



**Why Generation Z**  
**is choosing happiness**  
**A teen happiness study**  
**commissioned by**

*Coca-Cola*

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## **Introduction**

### **The inspiration for this study**

**Coca-Cola has stood for happiness and optimism since it launched in 1886.**

**Coca-Cola wanted to understand what happiness means to young people today, and what differentiates them from previous generations.**

**The brand wanted to understand what it could learn from teens today and how society both inhibits as well as supports their happiness.**

**Coca-Cola also felt there was no other real in-depth study on teen happiness and that is why it decided to commission this report on why teens choose happiness rather than chase it.**

## Study contributors



**ANNE-LISE GODDINGS**

Dr Anne-Lise Goddings is a paediatrician who completed her undergraduate training at Cambridge University and UCL. Since then, she has worked at a number of London hospitals and is a member of the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health. She is undertaking a PhD as part of an MRC Clinical Research Training Fellowship investigating the effects of puberty on adolescent cognitive brain development, supervised by Sarah-Jayne Blakemore and Professor Russell Viner at UCL.



**BETH REEKLES**

Beth Reekles is a 19-year-old Young Adult author from South Wales, and is currently a Physics undergraduate at Exeter University. She began posting her first novel, *The Kissing Booth*, online to Wattpad when she was 15 years old, and when she was 17 she earned a three-book deal with Random House. In 2013, she was on the *Time's* Top 16 Most Influential Teens list, and in 2014 she was nominated for the Queen of Teen awards. Her current published works are: *The Kissing Booth*, *Rolling Dice*, *Out of Tune*, and *Cwtch Me If You Can*.



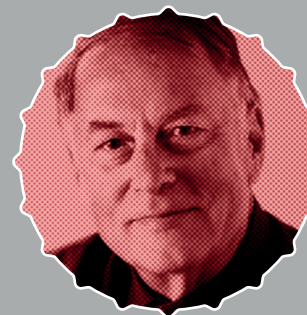
**CHINNY BROWN**

Chinny Brown is a fifteen year old teenager growing up in South London. She is a great voice on everyday teen life, today. She is currently preparing for her GCSE's, approaching next year and enjoys sleeping and Korean culture.



**CHLOE BINGHAM**

Chloe is an aspiring film director and currently an apprentice for the 4Talent team at Channel 4: helping to shortlist and recruit for all of Channel 4's entry level programmes, including The Graduate Scheme and the Work Experience Programme. She sits on the BAFTA Youth Board and has previously sat on Youth Advisory Boards for SBT, The Young Foundation and the National Children's Bureau. In February 2014 she completed a two-year term as an Islington Youth Councillor, with a focus on raising awareness of Youth Unemployment, an issue she is very passionate about.



**JEAN-PIERRE TERNAUX**

Jean-Pierre Ternaux, neurobiologist, is an honorary research director from the "Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique" (CNRS). His research was successively devoted to sleep mechanisms, release of neurotransmitters and development of spinal motor neurons, using in vitro culture methods. He was at the head of a neurosciences laboratory in Marseille for ten years and has also been teaching this field of study all along his career. His last position within the CNRS as scientific director of the communication office involved him deeply into the matters of science communication. Since 2010, he has been the coordinator of the French "Coca-Cola Happiness Observatory". Jean-Pierre Ternaux is also author of several books dedicated to neurosciences, among other subjects such as happiness.



**MARK WILLIAMSON**

Dr Mark Williamson is Director of Action for Happiness ([www.actionforhappiness.org](http://www.actionforhappiness.org)), a movement of people taking action to promote mental wellbeing and create a happier society. Mark also advises organisations of all sizes on issues relating to happiness and wellbeing and regularly speaks on related topics at events across the UK and around the world. He has a diverse range of experience working in both private and non-profit sectors, including the Young Foundation, Carbon Trust, Accenture, What You Can Do, HP Labs and Orange. He holds an MBA from IMD business school in Switzerland, and a PhD in Electronics and Communications from the University of Bristol. He is a Sainsbury Management Fellow, a Chartered Engineer and a member of the Institute of Directors.

## Study contributors



**ROBERT HOLDEN**

Robert Holden Ph.D. created The Happiness Project on the NHS in 1994. His work on happiness has been featured on an Oprah Winfrey Show called How Happy Are You? and in two major BBC TV documentaries called The Happiness Formula and How to Be Happy, shown in 20 countries to over 30 million television viewers.

Robert is the best-selling author of Happiness NOW!, Shift Happens!, Authentic Success (formerly titled Success Intelligence), Be Happy, Loveability and Holy Shift! He hosts a weekly show on Hay House Radio called Shift Happens! He posts daily on his Facebook page (drroberholden). He lives in London, with his wife Hollie, daughter Bo, and son Christopher.



**SUE JACKSON**

Suzanne Jackson is one of Ireland's leading fashion and beauty bloggers. Suzanne created SoSueMe.ie, a one stop shop for celebrity fashion, beauty and lifestyle in July 2010 and since the success of the her 'little' blog has succeeded all expectations being voted one of the most influential fashion websites in Ireland, and Ireland's Best Blogger with Stellar Magazine in 2015.



**TOM CHATFIELD**

Dr Tom Chatfield is an author, broadcaster and technology theorist. The author of five books exploring digital culture, his work has appeared in over two dozen territories and languages. Tom is interested in improving our experiences of digital technology. Past collaborators include Google, the BBC, ITV, Channel 4 Education, Mind Candy, We Are What We Do / Shift, Flamingo, Six to Start, Preloaded, Firefish, Future Lab, Sense Worldwide, SAGE Publications, BMJ Learning, Sugru and Allianz. He speaks and broadcasts around the world on tech, business and media. Appearances include TED Global and the Cannes Lions; authors@Google; the World Congress on Information Technology; Science Foo Camp; and Aspen Seminars for Leaders.



**TOMMIE ROSE**

The 15-year-old schoolboy shot to fame and made international headlines in 2014-2015 after revealing his "black market" school tuck shop. The young businessman, who is trying to fund his university tuition fees, was inspired by TV shows Dragon's Den and The Apprentice. Since then he has had interest from business gurus Duncan Bannatyne and Deborah Meaden, and also been involved in a range of new business and community projects.



**TOM PALMAERTS**

Tom Palmaerts is partner and trend watcher at Trendwolves, experts in European youth culture and its trends. Previously he worked 5 years at Ladda, a non-profit research lab specialized in youth subcultures. There he edited a book 'Talkie Walkie', after a two-year public search to uncover the current meaning of the concept 'subculture'. Within Trendwolves Palmaerts currently conducts research, gives lectures and continually expands a network of young and talented trendsetters, with his main interests being micro trends, tribes, online communities and street culture. In 2009 Tom Palmaerts was awarded "Trendspecialist of the year" by the dutch trendwatching platform Second Sight, as a result of his drive, originality and passion. Since 2013 he also teaches 'scenario thinking' and 'coolhunting' at the postgraduate Trendwatching HoGent. In 2013 and 2014 he was also named trendwatcher of the year by Second Sight.



