

Young people's experiences during the coronavirus pandemic: views of young HeadStart volunteers

During summer 2020, the young people who volunteer for HeadStart shared their experiences of the coronavirus pandemic. Their views have been collated and these are the findings.



Main challenges include:

- Loneliness and isolation
- Missing friends
- Boredom
- No one to talk to
- Bad home situation
- No motivation
- Worried about health and family
- No contact with outside services and support
- School work and home learning
- Exam stress
- No independence



Challenges young people are facing during the coronavirus pandemic



For some young people, going to school and meeting with friends is an escape from a bad situation at home and some young people at home could be feeling scared, anxious or depressed.



I feel that young people are being ignored when they express concerns about COVID-19, because the coronavirus is considered a 'grown up' topic.



As we are not attending school, young people can feel lonely and isolated especially if they are an only child.



Helping young people during the coronavirus pandemic



Check up on them and just show you are there for them because that's what will count because they maybe don't have anyone at home and you're the only one they have to talk to.



Looking out for emotional support online and helpful mental health resources.



1-to-1 phone calls allow young people to talk privately and confidentially, especially if you don't want to talk to your parents. The phone calls are a good way to offload.



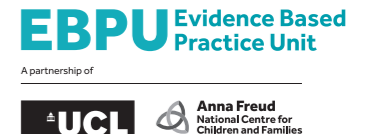
The top 10 questions you should ask young people during the pandemic:

1. Do you feel supported?
2. Do you have someone to talk to?
3. Are you worried about school exams?
4. Do you feel safe outside and going out?
5. Are you worried to return to normal?
6. Do you feel safe at home?
7. Do you feel listened to by adults?
8. How have you kept in contact with friends?
9. What have you been doing to keep busy?
10. What kind of coping strategies do you use?

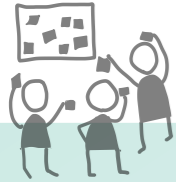
Other things that might help:

- Keeping in touch with others
- Having a safe space to share feelings
- Finding something positive to do
- Checking in with and supporting each other
- Learning skills for the future
- 1:1 phone calls with professionals
- Producing things and being creative
- Exploring new ways to express yourself
- Participating in something
- Having group chats

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The top 5 challenges for young HeadStart volunteers were:

1. Missing seeing each other in person
2. Technical problems
3. Miscommunication and confusion
4. Hard to get work done
5. Slow process

The volunteers prefer meeting up in person and value face to face interaction. They felt this was highlighted because not every volunteer has access to the internet or a computer to be involved in online meetings. Many felt that it is difficult to read people online. Someone could say 'I'm fine' but they're actually not.



At first it was awkward but I got used to using Microsoft Teams for our meetings and it became really fun, especially running online quizzes with the team. I find that I have actually engaged more with HeadStart.



It's easy to become isolated right now, so meeting with HeadStart online helps me feel less lonely and that I'm doing something that matters.



It's nice to be able to meet the team virtually, but for the future I prefer working face to face. I think it is a better and a more quality experience. I feel that time wise working face to face is more productive.



We could help by making stuff such as videos or PowerPoints of how to cope and all other issues that have come up in this situation.

Being part of HeadStart during the coronavirus pandemic



The top 5 benefits for young HeadStart volunteers were:

1. Being part of a team
2. Getting support
3. Getting to see people (at least virtually)
4. Doing something that matters
5. Rewarding

Other positive things HeadStart volunteers mentioned were:

- Feeling less bored
- Having something to do
- Helping others
- Having fun
- Making people happy

About HeadStart



HeadStart is a six-year, £67.4 million National Lottery funded programme set up by The National Lottery Community Fund, the largest funder of community activity in the UK. It aims to explore and test new ways to improve the mental health and wellbeing of young people aged 10 to 16 and prevent serious mental health issues from developing.

Six local authority led HeadStart partnerships in Blackpool, Cornwall, Hull, Kent, Newham and Wolverhampton are working with local young people, schools, families, charities, community and public services to make young people's mental health and wellbeing everybody's business.

We would like to thank the HeadStart partnerships, especially Hull and Kent for providing responses from young volunteers for this document and the Child Outcomes Research Consortium (CORC), who supported this work.

