

## Letter to the Telegraph

As professionals and academics from a range of backgrounds, we are deeply concerned at the escalating incidence of childhood depression and children's behavioural and developmental conditions. We believe this is largely due to a lack of understanding, on the part of both politicians and the general public, of the realities and subtleties of child development.

Since children's brains are still developing, they cannot adjust – as full-grown adults can – to the effects of ever more rapid technological and cultural change. They still need what developing human beings have always needed, including real food (as opposed to processed “junk”), real play (as opposed to sedentary, screen-based entertainment), first-hand experience of the world they live in and regular interaction with the real-life significant adults in their lives.

They also need time. In a fast-moving hyper-competitive culture, today's children are expected to cope with an ever-earlier start to formal schoolwork and an overly academic test-driven primary curriculum. They are pushed by market forces to act and dress like mini-adults and exposed via the electronic media to material which would have been considered unsuitable for children even in the very recent past.

Our society rightly takes great pains to protect children from physical harm, but seems to have lost sight of their emotional and social needs. However, it's now clear that the mental health of an unacceptable number of children is being unnecessarily compromised, and that this is almost certainly a key factor in the rise of substance abuse, violence and self-harm amongst our young people.

This is a complex socio-cultural problem to which there is no simple solution, but a sensible first step is to encourage parents and policy-makers to start talking about ways in which we can improve children's well-being. We therefore propose as a matter of urgency that

- public debate be initiated on child-rearing in the 21st century
- this issue should be central to public policy-making in coming decades.

Signatories:

**Professor Peter Abbs**, University of Sussex  
**Liz Attenborough**, Manager *Talk to Your Baby* Campaign  
**Robin Balbernie**, Consultant Child and Adolescent Psychotherapist  
**Jean Barlow**, Teacher Consultant, Rochdale Children's Trust  
**Sally Barnes**, writer and consultant on early years education  
**Geoff Barton**, headteacher King Edward VI School, Suffolk  
**Camilla Batmanghelidjh**, founder, Kids Club  
**Virginia Beardshaw**, CEO, I CAN  
**Professor Ron Best**, Roehampton University  
**John C Beyer**, Director of Mediawatch UK  
**Sir Richard Bowlby**, President, Centre for Child Mental Health  
**David Brazier**, Ph.D., Rev. author, abbot  
**Professor Tim Brighouse**, Commissioner for London Schools  
**Mick Brookes**, General Secretary, National Association of Head Teachers  
**Professor Greg Brooks**, University of Sheffield  
**Dr Christopher Houghton Budd**, economic historian  
**Christabel Burniston**, President, The English Speaking Board  
**Jean Clark**, Fellow of the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy  
**Paul Cooper**, editor *Soccer Coaching International*  
**Pie Corbett**, author and literacy consultant  
**Arthur Cornell**, Chairman, Family Education Trust  
**Jill Curtis**, [www.familyonwards.co.uk](http://www.familyonwards.co.uk)  
**Professor Tricia David**, Canterbury Christchurch University College  
**Marion Dowling**, President, British Association of Early Childhood Education  
**Dr John Dunford**, General Secretary, Association of School and College Leaders  
**Margaret Edgington**, Early Years specialist consultant and author  
**Dr Peter Elfer**, Roehampton University  
**Michele Elliot**, Director, Kidscape  
**Professor Colin Feltham**, Sheffield Hallam University  
**Anne Fine**, author and former Children's Laureate  
**Helen Freeman**, Director of Publications, Scholastic Magazines  
**Dr Marilyn Fryer**, C.Psychol. The Creativity Centre Ltd.  
**Di Gammage**, Play Therapist, University of Plymouth  
**Jan Georgeson**, University of Gloucestershire  
**Melanie Gill**, child forensic psychologist, Commonsense Associates  
**Christopher Gilmore**, Atma-Dovetales Educational  
**Sally Goddard Blythe**, Director, Institute for Neuro-Physiological Psychology  
**Diana Goodey**, educational author  
**Prue Goodwin**, literacy specialist, University of Reading  
**Rob Grant**, Lecturer in Development Economics, University of East Anglia  
**Baroness Susan Greenfield**, Director of the Royal Institution  
**Dr Natasha Grist**, University of East Anglia  
**Grethe Hooper Hansen**, former head of S.E.A.L., educational consultant  
**Colin and Jacqui Hawkins**, children's authors  
**Sylvie Héту**, international trainer, International Association of Infant Massage  
**Brenda Hobbins**, founder, Osiris Educational  
**Dr Richard House**, Research Centre for Therapeutic Education, Roehampton University  
**Dr Frances Hutchinson**, economist  
**Virginia Ironside**, journalist and author

