenger between his parents. His parents did not respect the boundaries of the relationship, treating him as a confidante rather than a child. Amy too was used as a 'mediator' between her parents from a young age.

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Finally, older siblings across the sample felt a weight of responsibility as the eldest child, to look after their younger siblings and take the lead on any organising that needed doing: 'And because I'm the eldest, I don't know if it's just oldest child or whatever, but I didn't really like my little siblings getting involved, or, you know, plus they didn't really understand' (Rachel, 22). Many felt protective of their younger sibling, with some stepping into a more parental role than previously held. For some, this was detrimental to the sibling relationship where the elder sibling performed more of a parenting than sibling role, or where they felt they were taking more of their share of the responsibility as everyone got older. Ivy & Ava (17) felt responsible for creating a positive atmosphere for their younger half-brother, pointing out the benefits of the situation, like having two Christmases!

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter has brought together the analysis of how these young people experienced family. Two themes were developed which demonstrate the varying quality of the family bonds that young people experienced: *Strong family bonds: Blood ties and beyond*, and *Fragile family bonds: Strain and relationship work*. Who was considered family was a subjective decision, with wide variety across the sample, both in terms of who was included and who was considered as the closest members of the family. These young people experienced a variety of both positive and negative family bonds across their households, and families consisted of both close blood ties and close relationships which were not defined by blood. Whilst these relationships often had a similar status for the young person, in many of the families, blood ties

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were given a special status as even when not experienced positively the ties were non-negotiable. Where the family member was related by blood it seemed that these bonds incorporated a sense of duty that was not replicated in the same way for those not related by blood. As such when these non-blood ties were experienced negatively the young people were less likely to view them as family.

Parents were central to most of the young people's families, with many seeing their parents equally even though they may not experience an equal amount of time with each of them. Others experienced a much closer relationship with one parent than the other, and some struggled with parental relationships. Many of the young people were close to a stepparent, and the process of living together and them being involved in parenting was a way in which many bonds were formed and strengthened. Whilst stepparents and half, and step siblings were integral to many of the young people's lives, there was a fragility to these bonds which often hinged on parents' romantic relationships rather than the young person's own needs and preferences. Whilst young people may have had some agency in who they considered to be close, they lacked agency in being able to maintain those relationships. For many, their family relationships whilst varied in nature, were essentially unproblematic, but for others, relationships with certain family members were strained, some to the point of there being very little bond at all. Young people whose parents were still in conflict experienced family from a position of effort, and many young people felt a responsibility to undertake relationship work to ensure that things ran smoothly and without upset.

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Throughout this chapter's exploration of the experiences of family relationships it has been clear that relationships are inextricably linked with time, with time spent together impacting the quality of the relationship, and relationships varying over the course of time. The next chapter will explore in depth the young people's experiences of time including the routines that they have, the time that they spend together as a family, and the fact that not all time is experienced in an equivalent way.

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The previous chapter discussed the wide variation that exists in family relationships for the young people in the sample. Both the strong bonds, and those that were more fragile, were impacted by the time that the young people spent with the people in their households. As time is the organising force behind when the young people were in each house and with each family, inevitably conversations exploring how young people experienced home and family when living in two houses also considered time. As shown in chapter three, time for those in shared residence can be viewed differently between young people, parents, and officials such as the courts. Where some may focus on the quantity of time, others focus on the quality- where what is happening during the time together is more important than the amount of time spent together. The concept of quality is explored in this chapter, both in relation to the young people's experience of the standard of time, and of the distinctive characteristics of time. This chapter will explore three themes that encompass the quality of time: *Controlled time: routines, evolving arrangements and agency*, *Not all time is equivalent*, and *Time spent together*.

The first theme, *Controlled time* explores the routines that exist in the families, and things that influence those routines such as practicalities, changing needs, a perception of fairness, agency and a rigidity that comes from a sense of ownership over time. The second theme, *Not all time is equivalent* explores the notion that time is not experienced in a uniform way but rather the young person's experience depends upon the circumstances, i.e. the day of the week and the house that they are in. Finally, *Time spent together* explores ideas of

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how these young people experience family in the context of family practices (Morgan, 1999, 2011); highlighting that it is what families are doing together that is important in creating and maintaining familial bonds.

6.1 Controlled time: routines, evolving arrangements and agency

It is a fact of most people's lives that they must be in certain places at certain times. But for these young people, the sense of not having control over time seemed to be heightened by living life across two households, with their time perhaps being more controlled than others of a similar age. This theme explores the ways in which the young people experience time as controlled through routines and explores their sense of agency in where they spend their time. The young people in this sample were not initially involved in the decision making for where they would spend their time, many would find that too much responsibility, but some were consulted as to whether the decision made by the adults 'was ok'. Many of the young people carried a sense of fairness that whatever had been decided is what is fair, and as such they should go along with that, whatever their own preferences might be. Some arrangements evolved over time and had a degree of flexibility, often determined by practicalities and the changing needs of the young people as they grew older. Other arrangements, often those where parents were in conflict, were more rigid, with time viewed in compartments and as a possession that could be encroached upon by the other parent. Some young people exercised their agency by voting with their feet.

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6.1.1 Set routines

The predominant feeling across the interviews, particularly with the under 18s who were living the everyday reality of shared residence, was that this was just how things were, things didn't need to change and had I not come to talk to them about it, they probably wouldn't have given their living arrangement much thought: 'It's just always been like that, yeah, I just, every weekend I see him (River, 14)...it's just normal'. As described in detail in Appendix D, the majority of the young people had a fixed routine for when they were with each parent: 'It's just a routine really, I just go with it' (Paige, 12), only Rebecca was able come and go as she pleased, and Alex in his later teenage years. Some routines, like Lauren's (14), were very simple: 'we do one week at Mum's and one week at Dad's and we usually swap Friday evenings after school', whilst others were more complicated:

Well, I usually go to my Dad's for dinner on Wednesdays um, but we started staying overnight recently but some Wednesdays we go swimming um and then I go to my Dad's on Fridays and Saturday nights as well. But every like, we like, alternate it between my siblings where we stay at my Mum's one Friday to make it so she gets to spend time with us on the weekend as well. (Leah, 14)

Generally, the impetus and control of the organisation of time came from adults. For the majority this was the parents, but for three of the young people this was the courts. Many of the young people couldn't remember being asked their opinion when the arrangement was initially set up, or being asked how it was going once it was happening; this was news that was delivered rather than discussed. The following quote from Olivia (12), who was asked by her

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parents, nevertheless conveys the sense across many of the interviews that young children are not involved in decision making: 'They asked if that was ok. And I said that was, but it was more presented, um, because I was quite young at the time, I think, but, I can't 100% remember....'

It is interesting to note that these decisions were not revisited in many families as the children got older and generally recognised as more capable of making decisions, and more emotionally aware, with many of the young people following a routine that was set at the point of separation and had been left unchanged since then. It was clear from the data that these ways of living became normal, and in the same way that children who live with both parents in the same house wouldn't expect to be able to change when they see their parents, these young people also take their routine as a fixed part of life. As River (14) says: 'I never see it changing so I've never thought about what would happen.' This is reflected in the fact that routines and sharing time between parents, was only touched on in the advice written to the young people: '...you'll get to see them both a lot'. (Rebecca, 15) and parents: 'Keep things fair and if you're having trouble agreeing on things always keep the child in mind and do what's best for them.' (Ivy, 17).

Having a clear routine was important to many of the young people, they wanted to know what was happening and appreciated their parents taking control of the situation. The routine gave the young person a predictable structure and without it they could feel lost and vulnerable. For Rachel, the court order meant that once she and her siblings turned 12, they were able to decide for themselves where they wanted to live. Rachel was grateful for the

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stability that having a fixed routine brought, it wasn't one that she wanted, as she would have liked to be with her dad for more time, but she was grateful that the arrangement allowed her to relinquish having to make decisions about it and as such, she did not make a change when she turned 12:

I found it difficult, especially when I wanted to go and see him and it was like, this is the structure, um, so yeah when I was younger, it was very much like 'this is just how it is'...I think I just got used to the structure of the week, um, to be fair, so when I became a teenager, I was just like this is just how it is... I don't know what I would change it to, because it was just not a fun experience for the whole time anyway... I think to be fair, at that time, I think that me especially, I need some stability...I don't know if my input would have been helpful, erm...erm...because I don't really know, like even now I don't really know how it would have, if it would have been different, if it would have been better but I guess that's because, again, we weren't really, you know, given an alternative or a different structure, it was 'this is how it's going to be', just crack on (Rachel, 22).

Her younger sister however, immediately changed the routine to living with her dad full time, showing that one routine does not necessarily suit all children in the family, and that being able to have agency to make decisions about where you live is also not universally desired by young people, but rather dependant on circumstances and individual characteristics.

I was conscious when asking questions not to put the concept of 'fairness' into the young people's heads, however the concept was brought up by some and seemed to be something that could lead to feelings of guilt and responsibility

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in the young people. Some mentioned it during their interview as something that either influenced the routine: 'I presume it was to just to try to split it evenly enough' (Olivia 12) or influenced how they felt about the routine. For example, Lauren (14) considers it unfair on one parent when she spends extra time with the other and 'doesn't really like that'. This resulted in Lauren sometimes feeling mixed emotions about exciting times such as going on holiday. The quote below from Olivia (12) demonstrates the complexities of balancing varying aspects of what is best for the child and parents. In deciding and adapting the routines, Olivia does things slightly differently from her younger sisters now that she is at high school:

To even it out and also, like there was something like, with my high school being here it was easier and also this needed to be my official house instead of my Mum's, so I think we changed it so it would be more even and also it's slightly easier getting into school and stuff like that because from my Mum's I have to drive and then get dropped off here. But I can just walk and it's like two minutes (Olivia,12)

6.1.2 Evolving routines

Whilst for most young people, their everyday routines were set, there were also options for flexibility within the routine, with some evolving over time to take account of the changing needs of the young person and other family members. Contrary perhaps, to popular belief, there was a sense that living in two places got harder as they got older. The young people needed more things for school and were putting in more effort at school so were more tired and didn't want to move around, and their social lives became separated from their parents. There was also a sense that having parents separate when the

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child is younger is easier for the young person because adapting to a new way of living is simpler when there haven't been many years of living with their parents as a unit: 'cos we've done it from like when we was so young, like, it doesn't really feel like any different if you know what I mean...' (Ivy, 17).

In most families, there were practical reasons for the routine being as it was that came from both the parents and young people. For example, several of the young people always got ready for school at one house, as this was easier for them, or was tied to parent work schedules:

I tried getting ready at hers and I would go to school from there, however, um, it did become the case that the older I got, the more complex my routine got. I started wearing make-up...so I'd ended up making it so that I'd wake up at my Mum's and then go over to my Dad's and that's where I'd get ready for school. (Amy, 20)

Parents' work schedules were the biggest influence on routine changes, with young people sometimes needing to adjust their normal schedule or make a more permanent change to accommodate the demands of their parents' job, as Jack (11) says: 'Erm, it depends, like sometimes I'll go to my Dad's on Tuesday instead of Wednesday and like sometimes I go on Tuesday and Wednesday if my Mums working or something'. Another key circumstance to affect routines is special occasions and holidays. It was almost universally the case that the young people alternated each year for Christmas and either did the same for their birthday or spent the day with both parents:

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Well for Christmas...one year we're at my Mum's and one year we're at my Dad's. And for my birthday, I get to choose which house I want to be at and when it's my Dad's birthday I get to go to his and when it's my Mum's birthday I get to go to hers if they want that. (Leah, 14)

As the young people got older, routines could be adapted in accordance with their social life, as Gavin (21) says: '...it would be 'Hi Dad, Leo's going to his friend's house, is it ok if he goes to Mum's'...and the answer would always be yeah.' The young people discussed wanting to be at a particular house because it fit with seeing friends rather than to see that parent, and in some families, their agency in making their own choices was recognised and this was met with flexibility from the parents. Once they were older and able to transport themselves, this also impacted the routine, as Rachel (22) says:

and it was just like, well, the two of us are like old enough now that we don't have to keep to whatever structure you've decided. Like at one point I was just going to round to whichever parents' house had the preferred dinner, you know.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the young people were active in their families in keeping things running smoothly and protecting their parent's emotions. As such, changes that came through happenstance rather than design, were sometimes a chance for the young person to get things the way that they preferred them to be without risking hurting anyone's feelings. The practicalities were seen as the driving force rather than the young person's preference: 'We changed the split when I went to high school, because my high school was closer to Mum's, quite dramatically. It was a much shorter

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[commute for me' \(Violet, 22\)](#). Here we only have the young person's viewpoint on this, it is very possible that the adults knew that this was what the young person would prefer, and this was accounted for in the decision-making process, but for the young person they viewed it as separate to their preferences:

[I don't want to sound mean but we do like it better like at Mum's and now Dad and Michelle aren't together it's kind of made it so we're more with Mum which we've always wanted to kind of do but we've never could really say that if you get what I mean. \(Ivy, 17\)](#)

The flexibility seen in some families regarding the routine poses interesting implications for parents and courts who are making these decisions on behalf of children. What suits a family and child, at that one point in time may not do so later, and so it seems that communication and openness to change in response to the changing needs of a child and the family, is more appropriate than sticking to a rigid routine that reflects the 'fairness' for adults, or what was best for a young child rather than an adolescent.

6.1.3 Exercising agency

Some young people talked about preferring one house or more particularly, one parent to the other, but most did not think that this could affect where they spent their time, or it wasn't enough of a preference for the young person to think that it should make any difference to daily life. As discussed in chapter five, several of the young people put their needs second to those of their parents, dismissing their preferences because the parent 'enjoys seeing

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them'. The notion that there could be an option of a choice of where to be is something that most young people did not consider, however some did recognise that they wanted some control and choice over where they were living. An example of this is where one sibling chose to live permanently with one parent, whilst others moved between: 'Er, my sister (eldest), she doesn't go to my dad's house. But my sister (older) does' (Jack, 11). Paige (12) talked about sometimes not wanting to go to Dad's because it meant making a change, and she'd prefer to be able to stay in one place, but she was always pleased once she'd gone. Her reluctance seemed more about the effort that had to be put into moving rather than a particular preference for one parent over the other.

A feature of many of these structures and routines is that whilst they were fixed, they were also flexible enough to allow for changes that related to logistics rather than emotion. However, for some, their emotional needs did make a difference to where they spent their time:

Poppy [younger sister] went through a period of time where she spent more time at Mum's house so, they were supportive of that because it's understandable going through like, phases, wanting to be with one more than the other. (Lauren, 14)

In some families, young people perceiving that their opinions and preferences were not listened to and accounted for by adults was a cause of conflict between them and their parent/s. In her interview, Amy (20) was angry that she wasn't listened to as a child but also spoke of recognising why she was told to spend equal time with each parent. Whilst she hated that she wasn't listened

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to, she also felt that children should not be expected to make these kinds of decisions. Amy experienced a strained relationship with her mum. Her interview conveyed the sense that Amy thought of her mum as an unreliable parent, someone that prioritised her own needs over those of her child, someone who manipulated situations and whose own mental health struggles made her unavailable – often literally as her mum spent chunks of time in the country of her birth. Whilst there was a court order stating Amy should spend 50% of her time with her mum, she asserted her agency and control over the situation in the small ways that she could. She actively avoided her mum by doing things like employing delaying tactics on her way home from school, and never spent weekends with her:

...so I joined a lot of clubs because I knew to walk to my Dad's I'd have to walk past my Mum's and she'd always be smoking at the window and then she'd see me and then it would be 'Oh, come up and spend time with me, your Dad's not home for two more hours', 'Ah! Now I have to go'. (Amy, 20)

Amy conveyed frustration that adults would talk about her as if she wasn't there, and often actively ignored her preferences or opinions: '...if people had listened to me as a child they would have understood a whole lot better' (Amy, 20). In Amy's eyes, there will always be an underlying reason why a child wants to be with one parent more than the other and she urged adults to find out and take notice of that reason.

Whilst other interviewees did speak about siblings who remained in one house, Chloe is unique in the sample as the only one of the young people whose arrangement changed when she was still young (around 11), and so

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significantly that she no longer spent any time with her father because of her preferences. Six years had passed since her parents separated and she could no longer remember a time that she lived with her dad in the way that her two siblings did. She described never having got on with him as well as her siblings did, or as well as she got on with her Mum. She found it difficult to be with him without another adult, feeling trapped in arguments without another adult to support her. By asserting her preference, additional conflict occurred between her parents as well as between her and her dad, but perhaps this was manageable because she experienced conflict with him anyway. Eventually, Chloe was too old and too determined to be forced to be somewhere that she wasn't comfortable. The sense of duty that was apparent when other young people talked about the parent that they saw but only because they 'should', isn't there for Chloe:

I think I just started saying like 'No', like I wouldn't go. And then there was like ages where there was like, where he'd get really annoyed about it and my Mum would get involved and I'd like, and like it would be like a whole massive thing, but then after a while it kind of like, stopped being as big of a deal and then I could just... stay here...and it wasn't as bad...

Yeah, like, (laughs), there was one time I went and I really wasn't happy about it. I can't remember when, we'd had a massive argument and he'd like locked the door and he was trying to stop me from getting out because I was going to walk home or something (laughs) and I climbed out the window and I walked back to here and then after that it's kind of been, I haven't really, like it got to the point where they just couldn't really make me go. (Chloe, 15)

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It is particularly clear from the two examples of Chloe & Amy, that the quality of relationship between a young person and their parent affects the amount of time that they want to spend with them. Where some young people took the view that 'it is what it is', others made changes to enable them spend a much greater portion of time with the preferred parent to the other. Finally, this theme will consider the impact that viewing time as something that each parent owns has on the young person.

6.1.4 Time as a possession

In some families, the young people conveyed a sense that time was seen by the young people and their parents as something to own. That certain time periods (e.g. alternate weekends) are a parent's time with their child, and that that time belongs to the parent. Lauren, and Ivy & Ava, who had 50/50 routines were particularly conscious of keeping time fair and equal. Incorporated into this notion of equal being fair, was an exchange of time, if one parent had extra time with them, this was something that needed 'paying back' to the other parent: '[And we usually make up for it afterwards](#)' (Lauren, 14). In some families, rather than the young person having agency and owning their own time, each parent 'owned' a portion. Where time was seen in this way by a parent, this resulted in some difficulty for the young person when both parents were present at an event. They had two parents no matter which day it was and therefore may not want to separate out the time when both were present. Gavin experienced this differently to his siblings, he was more able to sit with the discomfort of his behaviour making his Mum unhappy, as shown in the following quote:

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...Like there was one time when it was my brothers' like football tournament and both parents were there, and like Leo and Lily felt so awkward going over to Dad and Marie that they basically just ignored them all day. And they just stuck with Mum, and I just kind of went back and forth and I felt like I was just dividing my time quite evenly, and yeah, Mum was really not happy about it and it was a bit of an...interesting period! (Gavin, 21)

Treating time as a possession appeared more as a feature of families where there was ongoing conflict between parents. In Reece's family, he knew that tensions were so high between his parents that neither would agree to him spending time with them when it wasn't their turn. This led to him adapting, in his words, to being manipulative and deceitful at times, to be where he wanted to be: 'Um, I, well like I said I lied a lot, to say like 'oh, I'm going to stay at my friends' and in fact I'd be going to like a family function for like the other parent' (Reece, 21). This territorial approach to time was seen in other families where there was conflict between the parents, rather than the young person being prioritized, it seemed the priority could be in depriving the other parent of time with the child. As discussed in chapter five, communication is a way of the young person creating a permeable boundary in the times that they are with each parent. Through communicating, the young person remains connected with the parent that is not there. However, this was not welcomed by some parents who the young people perceived as wanting to keep the time they had with their child separate from the other parent. Gavin and Rachel had arguments with their respective mums about the phone they were given by dad, with both mums using the phone as a sanction, enabling them to limit the young person's communication with dad:

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because my dad was very much wanting to keep up that contact, so like, for my seventh birthday he gave me a phone because he wanted to make sure I could contact him myself if I wanted to... But my Mum didn't like it, she really didn't like the fact that I had that direct contact with him... she didn't take it from me fully, but if I did something out of line she would take it from me and she would take it for a very long time. (Rachel, 22)

The young people's understanding of this is that the mums were worried that dad would spread dissent and bad feeling towards mum, however, there seems to be a lack of understanding from the mum of the two-way nature of communication - only the dad is considered, rather than the young person's desire to keep in touch.

It seemed that there was a positive difference for young people in families where parents viewed the young person's time and life holistically across houses, compared to those whose parents viewed it in two compartments. The fact that Amy's dad comes on holiday with her and mum in the same way that he did before the separation was a source of joy to Amy, however, it was difficult for her mum to have to allow dad access to her life when this is not reciprocated:

So, I think my mum gets territorial that there are parts of my life with my dad that she can't breach and yet this is a part of her life with me that my dad can breach. But I don't see it as that, I see it as my life, they just happen to be, people within it and I can have whoever I want. (Amy, 20)

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This theme has considered the different ways in which the young people experienced time as controlled. Most experienced life to a set routine, but for many this routine could evolve over time in response to the changing needs of the young person and in response to events and practicalities. This theme also considered the power and desire for the young people to exercise agency in the arrangement, and the impact that having parents who view time with their child as a possession may have on the young person. The next theme will explore the idea that not all time is experienced in an equal way, but rather experience was dependent on which day of the week it was, who they were with, and which house they were in.

6.2 Not all time is equivalent

Whilst the amount of time spent together is important in maintaining and enhancing relationships, it is not just the quantity but the quality of time that is important. Notably, these young people's experiences of home and family could be significantly different across their two houses depending on factors such as day of week spent there, who else lived in the house, and the parenting style of the adults. In some cases, the differences in environment between the two houses meant that the young people created and took opportunities that arose due to those differences. Friends were seen more when they were at one house than the other, homework was done in the peace of the house with fewer people, time was spent with siblings when they were there, and they walked to school via friends' houses when at the right house to be able to:

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So where everybody lived around the school was closer to my Dad's house, so I did see my friends more at my Dad's because it was just easier for people to get to in that way, but that meant that I could have my, you know, alone time at my Mum's house because you know there were less people there, it was a bit roomier. (Imogen, 18)

6.2.1 Day of the week

Which days of the week were spent with which parent influenced the way that time was spent in each house, in addition it also impacted how the young person viewed each parent. Where the young person was with one parent on school days and the other at the weekend, the chaos and stress of school mornings were partly attributed to the parent rather than the fact that it was a weekday morning. Weekdays in most of the households involved going to school and work, and often being looked after by grandparents, whereas weekends involved free time to spend with parents, friends or doing activities.

Robin (12) found the difference in experience between the two households difficult to manage. Whilst the chaos experienced at Mum's was primarily due to getting ready for school and the number of people in the house, because the intensity of activity didn't occur at Dad's, they saw the difference as more of a difference between time with each parent, than a difference between day and weekend time that would naturally occur if all members of the family lived in one house. In response to a question about whether they thought moving around affected how much time they had with parents, friends and to themselves, Robin responded:

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I'm not sure but it might make me feel a bit stressed. I have different things going on at my parent's houses. One, everyone's there and it's quite busy and we're usually getting ready for school, or we've just been to school. And at my Dad's is much more relaxed and we get to do our own thing. (Robin, 12)

As they spend weekdays with their mum and weekends with their dad, twins Liam & Ryan made sure that they watched tv with Mum in the evenings in the week so that they spent some time together, reserving school holidays for bigger activities with Mum, like going out for dinner and going swimming. The type of time that was available to them dictated the types of activities that they could do with their different parents. Whilst they were at their mum's house for a longer amount of time, there wasn't much available time to spend together, unlike when they were at Dad's, when all time was available time. So, whilst on paper, it seemed that their mum had the 'best' side of the arrangement as she had the twins for a greater quantity of time, it could be argued that their dad had the 'better' arrangement as he had the greater amount of 'quality' time with them. The twins were conscious of the disparity in quality of time spent with each of their parents, when asked if he would make a change to his routine, Ryan answered:

Maybe if we got to do a few more things with Mum, 'cos we don't really do much with her unless it's a holiday. Because we just go to school, then come home, do homework, and then go to bed. (Ryan, 13)

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6.2.2 Members of the household

In addition to the different experience created by which day they were in a particular house, was the difference that came from who lived in each house. Some of the young people, like Paige, Gavin, and River & Ashley, experienced change from time in houses full of siblings and adults, to time being the only child, or in a quieter house. This difference had varying impact. Paige stood out as someone that really missed the people who weren't there when at the other house and felt a weight of responsibility to optimise time with siblings even though the time she spent away was small in comparison to the time she had with them:

I get a lot more time to myself when I'm like at my Dad's because I'm not always on my feet, I can relax and chill on the sofa and watch films and play with the dog...Whereas here, I don't have to always be on my feet, I choose to spend as much time as I can with the others, 'cos I know that I won't see them for the weekend, so I want to make like, I want to make the most of it, that I have with them during the week on the days that I'm not doing anything. (Paige, 12)

Gavin's experience of family also differed between houses, this was due to both numbers of people and the differences in their personalities. Gavin felt more aligned and relaxed with family members at Dad's, his interview conveyed a preference for the fun and relaxed time spent there:

So like at home it feels like, at Mum's when it's just Leo & Lily about it can sometimes feel like, you know when you visit a relative who's quite tidy and you know, ok so we sit and we'll...whereas at Dad's just chaos and I quite like the chaos. (Gavin, 21)

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It is interesting to consider the young person as a constant, but as they spent time with different people in different environments they sometimes needed to adapt, with some having more affinity with one household than the other. If both parents lived in the same house, it may be that their personalities and parenting styles would complement or balance the other, but when separate, the difference may be felt by the young person more acutely. The difference in experience due to parenting style is discussed next.

