



THE IMPACT ON YOUNG PEOPLE OF SCHOOL CLOSURES DURING COVID-19

JUNE 2020

THE DIANA AWARD

Listening to the Experiences of Young People

The Diana Award is proud to be the only charity set up in memory of Diana, Princess of Wales and her belief that young people have the power to change the world. 'Change' *for* and *by* young people is central to all our work.

It is predicted that young people's futures will be significantly impacted by COVID-19 (The Children's Society, March 2020). As schools begin to return, and as we work together to protect and champion the interests of young people in the recovery, listening to their voices is as fundamental as ever.

Schools provide more than just an education for young people. Experiences in school can be catalysts for personal and societal change, so while schools remain closed for most, we wanted to hear from young people directly, to understand their experiences of lockdown and their feelings about returning to school. The responses presented here represent a snapshot of the experiences of some young people in the UK.

For many of the young people who took our survey, there is a sense of excitement about returning to school, to see their friends and regain some normality over their education. However, many have serious concerns about how their learning will have been affected as well as how friendships may be changed by the time apart and new social distancing measures. 1 in 5 no longer feel close to their friends at the moment.

With 41% of the young people surveyed having experienced a worsened state of mental health during lockdown, it is crucial for schools and the charity sector to support young people's anxieties around school reopening, catching up with schoolwork, and maintaining positive peer relations.

In amongst their feelings of uncertainty, young people are still finding creative ways to build connections with their family, friends and communities, demonstrating, as always, their role as positive change-makers in society.



SUPPORTING YOUNG PEOPLE

Through lockdown

With these findings in mind, it has never been more important to The Diana Award to continue to support young people.

Our Awards and Development team has supported youth mental health through our Conversations for Change discussion groups on the topic. The high attendance rate from Diana Award recipients and the feedback since has highlighted how important peer relationships, moments of connection and spaces to talk about mental health are right now.

Schools on the Anti-Bullying Ambassador Programme can use our resources to take their campaigns online and continue their peer-led approach to supporting students' mental wellbeing while at home. We'll also be sharing advice for how Ambassadors can support new students as they transition to the school, so that from day one they are promoting the positive peer relationships that young people are missing so much.

As young people experience difficulties in receiving personalised attention from their teachers, one-to-one Mentoring will be a crucial source of support for many at-risk young people. Our Mentoring team continue to offer consistent support to our cohorts of mentees, and are implementing new initiatives to fill the gaps caused by school closures.

Moving forward, The Diana Award urges the education and youth sectors to prioritise youth mental health in the recovery from COVID-19, and to empower young people to build the lasting, positive connections with each other that they find so comforting. By listening to the experiences of young people, we can help them adapt to the challenges of COVID-19, and give them a leading voice on crafting the future they want to see.



LISTENING TO YOUNG PEOPLE

Who we spoke to

Between 30th April and 22nd May, The Diana Award surveyed students at our Anti-Bullying Ambassador Programme partner schools.

Programme Staff Leads were sent a questionnaire in our monthly newsletter and asked to share it with all students at their school (not just Anti-Bullying Ambassadors).

We had 603 individual responses. 97 respondents did not complete the survey so they have been excluded here. 1 response was removed due to unintelligible response and quick response time.

The final sample is 505 young people.

Responses were gained from 13 schools who self-selected complete the survey.

It should be noted that 3 schools are heavily represented (100-150 responses each).

