

# NATION'S CONVERSATIONS

MARCH 2020

A report looking into what the nation  
is talking about at the dinner table.







# FOREWORD



In this second Nation's Conversation report from McCain, we have once again polled parents up and down the country, to listen in on the conversations happening around mealtimes. And whilst the food being eaten might differ from table to table, and the type of people round the table change from family to family - it seems we are united by the topics of conversations that are being had time and time again.

To truly understand families, and the differences that exist within them, we felt it important to not just get the thoughts of parents but also their children; to build a more representative picture of what families are talking about and explore the generational differences further.

And while we saw many families united in their love, or intrigue, of the perplexing nature of 'The Masked' singer for example or still embroiled in debating the UK political space, we also saw the emergence of a subject close to all our hearts; the environment.

Just as the children in the report highlight, we could all be doing more to help tackle the climate crisis. Recycling was hailed as one of the things that we could all be better at – and something that starts at home. At McCain, we are also working to ensure we make recycling our product packaging as easy as possible for families.

Overall, the report confirms what we have long held to be the most important thing about the mealtime occasion – that our shared love of food, enjoyed with our families, provides the opportunity to learn more about each other. Whether that's through expressing our differences or coming together on the things we agree on; it's great to see the dinner time occasion facilitating these important conversations.

**Mark Hodge**  
**Marketing Director,**  
**McCain Foods Limited**



**SO, WHAT ARE  
WE TALKING  
ABOUT NOW?**



## TABLED FOR DISCUSSION...

It's no surprise that when families sit down together, they discuss a variety of topics, with everyone having their say. Interestingly, the topics which are more likely to cause disagreement has shifted since 2019, with only one topic remaining the same.

Parents told us that the top three conversations most likely to cause disagreement among family members were:

1

Homework



2

Education /  
School



3

Child's  
day at  
school



Previously we found that money, video games and food choices were the cause of most disagreements around the dinner table, with discussions around the children's school day also playing a part, but to a lesser degree (10% versus the current 15.91%).

Education and homework also remain a troublesome topic at mealtime, with homework being a big bugbear for children. In fact, 83% of children do not enjoy talking about homework at the dinner table, however when it came to education more broadly and a child's day at school, this was a much more favourable topic for kids, with over a quarter of children stating that they enjoy talking about their school day. This demonstrates a clear difference between what parents and their children find enjoyable to talk about, whether it causes disagreements or not.

"I like talking to my family about my day at school as they give me good advice and tell me useful things which help with my lessons and homework. Sometimes even my brother is helpful as he is older than me and has done all the same things."

*Lenny, aged 6*

When it came to the key instigators of disagreements at the dinner table, Dads came out on top (18.75%) as expressing opinions at mealtimes that cause the disagreements, compared with just 1 in 10 mums (10.69%) causing similar unrest at the dining table.





## WHAT'S ON THE BOX?

TV is a happy subject for contented mealtime chatter – with over 80% of parents reporting that TV is spoken about at the dinner table, with just 7.72% reporting differences in opinion around the table. Over a quarter of children (25.80%) stated that it was the topic of conversation they enjoyed the most around the table, followed by upcoming family holidays (32.60%).

Compared to last year's Nation's Conversations findings, we can see there are new programmes creating a stir across the UK. 'The Masked Singer' and 'I'm a Celebrity Get Me Out Of Here' knocked 'Britain's Got Talent' off the top spot as the most talked about programmes at the dinner table.

### Top 5 TV programmes getting families talking



- 1 I'm a Celebrity...Get Me Out of Here!
- 2 Masked Singer
- 3 Britain's Got Talent
- 4 Love Island
- 5 Stranger Things

## WE GOT MORE POLITICAL

Parents also told us that their children are becoming much more engaged with current affairs and are actively keen to discuss political topics and join in the discussions which might have previously been only adult conversations.

Parents are also enjoying seeing their children get involved with more complicated topics like current affairs (70.87%) highlighting mealtimes as a great

opportunity for families to come together and get under the skin of topical issues. In fact, over half of parents (57.32%) stated that it made them enjoy mealtimes more when they were presented with these trickier topics to tackle with their children.