# **WHY:** **A teen perspective**



**We're not a  
'me' generation.  
We are the  
'we' generation.**

**Our methodology:  
a study of teen happiness**

Coke is one of the first global brands to spotlight what happiness means to teenagers today, through their eyes and the perspectives of world-leading happiness experts. Coke conducted a quantitative study with Tapestry Research of 3,331 teenagers aged 15-19 across the eight European markets (UK, Ireland, France, Belgium, Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden, Norway) and then commissioned Cultural Intelligence at Flamingo to pressure-test the findings with a round table expert salon event in February 2015 before a panel of teens and cultural commentators including: Beth Reekles (Teen & YA Author, named one of the world's most influential teens by Time magazine<sup>1</sup>, UK), Chloe Bingham (Teen & Youth Employment Campaigner, UK), Dr. Tom Chatfield (Tech theorist, gaming and teen expert, UK), Tom Palmaerts (Youth Trendwatcher, Belgium), Dr. Robert Holden (founder of The Happiness Project, UK) and Dr. Mark Williamson (Director, Action for Happiness).

Additional interviews were also conducted with Dr Jean-Pierre Ternaux (Neuroscientist, France), Sue Jackson (Irish Fashion & Beauty Blogger), Tommie Rose (UK Teen and Entrepreneur), Chinny Brown (UK-based Teen), and Dr. Anne-Lise Goddings (Paediatrician & Cognitive Neuroscientist, expert on the teenage brain).

<sup>1</sup>The 16 Most Influential Teens of 2013, TIME.com, 12 November 2013

# Why Generation Z is Choosing Happiness

## A Teen Happiness Study

### Our Top Ten Findings

Report conducted across UK, Ireland, France, Belgium, Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden and Norway with 3,331 Teens aged 15-19 years.

1



72% of teens believe happiness is a choice, not chance.

2



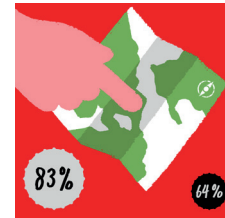
96% of teens have tried doing things in the last year to just feel happy.

3



89% of teens agree that when their friends are smiling and happy, they feel happy too.

4



83% of teens said it is hard to make the right choices in life, 64% say they need help making the right choices in life.

5



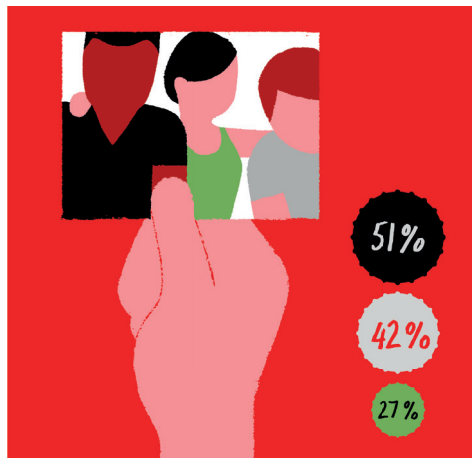
72% of teens see happiness as something that is "down to you. That it's you who can make the choice to be happy and do something about it."

6



78% of European teens agree 'Choosing to be happy is more important than anything else you can do in your life'.

7



The key things that made teens happy in 2014 are; friends 51%, family 42% and social life/love life and school/college all came in at an equal 27%.

8



Only 2% of teens see finances as the most important element in life.

9



85% of teens believe happiness is about appreciating the small things in life.

10



78% feel happier when they see a stranger smile.



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**Let me tell you something about my generation. There's a lot written about us. We get demonized by the older generations for being 'a vain, selfie generation', and 'all about me'. In reality, this couldn't be further from the truth. We're not a 'me' generation. We are the 'we' generation.**

***Beth Reekles***

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### WHY: A Teen Perspective

During the study one of the young people we spoke to was Beth Reekles, a 19 year-old YA author and TED Fellow who was voted one of TIME Magazine's most influential teenagers in 2013. She's helped us with the research all along the way and her story of how she became a published author at the age of 17 makes her an emblem of the 'Do, Don't Dream' generation.

At the age of 15 Beth realised that she wasn't finding the books she wanted to read. She didn't want to read about vampires, she wanted one about straight up high-school life and love. So she went onto Wattpad and started writing her own. Two years later she signed a three series book deal with Random House.



**The 'Do,  
Don't Dream  
generation.'**

## Why happiness matters to this generation of teens?

**Do, don't dream: my generation's brand of happiness, by Beth Reekles, author of Young Adult fiction**

**"So it's time for us to celebrate teens as being part of the We Generation, we are the doers not the dreamers, and we will be heard."**

*"Let me tell you something about my generation. There's a lot written about us. We get demonized by the older generations for being 'a vain, selfie generation', and 'all about me'. In reality, this couldn't be further from the truth. We're not a 'me' generation. We are the 'we' generation.*

*Why do I say this? Because we have social media, it's a huge part of teen life today – between Snapchat and Instagram, Facebook, Twitter and Tumblr. But they aren't the ugly, negative websites the media often portrays them to be; they're all one big support system, with teens at the very core. We encourage each other, create and share content, even help fund Kickstarters and sign petitions. Lately, I've seen a lot of online support and petitions to help trans people, and as for my own experience of support – well, I likely wouldn't be a published author without my readers from Wattpad.*

*I'm not saying we don't have pressures. As teenagers, we are often told that we're too young for this, and too old for that. Too young (and usually dubbed 'inexperienced') to get a part-time job,*

*but expected to start paying adult prices for everything. We're stuck in some kind of purgatory where we're pressured into making apparently huge life decisions ('What do you want to study? What career do you want?'), made to feel like a failure at school equals failure at life, and it feels like nobody will listen to us. As teenagers, we've all heard the phrase 'You think you know best' because apparently, we don't know what's best for us. Apparently, we can't make our own decisions. But we're still expected to decide what path to take from school for the rest of our lives.*

*Which brings me back to how social media helps. The internet is where we can make ourselves be seen, be heard, be noticed. And all without the immense pressures to be an adult already, and buckle under the weight of academia, and where our differences are something to celebrate, not something that makes us a social pariah. I've seen so many posts celebrating different ethnicities – recently, the 'blackout' tag on Tumblr, for instance – and cultures, different body types (I've seen so many blogs promoting healthy bodies without fat-shaming or putting down naturally thin people) and*

*different sexualities – for example, posts on Facebook spreading awareness of asexuality. Everyone needs that bit of celebration to know they're not alone.*

*When I think about the things that make me happy or sad it's this resource that is so helpful. Happiness is up to us and we can create opportunities for ourselves if there aren't any around. I hid away my passion for writing for so long for example, until support online from Wattpad users gave me more self-confidence. Then, in real life, I started owning up to the things I liked. I made a choice to start being who I really was. I stopped caring if people thought I was weird and said, 'I like to write. I like physics. And I don't like that music. This is who I really am.' And it was one of the best decisions I've ever made.*

*So it's time for us to celebrate teens as being part of the We Generation, we are the doers not the dreamers, and we will be heard."*



# Why look at teen happiness?



### A) Happiness is higher on the agenda for teens today than for previous generations

Happiness isn't just a concept for adults to grapple with; it's on the teen radar too. 78% of European teens agree "Choosing to be happy is more important than anything else you can do in your life"<sup>2</sup>. To understand why we need to step back and consider some difficult truths. One of the things which marks this generation out from others before is what tech theorist Tom Chatfield sees as "an accelerated education in reality". This hyper-exposure to the world has driven a very instinctive sense for teens that happiness is not a given: they see and follow the divisions and challenges that compromise wider social wellbeing; they see their parents' generation struggle with their search for happiness and moreover, recent studies show rates of anxiety and depression among adolescents have increased in recent decades<sup>3</sup>.