6.2.3 Parenting style

Some young people experienced time differently in each house due to their parent's differing views and expectations in relation to things such as behaviour, school, diet, and free time. For example, what food was provided by a parent, how much access the young person had to screen time, what activities were encouraged, and whether they had a strict bedtime. River & Ashley found they could explore different activities when with their dad, this was facilitated both by the difference in parenting style apparent between households and the fact that there were no little brothers at Dad's. For River (14), the difference in parenting style led them to consider her dad differently to her Mum and Stepdad:

But then I don't see him ever taking me to school or whatever. I don't think he can even cook, so, so like, most of the time we like get a Chinese, because he lives like underneath one.

Where perhaps there would have been negotiation between the parents when living together, the detachment between parenting styles of each parent leads

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to the young person experiencing quite different lives between houses. However as previously stated, whilst the parents may see things separately, the young person keeps the other parent in mind, reflecting on how they would feel about how the young person was spending their time:

So, we own an air rifle at his, kind of, we go to the shooting range and do some stuff where, and my Mum's like 'no don't do that', well she doesn't say that, she doesn't approve of us doing that, she's very disappointed. (River, 14)

For several of the young people, variation in parenting style affected the way they experienced time in relation to both their level of independence and how much they were expected to contribute to household tasks. This can be seen in the quote below from Lauren, who preferred different elements of each house and appreciated that often she got the best of both worlds by living with each parent separately, even though there were aspects that she found difficult. Lauren is someone for whom conflict is difficult, and whilst she said there wasn't any overt conflict, I wonder whether these elements that she knows would cause arguments were her parents in the same house, still caused her to experience that conflict through imagining how the other parent would react when she's eating the 'wrong' food or staying up late:

It's quite different, um, because at Dad's house I have a little bit more responsibility I guess, um, because at Mum's... I can rely on Mum or John to wake me up in the morning when it's time to get ready for school. But at Dad's house I can't, he has to rely on me and so does Poppy, so that can be a bit stressful...But then at Dad's house I have more space, so, there is quite a big difference in our lifestyle, like, I

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might go and cook dinner for myself...whereas at Mum's we'll all sit down together...Mum doesn't like me staying up late... Dad doesn't like the idea of eating more junk foody things...at Mum's house we'd have more like fish fingers and at Dad's house you'd have like salad with salmon, so there's a big difference and Dad doesn't like the idea of us having different food. (Lauren, 14)

This pronounced difference in parenting was also apparent for Rebecca (15) for whom her dad's feelings of guilt created a more indulgent form of parenting than she got with her mum, allowing her to spend time at Dad's very differently to when at Mum's:

I'm more lazy at Dad's. A lot more lazier at Dad's. More active at Mum's.

Yeah, like what kind of thing?

I wake up really early and like, I'm always up. We eat a lot more healthier here and at Dad's I just eat junk food (laughs). And then normally sit in my room playing Xbox.

Why do you think there's that difference?

Because Dad lets me get away with everything.

The young people showed the capacity to behave quite differently depending on the expectations of the parent. Violet and her brother also experienced this

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difference, but for them it meant they gradually spent more time with their Mum than Dad once Violet began high school:

He was a big proponent of child independence, so he pushed us to make our school bags and bear the punishment at school or at home if we hadn't done them well... Mum was a lot gentler in how she handled things and her boundaries were very clear... (Violet, 22)

Whilst many of the young people experienced a varied approach to many aspects of their lives, there were common threads that ran through all the time that they spent with their families. In particular, it was the very every-day and mundane aspects of family life that the young people spoke most about during the interviews. This 'ordinary' time and how time spent together in family practices (Morgan, 1999, 2011) creates family across households will be discussed next.

6.3 Time spent together

Across the interviews, the young people talked to me about their everyday lives, those day-to-day things that they did with their families that shaped their experience often of both home and family. This included things such as getting to and from school, going to football practice & matches, going for walks and the things that they spent time on when inside the house. A feature of how some young people experienced their family, particularly within the home, and particularly with those who spent equal amounts of time with each parent, was doing your own thing in the company of other family members. Shared areas

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of the house were used by different family members at the same time and there was a sense of comfortable amicability in this environment:

Figure 7 Lauren's living room



That's one of the living rooms in Dad's house. And, um, we spend a lot of time in there just playing, we all do separate stuff, but we're all there together. And I like playing on the Nintendo, and Poppy plays on her iPad and Dad will be watching a film, and we all just kind of do that together and I thought that was quite special, cos it was just like an us thing (Lauren, 14)

Lauren's quote above is interesting, the 'us' that she refers to separates this activity from the film watching talked about later in the theme, which included Dad's girlfriend and her daughter and was more of planned activity meant to include everyone. What she refers to above is a more natural, incidental occurrence where everyone happened to be using the same space at that time but could move on to do something else, somewhere else, if they wanted to. By marking this out as a special thing, she implied that this guarding of time spent with dad and her sibling was an important aspect of family life for

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her. As someone who has equal amounts of available time at each house, she is able to find this companionable time at both houses.

Chloe (15) echoes other's experiences across the sample of families spending time together eating an evening meal and then watching tv: '*...in the summer we'd go like out on walks and stuff, but everyone just says no in the winter cos it's freezing. But we normally like eat dinner together and then watch tv afterwards*'. These ordinary activities are explored next before exploring family time designated as 'special' time.

6.3.1 Eating together

Erm, and we would, in both houses, always sit down for dinner together. So that was always a nice point to see each other. (Rachel, 22)

Eating together at home, or out as a treat, featured in over half of the conversations. It is possible that when time together is only experienced for some of the week, families are more conscious of spending it in each other's company. Everyone needs to eat, so mealtimes could be the time that was carved out and protected as 'family time', where everyone came together in the same place and were provided a chance for conversation. In other houses, evening meals were still a communal event but took place in front of the tv as a treat, or in the case of Paige, as a way to avoid the mess of the dining table and to allow everyone to eat at their own pace. For some, the predictable routine of mealtimes was a comfort. This forms a lot of how Paige talked about mealtimes, she liked home cooked meals because she liked to know what was going into her dinner, but also talked about getting take aways like fish

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and chips every Wednesday after dancing. As long as it fit with the regular routine, she was happy, because she knew what to expect, allowing her to feel comfortable and at ease with where everyone was and what everyone was doing.

Figure 8 Paige's dinner cooking on the hob



As seen in this quote from Alex, religious beliefs (his Mum is a practicing Christian) combined with cultural norms, also played a part in the significance of mealtimes. The importance of a particular time or day shaped the way that day was spent in certain families, often creating an expectation and sense of duty around a tradition such as Sunday roast:

Sundays were always very much a family day. She'd try to make it a family day and that would evolve around the dining room, having a big Sunday lunch and the living room, you know, I just remember very well,

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in the winter I guess, but fireplace going, and we'd just play games and things. So that was the family aspect of it. (Alex, 24)

Later in the interview Alex talked about this as one of the aspects of family life that didn't continue once Mum had a new partner and afterwards when she was on her own struggling with her mental health. Where before he could predict the time that they would spend in each other's company, this was no longer the case and was accompanied by more fraught times together. Losing the traditional family Sunday reflected the wider loss for Alex of the close relationship that he had with his Mum prior to her being in a new relationship.

Many of the young people discussed family mealtimes as something that happened in both houses, but for others it was a distinction between the two. For Ava and Ivy, mealtimes reflected the more general case that time was spent together doing things as a family at Mum's house and time at Dad's was not spent with him:

Yeah, so at our Mum's we'd have like, we'd sit around the table for dinner, we'd do things like family games nights...but then at Dad's we wouldn't do anything while we was there, we was always quite bored, we're just upstairs on our phones...and then dinner, we'd either just take it up to our rooms like everyone just go different places, we wouldn't all sit together and talk or anything like that but then here we did, so it was quite different. (Ava, 17)

The way that mealtimes worked in different houses often reflected the availability of each parent. Imogen's (18) mum's shift pattern meant that

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whenever Imogen was with her, her mum wasn't working and as such her mum was available to make all the meals and to spend time with Imogen eating them together. Conversely when at dad's he was busy working and adapting to his new parenting role, therefore meals were often eaten separately, or they cooked them together once her dad was home. Imogen reflected on how looked after this meant that she felt, and the impact on her own role within the family; she felt more able to relax when with Mum but took a more active role in domestic life at Dad's. For Amy, mealtimes at Mum's house were an indication of Mum's mental health and illustrated how her dad was seen as the parent and provider and her mum was seen as unreliable:

Um, my Mum used to cook a lot, I think it was when she'd be manic in her depressive episodes... a lot of the time it would be 'oh, I forgot to go shopping, here's some left over spaghetti' or she'd go 'go and check in the fridge if there's like any tomato sauce' and there'd be this mouldy tomato sauce, and I'd go 'there's nothing in there, sorry'... But my Dad, he learnt to cook, he couldn't cook when he was with my Mum... We had our consistent meals, I'd always have a lot of pitta bread based foods, but you know, like pitta pizza or falafels and pitta, but it's these little things of we had consistent meals that were all kind of the same thing, but also like a lot of time and effort was put into them despite how simple they were. (Amy, 20)

This distinction between the type of meal that would be served at the different houses was experienced by other young people as well. For Parker, Leah & Robin, when at their Mum's, dinner was something from a cookbook, and when at Dad's it was to a set schedule. The siblings had their different preferences around this, mostly depending on the exact meal that was being

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prepared rather than a judgement on whether elaborate or simple was preferable:

Um, well he usually, he doesn't always make, I can't think of the word, like different meals. Um, he has like quite a few meals that he goes through but does them over and over again, but we eat as a family and that's quite nice. And then he usually has something cool or nice for dessert. (Leah, 14)

As the young people got older, cooking was also a way that they could contribute and help out in the family. Ivy took pride in being able to take some of the pressure off the people that normally cook, by doing this 'homey' thing for them, and Robin (12) spoke about liking their sister's cooking the best: 'I like nachos which my sister makes'. The everydayness of home life could be flexible, but evening mealtime together was a constant in most houses within this sample.

Figure 9 Ivy's meal that she cooked for the family



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6.3.2 Watching tv together

As indicated by Ryan (13), another aspect of 'ordinary' time that was a recurring family activity for many of the young people, was watching tv together: 'We always watch a film in the evening with Dad'. This activity might reflect the age of the sample; this was something that could be done together that everyone could enjoy without much effort. In some houses it became a ritual, based around the television schedule, for others it was combined with eating together, and here it was even more a treat as it represented something that was relaxing and time off from the weekly slog. As with the evening meal, this was often a predictable part of their routine with the family. In some cases, watching a film together was a way of bonding with stepparents and stepsiblings. Everyone was in the same place, engaged in the same activity but they did not necessarily have to be engaging with each other, thus this might alleviate any pressure, leaving space for relationships to grow over time. Films also provided a low stakes opportunity for young people and adults to bond and enjoy a shared interest:

that's the other sofa and we usually watch movies like altogether there, cos it's bigger so we can fit me, Dad, Kelly, Ruby and Poppy. Um, and we all have like a certain seat on the sofa, mine's not actually on the sofa, I like the corner behind the sofa because I've got loads of blankets and I can snuggle in the corner. But, um, it just, it's nice to watch a movie with them at the end of the week. (Lauren, 14)

Whilst much of what the young people told me about spending time with family focussed on the everyday activities, there was also a focus on the special times that families have together, sometimes these were combined –

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an everyday activity was made special by the fact that the time was designated as time to spend together, those memorable moments and special occasions are discussed next.

6.3.3 Time together 'just us'

As previously mentioned, there seems to be a self-perpetuating effect between spending time together and the strength of family bonds. Those young people who wanted to spend time together with a parent had a strong bond with them and this bond was further strengthened by spending time with the parent, reinforcing and maintaining that bond. Conversely where relationships were strained, the young person was reluctant to spend time with their parent, and opportunities were not created to repair or strengthen the bond. Some young people experienced time with their parent/s through set activities that they could look forward to: 'That's something I do with Mum, the horses. That's like mine and her time' (Rebecca, 15). As discussed above with mealtimes, there was a sense, particularly in the families that spent less time together and in those where weekend time was spent more with one parent than the other, that some time needed to be protected to be able to be experienced as quality time. That time could involve days out and 'exciting' things, however, often it was still quite ordinary time, but made precious by being ring-fenced as time together. As with Jack (11): 'I sit there with my Dad and watch, you know Hawkeye? There's a series on Netflix now, so yeah we watch that together every week. We'll probably watch that together tomorrow'. For Jack, watching that programme was a predictable part of his time with Dad, he knew that they would spend that time together and for him that was quality time. It was a simple and seemingly small activity, but was time spent together just the two of them, engaged in something that they both enjoyed. Some of the young

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people spoke about being made to feel special through inclusion in certain activities, like Paige being allowed to ride in the lorry with her Stepdad and watching Dancing on Ice with Gran whilst eating pizza. For Liam (13), the places in the house where he felt most at home were linked to the time and activities that he spent with different people: 'I like here, my, like the lounge where I spend time with my Mum, my bedroom where I can spend time with my friends. My Dad, it's like the lounge, 'cos we always watch a film every night.'

As discussed above, the time available affected what the young person could do with their parent. For Reece (21), this affected the final court ordered arrangement, as his dad recognised that by being able to spend an entire weekend with the children, this time was entirely within his control. Whereas in a weekend that was split between the parents, the quality of time available to them to spend together was impacted by what had happened in the other part of the weekend: 'my Dad really wanted full weekends because that way we could go to places, um, like, you know, he do, at that point he'd do a lot of trips like you know, taking us to Blackpool or something'. When the amount of time available is limited, like for Paige, the time spent together seemed to be more focussed on activities than 'ordinary' time, however not exclusively, as she did also mention spending time in the house 'doing their own thing':

...every other Friday after football I'd go with my dad and we'd go to his house, have dinner and then... it just varies we don't really have a set thing we always have to, we could go to the arcades or we could go bowling or anything really. And then we could have dinner, take away, anything. (Paige, 12)

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Gavin spoke of a lack of pressure surrounding time spent together as a family because they were with each parent an even amount, this is in contrast with Rachel who recognised that her Dad wanted to optimise the time they had together as it was limited:

Um, it was, you know, yes we did have weekends or evenings when we were in the house, Tuesdays were very much just like I think, just lets have dinner and then hang out and do a variety of things and then head to bed kind of thing. And then weekends were filled with lots of different things... So I think he was trying to make the most of the time that he had (Rachel, 22)

Rachel also highlighted the difference in available time that she had with her parents. As with some others, Rachel spent much less time with her dad than with her mum, but due to the difference in their jobs, he was more available to her when they were together than her Mum was.

The strong bond between a daughter and a dad who lives on his own was seen in families across the sample. It seemed that daughters saw time with their dad as different to time with mum, there was a sense of mutual benefit, that they enjoyed spending time with dad, and they saw that it benefited him to have them around. They were aware that when they were not there, he might be lonely, so they made sure that when they were with him, they spent time with him:

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I quite like watching things here, like on my own, because I think it's quite fun and I can just choose whatever I want. But at my dad's, I like watching movies with him in the evenings, or helping him do gardening or something, because that's quite fun and he quite enjoys it which is nice. (Leah, 14)

Throughout Amy's interview she alluded to what she thought a family 'should' be like, she went through the motions of family life even though she wasn't comfortable in mum's company, because behaving like a family was important to her. Amy had a preconceived idea of how a parent and child should behave and felt that her and her dad fit into this ideal, but mum lets her down by not fitting into this. The very strong bond that she has with her dad is created through this picture she has of them behaving 'as they should':

We'd read together. Watch tv. Play games. My dad and I are film buffs, we'd watch films and he'd try to get me to watch the football. We'd do everything a close father and daughter would do. (Amy, 20)

In some cases, engaging in a joint activity helped to build a relationship where there wasn't one before. As has been mentioned at other times, due to Covid-19, these young people experienced a period of lockdown which forced them to spend more time with family members than usual. Reece (21) spent some of this time building a bar with his Stepdad, and whilst it wasn't plain sailing, it did provide them with an opportunity to bond and repair some of the rifts in their relationship.

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In some of the young people's families, the boundaries between the households were permeable, allowing a range of family members to spend time together. In particular, Parker, Leah & Robin, Rebecca and Alex were able to spend quality time together with their dad whilst at their mum's house, eating together, going for walks or playing games: 'Usually my dad just comes over, cause my parents get along very well. Cause usually at the weekend we all go for walks' (Robin, 12). Additionally, Dad also came on holiday with Mum in two of the families. For these young people, permeable boundaries allowed them to enjoy both special and ordinary times together with both sides of their family.

6.3.4 Special times

For the majority of the young people, some periods of time with their family were particularly precious, with most young people telling me how they celebrated special occasions like Christmas and birthdays: 'So, we usually did a family Christmas, just the four of us' (Violet, 22). These are times when even a rigidly fixed routine could be changed, in some families everyone came together to celebrate, in others they took it in turns, resulting in double the occasion for the young person. In some families, it took a while to work out the best way to enjoy special times:

in the early years, it would be like, 'ok, it's my birthday on Mum's day, so Dad's going to park up outside and I'm going to sit in the car with him for half an hour and just get my presents and cards and stuff and then go back in', and then as we got older, you know actually that doesn't work. We'll just celebrate my birthday with Dad on a different day, and I'm going to get two birthdays, that's even better! (Gavin, 21)

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The different traditions that existed in certain families also dictated how time was spent. Ivy spoke about celebrating with extended family and her photos highlighted the prominence for her of time spent with relatives and friends. They also highlight that it is Mum's family that are *the* family:

And obviously birthdays and stuff, um, we go out for meals like all together, that's like a tradition, we'll go to like Bella Italia or somewhere for like someone's birthday... It's like a tradition on New Years' Eve, we'll all go round my Aunties and celebrate it and we'll all sleep there, so all of our family will play games, have a party kind of thing, it is really nice we're like quite close with them, so, yeah it's really nice. (Ivy, 17)

Figure 10 Ivy's hot chocolates after pumpkin picking with extended family



6.4 Conclusion

This chapter has explored how young people experience time when living in shared residence, through the three themes: *Controlled time: routines*,

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evolving arrangements and agency, Not all time is equivalent and *Time spent together*, and highlights that time spent with family builds and strengthens family bonds. There appears to be a cyclical effect of young people wanting to spend time with those that they are close to, time which in turn strengthens bonds, creating a desire to spend more time together.

The majority of these young people experience time as controlled, living their lives to a set routine. These findings show that there is variation within families as to how much flexibility there is in the routine, and in how much young people can and want to affect that routine. Often the young people appreciated the structure that the routine gave them and didn't want to be responsible, or didn't see change as an option, whereas others felt strongly about where they wanted to be and voted with their feet. The idea that time is a possession was explored, something that parents own when it is their turn for the young person to be with them. This was by no means universal and most noticeable in families where the parents are in conflict, with young people treated as something that is theirs when it is that day of the week.

These findings explore the idea that not all time is created equally and as such, whilst on paper there might be a 30-70 or 60-40 split, the days of the week in that allocation make a big difference to the amount of *available* time that parents and young people are able to spend with each other. The way that time is experienced in each house is also affected by other household members and the parenting style of the adults.

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This chapter explored that it is what families spend time doing together that builds bonds, with 'ordinary' activities forming much of what the young people report doing with their families. Perhaps surprisingly in a culture of busy schedules and a plethora of devices, most young people spoke about eating dinner as a family. For many this was protected time, where all members of that family household came together at the table. This notion of protected time seemed particularly important in many families; the young people liked to have certain activities that they knew they would do with the parent at a particular time. There was also an aspect of family members being aware of making the most of time together.

This chapter illustrates the ways that these young people experience home and family through time spent together. This time varies in its qualities depending on the day of the week and the quality of the relationships that the young person had with their family members. The next chapter will explore how the young people experience space and place when living in two houses, including what is important to them in terms of the everyday objects within the space in creating a sense of home, and what barriers exist to mean that they may not feel at home in both places.

Chapter 7: Home as familiarity and territory

This chapter presents findings from the data analysis relating to the young people's experience of home as a space. In addition to the reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022), it also draws on detailed analysis of the photos and transcript under the framework of systematic visuo-textual analysis (Brown & Collins, 2021). As discussed in chapter 4, this form of empathic analysis sought to elaborate and amplify meanings (Willig, 2012) contained within both the photographs and the interview transcripts. As such in this chapter, the photographs are prioritised to allow the reader to fully understand the young person's experience of home in relation to the everyday objects that reside there with them.

Two themes were developed which explore the aspects to feeling at home that relate to the fabric of the house, both in terms of what is important to the young people in feeling a sense of home across two houses and what barriers exist to mean that they don't always feel at home in both places: *Home as familiarity: A consistent space* and *Home as territory: somewhere to take up space & leave a trace*. The first theme, *Home as familiarity: A consistent space*, explores the importance for feeling at home of the familiarity of the space that the young people are in. This familiarity is constructed through different sources: the space itself, the things within that space, the things that bring comfort, and those things that have emotional value through their connection to people and events. Importantly, this can transcend locations. The second theme, *Home as your territory: somewhere to take up space & leave a trace*, explores the importance for feeling at home of young people experiencing the house as their own territory. When somewhere was

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their territory, They could choose how to spend their time and surround themselves with the things that they needed to be able to do what they wanted to do. The theme explores how the young people shared territory, particularly in relation to their bedrooms and how being able to personalise their bedroom created a strong sense of home. Lastly the theme explores the experience of home when territory became unfamiliar due to new family members moving into the house.

7.1 Home as familiarity: A consistent space

The word familiar has several meanings. On the one hand, it relates to the ordinary and the usual, something that is well known, often because of a long association with it. On the other hand, it means pertaining to one's family or someone who is close. In this theme, both senses of the word are evoked, as a sense of home for these young people came from being in a place that was well known to them and being surrounded by things that had always been there, some of which held memories and provided connections to people and the past.

