Young People's Experiences of the Covid-19 Pandemic

Survey for Secondary Age Students

Report of Findings; July 2021

Education & Skills Service

People Portfolio

Sheffield City Council

i. Introduction

Since the Covid-19 pandemic hit in March 2020 and the United Kingdom went into lockdown, Sheffield City Council, together with its partners and many others, has worked tirelessly to keep its young people safe.

The Public Health Team, the Communications Service and the Education & Skills Service have collaborated on a series of initiatives aimed at informing and supporting young people, families, schools and settings. These initiatives have included:

- Ongoing consultation on our communications plans with Sheffield Youth Cabinet
- New approaches used to reach young people with Covid-19 guidance, based on their feedback:
    - New channels used to communicate with young people, including Spotify and I-vans for key events such as Halloween and Bonfire Night
    - Collaboration with local influencers on Instagram and TikTok
    - Co-creation of content with young people at Sheffield College and Sheffield Hallam University
- Using behavioural science, plus insights from young people, around things that helped or hindered them to do the protective behaviours and / or support a collective effort to reduce transmission

This report looks at one of these pieces of work in detail, namely the findings from a survey for secondary-age young people.

The survey was initiated by an insightful discussion in February 2021 with members the Sheffield Youth Cabinet and SCC's Communications Service regarding the impact of the pandemic on young people. We wanted to find out more about the different experiences of young people.

On Monday 22 March 2021, we distributed a bespoke edition of the fortnightly Education & Skills News bulletin to over 900 employees within the service. In this

edition, we asked for their help to encourage secondary-age young people they knew to complete our online survey.

We saw the survey as a relatively small piece of work, one that would give us a snapshot of the experiences of a handful of young people. We estimated that we would receive in the region of 50 responses but, after being shared by colleagues and promoted on the Council's social media channels, we were delighted to achieve 299 completions.

This report summarises those responses. We hope that you find it interesting.[1]

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[1] Please note that all percentages over 10% have been rounded up. Responses to open text questions i.e. where respondents type in their answers have been edited for clarity. The originals are available on request.

ii. Twelve Key Findings

Our report provides a detailed discussion of what young people told us via the survey and is divided up by questions, responses and themes. We have, however, collated and summarised twelve key findings below.

1. Being unable to see family and friends was the hardest thing for young people to cope with.

2. School, exams and education being disrupted was a major worry. Many were anxious about how this would impact on their future, for example, their chances of getting into college, university or a job.

3. Feeling isolated, the lack of support and missing out on key experiences were common issues.

4. Young people said they had been very worried about friends, family and loved ones contracting Covid-19 and that they might become seriously ill or die. Those that were worried about catching it themselves were more concerned about transmitting it to older relatives.

5. 63% of respondents said they had struggled more than usual with their mental health and wellbeing, however, 9% said their mental health had improved.

6. Those who struggled with their mental health spoke of increased anxiety, panic attacks, depression, self-harm and thoughts of suicide.

7. 56% of young people said there had been good things for them over the last year. Spending more time with their family was the most positive aspect of lockdown.

8. Many young people used the opportunity to take up new pastimes and hobbies or rediscover things they once enjoyed.

9. 72% of respondents said they found the government's rules "very easy" or "quite easy" to understand.

10. 56% thought it was "very important" to stick to the government's restrictions and 34% thought this was "quite important".

11. 63% of young people said they hadn't "always" followed the rules around social distancing.

12. Reasons given for not always obeying the rules included needing to see or help family and friends, confusion about, or forgetting, the restrictions and it being hard always to socially distance.

iii. Survey: Introduction

The survey began with the following introduction:

"Your Experiences of the Covid-19 Pandemic

In March 2020, everyone's world was turned upside down when we went into lockdown. We've all seen on the news about the effect the Covid-19 pandemic has had on the lives of adults - but here in Sheffield, we want to hear about the experiences of young people.
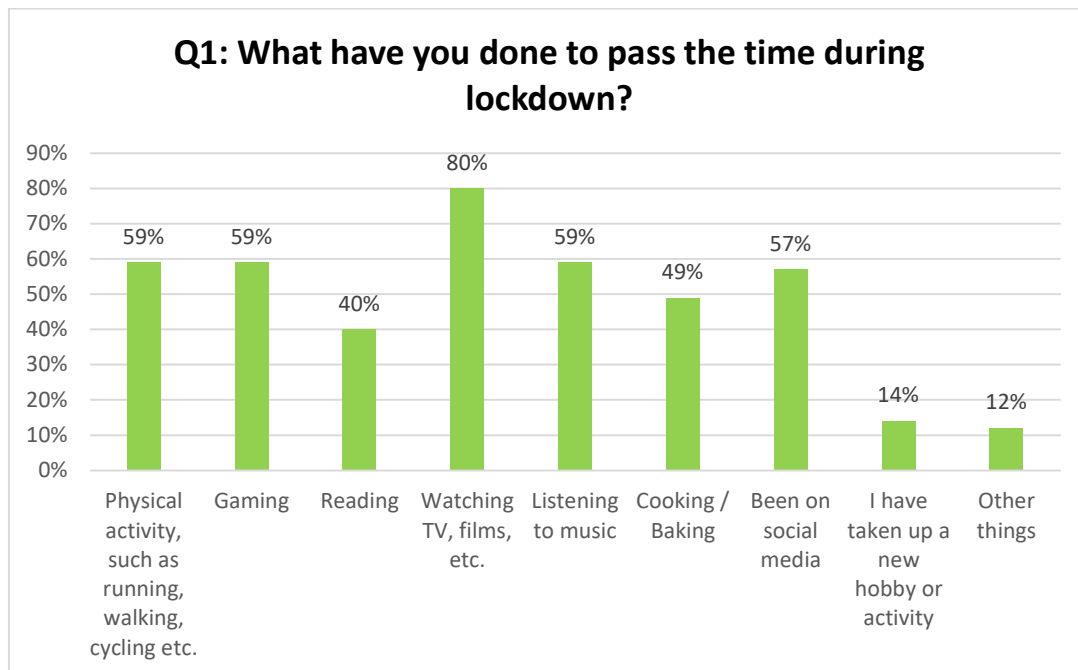
We are particularly interested in:

- _things you've done to pass the time_
- _your mental health & wellbeing_
- _any positive or negative experiences_
- _understanding and following the rules_

Our survey is anonymous so you can be completely honest with your answers. There is no judgement from us about what you tell us."

iv. Survey: Responses

Q1: What have you done to pass the time during lockdown?

- 59% of respondents said "Physical activity, such as running, walking, cycling etc."
- 59% of respondents said "Gaming"
- 40% of respondents said "Reading"
- 80% of respondents said "Watching TV, films, etc."
- 59% of respondents said "Listening to music"
- 49% of respondents said "Cooking / Baking"
- 57% of respondents said "Been on social media"
- 14% of respondents said "I have taken up a new hobby or activity"
- 12% of respondents said "Other things"

Q1: What have you done to pass the time during lockdown?

Q2: How else have you passed the time during lockdown?

Those who ticked 'other things' in the previous question were asked this. There were 31 responses with many of them listing or describing creative activities (drawing / painting, cosplay[2], arts & crafts, gardening etc.) or keeping up with school work.

A selection of others is listed below:

- *"Few bike rides with mum and little sister in nicer days and played on Roblox."*
- *"Working towards my A-Levels and my Uni Application to get into Medical School."*
- *"Helping to better the environment like recycling and doing barbecues."*
- *"Walking our dog."*
- *"I learned how to sign."*
- *"Food shopping and cooking for older relative."*

Q3: What new hobby or activity have you taken up?

This was only asked of those who said they had taken up something new in Q1. Broadly, the hobbies and activities taken up by the handful of respondents were creative (painting, crafting, digital art, sewing etc.) or were physical (cycling, running, dog walking, yoga etc.).

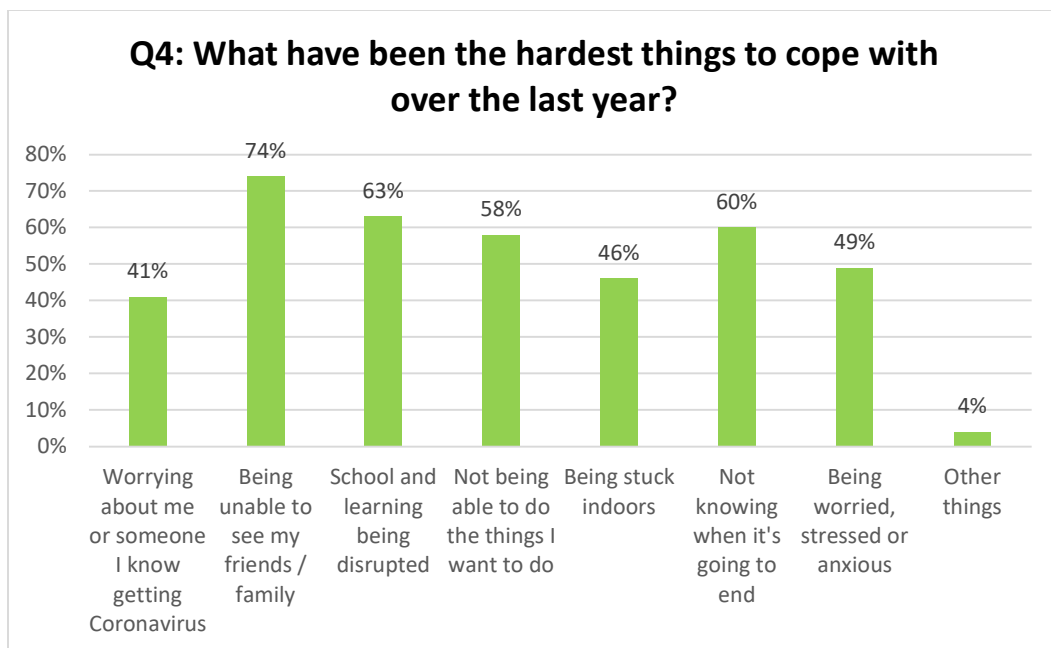A handful of the more unusual responses is listed below:

- *"Photo editing and music mixing."*
- *"Paper round."*
- *"Gotten back into photography and writing."*
- *"Piano and sewing."*
- *"Cosplay."*
- *"Horse riding."*
- *"Ukelele."*
- *"Warhammer."*

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[2] Dressing up as a character from a film, book, or video game.

- *"Origami."*
- *"Making songs."*

Q4: What have been the hardest things to cope with over the last year?

