

# A Level Sociology Knowledge Organiser

## Childhood (Family)

### The social construction of childhood

#### Is childhood more positive today?

##### Yes

**March of progress view** (Aries and Shorter): Children are more valued, better protected and have greater rights. Reasons include higher living standards, smaller family sizes and changes to policies/laws

**The family is more child-centred:**

Children are a focal point of families, at the centre of decision making, parents spend more time with them, family life revolves around children

× Parents spend less quality time with children (30 mins)

**Parents invest more financially:**

£230,000 until 21 due to longer spent in education and 'pester power' from children, have greater opportunities than before, parents may sacrifice own needs

**Longer compulsory education:**

Protected from adult world, better opportunities

##### No

**Conflict view:** Children experience more inequality today, adults exert more control leading to oppression and dependency

**Age patriarchy (Gittens):** Increasing adult dominance and child dependency, parents have more control over children's time, space, bodies

**Paranoid parenting (Furedi):** Culture of fear in parenting means children are monitored/supervised more closely leading to lack of freedom

**Isolation and loneliness (Brannen):** Smaller family sizes + higher divorce rates + longer working hours = increased loneliness for children

**Toxic childhood (Palmer):** Children poisoned by junk culture (media, technology, junk food), harms development

**Childhood is disappearing (Postman):** TV/media leads to children losing innocence, committing adult crimes, dressing like adults

#### It depends

**Womack:** Clusters of children likely to have negative experiences, depends on: Ethnicity: Asian parents may be more strict (Brannen), class: children from low incomes may have less positive childhoods, gender: girls may have more responsibility for housework (Bonke)

**Personal life perspective** – all experiences are different, should understand meaning of childhood to children themselves e.g. children differ in their perception of families and divorce

**Key terms:** Child-centred, March of progress, Conflict view, Age patriarchy, Paranoid parenting, Toxic childhood, Social construction, Commercialisation of childhood

#### Reasons for changes in childhood

##### Child protection laws

- ⊕ Better protected, less risk of abuse
- ⊖ Over-protected, less freedom

##### Free childcare provision

- ⊕ Parents can work, equal opportunities
- ⊖ Less time spent with parents

##### Longer compulsory education

- ⊕ Better opportunities
- ⊖ Increased pressure, less freedom

##### Divorce laws (easier, quicker)

- ⊕ Less conflict/tension in families
- ⊖ Increased stress, loss of contact, poorer socialisation (New Right)

##### Contraceptive policies

- ⊕ Choice/freedom for women, child-centredness
- ⊖ Isolation/loneliness for children

##### Changes in technology

- ⊕ Better opportunities
- ⊖ Toxic childhood, loss of innocence

##### Increased life-expectancy

- ⊕ Grandparents provide childcare, parents can work, socialisation

##### Increase in re-marriage/serial monogamy

- ⊖ Less stability, more reconstituted families, increased conflict/tension

##### More equal gender roles

- ⊕ Positive role models, better socialisation, Dads involved in childcare
- ⊖ Less time spent with parents in dual worker families

**Social construction:** Childhood is not a fixed stage of life but is shaped by society

#### Changes in childhood over time

Middle Ages – children seen as little adults, treated the same (same rights, expectations)

Today – childhood is 'separate' (Pilcher), seen as needing protection/nurture, is a golden age

Today – toxic childhood, shaped by media/technology (Palmer)

Today – childhood is disappearing due to technology/TV – society is shaping childhood, blurring lines (Postman)

#### Changes in childhood across cultures

Wagg – Childhood not the same in all cultures

Benedict – Children in non-industrial societies not seen as significantly different from adults

Punch – Children take responsibility at earlier age in Bolivia

Malinowski – Children's sexual behaviour can be viewed differently

#### The future of childhood

× **Postman:** Childhood is disappearing, children have access to adult world via media, are dressing the same as adults, commit adult crimes and are commercialised, longer education blurs line between child and adult

× **Palmer:** Childhood is disappearing due to being 'toxic' and harming development, lack of outdoor play etc.

✓ **Opie:** Childhood is still a separate stage of life

✓ **Lee:** Childhood not disappearing, is just more ambiguous/complex

✓ **Laws** still distinguish/separate between adults and children (e.g. child protection)

✓ **Personal life:** Not all children negatively affected by changes in society such as divorce or technology