7.1.1 A familiar place

'...like I'd always just assumed that my Mum's house was a bit more, because I'd been there longer' (Lauren, 14). For many of the young people, their sense of home came from what they had become used to over the course of their lives, the amount of time spent in that house was instrumental in it feeling like home. The house that they had always known had unquestioned home status because it hadn't changed, meaning that in the cases where one parent

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stayed in the original home and one moved, the new house was automatically on a back foot, trying to obtain the same level of familiarity as somewhere they have lived their whole life. As Amy says: 'I've always felt stable, pretty much in my Dad's place because it's where I've lived since I was two months old. That to me is home. When I say home I mean my Dad's house' (Amy, 20). In cases where the young people had a home that had consistently been a part of their life throughout childhood, it took time for a new house to gain the familiarity needed to have a similar or equal status. This came through in Olivia's experience, she lived with Mum in the original family home, whereas her dad rented somewhere before buying the house that they are currently in:

...but I think in lockdown that's when I was like, for cos, for a while, I was like this is my home but I wouldn't call it as much a home maybe because I hadn't lived there as long as my other one. And then like throughout lockdown, I was like, yeah this is as much of a home (Olivia, 12)

Lockdown was a period in which people were in their houses for many more hours than was usual. This enforced time acted like a fast forward button allowing Olivia's dad's house to 'catch up' to the familiarity of her childhood home, giving it the same standing in her eyes. For some of the young people, it was the consistency that came from not moving that gave the house its home status. For somewhere to feel like home it needed to feel safe. This feeling came from the predictability that consistency provided; the young people could relax and build their home in that place when they knew that they weren't going to be asked to move. The young person didn't have to manage any changes, they had continued access to both the house that they had

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always known and the community that surrounded it, as such it was dependable and secure. This is encapsulated in Alex's interview:

So what made it the family home was simply that, so my Dad bought it for us when I was two, so I can't remember Mum having another home and Dad would spend a lot of time there until I was eight and then he lived in a few different places, so it was just consistent, it was always there. And it was in my hometown, near my school, near my friends. Um, and yeah I had my own bedroom, same bedroom for the whole 17 years we were there... (Alex, 24)

On the other hand, when something is unfamiliar, it is harder to feel comfortable and at home, as explained by Rachel:

I remember going to visit my Dad and appreciating the fact that I was there but also because this, because it was a different atmosphere in the house, it wasn't familiar, and so I remember also not feeling fully comfortable at my Dad's house." (Rachel, 22)

Rachel experienced similar feelings later in her life when she had moved away to university and based herself at her dad's when home:

My Mum moved house and she was like 'this is your room, Rachel, this is your room' and I was like 'I don't really think that's my room', because, I have a lot of attachment to my family home still and this is just a new house... (Rachel, 22)

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It was difficult for these young people who experienced a lot of change in their lives to have consistency taken away from them. As such it was painful to leave the familiar for the unfamiliar; being taken away from the home that they had always known was a wrench that some young people couldn't forgive, as described by Reece:

...my Mum left the house. Lived there with my Dad 'til I was ten, eleven and then he sold that house. I never really got over that because for me, throughout all the arguments and that, it was kind of my happy place, it was like where everyone I knew was." (Reece, 21)

For many of the young people, the familiarity of home came also from the surrounding neighbourhood, the proximity to friends and school, and the sense of community that this brought. By moving close to somewhere familiar, Gavin's Mum eased the transition for him, and the difficulty of moving was offset:

Then we went to [village] which was quite nice, that was nice as a kid because it was right by the park...like it was a park we used to like drive to from our family house and then suddenly we were living across the road from it, so that was nice...and I had a friend at school who lived like a five-minute drive down the road, so again, that was nice.(Gavin, 21)

For Reece, whose homes were not considered as places that brought comfort, the fact that visiting the local large supermarket would inevitably lead to bumping into friends and family, created a sense of home. For him, home was

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more than a house; it was the wider surrounding neighbourhood and the resources within that neighbourhood.

...the big shop that everyone goes to, so, I, like whenever we go I see a lot of family, family friends, my own friends and that, so that place, I don't really have much of an attachment to the houses that we're in now, so for me, but that's always been there. (Reece, 21)

Whilst the familiarity of the place that the young person lived created a sense of home, that building wasn't an empty shell and much of what the young people focussed on when telling me about home related to the objects within the house. How the furniture and household objects create a sense of belonging is considered next.

7.1.2 Familiar 'stuff'

Interestingly, the young people all responded in a similar way to the photo task by taking photos of 'stuff' rather than of whole rooms, or the outside of the house, those bigger aspects of home didn't feature, but the small details did. These were things that belonged to them or were most familiar to them - their 'stuff'. It seems that their sense of belonging in the space came through having and being able to leave their belongings in that space. As with the original family home having an automatic home status, when the contents of the family home went to one parents' house rather than being split between them, the family home was recreated in a way that was difficult to compete with.

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In the following quote from Imogen, the difficulty that she had in reconciling her desire to feel as much at home in each place, with the reality of feeling at home more strongly at her Mum's, is apparent. As she was 12 when her parents separated, she had a long history of the family home to compare new houses to. Through the furniture moving to Mum's new house, it was almost as though Mum had stayed in the original family home, and with the original home being held in such high regard, dad's house could not compete:

So my Mum's bedroom was definitely much more *my* bedroom than my Dad's was...The room at my Dad's was quite small as well so all of the stuff that I'd had at my family home had gone to my Mum's, you know my bed, my desk, dressing table, you know, all of that stuff was over there, so that felt much more like my bedroom because it was all my stuff...(Imogen, 18)

Imogen's photos highlight that different houses hold different levels of emotional attachment. Whilst she had the fondest memories from the house she currently lived in with her Mum, she wanted to keep the memories of the 'family house' alive. Through maintaining these connections with the time that the family were one unit she gave that time of her life prominence. Even though things had changed, these objects hadn't; she remained attached to them even though they were no longer useful and saw them as a vital element to feeling at home:

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Figure 11 Imogen's Mum's radio



...because she had it at the family house, er, she listened to Radio 2, mornings, school run that sort of stuff and again it's just one of those things that I just seem to think about when I think about that house and then, the newest house that we're in, just translated. She barely even listens to it now... (Imogen, 18)

For these young people who moved between two houses, it seemed that they needed those houses to remain constant. Where people had created a big change in the young people's lives, objects could be relied upon to stay the same. Some parents kept the things that the young people were used to even if those things didn't serve the purpose that they were meant for. The objects' new purpose was to maintain a state of stability in the house. However, for some young people, maintaining such a consistent environment meant that they could struggle when things weren't as they expected. This is shown in the following quote and photos from Lauren (14) (Lauren took the most photos of the group, taking 16 rather than the recommended 10):

Figure 12 A selection of Lauren's photos



The fireplace, like the kettle, they just make me feel at home. Like, when we go to hotels and stuff, and they don't have a kettle and they don't have a fireplace, it's just like "everything's falling apart!". And that sounds a bit dramatic, but it just doesn't feel like home without a fireplace and a kettle... (Lauren, 14)

Bringing things back and forth between the houses was a way that the young people had of being in control of maintaining familiarity and consistency between the two houses, whilst also being an aspect of the necessary practicalities of the situation they found themselves in. This seemed easier for those whose parents lived close together; siblings Parker, Leah & Robin, whose parents live a half mile apart, all talked about popping back over to Dad's on their bike if they forgot something. Whereas Lauren, whose parents lived 14 miles apart, talked about having to pack carefully, because otherwise she would be without things for a whole week. In her advice to a friend, she recommends: 'buying a cool bag to carry things from one house to the other!'. In all cases though, packing and forgetting to pack their things, was one of the biggest sources of frustration amongst the young people, as illustrated by

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Violet (22) who said: 'We packed and moved stuff a lot' and Leah (14), who said: 'it's quite stressful going between the houses because I have to remember to bring everything that I need'. For Lauren (14) and Paige (12), some continuity came from bringing their most special cuddly toys from one house to the other.

Figure 13 Cuddly toys



Most young people though, did not pack much when changing house, Gavin was the exception and for many years packed almost all his things when he left one house. This gave him control of his environment; whichever house he was in he still had access to all the things that he wanted or might have wanted:

I took a lot! (Laughs) Again, when I was young, I was really bad, and I'd basically try and take the contents of my whole room from one house to the other and I'd have like big bags and I'd fill the boot...But Leo and

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Lily...they were a lot better at the whole 'this is my stuff at Mum's, this is my stuff at Dad's', whereas I was a lot more 'this is my stuff.'" (Gavin, 21)

For many of the young people in the sample, bringing this amount of stuff between houses wouldn't have been possible because they took their things to school with them. But as Gavin had a younger brother and sister who hadn't started school when his parents separated, their changeovers tended to be done at a house in the evening. Both parents facilitated his desire to move the entirety of his possessions and it was the outside opinion of his stepmum that changed this for Gavin:

Marie said, you know 'do you need that? Do you need that for two days?!' um it got better, so then it was just like taking all my school stuff and then I'd basically have clothes at Dad's, clothes at Mum's, and then there might be a book I'd take back and forth and maybe a game. (Gavin, 21)

It is interesting that Gavin framed his taking of lots of things as bad, that wanting your things with you is a weakness and a strength is being able to adapt to each house as it is, with the things that are there. This is reflected in him choosing this as the focus of his advice to a friend: '[...try to separate your things so some things are at one house and others are at the other...](#)'. He seemed embarrassed that he thought he was coping well with his parent's separation but that in hindsight perhaps this was an indication that he wasn't coping. Later in the interview it transpired that the amount he used to take between houses is a family joke. He covers for this embarrassment by

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explaining how good he is at helping friends pack to go home from Uni: "it's transferable skills!".

Alongside discussions of familiar objects within the houses that provide consistency, the young people often spoke about those objects that existed within the home to create a comfortable and relaxing environment. It is worth noting that all except one of the young people, had constant access to homes that were comfortable and had the things that they needed.

7.1.3 Familiar comforts

Saying that you feel at home is synonymous with saying that you feel at ease, that you are comfortable to be yourself, to let your guard down and relax because you feel that you belong. Many of these young people showed that they felt at home in their houses by sharing photos that depicted those places that they could relax and take up space in the house. There was a psychological comfort that came with their physical comfort. In the interviews, the young people frequently referred to certain cosy clothes, comfortable places to sit, and blankets, beds and cuddly toys that created the comfort that they expected from home: 'And that is my Oodie, big jumper thing and I love chilling, relaxing.' (Paige, 12)

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Figure 14 A selection of photos that depict comfort



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Some of the familiar home comforts didn't belong directly to the young person but were instead a feature of the house, or an aspect of a shared room. In some cases, like for River, Jack and Leah, it was a special place to sit; in these homes they knew that they had a place that was set aside just for them: ['It's the most comfortable place, I think, in my opinion to watch the TV...'](#)(River, 14).

Figure 15 Special places to sit



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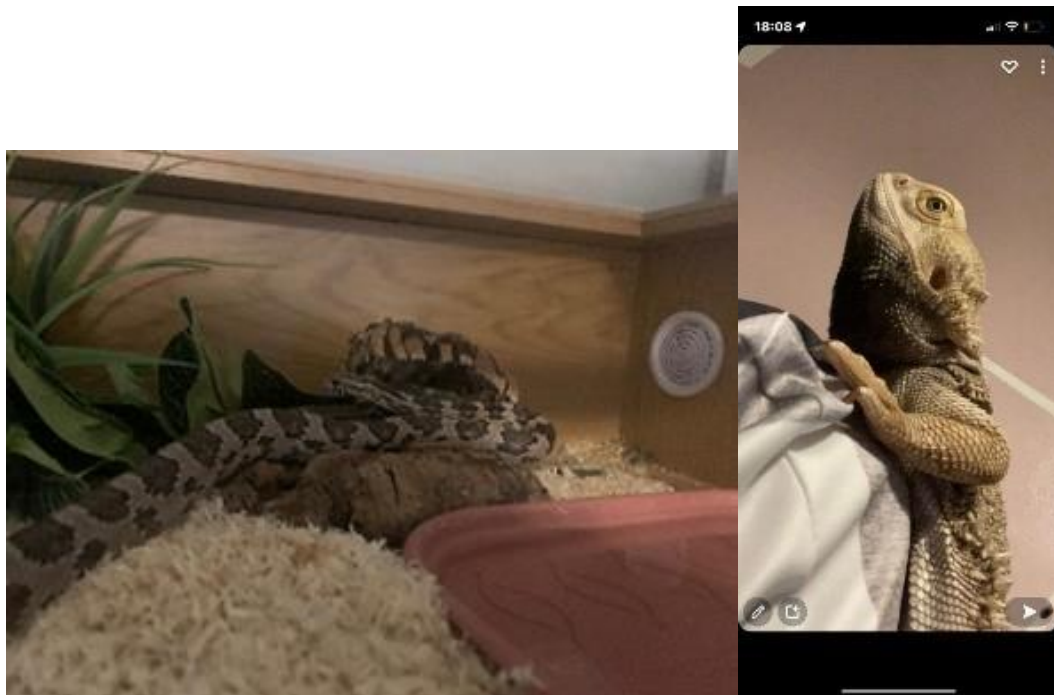


Whilst, not exactly 'stuff', pets were talked about by more than half the young people as a key feature of feeling at home and a significant source of comfort. Their pets provided unconditional and unwavering affection, a sense of safety, were a constant companion when the young person was in the house, and in some cases, a travelling companion between houses. The pets were not only comforting in themselves but brought comfort by being a consistent feature of one or both houses: 'When I come home, as well, the dog's always just waiting for me, either at the door, or, and he's so excited to see me, so he really reminds me of home. Definitely' (Ashley, 11). For Paige, Rebecca, Liam and Ryan, different pets contributed to the feeling of home depending on which house they were in. The pets also provided a definition between the houses, giving each house its own identity via the pets that resided there, as shown in the following quote from Olivia:

Yeah, I wanted that to be part of it because I'll just like chill and like maybe have her [snake] just with me while I'm just like doing stuff and I felt like that was quite a big part of my house at Mum's just like the animals that are there. (Olivia, 12)

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Figure 16 Pets



Pets were so central to Rebecca's sense of home that she chose pets as the subject of every photo. In her descriptions of each pet, she conveyed a sense that they were a continuation of her and her most treasured possessions. Rebecca's parents lived on the same road and as such she had a very relaxed

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pattern of when she was at each house. As she often went between the two, she could see her pets as when she wanted to. Through the pets she had a connection to each parent: she went with her Mum to ride their horses, and her pet rabbit that was rescued by her and her dad travelled with her between houses. Interestingly, whilst she felt most at home at Mum's because she missed her Mum when not with her, it is the pets at Dad's that she spoke about most when telling me what made her feel at home. It was apparent for Rebecca more than for the other young people, that the companionship of her pets recreated the feeling of love and safety that you get from a parent. That when at Dad's and she is missing Mum, the affectionate animals help to fill that gap: 'That's SamSam. She makes the house really lazy and comfy cos she just gives you a nice warm cuddle.' (Rebecca, 15)

The pets had a special status in some houses to move between both, this may be because they were a family pet before the separation and are missed by the parent, or it may be that the young person misses them too much otherwise. As with many things in these young people's lives, practicalities affected what happened with the pets. As Jack's parents live near to each other, his dog could sometimes accompany him to his dad's house, but then returned, as there was nowhere for her to sleep. Similarly, Imogen took her dog with her from her mum's to her dad's, giving her a constant companion when otherwise moving by herself:

He used to come with me no matter where I went, so no matter what house I was in he was with me... so yeah, he's probably one of the most familiar things about. If he's there, it's you know, more home. (Imogen, 18)

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Figure 17 Imogen's dog



So far, this theme has explored how a sense of familiarity builds a feeling of home. This comes from the place, the consistent objects, and the sources of comfort within the house. Finally, this theme will consider the familiar feelings that are evoked by objects within the house; that objects provide a connection to both people and memories.

7.1.4 Familiar connections

For many of the young people, the photos that they shared with me offered an insight not only into their home but also provided them with the opportunity to talk to me about memories that are sparked by that object, or the people or period that they associated with it. The objects provided a connection that

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created a feeling of psychological comfort by reminding them of fun times spent with the family or to particular people in their lives. Therefore, whilst these aspects of the house contributed to a feeling of home, this came more from their association with something rather than the object itself.

For Leah, Jack and Ashley, home was about being reminded of times spent with family. For Leah, it came from the photo wall at her mum's that shows lots of family holidays and days out, and through a plant that she spent time with Dad choosing:

Figure 18 Leah's plant



“That’s a plant at my Dad’s, Um, I really like it, I don’t know why but I think it’s just quite cool because the colours and I really liked buying it with him because we don’t usually go out with just him on our own ‘cos he’s quite busy and doesn’t really like going out. (Leah, 14)

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Ashley (11) chose to only take photographs at her mum's house, but when talking about some of them, emphasised the connection between both parents' houses. By emphasising these similarities, she presented the houses on a more equal footing than she experienced them (she is with her mum the majority of the time and at her dad's on alternate weekends):

Figure 19 Ashley's shelf of knick-knacks



This is my little shelf of knick-knacks, at, up there, and it reminds me of um all the places like I got them and some of things that I've done here at home and some of the things, there, at home. (Ashley, 11)

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Figure 20 Ashley's bedding



This one, at Carl's and at home, I both have butterfly cov...patterns, on my sheets, so if I were to see that, I would think 'oh, that's what I've got at home' and it, I would, I wouldn't associate it with one home or the other, it's just home, cos, that's what I've got at both homes. (Ashley, 11)

Jack (11) chose to photograph the fireplace in each house. As with Ashley, he showed the continuity between the houses and between the memories that were evoked through the object. It didn't matter which house he was in; he could be reminded of campfires and time spent having fun together with each of his parents on separate but equally memorable camping holidays. These elements of familiarity went beyond the objects, the young people seemed continuously connected to each parent through those objects that sparked memories.

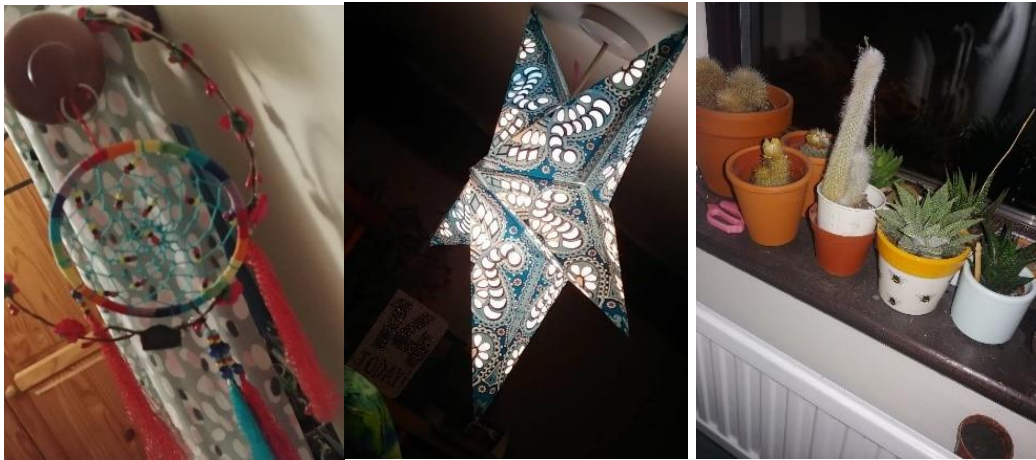
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Figure 21 Jack's fireplaces



This was also shown in Lauren's (14) photos from her Mum's house which focussed on special objects that connected her to people that she wasn't always with. Whilst for the others, the memories seemed to be a happy coincidence, for Lauren it seemed more effortful. She ensured that she was surrounded by things that kept her connected to the people who weren't there with her, and to the time when her parents were together. Without those objects to signify different people she would feel disconnected from them and less comfortable in her houses:

Figure 22 A selection of Lauren's photos



...it's my light. Mum got it from Belgium, and she got one for my friend Cleo, um, just before she moved to France, and we also got one for Poppy, and it was just kind of something that we all had and it just made it feel special so whenever I like, whenever I turn it on, it makes me think of them. (Lauren, 14)

Having a connection to people and the past was something that the young people spoke freely and happily about. However, when a family breaks down, members do not always want to be reminded of the past. Unfortunately for Reece, his father could not bear to be reminded of the past and to avoid the trauma, he removed all trace of the previous life from his son's bedroom.

A lot of the personal stuff, at one point as a kid, my Dad threw away. Um, so like, I had some stuff that I took to me Mum's and then some stuff that I left at home before he sold the house and then I don't know what the catalyst was, but one day I came back, and everything was gone, and he'd just thrown it all. (Reece, 21)

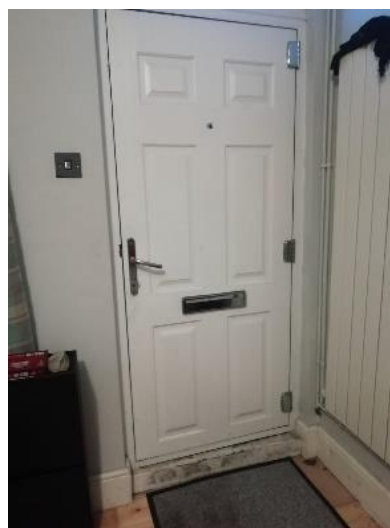
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This traumatic event had lasting consequences for Reece who developed ways to manage this situation by keeping everything of emotional importance in a box in his aunt's attic. Not being allowed to have these connections on show in his dad's house was difficult and limiting for Reece who was forced to compartmentalise his life into separate areas for Mum and Dad. Whilst for Lauren, the effort came in ensuring there were things to remind her of the other parent, Reece put effort into ensuring there was nothing that linked to Mum at Dad's house.

7.1.5 Threshold transitions

Finally, within this discussion of how familiarity builds a feeling of home, is the significant but simple act of arriving home. Crossing the threshold into the house, evoked a sense of being home, they had arrived at the place where they were comfortable and safe. This is conveyed by Jack and Ashley and River who all chose to tell me about arriving home.

Figure 23 Jack's front door



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Figure 24 River & Ashley's 'dent'



Ok, so when we come home from Carl's [Dad's], or actually, no not from Carl's, just when we come home in that car, there's always a dent and if like, I'm not paying attention or something and I see that and I feel that dent and I know I'm home (Ashley, 12)

There was something powerful for the young person in arriving at the place that they considered home. This was a place where they did not have to ask permission to come in or to be there. This was their territory and the things that contribute to the creation and feeling of it being their space will be considered by the next theme: *Home as territory: somewhere you can take up space & leave a trace.*

7.2 Home as territory: somewhere to take up space & leave a trace

This theme explores how young people gain a feeling of home through the creation and maintenance of territory. Where the young person had some control over their surroundings and could do things that they chose and

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enjoyed, the space felt like home. Home was somewhere where young people shared certain spaces but also often had spaces that were just for them; this theme explores the importance of the personalisation of spaces for feeling that it is your territory rather than feeling like a visitor. Lastly this theme explores the difficulties some young people experienced when their territory became unfamiliar through other people making it theirs.

7.2.1 Do as you choose in your territory

It was clear from the data that for these young people, home was somewhere that was often free of the constraints on time that the outside world imposed. As such home held a special position as somewhere that they were free to make choices about how to spend their time, often choosing to relax and spend time doing the things that they enjoyed. For these young people, feeling at home meant that they could take up space both in their bedrooms and shared spaces, with both their bodies and their belongings.

Whilst which house they were in affected what they did in some cases, and who they could spend time with, many of the young people talked about the different activities that they did no matter which house they were in. Each house provided them with the space that they needed to be themselves, to take part in the activities that they enjoyed and that provided them with a sense of self: 'Yeah well, this one is because I like reading and I read quite a lot in my spare time and this makes me feel much more relaxed' (Robin, 12). For many, playing video games was the thing that they chose to spend their free time doing. For some this could happen in either house as they had devices in each place and would sometimes just need to take the game that they wanted

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or return a controller. For others, like Liam & Ryan, it was something that only happened in one house: 'So that's like when I play games with my friends, I'm always on that chair, and I'm playing with my friends.' (Ryan, 13).

Figure 25 Ryan's gaming chair



Playing video games was a way for several of the young people to spend time with their family in the house, but also, as for Ashley, a way of spending time with friends and family virtually, whilst in the comfort of their home:

This is from both houses, because Carl made that PC and either when we're at his or we're at home, we're playing on PCs and Xboxes and um, my, Pete and Carl both like to play on it and stuff. (Ashley, 11).

Figure 26 Ashley's gaming set-up



The young people spoke about home as somewhere that they were able to chill out with their friends. However, unlike many of their past times, this was something that was more dependent on which house they were in, particularly in the cases of those whose parents did not live in close proximity: '[...so yeah, it was definitely more like my Dad's was where I had friends over and my Mum's house was where I had my own time...](#)'(Imogen, 18).

7.2.2 Sharing territory: bedrooms

Within the house, a bedroom was place that a young person could claim as their own, or at least a share of it. A bed, however, was a sacred space, no other family members were allowed on their bed; it was entirely their own territory, something that was particularly important if the rest of the bedroom was a shared space. Many of the young people shared their bedroom with a sibling, for some, their bedroom was a space entirely for them, and for others it

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depended on which house they were in for whether they shared. The practicalities of growing family numbers and then reducing numbers meant that some spaces were used differently at different points in time. Regardless of whether it was a shared space, many of the young people portrayed their bedrooms as safe spaces, a sanctuary away from the rest of the household or the world outside, and as spaces that have what the young person needs to do the things they like, as explained by Olivia (12):

So, I've got a desk in my bedroom that I do art and that, I've got my bed and that and that takes up most of the space. I'd say it's quite a large bedroom, it's like the perfect size for me.

There was quite a lot of variation in whether the amount of time spent at a house or the number of siblings, affected whether the bedroom was shared. Eight of the young people had their own bedroom at both houses, six shared a bedroom at each house, and the remaining seven had their own room in one and shared in the other. Eight of the eleven young people who split their time equally between the houses had their own room in each house. The other three, Ivy, Ava and Gavin shared their bedrooms with siblings in each house. Their houses were busy with people, and this was experienced differently depending on which parent they were with.

