

# Life on Hold

## Children's Well-being and COVID-19

July 2020

**The  
Children's  
Society**

*Life On Hold: Children’s Well-being and COVID-19*

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## **Foreword**

### **Mark Russell, Chief Executive, The Children's Society**

We are living in unprecedented times. Months of national lockdown, only small numbers of children in school, and many families experiencing real crisis. Coronavirus has impacted every area of our lives and The Children's Society has been deeply concerned about the impact of this crisis on children, especially the most disadvantaged.

Each year we conduct a comprehensive study of children's wellbeing, and we will be publishing our annual Good Childhood Report in September as usual. However, as we planned our survey for this year, we felt compelled to ask children specific questions about the impact of Coronavirus on their lives. We are sharing these findings now, as quickly as possible, to shine a light on the profound implications that the coronavirus lockdown has had on children's wellbeing.

The Children's Society has reported a decline in children's well-being that long predates the global pandemic. Even before COVID-19, children's mean happiness with their lives was at its lowest since 2009/10. Too many children live in insecure housing, too many children live in poverty, and too many children are unhappy with their lives. Life was already difficult for too many children and Coronavirus has made their lives even harder. This report makes sobering reading and it backs up the experience of our front line practitioners who work with young people across the country.

Many children, and their parents and carers, have told us they have been very worried during the pandemic. And at the very time when children are really struggling, they have been cut-off from their friends, their school and wider family members.

This report spells out the consequences. Our survey found a higher proportion of young people experiencing low well-being than we are used to seeing. Whilst we know that most children's well-being will 'bounce-back', there will be some who do not. As a result, this crisis is likely to have lasting consequence on children in this country who are not satisfied with their lives. We should all be very concerned about the long-term implications.

But there is hope, while children are feeling the impacts now of the coronavirus and the lockdown measures, there is still a sense of optimism for their future. Children told us that through these difficult times they have enjoyed having a time to reflect, to learn new hobbies or restart old ones and have found gratitude for things in their life pre-lockdown.

We need to act now. We must listen to what children and young people are telling us and respond. Yes, we must keep the positives, but we also must move quickly to address emerging problems. We need Government to have an ambitious and concrete plan to put children at the very heart of our national recovery. We need action in Westminster and in town halls across the country; investing in and supporting our children. We will continue to play our part, so together we can put a strong protective arm around our nation's children, to stop childhood being disrupted and futures derailed. Together we can and we must create a society built for all children.

## **Executive Summary**

The report combines findings from The Children's Society's annual household survey conducted in April-June 2020 with over 2,000 young people aged 10-17, and a consultation with 150 children, seeking more in-depth information on the impact of Coronavirus and the associated lockdown on their lives. Key findings were:

- Parents report a wide range of impacts on their family, and on their children's happiness with friends and how much choice they have in life.
- Parents anticipate long term negative impacts on their children's education. Encouragingly, given the range of impacts reported, only around half expect a long term negative impact on the happiness of adults/ children in the household.
- Most children reported having coped to some degree with the changes made as a result of the pandemic. Those areas where they had coped less well were not being able to see their friends and family. The impact on friendships was also reiterated in children's responses to our consultation, which highlighted feelings of isolation.
- While most children are happy/satisfied, a greater proportion than usual scored below the midpoint on our preferred, and usually stable, multi-item measure of life satisfaction, which suggests that some children's cognitive well-being has been adversely affected.
- Parents felt that some children were happier with their time use than before lockdown and children responding to our consultation also highlighted advantages, such as being able to pursue hobbies, and appreciating more what they have in life.
- The self-care strategies described by children are reminiscent of the Five Ways to Well-being, with their main focus being on connecting with others followed by being active and creative.

## Introduction

The Coronavirus pandemic, together with the associated social distancing and lockdown measures, have had a substantial impact on health and public freedom. In May 2020, an estimated 1.27 billion children worldwide were out of school or childcare (UNESCO, 2020). With schools in the UK closed to a large proportion of children for up to six months, parents left to home school with varying access to internet and other resources, and wide-scale furloughing of staff and people unable to see wider family/friends, there is widespread interest in understanding the impact on our society. The immediate and long-term effect on the well-being and mental health of children and young people is not surprisingly a key concern.

A recent ONS survey looking at the social impact of coronavirus on young people aged 16-29 suggested that, among those worried about the effect on their lives, primary concerns were the effect on their school or university, their well-being, work and household finances. Those who reported an impact on their school/university were concerned about exam and qualification uncertainty, the impact on the quality of education and moving to home schooling. Young people who reported an impact on their well-being more often said they were bored and lonely, and that the lockdown was negatively impacting on their mental health (see ONS, 2020a).

Unfortunately, the Government has not yet published a comparable study looking at the social impact of COVID-19 on young people aged under 16. A range of other research studies have been undertaken/ are underway with parents and children to look at the immediate impact on the lives of children and young people<sup>1</sup>. Many of the studies published to date have relied on opportunity/ non-representative samples, however. Those studies with children/ their parents published thus far suggest there have been increases in young people's levels of anxiety (see Levita, 2020. survey of 2,002 young people aged 13-24), in emotional, behaviour and attention difficulties among primary aged children (aged 4 to 10 years) and in attention difficulties among secondary aged children (while these rises were reported by parents, adolescents in the same study themselves reported no statistically significant changes in emotional, behavioural and attention difficulties) (see Pearcy et al, 2020 study of changes over one month of lockdown in a non-representative sample of 2,890 parents). Research with 2,111 young people (aged 13-25) with a history of mental health needs has also revealed a worsening in mental health for over four-fifths (83%) of respondents, with many reporting heightened anxiety, sleep problems, panic attacks and increased urges to self-harm (among those with a history of doing so). A quarter of these young people also said they no-longer had access to mental health support as a result of the pandemic (see Young Minds, 2020).

In terms of children's well-being, studies have highlighted feelings of loneliness and lower well-being scores (see, for example, Barnardo's, 2020 on loneliness; and ONS, 2020b findings on life satisfaction and feeling things in life are worthwhile among those aged 16+). A recent poll conducted for Barnardo's by YouGOV reported a rise in issues related to mental health and well-being for at least one in three of the participating 4,000 children and young people (aged eight-24 in Great Britain). Over two-thirds said that not seeing their friends was one of the three hardest things about lockdown (Barnardo's, 2020).

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<sup>1</sup> See <https://www.rcpch.ac.uk/resources/covid-19-research-studies-children-young-peoples-views> for a summary of other studies that have been completed and currently underway in the UK.

Some benefits, particularly related to lockdown, have also been reported by children. These have included spending more time with family and outdoors, and relief from certain mental health difficulties and bullying (see Children's Commissioner for Wales, 2020).

The Children's Society has conducted annual household surveys into children's well-being in Spring-Summer for the last decade. With our routine survey in the field during lockdown from 28 April to 8 June,<sup>2</sup> we were keen to further understand the experiences of children and their families in the pandemic and the associated lockdown, and to also look at the well-being of children at this time. This report offers a timely summary of parents and children's responses to survey questions about COVID-19 and their well-being, together with children's accounts 'in their own words' based on a consultation of 150 young people. We may conduct more in-depth analysis on children's experiences of COVID-19 in the coming months. Our annual Good Childhood Report, which examines the most up to date sources on children's well-being more generally, will be published later in the Summer.

The report ends with a discussion of the implications and recommendations for policymakers to address and reverse the adverse impact of the pandemic on the well-being of some children.

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<sup>2</sup> A nationwide lockdown was announced by the UK Government on 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2020 when the public were told to stay at home and only leave for food shopping or taking exercise for up to one hour per day. On 13<sup>th</sup> May, people who were unable to work from home were able to return to their jobs whilst maintaining social distancing of two metres. People were also allowed out of their house for unlimited exercise and could meet one other person outdoors so long as they maintained social distancing requirements. On 1<sup>st</sup> June 2020, some schools reopened for reception, Year 1 and Year 6 pupils, and groups of six people were allowed to meet outdoors as long as they practised social distancing.

## **Key Sources**

This report draws on the following sources on COVID-19 and children's well-being.

### **The Children's Society household survey**

Since 2010, The Children's Society has conducted household surveys with parents and children. The 2020 survey was completed in April-June 2020. For the first time, it covered over 2,000 parents and their child aged 10 to 17 from all four nations of the UK (England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland). These children were selected to closely match the demographic and socio-economic make-up of the wider population, and were spread across all geographic regions.