Given the UK's exit from the European Union in October 2019, it was no surprise that political talk is still dividing families in the UK well into 2020; 51.75% saying they talk about it and 48.25% stating that it isn't a topic of mealtime conversation. It's also still the same topics being raised when families venture into political debates.

### Most popular political topics at the dinner tables

1

Brexit



2

Boris Johnson



3

Donald Trump



4

The 2019 General Election





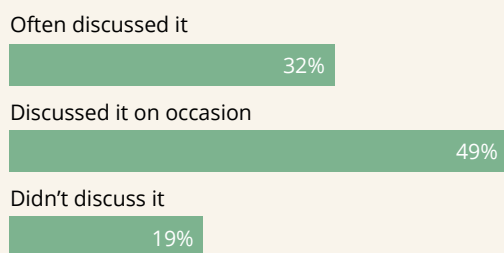
**ENVIRONMENT  
IS HEAD OF THE  
TABLE**



A popular emerging trend for mealtime conversation is the broad subject matter of environment and specifically climate change, as we see it impact both at family level as well as globally. Of the parents we polled, 64.44% said that they discuss environment more now than they did 12 months ago. Interestingly 71.43% of parents said they did not discuss the environment with their own parents growing up, showing a sign of the times and clear generational differences and life experiences.

Parents pointed to children learning about the environment in school (45.65%), seeing more of it on TV, from programmes like Blue Planet (50.23%) and also because they genuinely care about the environment (40.37%) to why the conversations were happening more frequently. But also, the topics being discussed at the dinner table seemed to provide a safe place for children to ask questions about the green issues; 17.71% of parents mentioned they used mealtime as a forum to help quell their child's concerns about the future.

### Families discussing the environmental issues at mealtimes



Reassuringly the majority of parents we polled recognised that climate change is happening – with 71.10% believing it was due to manmade activity and 19.30% believing it was happening but pointed to other reasons.

From the children's perspective, this topic really captures their attention – 64% said that they enjoy talking and learning about the environment. And whilst parents (53.96%) and TV (46.04%) were cited as a prominent sources of information on the environment, teachers came out on top at 60.60% - indicating that educating and raising awareness on environment issues is firmly on the curriculum.

"We love helping the planet and at home we recycle, switch off lights and have a compost heap. For my brother's 5<sup>th</sup> birthday he had an environment party where we all had to dress up as endangered species which was such fun! I also love chatting about the environment with my friends and we always try and find new ways to be eco warriors!"

*Omega, Aged 7*

We delved into this topic further to understand some of the nuances surrounding conversations around the environment within families.