**"If there were more happy adults, there'd be more happy teenagers; we're all in the soup together."**

**Robert Holden**

Happiness expert Robert Holden: "if there were more happy adults, there'd be more happy teenagers; we're all in the soup together."

And for the first time in generations, there are fewer promises of a comfortable future, as the transition from teenhood into adulthood becomes more complicated: teens today cannot assume the jobs and affluence that their parents did. In 2014 the youth unemployment rate in the euro area stood at an unprecedented 23% (well over that of 2007)<sup>4</sup> and looking ahead for our teens, a more long-term problem with financial and employment looms.<sup>5</sup>

These are major shifts in the social, economic and cultural conditions which shape this generation of teens' attitudes to life and happiness. What's heartening is that we have learnt that the difficulty of these conditions isn't holding teens back in their aspirations for happiness.

Quite the opposite...

### B) Teens are choosing happiness so they can thrive in a new world order

Our study shows that it's not money that drives teens today – only 2% see finances as the most important element in life.<sup>6</sup> They've learned from the mistakes of their parents' generation. New values sit higher on the teen agenda and happiness is at the centre.

**"Teens are now realizing that happiness is not something they have to wait for."**

**Tom Palmaerts**

Teens are not deferring happiness for a later date. Adults are looking back at their lives and regretting not putting happiness higher on their agenda. Teens, more aware than ever, look at it the other way around – they are choosing happiness and doing it now. 72% of teens believe it is a choice not chance. 96% have tried doing things in the last year to feel happy (and more so than they did in 2013)<sup>7</sup>. As European teen trends expert Tom Palmaerts puts it, "teens are realizing that happiness is not something they have to wait for".

As we'll come to see, what teens do to choose and create happiness are varied, as are the emotional benefits they are looking for. But the deeper-lying why they do it is clear – happiness (or acts of happiness) is a tool for teens to navigate their lives better in a changing world, full of opportunities but also challenges; using what Beth calls "owning up to yourself and sharing it with others", what Robert Holden terms their "internal GPS".

**96%**  
of teens have tried doing things in the last year to feel happy (and more so than they did in 2013)

<sup>2</sup>Coca-Cola NWEN Teen Happiness Study, 2015


<sup>3</sup>Are child and adolescent mental health problems increasing in the 21st century? A systematic review, Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry, 2014

<sup>4</sup>European Commission -Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion - Youth employment, 2014


<sup>5</sup>The problem of long-term unemployment in Europe, the economic council of the labour movement, 2014

<sup>6</sup>Coca-Cola NWEN Teen Happiness Study, 2015

<sup>7</sup>Coca-Cola NWEN Teen Happiness Study, 2015



of European teens  
agree “Choosing  
to be happy is more  
important than  
anything else you  
can do in your life”



### C) Society is in danger of educating teens out of happiness

Teens need help. But instead of being listened to they are being shut out. Teens are prioritizing and choosing happiness but they are also telling us that they could do with guidance: 83% say it's hard to make the right choices, 64% say they want help<sup>4</sup>. But Instead of being empathized with, they are demonized. For example we blame their use of technology for creating a maladjusted generation unable to learn or concentrate but don't stop to think we may be using out of date standards – we need to see the world through their eyes.

Society denies them space to act on their happiness instincts. Instead of providing them with the structures to develop their own aspirations and skills, the system is creating a culture of performance – “exam factories”<sup>19</sup> in the words of educationalist Sir Anthony Seldon – which more than ever are pressuring them to be versions of themselves they don't actually want to be.

There are enough pressures to compete. Happiness for teens as we'll see doesn't come from competition it comes from collaboration.

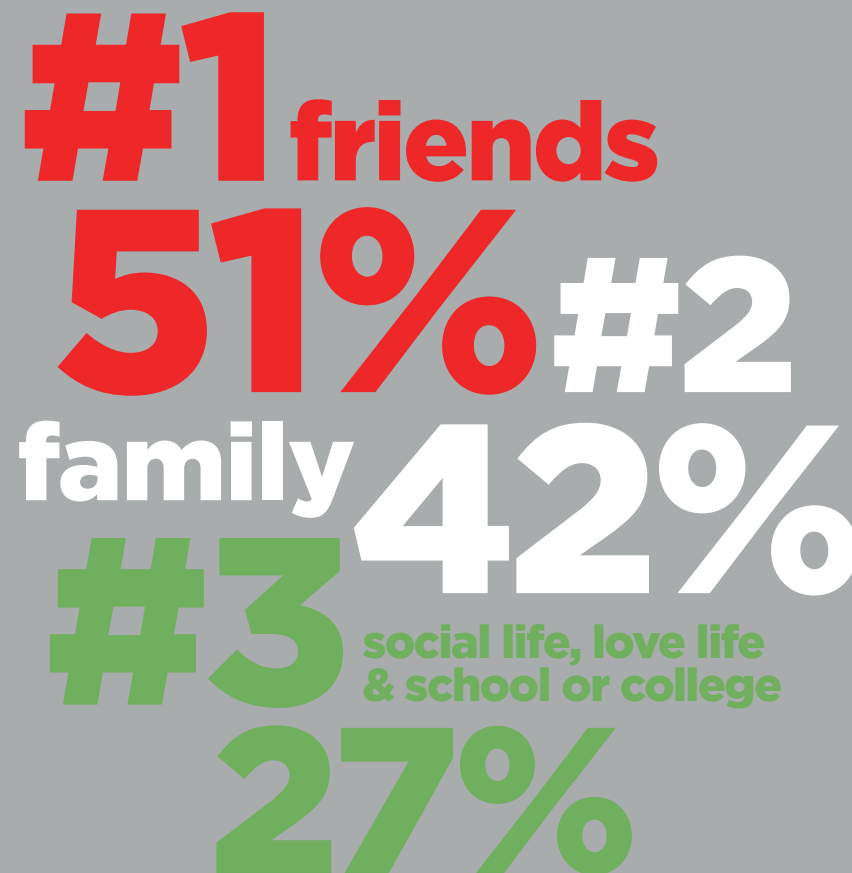
### D) When we listen, we all learn and we all can flourish. Teens can be our happiness gurus.