As well as including routine questions on children's overall well-being and their happiness with different aspects of life, a number of questions were included in our 2020 survey to gauge the impact of Coronavirus and the lockdown measures on children's lives. Our questions for children were developed and tested with a small group of children to ensure that they would be appropriate and easy to answer. In order to safeguard children who had had adverse experiences, further dual consent was obtained before asking children to complete questions on Coronavirus. Children in families that had experienced a COVID-19 related bereavement were not asked these questions.

For the first time, the 14-item Warwick Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS) was included in the survey, which assesses psychological and affective well-being. Whilst many of the cognitive well-being measures we have traditionally included are stable over time, WEMWBS looks at the well-being of children in the last two weeks. The temporal element of WEMWBS is therefore useful in understanding the well-being of children during lockdown.

The survey data have been weighted to make sure they closely match the demographic make-up of children (aged 10 to 17) in the UK.

### **The Children's Society Consultations with Children**

To complement the survey findings, the Children's Society consulted with children and young people on how they felt about lockdown and the impact on their future. In total, we received submissions from over 150 young people aged between 8 and 19 years from schools, youth groups and The Children's Society's projects in England.

Due to the challenges presented as a result of lockdown and social distancing, all consultation was done digitally – either in the form of online conversations, written submissions or via gatekeepers to ensure the safety of the young people and staff.

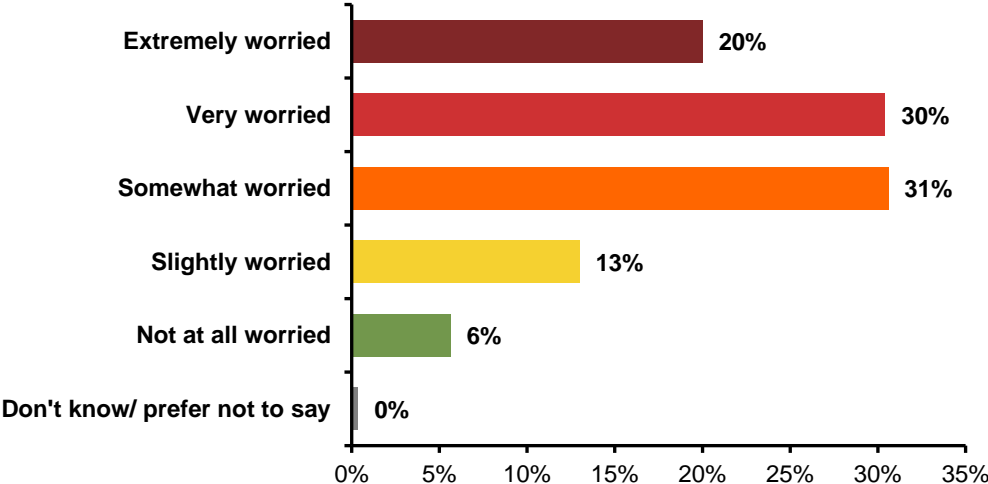
The views and opinions presented within this report are only a partial summary of the consultation findings. It is important to note that the majority of children and young people's comments and views from the consultations have not been included here. The comments included within this report are for illustrative purposes only.

Two researchers independently reviewed all the consultation material and then organised it into a single thematic framework – this was done without reference to, and independently of, the quantitative analysis. In this way we were able to triangulate the data sources and identify themes that were shared across the two methodologies and those that were not.

# Parent’s Experiences of COVID-19 and their reflections on the Impact on their Children

In our household survey, parents were asked *how do you feel about Coronavirus?* Not surprisingly, the vast majority of those who answered the question<sup>3</sup> were worried to some extent about the virus (94%) with only 1 in 20 parents not at all worried (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1: How parents feel about Coronavirus**



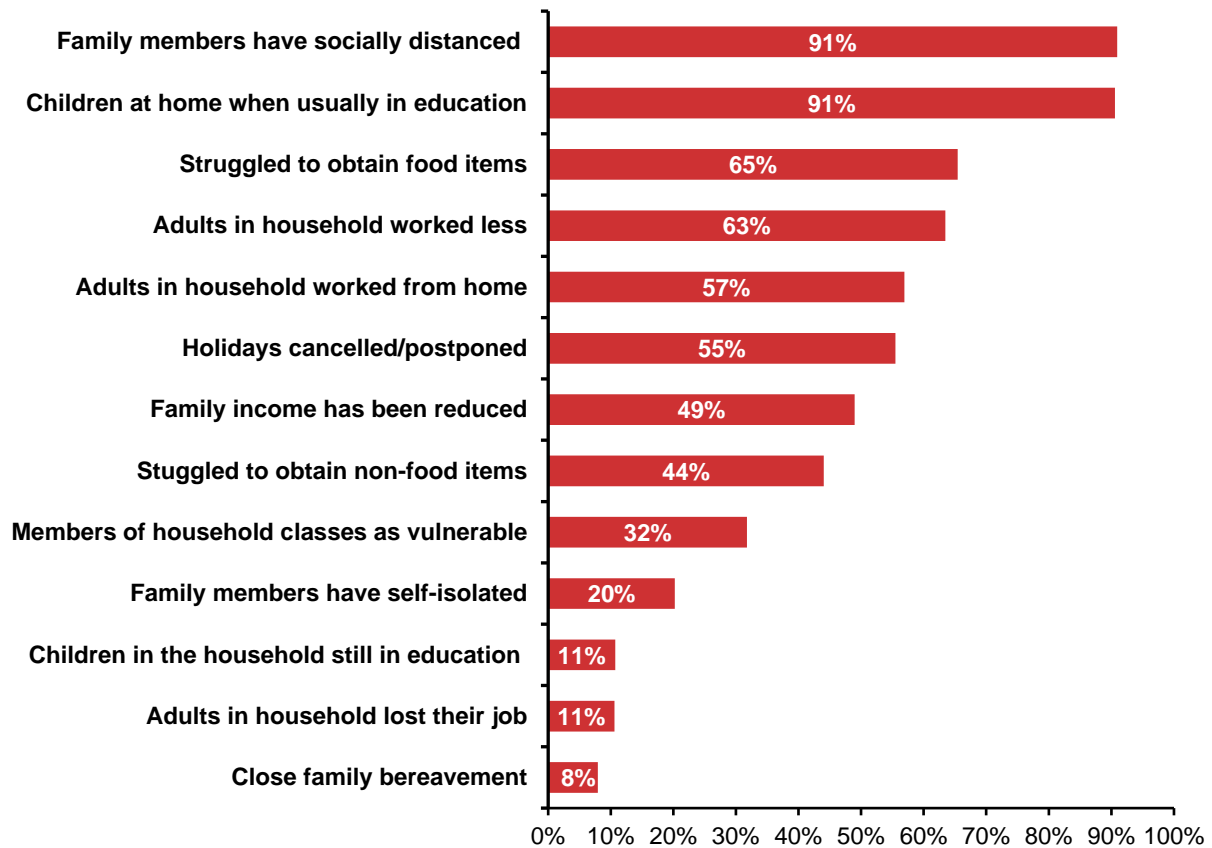
Note: The above percentages are based on those who completed the question (weighted N=1,968)

Parents were also asked about the immediate impact that Coronavirus had on their lives, and the expected longer term implications. Parents reported having experienced a range of issues (a range of 0 to 13 were reported by individual parents) from a predetermined list in the last three months (see Figure 2), with an average of six impacts. They most frequently stated that family members had socially distanced from others outside their household (91%), followed by children being at home when they would usually be in education (91%), and struggling to obtain food items (65%). Parents also reported adults in the household working less (63%) and working from home (57%) as a result of the pandemic, and their family income being reduced (49%). A small proportion of families had experienced a close family bereavement (8%).

<sup>3</sup> Thirty-three parents opted out of the questions on Coronavirus included in the survey.



