

Modern childhood 'ends at age of 12'

By Sean Coughlan BBC News education correspondent 6 March 2013

Childhood is over for many children by the age of 12, according to members of a parenting website.

Netmums website users are complaining that children are under (1)_____ to grow up too fast.

They say that girls are made to (2)_____ their appearance and boys are (3)_____ "macho" behaviour at too young an age.

The website's co-founder Siobhan Freegard blamed a "toxic combination of marketing, media and peer pressure".

"The pace of modern life is so fast that it is even (4)_____ away the precious years of childhood," she said.

"Children no longer want to be (5)_____ children, even when as parents we know they still are."

"There needs to be a (6)_____ rethink in society to revalue childhood and protect it as a (7)_____ time - not time to put pressure on children to grow up far too fast," said Ms Freegard.

The website asked for its members' views and received more than a thousand replies.

The most common view - from more than two-thirds of this group - was that childhood was now over by the age of 12.

'Under pressure'

About a third of those replying to this online (8)_____ believed that childhood ended even sooner, at the age of 10.

Parents voiced concerns that children were being put under pressure to act older than their (9)_____.

Girls were made to worry about their appearance and their weight, boys were meant to act (10)_____ and both boys and girls were under pressure to take an interest in sex at too young an age.

"Children need time to grow and emotionally mature in order to cope with what life throws at them," says Ms Freegard.

This is the latest example of (11)_____ concerns about children growing up in an over-sexualised culture.

Claire Perry MP, the prime minister's adviser on childhood, has warned about children (12)_____ inappropriate material on websites or through mobile phones.

Another MP, Diane Abbott, attacked what she called the "pornification" of youth culture, in which young people were growing up in an environment of sexual bullying and explicit sexual images.

<http://www.bbc.com/news/education-21670962>