- 45% of respondents said "Worrying about me or someone I know getting Coronavirus"
- 74% of respondents said "Being unable to see my friends / family"
- 63% of respondents said "School and learning being disrupted"
- 58% of respondents said "Not being able to do the things I want to do"
- 46% of respondents said "Being stuck indoors"
- 60% of respondents said "Not knowing when it's going to end"
- 49% of respondents said "Being worried, stressed or anxious"
- 4% said "Other things"

Q4: What have been the hardest things to cope with over the last year?

Category	Percentage
Worrying about me or someone I know getting Coronavirus	41%
Being unable to see my friends / family	74%
School and learning being disrupted	63%
Not being able to do the things I want to do	58%
Being stuck indoors	46%
Not knowing when it's going to end	60%
Being worried, stressed or anxious	49%
Other things	4%

Q5: What kind of things have you been worried, stressed or anxious about?
We asked those who ticked 'being worried, stressed or anxious' to elaborate in Q5. There were 124 responses; just under half of the total number of young people who completed the survey. These have been themed with supporting comments below.

(It is worth noting that there is often overlap between worries and concerns; young people may list two or three in their response. These usually correlate but where appropriate, we have split them here.)

i. **Education / School**

Around a third of the responses were about young people's education. Comments around not going to school, school work, exams, the future etc. cropped up the most, with concerns about online or home learning following them.

- *"School, life decisions, life, what A-Levels to choose."*
- *"Exams and how we are going to be assessed in school."*
- *"GCSE grades and whether I have chosen the correct sixth form as I couldn't look around them."*
- *"How my school could ruin my university career by giving me a bad grade."*
- *"Mostly school and the mock examinations being basically my result."*
- *"I have been stressed about college, and the fact that I might not pass my course due to the struggle of online learning."*
- *"Don't want to underperform at school / get bad grade for KS2 SATs."*
- *"How will this impact me at A-Levels, university, getting a job."*
- *"Getting studying done."*
- *"My school work because of delays and the uncertainties."*
- *"Missing out on Y6 things I've been looking forward to all through school like the residential and the party and not feeling like I finished school properly. The transition to secondary school."*
- *"That my learning won't be at the standard it should be, that everyone will be ahead of me and my teachers will be disappointed / expect more of me."*
- *"How will I catch up with my education?"*
- *"My academic studies – not getting the chance to actually do my A-Levels feels like my school years have been wasted. My first year at university has been a shambles with no face-to-face learning or chance to make new friends."*
- *"That we have missed so much school and we are expected to be able to do our exams like normal next year."*

- *"I have been worried about my transition to college and being away from school hasn't helped that, I've missed out on a lot of education too."*
- *"If WiFi or my Chromebook stopped working, that would mean I couldn't take part in my online working."*

ii. Family, friends and loved ones contracting Covid-19

Some of the respondents had directly witnessed the effects of Covid-19 on people they knew. For others, it was a fear of losing loved ones that caused them anxiety.

- *"Family and friends get Covid."*
- *"Feel bad and sad for people that have died or lost loved ones."*
- *"Not knowing if friends or teachers are OK."*
- *"Losing loved one – bereaved by suicide during lockdown."*
- *"Dad going through chemo, knowing an infection could kill him, seeing too many people not wearing masks or giving space, meaning could catch something and pass to dad, then not wanting to go out."*
- *"The virus and not seeing the people we love and worrying they will get it or we will get it again as we had it in September."*
- *"Scared not wanting my parents to catch is as they're high risk."*
- *"Deaths in the family."*
- *"My mum got Coronavirus and I didn't want her to die."*
- *"Family getting ill 'cos it's always in the news."*
- *"My mum is at risk but working from home for 12 hours."*
- *"I've been scared that my mummy will die."*
- *"My dad getting ill as he has a health condition. Other family members getting Covid."*
- *"My dad died last May (2020) from a heart/ lung condition, so I've been worried about my mum catching Covid 19."*
- *"That my parents or siblings will get a severe case."*

iii. Respondents contracting Covid-19

A smaller proportion of respondents expressed concerns about contracting Covid-19 themselves. Interestingly, most of those who did talk about this said they were

worried about getting it and *passing it on to others*. None of these mentioned any of the other negative impacts of *them* having Coronavirus, such as risk to their lives, long-term health etc. They were more concerned about transmitting it to other people.

- *"Me getting the virus and not knowing it and spreading it to others and therefore me being the cause of their death."*
- *"Not knowing if I have Covid."*
- *"Worried if I caught it, I could give it my family."*

iv. Missing friends and family

A lot of the responses under this theme simply said things like, "Miss my friends and family" but a few others expressed worries about losing – or not making new – friends:

- *"I have been anxious about friendships and that I might lose friends."*
- *"Not seeing my friends and not hearing from some friends as if we had fallen out."*
- *"My friends and losing them due to not seeing them for a long time."*
- *"Harder to make new friends."*
- *"That my friends forget me."*
- *"Feel I don't have a social life."*

v. Mental health

Around ten respondents mentioned 'mental health' but didn't elaborate. A few of those that did said:

- *"My anxiety about going out in public has become really bad, where I overthink new situations."*
- *"It's really affected my mental health. I was all on my own."*
- *"Sleep schedule."*
- *"Coping with addiction."*

vi.   The future / uncertainty

'The future' itself is a very broad theme as the responses referring to it covered a range of things, from personal issues to global ones, but we've grouped it with 'uncertainty' as there was a very significant overlap between the two. Here is a selection of what young people told us they were worried about relating to these themes:

- *"Job security."*
- *"Not getting back to normality."*
- *"Things going back to 'normal', seeing people in big groups at parties / gatherings again."*
- *"When I can start my life?"*
- *"Being scared about going back into society and being around others again."*
- *"How the future's gonna be."*
- *"Will there be any work in the future and how the pandemic will affect businesses and work prospects for mine and future generations?"*
- *"If the pandemic will ever end."*
- *"I used to use going to football matches at Bramall Lane, watching the Steelers play at Sheffield Arena and playing for my roller hockey team as ways to cope [with my anxiety]. I have not done two of those things in over a year and now my roller hockey team's rink has closed down and the future is up in the air. I am very worried about this."*
- *"The fear of the unknown."*
- *"Everything changing all the time and not knowing what will happen next."*
- *"The whole uncertainty of things."*

vii.   Miscellaneous worries, stresses and anxieties

As one might expect, there were a number of concerns for young people that didn't fit into the above categories – and also a few responses we felt summarised the situation the respondents were in. These are listed below:

- *"That my mask is going to stop me breathing."*
- *"Not fully understanding the rules."*

- *"Having to self-isolate after only 2 days back at school."*
- *"Uncertain situations."*
- *"People being too close when outside. I now can't deal with crowds."*
- *"Government changing policies weekly, not clear on why they are implementing new rules and why they lifted lockdown quickly."*
- *"That my life won't be the same anymore."*
- *"Will I get used to being inside then nervous when I'm allowed out?"*
- *"Everything."*

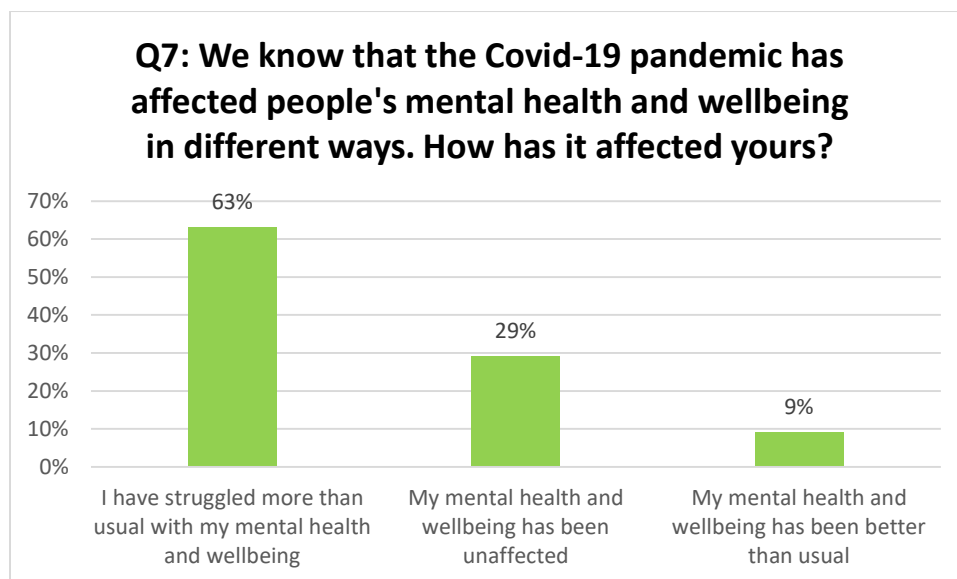Finally, we've included this comment on lockdown as it struck us as especially poignant:

- *"I feel like I've been grounded without being naughty."*

Q6: What else have you found hard to cope with?

There were only nine responses to this question and generally, they were covered in the one asked previously.

Q7: We know that the Covid-19 pandemic has affected people's mental health and wellbeing in different ways. How has it affected yours?

- 63% of respondents said "I have struggled more than usual with my mental health and wellbeing"
- 29% of respondents said "My mental health and wellbeing has been unaffected"
- 9% of respondents said "My mental health and wellbeing has been better than usual"

Q7: We know that the Covid-19 pandemic has affected people's mental health and wellbeing in different ways. How has it affected yours?

63% — I have struggled more than usual with my mental health and wellbeing

29% — My mental health and wellbeing has been unaffected

9% — My mental health and wellbeing has been better than usual

Q8: Is there anything you would like to tell us about how the pandemic has affected your mental health and wellbeing over the past year?

Around half of the young people who completed our survey had something to say about the effect of the pandemic on their mental health and wellbeing. Many young people told us that the pandemic had had a severe impact on their mental health.

One again, it is noteworthy that there is often overlap between how Coronavirus has had an impact on the young people's mental health with several describing two or three other things it has affected and how and why. Again, where appropriate, we have split them.

i. Increased anxiety

The words 'anxious' and 'anxiety' cropped up in several responses with many stating that lockdown either led to anxiety or increased it. Some of these were coupled with other mental health issues such as low mood, depression, anger, frustration and even physical responses such as sickness.

- *"I have been more anxious than normal."*
- *"I have struggled with new situations, my anxiety about meeting new people has become really bad and sometimes makes me feel vulnerable when I'm in them [sic] positions."*
- *"My mood is lower. I am more snappy and angry."*

- *"I am crying a lot."*
- *"I have had to be put on medication due to extreme anxiety and depression. I have been to hospital twice as I feel I no longer had a purpose in life and I hate being a burden to my parents."*
- *"All the things I had in primary school to help with anxiety had to stop and they don't exist at secondary school."*
- *"More panic attacks and feeling uneasy. Panic attacks causing symptoms- sickness, physical shaking and increased heart rate."*
- *"Made me more anxious, low in mood at times and frustrated and angry with family members."*
- *"More panic attacks, sickness, more headaches, anxiousness and depression."*

ii.   Other effects

Anxiety seems to be the main strain on mental health caused by the pandemic and lockdown etc., but many respondents reported other impacts, several of which are listed below. Panic attacks, depression, stress, fears (of various things) were commonplace, as were eating disorders, lack of confidence, loss of focus and sadness. Some respondents took care to point out things such as "completely new emotions" and "lot more than normal" after describing their issues. i.e. these were a result of the pandemic which triggered mental health issues in them. Others had prior issues that were exacerbated.