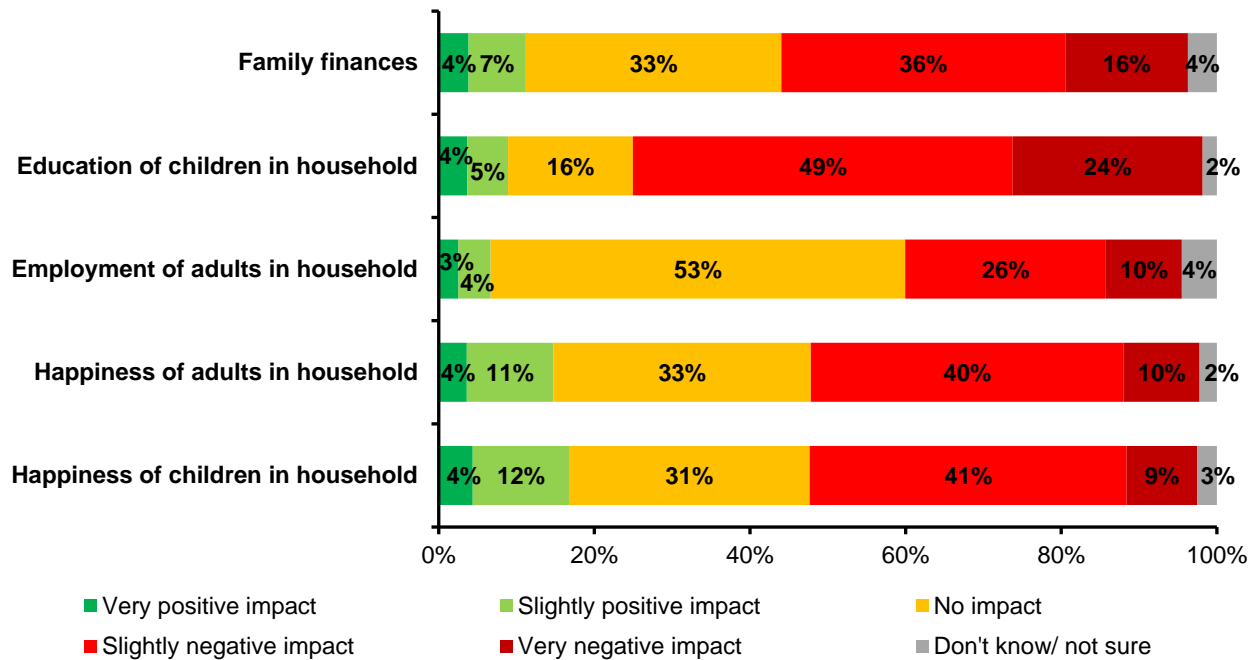
**Figure 2: Proportion of parents reporting different impacts of Coronavirus in the last 3 months**



Note: The above proportions are based on all those who completed the Coronavirus questions (weighted N=1,968) and include those responding 'Not sure'.

When asked about the likely impact of Coronavirus in the next 12 months (see Figure 3), parents most commonly expected a negative impact on the education of children in their household (73%), followed by their family finances (52%). Given the range of impacts reported, the expected effect on happiness was encouraging. Only around half of parents felt the happiness of adults and children in the household would be negatively affected, around one in three parents felt that there would be no impact on their happiness, and around one in seven that there might be a positive impact.

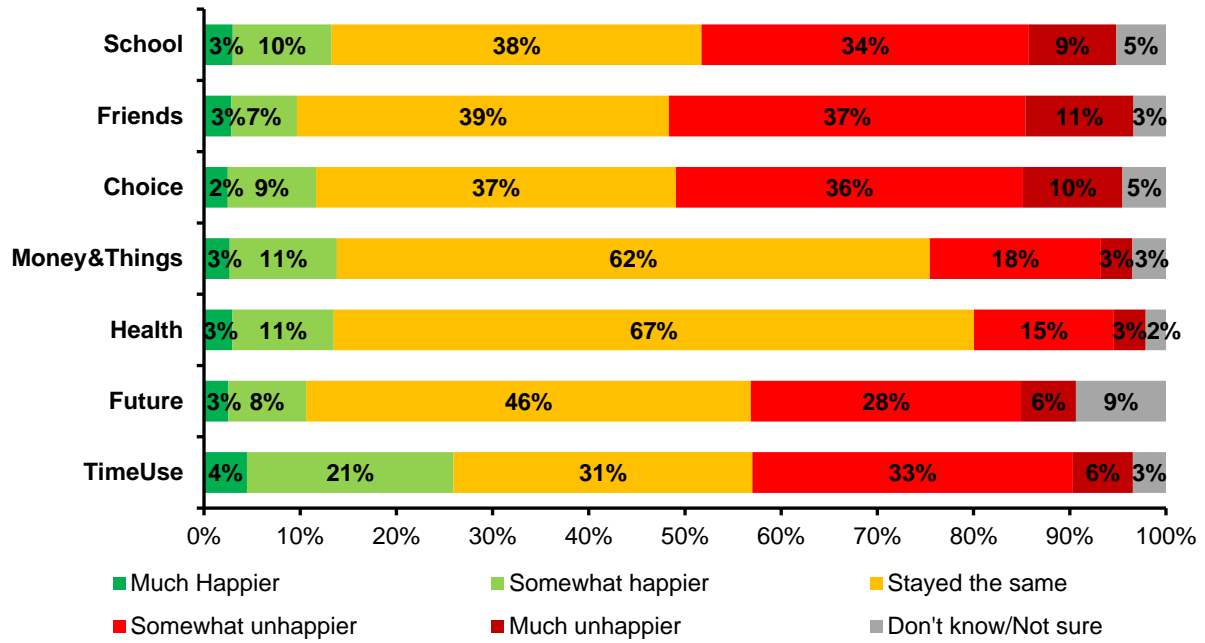
**Figure 3: Expected impact of Coronavirus on aspects of life in the next 12 months (weighted N=1,968)**



A key concern in the current climate is the impact that Coronavirus is having on children’s well-being and mental health, as they are no longer attending school and are separated from their friends and other forms of support. We were interested in parents’ views on the effect that Coronavirus has had on the well-being of the child who completed the survey. Figure 4 shows parents responses (they were asked: *What impact, if any, do you think that Coronavirus has had on how happy the child who will be completing this survey feels about the following areas of their life?*) in relation to seven of the ten aspects of life covered by The Children Society’s Good Childhood Index, which was developed with children in 2010.

Encouragingly, for five aspects of life (Time use, Future, Health, Money and Things and School), the majority (over half) of parents felt that their child’s happiness had either stayed the same or that they were happier. For Time-use specifically, a quarter of parents thought their children might be happier. The areas where the largest proportions of parents reported that their child was less happy were in their relationships with friends and how much choice they have in life.

**Figure 4: Parents' views about the impact of Coronavirus on their child's happiness with different aspects of life (weighted N=1,968)**



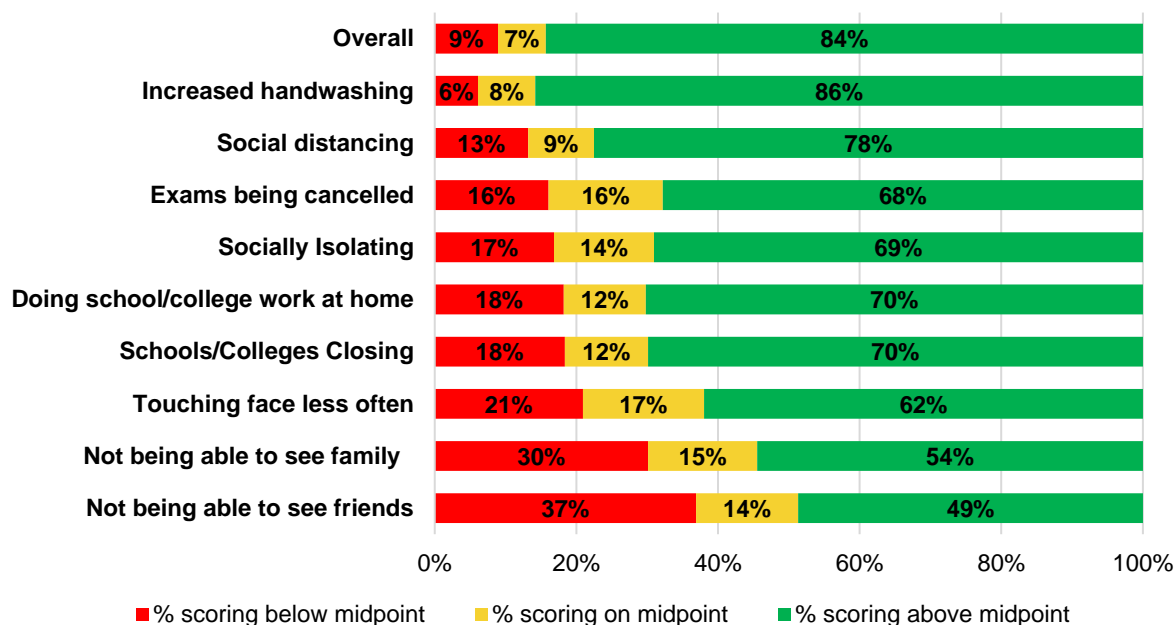
## Children’s reflections on the Impact of COVID-19

As we know that children and parent’s assessments do not always correspond, it is important to explore children’s own views on the effect that Coronavirus has had on their lives. We developed a small number of questions with children which asked: *How well do you think you have coped with the following changes that the government put in place because of Coronavirus?* We also asked how they had coped overall. Response levels were high among those completing these questions<sup>4</sup>, with the largest proportion of young people responding ‘prefer not to say’ for ‘exam cancellations’ (7%).

