



## SURREY YOUTH FOCUS

Improving the lives of young people by supporting our members

*"There is nothing good about being in lockdown in my opinion because you can't go out, you can't see your friends, you can't go to school. It's just annoying."*

### COVID 19: Listening to children and young people in Surrey

Compiled by Jo Cookes

June 2020

*"We have gotten stronger as a family and enjoying more time with them"*

This report has been compiled by Surrey Youth Focus, working in conjunction with the User Voice & Participation Team on behalf of the Surrey Safeguarding Children Partnership and Surrey County Council's Children, Families, Lifelong Learning and Culture Commissioning Team. We would like to give huge thanks to all the organisations listed below who have taken the time to listen to our children and young people to find out how they are coping and what their hopes are:

Emerge  
Halow  
Learning Space  
User Voice & Participation Team  
East to West  
Educational Psychologist Service

Transform Housing  
Young Epilepsy  
CFHS School Nurses  
ESDAS  
Surrey Young Carers  
Family Voice Surrey

We would also obviously give a massive thank you to the children and young people who were willing to be open and talk about their experiences of this pandemic.

## Summary

Frontline practitioners including youth workers, school nurses and the User Voice Participation Team<sup>1</sup> spoke to 199 children and young people about their experiences of life during lockdown. What is clear is that one size does not fit all – every child and young person has had a unique experience ranging from struggling with isolation, stress and difficult family circumstances to embracing this opportunity to learn new skills, spend time with family and re-engage with hobbies. This provides a challenge when we want to ensure that children, young people and their families have access to the right support, information and advice if they are feeling vulnerable, particularly during this unusual period of time. Despite this, there are themes that have emerged:

- Relationships and connections
- Finding time
- Access to learning
- Awareness of self and others
- Emotional wellbeing and mental health

As lockdown eases significantly over the coming weeks and life returns to some sense of normality, let's consider how we can maintain, sustain or change our practice taking into account what children and young people have told us. The emerging findings and recommendations are outlined below:

- The importance of family time for children and young people, there is a strong theme that children and young people have valued this time to strengthen family relationships and spend time together.
- The importance of friends for children and young people. Whilst children and young people have kept in touch using social media or other technology it has not replaced the need for them to see their friends. This is particularly for younger children who do not have access to technology in the same way and interact differently with their friends than teenagers do e.g. they play games which is so much more difficult using technology. Some children and young people have been lonely and felt isolated during lockdown.
- Some children and young people have embraced the positive impact of restrictions on creating free time to do other things – hobbies, exercise and time with family and friends
- Some children and young people have appreciated the slower pace of life and more time
- Many children and young people have a trusted adult they can turn to – parents, youth workers as well as friends but they don't know where to find help.
- A few young people demonstrated resilience and self awareness about their circumstances, needs and hopes.
- There is a theme of children and young people caring for others, the wider environment and community, perhaps building on the youth social action movement that we have seen over the last year.

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<sup>1</sup> The User Voice & Participation Team spoke to the following groups: CAMHS Youth Advisors, Youth Cabinet and SEND Youth Advisors. The questions were also posted on Instagram and responded to by young people.

- There was a constant theme of worry, stress and anxiety caused by strained family relationships, lack of social contact, school and home learning, and concerns about the future.
- Access to learning has been a consistent theme. Children and young people are concerned about returning to school, falling behind, the impact of home learning on their exams and the impact on friends. Whilst some have struggled with home learning others have embraced it and would like this way of learning to continue.
- Children and young people have voiced fear over the impact of COVID on their own health and that of their families and friends. They are also concerned about the uncertainty that COVID has caused and what impact it will have on the future.

## Background

The existence of COVID 19 in our communities across Surrey has created unprecedented circumstances that the whole population has had to adapt to very quickly. Schools partially closed their doors on 20<sup>th</sup> March to pupils except for those who were vulnerable or whose parents were key workers. Our children and young people found themselves at home, learning in a new way, through email, homework apps and virtual communication. They were also limited to exercise outside once a day and not allowed to interact with anyone face to face except those in their household. This has continued, although measures have now eased and we are now freer to be in contact with friends, family and the wider community.

Organisations have rapidly reconfigured services to be able to reach children and young people in different ways and to ensure that we have websites and helplines in place to support vulnerable young people and their families. However, how do we know that in the newly reconfigured landscape of our lives, that we understand what children and young people have faced and had to deal with during this time. What is going on for them? What are their needs? What is going well? What is going badly?