- *"More panic attacks and stressful moments caused by minor things that wouldn't normally trigger them."*
- *"I have lost a lot of confidence in dealing with other people."*
- *"Rapid decline in mental health and well-being – constantly worrying about death (completely new emotions)."*
- *"Worrying about money and the health of my family."*
- *"Makes you feel a bit hopeless."*
- *It's made me feel really sad and scared."*
- *"Worrying about lack of social distancing while I've been out. Afraid to go to shops and worried at school."*

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- *"I have been worried a lot more than normal and it has affected my sleep."*
- *"Felt trapped."*
- *"No patience like before Covid."*
- *"Started hating my body more as of the weight I'd put on in lockdown."*
- *"My social skills have gone."*
- *"The loss of routine has been very bad."*
- *"I've been worrying about losing my mummy and other family members."*
- *"Both of my parents have been working from home and have overworked so I have felt lonely a lot of the time. As a result of this I have been talking to myself too much and my head can be a depressing place at times."*
- *"Found it difficult to do things and look after myself since systems and routines have been thrown off after four years of doing them."*
- *"I disassociated myself from everything and felt like the days were just passing by right fast."*
- *"I have been less focused on work and I have been getting distracted very easily."*
- *"It has made me more dependent on myself for happiness."*
- *"I don't know how to be normal anymore."*

iii.   Self-harm / suicidal thoughts

We've listed three responses as a separate section as we feel it is important to be aware of the physical manifestations of impacted mental health and wellbeing.

- *"I have started self-harming."*
- *"Without my coping structure of football, ice hockey in stadiums and playing for my team, I have been driven in to a dark place. I am often having suicidal thoughts and no longer wishing to live. My mental health is worse than ever and I just want it to end."*
- *"It stopped the treatment I was receiving, making me contemplate hurting myself."*

iv. Education worries

As one might expect, uncertainty about education across the age ranges affected the mental health and wellbeing of some respondents.

- *"The results of my A-Levels feeling out of my control."*
- *"My learning and chances of getting the occupation I want."*
- *"Not being able to attend college."*
- *"Not being able to sit my GCSEs in the usual way."*
- *"Government plans for exams / school not being clear or having last minute changes as well as exam boards not being clear on how they will regulate exams has been stressful."*
- *"I feel anxious about my future and resentful that the pandemic has affected two really important years of my life - the end of thirteen years of school and the start of my university life. I feel that my age group have been affected very badly by the pandemic yet no one seems to care. I have a student loan debt for this year that totals over £16,000 when university has been a waste of time. The online lectures have been poor and with no face-to-face lessons or contact with other students, I feel that I am struggling and on my own trying to learn a new subject. I don't know how this will impact my career but I am stuck paying an awful lot of money for very little return. The government don't care about my generation, they have nothing to ease the financial burden on us or help us with our mental health."*
- *"I hope my college work doesn't suffer; I was unable to take my exams when I left school last March 2020."*
- *"Not knowing what I'm doing home learning. School thinks everyone can use a laptop; they've not taught us."*

v. Separation from friends, family and loved ones

Isolation and separation were big, recurring themes and their impact was keenly felt. Respondents talked about missing physical interaction such as giving and receiving hugs, missing face-to-face conversations and regret at not being able to physically meet up with friends.

- *"I just want to hug my best friend and my grandma but I couldn't even see them."*
- *"I've had to make more of an effort to get out, do exercise and reach out to friends and family so it has been harder to maintain a healthy balance. It would have been easy not to do those things and end up very isolated."*
- *"I just feel so lonely."*
- *"I have missed seeing friends and family."*
- *"Isolation and lack of opportunity to do things and experience things with friends, not being able to experience my 18th birthday."*
- *"Not being able to talk physically with friends has affected how I deal with things. I have a healthy relationship with my parents but I don't talk to them the same way I do my close circle of friends and it's just not the same over a video call and not as private."*

vi.   Deaths of family members

Three young people reported losing loved ones and the added grief, sadness and frustration caused by the restrictions placed on funerals. All three comments are listed below.

- *"Lost family members but unable to attend funerals due to restrictions."*
- *"My dad died in May 2020. The funeral was limited numbers, we had to travel in our own cars and then come straight back home. I don't feel like I've said a proper goodbye to my dad. I was 15 when he died."*
- *"I am having problems with my mental health as my dad caught Covid from his work and died. I am 12. My dad should not have died."*

vii.   Lack of support / missing support

The word 'support' cropped up in various guises several times in response to this question; namely a lack of it. This varied from young people missing the support of their friends, being unable to access professional support or support from school and, in one case, from a much-loved pet.

- *"I've struggled to get the right support for my health issues and support with access to school."*
- *"I've felt cut off from my friends who are my support group."*
- *"Not enough support from people other than my parents."*
- *"I feel schools need to talk to us more about mental health and offer support alongside our studies."*
- *"My hamster died in lockdown and it was a joke that he was my emotional support hamster but actually he was and I've been upset ever since and now I've got nothing for support."*
- *"My mental health was bad before the pandemic it's just made it harder to get help and support."*

viii. Missing out on things

There is a strong element of missing out and lives on hold, with these young people not getting to enjoy key rites-of-passage and experiences.

- *"Not being able to do the things with Dad that we would normally do like go karting, arcades, going out on the boat, playing in the parks with other children."*
- *"[Not being able to] go to clubs especially holiday club."*
- *"Found it difficult to go out just to exercise because there are so many people about still. The first lockdown I felt I could go out once a day to cycle but now I cannot due to all the cars on the road. I miss socialising in my weekly clubs such as running clubs."*
- *"Not being able to celebrate my 16th birthday and not having a school prom, so I have missed out on important memories."*
- *"My 16th birthday last August was a meal out with my mum and my two brothers. I wanted to see my friends or have a party but it wasn't allowed because of the pandemic."*
- *"I feel my life is on hold."*

ix.   Miscellaneous frustrations

Some respondents expressed misgivings about the national handling of the pandemic, in particular the impact on young people.

- *"Constant locking down has not worked well and has caused unnecessary issues."*
- *"No, although, the government didn't put anything on to help young people to cope with this. They need to get more engaged other than politics."*
- *"I had to stop watching the news because it made me worry more. They make everyone more fearful."*
- *"No one has thought about the impact on young people."*
- *"Not understanding the different rules we have had to change to and not understanding why some places have been shut such as shops and places of activity."*

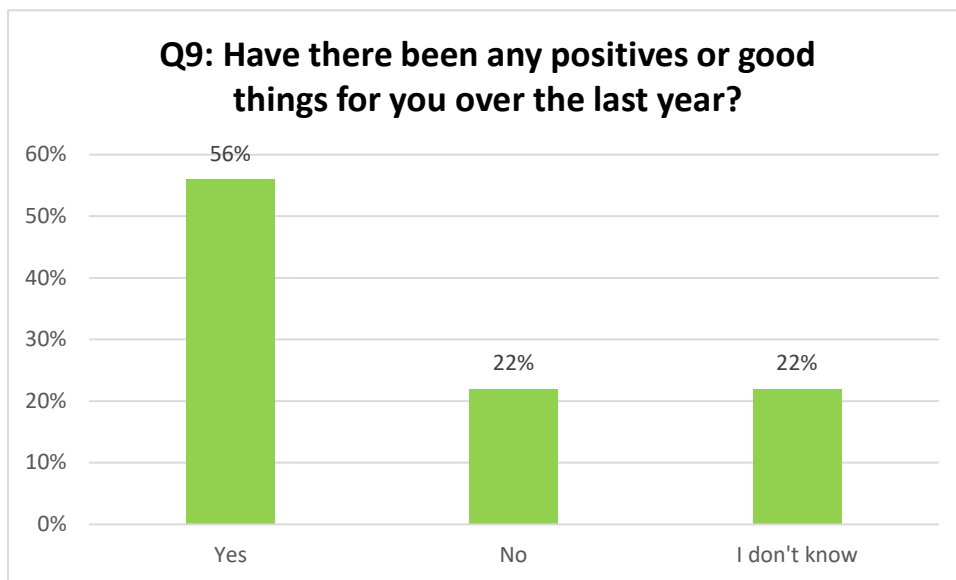### x.   The less negative effects of lockdown

Finally, a handful of respondents listed things about the pandemic which didn't have an adverse effect on their mental health.

- *"Some things have been good like school quieter."*
- *"I felt better away from school though I missed being able to be social outside school."*
- *"More time for exercise and to be outside."*
- *"Less expectation to have to do things and school being closed has meant I'm less stressed."*
- *"I have felt safer and more close to my family with us all staying in together. I don't want to go out and I'm not bothered about having friends. This was the same before COVID. Me and my sister usually had to go to holiday clubs while my nan worked and not have much time during the week because of work. Things are much better in lockdown."*
- *"My mental health as not been affected."*
- *"My mental health is better because I got to do more relaxing."*

- *"Free time due to exam cancellation allowed me to get a better understanding of my mental health."*
- *"Great response from organisations in Sheffield. Greg Fell deserves a big award - and his team!"*
- *"I quite enjoyed lockdown; it was relaxing."*
- *"It's kind of improved me and my thinking way as a person and my self-acceptance because there was no one to compare to and it's made me figure out who I am and what I want."*
- *"It has affected it negatively but during the third lockdown I have been able to do a lot more walking and reading and that had helped."*

Q9: Have there been any positives or good things for you over the last year?

- 56% of respondents said "Yes"
- 22% of respondents said "No"
- 22% of respondents said "I don't know"

Q9: Have there been any positives or good things for you over the last year?

Q10: Can you give us an example of something positive or something you've enjoyed?

This question was only asked of those who ticked 'yes' to Q9. 153 young people gave us examples of positive things or things they've enjoyed since March 2020. These have been edited and themed below.

i.   Family time

The most popular thing the respondents enjoyed doing was simply spending time with their family. Around a quarter said this with many using the phrases 'spending time / more time with family'. We've listed below those that were more unusual in this theme.