The majority of children scored above the midpoint on the 0 to 10 scale (where 0 indicated they had not coped very well and 10 that they had coped very well) for eight of the specific areas examined, suggesting they were coping to some extent with these changes. The only exception was for not being able to see friends where over half scored five or below. Encouragingly, 84% of children who provided a response scored above 5 for how well they had coped overall.

Figure 5 shows that the areas where children said they were coping less well were not being able to see friends and not being able to see family members not living in their household (37% and 30%, respectively, scored below the midpoint). Given what we know about the importance of relationships to children’s overall well-being, this is a key concern.

**Figure 5: Extent to which children (aged 10 to 17) feel they are coping with Coronavirus changes**



Note: The above proportions exclude those who responded ‘prefer not to say’. As a result, the N’s vary slightly between items (weighted Ns range from 1,615 for exam cancellations to 1,734 for not seeing friends).

<sup>4</sup> Overall, 13% of children either opted out, their parents asked that they did not answer questions on Coronavirus or were not asked these questions due to parents reporting that there had been a related family bereavement.

Analysis of children’s responses by key demographic characteristics revealed patterns (when comparing those with scores below the midpoint with those on or above the midpoint) for some domains by gender, and age group.

- A greater proportion of girls (than boys) scored below the midpoint for school/ college closures (22% and 15% respectively), exam cancellations (19% and 13%), and not being able to see friends (42% and 32%).
- Not surprisingly, a higher proportion of those aged 14 to 17 (21%) scored below the midpoint (indicating they were not coping well) than their younger peers (11%) for coping with exam cancellations.<sup>5</sup>

There were no differences by child poverty status or by ethnicity.<sup>6</sup> However, as sample sizes for this study only supported dichotomous analysis for those from white and non-white backgrounds, differences between children of particular ethnicity could not be assessed and may have been obscured.

Children taking part in the survey were asked how they felt about Coronavirus using a different scale to parents to ensure age appropriateness, which may affect the direct comparability of their responses. Like parents, most children were worried to some extent about the virus (89%). A greater proportion of children said they were only a little worried or not at all worried, however (47% compared with 19% of parents saying they were slightly or not at all worried). Not surprisingly, there was some association between children’s level of worry and the level of worry expressed by their parents (see Table 1 below).<sup>7</sup>

The only significant association between levels of worry and demographic group was for relative poverty status, where a higher proportion of children in relative poverty (23%) indicated that they were very worried than peers who were not in relative poverty (15%).<sup>8</sup>

**Table 1: How children (aged 10 to 17) and their parents feel about Coronavirus**

		Child worry			
		Very worried	Quite worried	A little worried	Not at all worried
Parent worry	Extremely/very worried	16%	22%	11%	1%
	Somewhat worried	1%	10%	19%	1%
	Slightly worried	0%	2%	9%	2%
	Not at all worried	0%	0%	1%	4%

Note: Responses from parents who said they were ‘extremely’ or ‘very worried’ have been combined to provide a four-point scale, as used for children. It is possible that the differences between scales has affected their direct comparability, however. Weighted N=1,677.

<sup>5</sup> This analysis consisted of two by two contingency tables compared those scoring 0 to 4 and those scoring 5-10 by each of the demographic characteristics (gender, age group, etc). The associations reported were statistically significant at the 0.01 level.

<sup>6</sup> Any differences would not be statistically significant at 0.01 level. Relative child poverty was defined as a household with less than 60% of the median equivalised income based on the sample for the 2020 household survey.

<sup>7</sup> Statistically significant at 0.01 level.

<sup>8</sup> Statistically significant at 0.01 level.

## **Well-being of Children during the Pandemic**

Our annual household survey includes several routine measures of children's well-being, mostly concerned with assessing overall cognitive well-being and happiness in relation to different aspects of life. As there were some modifications to our survey in 2020<sup>9</sup>, we might expect small changes in these measures (although the questions and use of a household panel remain constant) and acknowledge that the data are not directly comparable with that from previous survey years. We therefore make only broad comparisons to prior results.

The box on the next page outlines the well-being measures that were employed in this year's survey and drawn upon in this report.

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<sup>9</sup> Our 2020 survey included children and parents from Northern Ireland and used nationally representative weights. We also changed survey provider. Comparative analysis, excluding Northern Ireland and using our previous weighting approach, replicated the increases in particular measures outlined in this report.

## Measures of Subjective Well-being

The Children's Society's 2020 household survey included the following measures of children's subjective well-being. The Good Childhood Index and the ONS three measures were asked of all children included in the survey (aged 10-17). The 14-item WEMWBS measure is suitable for use with those aged 13 years and above and was therefore only asked of this group.

### Good Childhood Index (Cognitive Well-being)

The Good Childhood Index was developed by the Children's Society in 2010 to measure overall and domain based satisfaction (see The Children's Society, 2010). It consists of the 16 items outlined below.

- Multi-item measure of Life Satisfaction: The multi-item measure of life satisfaction is based on *Huebner's Students' Life Satisfaction scale* (Huebner, 1991), and comprises of children's collated responses (on a five point scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree) to five items: *My life is going well; My life is just right, I wish I had a different kind of life; I have a good life; and I have what I want in life.*
- Ten Domain measures: Children are asked to indicate (on an eleven point scale from 0 'very unhappy' to 10 'very happy') how happy they feel with their life as a whole and ten specific aspects of their life (relationships with family, their home, how much choice they have, relationships with their friends, the things they have, their health, their appearance, what may happen later in life (in the future), the school they go to and the way they use their time).

### Office for National Statistics (ONS) 3 measures of children's well-being (Affective, cognitive and eudaimonic/psychological well-being)

The Office for National Statistics has developed three measures of well-being for children, which are similar to the measures they use for adults. Children are asked to state on a scale of 0 to 10 (where 10 is the most positive response):

- how happy they felt yesterday (positive affect),
- how satisfied they feel with their life nowadays (life satisfaction); and
- whether they feel that their life is worthwhile (eudaimonic well-being).

### Warwick Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS) (psychological functioning and positive affect) and the Short Warwick Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (SWEMWBS)

(See <https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/sci/med/research/platform/wemwbs/about/strengths>)

WEMWBS is a 14 item scale, which was developed by The University of Warwick and The University of Edinburgh and funded by NHS health Scotland. It has been validated for use in a range of settings and with children aged 13 and over as well as adults. It covers aspects of:

- psychological functioning: 'optimism, autonomy, agency, curiosity, clarity of thought and positive relationships'; and
- positive affect: 'confidence, feeling relaxed, cheerful, having the energy to spare'.

Total scores for the 14-item scale range from 14 to 70 (see NHS Health Scotland, 2015).