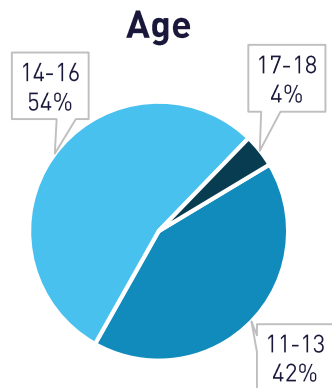


LISTENING TO YOUNG PEOPLE

Who we spoke to

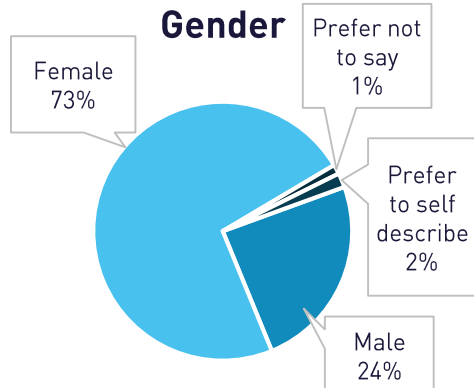
Age

All respondents were in secondary school



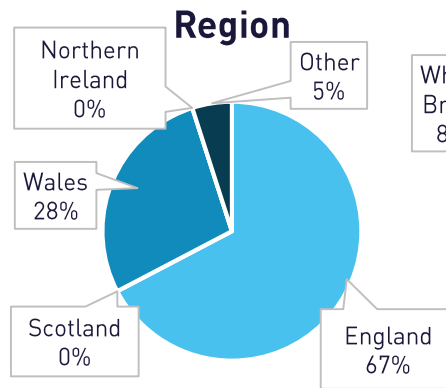
Gender

Girls are overrepresented compared to boys



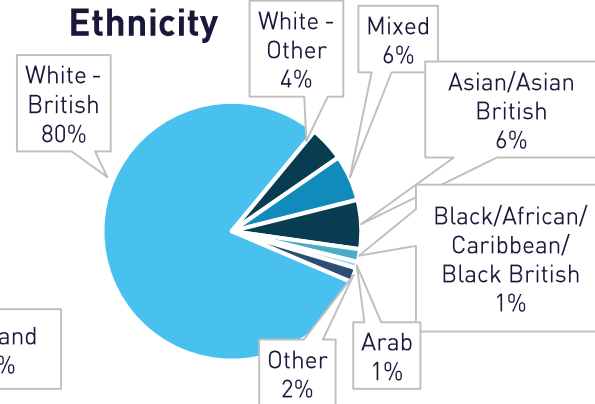
Region

Only schools in England and Wales responded



Ethnicity

White British young people are overrepresented



RETURNING TO SCHOOL

65% are looking forward to schools reopening but 33% feel worried.

Nearly half (48%) of the surveyed young people didn't feel worried about returning to school, and most are looking forward to school reopening (65%).

The most common emotions described were happiness and excitement. Others felt good and relieved, and many felt "fine" or "OK".

However, 33% agreed that the thought of going back to school makes them feel worried, and 14% are not looking forward to schools reopening.

A high proportion of open-ended responses reported feeling anxious, worried or nervous about the thought of returning to school. Some even felt scared or sad, while a few were annoyed.



PEER RELATIONS & FRIENDSHIPS

61% still feel close to their friends, but 29% feel worried about friendships changing.

The most common impact of school closures was that young people were missing their friends during school closures.

It has made me upset that I can't play any of my sports or see any of my friends

School being closed has made me miss my friends and realise how much I enjoy school.

i just miss my friends



FRIENDSHIPS & PEER RELATIONS

Missing friends & feeling lonely

Similarly, the strongest reason for students' feelings of excitement and happiness at the thought of returning were that they were looking forward to being reunited with their friends (nearly half of responses).

I can't wait to properly see my friends again!

its been a long time since school has been opened and me and my friends havent seen each other for a long time

Most of the young people (52%) didn't feel worried that their friendships will change when they go back to school. This is supported by the fact 61% said they still feel close to their friends while school is closed.

I feel like its fine because i'm still connected with mt closest mates and also the work isn't stressful which is good.

However, 21% did not feel close to their friends now, and many said they felt lonely or isolated from others during this time, as they withdrew or found it difficult to socialise.

it's made me feel more isolated and broken away from friends. loneliness is the biggest factor of school closing

It has made me more anxious and has put more pressure on friendships. it has made it harder to stay close to people.