The biggest building blocks of happiness for teens are other people. If we look at what gave them the most happiness in 2014: #1 friends (51%) and #2 family (42%). #3 was a distant 27% (shared by social life, love life and school/college)<sup>10</sup>. Right now there's an opportunity to learn about happiness from teens when we need it the most. We're looking for alternatives to understanding progress, prosperity and wellbeing – material pleasures we've found don't equate to happiness, for example Action for Happiness Director Mark Williamson says: “All the research says that having money doesn't necessarily make you happy. In fact spending money on experiences makes you a lot happier than spending money on things.” This is an opportunity to learn from the teen instinctive truthfulness instead of educating this out of them.

<sup>4</sup>Coca-Cola NWEN Teen Happiness Study, 2015

<sup>19</sup>Wellington College head: 'Schools becoming exam factories', BBC, 12 October 2011

<sup>10</sup>Coca-Cola NWEN Teen Happiness Study, 2015



**E) Happy kids become successful adults:  
it's time to retune the education system**  
by Mark Williamson, Action for Happiness

We care more than ever about being able to achieve a greater sense of wellbeing. So it is vital that we understand which factors in a young person's life best predict high wellbeing later in their adult lives. The research shows that their emotional health is a much better predictor of lifelong wellbeing than their academic achievement. But this message is completely lost in our system, which puts tremendous pressure on teenagers to achieve. They end up saying to themselves "If I don't get good results, I'm not worth anything", but nothing could be further from the truth.

There are two sides to human nature: one is self-interested, the other is cooperative. Charles Darwin is often remembered for the "survival of the fittest" theory highlighting our selfish tendencies. But actually, if you read Darwin, he talks much more about cooperation than competition. He observed that communities with the most cooperative members are actually more likely to thrive.

Modern culture encourages young people to focus on self-interested behaviours and undermines their collective and empathic instincts. We should be encouraging them to see each other as a source of support, not a source of threat. But our education system promotes success as being better than others, rather than caring about or helping them.

The following section explores what happiness looks like to teens, through their eyes.





**WHAT:**  
**What does  
happiness look  
like for teens  
today?**



**Doing, owning  
and sharing  
happiness**



## What does happiness look like for teens today?

### Doing, owning and sharing happiness

There are three principles at the heart of teen happiness that are distinct from ‘adult happiness’ and particular to this current generation of teens. Specifically, they are doing, owning and sharing happiness.

#### A) Doing Happiness

Our task with this research was to identify the building blocks that make up teen happiness. They are all examples of natural teen behaviours, driven by their formative influences or by their neurologically development. Some may feel like enduring truths, some may feel frivolous, some may feel counter-intuitive. But each are grounded in current cultural conditions specifically true for Generation Z. And they all have things in common: they are about ‘doing’ rather than ‘striving’, they are small, multiple and attainable, rather than large, singular and intimidating, they are at their heart ‘teen’ – teens have helped us identity and build them.

**“People treat me like a child but expect me to act like an adult”**

*Chinny Brown, Teen*

#### B) Owning Teenhood

In the 1940s, the world consisted of children and adults. When LIFE magazine introduced their readership to the concept of a teenager in 1944, they talked of a special time in life – the ‘teen age’ as “a lovely, gay, enthusiastic, funny and blissful society”<sup>11</sup>. Today, society is less positive about the teen years. We seem to fear them, actively chipping away at them and either fast-forwarding them to adulthood, or rewinding them to childhood. danah boyd, author of ‘It’s Complicated, The Social Lives of Networked Teens’<sup>12</sup> says: “just as society formerly wrote women out of civic life, we now prohibit teenagers from many aspects of public life”.

“People treat me like a child but expect me to act like an adult.” – Chinny Brown, Teen

In our salon, Beth Reekles summed up this confused and antagonistic attitude to the teen lifestage perfectly: “Take movies. Child characters are played by child actors. Adult characters are played by adults, but teenagers are played by adults. We get this really warped idea of what we’re supposed to look like.” An example of this is Glee: both Mark Salling and Harry Shum Jr. who played teens at McKinley High are over 30.<sup>13</sup>

Our building blocks show that so much of happiness is about reclaiming the teen years, pressing pause on society’s crazed rush towards adulthood and re-colonising the teen spaces that society is eroding. Essentially teen happiness is about owning those teen years rather than diminishing them.

#### C) Sharing Happiness

Happiness is a social emotion and this generation’s connectivity is amping it up - if teen happiness starts from within the individual, our research shows how contagious it can be. The me-generation has made way for the we-generation. In a world of disconnects and divisions, this generation is driven more by a desire to feel part of something bigger, empathy for others becoming a hallmark as they look to bridge divides not increase them.

**“...this generation is driven more by a desire to feel part of something bigger, empathy for others becoming a hallmark...”**

<sup>11</sup>Teen-Age Girls: They Live In A Wonderful World Of Their Own, LIFE magazine, 11 December 1944

<sup>12</sup>It’s Complicated, The Social Lives of Networked Teens, danah boyd, 2014

<sup>13</sup>Cast’s Birthdays, Glee Wiki,



1.

**Own up to  
your true self**

**Happiness is true,  
vulnerable and raw,  
not candy coated,  
photoshopped  
and curated**



**“Once I started owning up to what I really liked instead of putting forward this toxic front then I started to feel happier.”**

**Beth Reekles**



## **Own up to your true self**

### **Happiness is true, vulnerable and raw, not candy coated, photoshopped and curated**

Part of owning teenhood is owning up to our true selves; living real and raw lives. Teen culture has shifted from tribalism to pluralism. Today's teens have access to massively magnified social networks and are exposed to myriad cultures and stories from across the world. They embrace this diversity; to use activist Jane Elliott's phrase their social world is a 'salad bowl' (where all parts are distinct but integral) rather than a 'melting pot' with a goal of homogeneity.

Previous generations of teens used music and bands to 'badge' identity, adopting one style to broadcast their values. Today, culture has exploded. Gen Z have so much more than music to display their identity. Belonging for Gen Z is about diversity and empathy, rather than 'us and them' tribalism and conformity.

**"They've started from the point that everything is essentially messed up. So they've stopped dreaming and started acting."**

**Tom Palmaerts**

All-inclusive, heterogeneous movements like EDM (Electronic Dance Music) are growing compared to monolithic tribes like Goths and Emos. Empathy and bridging differences is a key source of support and 'authentic happiness'.

"Once I started owning up to what I really liked instead of putting forward this toxic front then I started to feel happier." – Beth Reekles

Teen currency is around how real and raw you can be. With access to 24/7 news-streams and unfiltered information, they're the exposed generation.

"They've started from the point that everything is essentially messed up. So they've stopped dreaming and started acting." – Tom Palmaerts

Unlike Gen Y who believed in the unlimited potential of 'me', Gen Z have fewer illusions. They are pragmatic realists and much more in touch with who they are and the world around them than previous teens.