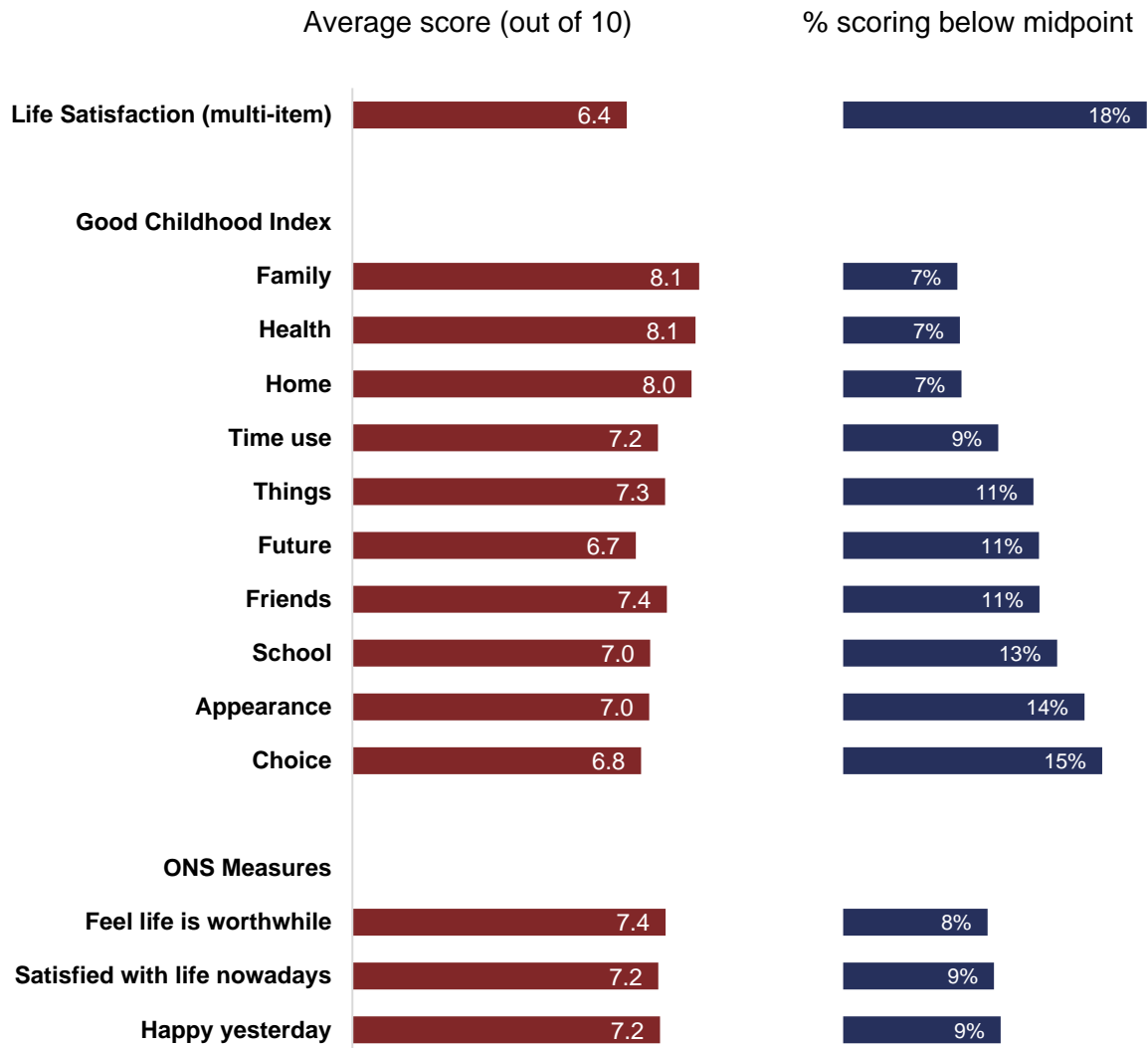
A shorter 7-item version of WEMWBS – Short Warwick Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (SWEMWBS) – has also been developed, which uses seven of the items that are said to relate more to functioning than feeling. Scores on these seven items are summed and these raw scores, ranging from 7 to 35, are transformed into metric scores using a conversion approach developed by those who wrote the questions (see Stewart-Brown et al, 2009).

Figure 6 shows the mean scores and proportion of children scoring below the midpoint on the multi-item measure of life satisfaction, different aspects of life and the three well-being indicators developed by the ONS. The most noteworthy findings are as follows:

- **Life Satisfaction:** In 2020, the majority of children scored on or above the midpoint of the scale (10 out of 20), which is consistent with other years. However, a larger proportion than usual – almost one in five children - reported scores below the midpoint (18%). In our previous five surveys, this proportion has ranged from 10% to 13%.
- **Good Childhood Index domains:** In line with our findings in previous years, the area of life where children had the highest mean score/ the lowest proportion unhappy was family. Whereas in the last two year's children's responses have suggested they are least happy with their school, the aspect of life with the highest proportion of children scoring below the midpoint in 2020 was Choice. This corresponds with parents' views that children would be less happy with their choices as a result of the pandemic. The proportion with low scores for their relationships with friends was also higher than usual (11% in 2020 compared to proportions of between 3% and 6% in our previous five surveys), which corresponds with (and may in part be accounted for by) children's assessments that they felt they were coping less well with being unable to see their friends.
- **ONS Three:** In 2020, the vast majority of children scored on or above the midpoint of the scale (0 to 10) for feeling their life was worthwhile, satisfaction with their life nowadays and how happy they felt yesterday. Less than one in ten children scored below the midpoint on each of these measures, reflecting only modest increases on recent years, which are more in line with what might be expected based on natural fluctuation.



**Figure 6: Mean scores (out of 10) and proportion scoring below the midpoint on well-being measures**



Note: The above figures are based only on those children (aged 10 to 17) who provided a valid score (0 to 10) for the individual measures (Weighted N's vary from 1,911 for the ONS measures feel life is worthwhile to 2,001 for the GCI family and choice domains).

As many of the measures of well-being included in our survey do not refer to a specific timeframe, the 14-item version of WEMWBS<sup>10</sup> was included for those aged 13 and over for the first time this year. The original studies undertaken to validate the scale with secondary aged children in England and Scotland reported a mean of 48.8 and a standard deviation of 8.6 (see NHS Scotland, 2015). More recently, the NHS prevalence study on the Mental Health of Children and Young People aged 11 to 19 in England (NHS Digital, 2018) found a mean of 51.7.

All children aged 13 and over who took part in The Children’s Society’s household survey completed the WEMWBS questions (see Table 2 below). The mean score among these children was 47.7 with a standard deviation of 8.8 (WEMWBS has a minimum score of 14 and maximum of 70). Boys had a higher mean score than girls (48.5 compared with 46.9).<sup>11</sup>

**Table 2: Mean Scores and proportions low, medium and high for WEMWBS and SWEMWBS items among children aged 13-17**

Measure	Age		Gender		Total
	13-15 years	16-17 years	Male	Female	
<b>Mean WEMWBS Score</b>	47.8	47.7	48.5	46.9	47.7
% Low (<43)	27.5%	26.1%	23.7%	30.2%	26.9%
% Medium (43-60)	64.5%	67.8%	68.5%	63.0%	65.8%
% High (61+)	8.1%	6.1%	7.8%	6.8%	7.3%
<b>Mean metric score<sup>12</sup> for SWEMWBS items</b>	21.6	21.5	21.9	21.3	21.6
% Low (7-19)	22.1%	22.0%	19.2%	25.0%	22.1%
% Medium (19.1-27.9)	71.1%	72.6%	74.0%	69.3%	71.7%
% High (28-35)	6.7%	5.4%	6.7%	5.7%	6.2%

Note: The above scores are based on those aged 13+ only who completed the 14-item WEMWBS (Weighted N=1,201).

The low, medium and high category thresholds are taken from University of Warwick website (<https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/sci/med/research/platform/wemwbs/using/howto/>)

<sup>10</sup> The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale was funded by the Scottish Government National Programme for Improving Mental Health and Well-being, commissioned by NHS Health Scotland, developed by the University of Warwick and the University of Edinburgh, and is jointly owned by NHS Health Scotland, the University of Warwick and the University of Edinburgh.

<sup>11</sup> This difference would be statistically significant for a random sample at the 0.01 level.

<sup>12</sup> Scores have been converted using a conversion table as recommended by the question developers (Stewart-Brown et al, 2009).

## **HeadStart Programme**

HeadStart is a five-year, £58.7 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.

To make sure support works, the HeadStart partnerships involve young people in the co-design, commissioning, delivery and evaluation of services.

The Evidence Based Practice Unit (EBPU) at the Anna Freud Centre and University College London (UCL) is working with The National Lottery Community Fund and the HeadStart partnerships to collect and evaluate evidence about what does and does not work locally to benefit young people now and in the future. Partners working with the EBPU on this evaluation include the Child Outcomes Research Consortium (CORC) and the University of Manchester. This collaboration is called the HeadStart Learning Team. Previous partners in the HeadStart Learning Team include the London School of Economics (LSE) and Common Room.

The development of the wellbeing measurement framework has been a collective effort to support the mental wellbeing of 10 – 16 year olds. This framework was developed in the context of the HeadStart programme, funded by the National Lottery Community Fund. The measures were selected by partnerships involved in HeadStart at the time of development in the following areas: Birmingham, Blackpool, Cornwall, Cumbria, Kent, Kingston Upon Hull, Knowsley, Lewisham, Middlesbrough, Newham, Southampton, and Wolverhampton. The process involved a series of facilitated workshops and consultation with wider networks including young people and schools. The measures were then piloted and refined.

One of the measures in the survey is the Shortened Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (SWEMWBS).