- *"Whilst we are all very stressed, I feel closer to my children."*
- *"Seeing everyone home together as a family in our house."*
- *"I've enjoyed being at home."*
- *"I developed a closer relationship with my mum."*
- *"I laughed a lot and was very happy to spend more time with my parents."*
- *"Spending time with my brother and mum. We have become a really close unit. We were strong but we are even more so now."*

ii.   Activities

Young people listed a variety of activities they had enjoyed during lockdown with being outdoors (walks, exercising, cycling, time in the garden, time under the sun) proving very popular. Others acquired new interests and skills or found a renewed passion for things, such as reading, that they previously hadn't the time for. Whilst not strictly an activity, a handful of respondents acquired new pets – mainly dogs but one young person "welcomed two kittens into the family." A selection of the more unique responses under the theme of 'activities' are listed below.

- *"I found a love for cooking and research in history."*
- *"Playing board games, baking."*
- *"Learned new skills in garden and DIY."*

- *"I got the lead role in a play for my acting company (the girl playing the character dropped out of the company) and I've found my new best friend who makes me feel like I can tell her everything."*
- *"I've learned lots of new hobbies such as cosplay, editing, cooking etc."*
- *"Getting better at art."*
- *"Developing some skills, reading things I had aimed to read but didn't have time to due to other commitments (that stopped due to Covid!)."*
- *"I have begun to write stories."*
- *"Discovering new parts of Sheffield."*
- *"Made me focus on my Taekwondo. Have passed my blue belt in Taekwondo."*
- *"Got a lot of time to practise my guitar."*
- *"I learned about money."*
- *"I've become more political."*

iii. Home learning / not having to go to school

Some respondents admitted they enjoyed not having to go to school with a number giving reasons why. Online and home learning were popular with a small number of young people.

- *"Not going to school. I hate school. I get picked on."*
- *"Being at home more and less time at school (I suffer from anxiety and have learning difficulties so school is hard for me)."*
- *"Streaming lessons means I can access lessons without going into school."*
- *"Not having to get up so early as no journey time to join school."*
- *"My school work is better at home. I have my mum and dad to explain things and I can work without distractions."*
- *"Not feeling scared about people judging me with online learning."*
- *"I felt less pressure doing home school, therefore more relaxed."*
- *"We used to do online learning together, it was fun."*
- *"Liked home school[ing], did well. Teachers at Tapton School helped me. Very good online lessons and structure this time."*

iv. Self-reflection, introspection and appreciation

Lockdown allowed some young people the time, freedom and opportunity to become more at ease with themselves, be grateful for the things they had and, as one put it, "really see what matters most in life."

- *"I have got to know myself better and I enjoy my own company a lot more now."*
- *"It's made me more appreciative of the things I've taken for granted."*
- *"Having more time to focus on myself."*
- *"I got to be more independent about what I want to focus on in life and learnt to be less angry / petty at others just because I'm having a bad day / time."*

v. Seeing friends

When lockdown restrictions lifted and schools reopened, young people enjoyed reconnecting with their friends in person while others talked about maintaining friendships online i.e. FaceTime, Zoom etc.

- *"Become closer with my friends."*
- *"Seeing my friends after not [seeing them] for a few months."*
- *"I've made a few new friends."*
- *"I have appreciated seeing my friends in person more."*
- *"Slowly seeing friends and family again after so long – in a way it's more special."*
- *"Lockdown lifted for a small time so we could see our friends somewhat."*

vi. Going to / returning to school

Returning to school or starting at college was popular with a small number of students.

- *"Be able still to go to school part time has helped break the week up."*
- *"Being at school during lockdown in a small bubble."*
- *"Starting college at Sheaf Training."*

- *"It made me like going to school because I realised that without school life would be boring."*

Finally, we'll end with one positive that doesn't belong in any of the categories above but is worth noting:

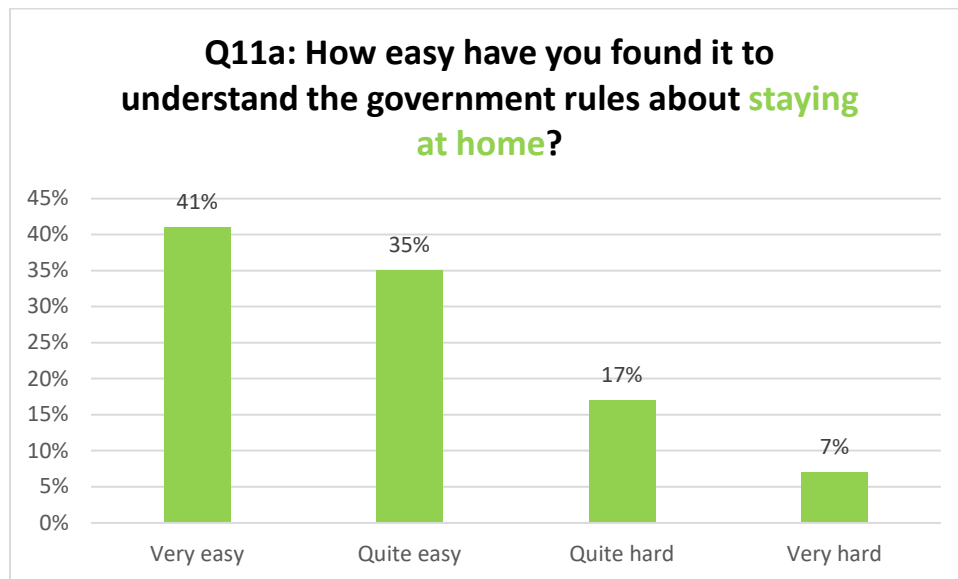- *"Knowing that my dad and grandparents have had their vaccine."*

Q11: How easy have you found it to understand the government rules about…
- **Staying at home**
- **Not mixing with other households indoors**
- **Handwashing / sanitising**
- **Social distancing (2m rule)**
- **Wearing a face covering**
- **Gathering in groups**

Generally, the majority of respondents found following the rules "very easy" or "quite easy" and appeared to take them seriously.
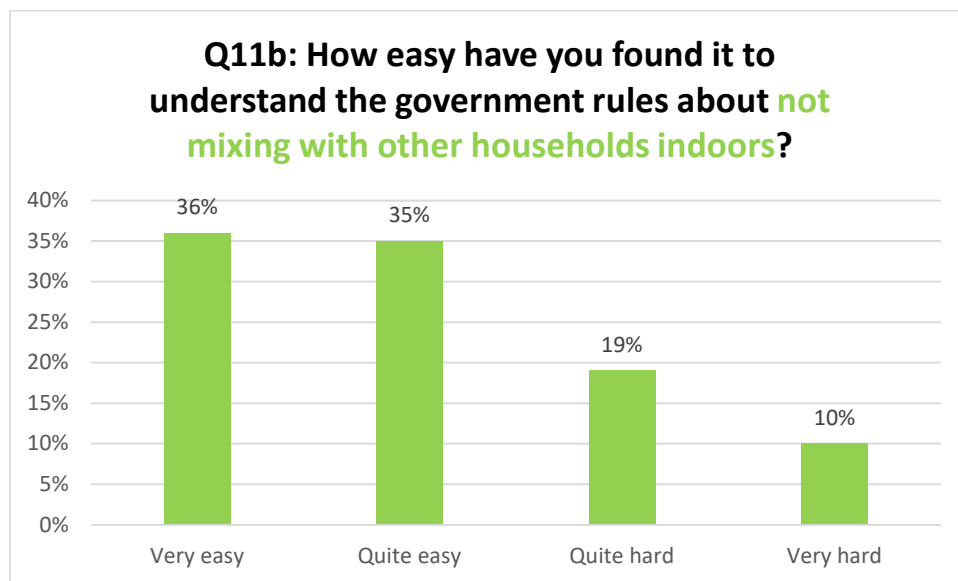
Q11a: How easy have you found it to understand the government rules about staying at home?

- 41% of respondents said "Very easy"
- 35% of respondents said "Quite easy"
- 17% of respondents said "Quite hard"
- 7% of respondents said "Very hard"

Q11a: How easy have you found it to understand the government rules about staying at home?

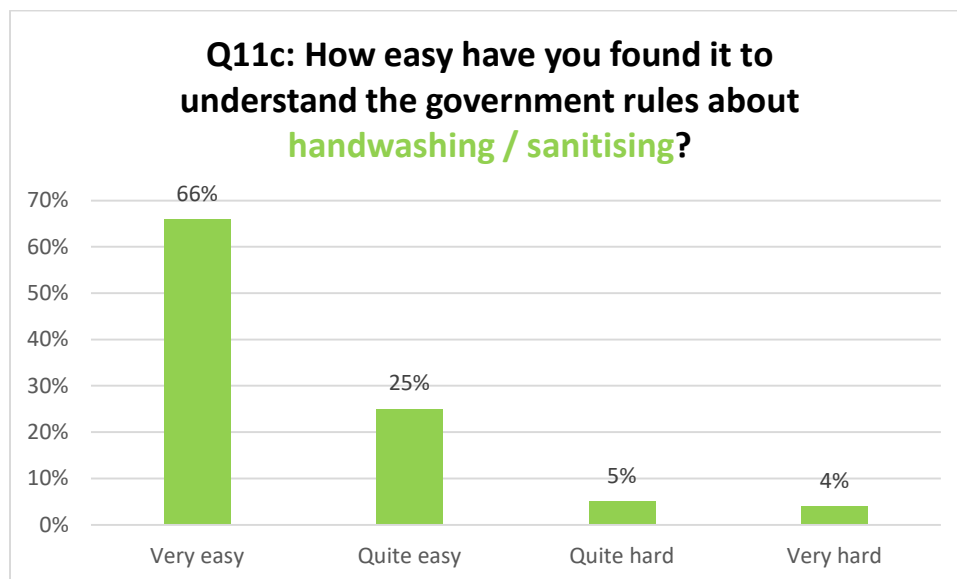| Response	Percentage
Very easy	41%
Quite easy	35%
Quite hard	17%
Very hard	7%

Q11b: How easy have you found it to understand the government rules about not mixing with other households indoors?

- 36% of respondents said "Very easy"
- 35% of respondents said "Quite easy"
- 19% of respondents said "Quite hard"
- 10% of respondents said "Very hard"

Q11b: How easy have you found it to understand the government rules about not mixing with other households indoors?

