

Topic 1

What makes us happy?

Family, sunshine and a giraffe

In the good old days, a successful country had a high gross domestic product. Now, governments also want to measure how happy their citizens are. There have been many surveys which try to put a number on people's quality of life and feelings of contentment.

Here five young English-speakers from around the world tell us what makes them happy.

Karl Holme, 18, Australia: 'Give me sunshine!'

One thing we Aussies say a lot is "No worries". Of course, we do have worries, but with the sunshine and the beach it's hard to get too worked up. At least, that's how I feel. I live in Queensland, so I spend most of the year in shorts and T-shirts. I reckon people who live in sunny countries will always be happier than people who live in cold places.

Tasha Khan, 16, UK: 'It's the people around you.'

It used to annoy me how our house was always full of aunts and uncles drinking tea and gossiping. I never had much privacy. Now, I think it's one of the good things in my life – I have some connection with my Bangladeshi roots. And I never feel lonely. There's always someone to talk to. So, family is one of the things that makes life good – the bigger the better!

Neil Maclean, 19, Canada: 'Downtown – no better place to be.'

People say Disneyland is the happiest place on earth, but I think it's Canada. In surveys on quality of life, a Canadian city is always in the top five places. And lucky me – I live in a city! I like having a sports centre and a movie theatre near me. Maybe I wouldn't be so happy if I was stuck out in the middle of nowhere.

Josh Stockton, 17, US: ‘Enjoy life – play games.’

I’m quiet and not that into sport. The best part of my day is when school is over. Then I boot up my computer and join my friends online. It’s great to be part of the gaming community. We share the same interests, so we have plenty to talk about. Some of the graphics seem almost real. And the soundtracks are so amazing you can just sit back and listen to them. You don’t even need to play the game to enjoy it.

Celeste Lomas, 15, South Africa: ‘A giraffe walks into my backyard.’

There are plenty of problems in my country, but there’s one thing I really love: the amazing wildlife. Seeing a giraffe in my backyard makes my day. Driving to the shops we stopped because a pride of lions was crossing the road. They were on their way to a watering hole nearby. I love that. One minute dad’s talking about what brand of coffee to buy, and then I see something like that!