29% did feel worried about friendships changing while school has been closed.

school being closed has made me nervous seeing my friends as i havent seen them in a while

I am just worried friendships will be different when we go back.

I'm starting a new school and haven't met anyone due to Covid-19



IMPACT ON EDUCATION

**Feeling behind, uncertain,
and miss normality. But a
time of growth for some.**

A similarly large concern for the young people was that their education had suffered at this time. Lots found the online learning to be difficult, particularly as it meant they were unable to get help from teachers in a timely manner.

It's a little bit more difficult because there is no teacher around to help me when I am struggling and more work keeps on piling up so it's hard to catch up

It makes being able to complete work hard as if you get stuck you have to email and then wait for a teacher to reply which takes a while



IMPACT ON EDUCATION

Falling behind

When thinking about schools returning, many of the anxious responses were driven by the concern that they would be behind on schoolwork and unable to catch up:

I miss my friends. I'm nervous about the fact that if we don't go back to school until September, we are going to have missed half a year of learning.

Stressful, the work load is barely manageable and I am unsure about how GCSE exams will pan out. I feel like I am falling behind.

there is a lot of work we will have to catch upon and things wont be the same but i am looking forward to seeing my friends

Many reported feeling increased work pressure at this time, due to a greater workload set:

We have been set so much work at home it has been really stressful and overwhelming.

This meant many were looking forward to being able to learn better in school again.

I will get to talk and share news with teachers and friends and spend more time with friends.

*I'll understand the work better when it gets explained
i can get more personalized feed back for my work*



IMPACT ON EDUCATION

Productivity

Other academic issues reported were that some were finding it hard to concentrate, organise or motivate themselves while working at home.

I don't get as much work done because I get distracted by other things

I feel tired and I don't know how to concentrate at home because I am used to school surroundings. I am panicking because I can't keep track of all the work I'm being set online.

I find it hard to motivate myself to do either schoolwork or my hobbies because there is more time in the day and it is hard to see an end goal.

This all said, lots of the young people were actually enjoying the increased independence and productivity, more relaxed atmosphere, and opportunity to be flexible with their time that came with working from home.

I've much preferred working from home as I can for it around hobbies and teach myself most efficiently and effectively.

I am more relaxed and less stressed because there is no homework and just school work, so you can easily balance home and school. I also feel like I have more freedom and flexibility.



IMPACT ON EDUCATION

Uncertain futures

Many were looking forward to or wanted a sense of normality and a routine again:

Working from home has been challenging, and I have felt increasingly isolated as lockdown has gone on. I really want to go back to school and back to normal.

I will be happier getting back into a normal routine.

Although others recognised that things would likely be very different from before:

So much has changed I don't know what it will be like when we go back.

There was a strong feeling of uncertainty reported by many about how this time would impact them in the future. This was especially true amongst many of the year 10s, 11s and 13s that responded. Exams being cancelled or postponed was often given as a specific source of stress.

I am starting to worry about exams that will take place in under a years time

It has given me more anxiety as I was about to take my GCSEs and now I am going into 6th form without being properly prepared

I have no idea what's happening with school-I'm sure no one does.



IMPACT ON MENTAL HEALTH

**41% feel more anxious,
worried or upset since
schools closed.**

41% agreed that they have been feeling more anxious, worried or upset since schools closed, compared to 24% who report feeling less anxious, worried or upset since schools closed.

In the open-ended responses, a worsening of mental health was reported at least twice as often as improvements, most commonly regarding increased feelings of stress and anxiety. This was often due to school work, or excessive amounts of time spent alone without distraction or support from friends.



IMPACT ON MENTAL HEALTH

Increased anxiety

It has made me lonely and stressed because school is giving me too much work every day

I feel more anxious and a lot less happy. I really want to see my friends.

I have been thinking deeply about a lot of things, therefore becoming more anxious and worried about things. Also the amount of school work I have stresses me out slightly, and I can't seem to focus on it well.