- Imagine the school refuser. Are they now happier that they don't have to go to school – the world has fitted in with them rather than them being expected to fit into the world.
- Imagine someone who has a difficult relationship with their family. How have they coped with the isolation, no school or respite from a toxic environment.
- Imagine a house or flat near you. How do we know what's happening behind closed doors...
  - Is there a teenager who can't cope anymore? How is the parent managing to deal with this?
  - Is there a child who has witnessed abuse or has been abused – who might be in contact with a friend, whispering into a phone – what do they do? What does that friend do? How might they respond?
  - Is there a child who is searching the internet or on social media – what do they find? Self-harming websites? Comedy? Good advice? Or a chat room where they are groomed?

As we have all adapted to a new way of being, Surrey Youth Focus, together with colleagues from the public sector and third sector, have sought to understand how this is impacting and will continue to impact our children and young people. We have our own personal experiences, anecdotal comments and theories of what is going on in households across Surrey. There is some initial evidence that the children and young people needing help now are not all the same cohort as before. It is more difficult for children, young people and their families to reach out for help – they “don't want to bother anyone” – it's not as easy when you have to consciously pick up the phone or send an email. Issues may be magnified due to the intensity of all working, studying and living under one roof. In the same way it is more difficult for those working with children and young people to watch out and know when things may not be right.

In order to better understand, so that we can ensure services and support that is in place is right, Surrey Youth Focus is working in conjunction with the User Voice and Participation Team on behalf of the Surrey Safeguarding Children Partnership and Surrey County Council's Children,

Families, Lifelong Learning and Culture Commissioning Team to gather insight from children and young people themselves.

We have asked our colleagues across Surrey who work with children and young people<sup>2</sup> to seek their voices, to listen to how they feel about this situation. In the first instance we have asked them:

- How has your life got better since the Lockdown?
- How has your life got worse since the Lockdown?
- What are you most worried about when Lockdown is over?
- What's good about Lockdown that you would like to continue when it is over?

Where appropriate we have also asked young people:

- What are you doing to fill your day at home?
- How are you staying in touch with your friends?
- If you or a friend are feeling down / worried / scared:
  - Who are you turning to?
  - What social media platforms/ websites are you using?
  - Have you received the help that you need? If not, why not?
  - What information or advice would be helpful?
- What are the things you are most excited to do when lockdown is over?

Organisations have not asked all of the questions to every child and young person. In some circumstances there was not time during the encounter and so a smaller number of questions were selected. For example School Nurses only asked two questions – “what are you most worried about when lockdown is over?” and “what's good about lockdown that you would like to continue when it is over?”. This has not been a scientific exercise that has sought a specific representative sample using controlled conditions but rather a piece that seeks insight that can help enrich strategy and a way forward. Using known, trusted adults to ask open questions can sometimes provide enlightening and surprising responses that would not be achieved in a more structured environment.

## Findings

Twelve organisations, including charities and the public sector listened to 199 children and young people<sup>3</sup> across Surrey during May and early June 2020. Children between the ages of 5 and 19+ were asked their experiences of lockdown. An undisclosed number of children and young people had special educational needs and/or disabilities<sup>4</sup>. The table below outlines the age and gender distribution of the respondents who provided this information.

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<sup>2</sup> Charities, children's services, health colleagues

<sup>3</sup> 6 responses were from parents on behalf of their children with SEND

<sup>4</sup> Undisclosed number but known due to organisation seeking views – Halow, Learning Space, Young Epilepsy, SEND Youth Advisors and Family Voice.

**Table 1: Age and Gender distribution of children and young people**

Age	Total number	Male	Female
Under 10	43	21	15
11-13	28	18	6
14-15	22	10	7
16-18	32	12	18
19+	10	6	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>135</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>50</b>

Not all children and young people answered all of the questions, therefore the sample size differs for each of the questions outlined above. We have provided some proportions in the findings but these aren't statistically significant and should be used with the caveat that sample size may be small and it is not representative of the whole of Surrey, it is simply a snapshot in time. However, they provide an indication of impact and the quotes add strength and a rich insight.

Overall, the findings from this listening exercise highlight that children and young people are all individuals with unique experiences of lockdown. There are no definitive findings that are applicable to everyone and this creates a challenge when trying to draw conclusions that can be used to plan and/or adapt service provision. It indicates the need to be openminded and that we cannot predict how lockdown has affected our children and young people. Those who were thriving may now be struggling and the reverse is also true. Despite this, there are distinct themes that have emerged, and these are summarised below:

- *Relationships and connections* – with family, friends, partners
- *Access to learning* – experiences of not being in school and learning in a different way
- *Finding time* – how children and young people have been spending their time
- *Awareness of self and others* – what children and young people have learnt about themselves and others
- *Emotional wellbeing and mental health* – how children and young people have managed with their wellbeing.

The following sections provide more detailed insight into each of these themes.