The HeadStart Programme (see box above) uses SWEMWBS<sup>13</sup> in its measurement framework. The Wellbeing Measurement Framework is normally administered in HeadStart schools from January to April and results in approximately 30,000 responses. Comparisons with national datasets from 2018 show that the Year 10 sample is:

- slightly more deprived than the national average, based on free school meal (FSM) eligibility (study sample FSM: 4,934 (16.0%); national figures: 12.9%)
- has a lower proportion of children with a statement of special educational needs (study sample: 3,429 (11.9) either has a statement of SEN or SEN support; national figures: 14.4% with either a statement of SEN, an EHC plan or SEN support)
- has a greater proportion of young people classified as White (study sample: 22,685 (78.1%); national figures: 75.2%).

This year's survey period was impacted by Covid19 and the closure of schools. Data collection for the year was paused in March when schools closed. Prior to this point, there were approximately 7,900 responses across the Year 9 snapshot group and the longitudinal group which are in Year 10. Descriptive statistics from this year's survey period have been provided for use in this report to offer an idea of how children might be feeling in the months immediately before the lockdown (and not to evaluate HeadStart). These responses are not equally distributed across the six HeadStart partnerships, which had varying response rates at the time of school closures. Further, it is important to note that responses come from HeadStart schools where young people may have been involved in one or more intervention(s) that has had a specific focus on their mental health and wellbeing. The data do, however, offer a snapshot of children's well-being in the period immediately before lockdown.

Overall, the data from this year's survey of HeadStart schools showed a mean score of 21.0 (standard deviation of 4.56), with a slightly higher mean score for boys than girls (21.9 and 20.3 respectively). Using a categorical approach for those with SWEMWBS scores, 32.0% scored low, 60.9% had a moderate score, and 7.0% scored high. A higher proportion of girls (38.3%) had low scores than boys (23.8%).<sup>14</sup>

In our TCS household survey, children's (aged 13-17) mean score for the SWEMWBS 7-items (obtained as part of the fuller 14-item measure) was 21.6 (21.9 for boys and 21.3 for girls) with a standard deviation of 3.72.<sup>15</sup> Among the age group covered by the HeadStart data (school years 9-10 or ages 13-15), the mean score was very similar at 21.6 (standard deviation 3.89) overall, and 21.8 for boys and 21.4 for girls.<sup>16</sup> Both overall and among those aged 13-15, 22.1% had low scores. Interestingly, of the seven items, the statement with the lowest score for this age group was 'I've been feeling optimistic about the future'.

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<sup>13</sup> Short Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (SWEMWBS) © NHS Health Scotland, University of Warwick and University of Edinburgh, 2008, all rights reserved.

<sup>14</sup> The figures including the missing data would be 29.3% (low), 55.7% medium, 6.4% high and 8.5% missing. For boys, 21.5% low, 59.8% moderate, 9.1% high and 9.6% missing. For girls, 35.2% low, 52.6% medium, 4.4% high and 7.6% missing.

<sup>15</sup> The difference between the mean score for boys and girls would not quite be statistically significant for a random sample at the 0.01 level.

<sup>16</sup> While HeadStart is an England based initiative, the figure in the text applies to the UK as a whole to maximise sample sizes and further breakdowns. The mean for children in England only (aged 13-15) was 21.8 overall (21.9 for boys and 21.7 for girls).

## **Consultation findings with children and young people**

To complement the survey findings, we wanted to gather further information from young people on their thoughts and feelings about the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on their lives. Through virtual consultation sessions, we asked children and young people two questions:

- How has coronavirus changed how you think or feel about the future?
- What tips/advice would you give to other young people on how to cope with the coronavirus pandemic?

Whilst the consultations reiterated that young people are worried about the impact of the pandemic on how they think and feel about the future, some young people did tell us that there had been some positive aspects. On balance, however, the comments regarding worries and concerns outweighed the comments on positive impacts.

The consultation findings also reflect strategies of self-care that young people have put in place to support them through this time. These strategies are closely aligned to the Five Ways to Well-Being and highlight the importance of staying connected and active to young people.

### **What did young people tell us about how they think or feel about the future?**

We asked children and young people to tell us how they think Coronavirus has changed how they think or feel about the future. We know that children's feelings about the future are linked to their current sense of well-being. A consistent finding in our Good Childhood Report is that, of the different aspects of life that we ask children about, the lowest mean score is what may happen in the future (The Children's Society, 2019).

The majority of comments received in relation to this question concerned school and what this meant for their education going forward. There were also long-term considerations in relation to wider concerns about society and on the impact on health, generally mental health.

Most of the comments received were negative, but there was an important sub-section of positive comments from young people centred on feeling more appreciative and grateful as result of the pandemic.

Whilst children did not directly refer to the lack of choice in their lives, a key finding from our quantitative data, it was clear from their comments how constrained they felt across various different aspects of life.

## School

Our survey findings suggest that most children (over two-thirds) felt that they had coped well with schools/ colleges closing and doing work at home, although parents were concerned about the longer term impact on their children's education. Young people completing the consultation spoke about the impact of missing out on large amounts of teaching time and falling behind as a result of this.

*'It has worried the years that have started GCSE's such as Y9 and 10. It has put enormous amounts of pressure on us and makes us anxious that we won't achieve the grades we could of.'* **Female, 14**

*'It's going to make school harder as we missed lessons and a Proper teacher.'* **Female, 11**

Our survey found that one in five older children scored below the midpoint on coping with exam cancellations. Not surprisingly, those who had missed exams as a result of lockdown measures were uncertain about what this would mean for their future education, including future college and university places. Some young people expressed longer term concerns about their future job prospects.

*'I am thinking about my college placement and am I going to get the grades I need for college.'* **Male, 16**

*'Don't know where I'm going next year, all the induction days have been cancelled and I've got to make my decision on existing knowledge rather than experience.'* **Female, 16**

*'It's quite scary because you can die from it. I'm scared that the school has closed down. I'm worried about my exams next year. I need my exams to get a job.'* **Male, 15**

## Wider concerns about society

There were a number of comments from young people which related to wider uncertainty and societal change as a result of the pandemic.

*'Because we don't know anything about the future anymore. Before all this we didn't know much about the future but at least we had some ideas of what was going to happen.'* **Female, 13**

*'It has made me realise that the future is more unpredictable than I thought. I do not know what will go on in the future, so I am going to value what I have now.'* **Male, 13**

*'For me Coronavirus has given me more negative thoughts for the future.'* **Female, 15**

For a small number of young people, this time had helped them to think more about changes they would like to see in society. One young person spoke about this in relation to their future career.

*'Coronavirus has impacted a lot of people in society and personally, it has opened my eyes in the luxury people take for granted on a daily basis as well as that it has intensified my goals of wanting to become a doctor in order to help those in need.'* **Female, 14**

Other young people also described how the situation had made them think more about the environment and how they want to do more to support this in the future.

*'The environment. I was already passionate about the environment but situation has made me think much harder. I think young people think the same - but I cannot predict fully what they think.'* **Male, 11**

*'I think it has made me think how much pollution and climate change is in the world and I want to help make it better.'* **Female, 12**

## **Health**

Given that more young people in the survey scored below the mid-point for some well-being measures, it is perhaps not surprising that mental health was mentioned in the consultations. Whilst there were only a small number of comments in relation this, it is important to highlight that some young people thought mental health had been adversely affected as a result of the pandemic.

*'People aren't really understanding things like how much stress this is putting on some people, because I'm really anxious about this all the time, my dad is really anxious about this all the time.'* **18 year old**

*'I think it's caused a real decline in mental health for a lot of young people and a lot of people's parents are noticing.'* **18 year old**

## **Appreciation**

We thought it was important to highlight the feelings of appreciation and gratitude that were strongly reflected in young people's comments about some of the positives of lockdown. This was most closely related to relationships with friends and family. Young people expressed feeling more appreciative and grateful for the people and things they have around them as a result of lockdown measures. Young people spoke about not taking things for granted that have been taken away, such as seeing friends and family.

*'I actually feel a lot more grateful about things now - things I took granted for before that have now been taken away from me.'* **Female, 14**

*'It's given me a whole new perspective on life. I realise now that I can't take advantage of everyday things. You don't know how much you're going to miss something when it's gone. Especially friends, and the ability to go out.'* **Female, 12**

*'It has made me appreciate things a lot more.'* **Male, 14**

## Strategies for self-care

In these challenging times, we were keen to find out what advice these young people would give to others to help them cope with the coronavirus pandemic.

