

The 3 (children / the children)

A

When we are talking about things or people in general, we do *not* use **the**:

- ☐ I'm afraid of **dogs**. (*not the dogs*)
(**dogs** = dogs in general, not a specific group of dogs)
- ☐ **Doctors** are usually paid more than **teachers**.
- ☐ Do you know anybody who collects **stamps**?
- ☐ **Crime** is a problem in most big cities. (*not The crime*)
- ☐ **Life** has changed a lot in the last thirty years. (*not The life*)
- ☐ Do you like **classical music** / **Chinese food** / **fast cars**?
- ☐ My favourite sport is **football/skiing/athletics**.
- ☐ My favourite subject at school was **history/physics/English**.

We say '**most** people / **most** books / **most** cars' etc. (*not the most ...*):

- ☐ **Most shops** accept credit cards. (*not The most shops*)

B

We use **the** when we mean specific things or people.

Compare:

*In general (without **the**)*

- ☐ **Children** learn from playing.
(= children in general)
- ☐ I couldn't live without **music**.
- ☐ All **cars** have wheels.
- ☐ **Sugar** isn't very good for you.
- ☐ **English people** drink a lot of tea.
(= English people in general)

*Specific people or things (with **the**)*

- ☐ We took **the children** to the zoo.
(= a specific group, perhaps the speaker's children)
- ☐ The film wasn't very good, but I liked **the music**. (= the music in the film)
- ☐ All **the cars in this car park** belong to people who work here.
- ☐ Can you pass **the sugar**, please?
(= the sugar on the table)
- ☐ **The English people I know** drink a lot of tea. (= only the English people I know, not English people in general)

C

The difference between 'something in general' and 'something specific' is not always very clear.

Compare:

*In general (without **the**)*

- ☐ I like working with **people**.
(= people in general)
- ☐ I like working with **people who say what they think**. (*not all people, but 'people who say what they think' is still a general idea*)
- ☐ Do you like **coffee**?
(= coffee in general)
- ☐ Do you like **strong black coffee**?
(*not all coffee, but 'strong black coffee' is still a general idea*)

*Specific people or things (with **the**)*

- ☐ I like **the people I work with**.
(= a specific group of people)
- ☐ I didn't like **the coffee we had after dinner**.
(= specific coffee)