...so we basically have like, Delilah the princess – she's got her own room! Um, it's the smallest room, it used to be my room... Then the other three girls, are in one room and then the boys are in one room and then Dad and Marie are in a room downstairs. (Gavin, 21)

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Having their own bedroom was seen by many of the young people as a prized thing, somewhere that was their territory in its entirety was something that would make their siblings who had to share a room, jealous: 'I have my own bedroom; Annie has her own bedroom, and the two boys have to share one. Ha!' (River, 14). Parker (16) was very aware of the privilege of having their own room at their Dad's; having somewhere to be alone was special, something that their sister Leah (14) desired but acknowledged was not a simple thing to achieve: 'Um, I don't get much time alone, just because I don't have my own bedroom and that's quite, like, stressful but my Mum's looking and she's trying to make it happen, it's just like not as easy.' The young people were practical in their analysis of the necessity of having their own space. In many of the houses where the young person spent more time in one house than the other, sharing a room with a sibling seemed less important to them. For twins Ryan & Liam, and Ivy & Ava, there seemed to be a trade off in importance, by having a private space in one house it perhaps became less important in the other, or they were more willing to put up with it because it was only for a short time. As Ava & Ivy had been used to sharing their territory when at Dad's, sharing with their brother was a continuation of what they were used to, it is possible that they had no expectation that they would have their own space there:

So it's like a double bunkbed, so me and Ava share a bed there and our brother's on top, so it's still not our own space but because we're only there a few days, it doesn't really matter. (Ivy, 17)

Paige (12) enjoyed the fact that her and her three younger siblings shared two bedrooms. She saw their rooms as somewhere just for children where they were free to have fun, sharing their identity as children and as such enjoying doing similar things and having similar things that they did not like. It is possible that as she gets older, her views on this might change:

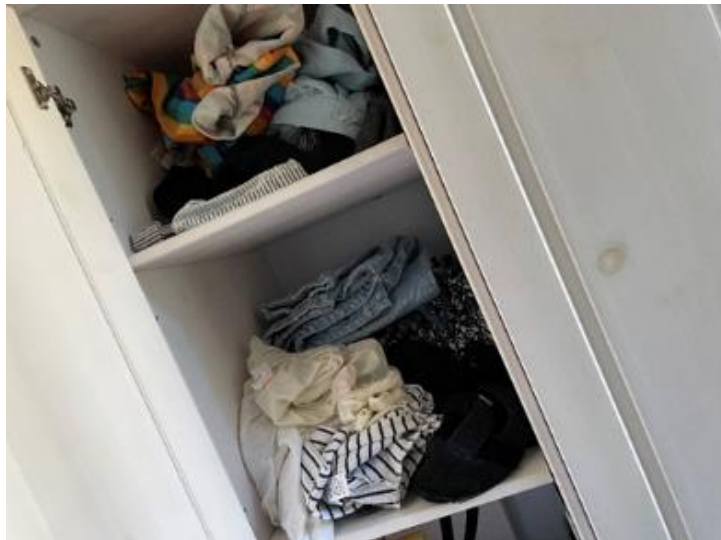
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So, my bedroom is the one there [points above us], so you'd've seen the window, probably curtains were closed 'cos me and my brother and sister we were playing. We like playing teachers because I've got this massive whiteboard that I love doodling and drawing on, we always like to play on that...it's always nice to have our own time, just us and not any adults or parents to like tell us what to do or anything... (Paige, 12)

Things were less rosy for some of the siblings who shared a room, with more rules and negotiation required to enable things to work smoothly. Siblings Parker, Leah & Robin shared a small space in both houses (despite Parker having their own room at Dad's, the rooms were still connected) and as such, furniture was shared and spread across the spaces creating ambiguity in terms of which spaces were whose territory. The siblings carved out small spaces within the shared space to be their own, places they could have their belongings and protect as their own territory. There was a hierarchy of age here, especially at Dad's house, as Parker the eldest had their own room and Leah appeared to get priority in using the other bedroom. For these siblings, their bed was the only space that was protected as their personal territory:

Um, well, we're definitely not allowed to go in each other's beds 'cause otherwise we'll always get mad at each other. Um, and yeah if one of us wants privacy we have to look away or go to a different room...Well, it's quite confusing but both my sisters have a wardrobe that is in my room at my Dad's and my drawers are also in my room. So we have to get dressed at separate times. And I've got my drawers, they're in the corner next to my bed, so that's kind of my space. And at my Mum's I don't really have a space, I just read on the top of my bed. (Robin, 12)

Figure 27 Shared spaces



The ways that the young people shape their spaces is discussed next.

7.2.3 Leaving a trace marks your territory

In Gavin's interview, he emphasised that everyone had their space to belong in Dad's busier house. But as the bedrooms were shared with lots of people, making other spaces in the home their own also became important, with Gavin accessing the outhouse to exercise and his siblings often playing football in the garden. Being able to use the whole house as their own, not just

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part of a bedroom was an important aspect of feeling at home. Those who felt that the whole house was their territory, not just their bedroom, were comfortable in taking up space with their belongings and bodies in a variety of spaces within the home, making a mess, claiming the best seat in the house, and having their things around them in the lounge or other shared spaces, all contributed to creating feelings of home.

Figure 28 Traces of everyone in the dining room



That is the dining table...the dining table's where we eat and there's all the mess on the table is like, the boy's mess. The brothers. And then we have the advent calendars in the background... and I like this, this is cool. (River, 14)

When they felt at home, the young people felt comfortable and as such were able to feel relaxed about rules and expectations, they could be themselves in all rooms of the house, and for some, like Ashley, this translated to being able to be messy: 'There, are shoes, everywhere! When, like either, when I'm at Carl's, like, home is messy. I don't have to be neat and tidy, and can just be messy...' (Ashley, 11)

Figure 29 Mess



A particular aspect of staking a claim on a space came from making that space their own. This could come from choosing the colour of the walls in the room, having their belongings in shared spaces and through having control over what was in their bedroom. Whilst in shared spaces, multiple family members were often displayed, bedrooms were spaces in which the young people could have the most influence on what it looked like and on how the space was used. Being able to choose what their bedroom looked like, was a key to it being their space. Many of the young people spoke about different elements in their bedrooms that displayed their personality and interests: *'And that's Tottenham, that's the club I support.'* (Jack, 11). In shared bedrooms, there is less opportunity to make a mark, here bedclothes and other elements surrounding the bed became the most important aspect of personalisation. Having things around them that sparked joy was also important and these often took the form of collections of objects such as plants, empty drinks cans and sea glass:

I've got hanging plants and fairy lights and a tapestry and I feel so like 'ooooooh! This is my room' and I get so excited every time I walk in

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there...but I walk in there and I'm like 'this is my space' and that feels really, really good." (Amy, 20)

Figure 30 Parker's collection of crystals



Olivia (12) talked about how in each house, personalisation came from different aspects. In the new house with her dad when they redecorated the whole house, she was able to choose the colour for her room, whereas at her mum's, as that had been her room since she was much younger, there was an accumulation of things that created personalisation: 'like you can tell it's mine it's got a lot of books, art materials, kind of just like thrown oddly, I've got some weird stuff on my bookshelves like weird homework projects that I've done'. As described by Alex below, through each house having the everyday things that are needed, a sense of temporariness was avoided and instead the young person could feel comfortable and at home in their surroundings:

so generally, I had, I had sort of two sets of quite a lot of things, just day to day things, you know bathroom stuff and stuff like that, so I didn't feel like I was going for a sleepover one night to the next, or anything. (Alex, 24)

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In situations where young people did not have a lot of control over their lives, being able to assert control over their bedroom as somewhere that was entirely their territory became important. The sense of being in control over a bedroom was particularly apparent with Chloe's, she decides when to clean it, which is often, and who to allow in, which isn't many people:

...it was a garage and then it was a playroom and then we turned it into my room, so I got to like pick everything out and like change it to how I wanted it. I think I painted the walls myself... I've got like LED lights, so I can change them. And I've got like fairy lights and a mirror. I've also got my own heater, so I can put the heating on, a lot. It's really warm. And I have like wax melts so I can make it smell nice. And I'm kind of a bit obsessed with cleaning, I like hoover every two days and change all the bedding and then it just feels nicer. (Chloe, 15)

When creating a new home, effort was required to personalise new bedrooms so that they felt like they belonged to the young people. For some, like Violet, this effort came from the parents: 'But every time, we got asked, if they were able to modify the place, what sort of colours would we like for the bedrooms, what sort of furniture, all these things...' (Violet, 22), for others, like Ryan & Liam, it was a joint project to create an ideal bedroom over time. For some, no matter how much effort was put into personalising the new bedroom, it still did not quite feel like home. This was apparent for Imogen, who appreciated the effort put in by her dad, but whose new room struggled to compete with the longstanding familiarity of the bedroom in the original home:

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Yeah, I mean, when I had a really big Harry Potter phase and he went and got me loads of stencils and framed artwork and all that stuff... he definitely put that effort in and let me help and all that stuff. It was just the actual practicality and the whole like actual aspects of the room that didn't feel that way, it was a nice room it just wasn't what I was used to. (Imogen, 18)

For Amy, the effort put in by her Mum was less appreciated as it did not result in a bedroom that she felt was for her. By not including Amy in any of the decision making, the bedroom reflected her Mum's taste rather than her own, as such this lack of personalisation made it harder for Amy to feel a sense of ownership over the space:

...the whole room felt as though she'd decorated it...it was quite hard for it to feel like my room, but still I liked that room. And then we moved into this new place, I'd put a big mirror up in that room and I stuck a load of photos of my family and friends up on the wall. But that's all I've been able to do to that room to make it mine. (Amy, 20)

It was clear from the data that having their own things in their bedroom made a difference to whether the young people felt at home. Ashley & River who spend alternate weekends with their dad, did not convey much of a sense of dad's house during their interviews, considering themselves somewhere between residents and visitors. It was apparent that a lack of any items that belonged to them at dad's contributed to this lack of a sense of feeling at home there:

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...we don't have like anything there, I don't think. Like the most we had was a toothbrush and now we don't. (laughs) Um, and I think he's planning to get something that we own there, like probably a dressing gown cos I keep stealing his. Um, and yeah. And we don't have like a charger or anything, so we have to like bring our own. (River, 14)

It was not the amount of time there, though, that necessarily created this lack of personalisation. Paige also sees her dad for two nights out of fourteen, but her photos and interview showed dad's house to be on a similar level of feeling at home as Mum's, with many familiar items in her bedroom creating somewhere that was her territory. Whilst there were some things in the bedroom that belonged to other people, it was still possible for it to feel entirely her space because she had a range of her belongings in the space and was able to personalise it as she liked:

Figure 31 Paige's bedding



So, I made that, that was just white pillowcases, white bedsheets, and everything, I tie-died it and it was really fun to do... I made a lot of origami and there's this massive lightshade like really big and round and there's this little bar across it and I made a few flamingos, like

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origami flamingos and I used their beaks to hook on to the piece of metal across...(Paige,12)

Again, emphasising that it is not the amount of time in a space that creates feelings of home, Ivy & Ava spoke about the difficulty of not feeling able to leave a mark on their bedroom in their dad's house, which they lived in for half of the time. For them, sharing a bedroom with stepsisters who resided in the house permanently meant they felt like visitors. It was not entirely clear why they were unable create any personalisation or leave a trace through their belongings, but they refer to it being 'easier that way', particularly as they did not trust their stepsisters to respect their territory when they were not there. In response to a question about whether she had many things at her dad's, Ava answered:

Not really, only things that like we got bought there, like sort of like little bits from like Christmas and birthdays but we didn't really have our own things there, like if you looked through the room there was kind of like mostly the other person who lived there most of the time, most of their things, but we had like little odd bits like little body scrubs, you know like bits you get like in your stocking from Christmas and things like that.

(Ava, 17)

Consequently, even though they spent equal amounts of time at each house, they felt like visitors to their dad's house and more at home at their Mum's. This emphasises just how important it is that young people are able to personalise their space to make their mark and transform it from a general space into their territory, as without this personalisation it is hard to feel a sense of belonging in the space:

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Even though it was equal amounts of time, it'd be like live here, go to stay there, over, like, it's like we were sleeping over somewhere when we went there, but then, it's weird 'cos it's the same amount of time but it felt like we were staying here, going there. (Ava, 17)

Reece also experienced this lack of ability to personalise his bedroom in one of the houses. His space was heavily controlled by his dad and stepmum, meaning that only approved items were able to be displayed, and when the time came to make changes in the house, Reece's opinions were not considered. This lack of being able to take up space applied in other areas of the house too, with the kitchen described as his step mum's domain. Not being able to express himself and "be my own person" at his dad's meant he preferred to be at his mum's:

Like I say, if I wanted something it'd have to go on the window sill and even then it was like, me Nan used to have this Greek jar, jug even, so when she passed I took that and put it on there, because it looked classy and nice, it was allowed to stay but everything else had to be in a drawer, or out of sight or under the bed or I'd have to like sneak it somewhere. (Reece, 21)

As previously discussed, despite Amy having a 50/50 arrangement, she avoided spending time with her Mum where possible, and felt that she was visiting rather than living with her mum. Amy asserted control over her living situation by keeping all her possessions at Dad's; creating a situation that meant she couldn't be at her mum's for particularly long periods of time because she was without the stuff that she needed. She had a fierce loyalty to

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her dad and by keeping her belongings separate, it seemed she made a conscious decision to not allow herself to feel at home at her Mum's house and therefore kept herself separate too:

I would never bring anything over, the most I ever brought over was maybe my uniform and a pair of spare pants in case I got my period. You know, cos there's nothing there that's mine, not truly mine. I store all my clothes at my Dad's. Everything that's mine is at my Dad's. To this day, it's always been that way. (Amy, 20)

Similarly, Chloe experienced such a strong sense of her mum's house being her territory that it meant she was unable to consider her dad's house her home:

...It just feels weird like being in another house like...like as much as I'd want to, I don't really see it as my, like it's not really my house, like, and I don't think I'd ever feel like, like I belonged or like it was my house or it was my bedroom, like I don't think I'd ever see it as another home. Like, it would always be that this was my house and that I'd just go there, it wouldn't ever be like two houses, like I wouldn't feel like it was my house. (Chloe, 15)

However, this also meant that she felt so safe and at home at her mum's house that it allowed her to manage when her dad came to her territory: 'I don't mind that, like when it's him coming here like it's more like, I don't mind speaking to him, like it's fine, I just don't really want to go over there' (Chloe, 15).

Amy and Chloe are in part, able to manage difficult relationships with their parents through their use of territory. Once Amy had moved away, her increased autonomy surrounding her territory allowed her to feel in control and able to enforce an emotional and physical distance from her mum:

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But the two times that they've visited me, it was nice to be 'ah, you're on my land now', you know, I had the upper hand, and I like keeping that separation of 'this is my life, you can't touch me here'. (Amy, 20)

Interestingly, in the examples of Ivy & Ava, Reece and Amy above, all had difficult relationships with the parent in the house where they were unable to personalise their space and didn't feel at home. It seems that there was a definite link between the quality of relationship and being allowed, or allowing themselves, to feel at home in the space dominated by that relationship.

Where the bond is weaker so is the ability to feel at home in the space. So far, this theme has considered how young people experience home as their own territory, and how when somewhere feels like your territory you can treat it as home. This section discussed the importance of being able to personalise your space as being central to being able to feel at home. Lastly, this theme will consider how the young person's experience of home is affected by other people coming into their territory.

7.2.4 Space invaders

For River, being able to show how a stepparent occupies the home was something positive that they wanted to ensure was central to their discussion of home. They used photos of Steve's guitars and record collection to convey their admiration of his musical taste, and to show how integral he was to the fabric of the house:

Figure 32 Steve's record collection



However, for other young people, the introduction of a parents' partner into the home was problematic as it raised questions of whose territory the house was, with many finding it difficult to adjust to someone new being in their space as it created uncertainty and feelings of discomfort. Inevitably, the new partner would bring their own belongings into the house, reducing the familiarity of the space for the young person and thereby changing how homely the house felt to them. For some, like Violet (22), this change was overwhelming: 'It felt weird. It felt a bit more like the shared spaces weren't ours anymore. It became easier with time but there was quite a lot more bedroom time than there was living room time. For a bit.' For those who found it most difficult, the encroachment into their territory was combined with a personality clash or a strained relationship between the new member of the household and the young person. When home is comfort, familiarity, and our territory, it is hardest when things are both unfamiliar and uncomfortable. For Alex, being in the home became so unbearable once his mum's partner lived there, that he changed the ratio of time spent with each parent to favour his dad. The introduction of someone new into his space enhanced his sense of territory very strongly and despite only being eight at the time, having a new adult coming to live in his

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house threatened his role as the protector of his mum. The house was no longer somewhere that he felt he could be himself and as such was no longer comfortable enough to live there:

I just felt like he was stepping into my home, I'd been the only man in that home permanently, or boy, before, so this was someone other than my mother. It's my mother's home and someone's coming into my mother's home, my family home who was not my family who I didn't know, who was from a very, who was just a very different person in general, didn't know me or my family and the actual environment, we'd had all the family stuff that I knew and associated with home there and over those few years, certain bits of furniture were replaced, or he brought his own furniture into the home and just very much changed the physical appearance of the home into something that didn't feel like me or my family. (Alex, 24)

The atmosphere in the house at Mum's due to her partner was also a problem for Reece. Like Alex, he also lost priority in claiming territory in the house, and as such avoided shared spaces, instead relying on the sanctuary of his individual space:

Stepdad, a lot of tension whenever he was there, kind of wanted to, if we were in the same room as each other, eating or whatever, I'd eat as soon as I can, clean up and get out of the same room as him because I didn't want to be near him. (Reece, 21)

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7.3 Conclusion

This analysis sought to enhance our understanding of how young people experienced home when living with both their parents after separation. Two themes were constructed that related to the fabric of the house: *Home as familiarity: a consistent space*, and *Home as territory: somewhere to take up space and leave a trace*. In this sample, young people felt at home when their house and the surrounding area were familiar, this is naturally felt most strongly when they had not had to experience a change, but this familiarity was also shown to grow over time in somewhere new. For many, the familiarity extended to the objects within the house, with these young people feeling most at home where the things that they had known throughout their lives were. Comfort was a vital element of feeling at home, the young people expected and prioritised things in the home that provided them with comfort, in particular the psychological comfort provided by pets. These young people also acquired a sense of home through objects that provided them with an emotional connection either to a person or a memory.

When the young people were able to consider the house their own territory, they felt particularly at home. When it felt that way, they felt safe and relaxed and able to do activities of their choosing. When somewhere was their territory, young people took up space both bodily and with their possessions across the home. This was also seen in the personalisation of their bedrooms; where the young people were unable to personalise their space according to their taste or with their belongings, they felt more like visitors than residents. It appears that the ability to personalise a space is linked to the quality of relationship with that parent.

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Having to share territory took some getting used to. When it was with siblings, the sharing of bedrooms may not be ideal as most would prefer the privacy of their own space, but most acknowledged the practicalities of how things must be, generally 'getting on with it', and some enjoying sharing their space.

However, when the person wanting to share the territory came from outside, they could be seen by some as an invading force due to the changes they created in the atmosphere of the house. For some, this sharing was unbearable, and they sought to change their living arrangements to escape the changes that threatened their ownership of the territory. Again, this was linked to the relationships that the young person had with those who were entering into their territory, it was hardest to share territory with someone that they did not get on with.

As discussed, these themes have been constructed primarily from the photos and the discussion of them that took place in the interviews. As the young people were asked not to include people in their photos, the everyday elements of the houses were highlighted, and it was possible to focus on how the house and the objects within it create a home for the young person. It was also possible to examine the barriers that existed for the young people in feeling at home in two houses.

Chapter 8: Discussion

This chapter will discuss the findings of this research in relation to previous literature before considering the strengths and limitations of the methodology and setting out messages for families and professionals. This research gathered the perspectives of twenty-two young people aged 11-24 in order to understand how they experienced home and family when living with both parents after a separation or divorce. The perspectives were gathered during a semi-structured interview which used a mosaic approach to combine family maps, photo-elicitation and advice writing. It was hoped that by listening to young people, other families could gain insight into the benefits and challenges of living in shared residence.

The findings explored how young people experienced living in two houses, with different people, at different times, with different belongings, and often, different expectations. They highlighted that young people are adaptable and active family members that co-create and maintain their home and family environments, but that also they feel they get little say and agency in family matters until they are an older teenager. This research aimed to give young people an opportunity to consider and reflect on their lives, where perhaps they had not had the opportunity before. Additionally, this research aimed to highlight the 'everyday complexity' of children's lives, that whilst living in shared residence may be complicated, so may many other ways of living. Through focussing entirely on the perspectives of young people rather than taking an adult or legal perspective, this research has been able to consider what matters to those young people and adds their perspective to the literature base.

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Following from the finding that 'one size does not fit all', Berman & Daneback (2020) called for research to identify circumstances in which shared residence works well. This research answers that call, as whilst as expected, the young people did not have unified ideas about family and home, there were aspects of each that stood out in creating a shared residence that worked well, and shared aspects in those that were not working as well. Viewing the family as a system highlights that it is not family structure per se that is the most important factor but the interacting dimensions of time, space and relationships in creating an environment in which shared residence works well for young people. As previous research suggests, family practices do not just take place in a space, but also create those spaces (Valentine, 2008 in Morgan 2020). This research highlights the integral nature of the quality of relationships in creating comfortable spaces and quality time.

There was a general view across the sample of 'everything is fine', however some of the young people were struggling and three had difficult experiences due to severely strained relationships. Figures 33 & 34 collect the shared aspects of what contributed to shared residence working well and not so well, into an ecological system's model (Bronfenbrenner, 1977) with the young person at the centre, their microsystems of family members surrounding them, and the interactions between those members of the microsystems and the young person, in the mesosystem. These models highlight the network of interrelated influences acting on the young person, and in line with Bronfenbrenner's later thinking (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000), recognise the importance of process, person, context and time (PPCT). This model reflects the development of Bronfenbrenner's thinking to emphasise the importance of

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the individual as an active agent continually interacting with the different aspects of each system and emphasises the importance of strong relationships (Rosa & Tudge, 2013). In this particular family form, the young person is involved in continuous interactions with the materiality of their environment and the family practices taking place in that space. Where they have strong relationships with their parents these result in the young person being able to form broader family relationships and create a desire to spend time with family. The young person plays an active role in influencing their environment, exercising their agency and actively managing the emotions of other family members. The wider contexts of the exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem are not represented in these models, but are considered within this research, in particular the impact that changing technologies and shifts in cultural norms may have on the young person's experience of shared residence. Time is integral to this particular family form, both in its chronology and in regard to events. When in their life the separation takes place, how soon after the separation a new partner might be introduced and important historical events such as the pandemic all influenced the young persons' experiences.