**Julie Jennings**, Chair of the Early Childhood Education Forum  
**Sue Johnston-Wilder**, Senior Lecturer in Mathematics Education, Open University  
**Martin Large**, author of *Set Free Childhood*  
**Dr Penelope Leach**, author and childcare expert  
**Dr John Lees**, University of Greenwich  
**Professor Del Loewenthal**, Roehampton University  
**Dr Christine Macintyre**, Hon Fellow, University of Edinburgh  
**Neil McLelland**, Chief Executive, National Literacy Trust  
**Dr Peter Martin**, Principal Lecturer in Counselling Psychology, Roehampton University  
**Mildred Masheder**, writer on childhood, author of *Positive Parenting*  
**Dr Brien Masters**, Director, London Waldorf Teacher Training Seminar  
**Dr Roland Meighan**, educational publisher and author of *Comparing Learning Systems*  
**Michael Morpurgo**, author and former Children's Laureate  
**Professor Janet Moyles**, Anglia Polytechnic University  
**Craig Newnes**, C. Psychol., editor of *Making and Breaking Children's Lives*  
**Vincent Nolan**, Synectics Education Initiative  
**Haya Oakley**, Hon Sec of The College of Psychoanalysts  
**Lynne Oldfield**, Director, London Waldorf Early Childhood Training Course  
**Jayne Osgood**, Senior Research Fellow, London Metropolitan University  
**Sue Palmer**, literacy consultant and author of *Toxic Childhood*  
**Professor Michael A. Peters**, University of Illinois  
**Gervase Phinn**, former school inspector and author  
**Professor David Pilgrim**, clinical psychologist and academic author  
**Chris Ponsford**, *What About the Children?*  
**Sir Jonathan Porritt**, environmental campaigner  
**Denis Postle**, psychotherapist and author of *The Mind Gymnasium*  
**Philip Pullman**, author  
**Tom Raines**, Editor, *New View* magazine  
**Dr Graham Rawlinson**, , educational psychologist, University of Sussex  
**Professor Colin Richards**, HMI (ret.)  
**Dr Alex Richardson**, Mansfield College, Oxford; author of *They Are What We Feed Them*  
**Veronika Robinson**, Editor of *The Mother* magazine  
**Dr Dorothy Rowe**, psychologist and writer  
**Professor Andrew Samuels**, University of Essex  
**Wendy Scott**, former early years adviser to the DfES  
**Dorothy Selleck**, Early Years consultant  
**Dr Aric Sigman**, writer, broadcaster and author of *Remotely Controlled*  
**Pippa Smith** and **Miranda Suit**, co-founders of Media March UK  
**Professor Margaret Snowling**, University of York  
**Professor Ernesto Spinelli**, psychotherapist and counselling psychologist, Regent's College, London  
**Dr Pat Spungin**, [www.raisingkids.co.uk](http://www.raisingkids.co.uk)  
**Dr Stephen Sterling**, academic and author of *Sustainable Education*  
**Professor Brian Thorne**, University of East Anglia and the College of Teachers  
**Dr Sami Timimi**, consultant child and adolescent psychiatrist, Lincolnshire  
**Nick Totton**, Editor, *Psychotherapy and Politics* journal  
**Norman Wells**, Director, Family Education Trust  
**Dr David Whitebread**, University of Cambridge  
**Hilary Wilce**, education columnist and author  
**Bryony Williams**, nursery manager  
**Jacqueline Wilson**, author and Children's Laureate  
**Sarah Woodhouse**, *Right From the Start* education and support project for parents