**Relationships and connections**

Social interaction is so important for all of us, and children and young people are no exception. They have shown that they have had both positive and negative experiences of relationships and social connectivity during COVID. Some children and young people are benefitting from being at home and spending more time with their family; but they are also missing their friends and the social interaction at and out of school. Others have found being at home with no opportunity to go out very frustrating and difficult.

A fifth of children and young people (n=83) felt that spending time with family was an improvement on life before Lockdown. Having more time with parents and siblings was a positive for them and was the most frequent response for what has been better during lockdown. This held for all age ranges, older teenagers have enjoyed time with parents as well as young children. A child under 10 years old spoke about it good to have *“Daddy around more”* and another older respondent similarly liked having *“More time with dad”* (14-15 year old young woman).

*“I am enjoying spending more time with the person that I care for on a more personal level rather than just caring”*  
(Young carer)

*“See family more my parents and brother”* (unknown age or gender)

Children and young people spoke about doing activities together with their families, for example, going for walks, cooking etc. One young person spoke about *“Increasing my cooking skills with my brother”* whilst another young child (under 10 years old) was excited as he has *“loved mummy and Daddy making and collecting a bug run which they do daily”* (School nurse’s words).

*“Spending more time with family, more bike rides and walks together”* young person (aged 16-18)

More than a third of respondents who responded to a question about what they most excited about (n=50) spoke of seeing their family when restrictions eased. A similar proportion who responded (n=147) would like to continue spending more time with family after restrictions ease.

*“My relationship with my mum - we have chatted much more”* (unknown aged and gender)

*“More time spent with family is nice and something want to continue.”*  
(unknown aged and gender)

*“I’d like to continue the amount of family walks we have been doing. Continue the amount of family time in general”*  
(young woman, 19+)

However, for some being at home can be difficult and relationships have been strained between family members. A young boy, under 10 years old commented he was *“arguing with brothers and sister and can’t go out”*. One young carer felt *“I find it hard to be good, not get angry and kick off”*. Another young person commented that lockdown was difficult as they were *“stuck indoors with parents”*. Other comments included:

*“I don’t want to be in the house today with my mum and dad. I do love them but friends are also like a family to me.”*  
(Unknown age and gender)

*“I have more arguments with my mum”*  
(Unknown age and gender)

*“A lot of time with family can sometimes be difficult”*  
(Unknown age and gender)

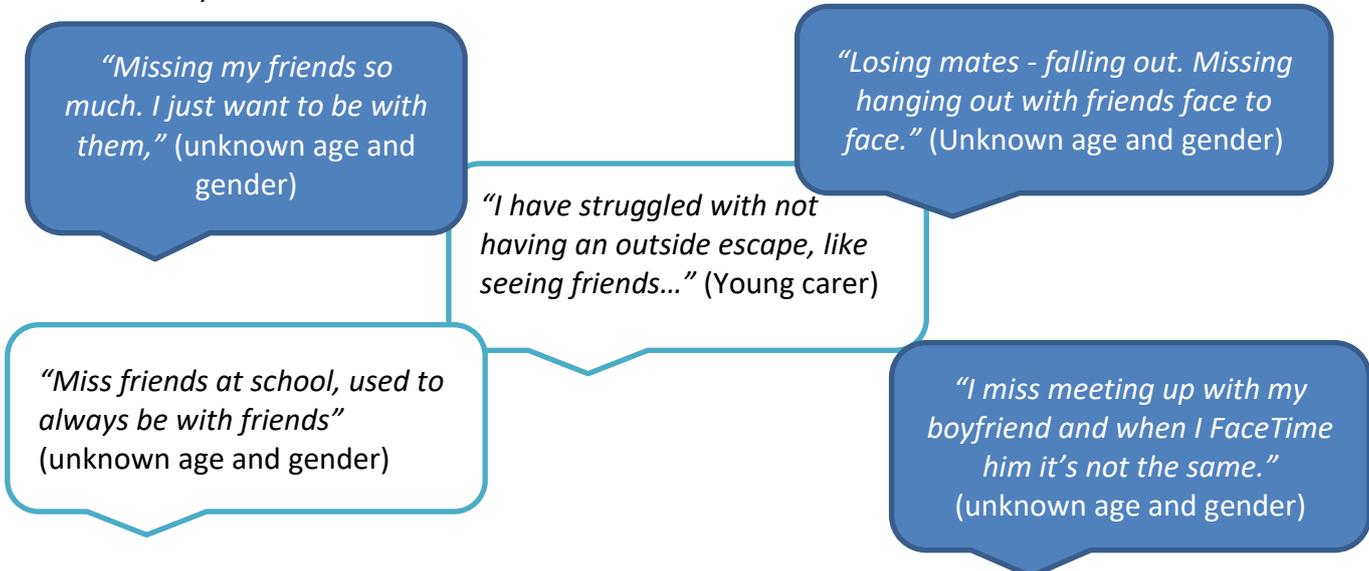
Some young people who we listened to have been away from their families as they are living in residential facilities. This has been hard for them as they are only able to speak with them through video conferencing or on the phone. This group accounts for 25% of those who we spoke to stating that not being able to see family had made Lockdown difficult. One teenage girl (16-18 years) commented that Lockdown was worse as she was *“Not going home to see my family as often as I would like”*. A teenage boy (14-15 years old) also said that *“Not being able to go home and see my Mum, Dad and older brother”* had been difficult.