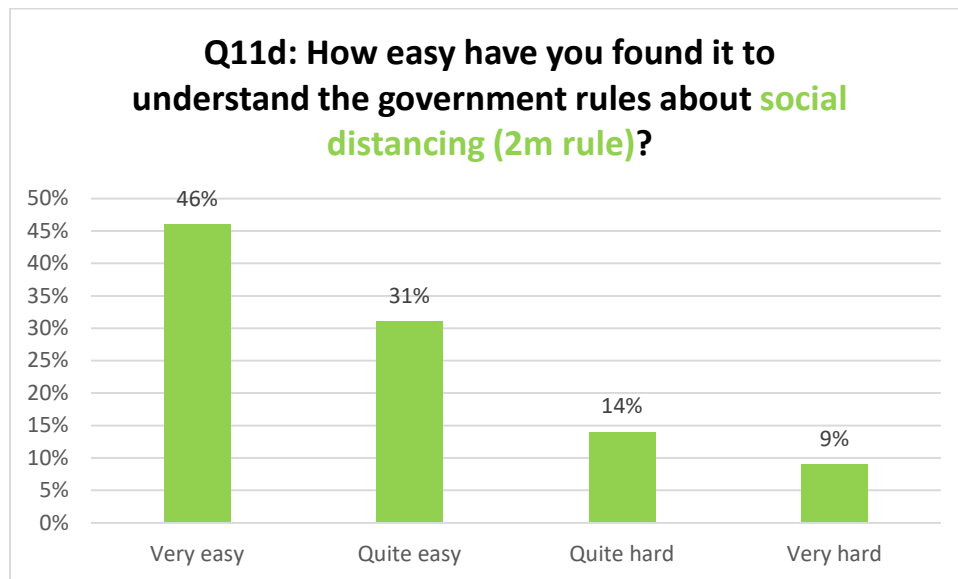| Response	Percentage
Very easy	36%
Quite easy	35%
Quite hard	19%
Very hard	10%

Q11c: How easy have you found it to understand the government rules about handwashing / sanitising?

- 66% of respondents said "Very easy"
- 25% of respondents said "Quite easy"
- 5% of respondents said "Quite hard"
- 4% of respondents said "Very hard"

Q11c: How easy have you found it to understand the government rules about handwashing / sanitising?
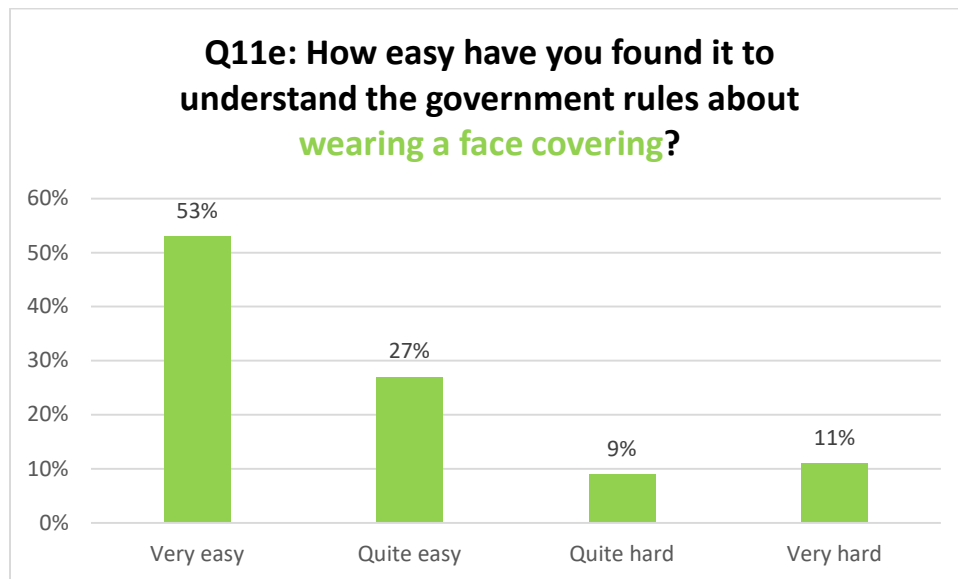
Q11d: How easy have you found it to understand the government rules about social distancing (2m rule)?

- 46% of respondents said "Very easy"
- 31% of respondents said "Quite easy"
- 14% of respondents said "Quite hard"
- 9% of respondents said "Very hard"

Q11d: How easy have you found it to understand the government rules about social distancing (2m rule)?
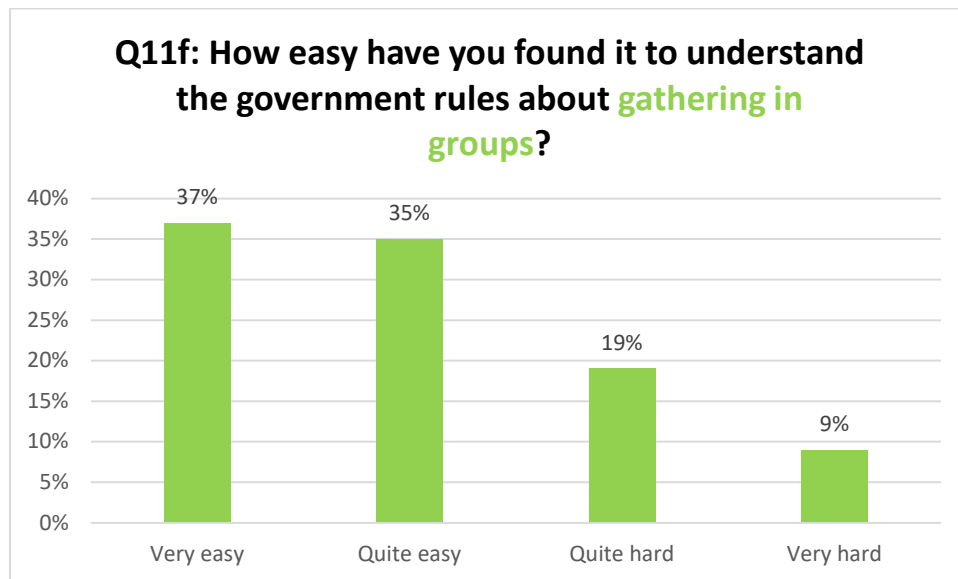
Q11e: How easy have you found it to understand the government rules about wearing a face covering?

- 53% of respondents said "Very easy"
- 27% of respondents said "Quite easy"
- 9% of respondents said "Quite hard"
- 11% of respondents said "Very hard"

Q11e: How easy have you found it to understand the government rules about wearing a face covering?

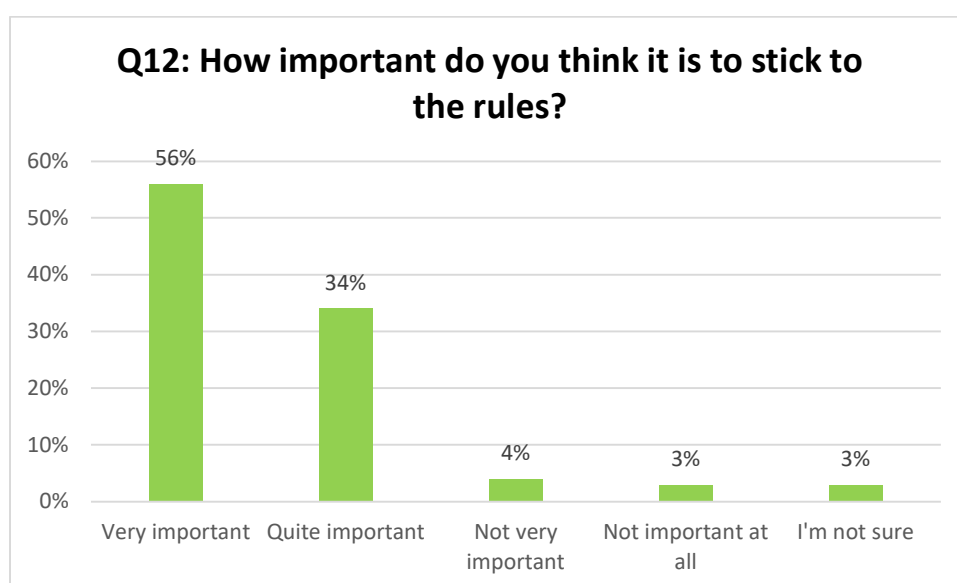| Response	Percentage
Very easy	53%
Quite easy	27%
Quite hard	9%
Very hard	11%

Q11f: How easy have you found it to understand the government rules about gathering in groups?

- 37% of respondents said "Very easy"
- 35% of respondents said "Quite easy"
- 19% of respondents said "Quite hard"
- 9% of respondents said "Very hard"

Q11f: How easy have you found it to understand the government rules about gathering in groups?

Category	Percentage
Very easy	37%
Quite easy	35%
Quite hard	19%
Very hard	9%

Q12: How important do you think it is to stick to the rules?

- 56% of respondents thought it was "Very important"
- 34% of respondents thought it was "Quite important"
- 4% of respondents thought it was "Not very important"
- 3% of respondents thought it was "Not important at all"
- 3% of respondents said "I'm not sure"

Q12: How important do you think it is to stick to the rules?

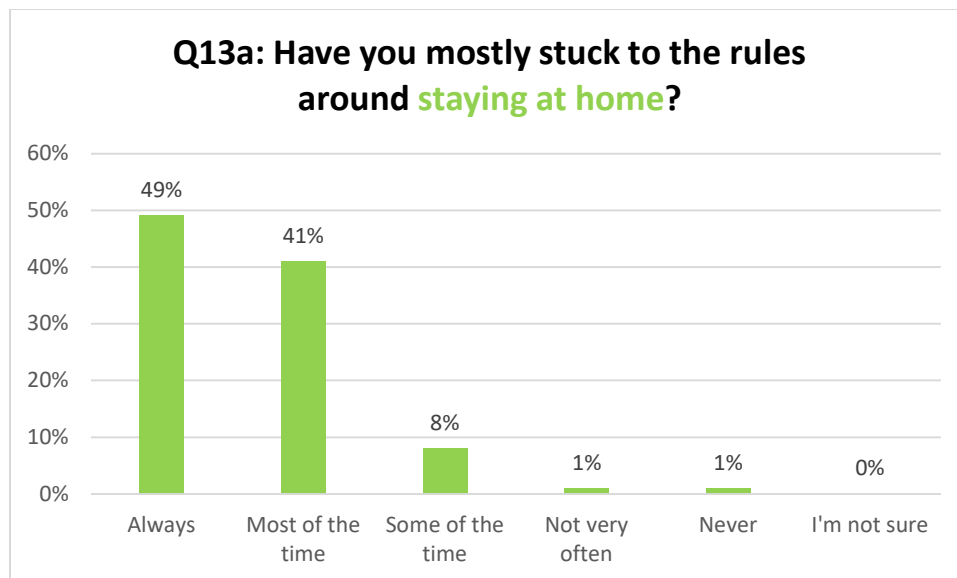**Q13: Have you mostly stuck to the rules around…**
- **Staying at home**
- **Not mixing with other households indoors**
- **Handwashing / sanitising**
- **Social distancing (2m rule)**
- **Wearing a face covering**
- **Gathering in groups**

We made it clear in our introduction to the survey that it was completely anonymous and that there would be no judgement from us about whatever the young people told us. This was important for all of the questions but perhaps none more so than Q13.