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Figure 33 Ecological systems map to show elements which contribute to shared residence working well for a young person

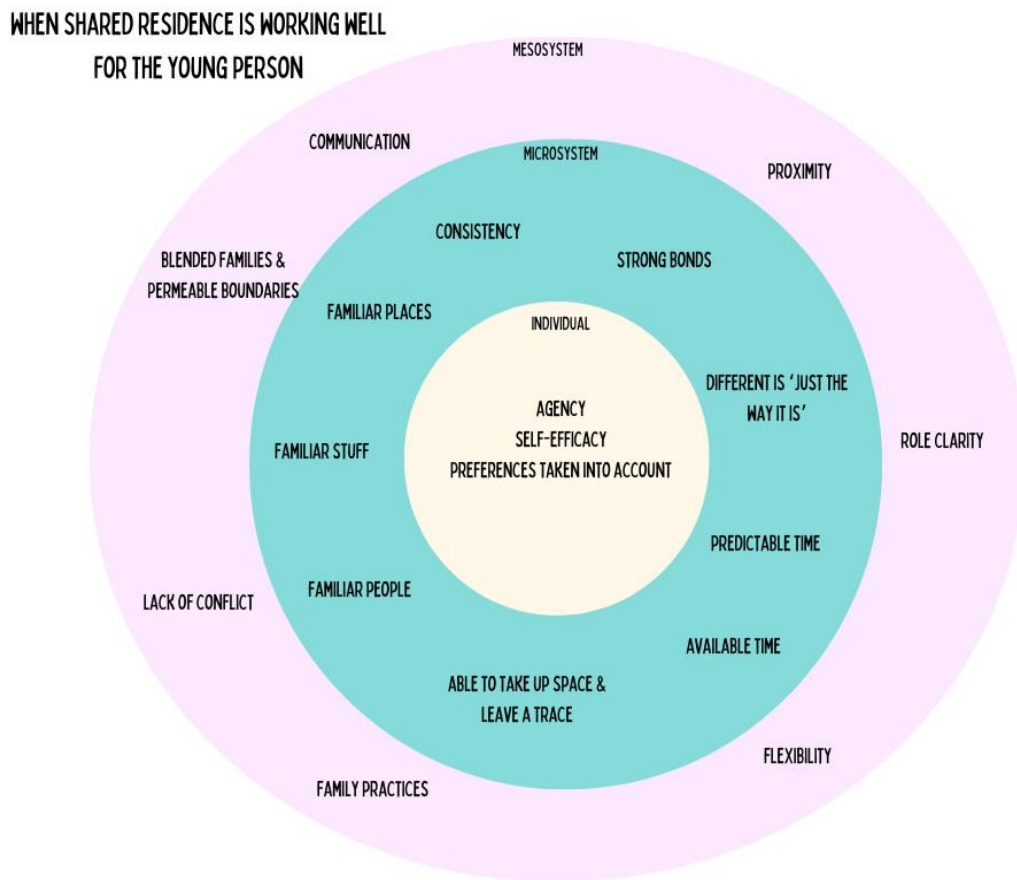
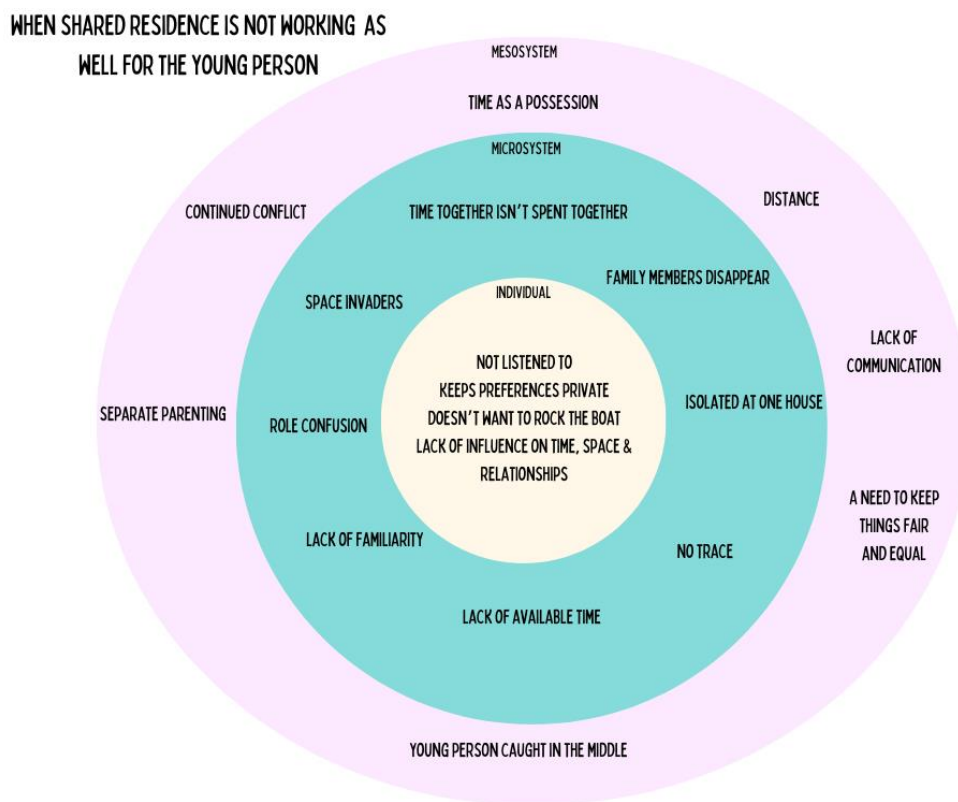


Figure 34 Ecological systems map to show elements which contribute to shared residence not working well for a young person



It is hoped that by distilling the findings of this research into these models, a simple overview is provided for anyone considering shared residence. The following sections will discuss in depth the findings relating to time, space, and relationships.

8.1 Time

Time was explored through the themes of *Controlled time: routines, evolving arrangements and agency*, *Not all time is equivalent* and *Time spent together*. There was a sense across the data, in particular in the advice, that time is a healer. Many of the young people experienced the separation of their parents as a difficult time but reported that after a while they got used to it and

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subsequently living in two houses seemed normal, however for others life remained complicated and for a few, things were particularly strained. This supports the notion of viewing divorce as a process; the young people reflected on what worked and what they found challenging throughout their childhoods as the separation of their parents continued to affect them in a variety of everyday ways.

8.1.1 Age of the young person

The current study's sample ranged from being a baby at the point of separation to twelve years old, with time between separation and interview similarly wide ranging between four and twenty-two years. Consequently, there was little discussion of the separation as an event, instead the young people focussed on their experience of living in shared residence - the everyday realities of it. The young people in this study experienced the effects of time at an individual level. They spoke of finding it particularly hard to adjust to shared residence if they had spent their younger childhood with parents living together. This is a small sample of young people, focussed on experience rather than adjustment, even so, it is interesting to consider their viewpoint that it may be better for the children if parents separate early as this results in shared residence being 'the way it has always been'. There is also, the added benefit of early separation in conflictual relationships of the young person being relieved of the tension of ongoing conflict in the home.

Teenagers also expressed that the increase in things to do, their morning routine being more complex, the increase in schoolwork and more varied social life all contributed to it being harder to live in two houses as they got older. This indicates that what is decided when they are younger does not

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necessarily keep working for young people as they get older, and as such plans need to be revisited and flexibility worked in, to truly have a routine that is 'best for the child'. Evident in the advice young people gave to parents is the importance of young people having self-efficacy; that they should know that if they do express a preference or opinion that it will be listened to and taken into account, and they should not be made to feel guilty.

8.1.2 Variation in time spent with parents across the sample

As discussed in chapter 3, one of the main reasons for not legislating for shared residence in the UK, is the wide variation in interpretations of the term. This variation was shown in this research both within those who contacted me, and those that took part. The lack of legal definition enabled me to be led by the young person's own conceptualisation of their family and home, thus whether they thought that they lived in two houses was able to be the most important consideration in whether they were eligible to take part. As such 'shared residence' in this study included quite a wide range of plans, with the majority falling within the 35% minimum definition which exists within the literature.

These findings also show that within this variation in time allocation, there was also variation in how the young people experienced home and family, with 50/50 not automatically resulting in secure family bonds and feeling at home in each house, and similarly an alternate weekend arrangement does not preclude feeling at home in that house or result in weaker bonds with that parent. It is interesting to consider that this wide variety in time allocation may indicate that parents are not fixated on each having an equitable share of time.

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In all but three of these families, the parents decided their own arrangements and it is therefore also interesting to consider whether this has any bearing on the allocation of time. Perhaps when parents are not in conflict, they are more able to come to arrangements which fit with the family rather than opting for an equitable split. As the conversations to decide the arrangements did not involve any of the young people in the study, which is likely to be typical, we do not have an insight into how complex or drawn out the process was for the parents. This research confirms previous findings, and the central issue raised in Berman & Danebacks' 2020 review, that what is best for one child may not be best for another, even within the same family, as such it is important that those deciding the arrangement seek both adult and children's views.

8.1.3 Available time

Each young person experiences time in their own unique microsystem, as can be seen in figures 33 & 34. These findings demonstrate the importance of families having a set routine for shared residence. The majority of young people in this study welcomed their routines and held onto the consistency and predictability of them, even when they weren't happy with the arrangement. Whilst it does seem that 'calendar and clock time' (Smyth, 2005) is a primary concern when arranging these routines there was also consideration of the quality of time, both for the young people and adults. In respect of allocation of time, those in a 50/50 arrangement did convey a sense of having enough time, that there was no need to rush or cram things in as they were in each other's company enough to be able to fit everything in. Others in a less balanced arrangement spoke of making the most of time together, but there was still a sense in these families that there was enough time for a variety of things.

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As has been pointed to in previous research (Campo et al, 2012; Christensen, 2012), an important finding from this research is that it is not the 'calendar and clock' allocation of time that matters to whether shared residence is experienced positively by young people, but rather it is the amount of *available* time with each parent that matters. Examples from across the data set showed that the day of the week is important in determining whether the allocated time together is actually time that can be spent together. These findings highlight the importance of the process of spending time together as it builds and strengthens bonds. As such it is important for young people that each parent has *available* time to spend with their young person.

It might be more difficult for a parent to experience 'ordinary time' and what Smyth (2005) refers to as 'in the moment time', (those unplanned snippets of time- conversations whilst drying the dishes, talking about a problem at school whilst they do their homework), if all the time experienced together is at the weekend. It seems important for parents and young people to experience a range of both the busy and relaxed times that exist over the course of the week. This interaction between elements of the microsystem impacts the quality of relationships between the parent and young people. Each family's work patterns and schedules are different and as such it is vital that individual circumstances are considered when deciding arrangements, and that arrangements should remain flexible to account for changes as life progresses.

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These findings also highlight that to allow the young person to experience available time with each parent it is important for parents to view the young person's time holistically rather than in 'here and there' compartments. It was difficult to get a sense of the 'in the moment time' from the interviews and this would be something that would warrant further investigation, however, accessing these incidental moments is challenging. It would be interesting to be able to watch a family by setting up a camera in the home. Where the photo elicitation method allowed the young people to focus on the mundane materialities of the home, this might allow for a focus on the mundane interactions, however I would anticipate recruitment for this level of intrusion into family life to be a challenge.

8.1.4 Flexible time

An indication that young people view the whole picture of their interacting systems, is shown in their desire for arrangements to be fair. It was perhaps surprising, that it was two families (3 interviewees) with a 50/50 share that spoke most about keeping things 'fair and equal'. The sense that time had to be 'paid back' was talked about both transactionally and emotionally. I know from living in this way myself that when routines change for a weekend away, for example, it has a bigger impact than you might expect on the length of time that you go without seeing each other, and I suppose this is more likely in 50/50 because events are more likely to interrupt the normal routine. I expected that the young people might talk about not being happy about changes in routine from the point of view of missing their parent, or their parent missing them, but it seemed more to do with giving them back what is owed. Perhaps the difference in whether this is emotional or transactional reflects the relationships between the parent and the young person, with paying back time

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being transactional where there isn't as much desire to spend time with that parent. Some young people found it difficult if they perceived that their parents treated time with them as a possession, as this is counter to viewing their life as a whole. Several pointed out that they 'have two parents no matter the day'. Where parents were able to be flexible with time, the young people experienced shared residence more positively than those whose parents had rigidly fixed routines.

These findings are consistent with previous research which found that young people are most satisfied with arrangements that are flexible and responsive to their needs (Neale, Flowerdew & Smart, 2003; Campo et al, 2012; Haugen, 2010). The findings reflect that a flexible arrangement suited young people as they got older, and their circumstances changed; they liked to be able to adjust plans to suit their social life or to spend more time with the parent that they got on better with. There was a definite sense in many families, that practicalities came before emotions and preferences when adapting the routine.

Interestingly, some of the young people had strong preferences which they did not disclose to parents, but which were able to come to fruition through other changes that were due to practicalities (e.g., the bus stop for high school is on a particular road). This could be because practicalities are often out of our control and as such cannot be argued with. Consequently, when young people are concerned with protecting their parent's feelings, as these young people often were, it is more comfortable for them to be led by practicalities than put their own preferences to their parents.

When deciding the aims of this research, I expected that young people's agency would be central to the discussions that I had with them during the interview. From reading previous literature and considering the UNCRC

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articles, the young person's right to be heard and have their opinions considered seemed a central issue for this research to consider. However, there were only a small number of young people for whom having a say in the allocation of time was a central issue. It seemed that there was a combination of timing, agency, self-efficacy and 'ordinary complexities' affecting whether young people considered change to their routine. These young people were a long way from the point of separation, as such it is worth considering how these conversations may have altered if they were being had 6 months to a year after separation, when the decisions were being made, as this would allow the young person to directly reflect on their level of involvement and their feelings surrounding that involvement.

The young people saw their life as a fixed entity in the same way as someone whose parents both work shifts so they spend more time with grandparents than parents, or someone who goes to breakfast and afterschool club. Lots of young people's families are complicated in one way or another to mean that they might not spend as much time with their parents as they would like, and to mean that a range of practicalities, opinions and emotions need considering within a family. There was a mature recognition from the young people, that life is complicated, and it's okay to accept that and make the most of the situation that they found themselves in. However, there were some cases where it was clear the young people were under emotional strain due to the expectation of parents in regard to how they spent their time, with the complexity of emotions, and keeping everyone's emotions in mind, weighing heavily on some. These findings show the importance of allowing young people the freedom to express their opinions in a safe place away from the possibility of becoming responsible for anyone's feelings. It would perhaps be useful for adults to have clear conversations with young people about the

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flexibility of the arrangement. If the young person knows up front what is and isn't possible, they will not need to second guess what their parents think, thus potentially alleviating any worry. Being able to have such discussions depends on the interactions within the young person's mesosystem. Those who have strong bonds in their microsystem are more likely to be able to have open conversations between themselves and their parents. Similarly, where there is conflict between parents, this may influence the parent's desire to be open to treating time flexibly.

8.1.5 Predictable time

The current research shows, like Christensen's (2012), that young people value the ordinariness and routine of family time. Within the set routines and available time that young people spent with their parents, were predictable activities which were looked forward to by the young person. These were not necessarily 'special' activities but were made special through being ringfenced as time that the young person and parent spent together. Strikingly, almost all of the young people spoke to me about eating dinner and watching tv as a family. The process of spending time together in simple family practices was important to young people. There are many interacting aspects of the family meal which could warrant further investigation; it was perhaps indicative of attentiveness (Campo et al, 2020), a way of parents showing the family that they are cared for and of the young person feeling cared for, as such it can also be an indicator for the young person of the 'quality' of parenting. Similarly, it was a way of the young people reciprocating this care as they got older and began cooking meals for the family. Gathering around the dining table or around the television represented the connections between family members and conveyed a sense of belonging, indicating the intertwined nature of time

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and relationships within each young person's family system. The message from the young people is that they enjoy the ordinary. This might be surprising to parents who may want to maximise the time that they spend with the young person by filling it with exciting trips, and so emphasises the importance of considering the type of time available to each parent when allocating time.

Previous research has highlighted the difficulty for young people in shared residence in becoming responsible for the emotional well-being of their parents (Neale, Flowerdew & Smart, 2003) and in feeling guilt that asking for a change may lead to conflict between their parents (Campo et al, 2020). These findings highlight that young people are aware of the feelings of family members, especially parents, and will ignore their own preferences to protect the feelings of their parents, or to avoid conflict. Part of what young people liked about having a predictable routine was that the choices were out of their hands. Many who indicated they might rather a different ratio between their parents, or a change in days, didn't think suggesting this was worth the potential upset that it might cause their parents. With the exception of Chloe who entered into a prolonged period of conflict in order to change her arrangement, the young people hadn't asked for a change and as such perceived this conflict and upset rather than experiencing it. Most did not know what would happen if they asked for a change or they had not considered it. As we only have the young person's view on this, it would be interesting to see whether their perception of how the parent would feel and react is in line with the parent's feelings on this. Future studies could interview multiple family members or could undertake a story completion task about parental reactions in different scenarios, which could be filled out by both the parent and the young person. It is also interesting to consider this awareness of parental feelings as a positive attribute of the young people, rather than a negative consequence of parental separation. Having adolescents who consider the

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feelings of others, who have empathy and don't always put themselves first is desirable, however this must also be in balance with having their own needs met.

8.2 Family

Family was explored through the two themes of *Strong family bonds: Blood ties and beyond* and *Fragile family ties: Strain and relationship work*. The findings show us that who counts as family for young people living in shared residence is subjective and whilst the majority of young people were closest to their parents, they also experienced close bonds with both those related by blood and those who were not. The findings also indicated that young people have little control over who is in their lives and tend to use socially sanctioned family roles to make sense of who is in their family.

As shown in figures 33 & 34 relationships were important across the young person's systems. The strength of bond that they had with a family member impacted their desire to spend time with them. The different relationships that existed within the household affected how that house was experienced, for example as a place to spend as little time in as possible or as a place to have fun and relax with siblings. They were most comfortable in their home when there were familiar people there and found it difficult if there were people in their home whom they didn't get along with. Relationships were also integral at the mesosystem level as interactions between themselves and family members, between parents, and between other family members all impacted how the young person experienced family life. As was the case with time, young people viewed their family holistically, as indicated by no one asking me

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'which family' when I asked them to put their family onto the family map. It is important for the adults in their lives to also see the young person's family holistically and to allow the boundaries between the two halves of the family, the different elements of the microsystem, to be permeable.

Despite being in separate locations in day-to-day life, the majority placed both parents together in the middle of the map, and some placed stepparents there too. This indicates that whilst there are a range of relationships and interdependencies for them within their family, for most young people, parents remain their closest family members. Perhaps surprisingly, as it is over 20 years later, compared to Smart, Neale & Wade's (2001) findings, the young people in my study were more traditional when placing family on the map, with most using recognised family relationships. Perhaps this reflects a more socially acceptable view of blended families; young people are sure of their family status and do not need to draw on other norms to be able to make sense of who is in their family.

In line with Smart, Neale & Wade (2001), these findings show that it is the quality of the relationships that are key to the young person in their consideration of who is closest family. The young people saw families as sharing feelings of connectedness and belonging (Widmer & Jalinoja, 2008) as can be seen in the interconnectedness between experiencing strong family ties and feeling they belonged within each home.

As discussed, it is what you do in the family and with household members that draws people into the family and maintains family bonds. Time spent together served to maintain and strengthen those bonds resulting in a desire to spend

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more time together. Conversely where the bond was weak, and the relationship strained, there was no desire to spend time together and as such, no opportunity to work on strengthening the bond. This further emphasises the importance of having available time to spend together and also points to the importance of making sure that young people spend time with a variety of people within their household in order to create bonds with them, this may take some relationship management from another adult such as their parent to help to build bonds with a stepparent or step sibling. Low key activities such as watching a film together appear to be a good place to start.

Counter to previous findings (Carsten, 2000; Gullov, Palludan & Winther, 2015; Mason & Tipper, 2008) which foreground the importance of interaction and negotiation in defining family, the young people in this study primarily saw family membership as defined by roles and positions. For the most part they followed either the norms of blood ties and marriage, or they were led by the processes of domesticity and care; those household members who parent us become parent-like. Those that we see parenting others in the household also gain a family status through having this recognised role. The importance to the young person of seeing their parent's partner in a parenting role was key to them being seen as family. Young people recognised and valued the parenting role (as does society); as such they knew where they stood when the adult was parenting them or another child within the house. The young person's perception of the quality of parenting from their parent also affected how close they felt to their parent and in turn how at home they felt at that house. The ability to parent in the child's eyes affected how they felt when in that house, whether they felt they were being looked after or they were having to take on a more adult role, whether it was a treat away from parenting and the normal

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rules and routines, or whether it was something to bear and 'go through the motions' of until back with the reliable parent.

How young people viewed the members of their households and parents' partners had an impact on the use of 'step' labels within blended families. It seemed to be the case that once the adult was living in the house, they were given the 'step' label by the young person, but only for convenience as it was a shorthand way of talking about people in the household without having to go into a lot of detail. Even when the young person used the family member's first name, it was also useful for them to put people into the socially sanctioned and recognised roles of, for example, parent or brother. As in Mason & Tipper's (2008) study, by creating 'family-like kinship', the young person is able to bring close someone who is not biologically related to them. However, this was not straightforward as the young people had to navigate the emotions of giving or not giving blended family members certain labels. Whilst they were using recognised labels, these young people still appear to be doing what Mason & Tipper (2008a) refer to as 'reckoning kin' as they are trying to fit their family into a recognised form. The labels didn't seem to add or take anything away from the relationships, as the basis for these were predominantly family practices not family labels.

As with young people in previous research (Mason & Tipper, 2008a), these young people were actively involved in maintaining relationships within their families. Ensuring that they were involved with half and step siblings, adjusting what they were doing to keep the peace, visiting parents 'out of duty' and making sure they watched tv with Mum in the evenings, are all examples of

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what these young people did to maintain relationships. This shows the importance of viewing children as active rather than passive members of their family system. However, whilst they are active in their management of relationships, they lack agency in who comes in and out of their lives.

These findings show that stepparents and stepsiblings are important and integral to family life for many of the young people. However, they also show that these relationships do not fall under the same rules and expectations as those that are biological, with a sense that step relationships were more optional than those relationships tied by blood. There was a sense of duty and obligation to those related to the young person through blood that did not exist in the same way for step relatives, even when that relationship had been part of the young person's life for as long as they could remember. Even the closest step relationships had fragile status, as could be seen with Ivy & Ava's stepmum who had brought them up for most of their lives but who they only saw rarely for dinner once she separated from their dad. As seen in examples of spending time with a parent out of duty, many of the young people's family relationships were influenced by ideas of responsibility and justice rather than by what the young person would like, however, this sense of duty was not afforded in the same way to stepparents. This fragility meant that stepfamily members were more likely to disappear from the young person's life. Perhaps this was due to outside influences on what is 'normal' family, a young person may struggle to maintain bonds that now fall out of what is a socially sanctioned step relationship. Maintaining relationships with an adult where a parent has dissolved their relationship with them will involve navigating parental emotions. It is therefore important that parents recognise that young people may want to continue these relationships, even if they do not, and put

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their own emotions to one side and help the young person to continue the relationship.

Often new family members were held closest by the young person when they brought a positive attribute to the family e.g., relieving stress or allowing the young person to perform the role of sibling where before they had been in a parental role. However, with some interviewees it seemed that if they had a family that fulfilled their requirements and expectations, new people were not as needed as in those families where there was strain or conflict. Historically, a stepparent would be a replacement for the biological parent, but in these shared residence blended families, the stepparents are an added extra. As such it would be an interesting avenue for future research to explore the logistics and consultation involved in parenting when there are four people doing it. Creating a blended family involves complex navigations of different people's emotions, needs and desires. The quality of relationship between the young person and their parent is key in their experience of becoming a blended family. Those young people that reported strong relationships with parent's partners reported being introduced slowly and having a good relationship with the parent, whereas those who reported a strained relationship felt 'invaded', had personality clashes with the adults, and felt unsupported by their parent in navigating the new relationships.

Contrary to Smart, Neale & Wade's (2001) finding that the young people in their study found it problematic adapting to different sets of rules & routines, these young people report coping well with different approaches to parenting. For some it was the case that there were different values or rules between houses

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but for the most part this was met with indifference. However, some young people kept in mind what the other parent was thinking which may have led to some emotional strain. This brings us back to the idea that adults should view the young person's life holistically and have in mind what happens in the other portion of their time, so as not to put the young person in a difficult position. Through the use of models such as those in figures 33 & 34, it can be possible to highlight to parents the interacting elements and processes that exists for young people in shared residence.

As with Smart, Neale & Wade (2001), the current study found that many young people experienced 'open' and 'closed' boundary families. However, unlike in the previous study, the young people in the current study did not seem to have control of this, but rather, this was experienced a consequence of how their family had developed. Whether or not they had close relationships with those 'new' family members depended upon how they were introduced, whether they spent time together building bonds, and whether there were conflicting personalities or other barriers to bonding, rather than whether the young person saw their family as 'open' or 'closed'. As discussed, young people benefited from shared residence arrangements where the boundaries between the two parts of their family were permeable. For example, young people enjoyed having both parents together for certain activities on special occasions. Not having to compartmentalise their life was positive for the young person, they were able to experience their life as a whole and were given 'emotional permission' (Trinder, Beek & Connolly, 2002) to continue relationships.

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Not all members of the family experiences relationships in the same way, which highlights the importance of listening to young people. We can't suppose that we know what young people are experiencing at an individual level, or what is important to them, without asking them. The next section will discuss findings related to strained family relationships

8.3 Strained relationships

As discussed in chapter two, frequent conflict that is unresolved puts children at risk of mental health issues, and behavioural, social, and academic problems (DWP 2021), additionally, Van Dijk et al's meta-analysis (2020) showed that conflict can have a detrimental effect on parenting (e.g., harsher, more intrusive).

Consistent with these previous findings, this study found that some young people experienced separation as relief from conflict, but others experienced continuing conflict within the mesosystem which affected them negatively. As findings have previously shown (Yarnoz-Yaben & Garmendia, 2016), being caught between parents as the messenger is particularly damaging, and those young people in this study who acted as mediator or messenger particularly struggled with their mental health and with their relationships with their parents. These findings also show that there is a negative impact for young people in undertaking relationship work in order to keep the shared residence way of life running smoothly. The small things that they did to aid communication, logistics and what they did with their time, were ongoing for many of the young people and as such were likely to impact their ability to do the things other people of their age were doing. It is important that parents are

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self-aware and recognise how their interactions with their ex affect young people. It is also important that they look out for the small acts of relationship work that the young people do and ensure that they are not overburdened, especially in relation to carrying the weight of navigating adult emotions. It is interesting to consider whether being in shared residence as opposed to in sole custody may increase the young person's exposure to continued conflict, and whether this may not be the best option for young people where there is conflict.