*“Not seeing my family because my Mum works in a hospital”* (young woman, 16-18 years)

The presence of COVID-19 and associated restrictions have caused a small number of children and young people to worry about their family. There was anxiety around risks from COVID-19 and this may be more acute for children with conditions like autism and OCD. One parent who responded on behalf of her son stated "My son is most worried about others not obeying the rules of measures easing & others hygiene." Concerns also included when they may be able to see them (for those who have been separated) – one young person was worried about *“When Boris Johnson will let me go home”* (16-18 year old young woman) and another commented they were also concerned *“That my mummy and my daddy and my grandad are not coming here”* (19+ young man with SEND). Younger children were particularly worried about missing parents when they go back to school - *“Going back to school and missing mummy, daddy and baby brother (boy 8yrs)”*.

Nearly 30% of young people that were listened to (n=81) commented on missing their friends and partners and being excited about seeing friends when lockdown was lifted was the second most popular response to that question. Only a small number answered questions about how they were keeping in touch with their friends (n=42) but they were generally interacting with friends using technology, including *“Using Xbox to speak to friends”* (unknown age and gender), *“Using Zoom, lots of friends or FaceTime with 1 person”* (unknown age and gender), What’s App, Instagram and Snap Chat.

What is apparent though is that social media is not the same as physically seeing their friends and many still missed their friends.



Young people were also worried about their friends – either them becoming ill or about how Lockdown will have affected their friendships. Examples of comments include:

*“Friendships may have changed”*  
(girl, under 10 years)

*“Worried how it will affect me seeing my friends and going out on our bike rides and building our trails.”* (boy, 13 years)

*“Worried about my friends or me getting the coronavirus”*  
(girl, under 10)

Friends were important to children and young people as support. Of the 61 children and young people who responded more than a third would turn to their friends if they were down, scared or worried - *“My friends, we turn to each other”* (young man, 16-18 years).

*“I stay safe [in bed], tucked up, warm and comfy. My mum, I can talk to her if I have a problem...”* (unknown age and gender)

*“My friends as they turn to me as well”* (young man, 19+)

*“I speak to my support workers or mum.”*  
(unknown age and gender)

For a small number of children and young people they were feeling isolated and lonely during lockdown. Comments included:

*“I feel isolated”* (unknown age and gender)

*“Realising how lonely and isolated I am”*  
(young man, 19+)

*“though you try to have fun, you don't talk to people I miss, it's boring, sometimes I get lonely”*  
(unknown age and gender)

A small number were also not keeping in touch with their friends, or found it difficult as they did not have access to social media or only had access to school chats which weren't conducive to 1:1 conversations.

*“Can't talk directly to my friend on the whole class through a school blog”*  
(boy, under 10)

Children and young people were asked if they had anyone they could talk to. Of the 61 children and young people who shared who they would turn to if they were scared, worried or down almost half felt that their parents were there for them. In addition, a small number mentioned other family or siblings and friends. Young people often mentioned more than one person that they would talk to if they were worried, it may be that this is dependent on the issue that was concerning them. Similarly, a lot of young people would speak to staff at the organisation they were engaged with. This included key workers. It must be noted that two organisations provide supported living and residential placements. This may have influenced the proportion who would speak to staff, however, it is again positive that young people have trusted relationships with key workers and they feel able to approach them to talk about concerns. The table below provides a breakdown of who young people would turn to.

**Table 2: Who would young people turn to if they are feeling down, are worried or scared?**

Who would you turn to?	Total	Percentage
Staff	28	46%
Parents	26	43%
Siblings	3	5%
Friends	22	36%
Key worker	2	3%
Other family	1	2%
Other	4	7%
No one	2	3%

n=61

A minority felt they had no one to turn to. This may be a cause of concern given that those young people who responded in this way are already involved in the ‘system’.

*“no-one I just bottle it up”*  
(16-18 year old young woman)

*‘Usually my Nan, no one at the moment’*  
(Unknown age and gender)

*“Not really - haven't really heard from them”*  
(unknown age and gender)

*“I'm not keeping in touch with friends”* (unknown age and gender)

## Finding time

For many children and young people restrictions and being housebound has provided opportunities to slow down and do things that previously there was not time for. In addition, some young people have used their spare time to do different and new things. Interestingly, despite a perception that young people spend all their time using social media and technology, many have spent time doing a variety of activities. As would be expected, some young people have found this period of time to be boring, with nothing to do.