### The most popular environmental topics of conversation



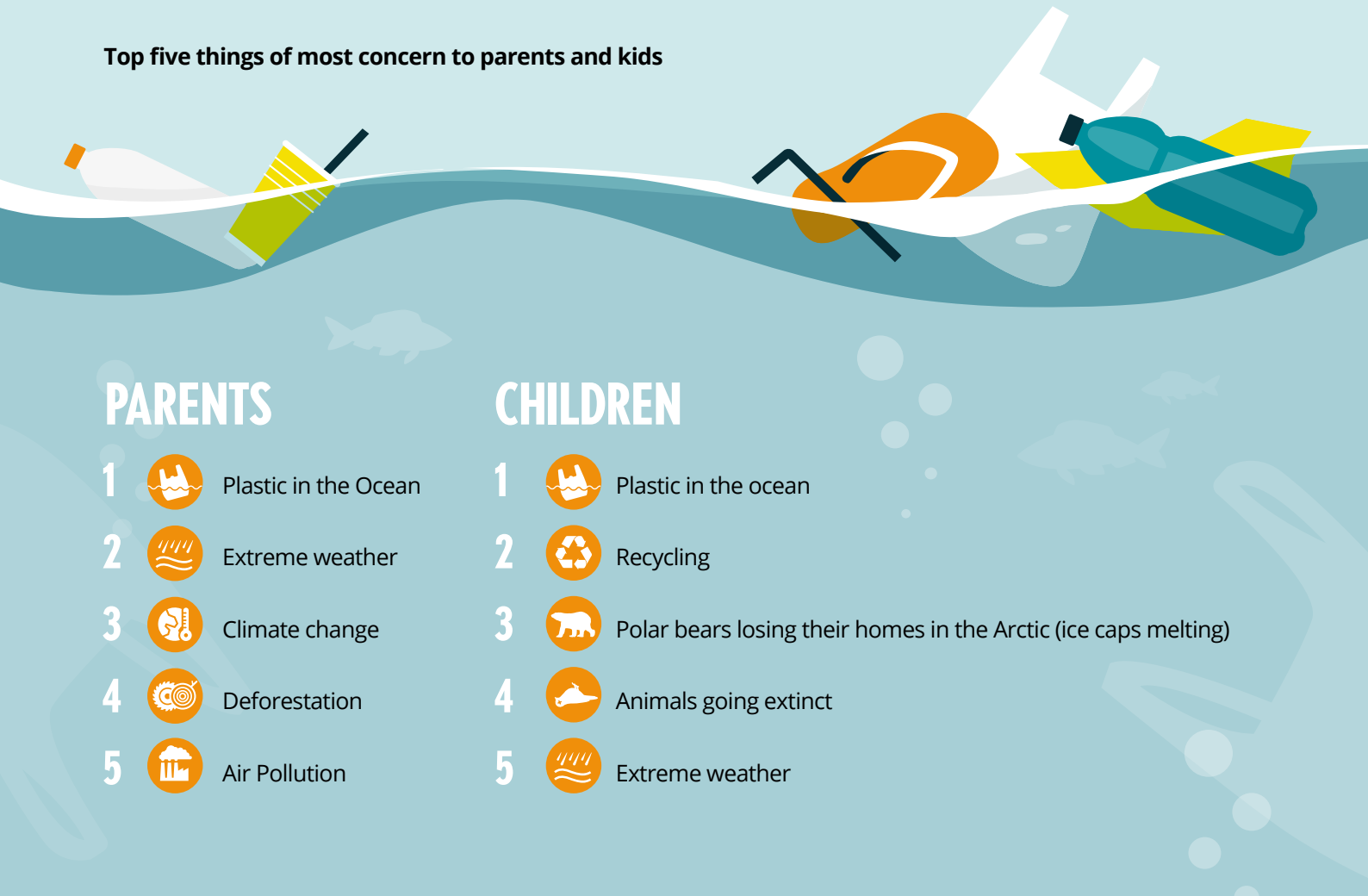
- 1 Recycling
- 2 Plastic in the ocean
- 3 Foodwaste
- 4 Climate change
- 5 Using less single use plastic

Youth was also on side, with Greta Thunberg coming up in over a quarter (26.68%) of conversations, whereas David Attenborough was mentioned slightly less, coming up in 23.69% of conversations.

It was interesting to note however, the different focus of concerns between parents and their children when it came to these issues. Both agreed that plastics in the ocean and extreme weather were a worry but expressed different concerns in the most part, with children much more concerned by the impact on wildlife.








## Top five things of most concern to parents and kids



### PARENTS

- 1  Plastic in the Ocean
- 2  Extreme weather
- 3  Climate change
- 4  Deforestation
- 5  Air Pollution

### CHILDREN

- 1  Plastic in the ocean
- 2  Recycling
- 3  Polar bears losing their homes in the Arctic (ice caps melting)
- 4  Animals going extinct
- 5  Extreme weather



## THE GRETA EFFECT

But it seems conversations around the environment can be heated, exposing further differences and emotions within families. On the topic of environment, we found that 17.10% of parents reported to having many disagreements on the topic – with 27.68% saying this had happened ‘once or twice’ around the dinner table.

The heated nature of these disagreements might be down to tensions over the fears that both parents and children attached to the topic of environment and climate change. We found that children also directed these emotions towards their parents, finding two in 10 (18%) of children reporting feelings of anger towards adults, blaming them for the state of the environment.

### The emotional impact of climate change

#### Parents reported to feelings of:



#### Children cited stronger feelings of:



And we can see the impact of inspirational young people like Greta Thunberg coming to the fore. Whilst parents would previously plead with their kids to eat more greens, it now appears kids are encouraging their parents to be more green.