"I don't have the balls to put myself online in the various states that I live through each day. Uploading unpolished, imperfect, even ugly images for example. But teens can. They are in fact much more grown up than adults." – Dr. Tom Chatfield

"We're not sending selfies with make up on, we're sending selfies with 12 chins, saying, 'Look how beautiful I am today,' just to be self-deprecating." – Beth Reekles

So teen happiness isn't photo-shop happiness, it's not candy-coated or airbrushed. Instead it's about the highs and the lows. They lay themselves bare, expose vulnerabilities and reach a true rawness of happiness as a result. We should all learn to do that a little more.

– 72% of teens see happiness as something that is "down to you. That it's you who can make the choice to be happy and do something about it."<sup>1</sup>

#### How this is playing out today

- **Top 5 celebrities as voted for by US teens are all YouTubers, only 4 'regular' Hollywood celebrities made the top ten.**<sup>2</sup>
- **#NOMAKEUPSELFIE:** UK Teen Fiona Cunningham, raised £8m after starting the #nomakeupselfie viral campaign for Cancer Research.<sup>3</sup>

- **The YouTubers: Constructed celebrity idols are being replaced by young people (just like them) with a webcam. From 'real' beauty tips by Zoella<sup>4</sup> to honest everyday philosophy from danisnotonfire,<sup>5</sup> these new guides are speaking their language.**

<sup>1</sup>"Coca-Cola NWEN Teen Happiness Study, 2015

<sup>2</sup>Survey: YouTube Stars More Popular Than Mainstream Celebs among U.S. Teens, Variety 2014

<sup>3</sup>No-makeup selfies raise £8m for Cancer Research UK in six days, The Guardian, 2014

<sup>4</sup>YouTube channel: [www.youtube.co.uk/user/zoella280390](http://www.youtube.co.uk/user/zoella280390)

<sup>5</sup>YouTube channel: [www.youtube.com/user/danisnotonfire](http://www.youtube.com/user/danisnotonfire)



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**of teens see happiness  
as something that is  
“down to you. That  
it’s you who can make  
the choice to be happy  
and do something  
about it.”**

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**2.**

**Carve out spaces  
for goofiness**

**Gen Z are subjected  
to intense pressure  
and competition  
and their instinct  
is to insulate  
themselves and  
protect pure fun  
and goofiness**







## **Carve out spaces for goofiness**

**Gen Z are subjected to intense pressure and competition and their instinct is to insulate themselves and protect pure fun and goofiness**

Our educational systems across parts of Europe are squashing happiness through testing and rote (repetition) learning. In the UK, primary school pupils face tests more frequently, at a younger age, and in more subjects than children from any other country according to a Cambridge University study. Society is stuck in a 'Happiness Catch 22'<sup>19</sup> – we agree that it's the most important factor in the wellbeing of our teens, but all our energies and infrastructures are focused on 'educating children out of happiness'.

"There are all these appalling problems on the existential scale that we can't do anything about. Information is agonising so laughing in the face of this creates an emotional solidarity with others and helps you be robust." – Dr. Tom Chatfield

They are told to perform, to focus on future success and to compete with each other. They are also faced with the paradox of social media – more connectivity and freedoms but more exposure and social comparison. This is a perfect storm of pressures – a recipe for unhappiness.

- While for 13% of our female teens picked self image as having a positive effect on their happiness, more than double this (27%) highlighted it as a detractor of happiness (whereas male teens picked it at +12%/-14% respectively).<sup>20</sup>

<sup>19</sup>Primary Curriculum and Assessment: England and other countries, The Primary Review, 2008

<sup>20</sup>Coca-Cola NWN Teen Happiness Study, 2015

But rather than breaking, the teen response is often to poke fun at it. Today's teens are very good at putting walls up around themselves and creating spaces where they can just let go, have fun, be goofy. These spaces are pure, protected from adult expectations and their chance to mock the mad world they're dealing with, building their own resilience.

And this is ushering in a whole new tone and aesthetic. They prefer YouTube superstars to Hollywood actors and share silly pictures on Snapchat rather than over-polished selfies, because being able to laugh at yourself means more for this generation.

"A big theme is 'lollology'. The importance of instant fun. This generation of teens like to have fun and it is imperfect." – Tom Palmaerts

**Today's teens are very good at putting walls up around themselves and creating spaces where they can just let go, have fun, be goofy.**

### How this is playing out today

- **6-Second Sillies:** Jerome Jarre is the king of short-form video looping app Vine and has over 8 million dedicated followers on the platform alone. His goofy videos regularly become number one trending topics covering practical jokes, slapstick and partial nudity.<sup>21</sup>

- **Goofy Gaming:** Through video sharing, a new aspect of computer gaming has started to evolve that, despite high-tech graphics and complex gameplay options, is creating and celebrating silly videos – games such as Goat Simulator (allowing the player to take the role of goat, that blows up) to Operate Now (which involves performing messy surgery) have garnered millions of views.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>21</sup>Jerome Jarre: The Making of a Vine Celebrity, New York Times, 28 January, 2015

<sup>22</sup>Goat Simulator - IT'S HERE & IT'S AWESOME!, YouTube, 29 March 2014

# 'lollology'

**"A big theme is 'lollology'.  
The importance of instant fun.  
This generation of teens like to  
have fun and it is imperfect."**

***Tom Palmaerts***



An illustration on a red background showing two white hands holding a central black device. The device has a grey rectangular component in the middle with four white dots. Two green and white striped wires extend from the top, and two grey and white striped wires extend from the bottom. The hands are wearing white gloves with green and grey bands.

**3.**

**Embrace  
everyday joy  
Don't dismiss  
it as 'instant  
gratification';  
the teen brain  
is happiness -  
hardwired for  
living in the  
moment**

**‘The sense is that today’s teens have to make do with less, they have to settle with less and so the essential parts of life such as love, children, family, friends all become very, very important. They even appreciate a bit of boredom and smallness.’**

**Tom Palmaerts**



## Embrace everyday joy

### Don't dismiss it as 'instant gratification'; the teen brain is happiness - hardwired for living in the moment

Teens are neurologically hardwired to feel the now, to experience everyday moments more intensely than adults. The limbic region of the brain (desire, pleasure and motivation) is highly active in teens so if a teen and an adult have the same experience, the teen feels it more. We dismiss this natural teen ability as instant gratification whilst at the same time, as adults, we are trying desperately to re-learn these skills in the form of mindfulness or appreciating the now.

"We think the limbic system, the reward system, is particularly active in adolescents. So small things that adults get a little bit of a sense of happiness from, adolescents get more."  
- Dr. Anne-Lise Goddings

Our gaze is on the horizon - we should be noticing what's right in front of our noses. Society places so much emphasis on life goals and the future, and adults adopt this attitude when thinking about happiness. We see it as an external 'thing' to acquire and aim towards, but our 'destination addiction' is counterintuitive.