Whilst watching TV/films or playing computer games were popular pastimes, children and young people also spent their spare time doing:

- art/craft activities,
- listening to or playing music,
- cooking and baking,
- gardening,
- exercise,
- keeping in touch with family and friends,
- school work.

*“doing lots of creative art and making bags,”* (unknown age and gender)

*“Listening to music, playing games and cycling”* (unknown age and gender)

*“Going for walks in local woodland, playing video games”* (unknown age and gender)

*“Learning a language.”* (unknown age and gender)

Nearly a third of children and young people have enjoyed exercising more – many have spent time going for walks with family.

*“I've been exercising a LOT more than I would've been doing before the lockdown was in place”* (Boy, under 10)

*“Doing yoga.”* (Unknown age and gender)

*“Enjoying my walks to the canal”* (Unknown age and gender)

Being outside enjoying the local area and playing in the garden has been a positive for children and young people. Others have enjoyed learning a new skill, such as a language. Having more time is a theme that runs through all of the questions that we asked. For teenagers – being able to sleep more and stay in bed has been a bonus as well as being something they'd like to continue.

*“Sleeping more – so have more energy”* (Unknown age and gender)

*“I don't have to wake up as early”* (Unknown age and gender)

*“Lie in, sleeping lots 13 hours”* (Unknown age and gender)

Being able to go out, celebrate birthdays that have taken place during the restrictions and going shopping were all things that children and young people were looking forward to.

*"18th party, will get to see everyone.  
Want a black and white ball theme."  
(Unknown age and gender)*

*"Shopping, Restaurant - KFC,  
Poundworld"  
(Unknown age and gender)*

Having more free time, a slower pace and more time for activities and hobbies were all highlighted as aspects of the Lockdown restrictions that children and young people would like to sustain.

*"More down time" (young  
woman, 16-18 years)*

*"That everything is slower, as in  
your able to do things at your  
own time." (young man, 16-18  
years)*

*"Having more lie ins, staying  
up late, Not having exams"  
(young woman, 16-18 years)*

On the flip side nearly 20% of those who were asked what's been better felt that nothing had improved. They found that it is *'more boring, nothing much to do...'* or that there has been no change, or *'no improvement'*. A small proportion also didn't feel there was anything positive that was worth continuing once lockdown was lifted and had found the restrictions difficult to deal with.

*"Nothing - watching Netflix  
really" (Unknown age and  
gender)*

*"Sleeping as much as I can, I'm so  
fed up" (Unknown age and gender)*

*"Nothing want to go back to  
college and see my friends"  
(young woman, 16-18 years)*

*"... more boring, nothing much to do... [I  
miss the] freedom of going out"  
(Unknown age and gender)*

*"There is nothing good about being in lockdown in my  
opinion because you can't go out, you can't see your  
friends, you can't go to school. It's just annoying."  
(young woman, 14-15 years)*

Two questions touched on social media and how children and young people kept in touch with their friends. The following list summarises the platforms that young people use:

- Snapchat
- Instagram
- Facebook (older ones – 19+)
- Whats App
- Tik Tok
- Messenger
- Zoom (for calls in lockdown)

The most popular methods of communication were video conferencing (Facetime, Zoom and others), and “calls”. These weren’t differentiated between telephone calls and calls using social media. Snap chat and Instagram were only mentioned a few times in relation to the question about keeping in touch but was a more frequent response for types of social media used<sup>5</sup>.

Three speech bubbles are arranged in a cluster. The top-left bubble is light blue and contains the quote: "TikTok helps me to distract myself, I can just get lost in it." (unknown age and gender). The top-right bubble is white with a blue border and contains: "Using Xbox to speak to friends" (unknown age and gender). The bottom bubble is dark blue with a white border and contains: "Using Zoom, lots of friends or FaceTime with 1 person" (unknown age and gender).

It must be noted that a few young people and children didn’t have access to social media due to age, family rules or because they found it difficult to engage with and so used video conferencing or school chats to communicate. This latter form made it difficult for one-to-one chats as they were more aimed at the whole class.

Three speech bubbles are arranged in a cluster. The top-left bubble is light blue and contains: "Staying in touch with friends through school online chat" (Girl, under 10). The top-right bubble is white with a blue border and contains: "Parents don't allow social media so speaking to UVP zoom and Microsoft teams with school." (unknown age and gender). The bottom bubble is light blue and contains: "My son does not use social media platforms & struggles to identify or ask for help. He will thankfully share his worries & anxieties with me but only rarely with another adult." (unknown age and gender).

<sup>5</sup> Proportions not provided due to small sample sizes.

