Children's lives have changed enormously over the last 50 years. But do they have happier childhoods?

1   It's difficult to look back on one's own childhood without some element of nostalgia. I have four brothers and sisters and my memories are all about being with them, playing board games on the living room floor, or spending days outside with the other neighbourhood children, racing around on our bikes, or exploring the nearby woods. My parents hardly ever appear in these memories, except as providers either of meals or of severe reprimands after some particularly hazardous adventure.

2   These days, in the UK at least, the nature of childhood has changed dramatically since the 1960s. First, families are smaller and there are far more only children. It is common for both parents to work outside the home and far fewer people have the time to bring up a large family. As a result, today's boys and girls spend much of their time alone. Another major change is that youngsters today tend to spend a huge proportion of

their free time at home, inside. This is due more than anything to the fact that parents worry much more than they used to about real or imagined dangers, so they wouldn't dream of letting their children play outside by themselves.

3 Finally, the kinds of toys children have and the way they play is totally different. Computer and video games have replaced the board games and more active pastimes of my childhood. The fact that they can play electronic games on their own further increases the sense of isolation felt by many young people today. The irony is that so many of these devices are called 'interactive'.

4 Do these changes mean that children today have a less idyllic childhood than I had? I personally believe that they do, but perhaps every generation feels exactly the same.