## The ways children are encouraging their parents to be more green

1

Scolding parents for not recycling properly



2

Encouraging parents to walk / cycle or scoot short distances instead of driving



3

Reminding them to compost food instead of throwing it away



4

Parents also report that their children had given THEM tips on how to do their bit for climate change

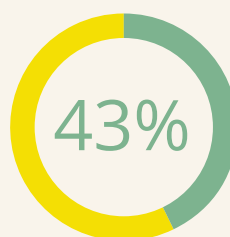


The research also uncovered the impact of this time round the table and how these conversations, no matter how heated, can go on to provoke positive action. Parents told us that following dinner time discussions on the environment over 76.51% had felt encouraged to be more eco-friendly.

## What families have committed to doing to help the planet follow a dinnertime conversation

- 1 Use less plastic
- 2 Reduce food waste
- 3 Be more conscientious when recycling
- 4 Get reusable shopping bags
- 5 Buy a reusable water bottle
- 6 Cut down on home energy usage
- 7 Eat less meat
- 8 Walk, cycle, scoot more and drive less
- 9 Use energy efficient light bulbs
- 10 Buy a reusable coffee cup

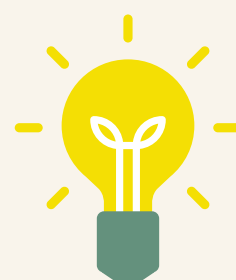
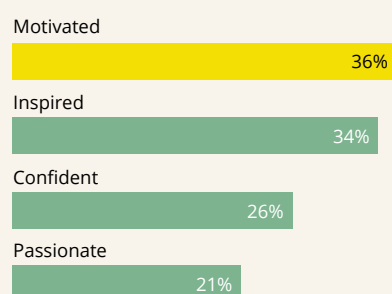
## Children are keen to be visible in the climate change conversation



of children would like to go to a climate change protest



## How does Greta Thunberg make you feel about the environment and climate change?



## Top reasons why children enjoy doing their bit to help the planet

- 1 It's important
- 2 It's my future
- 3 I like animals
- 4 I care about the planet
- 5 I'm scared about the future





1



## RECYCLE BETTER!

Recycling is something we can do every day. At school we learn about checking packaging labels for the recycle symbol, to wash out and dry tins and yogurts pots, and make sure that plastic bags are reused or taken back to the supermarket. Sometimes we have to remind our parents how to recycle better and make sure nothing goes in the black bin that can't be properly recycled.

2



## GO VEGGIE

Lots of kids worry about the impact of climate change on animals; what we eat at the dinner table can help. Meat can be really yummy, but so can vegetarian food, and it's good to cut down on meat to help reduced greenhouse gasses. In our family, we love eating veggie sausages. They taste great and cause a lot less harm to animals and the planet.

3



## LITTER PICK TO DO YOUR BIT

Keeping rubbish and plastic off the street and out of the sea is really important as we want where we live, and where fish live, to be nice and safe. We often pick up litter on our street that people have dropped and sometimes litter pick at our local pond. We have a competition to see who can get the most rubbish in our bag the quickest.

4



## AVOID FOOD WASTE

We hate wasting food, so we try to eat the food we have on our plate! But any food that isn't used goes straight in the food compost bin.

5



## WALK THE WALK

Walking to school can be so much fun with your family – so we try to do it one or two times a week at least, or even scooter if you can! You'll cut down your carbon footprint and be able to get exercise in everyday on your way into school.

In this latest Nation's Conversation report we have explored the differences that are brought to light around the dinner table between parents and their children. No matter how funny, complex, sensitive, controversial, awkward or just plain mundane, the nation's mealtime conversations are important in helping to give everyone a voice and find out what we love talking about and what we might disagree on. Reflecting on the generational differences, and speaking to children directly through the report has offered us an additional insight into the great value of these mealtime conversations. It is an invaluable forum for children and their parents to talk about their differences, passions, fears and ultimate hopes – whether that be for the following week at school or work or for their long term futures. It's clear that mealtime conversations have the power to bring families together in their differences, over food that everyone loves to eat. And at the end of the meal, it's our differences that truly make us a family. For more information on McCain's We Are Family campaign, please visit [www.mccain.com](http://www.mccain.com).