## Access to learning

Many young people spoke about school and home learning and the positive and negative experiences they have had due to the sudden change in the way that teaching has been delivered during lockdown. To be thrown into a completely new way of being educated has tested the resilience and adaptability of our children and young people and some have fared better than others. For a small number of respondents (those with SEND) this was not a new experience as they had already missed out on long periods of education prior to the lockdown.

The flexibility of being at home all the time has been beneficial to some young people. For example to be able to sleep more and do school work at different times has also been a positive for some young people. Being at home has meant schools are interacting with their students and families in a different way, with many making regular calls home to check how children and young people are managing.

*"For the first time in 7 years, someone from my school called to ask if I was ok. I'm shocked"*  
(unknown age and gender)

*"I can do my school stuff at my own pace, sleep longer in the morning and work more productive in the afternoon"*  
(unknown age and gender)

*"Flexibility of having some lessons delivered via teams particularly on days when she struggles with tiredness anxiety or low mood."* (parent of girl with SEND, unknown age)

Contrary to the positive experiences of some, there are a number of young people who are not managing as well with home learning and have found it difficult to complete school work. It is a very different learning environment and some are struggling with this. A small number of children were looking forward to going back to school, particularly in order to return to 'normality'.

*"My focus hasn't been as strong with school work - I've lost the drive to do it"*  
(unknown age and gender)

*"I hate home schooling as no routine"* (girl, under 10)

*"I get stressed when I sit down to my school work"*  
(unknown age and gender)

Many of our children and young people are facing transition at the end of this summer term, whether to junior school, secondary school, sixth form or university. Nearly a third of young are worried about returning to school – about what it will be like, particularly for those transitioning. They are also worried about exams and that they have fallen behind. How friendship groups would change was also a concern for some young people.

*"If the teachers in year 2 are going to be stressy"* (boy, under 10 years)

*"Going back to school, feeling socially awkward"*  
(unknown age and gender)

*"That school will be coming back on again, anxiety of social pressures and beauty standards will return to normal"* (young woman, 16-18 years)

*"I've been chatting to people from my course in the group chat that my uni made, so I feel ready for September"* (unknown age and gender)

*"Not knowing who new teachers or class mates will be (if don't return to school before September)"* (under 10 years)

*"My exams (A levels) if there will be any special considerations given as we are basically lone learning.."* (young woman, 16-18 years)

*"Going back to school and being in year 2 (because I won't have the same teacher)"* (boy, under 10 years)

*"most worried about getting back into a routine to school and because we had to teach ourselves a lot of the new subjects, I would be worried that I wouldn't be able to catch up with the work"* (unknown age and gender)

Home learning has been a positive experience and nearly 20% children and young people said they would like this to continue (n=142).

*"Online learning for school ... find it more fun than the usual stuff"* (girl, under 10 years)

*"I like to be at home, home is where I'm at my best and best feel myself. I can learn at my own pace and can structure my own learning day on a day to day basis"* (young woman, 16-18 years)

*"Don't have to get dressed into uniform, wearing comfy clothes, less stressful working from home, not having to wake up early"* (boy, 11-13 years)

*"Learning at home as easier as less pressure"* (boy, 11-13 years)

*"Haven't had to worry about finishing work in a set period of time like we do at school which means less pressure"* (girl, 11-13 years)

## Awareness of self and others

Children and young people often surprise us in their resilience and self awareness and this listening exercise has been no different. It has provided some interesting insight into children and young people's perspectives. There have been a number of comments from young people that demonstrate that Lockdown has provided an opportunity for reflection and self-realisation:

*"Grateful for family and friends"* (unknown age and gender)

*"Realise that I am happy with [who] I am, and to ...have more trust in people..."* (unknown age and gender)

*"I've definitely learnt who my real friends are during lockdown. I now know who I should invest my time and friendship in."* (unknown age and gender)

*"Feels it has made [me] a stronger person to deal with change in the future. (young man, 16-18 years)*

*"Made me think more to life, other things, [need to] do more stuff for self. I look at things differently, helps you to appreciate..."* (unknown age and gender)

*"helped me focus on the person I want to be"* (girl, under 10 years)

A small number are concerned about the future and what it holds for them. Everyone is experiencing uncertainty and children and young people have picked up on this too and this is being reflected in the young people's comments. They aren't just worried about school, but also about the economy, the environment, the impact on people's jobs as well as how things will change due to COVID.

*"Will I ever get back to the place I was in before my anxiety got bad again?"* (unknown age and gender)

*"What I will be doing in the future, I have no plans and I can't make plans at the moment"* (unknown age and gender)

*"Trying to get a job or access training"* (young man, 16-18)

*"Significant Recession... I don't know much about it but I have a feeling it will impact my generation in a way"* (Boy, under 10 years)

*"The future. The next year being too rushed. Worried about making choices about my future, about whether to go to university, what to study."* (young woman, 16-18 years)

Conversely, there were also some concerns that there would be no change – that any good that has come from this period would just fall away.