When we analysed findings, it was striking how close the advice and tips young people provided related to the Five Ways to Well-Being. *The Five Ways to Well-Being* provides a framework of activities that people can do themselves to increase their well-being (The Children's Society, 2014). For children and young people these are: connect, be active, take notice, keep learning and be creative.

Connecting was the most popular response from young people as they spoke about the importance of staying in touch with friends and family. Young people also spoke about being active, creativity and learning, and the activities they had taken up to support this. There were a few comments surrounding advice to take notice, but these were not as popular self-care strategies.

Young people also spoke about one additional category which related to the importance of following Government guidance. From the consultation responses, it is not clear why this was so important to self-care for young people.

## Connecting with friends and family

Many young people told us that they missed their friends, reflecting our survey findings that friendships is an aspect of life young people have struggled with as a result of lockdown measures.

The majority of the advice provided by young people revolved around the importance of staying in touch and connected with friends and family, highlighting the importance of relationships to these young people. Connecting with friends and family, particularly online, has also been found to be a positive coping strategy in other research (Mind, 2020).

*'If you can try and FaceTime as often as you can with your friends because personally it really comforts me. It isn't the same as seeing them in person but you are still seeing them.'* **Female, 11**

*'Facetime and keeping in contact with as many people as possible. It makes you feel like you have someone else to talk to and reminds you that you are not alone.'* **Female, 15**

They also highlighted the value of talking to others about how they are feeling.

*'Talk about how you are feeling. Do something nice for yourself and try and take your mind off it.'* **Female, 14**

*'Be vocal about your problems. Don't be scared to say stuff to people around you.'* **Male, 13**



## Being active

Young people spoke about how staying busy with hobbies had helped them during lockdown and advised other young people to try and do the same. Having a routine and structure were both highlighted as important.

*'Doing things you enjoy. If you find yourself worrying about the current situation or of what is to come try to distract yourself with things to do...These things are the little things that we enjoy that we usually don't have time to do when at work/school so use this situation to your advantage.'* **Female, 16**

*'Maintaining hobbies and things like that, making sure you get out every day is like a big thing. That's what has helped me the most, even if it's just a five minute walk or you just go to the corner shop to get some loo roll or whatever.'* **18 year old**

*'It's about creating a structure, a thing that you do that marks the beginning and end of a day and the beginning and end of a week and that's what's helped me.'* **18 year old**

## Being creative and keep learning

When providing examples of activities that young people had taken up that had helped them during lockdown, these activities were in line with being creative and learning. Some young people mentioned creative activities such as drawing and hobbies such as learning to play the guitar.

*'I've gone back to lots of hobbies that I ran out of time for with college and stuff but drawing is a big one that I started doing again. I stopped doing that for like a year, and reading – I stopped doing for a long time and I started doing that again as well.'* **Female, 18**

*'I went back to an old hobby that I haven't done for a while - playing guitar. I haven't played in like over a year or something like that. So I'm really happy that I'm doing it again.'*  
**18 year old**

## Taking notice

There were very few comments received in relation to the taking notice aspect of the Five Ways to Well-Being. What some young people did tell us, however, was that this time had given them more time to reflect on their lives, and a break from stresses, such as exams.

*'It's made me reflect more, normally I'm pretty busy, not much time to think, so it's made me think more.'* **Female, 17**

*'There were a lot of people who were nearly burnt out, they were working at full blast and they really couldn't handle it and so this has given them a chance to have a break. Like for some of my friends this came at like the best time possible for them, because we're this close to just snapping because there's so much work being put on us all the time, especially students.'* **18 year old**

## Following government guidelines

There were many comments from young people which related to following guidelines, such as staying inside, washing hands and socially distancing. The volume of comments received in relation to this suggests that young people were acutely aware of what it is they need to be doing during this time.

*'2m apart from anyone you do not live with. Wash your hands for at least 20 seconds a few times a day. Use hand sanitizer if soap not available. Put used tissues in the bin. Wash your hands as soon as you get home. If you can wear something that covers your nose and mouth (Coronavirus mask basically looks like a surgery mask).'* **Male, 15**

*'They should make sure that they are following what their government says.'* **Male, 11**

It was not clear from consultation responses why following Government guidelines was so important in self-care. Staying informed and following guidelines perhaps can be seen as a way for young people to feel in control of the situation and may well be connected to our survey finding about children struggling with a lack of choice and autonomy. However, further work would be needed to explore this link.

## Summary

Our research with parents and their children during the COVID-19 lockdown period has shown that both groups are understandably worried about the pandemic, although children may be worried to a slightly lesser extent. It also suggested there may be a relationship between the extent to which parents and children were worried. The survey results reflected a wide range of immediate practical and financial impacts on families, together with anticipated longer term negative impacts on children's education in particular.

Encouragingly, the majority of parents felt that children's happiness had only been adversely affected in two out of seven aspects of life examined (happiness with friends and how much choice they have in life). Most children also reported having coped to some extent with the lockdown changes, although they admitted having coped less well with not being able to see friends and family. This was reinforced by our consultation responses which highlighted the challenges that lockdown posed for children's friendships, including feelings of isolation from friends.

In terms of well-being specifically, most children continue to be happy/ satisfied with their life overall and different aspects of life. Almost one in five children scored below the midpoint on the usually stable multi-item measure of life satisfaction, however, which is of concern and suggests that the cognitive well-being of some children might have been affected. The area of life where the largest proportion of children scored below the midpoint (suggesting they were unhappy) in our 2020 survey was for the amount of choice they have, which is not surprising given the enforced lockdown and associated implications.

A small proportion of parents felt that their child's happiness with time use may actually have improved during lockdown. Children's consultation responses also reflected this with children referring to advantages, such as being able to pursue hobbies, and a general appreciation for what they have in life. The strategies they shared for self-care were reminiscent of the Five Ways to Well-being and the importance of connecting with others and being active.

## **Policy Implications and Recommendations**

As the country recovers from Coronavirus, we are afforded an opportunity to reset how we promote, support and respond to children's well-being. There should be four key priorities for Government moving forward to respond to the findings outlined in this briefing:

1. Comprehensive measurement of children's subjective well-being;
2. Getting the return to school right;
3. A funded prevention and early intervention strategy to promote positive well-being;
4. Supporting the financial security of low-income families.

### **National measurement**

Our findings suggest that the Covid-19 pandemic may have resulted in more children experiencing low well-being. In addressing these challenges however, decision makers are already on the back-foot because we are responding to all these problems long after they have occurred.

Data on the well-being of adults, collected through the Office for National Statistics (ONS) National Well-being Measurement Programme, has allowed much more timely tracking of adult well-being through the pandemic (ONS, 2020b). This data has been extremely useful in allowing the Government to prioritise the lifting of lockdown measures. Understanding this data also enables the Government to more effectively target different groups in the population who are clearly still struggling – like young adults for example (ONS, 2020a).

Comprehensive data of this kind does not exist for children. Our study is the first near representative look at UK children and it will not be repeated until next year. For those children and young people who do not bounce-back, any insight next year's survey provides will likely be far too late to intervene effectively and the negative consequences of the pandemic may have become entrenched in their lives.

The pandemic highlights why The Children's Society has long called for a more comprehensive approach to collecting data on children's subjective well-being. All policy about children should be made with the express intention of maximising their well-being. This is not possible if high quality data is not available when key decisions are being made.

Measuring well-being has many benefits: it provides an evidence base to demonstrate the efficacy of different interventions, allows for the identification of new trends and pressures on well-being, provides a mechanism to target support to the most in need and allows for progress to be tracked so we can understand if the changes we make are resulting in improvements.

As a society, we face some big policy challenges in the coming months in relation to children. How do we get children back to school safely now the well-established norm of mandatory school attendance has been undermined? How do we understand the long-term effects of the pandemic on young people's mental health? How will we support young people as they transition into adulthood during an economic downturn? How do we find and respond to those young people who suffered abuse, neglect and trauma whilst hidden from view at home? Having timely data from children, about their lives, can only be helpful in meeting the challenges ahead. At a time where great change is underway, it is crucial that the opportunity is seized to make children's well-being a priority.

## **Getting the return to school right**

The next most critical change children and young people will experience in their lives is the return to school in September. Getting this transition back into the classroom right is a massive challenge but our findings suggest some important things for decision makers to consider.