It was the case in a few families that the young people experienced strained relationships with a stepparent or parent's partner. This occurred for different reasons but often seemed due to a clash of personalities, a difficulty in accepting someone into their territory, or due to the abrupt entrance into their lives. There was a difficult balance here in terms of parents carrying on with their lives and children struggling with not liking a significant person in their life. These findings point to some ways that adults can try to improve the relationship between their child and partner, for example, ensuring that they spend time together, that they are gradually introduced into the home, and that young people are consulted about changes to their physical environment.

It is interesting to consider that a young person's relationship with a stepparent in one house can be indirectly influenced by the parent in the 'other' house. The young person's perception of how that parent may view the stepparent may affect how close the young person thinks they can get without upsetting their parent. In such cases it would be beneficial for parents to talk to the young person about their relationships, potentially putting their own feelings

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aside in order to give the young person 'emotional permission' (Trinder, Beek & Connolly, 2002) to embark on new relationships.

It was interesting that in some households where the young person reported a lack of conflict, there still remained a worry of potential conflict. There seemed to be something in their perception of having separated parents that meant they expected a rocky time. This wasn't the case universally, and those families where there were permeable boundaries between the young person's life with each parent resulted in a positive outlook that relationships remain strong once they are close.

In some interviews there was evidence of 'relationship management' work by parents, for example, Violet's Mum did the laundry for both houses. This is an aspect of shared residence that is difficult to understand from an entirely young person's perspective as they may be unaware that it happens and as such would be an interesting element for further investigation.

8.4 Home

As called for by Natalier & Fehlberg (2015), by listening to what these young people said about home it is hoped that other families, policy makers and professionals may be able to draw on these findings to support other young people in their adjustment to living in two houses after parental separation.

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Home as a space was explored through two themes in the findings: *Home as familiarity: A consistent space* and *Home as territory: somewhere to take up space & leave a trace*. These findings show us that feeling at home is not limited to one location, with the majority of these young people feeling at home in both of the houses where they were resident with each parent. The photo elicitation methodology in this study allowed the materiality aspects of feeling at home to be focussed on alongside the relational aspects, showing that young people feel most at home in familiar places with familiar stuff. The importance of personalisation of bedrooms and being able to take up space and leave a trace across the house was also emphasized. Where young people felt less at home in one house, it was due to a lack of familiarity and personalisation, with young people finding it difficult when unfamiliar people started living in the house, changing the materiality and atmosphere.

Whilst the photo elicitation method allowed for the materiality of the home to be foregrounded, these findings also highlight the importance of the interaction of space and relationships. It didn't seem to matter how much time the young person was there in terms of how at home they felt, but if they were not experiencing strong bonds with the people in the house they felt less at home, sometimes to the point of not living there, or avoiding time there. This was also seen in the young person's preferences; a house was preferred because of the people there rather than the things, size of the house or having their own bedroom, for example.

As discussed above, the family practices that take place in the house are key to a sense of home and family. It was evident that there was a self-

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perpetuating cycle where spending quality time together strengthened bonds which in turn created a desire to spend time together. It is indicative of young people feeling at home and at ease, that much of what they told me was not particular to being in shared residence but instead was 'ordinary home making' (Walsh, 2017; Smart, Neale & Wade, 2001). How time was spent in the home took up a large part of the interview, in particular those aspects of 'ordinariness & routine' (Christensen, 2012). These findings are consistent with previous research from Australia which found a sense of ease and comfort; feeling welcome; sharing meaningful, often mundane experiences with their parents, and access to personal belongings, were conditions valued by young people in their definitions of home (Campo et al 2020:300).

A key finding of this research is that belongings create belonging; the young people who felt most at home were surrounded by their things and those things remained there when they didn't. It was interesting that no one took a photo of the whole house, or a road sign, something to denote home as a location, but instead, with a few exceptions of animals outside and gardens, all took photos of the things within the building. The young people placed a lot of importance on the familiarity of objects and furniture within the home, as such it is important for parents to realise that young people may struggle when a new home is being set up, particularly if one parent stays in the already familiar family home. Parents could consider sharing items from the family home and perhaps replicating some of the furniture in the young person's room, but this is of course not always possible due to finances and differences in size of house. These findings have implications for other young people who move between houses, or who are having to move to a new home: it is important for adults to realise the importance of allowing young people to have their things with them.

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The difficulty in obtaining two homes was spoken about, with shared residence unable to start until the parent (often the Dad, but in some cases the Mum) had found their new place to live. Some young people spent months visiting Dad somewhere before being able to live with him in the shared residence arrangement. Contrary to previous findings (Walker, 2020), once there were two houses, all young people in this study had designated bedrooms with beds that were their own. Whilst not all were personalised in the way they would want, and as such one may be more homely than the other, none of the young people experienced any transience in where they slept within the house until, for example, they moved out to go to university. Where, in the cases of River & Ashley and Paige, they were only there two nights out of fourteen, their bedroom did get used for other things, but this didn't seem to bother them. The young people spoke about bedrooms in a very practical and mature way, recognising that sharing a bedroom was just how it was – not necessarily what they ideally wanted but they knew it was not an easy thing to adjust. This acceptance was prominent in those who had their own room at the house they were in the most and shared in the other. There is something important about balance for these young people, perhaps they found it easier to accept the less than ideal, because it was not happening all of the time. The relatively middle-class makeup of the sample potentially affected the young people's experience of having designated bedrooms.

All the young people experienced some contrast of environment between the two houses and coped with this perfectly well. They were accepting of the situation, having the view that 'different is just different' without any judgement or expression of preference. These young people could adapt and take the

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positives from the varied environments in which they live. The environments were varied in that the two varied from each other, but they were static, these two places were different to each other but remained constant in themselves. Unlike a child who experiences multiple foster home moves, or a child who is homeless, who would experience multiple different environments and so must keep adapting to something new, those in shared residence adapt between environments, but each time they are readjusting to the familiar. For some, the contrasting environments were a bonus of living in this way as they could experience two ways of living: one house was where they were social and a big sibling, the other was where it was peaceful, and they could get their homework done. Some found a difference in their levels of independence, with one parent expecting much more of them than another, again this seemed welcome for some young people, perhaps because of the balance involved - they could cook their own dinner sometimes but not all the time, go to bed when they wanted sometimes but have a parent organise it at other times. Shared residence may be a way of young people getting a wider experience than they would if both parents were in the same house compromising with each other about rules and expectations.

Finally in this section, these findings show that proximity of houses makes living in shared residence easier. Having to remember what was needed was universally the biggest problem for the young people and was offset by parents living close to each other as this enabled them to pop back and get forgotten items or ask the parent to drop them off. That's not to say that forgetting things needed for school is a problem isolated to those young people living in shared residence, but rather that it may have more impact on them as the problem may not be easily rectified.

8.5 Methodological contributions and limitations

Reviews of the literature (Berman & Daneback, 2020; Steinbach, 2018) show that those who choose shared residence tend to be higher income, better educated and lower conflict than those who have mother only custody. Living close to each other, being child-centred, and having practiced equitable task division prior to separation were also characteristics of those who practice shared residence. Whilst this study reflected this to an extent, it is an additional contribution that the sample also included parents who had inequitable task division before separation, lower income parents (I did not ask their income, but did ask their occupation, from which income could be inferred, see Appendix D for family demographics), parents who live longer distances from each other, and parents who were in continued conflict since the split.

Unlike previous studies which have tended to be rigid in implementing criteria around what counts as shared residence (i.e. 50/50), the current study had more fluid definitions based in part on how the young people themselves viewed their situation. This is useful as it is the young person's perspective which this research aims to foreground. This also helps us to understand a range of circumstances in which shared residence may or may not work, rather than seeing it as a fixed model of equitable division.

Additionally, where previous research has predominantly focussed on married couples, this research reflects the variation in relationships that exists in society, as it included families from a range of relationship backgrounds such as previously married and divorced, never married, married and separated but not divorced, and remarried. It is a limitation that the sample did not include

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same-sex couples, and more research is needed to understand young people's experiences when same-sex couples break up and choose shared residence. The sample included three young people who moved from experiencing their mothers as heterosexual to LGBTQ+, this gave some insight into their experience, but more research is needed to understand how young people experience this big change to their family. There was also considerable variation within the families as to whether parent's partners lived with them, whether there were step siblings, and whether there were half-siblings. This variation existed both between and within families, and it would be an interesting avenue of future research to build a bigger picture of how each family member experiences shared residence.

Tracy (2010) sets out eight 'Big-Tent' criteria (shown here in italics) for excellent qualitative research which I was guided by in the design and implementation of this research and which I will use now to reflect on the methodological strengths and limitations of this study. I believe this project to have *meaningful coherence* in that the aims related to the purpose of the research, the methods and interconnected literature. As an increasingly popular way for families to be organised after separation, this is a *worthy topic*. This topic is interesting and significant as it challenges assumptions about what is important to young people in relation to their experience of family and home by drawing on young people's perspectives. Additionally, this is an under researched topic in the UK.

This research contains *rich* data that was subjected to *rigorous* in-depth analysis. The sample included a range of ages and genders, including several young people who defined themselves as non-binary and LGBTQ+. However,

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it was almost entirely White British and with most participants being drawn from the university in some way, did not reflect a wide spectrum of social-economic status. There was also a lack of families within this sample who would fall into a 'high-risk' bracket. Whilst qualitative research is often not representative, future research could attempt to address the gaps in the sample in relation to ethnicity, social status, and sexual orientation of parents.

My concern that the interviews may only present what is 'front stage' in the family and not tap into the 'backstage' aspects was not warranted, with all in the younger age group taking photos of their homes, and all answering the questions that I asked. Perhaps a benefit and difference in interviewing young people rather than adults was that there didn't seem to be any reticence in opening up about their family life. Apart from a more general shyness from some participants, the majority of young people were keen to talk to me about their family life, with several commenting that they were pleased to be able to share their experiences and were similarly pleased that someone was asking them to; in being asked about their lives they felt respected. The young people were open with me, some like Reece and Amy, were very open and most answered the questions as fully as I would have hoped. At no point did I think that any of the young people were uncomfortable with what they were telling me, and apart from Reece and Amy, at no point did I think that the parents or other family members would be uncomfortable with what was being disclosed during the interviews. There were a combination of factors interacting here, my questions were open and sensitive. The young person had quite a lot of control over the content of the interview, in particular during the photo elicitation stage. Young people are perhaps not as concerned with keeping the family behind closed doors as adults. Also, maybe despite my best efforts to balance the power, the experience was still an interview, and the young people

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were likely to have experienced some demand characteristics. This research has then, within its modest sample, achieved the aim of giving young people the opportunity to talk about aspects of their life that they may not have had the opportunity to before. As many of the young people welcomed this opportunity to talk, it would be useful for young people to have someone to talk to, perhaps in school, after the separation of their parents.

I aimed to be *sincere* throughout this research, employing both self-reflexivity & self-awareness throughout the design, data collection and in the writing up of this research. I was earnest in wanting to accurately reflect the experience of the young people and empathetic in my design and analysis. I paid particular care to ensure mutual respect and connectedness between myself and my participants. During the analysis I was open to suggestions and alternative viewpoints. This research demonstrates *credibility* through its collection of rich data. A mosaic style approach of using family maps, photo-elicitation, advice writing, and interviews invited rich responses and aimed to break down the power imbalance of a research interview. The photo-elicitation enabled the young people to focus on the everyday and mundane aspects of family life in a way unlikely to be achieved through questioning alone. A limitation of using photo-elicitation however is that it is likely that some parents were put off the research as it created the need for both parents to agree to their young people taking part. An advantage of the advice writing was that it allowed the young people to distance themselves from the situation, thinking about someone else in that situation rather than themselves, additionally it was a chance to reflect back on the point of separation, resulting in a different emphasis than the interviews.

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It is important, particularly for early career research, to keep modest the expectations of what can be achieved with one study (Willig, 2012), consequently this study was clear in its aim to listen to young people and find out about their experience and as such it was important that their voices were the only ones sought. By speaking to young people, these voices that are often unheard, were heard. This gives us one aspect of the experience of shared residence but not the whole picture. From this research we can be curious about other aspects of shared residence. It would be interesting for future research to look at another part of the picture by obtaining the perspectives of other members of the family, for example what it is like for half-siblings to experience their siblings only living with them some of the time. It would be pertinent and interesting to build on this by seeking to understand the experiences of the family as a unit, for example, exploring in more depth the processes that are occurring, and how different family members experience this same phenomenon differently?

In foregrounding the young people's voices and photographs in the report it was my intention to present the young people's experience in a way that *resonates* with the reader. This research provides a *significant contribution* to our understanding of how young people experience home and family when living in shared residence from the sole perspective of young people. This research has real world value for families who are navigating the emotionally turbulent time of separating, and there are shared messages that can be generalised to policy and practice for young people living in a variety of home and family structures, these messages have been woven throughout this chapter and are summarised below.

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8.6 Implications for family life, policy, and practice

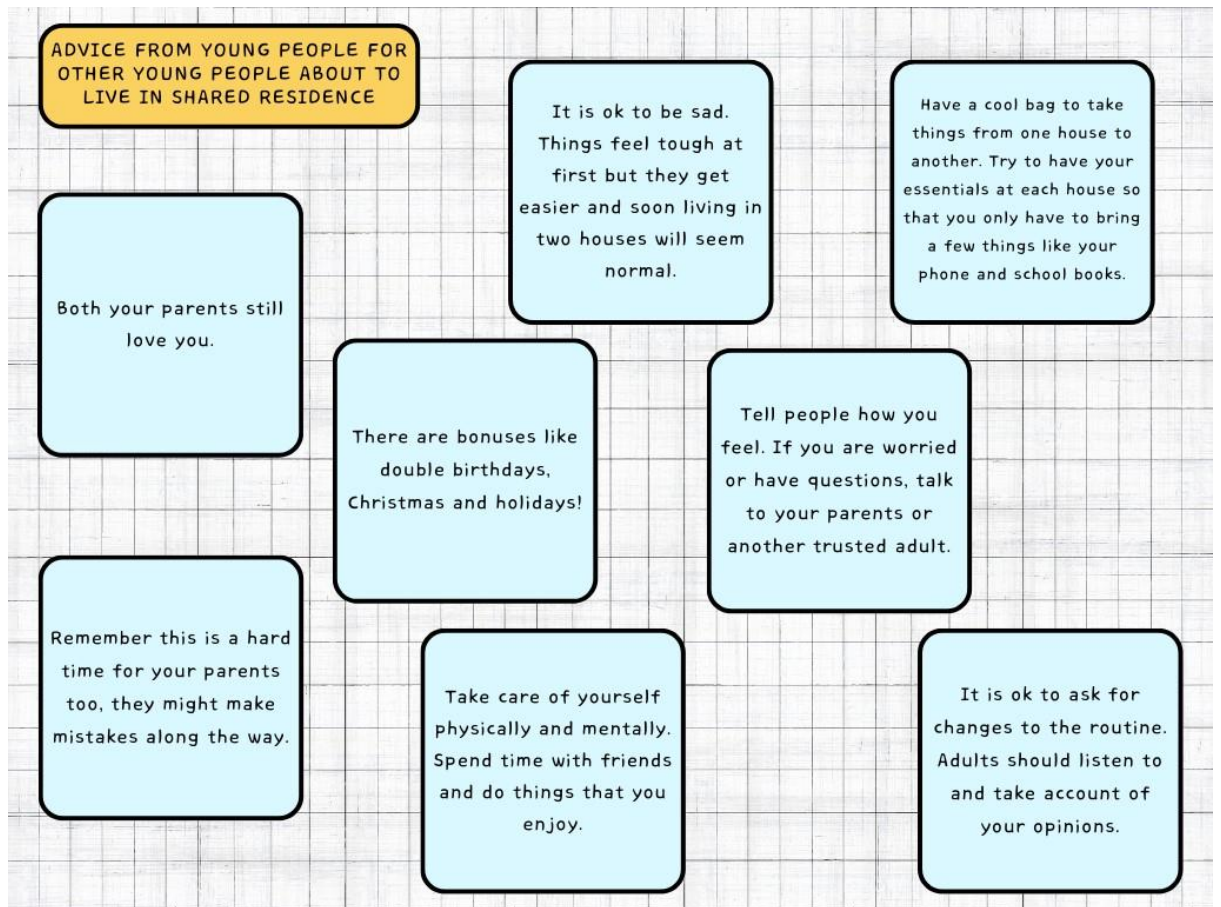
As this research has sought to understand the experiences of young people, and to foreground their voices in this report, this section will begin with a summary of their advice to other young people. The advice, which can be found in full in Appendix M, written by the young people at the end of the interview was analysed alongside the interview transcripts and as such fed into the themes within the findings. However, it is also important that it serves the purpose given for writing it. It is therefore summarised here before considering key messages for parents who are considering shared residence as an option, and for legal professionals and mediators who may be supporting that decision making process. These have been broken down into practical advice for parents and adults working with children which can be found in full in Appendix O.

8.6.1 Young people's advice to friends

The young people's advice to their friends fell into eight main areas: that things are hard at first but get better with time, that relationships persist despite the breakup, that there are some positives to cling to, that they should communicate with their parents and others about the separation, that their opinions count and should be listened to, that parents need looking after, that the young person should look after themselves and put themselves first sometimes, and some tips to manage moving around.

Figure 35 collates this advice into one easy to access place. It is hoped this could be used to support young people with the transition to shared residence.

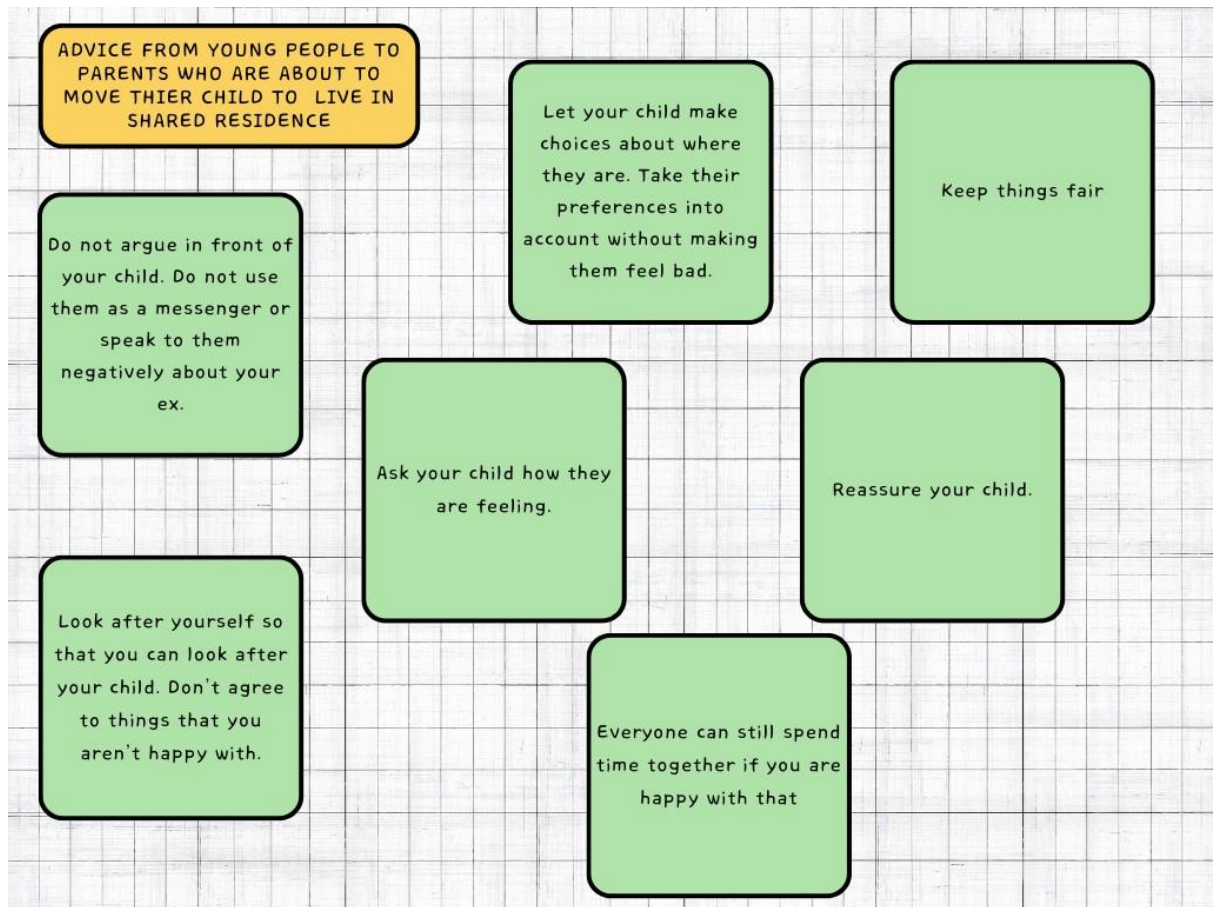
Figure 35 Advice for young people from young people



8.6.2 Young people's advice to parents

The advice given to parents was less varied, predominantly focussing on making sure that the young person is supported and looked after. It was important to the young people that parents knew they should communicate with their children about the situation and protect them from conflict. As with figure, 35, figure 36 collates this advice.

Figure 36 Young people's advice to parents



8.6.3 Key messages for family, policy and practice

1. **Every family needs an arrangement that suits them:** This research agrees with previous research that one size does not fit all; this is a way of life for families after divorce and separation that works well for *some* children, in *some* families, *some* of the time. As shown in the models in figures 33 & 34, there are a wide range of factors which contribute to understanding whether, on balance, this is the best option for a child, and these may not be the same for each child within a family. As such it should not be assumed that the 'correct' way to approach these arrangements is for an equal sharing of amount of time, but rather each

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family's circumstances should be considered on an individual basis.

Where there are certain positive circumstances, shared residence can work well for young people who report this as a way of life that is normal and 'just different', but where there are negative conditions, such as poor parental mental health, young people may not do well in shared residence. Additionally, there are circumstances where it may not be possible to create the positive environment required for shared residence; as discussed in Chapter 3, this is a way of life that requires a certain level of financial capital to provide two comfortable and familiar homes for the young person.

- 2. Arrangements need to remain flexible and responsive to changing wishes and circumstances:** This should not be a way of living that is set in stone at the point of separation, but instead a working document that responds to the different needs and demands of family life over time. This applies both on a day-to-day level, and across time. Young people need to be able to have the option to stay at one house for a night in order to attend an event, or to spend time with family members, when they 'should' be at the other house. Across time, adults need to understand that what suited the young person and the family when the children were young may not still suit them when they are teenagers. The young people in this study were clear that shared residence became harder the older they got. The flexibility also needs to apply to the rest of the family, perhaps one child would like to change the arrangement, but the other child doesn't. Perhaps a parent's job changes and now they can spend more time in the week with the children. Perhaps grandparents move closer which facilitates the child spending more time with that side of the family. Perhaps there is a change in a parent's health which negatively affects their ability to

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parent on their own. Such factors would need to result in an adaptation of the arrangement.