I feel less motivated, My mental Health has gotten worse even though going back to school will definitely make it worse.

It has made me ten times more anxious, angry and sad. i think its good to be inside f school so you can socialise.

My mental health has dramatically depleted, I normally gain energy being around people but since I can't do that I'm exhausted all of the time and can't sleep but when I do sleep I sleep for extreme periods of time. Consequently, I can't focus or do my work because I'm exhausted and am having to will myself to get out of bed each day instead of just staring at the wall for hours on end. Additionally, due to stress from being super overwhelmed because of coronavirus, I'm really struggling with self harm and intrusive suicidal thoughts.



IMPACT ON MENTAL HEALTH

Self-reflection & time given to wellbeing

For those who say their mental health had improved, being given time to reflect and find activities that improved their wellbeing was seen as a positive contributor.

It has affected me positively because I feel safe at home with my mum and have had more time to focus on my mental health because I'm not worrying about going into school and what people think of me as they aren't seeing me face to face.

It has allowed me to have time to reflect on myself and make myself feel happy

For most of these young people, COVID-19 was not having an impact on their sleep (78%), though 8% reported that they can't sleep because they are worrying about COVID-19.



FAMILY RELATIONSHIP

88% reported that they have support from trusted friends or family at this time.

The majority are enjoying being at home with their parents/carer(s) (72% agree). Siblings experiences are still positive, but to a lesser extent, with 51% reporting enjoying being at home with them.

21% agree that they are finding it difficult being at home with siblings, while 16% report finding it difficult to be at home with parent/carer(s).

On balance, more young people described improved family relationships compared to increased family tensions.

I haven't been in contact with many people but I'm enjoying my time with my family as we can be closer without many interruptions

Made me and my sister get to know each other more.

I find home learning tricky and sometimes it can be annoying living with my parents. I love them a lot but sometimes we can get on each others nerves. I miss my friends a lot.



CONCERNS ABOUT COVID-19

COVID-19 shows positive side to society, but safety concerns remain strong.

More than half of young people thought that COVID-19 has shown the good sides to people and society (56%). 11% disagreed, and 33% remained unsure.

But a concern that came up in a fair number of responses was the risk of spreading COVID-19 as schools reopened.



CONCERNS ABOUT COVID-19

Spreading & socialising

Some young people were unsure that it was the right time, or they worried how social distancing measures would be implemented successfully in school to reduce the risk.

i dont want them to reopen too soon and let it be a massive mistake. however, i am excited for things to go back to normal.

I want to see my friends but do not want anyone to get ill

I don't really want to go to school until the number of deaths have dropped and it is safe to go to school.

everything will be different and I don't want to put other people in danger of catching COVID 19.

In particular, they worried about how new rules would impact their socialising:

i dont know if i will be able to sit with friends at lunchtime

I feel excited and happy that I will see my friends again, but anxious that people might not stick to social distancing.

I'll be able to see my friends but a lot of people will be cautious and bully each other from past experiences of the virus like if someone coughs everyone will stay away from them and ignore them which will be unfair.

I don't know how schools can keep us 2 metres away from each other



BULLYING BEHAVIOUR

**Bullying behaviour reduced
but still occurring on social
media and anonymous apps.**

Most respondents hadn't experienced bullying either offline (80%) or online (83%).

Of the young people who had experienced bullying behaviour at this time, 76% had experienced less in-person bullying since school and only 7% had been experiencing more in-person bullying. 17% said their experiences remained the same.

The reduction in online bullying was smaller. Only 48% of those who had experienced bullying behaviour at this time reported a decrease in online bullying behaviour. 27% were experiencing more online bullying behaviour. 25% stayed the same.

37% experienced the bullying behaviour from other students in their school. The second most common perpetrators were young people's siblings (25%), followed by other young people who were strangers to them (23%).