"As society we have turned happiness into an 'it' or a 'thing' that we chase or search for or in particular try to 'get'. We've turned it into a commodity. When you place happiness outside of yourself you end up with a manic society racing faster and faster to get there." - Dr. Robert Holden

Happiness is found in small everyday moments today, not far-off achievements that leave it always one step away.

- 85%: Proportion of teens who believe that happiness is 'appreciating the small moments' or 'a general sense of well-being, of feeling contented'<sup>23</sup>
- Those who define happiness as 'appreciating small moments' tend to be happier - (59% rated their happiness in 2014 as 7+ vs. 53% for everyone else).<sup>24</sup>

"The sense is that today's teens have to make do with less, they have to settle with less and so the essential parts of life such as love, children, family, friends all become very, very important. They even appreciate a bit of boredom and smallness."  
- Tom Palmaerts

Teens 'do' happiness, they're not trying to define it. They choose via experiences and actions; a generation of do-ers, Gen Z see the best solution for the future is in focusing and engaging in the now as apposed to Gen Y who are being left behind - still dreaming.

**...small things that adults get a little bit of a sense of happiness from, adolescents get more."**  
*Anne-Lise Goddings*

#### How this is playing out today

- **Sharing For Now:** Ephemeral photo sharing app Snapchat has over 30m active monthly users and 71% of these are under 25. Sharing photos here is simply about doing it, viewing it and then moving on to the next one as it expires.<sup>25</sup>

- **JOMO** is fast replacing FOMO for this demographic who cherish time spent with others, face to face and away from distraction. As expert Tom Palmaerts says, "turning off your phone is the new luxury for Gen Z". Activities, such as binge watching TV shows, allow for fully dedicated concentration, whether with friends or on their own.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>23</sup>Coca-Cola NWEN Teen Happiness Study, 2015

<sup>24</sup>Coca-Cola NWEN Teen Happiness Study, 2015

<sup>25</sup>This Chart Explains Why You're Not on Snapchat, TIME, 4 April 2014

<sup>26</sup>Coca-Cola NWEN Teen Happiness Study, 2015



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**proportion of teens  
who believe that  
happiness is  
‘appreciating the small  
moments’ or ‘a general  
sense of well-being, of  
feeling contented.’**

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4.

**Risk today, life skills tomorrow**  
**Teens push themselves out of their comfort zone.**  
**Society thinks risk jeopardizes wellbeing but in fact it leads to adaptability, resilience and long-term happiness.**





## **Risk today, life skills tomorrow**

### **Teens push themselves out of their comfort zone. Society thinks risk jeopardizes wellbeing but in fact it leads to adaptability, resilience and long-term happiness.**

Our world today is changing at pace and is characterized by VUCA (volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity). We don't understand the world our teens will inherit: according to futurist Thomas Frey, 60% of the jobs we will do ten years from now haven't been invented yet.<sup>27</sup>

Despite this, we are intent on crushing one of the instincts that teenagers have which equip them for a fast-changing world: risk. The teen brain is wired for risk: a healthy teen reflex which allows them to experience firsts and develops their skills at coping, managing and learning from the new.

"Teens are designed to push boundaries, to explore, to discover. The decision making part of the brain hasn't yet kicked in to tell them not to take risks. They're 'designed' to take risks, to not feel fear and go with their heart" – Dr. Jean-Pierre Ternaux

"If you never let that teen do anything or go anywhere how can they cook for themselves or do a wash? They might shrink every item of clothing but you have to let them try. The little day-to-day things are how they get that maturity and flexibility and cognitive capacity to become independent" – Dr. Anne-Lise Goddings

<sup>27</sup> 55 Jobs of the Future, Thomas Frey, DaVinci Institute, 2011

But as adults, we associate risk with danger, in particular when thinking about our children. We box them in. Our world is risk-averse and lacks the conditions needed for teens to explore and try out new things... a sort of biological short circuitry.

– At 18% 'Personal development' is the third most important net contributor to happiness (behind family & friends).<sup>28</sup>

Taking risks isn't just the negative elements that societies sees about experimenting, it's also about travelling alone, cooking for yourself, learning independence. It's the imbalance between the executive functions and decision-making part of the brain and the reward, emotional system of the brain that means when a teen weighs up a decision, they are drawn to 'the new'. The fact that these two parts of the brain are developmentally out of sync in teens suggests it's an evolutionary need to be adventurous. Experiencing risk is a life skill not just a pleasure.

#### How this is playing out today

● Demand For Risk: The Scouting movement, which saw its numbers decline during the 1990s, has grown by 20 per cent in the last eight years to 536,787.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Coca-Cola NWN Teen Happiness Study, 2015

<sup>29</sup> Scouting movement, UK, 2013

"The whole point of Challenge UK is to equip young people with things they don't learn at school. School is goal-orientated. If you don't progress you'll fall behind and won't necessarily progress any further. I think teaching young people work skills is very important. There needs to be a lesson in school that does that, otherwise when entering the world of work young people won't be able to adapt effectively"

– Chloe Bingham, Teen, on Challenge UK <sup>30</sup>

**"Teens are designed to push boundaries, to explore, to discover. They are designed to take risks..."**

**Dr Jean-Pierre Ternaux**

● Exploration through gaming: Titles such as Minecraft, which are built with what Tom Chatfield calls 'beautiful seams' allow the player to explore what is possible and redirect elements within the game.

<sup>30</sup> The Challenge Society



A stylized illustration on a red background. A white hand enters from the left, holding a large black circle. Inside this circle are two black smartphones. Each phone has a green and white striped band wrapped around its back. A green and white striped cord is attached to the bottom of the phones and extends towards the bottom left corner of the frame.

**5.**

**Happiness:**  
**pass it on**  
**Happiness is**  
**contagious and**  
**teens' 'baked-**  
**in' connectivity**  
**is effortlessly**  
**multiplying it**

**“This new generation of teens is less focused on consumption and more focused on contribution. They’re asking ‘How can I do something that makes a difference?’ and they long to be part of something bigger in a more meaningful way.”**

**Mark Williamson**

5.

## **Happiness: Pass it on**

### **Happiness is contagious and teens' 'baked-in' connectivity is effortlessly multiplying it**

The 'me-generation' has made way for the 'we-generation'. As danah boyd highlights in her 2014 book, 'It's Complicated':<sup>31</sup> teens aren't addicted to social media so much as they are addicted to their friends and to the human contact the web allows. Adults worry about cyber-bullying, but teens also recognise the positives: communities of support.

"Adults think teens are passively on their iPads in their rooms, and that the online world is evil and populated by cyber-bullies. But we're out there connecting and sharing and creating. The online world is actually about finding supportive communities that help each other" – Beth Reekles

And it's not just about helping each other on an individual scale, it's about creating movements for good. Doing good feels good.

"This new generation of teens is less focused on consumption and more focused on contribution. They're asking 'How can I do something that makes a difference?' and they long to be part of something bigger in a more meaningful way." – Dr. Mark Williamson.

