



Locked Down and Online

Teenagers' wellbeing and online lives in the COVID winter lockdown 2020.

'Life's gone digital' said a boy of 13 during the winter lockdown. What has this meant for young people? While they depended on their phones, tablets, games consoles and laptops as a lifeline to friends, fun and support, this is not all they found online. Many encountered harmful content talking about suicide, anorexia and misinformation about COVID. Teens also report online environments filled with sexist, homophobic and racist comments.

Young people were worried and anxious and described worries so overwhelming, 'they affect my life'. 20% feel alone. Sleep and appetite were affected.

The annual Cybersurvey compared answers from 2019 with those from 2020.

Worries Increase year on year 2019/2021

- Almost 2/3 of young people say, 'I worry a lot' (6% up)
- 45% feel 'My worries affect my life' (5% up)
- 68% feel nervous or anxious (5% up)
- Twice as many worry about life at home

They come across more harmful content in 2020

- 31% saw online content talking about suicide (up 6% on 2019)
- 27% saw online content about anorexia (up 4% on 2019)
- 34% saw content about bulking up the body (up 6% on 2019)
- 42% saw misinformation about COVID

Happiness reduced or became sporadic

- Only 46% of teens feel happy most of the time (6% down on 2019)

Young people were already worried and anxious in 2019 and remain so

- 53% cannot 'make my worries go away'
- 56% are 'afraid bad things might happen'
- Only 1/3 feel positive about things most of the time

Friends were lost due to missing school

In 2019, 62% of both boys and girls strongly agreed that they had good friends. By the end of 2020 this decreased to 54% of girls and 57% of boys. Among those who prefer not to state their gender, the difference was more marked, from 54% in 2019 to 35% in 2020.

Young carers were 5 x more likely than other teens to say 'I have lost my friends due to missing so much school.'

The Cybersurvey compared young people's experiences before the pandemic with a 2020 sample. Data from 2051 teens aged 11-17 were collected in late 2020/21 during lockdowns. Impacts of COVID did not strike everyone equally.

178 young people said they or their family had been badly affected by COVID 19. This could include health, bereavement, job loss problems, food poverty, domestic violence, or family breakup.

The absence of services during lockdowns increased the burden for families and especially for young carers and those with a longstanding physical illness, the two groups most affected by COVID.

Young people who say 'COVID-19 has affected me or my family badly'

are understandably both worried and afraid of worse to come. Over two thirds say, 'my worries affect my life' (68% compared to 42% of all other respondents). Their sleep, appetite and ability to concentrate are all affected.

- 74% say: 'I can't make my worries go away' and 'I'm afraid bad things might happen'
- 68% say 'my worries affect my life'
- 62% feel 'It's too much effort to do anything'
- 31% feel nervous or anxious 'most of the time' compared to 14% of all other respondents
- 22% can concentrate well most of the time, compared to 37% of all others
- They are more than 2 x as likely to feel tired for no reason most of the time, than peers
- 28% sleep well most of the time compared to 42% of their peers
- They are 4.5 x more likely than peers to feel I've missed so much school I have lost my friends

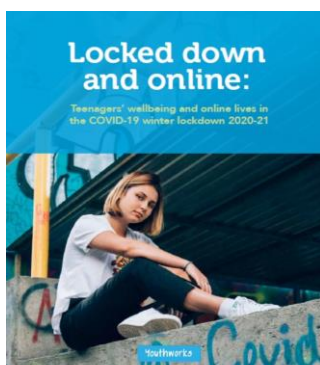
Friendship:

Faced with disrupted routines, uncertainty and fear, many felt isolated while others contact old friends from primary school or family abroad and meet new people online. However, 6% fewer than in 2019 say 'I have no worries about friendships.' 20% say 'I feel alone.'

The percentage of young people who said 'I worry about life at home' doubled from 4% in 2019 to 8% in 2020. Almost 1 in 4 of those who worry about life at home, said, 'I feel alone.'

Adrienne Katz, Director of Youthworks, who runs The Cybersurvey, said, 'It is vital to hear from young people so that we can develop and sustain nuanced and sensitive support for their recovery. This is a priority. They will struggle to learn with this burden of worry. We are so grateful for schools and teenagers who helped make this happen at such a tough time.'

'Covid 19 has affected me badly - my anxiety has got worse and in general just everything, not seeing my friends, has made an impact on me because my friends mean everything, and Georgia understands me more than anyone and not seeing is actually hard.' Girl, 12



The Cybersurvey is an annual survey for 11-16year olds, run every year since 2008 by Youthworks, a consultancy making young people's views heard. Youthworks has a research partnership with Dr Aiman El-Asam of the Department of Psychology at the University of Kingston, London.

Any school can take part in The Cybersurvey, and students of every ability are encouraged to take part.

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