The majority of young people said that they had stuck to the rules "always" or "most of the time".
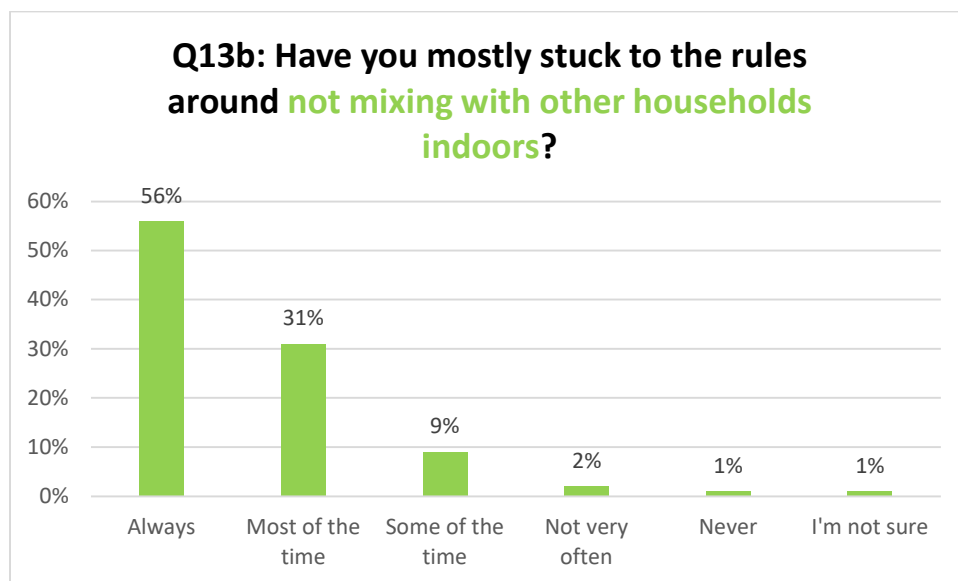
Q13a: Have you mostly stuck to the rules around staying at home?

- 49% of respondents said "Always"
- 41% of respondents said "Most of the time"
- 8% of respondents said "Some of the time"
- 1% of respondents said "Not very often"
- 1% of respondents said "Never"
- 0% of respondents said "I'm not sure"

Q13a: Have you mostly stuck to the rules around staying at home?
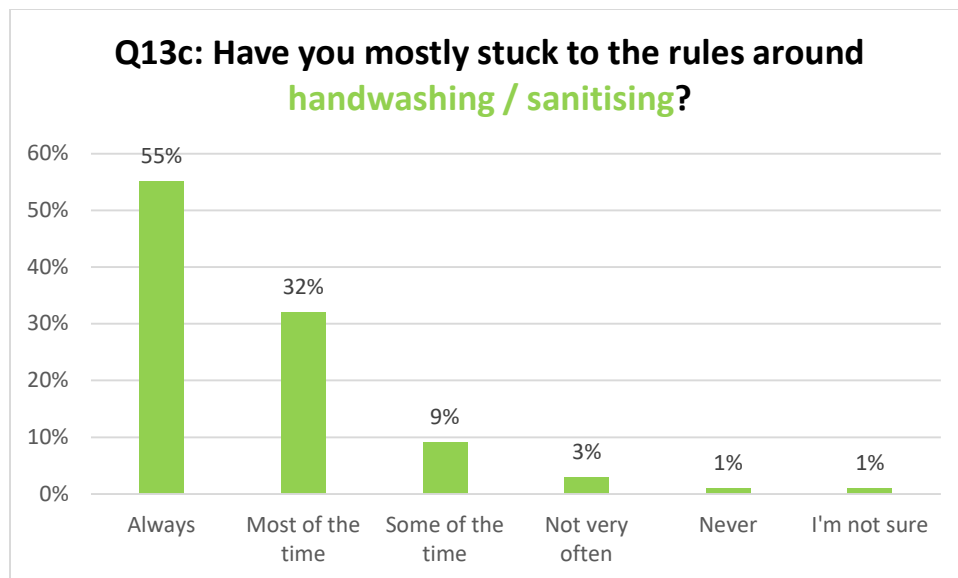
Q13b: Have you mostly stuck to the rules around not mixing with other households indoors**?**

- 56% of respondents said "Always"
- 31% of respondents said "Most of the time"
- 9% of respondents said "Some of the time"
- 2% of respondents said "Not very often"
- 1% of respondents said "Never"
- 1% of respondents said "I'm not sure"

Q13b: Have you mostly stuck to the rules around not mixing with other households indoors**?**

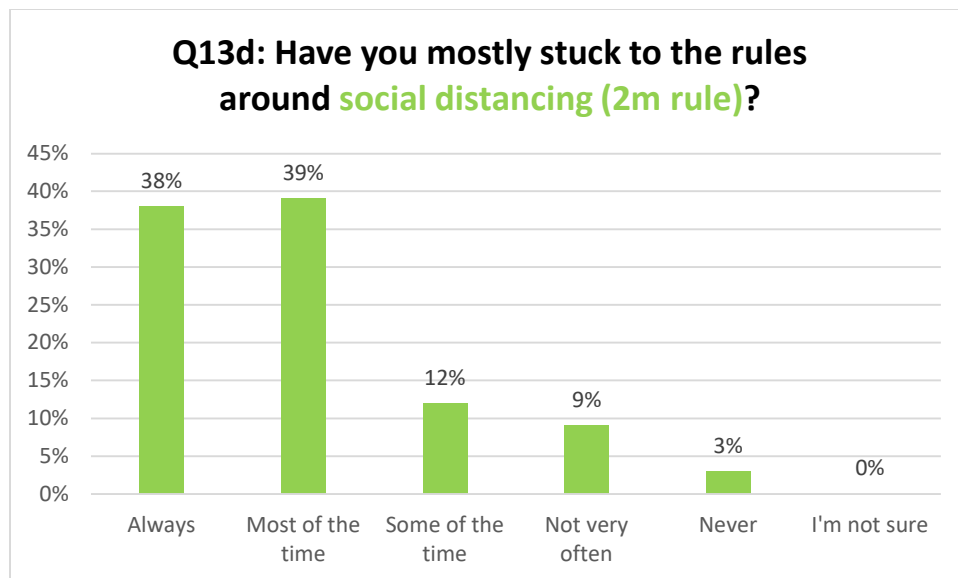| Category	Percentage
Always	56%
Most of the time	31%
Some of the time	9%
Not very often	2%
Never	1%
I'm not sure	1%

Q13c: Have you mostly stuck to the rules around handwashing / sanitising?

- 55% of respondents said "Always"
- 32% of respondents said "Most of the time"
- 9% of respondents said "Some of the time"
- 3% of respondents said "Not very often"
- 1% of respondents said "Never"
- 1% of respondents said "I'm not sure"

Q13c: Have you mostly stuck to the rules around handwashing / sanitising?

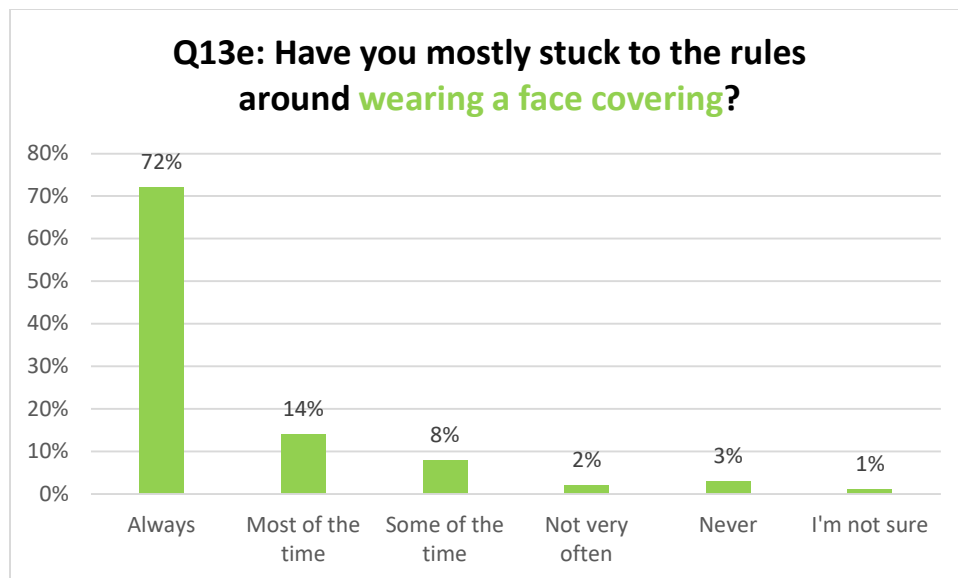| Response	Percentage
Always	55%
Most of the time	32%
Some of the time	9%
Not very often	3%
Never	1%
I'm not sure	1%

Q13d: Have you mostly stuck to the rules around social distancing (2m rule)?

- 38% of respondents said "Always"
- 39% of respondents said "Most of the time"
- 12% of respondents said "Some of the time"
- 9% of respondents said "Not very often"
- 3% of respondents said "Never"
- 0% of respondents said "I'm not sure"

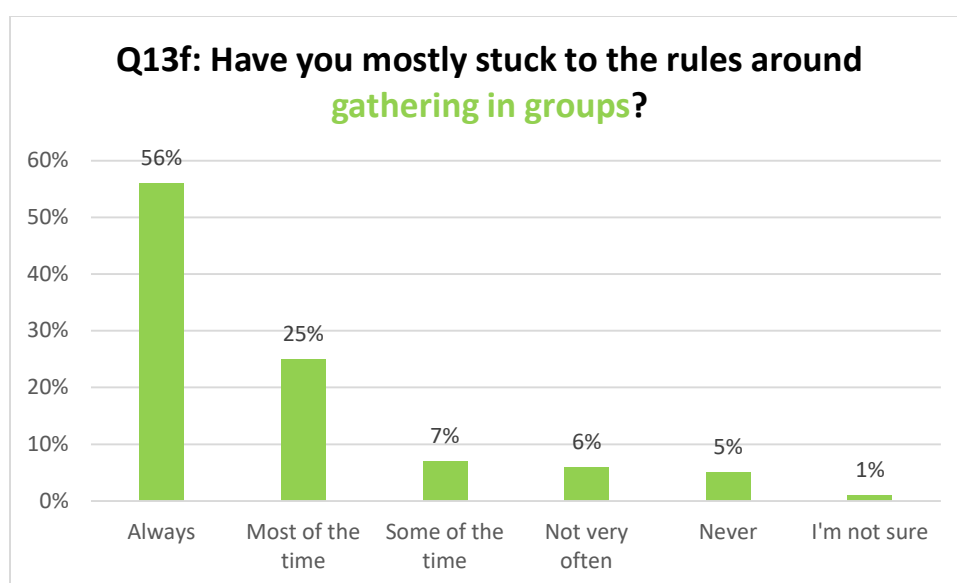Q13d: Have you mostly stuck to the rules around social distancing (2m rule)?