*“That everything will go back to exactly how it was, that things won't change. That we will miss this opportunity to improve.”* (young man, 19+)

*“I'm worried that things will revert back to normal and all plans of change will be forgotten.”* (Young woman, 16-18 years)

*“When lockdown ends I feel that everybody is just going to forget that the virus has ever happened and many people, especially young people will go back to how it was before and it will be very hard to control...”* (young woman, 14-15 years)

*“If things will ever return to 'normal' again afterwards or if we will always have restrictions like 'social distancing’”* (Boy, 11-13 years)

There were concerns about COVID itself – about friends or family getting ill or dying. They were also concerned about the arrival of a second wave and the knock-on effects. How social distancing would work, whether it would be adhered to and lockdown being lifted were all topics that children and young people spoke about.

*“Is it really safe to go back to school/college or just go out– will I bring the virus back to my family”* (unknown age and gender)

*“if someone in my family gets the virus or some spreads the virus again and people die”* (boy, under 10 years)

*“That the Covid infection rates increase again and that lockdown restarts”* (young woman, 16-18 years)

*“Worried about people being too relaxed about washing hands/social distancing when lockdown is lifted and leading to a second wave”* (young woman, 14-15 years)

There was hope too. Children and young people are looking forward to a return to normality and 'new beginnings' for themselves and the wider community. The environment and a sense of community were aspects that young people also commented on and wanted to continue as lockdown eased.

“Less cars on the road - less pollution, Friendliness of people to each other,” (young man, 19+)

“I’d like to learn to drive” (unknown age and gender)

“Looking for employment” (young man, 16-18 years)

“I would [like] the continuation of the reduction in Pollution” (young man, 19+)

“talking and helping our neighbours and people knowing about how the planet is getting better” (girl, under 10 years)

“Just get back to normal” (unknown age and gender)

“No planes in the sky.” (boy, under 10 years)

“Relationships between people have improved and people in the community are supporting each other...” (young man, 16-18 years)

“normality of being at school” (unknown age and gender)

**Emotional wellbeing and mental health**

Some children and young people have struggled with adapting to the restrictions that have been put in place due to COVID and have felt that there has been nothing good about the whole experience.

A small number of young people have felt down, lonely or isolated or have found lockdown stressful. The stress is sometimes related to school or to family circumstances

“It’s probably driving me crazy being locked up and I can’t go out. It doesn’t feel the same, bits are bad, I feel isolated” (unknown age and gender)

“Worse totally set us all right back do not know how we are going to get back” (parent of boy with SEND, age unknown)

“Feel anxious about the future.” (young woman, 16-18 years)

“I have found myself getting more deflated and not wanting to do stuff” (unknown age and gender)

“I have felt stressed due to the unpredictability of situations and no routine’ (unknown age and gender)

“Higher levels of stress, Realising how lonely and isolated I am” (young man, 19+)

Young people also spoke about how they dealt with feeling anxious or down. As well as speaking to someone they trusted they also had strategies that helped them be calm, come to terms with their feelings or distract them.

Four speech bubbles of varying colors (blue and white) containing quotes about coping strategies. The quotes are: "Write things down in feelings book." (unknown age and gender), "Listening to calm and relaxing music." (unknown age and gender), "... but I would go to bed" (unknown age and gender), and "turn on Netflix as an escape, and I try eating yummy food. I sometime watch sad films to help me cry." (unknown age and gender).

Additional questions were asked including what information would be helpful to children and young people. One interesting comment from an older young person was that they were seeking "Re-assurance". However, overall, young people want to know answers to the perennial questions of:

- how to access help,
- what is available and
- where to find it.

Five speech bubbles of varying colors (blue and white) containing questions about support and coping. The questions are: "How to cope at home... tools that could help de-stress" (unknown age and gender), "What support is in place? People are asking me for support and I don't know. What mental health support is available, only know Kooth and CYP haven virtual?" (unknown age and gender), "How do we suppress the anger of being stuck inside as at the moment coming out in the wrong ways[?]" (unknown age and gender), "We had just been discharged from CAMHS prior to Lockdown. Being able to check in by phone with someone we have already built a relationship with would be most useful but otherwise rely on advice received previously." (parent of girl with SEND, age unknown), and "What services are running, when are they running, updating social media and websites regularly with changes and answering the phone if they have a number" (unknown age and gender).