- 3. Ensure good communication to remove the burden of management from the young person:** To ensure that this way of life is as positive as possible for the young person, the adults in their life need to be prepared to establish and maintain good channels of communication. This applies both to the communication between parents, and between the young person and each parent. When adults communicate well, the burden of managing the logistics of the arrangement and the emotions of the various family members, can be lifted from the young person. Good communication can also help the young person to know what the adults' preferences are regarding the logistics of the arrangement and in building and maintaining relationships. Knowing this means that they do not have to second-guess what parents think, which will help to protect their mental health. It is beneficial to young people when they are given emotional permission from their parents to form strong bonds with new family members.
- 4. Practise an arrangement which recognises the totality of a young person's life:** Whilst these young people may live in two homes, they only have one life. As such adults need to ensure that the arrangement and additionally the way that the child lives their life when with them, takes account of the other parts of their life. For example, do they have access to free time at each house, does each parent have the opportunity to be involved in their school life, if the young person is only able to spend time with friends at one house do both parents account for that when considering the time allocation between houses? This also applies to the young person's relationships; they need to be allowed to continue relationships when adults have decided to end a

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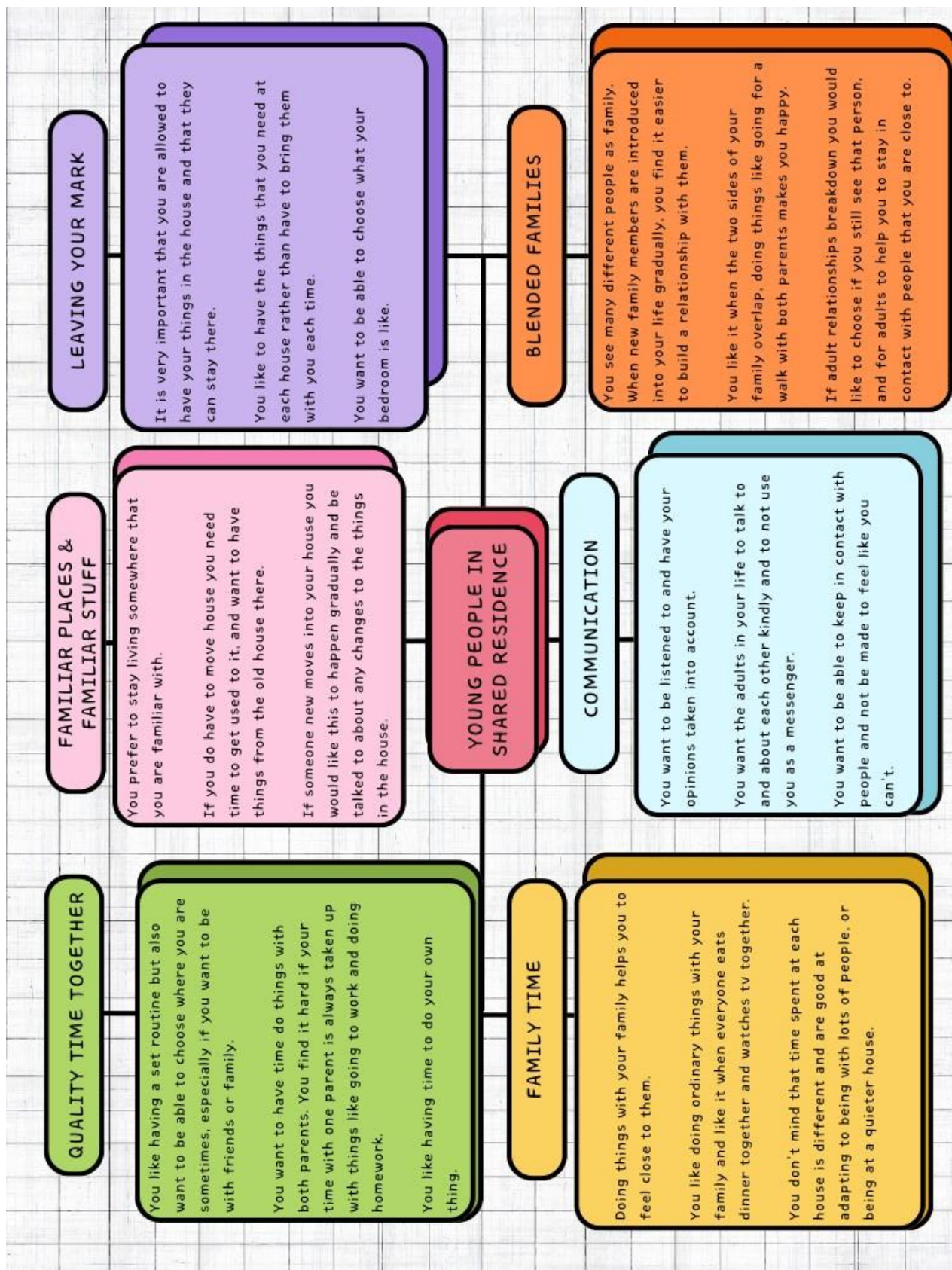
relationship, for example in the case of a relationship breakdown between a parent and stepparent. They need to be allowed to communicate with all members of their family at any time.

- 5. Create family spaces which allow your child to feel comfortable and that it is their space:** For young people to feel at home across two houses, it is important that they feel that both of those houses are their space. This can be facilitated by ensuring the young person has familiar items in both houses, including all the basic things they need so that they don't need to move much each time they swap houses. It is important that young people are able to leave their things around the home and that their stuff can stay there when they leave. Young people will feel more at home if they are able to personalise their bedrooms. It is important that adults ensure that they talk to young people about any changes to the home, especially when these changes are as a result of new people moving into the home.

8.6.4 Key messages for young people

In line with the ethos of this research, figure 37 contains messages which summarise the main messages into practical points for young people.

Figure 37 Key messages from the research written in an accessible format for young people



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8.7 Conclusion

In conclusion, this study explored what is important to young people in their experience of home and family when living in shared residence. Overall, this was a way of life that was treated as normal by the young people who had adapted to their change in circumstances and told me that different is 'just the way it is'. The findings suggest that shared residence is often not an equitable split of time between parents but rather is organised in ways that fit with individual families and family members, and which should remain flexible in order to account for changes as life progresses. These findings highlight that young people are adaptable and often see the advantages in living in contrasting environments, making the most of the differences that exist. They also emphasise that young people are active family members who take on much relationship work within the family to ensure that shared residence life runs smoothly. It was clear from the data that whilst they split their life between two parents and two houses, these young people live their life holistically and as such it is important that the adults in their lives remember that they are a whole child experiencing all aspects of their life.

The young people appreciated the predictability of having a set routine and having flexibility in that routine as they grew older and more independent. A key finding of this research is that adults should consider the *available* time rather than amount of time when deciding the routine so that young people experience a range of time with each parent. These findings, like findings before them, highlight that it is not the structure of a family that is the most important element of family life, but the relationships that exist within that family. Where family bonds were strong, the young people felt at home and wanted to spend time with their parents and other family members, in turn strengthening and maintaining those bonds and cocreating an environment in which the young person wanted to spend more time with the family.

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Conversely, those young people who struggled the most were those who experienced continued conflict either between the parents or between themselves and a parent or stepparent. The young people who felt most at home in both houses were surrounded by familiar stuff, were able to personalise their bedrooms, and take up space and leave a trace across the whole house. It is hoped that by listening to the experiences of these young people, other families living in shared residence will be able to draw on the shared messages to guide them through the change in their family structure.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Flyer

A flyer with a red and orange background. The top half has a yellow circular graphic on the left. The text is in white and orange. At the bottom, there are two logos: 'crcf' in red and 'UEA' in black with a purple star.

**Are you separated or divorced
with a child aged 11-18?
Does your child spend roughly
equal time living at both parents'
houses?**

Jen Coleman, PhD researcher at the UEA is looking to interview young people about their experience of home and family when living at both parents' houses after separation or divorce.

This research hopes to give an insight into the benefits and challenges of living in this way from the perspective of the young people.

To find out more about the research and discuss if your child would be interested in taking part please contact Jen Coleman
jennifer.coleman@uea.ac.uk 07840262863

Please be aware that due to the photo-based task involved in this project, both parents will need to agree in order for the child to take part.
Each young person will receive a £10 voucher as a thank you.

crcf Centre for Research
on Children & Families

UEA
University of East Anglia

Appendix B Information sheets

RESEARCH INFORMATION SHEET FOR YOUNG PEOPLE



How do young people experience home and family life living at both parents' houses after separation or divorce?

My name is Jen Coleman. I am a PhD research student in the Centre for Research on Children and Families at the UEA.

This sheet will give you information about my research. I would like to talk to you to find out what it is like for young people living at both their parents' houses and how this might change as children get older.

By listening to young people to find out what their lives are like living at both their parents' houses, this study hopes to gain an insight into what works and what doesn't, enabling other families to learn from those in a similar situation to them and to inform policy and practice.

If you have any questions, please contact me.

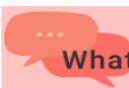


Am I suitable for the study?

For you to take part in this research you either need to live or have lived, roughly equally at both your parent's houses when you were living at home. This should include spending regular and frequent time at both houses, including staying overnight. E.g. Mon - Wed and alternate weekends with one parent. Ideally you will have been living like this for at least a year.

I am interested in talking to young people who are still living in this way and those who have moved out of their parents' houses.

You can change your mind about taking part up until the point that you are interviewed. After the interview, if you change your mind about me including what you have said, you will need to let me know within two weeks.



What will the study involve?

We will meet at a mutually convenient time and place, and I will interview you for up to an hour about your experience. During the interview we will talk about your family and about what home means to you, this will involve answering some questions and making a map of your family. There are no right or wrong answers, I'm interested in each person's individual experience.

It is important that you feel free to talk openly and honestly, so it would be best for the interview to take place in a quiet place where you feel comfortable. I can arrange somewhere if needed. It is possible for the interview to take place online if you would prefer. With your permission, the interview will be audio recorded and later transcribed.

Before the interview we can meet for a short chat on Teams so that I can answer any questions you might have.



Will you keep what I say private?

I will record our conversation and then type it up myself. All recordings, transcripts and photos will be kept in password protected cloud storage. I'd like to use quotes and some of the photos in the write up of my analysis and final research report and in the future when I write or talk about my research. I won't use anyone's real names and will remove any identifying information.

I won't tell anyone else what you tell me. An exception to this is if you say something that makes me worried about yours or someone else's safety, at which point I will have to pass that information on to the local safeguarding team. If I do need to pass on concerns, I may not be able to talk to you first, although I will discuss it with you if possible.

Your personal data will only be used as outlined in this information sheet, and data management will follow the Data Protection Act 2018 and UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR) and the UEA's Research Data Management Policy.



Will I get anything for taking part?

Yes! As a thank you for your time you will get a £10 voucher.

Whilst taking part might not make a direct difference to your life, sharing your experience might help other young people living at both their parents' houses. With lots of young people sharing what works and what doesn't, it might help adults know what is best for children when parents separate.

If you would like to know what I find out through this research, I can send you a summary.

What next?

If you would like to take part, please contact me either by email or phone on the details below.

We can arrange to have a short chat and I can answer any questions that you might have.

If you are worried about any aspect of this research, you can contact my supervisor Jeanette.Cossar@uea.ac.uk and she will help you.

If you have any questions please contact me
jennifer.coleman@uea.ac.uk
07840262863

RESEARCH INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARENTS



How do young people experience home and family life living at both parents' houses?

My name is Jen Coleman. I am a PhD research student in the Centre for Research on Children and Families at the UEA.

This sheet will give you information about my research. I would like to talk to your child to find out what it is like for them living at both their parents' houses.

If you have any questions, please contact me.



Listening to young people

By listening to young people to find out what their lives are like living at both their parents' houses, this study hopes to gain an insight into what works and what doesn't, enabling other families to learn from those in a similar situation to them and to inform policy and practice.



Are we suitable for the study?

For your child to take part in this research they need to be living at both their parent's houses. They should spend regular and frequent time at both houses, including staying overnight. E.g. Mon - Wed and alternate weekends with one parent. Ideally, they will have been living like this for at least a year.

Because this research is about your child's whole family, and because I am asking them to take photos of what home means to them, it is important that both parents agree to them taking part.

If you do not feel comfortable passing this information on to your child's other parent please let me know.

It is important that your child wants to take part, I don't want anyone to feel that they have to.



What will my child be asked to do?

Participating in this study involves two activities and one interview. Detailed instructions for the activities are provided on the young person's information sheet. Here is an overview:

Task 1: Take up to 10 photos of what home means to you and email them to me.

Task 2: Interview lasting about 1 hour - I'll meet with your child either via video call or in person at your home and we'll chat about home and family for about an hour. The choice will depend on current UEA guidelines due to covid restrictions and your child's preference. I will use the photos that they chose to share with me as a starting point for the conversation and I'll ask some questions. It's important that they feel free to talk openly and honestly, so it would be best for the interview to take place in a quiet place away from other members of the household. With both yours and your child's permission, the interview will be audio recorded and later transcribed.

Task 3: During the interview, we will create a diagram together to show who is in their family.

If you have any questions please contact me
jennifer.coleman@uea.ac.uk
07840262863

RESEARCH INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARENTS



Will you keep the photos and what they say private?

I'd like to use quotes and some of the photos in the write up of my analysis and final research report and in the future when I write or talk about my research. I won't use anyone's real names and will remove any identifying information. To help protect your identities, the young people will be asked not to include any people in their photos. I will record our conversation and then type it up myself. All recordings, transcripts and photos will be kept in password protected cloud storage.



I won't tell you or anyone else what your child tells me. An exception to this is if they say something that makes me worried about theirs or someone else's safety, at which point I will have to pass that information on to the local safeguarding team. If I do need to pass on concerns, I may not be able to talk to you or your child first, although I will discuss it with you if possible. If during the video call we lose connection completely, your child leaves the call suddenly, or they become very upset, I will call you to check that they are ok.



Will my child get anything for taking part?

Yes! As a thank you for their time they will get a £10 voucher.

Whilst taking part might not make a direct difference to your child's life, sharing their experience might help other young people living at both their parents' houses. With lots of young people sharing what works and what doesn't, it might help adults know what is best for children when parents separate.

If you would like to know what I find out through this research, I can send you a summary. The summary won't be available for a couple of years as it will take a long time to complete the study.



Can we change our minds about taking part?

Absolutely, you can change your mind up until the point that your child is interviewed. If you change your mind, please let me know. If your child's other parent tells me that they have changed their mind, your child will no longer be able to take part. During the interview, your child can choose to skip any questions that they are not happy with answering. After the interview, if your child changes their mind about wanting me to include what they've said, they will need to tell me within two weeks and I can remove their photos, family diagram and interview.

What happens next?

If you agree to your child taking part in this research please continue to the consent form. Thank you very much for your support.

If you are worried about any aspect of the research, you or your child can contact my supervisor at the University, Jeanette.Cossar@uea.ac.uk, and she will help you.

If you have any questions please contact me
jennifer.coleman@uea.ac.uk
07840262863

Appendix C Consent forms

Young person consent form

Please confirm your agreement to the different aspects of taking part in this research by clicking on the check boxes below. We'll go through this at the start of the interview.

I understand that I have been asked to take part in a PhD research project. I have been able to ask questions about the study and feel I have all the information I need.	
I agree to do the two activities and be interviewed for the project. I understand that I don't have to answer all the questions and I can stop the interview at any time. After taking part in the interview I can ask for my photos, family diagram and what I have said to not be used in the study. I can do this up to 2 weeks after the interview, without having to give a reason.	
I agree for the interview to be audio recorded so that it can be transcribed (typed up in Word).	
I agree for my family diagram to be used in the write up of the research and future circulation of the research findings.	
I agree for quotes from the interview to be used in the write up of the research and future circulation of the research findings.	
I agree for the photos to be used in the write up and future circulation of the research findings. (See separate list of photos to consent or not to each one)	

Name of interviewee

Date

Once the project is complete, I will produce a summary of my findings for the young people that took part. If you would like a copy of this, please provide me with a home address or email address to send it you. Please be aware that this will be a couple of years after the interview as the study takes a long time to complete.

**Thank you very much for your support.
If you have any questions please contact me:**

Jen Coleman

Jennifer.coleman@uea.ac.uk

07840 262863

Parental consent form

Please confirm your agreement to your child taking part in the research by typing yes or no in the boxes below and emailing it back to me. If you would prefer to discuss this over the phone, message me and I will get back to you as soon as I can. If you feel that you are able to pass this information and consent form on to your child's other parent, please do. Please remember that as your child may take photos of both houses, we need both parents to agree before they can take part.

I understand that my child has been asked to take part in a PhD research project. I have been able to ask questions about the study and feel I have all the information I need.	
I agree for my child to take photos of our home and to be interviewed for the project. They can decline to answer questions or stop the interview at any time. After taking part in the interview they can ask for their data to be withdrawn /not used up to 2 weeks after the event, without having to give a reason.	
I agree for the interview to be audio recorded so that it can be transcribed.	
I agree for the anonymised family diagram to be used in the write up of the research and future circulation of the research findings.	
I agree for quotes from the interview to be used in the write up of the research and future circulation of the research findings.	
I agree for the photos to be used in the write up of the research and future circulation of the research findings.	
I understand that I am giving consent for my child to take part, but that they will also be asked to give their consent separately.	

Name of interviewee:

Name of parent: Date

Once the project is complete, I will produce a summary of my findings for the young people that took part. If you would like a copy of this, please provide me with a home address or email address to send it you. Please be aware that this will be a couple of years after the interview as the study takes a long time to complete.

If you have any further questions, please contact me:

Jen Coleman
 Jennifer.coleman@uea.ac.uk
 07840 262863

Appendix D Participant overview table

Ppt no.	Gender	Age	Parents	Care arrangement	Distance between parents	Changes to the family since split
1	M	11	Mum 49 Dad 49 White British professionals. Split 5 years ago after 16 year relationship. Weren't married Sibling – ppt 5	Kids go to Dad Wed + Fri nights + Sat day in term time. In the school holidays we split the care roughly 50/50, *Meets 35%+ definition of shared care*	1.5 miles Sometimes cycles between.	Dad has girlfriend with children who are in same school as ppt. – they spend time together. Doesn't see much of Mum's boyfriend.
2	F	14	Both professionals. Mum 39 white brit Dad 41 other/mixed Split 8yrs ago. Weren't married. Younger sister – age 8	Started as 3 days / 3 days, evolved to 7 days alternating between parents. 50/50 split *Meets definition of shared care*	14 miles	Mum's boyfriend lives with them. Dad's girlfriend + her daughter live with them at wkend.
3	NB	14	Separated 12 years ago. Weren't married. Mum 43 White British Dad 43 White British Admin / Sales Sibling ppt 4	Live with Mum, StepDad and siblings. Go to Dad every other weekend & some time in holidays. (Doesn't fit shared care but yp stated two homes)	16 miles	Step Dad and two half siblings. Dad has girlfriend but they don't see her much.
4	F	11	Sibling of ppt 3 (Doesn't fit shared care but yp stated two homes)			

5	F	15	As ppt 1	Used to do same as siblings but no longer goes to Dads. *Meets 35%+ definition of shared care*	As ppt 1	As ppt 1
6	F	15	Mum 50 White British Cleaner PT Dad 53 White British Decorator PT Split 7 years ago. Weren't married.	Very flexible, she goes back and forth as she likes (but lives at Mum's?). Might spend a few weeks in one house then move back. Dad comes to Mums every day for a coffee, or dinner. *Meets definition of shared care*	Same street	StepDad (not married?) lives with them.
7	M	13	Mum 44 White British Teacher Lesbian Dad 46 White British Healthcare Split 4 years ago. Married, now divorced.	Due to long distance involved, they go every weekend to Dad and stay with Mum on weekdays. Alternate wkend is shorter. More time in holidays.	54 miles	Both parents have new partners. Mum is now in lesbian relationships.

				Meets 25% definition of shared care		
8	M	13	Twin brother of ppt 7			
9	M	11		Alternate weekends and every Wednesday with Dad. More time in holidays. *Meets 25% definition of shared care*		
10	F	12	Dad 43 White other Professional Straight Mum 39 White British Teacher Bisexual Split 5-6 years ago Were married now divorced	Alternating weekends M (pm), T, W(am) Dad W (pm), Th, F(am) Mum 50/50	8 miles	Mum has live-in female partner.
11	F	16	Dad Straight Mum Straight Was teacher now business owner. Were married. 13 years (?) since split.	With Dad Sun-Tues am, used to be 50/50 up to 18 months ago	5 miles when 50/50 3 miles now?	Both parents re-partnered quickly and eventually married. Step siblings on both sides. Half brother on Dad's side.
12	F	16	Twin sister of ppt11			
13	NB	16	Dad 42 Straight Full time security analyst Mum 38 Straight Part time sales assistant	Described by Mum as 'very flexible' Mum has all 3 children Sun/Mon/Tues night. Dad has them all but the 1 st Wed of the month, then I have	0.5 mile	Dad remained in original home. Mum formed new relationship – has 8 yr old child.

			Were married, now divorced. 10.5 years since split	1/3 every Friday (rotating between all 3) and Dad has the other 2. Has all three on Saturday. Holidays are split.		
14	F	14	Ppts 13, 14 & 15 are siblings 50/50 weekend time, 40/60 weekday – with some variation			
15	(NB)	12				
16	F	12	Mum 34 Straight Dad 31 Straight Both work fulltime Never married Split 7.5 years ago	Stays at Dad's every other weekend Doesn't fit definition of shared care.	Were on same estate. Now 3 miles	Mum & new partner live together with their children age 6, 5 & 2. Dad also recently moved in with new partner.
17	M	24	Mum 57 Straight WhB Dad 66 Straight WhB Separated 22 years ago Were married. Divorced	Different for different stages of life. 50/50 from 14-19		Mum's new partner caused him to live solely with Dad for a period of time.
18	F	18	Mum 52 Straight WhB Dad 56 Straight WhB Both full time employed Dad – Painter/Decorator Mum - Nurse Were married. Separated 6 years ago. Divorced once	50/50 until 16 then moved in with Mum, alternate weekends with Dad.		

			youngest turned 18 (6 months ago)			
19	M	21	Mum 45 Straight WhB Dad 54 Straight WhB Both full time employed in NHS Separated 14 years ago. Were married. Divorced	50/50	Some different houses for both parents. Parents lived 15-20 minutes apart.	Both parents with new partners. Step siblings and half sister.
20	F	22	Mum 54 Straight WhB Dad 50 Straight WhB Full time employed Dad – Deputy Head Mum – Nurse Separated in 2007. Were married. Divorced	Court ordered arrangement Tuesday night with Dad Other week days Mum Weekends – alternate. Friday after school to Sunday evening. Just fits shared criteria	Mum stayed in family home. Dad first moved to a flat. Then a 10-15 minute drive away.	Dad moved in with Step Mum. They have a child together who is 6 now. Step Dad moved in with them at about the same time as their new brother was born. This caused some tension especially with her sister.
21	M	21	Mum 49 Straight WhB Dad 62 Straight WhB Full time employed Dad- Bank manager Mum – Finance officer Separated 13 years ago	50/50 Mon & Tues Dad Wed & Thurs Mum Fr, Sat & Sun - alternate	Different houses at different times. Always in same town as each other.	Both parents with new partners. Refers to them as Step Dad and Step Mum. Step siblings on each side.

			Were married. Divorced Court order for children.			
22	F	22	Mum 56 Wh French Dad 56 Wh French Both full time civil servants Separated 14 years ago. Still married, did not want to involve courts so did not obtain a divorce.	50/50 70/30 Mum/Dad Depending on times.	Stayed living nearby to each other.	Mum's partner for 14+ years - refer to him as Step Dad.
23	F	20	Mum 51 Wh Portuguese unemployed Dad 51 Wh B ft employed – librarian Separated 10 years ago Not married but did involve mediators and court in arranging residency.	50/50 But often periods of time when solely with Dad as Mum goes away to Portugal.	Lived on same road or very nearby.	No change on Dad's side Mum has had a few partners but not part of the family.

Appendix E Interview guide

test the recording equipment

Begin recording

Family map - show me who is in your family. Let them set it all up before talking about it with them, but try to make some notes to show thought process/changes of mind.

Tell me about them? Why are they in that circle? I see you have put x closest to you, can you tell me why you've decided that.

What do you think makes someone part of your family?

Has your family changed since your parents separated? Can you tell me about that?

How does that affect you?

(Parent's new partner, new children) How did you get to know them? How did you get on at first? Has that changed? Why?

Blank houses – move the people into the houses

What can you remember about the time just after your parents separated? Can you tell me about what that was like?

Can you remember how you felt when your parents were together? How do you feel now that they are separated?

Can you tell me what your routine is for when you are at each house? (E.g. last Monday what did you do?)

Who decided the arrangement? Can you remember being asked your opinion?

Has that always been the arrangement? If it has changed, what changes have been made? What were the reasons for those? Does it feel like it works well?

Do you think it will stay the same?

Would you make any changes?

What would happen if you wanted to spend an extra night at your Dad's? What would happen if you didn't want to leave one of your parent's houses?

What about at special occasions, how does that get organised? What happened last e.g birthday?

Do you feel that you get the right amount of time with each parent? Do you have the opportunity to do different things with them both? Do you get enough time to spend with friends? Do you have enough free time/time on your own?

How does being at each house affect what you do? Can you give me some examples of how you spend your time at your Mum's / at Dad's?

What are meal times like in each house?

Have you got a favourite thing that you do with each of your parents? Or a favourite memory?

Photos – either printed or emailed across at start of interview

If someone asked you 'where do you live?' what would you answer?

Look through them together talking about home.

What helps you to feel at home?

Is there anywhere that you feel more at home?

Are there any particular people/things that make you feel at home?

Does your bedroom get used for anything else when you're not there?

Other questions

Do you know other people that live in this way? Do you ever talk to your friends about it? Does anyone ever say anything negative to you about it?

Does living in this way cause you any problems?

Do you know who pays for different things, like your phone if you have one. School trips, uniform etc. Do you get pocket money?