Q13e: Have you mostly stuck to the rules around wearing a face covering?

- 72% of respondents said "Always"

- 14% of respondents said "Most of the time"

- 8% of respondents said "Some of the time"

- 2% of respondents said "Not very often"

- 3% of respondents said "Never"

- 1% of respondents said "I'm not sure"

Q13e: Have you mostly stuck to the rules around wearing a face covering?

Category	Percentage
Always	72%
Most of the time	14%
Some of the time	8%
Not very often	2%
Never	3%
I'm not sure	1%

Q13f: Have you mostly stuck to the rules around gathering in groups?

- 56% of respondents said "Always"
- 25% of respondents said "Most of the time"
- 7% of respondents said "Some of the time"
- 6% of respondents said "Not very often"
- 5% of respondents said "Never"
- 1% of respondents said "I'm not sure"

Q13f: Have you mostly stuck to the rules around gathering in groups?

	Always	Most of the time	Some of the time	Not very often	Never	I'm not sure
	56%	25%	7%	6%	5%	1%

Q14: If you or your friends haven't always stuck to the rules, please tell us why not.

Respondents who had not always stuck to the rules gave a variety of reasons for why not.

i. Needing to see / help family members

Many respondents made it clear that they needed to see others for practical reasons such as delivering shopping or providing care for elderly relatives.

- *"Gone in my grandparents' home whilst dropping off shopping."*

- *"Support bubble were needed very early on but were only "allowed" later on. I have spent time with grandparents who give my parents respite and cared for me once a week since I was three years old due to my autism."*
- *"I have technically stuck to the rules, because on the rare occasion I haven't, it has been in the capacity of providing care for someone vulnerable i.e. going to my father-in-laws to provide vital care, when no one else could."*
- *"I haven't met friends but I have needed to care for other family members which is sometimes a job for multiple family members at a time."*
- *"I have visited my parents to do their shopping for them as they are on the vulnerable list and can't get out to do this themselves."*
- *"It's not my friends I have gathered with, it was a family member who was very ill and is dying we broke the rules to see."*

ii. Mixed messages / confusion about the rules

There was a strong sense among the majority of responses grouped under this heading that, especially for young people attending school, the rules were contradictory, confusing and didn't make sense. This is probably summed up best in the following response (but we have included a few others below too): *"If we have been in the same lessons and sat right next to each other and then been standing next to each other in the playground at lunch etc. then it seems silly that we then couldn't all meet up later that same day given we've all been with each all day anyway."*

- *"Seeing other people break the rules (in public, on social media etc) makes it really difficult to not do the same because it feels like I'm missing out and that there's no point in me following the rules if none of my friends are. But when there's a spike in cases or tighter restrictions I always follow the rules."*
- *"It's so extremely difficult for us young adults to deal with something like this without face-to-face contact. I know that some people need it more than others, but this alongside the confusing and unhelpful words of the Prime Minister in this time of need makes it difficult for all of us."*
- *"[I've] been caught out by changes in the rules."*

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- *"We want to be able to hug or celebrate if we score a goal and the Premiership footballers do so why can't we?"*

iii.   Hard / impossible to socially distance all the time

A lot of these responses refer to being unable to socially distance when attending school, which forms a slight overlap with those above who didn't understand why they were allowed to be in large groups at school but not outside.

- *"At school you can't always be 2 metres apart."*
- *"It's almost impossible to have any social interaction and consciously socially distance at all times."*
- *"School. 30 people are all in one room shoulder-to-shoulder and the first return to school didn't allow face masks in classrooms."*
- *"College bubbles – going into the town centre it's hard to distance on small pavements."*
- *"It is hard not to go near my friends when you don't see them for a long time."*
- *"The two meters rule was hard because even if I try and stick to it others don't. I went shopping with my dad and people were acting as if there's nothing serious going on. It was hard telling others to keep their distance. Some were so rude and never follow the rules outside."*
- *"Not always possible to stay 2 metres in shops and public transport."*

iv.   Forgetting to follow the rules

A handful of young people admitted to memory lapses when they were trying to follow the rules.

- *"It's just too hard to remember to social distance when I'm with my friend."*
- *"You sometimes forget when you're talking to someone you may have got a bit close."*
- *"Because we not used to it and feels strange and keep forgetting to follow rules."*
- *"I haven't kept 2 metres away from my friends when outdoors as we always forget or find it difficult when we are playing together."*

- *"Once or twice we've simply forgotten (early on.)"*
- *"I don't like wearing a mask so I often forget to put it on."*

v.   Impact on mental health and wellbeing

Young people were very honest about not always following the rules for reasons relating to mental health. These included the need to provide and receive emotional support and generally a desire to not feel alone during the pandemic. A couple of others mentioned being bored and wanting to feel happier as reasons for meeting friends.

- *"I've provided support for a friend suffering a mental health crisis."*
- *"Because mental health matters. If I couldn't see my friend, I don't think I would be here now."*
- *"Finding wearing a face covering has made me really anxious."*
- *"Needed the social contact to get through it and not to be lonely."*
- *"Our mental well-being, as young people we are constantly told that the age that we are at is the best time to be with friends and make memories but Covid had stopped this."*
- *"We're depressed kids that need time away from all the dreary news, it's too much to handle alone."*
- *"Because my mental health is so bad, I just need an escape for my own sanity. If I don't do some of these things I dread to think where I'll end up."*
- *"I needed to see someone other than my parents to talk about my mental well-being."*
- *"Mental health has a bigger impact that Covid on our physical health."*
- *"I needed to get out of the house. I felt like I was climbing the walls."*

vi.   Deliberate defiance of the rules

There are a mix of reasons given below by young people who have either deliberately defied the rules themselves or know of those that have.

- *"Because Covid kills literally 0.001% of the population. It's ridiculous we are living like this. There's always a risk of death it doesn't stop us all living."*

- *"The government is incompetent so why should we comply when they are corrupt criminals that do as they please?"*
- *"Young people have sacrificed enough when we are at no risk. Let us live."*
- *"They don't think it's important. It might not affect them but they don't know it will affect other people and families. We need to understand selfishness."*
- *"Some friends at school think they won't get Covid and if they do, they won't get it bad."*
- *"Outside there is very little risk of transmission. Transmission has been shown to be very little affected by hand washing."*
- *"We were fed up of being stuck indoors and met up on the football pitch. We thought we would all be OK. There isn't much virus round here and we are young and fit anyway."*
- *"Too much effort."*
- *"We are a small community so we can manage the risks."*
- *"We've already had Covid and have no vulnerable family members anymore."*

vii. Young people who have met up with others

Finally, here is a selection of responses from young people telling us about how, when and who they met up during lockdown.

- *"I've arranged to meet up with one friend outdoors for a walk or just to hang out, but if we have bumped into other friends then we have hung round with them as well."*
- *"Lots of friends my age haven't followed the stay home rule and have met up and some had sleepovers."*
- *"I have only been out of the house for hospital appointments or to get essentials with my mum as I'm too young to stay on my own."*
- *"Some of the time I spend time with my friends after school and they have money and I don't. They go into shops and I go with them even if I don't have a mask."*
- *"Met in larger groups than allowed."*
- *"Walking to school in a bigger group because it's safer and we won't get targeted."*

- *"Me and my friends go to school together and so we hang out in a group larger than six outside of school."*

And we've included this comment because, while it doesn't sit with any of the above themes, we think it is especially poignant and perhaps encapsulates the hardship endured by Sheffield's young people during the pandemic:

- *"I do not have friends anymore because of this stupid Covid."*

Q15: Is there anything else you would like to tell us about your experience of lockdown and Covid-19?

There were a third of total responses to this (104) final open text question. We've included here a selection of comments that haven't cropped up in previous questions and themes.

i. Thoughts on the national response to Covid-19 and lockdown etc.

A number of young people wanted to share their thoughts on the government's handling of the pandemic. There was a real sense of anger and frustration in what they told us.

- *"I think the government could've handled the situation a bit better – clearer rules, more locking down when necessary, less locking down when not needed."*
- *"The messages should have been the same for all nations [sic] in the UK. We should have closed our borders sooner."*
- *"We keep coming out of lockdown too early. People are desperate to get out so when the cases dip slightly everyone goes out and causes it to spike so we have to go back into lockdown in an endless cycle."*
- *"Boris Johnson is very bad at running a county and telling us what to do clearly and helping the NHS."*
- *"England was so incredibly unprepared and should've taken more extreme measures sooner – things like ending lockdown for Christmas was unfair for a*

lot of other religious communities such as Hindus or Muslims and was poor judgment."

- *"Not really apart from the government were really annoying because they weren't clear AT ALL."*
- *"It could have been handled better. Rules changed very quickly and didn't always make sense. Some rules contradicted others. It made life more stressful."*

ii. The negative effects of the pandemic on young people

Broadly speaking, the majority of the remaining comments are on the negative, harmful and upsetting effects of everything relating to Covid-19. Some of these responses make for hard reading.

- *"Drank, did drugs for the first time."*
- *"It's been very difficult to understand and believe this is going away."*
- *"It is the worst experience of my life and if it doesn't end soon, I am not making it out the other side."*
- *"No positive news on TV. Always talking about numbers of deaths."*
- *"I have put weight on and struggled emotionally."*
- *"Social isolation for teenagers is the opposite of what we should be. Y11s basically left school in March 2020 and left to fester."*
- *"More mental health support needed in schools. A psychologist / counsellor should be employed by every primary school."*
- *"It was the most difficult and stressful experience of my life."*
- *"I've lost things I can't get back or do again and I'm sad all the time about it."*
- *"It has been a bit surreal and I'd quite like it to end now."*
- *"Life-changing."*
- *"We need an end date; we can't live like this!"*
- *"Never again. Please."*

iii. The positive effects of lockdown on young people

The counterpoint to the comments above is that some young people found aspects of lockdown positive or pleasant.