Moreover, in today's hyper-connected world, happiness is a contagious emotion. As Mark Williamson notes: "Mood, like a happy mood, is contagious, measurably, to three degrees of separation. If I've been cheerful to the bus driver, who's been more friendly to the next passenger, he'll go home and have a slightly more constructive conversation with their sister." Happiness starts with you, but it continues and grows and becomes contagious with others.

"Being part of something in a bigger way. Even if you're not necessarily contributing original content, just sharing and commenting. That's a really big thing." – Beth Reekles

- 89%: Proportion of teens who agree that "When my friends around me are smiling it makes me feel happy as well. (78% still agree even if it is a stranger)"<sup>32</sup>

This sociability and contagion of happiness sits naturally within a generation weaned on social media and sharing. So this isn't just about teens. In fact it's good for all of us that teens choose happiness because they are the best placed to share that around.

"You might start with 'my happiness' but fundamentally it is going to be shared. That's what becomes meaningful. In basic terms, if you see a beautiful sunset, you don't think, 'Oh my god I hope I'm the only one seeing this today.' 'Everyone else look away, this is for me.' You want to share that experience." – Dr. Robert Holden

- Three of the four most common tactics teens choose to increase happiness are social: (Phone a friend – 51%, use social media – 50%, set aside time to be with people I care about – 47%).<sup>33</sup>

**"You might start with 'my happiness' but fundamentally it is going to be shared. That's what is meaningful."**  
**Dr Robert Holden**

#### How this is playing out today

● **Emoji Me:** Emoji use in digital messages has exploded in recent years, with teens leading the charge. The pictorial character set of smiling icons and curious objects or actions (such as joy, eyes, wave) speeds up communication by encouraging sentiment over precision.

● **Creating Own Culture:** Teens are building their own networks to share their creations and in doings so outlining their own culture of sharing and feedback. Networks such as Wattpad<sup>34</sup> or CowBird<sup>35</sup> are an ongoing conversation of teen publishing and consumption.


<sup>31</sup>It's Complicated, The Social Lives of Networked Teens, danah boyd, 2014

<sup>32</sup>Coca-Cola NWEN Teen Happiness Study, 2015


<sup>33</sup>Coca-Cola NWEN Teen Happiness Study, 2015

<sup>34</sup>Wattpad: the world's largest community for readers and writers ([www.wattpad.com](http://www.wattpad.com))

<sup>35</sup>CowBird: a public library of human experience ([www.cowbird.com](http://www.cowbird.com))



**Proportion of teens  
who agree that “When  
my friends around me  
are smiling it makes  
me feel happy as well.  
(78% still agree even  
if it’s a stranger)”**



### So what is the new language of teen happiness?

Our work has shown that there isn't one singular definition: we need a new happiness lexicon. Within this complexity, teens are already crafting or adapting new methods of expression. Emergent forms of communication such as short form social media, videos and even Emojis are allowing teens to employ levels of ambiguity or subtlety in order to communicate.

As Sherry Turkle, author of *Alone Together*, notes "One of the pleasures of digital communication is that it does not need a message. It can be there to trigger a feeling rather than transmit a thought. Indeed, for many teenagers who discover feelings by texting them, communication is the place where feelings are born."<sup>36</sup> Happiness for teens doesn't sit in a dictionary, it's not cerebral and conceptual, it's lived, experienced, multiple and cumulative. Above all it's shared, morphed and ever-changing.

<sup>36</sup> *Alone Together*, Sherry Turkle, 2013

vulnerable truthful  
 small goofy choose  
 everyday share  
 infectious little things  
 different support  
 spontaneous silly  
 free laugh simple  
 fun warm & fuzzy  
 'buzzin' realistic  
 intuitive confidence  
 together space



# RESEARCH FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

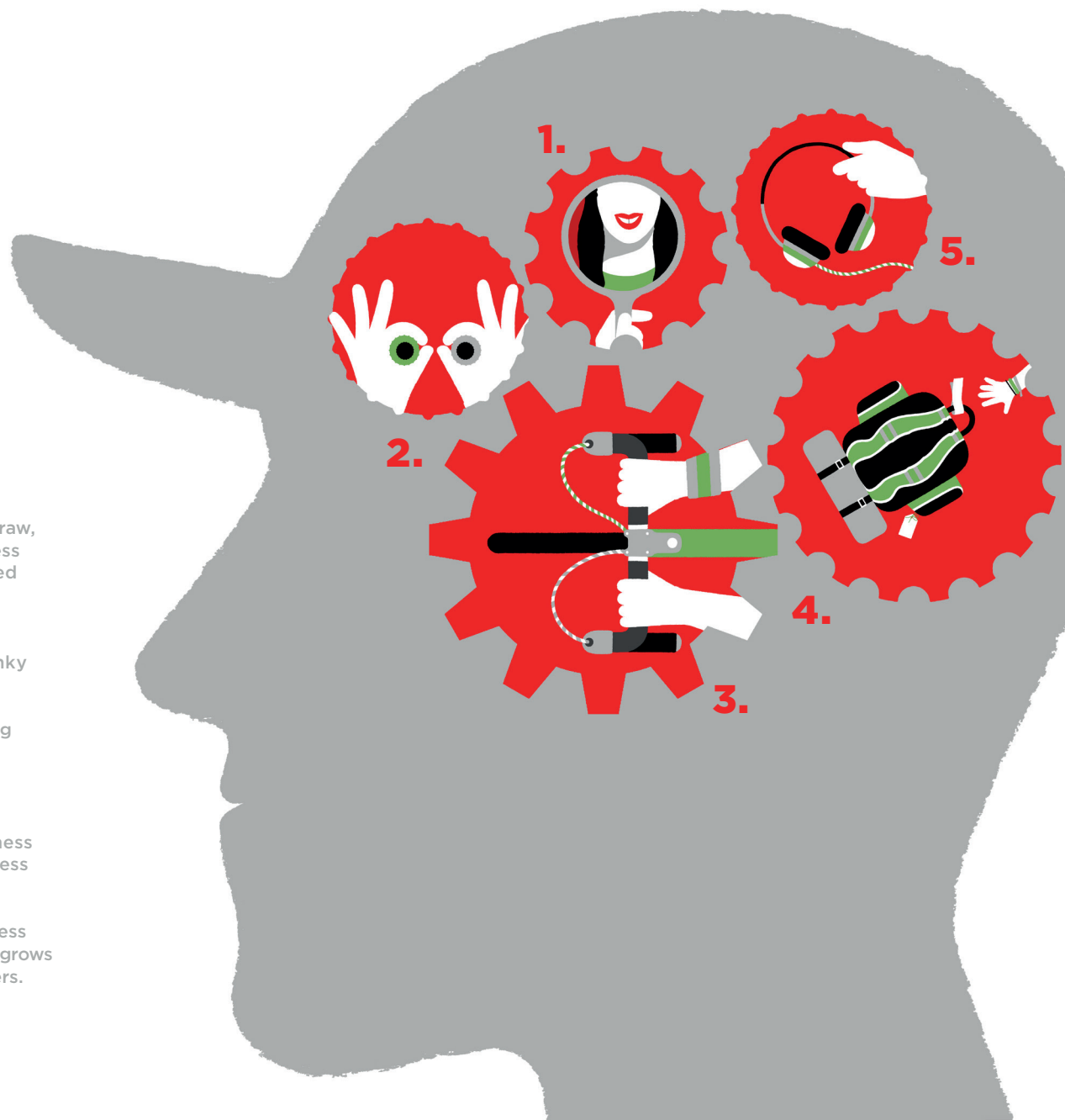
## Take-outs for Teens

This generation of teens is doing, reclaiming and sharing happiness to thrive in a challenging new world order.