Do you keep in touch with your family in the other house when you are at one house? How?

Talk to me about how it was during lock down and home schooling. Did you keep your routine?

How do you keep in touch with your friends when you are at each house?

How do you manage transport?

Are there areas of your life that your parents disagree about? E.g. Are there things that one parent lets you do that the other one doesn't? Do they feel differently about certain things (e.g. staying out, drinking alcohol)?

11-13 Do you cover stuff about puberty, sex and relationships in PSHE at school?

Who would you talk to in your family about stuff like that? Can you give me an example? (if appropriate). Do you feel that you can talk to both parents no matter which house you are in?

do your parents ever raise these topics with you?

for 14+ How do your parents feel about boyfriends/girlfriends?' might lead on to conversation about rules/guidance/support around these issues.

Finishing the interview

Is there anything that we haven't talked about that you want to talk about?

Is there anything that we've talked about that you'd rather I didn't include in the research?

Are you still happy for me to include your photos and family diagram in the write up of my research? (do consent form with them)

Messages

If one of your friend's parents were separating, what advice would you give to them? What advice would you give to their parents?

Debrief - provide them with sheet.

Check they are ok and signpost to support if needed.

Ask if they would like a report of the findings and how best to send to them.

Thank them for taking part.

Appendix F Debrief sheets

THANK YOU FOR TAKING PART IN THIS RESEARCH

I HOPE THAT YOU ENJOY SPENDING YOUR VOUCHER!

WHY DO RESEARCH?

It is really important to ask questions! Research is a way of finding out the answers to those questions.

We do research to learn and to understand the world. Often research builds on what people already know, sometimes it uncovers something completely new and unexpected.

What gets found out through the research gets shared with other people. This helps people to make the best decisions and make improvements to the world we live in.



HOW I WILL USE YOUR ANSWERS

You have been very generous in telling me your experience. Sharing your experience might help other young people living between their parents houses. With lots of young people sharing what works and what doesn't it might help adults know what is best for children when their parents separate.

When I write up my research, I might use some of what you said to help people to understand a point that I make. I might also use photos and the family diagram if I have your permission.

Remember I'll change your name and other details so that people won't know it is you.

HOW DO YOU FEEL?

Sometimes talking about our lives can stir up our emotions. Talk to someone that you trust if you are feeling upset after this interview.

If you'd rather talk to someone that you don't know, you can text SHOUT to 85258 and someone trained to talk to young people will text you back.

You can also try these websites:

childline.org.uk youngminds.org.uk

themix.org.uk gingerbread.org.uk

If you change your mind about being included in the research, or if you think of something else that you wish you'd told me, please contact me within two weeks of the interview.

If you have any other questions about this research, please get in touch.

jennifer.coleman@uea.ac.uk 07840262863

**I HOPE THAT YOU ENJOYED BEING PART OF
THIS RESEARCH**

Appendix G Task instructions

TASK INSTRUCTIONS



Photos

Please take up to ten photos that show what home means to you. This could be particular places where you feel at home, certain objects that make you feel at home, or it could be the opposite, places and objects that make you feel not at home. It might be zooming in on small details or zooming out to whole rooms. This is your chance to show what home means to you, so there is no right or wrong way. If you're not sure though, just message me and I'll help.

Important – please don't include people in your photos.



Photos

Once you have your photos (if you've taken more than ten, choose ten) please email them to me before we are due to meet to talk. If you have any trouble with emailing them, let me know and I'll do my best to help.

Jennifer.coleman@uea.ac.uk

I'll put them into a slideshow so that we can look at them together during the interview.

If you don't have a smart phone or digital camera to use, please let me know and I'll do what I can to help.



Interviews

I'll be in touch to arrange a time for us to have a conversation about your experience of living in two houses. This will probably be a video call using Teams. I'll need to send you an email with the invitation to join the meeting, which you click when it's time. You can use a smart phone or computer, whatever is easiest, but it will need a microphone. It would be nice if you had your camera on, quite a lot of the time we will be looking at the photos and diagram too. If you would rather talk in person, please let me know and I'll see what can be arranged.

We'll need about an hour for the interview. It will be best if you can be in a quiet place in the house so that it is easy for us to talk and listen.



It can be harder to tell if someone is ok when you talk over video call, so I'll check that you are ok as we go along. If I ask you a question that you don't want to answer, just say and I'll move on to the next question. If you need to take a break, just say. I'll remind you of all of this at the start of the interview. I'll ask you at the end whether there is anything that you've said that you don't want me to include.

You can contact me up to two weeks after the interview to add things that you think about afterwards, or to ask me to take bits out.

Family diagram

We will create a diagram together during the interview to show who is in your family.

We will use a concentric circles diagram, like in the picture.

You will put yourself in the middle, the people closest to you in the next circle, next closest in the next circle and so on.



I hope that you'll enjoy the chance to talk and tell your own story about what life is like living in two houses.


I really appreciate the time that you are taking to be part of this research, thank you.


If you have any questions please contact me

jennifer.coleman@uea.ac.uk

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Appendix H Examples of visuo-textual analysis

		Level 1 noticing and describing		
 <p>Photo 1 Lauren</p>		<p>A fridge door with 8 magnets. Some are holding up a menu. Post-it note next to menu (unreadable). Visible on some magnets are the names of destinations – Grand Canyon, Mallorca.</p>	<p>“A load of random magnets and stuff we collected on holidays”. The magnets are memories of special times with just her, Dad and sister. Her younger sister has damaged the magnets but that just adds to the memories. The fridge is integral to life at Dad’s. It contains the treat of ice cream. In other houses the freezer hasn’t worked properly, but this one does.</p>	<p>Displayed magnets connect to memories of special times together. The working fridge-freezer is important to their time with Dad.</p>
		Level 2 Conceptualising		
		<p>Fridge displays the holidays they have been</p>	<p>Holidays are special times, but so are the</p>	<p>Memories are displayed to remind the</p>

	<p>on. Two of each magnet – one for each of the children?</p>	<p>incidental things that happen at home. She holds on to precious things that remind her of special times.</p>	<p>family of special times gone by. It can be added to but these were times that we especially special because it was just Dad and his daughters. Have those times gone?</p>
 <p>Photo 6 Robin</p>	<p>A close up of a Nintendo Switch with a glittery protective case and an Animal Crossing game card.</p>	<p>That one's my Switch and that's the Animal Crossing New Horizons game. Because whenever I play that I just feel really relaxed, it's a bit like reading, going to a whole other world</p>	<p>The object & the activity that she does to feel relaxed.</p>
	<p>This photo is showing the game and console together.</p>	<p>Described the object. Feeling relaxed. Like reading in that</p>	<p>Activities that they do at home are relaxing and transport them to</p>

		it transports her away.	another place.
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Appendix I: Examples of summaries of participants from visuo-textual analysis

#10 Olivia is 12 and lives 50/50 between her Mum and Dad. She provided an eclectic mix of photos of objects, outside, a pet and photos that indicate special or unusual times and that convey her interests. Her explanations of the photos conveyed that she lives in two contrasting but equally homely environments. She enjoys that each house 'has a thing' and shares elements of family identity when talking about what happens in each of the houses. Dad's house is a chilled environment but in the city so less access to outside space than at Mum's so they use the wider surrounding to access nature and bring nature in by having pot plants. Mum's is a house for celebrating and having family and friends over, a house where pets are very important and where they can enjoy their own outside space. Both houses allow her to relax, express herself and enjoy her main interest – reading.

#13 Parker is 16 and lives 50/50 between their Mum and Dad at the weekend and primarily with Mum on weekdays (30/70), Leah & Robin are their siblings. Parker took a mix of photos to explain the shared spaces, to show things that they like/love, and photos that show places that they like to be. There was some indication of which house the photo comes from, but this wasn't emphasised. Parker cheerfully explains that space at Mum's is busy and full and all spaces are shared. Some space is shared at Dad's too, and they have to find ways to make that work but her bedroom is her own at Dad's and that is special – somewhere to be alone. The shower might provide that alone time at Mum's. To Parker, home is somewhere we can display things that we love & collect and are places to be comfy. Parker's bedrooms give them space to display the things that they find attractive, the things that they like and things

that are familiar and don't need to change simply because they are getting older. In shared spaces they are able to carve out areas that are just for them but sometimes belongings still get combined and it can be hard to discern who things belong to.

Appendix J: Examples of initial coding

Transcript 5:

Parent against young person having choice
Young person has clear preference for particular house / particular parent
If you give the young person choice they might not choose you
Adults don't listen to children
Dad disregards young person's opinions
Conflict makes it uncomfortable to stay
Escape to the other parent
Young person physically trapped at Dad's house
Extreme behaviour from young person allows them to choose
Age brings agency
Age brings choice and independence

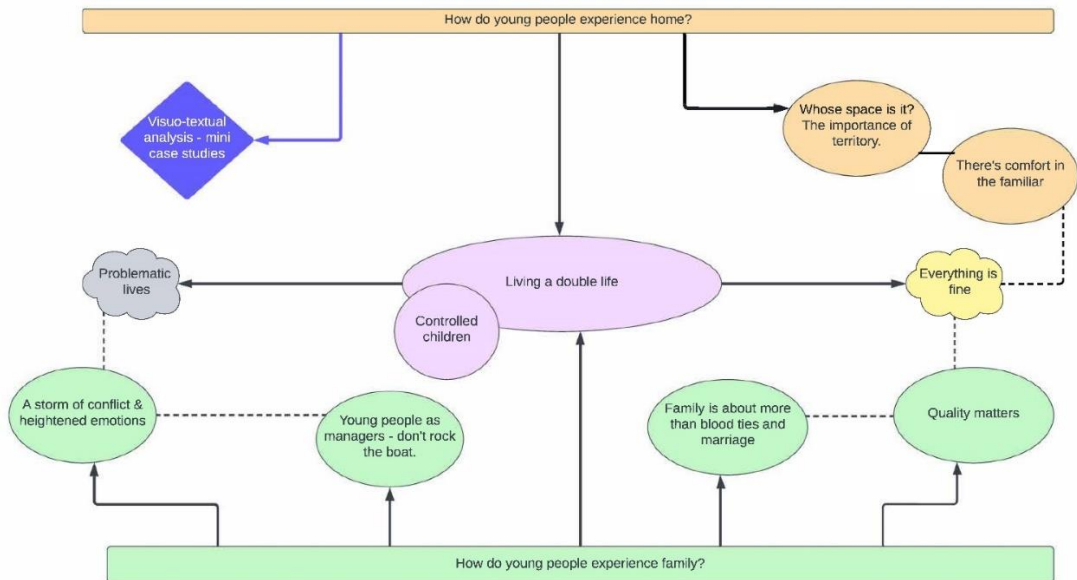
Transcript 10:

Confusion over how it will work
Equal time with both parents made it easier to cope
Normal life
Just the way it is
Positive about shared residence
Positive about amount of time spent with each parent
Divorce is common place
Don't know who is in the same situation as you
Predictable routine
Young person hasn't considered change
Normal life

Transcript 18:

Natural to prefer one parent to the other
Separation can change the role of a parent
Separation can force a parent to be present
Dad had to learn to parent & keep house
We are closest to those that we spend most time with
Closer to Mum's side of the family
Moving out of home changes your status & right to a bedroom
Different siblings have different routines
Age brings agency
We are closest to those that we live with
Sibling relationship is affected by having different routines to each other
Too young to be told any details of separation

Appendix K: Initial mind map of candidate themes



Appendix L: Overview of family maps

	Inner circle with them	Next circle	Outer circle	Edge
Jack	Mum Dad	Sisters Grandma	Uncle Cousins	Cousins Grandad
Lauren	Mum Dad Sister Best friend	Mum's boyfriend Dad's girlfriend "Kind of like stepsister" (named) Grandparents Great grandparents Mum's wider family	Dad's wider family Friend & her family	
River	Mum Sister Dad (birth – my words, she named) Dad (step – as above) Dog Brother brother	Gran Gran Aunt & cousins Aunt Grandad	Dad's girlfriend Grandma Grandad	
Ashley	Mum Sister Dad Dad Brothers	Granny (Mum's Mum)		
Chloe	Mum	Brother Sister	Dad	
Rebecca	Mum Dad	Older Brother (a bit further out) Older Sister	Step Dad (on line of next & outer)	
Ryan		On line between inner & this circle: Mum Dad Twin brother	Younger brother Grandma (mum's Mum) Grandad	Grandma (dad's mum) Dad's girlfriend Mum's girlfriend
Liam	Mum Dad	Twin brother Younger brother Dad's girlfriend Mum's girlfriend (He moved both girlfriends from the		

		next circle out to this one)		
Olivia	Sister Sister Mum Dad		Step Mum	Grandad & Grandma Grammy (all three on line between 3+4)
Ivy	Twin sister Mum Step Dad Step siblings Cousins (Mum's side) Grandparents (Mum's side)	Dad Grandma (Dad's side) Granddad (Dad's side) – listed separately as they are separated Aunties & Uncles		
Ava	Twin Sister Mum Step Dad	Dad Half brother (Dad & step Mum are parents) Step sister (Step Dad parent) Step Sister (Step Dad parent) Step Brother (Step Dad parent) Step sister's girlfriend	Estranged Step Mum Step Sister (Step Mum parent) Step Sister (Step Mum parent)	
Parker	Mum Dad Step Dad Sibling Sibling Sibling	Step brother Grandma & Grandpa (Step Dad's side) Grandma (Dad's side) Grandma, Aunt and cousins (Mum's side) Grandpops Aunt's boyfriend (on boundary)	Aunt and cousins (Step Dad's side) Uncle & family (Step Dad's side) Aunt & cousins (Mum's side)	More relatives on Step Dad's side
Leah	Dad Mum (On the line between 1+2)	Aunt (mum's side) Little brother Grandma	Little brother Step brother Grandparents (Dad's side)	Step Dad Sister Aunt (Mums side) Aunt & Uncle (Step Dad's side) Grandparents (Step Dad's side) Aunt (Dad's side)
Robin	Mum	Dad (Further away) Stepdad Younger brother	Youngest sister Oldest sister	
Paige	Mum	Step Dad		

	Dad Nana Grandad Best friend	Step Mum Dog Siblings Aunt Uncle Cousin Great Grandad Baby cousin		
Alex	Dad Mum Grandma Aunty (Dad's side)	Step Father Aunties	Step Mother	
Imogen	Mum Mum's close friend that they live with	Dad Older sister Older brother Grandparents (mum's side) Cousins (younger)	Nanna (Dad's side)	
Gavin	Dad Step Mum	Mum Younger siblings	Older siblings Grandad Grandad Uncle (Dad's side)	
Rachel	Mum Dad Step Mum Grandma Brother Sister Brother Cousins Grandparents (Dad)	Step Mum's family Step Dad		
Reece	Close friends (x10)	Sister - inner edge Mum - outer edge	Step family with Mum (on line between this and previous circle)	Other family on Mum's side Dad - on outer line Step family with Dad - outside of diagram
Amy		Dad	Mum - bordering outer circle	
Violet	Dad Mum brother	Grandma Grandad Step Father	Step Brother Step Brother	

Appendix M: The advice from the young people

To a friend:

Jack: It's okay to be sad that your parents are splitting up, just be calm and you are still as close to both your parents so talk to them if you have a problem.

Lauren: everything will be ok! It's tough at first but things will be alright. I recommend coming up with a clear routine with your parents help, spending equal time with family is a good point to start. I would also recommend buying a cool bag to carry things from one house to the other!

River: :D you ok? I guess at least you get double Christmas presents now? The first bits hard but it'll get not as bad later. See you :D

Ashley: It's OK! Your parents splitting up will affect you too. You can arrange to see the other parent every week/weekend. And its fine to ask your parents questions! You may feel sad for a bit but it wont be forever.

Chloe: It isn't as bad as it seems right now and eventually it will become the new normal for you. They love you the same and even though it's weird right now it won't always be like this.

Rebecca: I would tell them not to worry, because both their parents still love them and you'll get to see them both a lot. And, that they'll always care for you and be there.

Ryan: I think that it is most important that you make sure you speak to people and don't leave anything out and tell people close to you how you feel.

Liam: I would say to my friends talk to people or do things you enjoy because it does help distract you. Like spending time with parents or friends.

Olivia: Always share how you are feeling. You aren't alone and if you are worried talk to a parent or friend.

Ivy: Some good things come from parents splitting up such as, two Christmases and two birthdays! So always think of the positive.

Ava: It seems scary at first but everything works out how it's supposed to.

Parker: It's not your fault, it's not on you and you are not responsible. Things will get better, and this might be what they both needed. Talk to other people about it. Preferably don't talk to one parent negatively about another, it won't end well.

Leah: Find someone to talk to who you trust. Talk to your parents. Don't overthink too much. Don't hide how you feel.

Robin: Talk to your siblings (if you have any) and see what their experience is like. Also do something you enjoy to take your mind off it.

Paige: I would say, don't think that you won't see a parent/Mum/Dad again because you probably will.

Alex: Firstly, don't beat yourself up – it happens and it's not your fault. Be mindful of your parents emotions but don't feel you need to be their council or the 'diplomat' in the middle: you're still a child – enjoy being a child, spend more time with close friends and other family when you feel annoyed or distant from your parents.

Gavin: If you're going to each house an even amount, try to separate your things so some things are at one house and others are at the other; don't try to keep everything you own with you all the time.

Rachel: Try to have open & honest conversations with your parents if they are willing, you do deserve to understand what is going on around you. But, remember your parents may be in pain, be kind and allow them to make mistakes. They can learn, if you help.

Reece: Dear kid, however old you are, it will get better as long as you be sure to take care of yourself (mentally and physically) and put yourself first sometimes, you'll get through it just fine.

Violet: don't take what is happening personally, and don't believe for a minute that it is your fault. It's not because parents don't love each other anymore as a couple that you won't be able to continue having quality family time,

sometimes you may just have to ask them if they would be open to having dinner all together (for example).

Amy: You are not alone in this. There will be people out there that can help, and if nobody's listening to you, make them listen.

To parents:

Jack: Acknowledge your kids feelings and talk to them a lot.

Lauren: Your child is going through a lot so please be there no matter what. Be honest about the separation and don't argue in front of your child. It makes them feel so guilty. Its hard for everyone. Please help them in anyway you can. Thank you for helping them through this!

River: Hey...So um yes you may hate your partner right now, but your child's struggling too...if they are young it won't be as bad, but make sure you remember they love you too.. :D

Ashley: I'm sorry to hear that you have been going through something rough. You can still keep in touch with your child and ex-partner.

Chloe: Make sure you let her feel like she has a choice and a say on what is happening and let her have her feelings without making her feel bad.

Olivia: Always ask how they are feeling. Be real supportive.

Ivy: Keep things fair and if you're having trouble agreeing on things always keep the child in mind and do what's best for them.

Ava: Try not to involve the kids as much as possible.

Parker: Communicate with your child, even if you don't like each other, do it for their sake because they are most important. Talk to your child about what they want/need. Be there for your children but also for yourself. Get help for yourself too. Talk to someone/your ex – try to make it amicable.

Leah: talk to your child and ask them about it. Make sure the other parent is happy. Sort out childcare appropriately. Make sure your child is okay. Don't do anything that you are unhappy with and will stress about.

Robin: Tell your child your plans and see how they feel about the divorce.

Maybe try and help by talking to them.

Paige: I would say, make sure that the child knows that nothing bad is going to happen.

Alex: Don't use your children as emotional soundboards while you're going through family issues. Even if you think they're "mature enough" – they're still children and shouldn't need to carry that emotional baggage with them at a time when they're growing up. Don't completely hide things but share what they do need to know in a kind way.

Gavin: Would be that you have separated so you don't have to try to be friends for the sake of your child. It helps to still have some levels of communication to make life easier for everyone, but don't force yourself into a situation which will just make you uncomfortable.

Rachel: Be kind and honest, your children will be confused, they need to understand what is happening but also that both parents are there for them. Your children will have angry bursts but don't meet their anger with your own, allow them to cool off.

Reece: Listen to your children, they will carry these experiences all their life and learn from it. So teach them lessons that will have positive outcomes from this.

Violet: so long as the separation did not involve abuse, keep communicating and put your children first. You might be important people in your own rights, but you chose to have and raise these kids; they need to be your priority, at least until they are old enough to better understand the situation and express their needs. They need some stability, fair and consistent rules, and they need to know they can come to you if they're ever worried. Also don't date someone who can't respect your previous partner.

Amy: This is your child's life. You will have to make sacrifices, you might not always be happy doing so, but if your child is happy and safer for it, that's all that matters. Listen to your child(ren).

Appendix N: Messages for families and professionals

Some messages for parents:

Young people's time:

- ✓ Most young people like to have a set routine. They like the predictability of it and for adults to be in control. However, young people also want to make some choices, about where they are, especially as they get older. It is important to allow some flexibility in the routine so that young people can see their friends when they want to and can attend family events with the other side of the family even if they fall at a time they would be with you.
- ✓ It is important that young people aren't made to feel guilty about wanting to change the routine. What worked for them when they were 4 might not still work for them when they are 14. Try to let them know that it is ok if they want things to change, and similarly it's ok if they want things to stay the same. Try not to treat the time that you have with your child as something that you own - remember that depriving your ex-partner of time with your child/ren also deprives your child of that time.
- ✓ When deciding when your child/ren are with each parent, try not to get too stuck on the number of days but instead consider the amount of *available* time that each parent will have with the young person. It is important to consider whether each parent has a range of time to experience with the child e.g. time for helping with homework, time that is taken up with driving them to clubs, time when everyone is relaxing and doing their own thing, time that can be spent on an activity together. Can they spend time together, or has one parent only got time when everyone is busy?

- ✓ Whilst you will only see your child for a portion of the week, remember that they are still experiencing all of their time, try to keep this in mind and account for it when planning and making decisions.
- ✓ Children are adaptable and can manage their environments being different. Support them to make the most of the differences, e.g. seeing friends that live nearby, doing homework in the quieter house, playing with half & step siblings.
- ✓ Children see having double celebrations as a bonus of shared residence, but they also like it when the two sides of their family come together for special occasions. Consider whether this is something that you could manage.

Their relationships

- ✓ Children think of lots of different people as family and it is important to respect and consider their views on this.
- ✓ It is important to help young people to keep in contact with whomever they wish when apart from them, if that is what they want.
- ✓ To build and maintain strong bonds, young people and family members need to spend time together. Once those strong bonds exist there is more desire to spend time together and the bond will be maintained.
- ✓ Often we are close to people that our family are close to. It might be that this means there are permeable boundaries between the sides of the family, especially when there are half-siblings in the young person's family.
- ✓ Young people do best when their parents communicate. It is very difficult and damaging for young people to be around conflict. If you do not get on with your ex, do not involve your child, and do not use them as a messenger.

- ✓ Young people find it easier to welcome new people into their family when they can identify them with a known role. Consider how your child views your partner, do they see them as a parent? Consider having conversations about the different roles of the members of your blended family.

Their homes

- ✓ Shared residence is easiest for young people when their parents live in proximity. Consider this when deciding where to live.
- ✓ Young people feel most at home when surrounded by familiar belongings. If one parent stays in the family home and one moves to a new home, consider moving some of the furniture & belongings to the new house.
- ✓ Let your child help to get their new bedroom ready, try to bring some of their things from the family home too. Aim for them to have everything that they need at each house so that they only need to bring a few things between the houses.
- ✓ It is very important that young people are allowed to take up space in other areas of the house, not just their bedrooms. For example, let them have books on shelves downstairs, footballs in the garden, toiletries in the bathroom – it is important that a trace of the young person remains in the house even when they are not there.
- ✓ If the time comes that other people will move into the house with you and your child/ren, be considerate of the fact that they are coming into the young person's territory and talk to your child/ren about how this makes them feel. Be careful to make changes gradually so that the young person still feels at home in the house.
- ✓ Children can cope with different parenting styles leading to different expectations and rules. However, be mindful not to make them feel

guilty about what they might be doing at the other house if it doesn't align with your values.

Messages for adults working with children

- ✓ Amount of time with each parent is not the same as amount of available time. For bonds to be maintained, parents and children need regular opportunities to spend quality time together, as such it is important that each parent has a variety of time with their child/ren.
- ✓ Lots of different people are important to young people, don't suppose that you know who they are closest to without asking them.
- ✓ Children have opinions and preferences about where they live but they are mindful of protecting their parent's feelings. Find low-key & private ways that they can share these preferences with you and reassure the young person that it is ok to share their opinions.
- ✓ What young people want and need at one age is not necessarily consistent throughout their childhood. Routines need to have flexibility built in to account for these changing needs.
- ✓ Not all children from the same household will want or need the same thing.