- *"I think the feeling of everyone going through it together has been really reassuring."*
- *"It's been hard I guess but I've been reading a lot and I've started to watch Marvel and that's kind of distracted me from the pandemic."*
- *"I had great support from my school with regards to my learning and haven't fallen behind (I'm in Y9)."*
- *"Not much different from 'normal' life."*
- *"It has made me appreciate family / friends more."*
- *"I didn't miss school and I got better sleep and could do other things in the day.*
- *"I feel I have had more fresh air than usual as when I get back from school I like to walk in the park with a friend, now I am allowed, and as the weather is nice, I stay out longer. I used to just sit in my bedroom."*
- *"I was very lucky with my learning; we also have enough space in our house and all have IT equipment and a lovely garden. We live close to parks and the Botanical Gardens and parks. Also we can walk to town and the country. My grandparents live close by so when we could see each other outdoors we did. Our neighbourhood is very supportive of each other."*

Finally, we'll close the open text responses with this measured, considered reply:
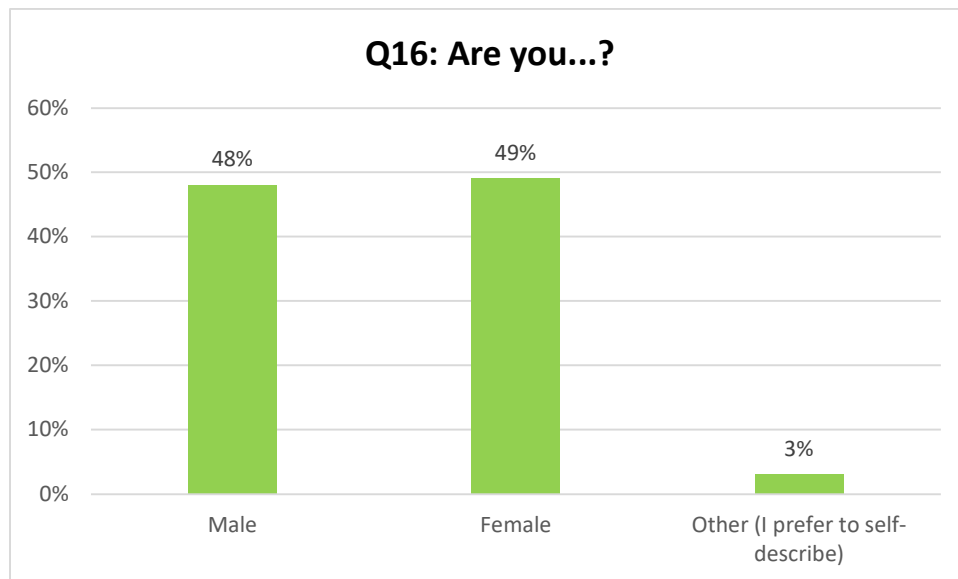
- *"In the beginning of the pandemic, we witnessed humanity at its best – kindness, thoughtfulness, cooperation, and now [spring 2021) I have noticed more selfishness, people disheartened, loss of faith in the government, people not listening."*

v. About You

The survey concluded with optional questions about the respondents' personal circumstances: gender, age, ethnicity and whether or not they had a Special Educational Need or Disability (SEND).
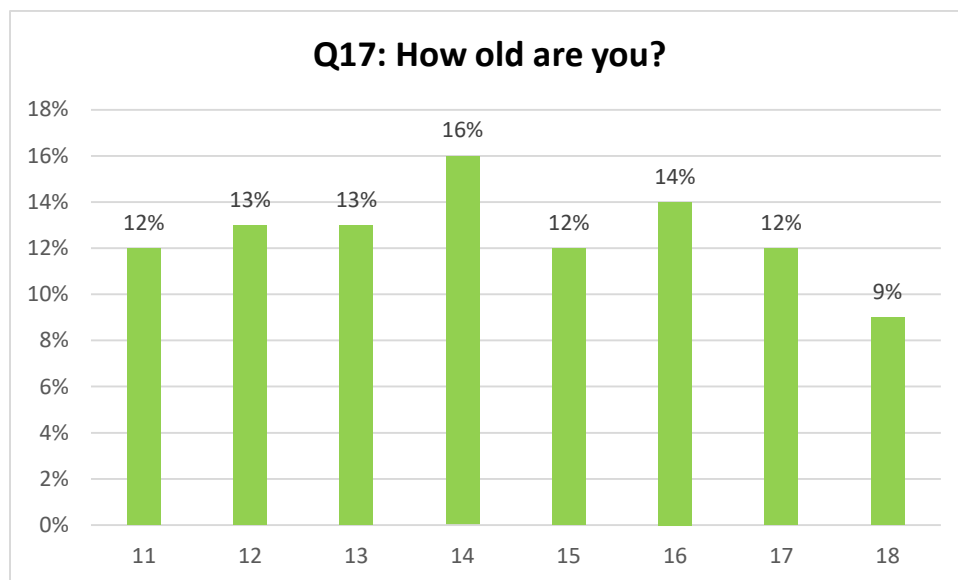
Q16: Are you…

- 48% of respondents said "Male"
- 49% of respondents said "Female"
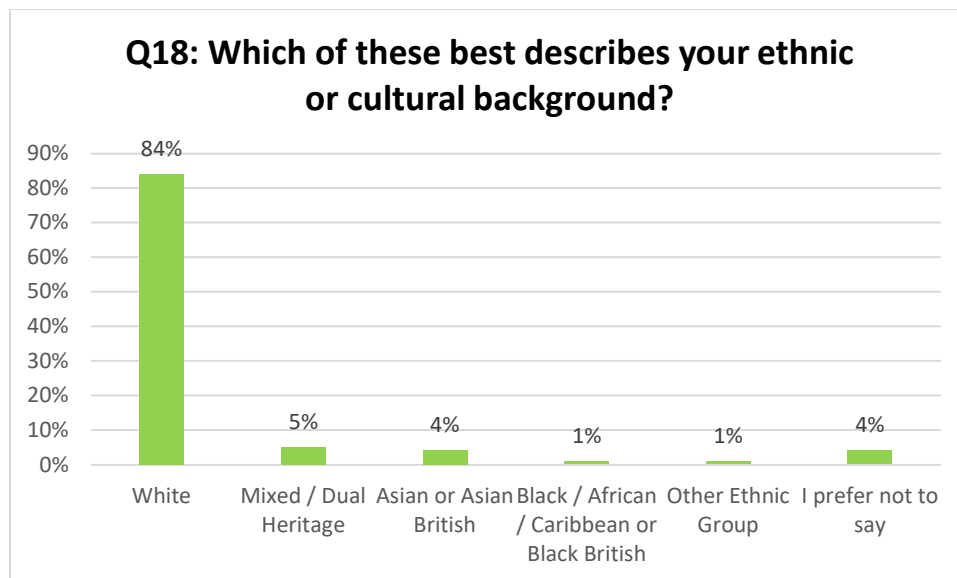- 3% of respondents said "Other (I prefer to self-describe)"

Q17: How old are you?

- 12% of respondents were 11 years old
- 13% of respondents were 12 years old
- 13% of respondents were 13 years old
- 16% of respondents were 14 years old
- 12% of respondents were 15 years old
- 14% of respondents were 16 years old
- 12% of respondents were 17 years old
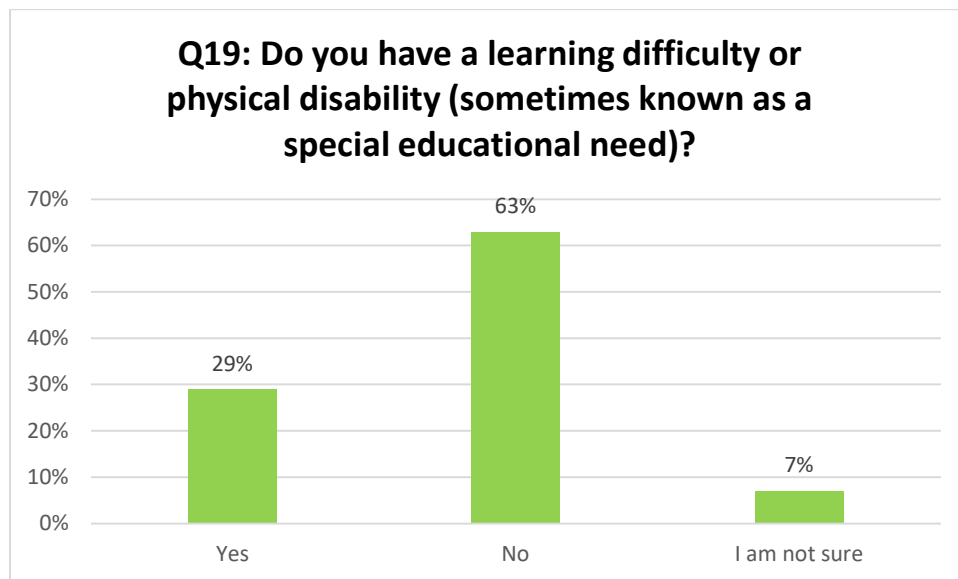- 9% of respondents were 18 years old

Q18: Which of these best describes your ethnic or cultural background?

- 84% of respondents said "White"
- 5% of respondents said "Mixed / Dual Heritage"
- 4% of respondents said "Asian or Asian British"
- 1% of respondents said "Black / African / Caribbean or Black British"
- 1% of respondents said "Other Ethnic Group"
- 4% of respondents said "I prefer not to say"

Q18: Which of these best describes your ethnic or cultural background?

	White	Mixed / Dual Heritage	Asian or Asian British	Black / African / Caribbean or Black British	Other Ethnic Group	I prefer not to say
	84%	5%	4%	1%	1%	4%

Q19: Do you have a learning difficulty or physical disability (sometimes known as a special educational need)?

- 29% of respondents said "Yes"
- 63% of respondents said "No"
- 7% of respondents said "I am not sure"

Q19: Do you have a learning difficulty or physical disability (sometimes known as a special educational need)?

Category	Percentage
Yes	29%
No	63%
I am not sure	7%

We haven't filtered the responses to the survey by any of these characteristics. If you would like to take a look at how young people in these different categories responded to the survey, however, please email us at: OVM@sheffield.gov.uk and we will be more than happy to provide details.

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vi.   National Research Studies

Our survey and this report are Sheffield-centric, however, a great deal of research has been done since March 2020 into the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on children and young people. The Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health (RCPCH) have compiled the details of many of these studies on their website[3]. Over 50 surveys and studies have been completed for which the data and reports are now available. A further 20+ studies are ongoing (plus others which may not have been submitted to the RCPH).

We have included below a selection of the national studies that reflect our local findings:

- To Lockdown and Back (Growing up Under COVID)
- Co-SPACE Covid-19: supporting parents, adolescents and children during epidemics)
- CCopeY: Young people's mental health and coping styles during and after COVID-19 lockdown
- Our views on COVID-19
- Stress among children in England during the Coronavirus lockdown
- Young People's Mental Health during the COVID-19 Pandemic
- Mental health of children and young people in England
- Children's experiences of physical activity in lockdown
- Life on Hold
- Mental health and COVID-19: In our own words
- Impact of lockdown on young people (PDF)
- Coronavirus: Impact on young people with mental health needs

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[3] COVID-19 - research studies on children and young people's views | RCPCH

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