## Emerging Themes for exploration and recommendations

There is huge depth and richness to the information and insight provided by these 199 children and young people. Whilst we don't have a complete set of demographic information we can surmise from the organisations that have reached out to them that they cover a broad spectrum of the community in Surrey, those who are vulnerable for a variety of reasons and known to services and others who have more settled lives. What is apparent is that over the last three months the experiences of these children and young people have been diverse, each has been unique. There are however, as outlined above some themes that have emerged and below are some suggestions that as a partnership and system we could consider.

- The importance of family time for children and young people, there is a strong theme that children and young people have valued this time to strengthen family relationships and spend time together.
  - *Is there anything we can do to enable this to continue?*
  - *How can we encourage the importance of family interaction?*
  - *Can we explore with parents what they think would need to change in the world in order to have more quality time with their kids?*
  
- The importance of friends for children and young people. Whilst children and young people have kept in touch using social media or other technology it has not replaced the need for them to see their friends. Particularly for younger children who do not have access to technology in the same way and interact differently with their friends than teenagers do i.e. they play games which is so much more difficult using technology. Some children and young people have been lonely and felt isolated during lockdown.
  - *How can we encourage children and young people to 'belong', particularly those who find it difficult or have felt isolated and lonely?*
  - *How can we identify those children and young people who are feeling isolated?*
  - *If there is a second wave of the virus, what can we encourage parents and schools to put in place for younger children to enable them to keep in touch with their friends?*
  
- Some children and young people have embraced the positive impact of restrictions on creating free time to do other things – hobbies, exercise and time with family and friends
  - *What can we learn from the activities they have been doing that we can use in the way we work with children and young people?*
  
- Some children and young people have appreciated the slower pace of life and more time
  - *How can we encourage this to continue and not revert to filling every minute of the day with organised activities and school work?*

- Many children and young people have a trusted adult they can turn to – parents, youth workers as well as friends but they don't know where to find help.
  - *Is there a way of upskilling parents, young people and workers so that they can signpost and know where to refer when a young person is looking for help – no wrong door?.*
  - *What more can be done to communicate where to find help?*
  - *How can we build trust with those young people who feel they have no one to turn to?*
  
- A few young people demonstrated resilience and self awareness about their circumstances, needs and hopes.
  - *How can this be harnessed?*
  - *How can we build on this and share with other young people?*
  
- There is a theme of children and young people caring for others, the wider environment and community, perhaps building on the youth social action movement that we have seen over the last year.
  - *Is there something that can be done to build on this civil responsibility?*
  
- There was a constant theme of worry, stress and anxiety caused by strained family relationships, lack of social contact, school and home learning, and concerns about the future.
  - *What more can be done to identify and support those children and young people who have these worries and anxieties, particularly as they may not have experienced these feelings before?*
  - *How can we make it easy for them to access information and advice to help them understand and deal with how they are feeling?*
  - *How can we help children and young people to cope if they are feeling angry with parents/family?*
  
- Access to learning has been a consistent theme. Children and young people are concerned about returning to school, falling behind, the impact of home learning on their exams and the impact on friends. Whilst some have struggled with home learning others have embraced it and would like this way of learning to continue.
  - *Is there more we can do to support those transitioning between schools and colleges, as well as those progressing between years within existing schools?*
  - *What can we learn from home learning and is there anything we can take forward and continue, for example for those who find it difficult to engage in the school environment?*
  - *What can be done to support children and young people worried about falling behind and any impact on exams, particularly the current year 10 and 12s.*
  - *What can be done to ease the return to school for all children and young people who may be anxious about friendships, social distancing and coronavirus?*

- Children and young people have voiced fear over the impact of COVID on their own health and that of their families and friends. They are also concerned about the uncertainty that COVID has caused and what impact it will have on the future.
  - *How can we encourage positivity and hope for the future individually and as communities?*
  - *What can we do to allay fears about the impact of COVID on the health of our children and young people and their families and friends to enable them to have confidence in the future and make positive choices?*

The voice of these children and young people is a snap shot of a unique time. It helps us to understand their perspective so that they can be at the heart of our planning and decision making. Let's put ourselves in the shoes of others so that we might, as a partnership and a system, use this insight to guide our practice.

## Appendix 1: Additional information

**Organisations that were involved in the listening exercise and the number of children and young people they spoke with**

<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Number of respondents</b>
Emerge	5
Halow	26
Learning Space	5
User Voice & Participation Team <sup>6</sup>	12
East to West	6
Educational Psychologist Service	1
Transform Housing	11
Young Epilepsy	17
CFHS School Nurses	102
ESDAS	2
Surrey Young Carers	6
Family Voice Surrey	6
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>199</b>

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<sup>6</sup> The User Voice & Participation Team spoke to the following groups: CAMHS Youth Advisors, Youth Cabinet and SEND Youth Advisors. The questions were also posted on Instagram and responded to by young people.