We are not adding to the list of steps or tips for happiness handed down from some all-knowing source. We want to provide sparks of inspiration and by laying them out here we are making a promise to help amplify these behaviours so they can be lived more, experienced deeply and shared further by teens.

Choosing Happiness by...

1. **Owning up to your true self.** Being raw, real and resilient because happiness doesn't come from a photoshopped view of the world.
2. **Carving out spaces for goofiness** because happiness should be wonky not perfect.
3. **Embracing everyday joys** by being in the moment and not deferring happiness to a faraway future.
4. **Braving life outside the comfort zone,** because firsts and fearlessness stimulate a higher form of happiness and give you the edge.
5. **Passing the experience on:** happiness starts with you, but it continues and grows and becomes contagious with others.



## **What can we learn from teens?**

We can all learn from how teens choose and create happiness, not just as a way to feel better about life but as a way to live it better. This means re-evaluating some ways of how we think about happiness.

### **01. Everyone can learn from teens' instincts to choose happiness.**

Instead of educating teens out of happiness, we all have the opportunity to relearn what came naturally to us as teens.

### **02. Choose don't chase happiness.**

See it as something inside yourself. A set of instincts to believe in and navigate by, rather than an 'it' outside of yourself, that you chase after.

### **03. Experience happiness now, not in the nearly-now.**

Pause and see happiness in the day-to-day rather than the achievement of a far-off goal.

### **04. Keep experiencing your own firsts.**

Instead of being nostalgic for the optimism of youth, when everything felt new, experience happiness by doing and living it.

### **05. Happiness helps you live life better.**

It's not just a warm and fuzzy feeling or end-goal. Happiness sharpens the skills and emotional resilience to live well in a complex world. If you are choosing happiness you are setting yourself up to succeed and thrive.

### **06. Help teens own their teenhood rather than contributing to society's crazed rush towards adulthood.**

We can learn so much about happiness from teenagers, so let's not demonise or diminish those very special years in which they 'do' their best happiness!

### **07. Happiness can be raw, about the highs and the lows.**

Teens lay themselves bare and we can learn from their 'empowering vulnerability'.

### **08. Spread and share happiness and see social media as a place for support and empathy.**

### **09. Teens don't need happiness lessons.**

They need the space and help to amplify the things they do which make them happy.

### **10. Happiness at its best comes from collaboration not competition.**

There's already too much competition in the world, and making a contribution, helping others and belonging to something bigger than yourself leads to a richer form of happiness.



## **Appendix:**

## **Ireland**

## **quantitative findings**

# Ireland

## Teens & Happiness: Key Stats

84% of Irish teens see happiness as a choice rather than chance.

It seems the ‘luck of the Irish’ doesn’t seem to extend to happiness for teens with 84% of Irish teens seeing happiness as a choice rather than chance.

However it’s a choice that Irish teens are taking seriously with 86% believing their happiness is the most important thing in life (compared to 78% in Europe) and something they are focusing on more (70% compared to 51% in Europe).

For Irish females though, love can’t conquer all, with love lives causing more unhappiness than happiness.

### Key Statistics

Shown beside is a summary of the key stats from the NWEN study on Teen Happiness. It was carried out in December 2014 among 15-19 year olds in UK, Ireland, France, Netherlands, Belgium, Norway, Denmark and Sweden. A total of 128 teens in Ireland took part in the study, weighted to 500. We’ve benchmarked the results for Ireland against those for all of Europe (a total of 3331 including Ireland, weighted to 4000).

How happy are teens?	Ireland	Europe (incl IRL)	IRL Males	IRL Females
Scale of 0-10, average score	6.3	6.5	6.6	6

Although they're not unhappy, teens in Ireland are not as happy as their peers in Europe. In general, males are happier than females.

Is happiness choice or chance?	Ireland	Europe (incl IRL)	IRL Males	IRL Females
Choice – you can make a choice to be happy and do things about it	84%	72%	84%	83%
Chance – its down to luck, sometimes good things happen	16%	28%	16%	17%

There's consensus among teens that happiness is a choice, not chance.

How are teens defining happiness?	Ireland	Europe (incl IRL)	IRL Males	IRL Females
Being happy is about appreciating small moments	37%	34%	35%	40%
Being happy comes from having lots of small moments	11%	12%	10%	11%
Being happy means having a general sense of well-being, of feeling contented	35%	39%	36%	33%
Being happy means having goals in life and achieving them	17%	15%	19%	16%

Whereas adults need to work at 'mindfulness', for teens it comes naturally. They don't define happiness in terms of chasing future goals, but as a general sense of well-being and appreciating small moments. What are the building blocks of happiness (according to teens)?

What are the building blocks of happiness (according to teens)?	Ireland	Europe (incl IRL)	IRL Males	IRL Females
Friendships	47%	39%	58%	37%
Family	40%	27%	44%	37%
Social life	13%	15%	26%	1%

Friends, family and social life are the main drivers of happiness in the UK. Friends and family have equal importance in the UK. Biggest contributors to happiness (% saying 'makes them happy' > % saying 'makes them unhappy')

Self-image, finances and academic life	Ireland	Europe (incl IRL)	IRL Males	IRL Females
Self-image	-16%	-8%	-12%	-19%
Finances	-16%	-7%	-7%	-25%
School/college/university	-5%	0%	-1%	-9%

Self-image, finances and career are the biggest barriers to happiness for teens in Ireland – particularly for females. Biggest detractors to happiness (% saying 'makes them happy' < % saying 'makes them unhappy')

The value of a smile	Ireland	Europe (incl IRL)	IRL Males	IRL Females
When my friends around me are smiling it makes me feel happy as well	91%	89%	92%	89%
If I see a stranger in the street smile it makes me want to smile too	73%	78%	66%	80%

Teens have an instinct for happiness and recognise the simple value of a smile. It can come from their friends, or from a stranger. Females are the most receptive to a smile. % of teens agreeing with these statements

Help needed	Ireland	Europe (incl IRL)	IRL Males	IRL Females
It's easy to say "I want to be more happy" but it's hard to actually do it	81%	83%	79%	83%
I'd love it if someone could help me to make better decisions to increase happiness in my life	77%	64%	80%	73%

Teens know from experience – most have tried doing things in 2014 to make themselves feel happy – that saying you want to be happy is much easier than actually doing it. % of teens agreeing with these statements.



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