It is worth noting that last year's Good Childhood Report showed a dip in children's happiness with school in the UK. Good Childhood Reports have not found a decline in happiness with schoolwork, however (The Children's Society, 2019). Some of the quotes from children and young people in this report demonstrate the fear, stresses, and challenges young people expect to face next year as they try to "catch-up" on the months of missed, or reduced, education. Without careful planning we risk that children returning to schools will exacerbate the low levels of well-being for some children, brought about by the pandemic.

As more children return to the classroom in September, there should be a focus on 4 key areas to improve well-being. Firstly, as the findings highlight, children have struggled with their friendships during the pandemic. Children need to be given the time and space to re-establish their friendships, not just as they return to school, but throughout the academic year.

Secondly, a focus on choice will be key. Children have been particularly unhappy with the amount of choice they have had at this time so this needs to be recognised and addressed when planning school catch-up activities.

Thirdly, with the national catch-up programme, extra tuition, and autumn exams for those unhappy with their predicted grades, the additional stress that catch-up plans may put on children needs to be considered. This is particularly important given the concerns expressed by young people in regards to missing large chunks of their education.

And finally, it is telling that some of the things young people feel have boosted their emotional well-being in lockdown are closely linked to the five ways to well-being. Music, art, connecting with family and friends, and sport have all helped to buttress children's well-being during this difficult time, these have rarely been the focus of previous reform initiatives from the Government which have focused heavily on a medical model of mental health.

We welcome the recommendation from the Government that, in the initial weeks of the return to school, well-being will have to take precedent over academic attainment. And we acknowledge that the Government has been highly active in improving mental health in schools through its introduction of designated senior mental health leads, the new RSHE curriculum, whole school approaches to well-being, and the pilots of the new school-based Mental Health Support Teams (Department for Education, 2017).

But, if we are to fully address and support children's well-being then we need to go further. Our children's well-being and their education should not be seen as conflicting priorities to be dialled up or down dependent on proximity to key exams. We need an education system that always promotes well-being.

Many of the most cost effective interventions identified in the Education Endowment Foundation's Teaching and Learning Toolkit, like feedback, metacognition and self-regulation, are all linked to

improved well-being too (Education Endowment Foundation, 2018). It is clear that we can have an educational system that improves well-being and secures excellent educational outcomes. The recovery priority for the Department for Education must be a detailed review and strategy to ensure well-being is a long-term focus for schools and not just an “intervention” to offset the consequences of a schooling system that appears to be a challenge for children’s well-being.

### **Emotional health and well-being support**

The report found that almost one in five children scored below the midpoint on a multi-item measure of life satisfaction, suggesting they were not satisfied with their lives. Whilst mental health and well-being are not the same, our previous research has found that low subjective well-being and mental health conditions like anxiety and depression are linked (The Children’s Society 2018).

Currently, low-level emotional health and well-being needs are met through support in schools and by the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) in the community. During the pandemic, as schools have closed, the support provided by the VCS through helplines and online support has become increasingly important.

Responsibility for the provision of these services is shared between the NHS and local authority. However, there is a lack of accountability and transparency across CCG’s, local authorities and public health as to who is responsible for ensuring this provision is available for all young people with low-level needs. As a result, the provision of emotional health and well-being services is patchy. This is further confused by a complicated funding environment which lacks a clear stream of funding to support children’s emotional health.

Given the poor progress in improving children and young people’s well-being over recent years, the findings in this briefing highlight that it is now more important than ever that a clear and well-funded community prevention and early intervention strategy to improve children’s emotional health and well-being is put in place.

We see that there is the role for the increased provision of open access, drop-in emotional health services within communities. For example, The Children’s Society runs a range of open access, drop-in mental health hubs for children and young people across the Midlands. These hubs aim to prevent the escalation of emotional health difficulties with timely support, whilst reducing the number of avoidable referrals to specialist mental health services. The drop-in nature of the hubs means there are no waiting lists so young people are able to access the support on offer whenever they feel ready.

Alongside services like these, a wider range of preventative activity is also needed. Children need access to sport, music, art, play and youth clubs. Analysis of local authority children’s spending in recent years highlights a massive reduction in spending on early intervention services and local authorities struggle to keep up with their statutory duties for the most vulnerable young people (Choose Children, 2020). We have to turn these trends around and using well-being as the lens for understanding the levels of funding required, and the outcomes of any spending is crucial.

The lack of a dedicated funding stream for emotional health and well-being services has previously hampered the roll-out of this provision. For a concerted effort to be effective, dedicated and sustainable funding services should be provided and distributed across health, schools, local

authorities and the VCS. This funding should be bought together into single grants for local areas to provide low-level services for children and young people's emotional health and well-being.

### **Family finances**

Many of our calls to protect low-income families from financial hardship pre-date Covid-19. However, the crisis will have exacerbated the financial difficulties experienced by some families. When we asked parents about the likely impact of Coronavirus in the next 12 months, 52% of parents expected an adverse effect on family finances. Whilst we recognise the quick work of the Government to put measures in place to protect economic livelihoods during the pandemic, there is much more that needs to be done to protect families, especially low-income families, from further financial insecurity.

We know that families are struggling with the additional costs of raising children, made worse by children being at home due to school closures and some parents experiencing a sudden loss of income due to job losses or not being able to work as a result of childcare responsibilities (Child Poverty Action Group, 2020). More support is needed for these families. In order to achieve this, the Government should invest in £10 per week increases in child benefit and the child elements of Child Tax Credit and Universal Credit, alongside the removal of the benefit cap and the two-child limit.

The crisis has also seen a surge in new Universal Credit (UC) claimants as 2.4 million households have applied for UC since the beginning of March (TUC, 2020). Whilst UC is designed to support those in financial hardship, the five-week wait for an initial payment can leave families without enough money to pay bills or provide food for their children. As a step towards addressing this, advance payments of Universal Credit should be given as non-repayable grants, rather than as loans.

The extended Free School Meal (FSM) provision into the summer has been welcome. Yet, the provision of vouchers has been found to be restrictive, with some vouchers only being valid in certain supermarkets that some families are unable to access. In order to improve the accessibility and flexibility of the scheme, it needs to be considered how the FSM voucher can be extended to include cash payments where appropriate.

What is more, Free School Meal provision should be extended to cover more low-income families who currently miss out on this crucial provision. The provision has been extended to cover families with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) during the crisis. Generally, families with NRPF cannot access benefits-based Free School Meals for their children, which can save families over £400 per year per child. It is crucial that going forward, this extension of Free School Meals to NRPF families is made permanent to ensure children with no resource to public funds who are living in poverty continue to have access to this provision beyond the crisis.

## **Recommendations:**

### **National**

- *The Government should commit to introducing regular comprehensive, national measurement of children and young people's well-being that provides localised insight into children's well-being across all local authority areas.*
- *We recommend that dedicated public health funding and a national strategy is developed to improve children's well-being. This would fund a range of prevention and early help services to improve emotional well-being.*
- *The Department for Education should review schooling in England to identify ways, beyond the "whole school approach to well-being" that the national curriculum, exams, behaviour management and other aspects of provision can actively support children's well-being.*
- *The Free School Meals voucher scheme should be extended to include cash payments where appropriate. The scheme should also be extended to include more low-income families and NRPF families on a permanent basis.*
- *To support low-income families, there should be £10 per week increases in child benefit and the child element of child tax credit and Universal Credit, alongside the removal of the benefit cap and the two-child limit. Advance payments of Universal Credit should be paid as grants rather than loans to address the five-week wait for initial payments.*



## Local

- *Local authorities should work proactively with schools in their areas to support children and young people's well-being during the return to education. This should include developing common resources, advising on a recovery curriculum that prioritises children's well-being, as well as close and collaborative working between schools and local authority children's services to provide additional support to the most vulnerable young people.*
- *Local authorities should convene CCGs, public health, and VCS organisations who have been delivering mental health and well-being services throughout the crisis. These bodies should then work together to plan a recovery in service provision, ensuring there is adequate capacity in local services to support children's mental health and well-being.*
- *Local authorities should commit to undertaking an assessment of the subjective well-being of children and young people in their area at least every 4 years. This will allow local bodies to better understand any underlying factors driving low well-being amongst young people in the future, and facilitate the planning of services accordingly.*

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Thank you to all those children who participated in our annual survey and the consultation exercise. Your views are essential in assessing how children feel about their lives.

*The future is more  
unpredictable  
than I thought*

13 year old boy

**Every young person should have  
the support they need in order  
to enjoy a safe, happy childhood.**

That's why we run services and campaigns that  
make children's lives better and change the  
systems that are placing them in danger.

The Children's Society is bringing  
hope back to children's lives.

To find out more about this report, email  
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