BULLYING BEHAVIOUR

Cyberbullying

Young people seemed unsure about whether there has been more or less cyberbullying since schools closed. When asked if they felt there had been more cyberbullying, 55% neither agreed nor disagreed. Only 11% thought there had been more, while 34% disagreed

Still, of those who had experienced or witnessed bullying, online bullying was, understandably, the most common, with 18% reporting bullying behaviour occurring on Instagram, closely followed by TikTok (16%). Snapchat was also highly ranked as a place for bullying to occur (11%).

A few respondents specifically mentioned that bullying behaviours were occurring anonymously, and often through a new platform linked to Instagram, called Tellonym.

lots of people have the tellonym app which is used to say anonymous things and lots of people get constant hate on there

my friend sent me a snapchat screenshot of people taking the micky of her and calling her names

I've seen lots of bullying on tiktok, where random people make fun of eachother, i think because people are so bored. I've also seen lots of arguments on houseparty where people have said nasty things to eachother.

On Instagram, people are reposting videos of people and making fun of them, most of them have a disability or disorder.



BULLYING BEHAVIOUR

Mean comments online

Across all reports, verbal bullying behaviour was the most common type. Specifically, posting or sharing mean comments online was most likely to be occurring.

I haven't experienced any bullying but I have seen some name calling and stuff on social media like tiktok and Instagram

People staying up late posting offensive messages and people making fun of other people.

As well as comments, photos or videos on social media, bullying may be occurring privately in WhatsApp group chats between friends.

I have seen an increase in online bullying on group chats, this may be because people are stressed and stuck at home.

I have not [seen bullying] as cyber bullying often happens in dms or private groups .

If young people gave a reason for the bullying behaviour, appearance and body shaming was the most common, followed by racism.

Mostly on social platforms, bringing people down by stating their 'less attractive' features

well i was on a group chat on Snapchat and there was these nasty people who were bullying people because of what they sounded like, what they look like or there ethnicity

Well in tiktok its just mostly racism but its not always but it randomly pops up just people saying what their not supposed to but then the videos get taken down as they don't follow community guide lines



ROLE OF SCHOOL & BULLYING

The majority (68%) felt schools should still help with bullying while closed.

Most surveyed young people were unsure how schools reopening would impact bullying behaviour, though more respondents (20%) agreed that there would be less bullying when schools reopened, compared to more (13%).



SPREADING POSITIVITY

**We asked young people how
they have been staying
positive at home.**

Across all our programmes, The Diana Award believes in the power of young people to be a positive force for change.

From their small acts of kindness, to their long-term campaigns, young people spread positivity to their friends, family and local communities.

We asked what they've been doing during this time at home, and their responses were incredible.

Here are some of our favourites.



SPREADING POSITIVITY

With friends, family, teachers and neighbours

We are clapping for the nhs every thursday and we are staying at home and video calling friends and family to stop the spread.

Every week we going shopping for all of our grandparents so they don't have to put themselves at risk

Me and my friends did a quiz on zoom and then had a dance party afterwards.

Ever since school closure I've been thinking about more of my hobbies and interests and have been focusing on that for a while.

My friends are helping each other stay in a positive mood at this time

The school did a talent show online, my family have invested a lot of time into the card game uno

we all go very bored so we decided to sit down for a couple of house with no phones no WIFI and play monopoly

I am talking to my friends a lot and face timing them, I have spoken to people I haven't spoken to in a long time

my family is not exactly the richest, a few days ago we received shopping from a volunteer who refused payment of any kind. Its small gestures like these are keeping the social economy going, heroes of the virus.

Every Wednesday my family do a quiz night and on Thursdays my friends and I do group calls where we play online games and have a laugh.



SPREADING POSITIVITY

With friends, family, teachers and neighbours

We have made a school group chat where we talk about what's going on, it does make me feel a bit more at ease

Exercise whether it's inside or outside is crucial. Helps mentally aswell as keeping you fit during lockdown.

the school may ask questions like are you still speaking to friends or are you ok with the amount of work you are receiving.

One friend made me cheese biscuits so I made her some brownie. Another friend sent me a small present to make me smile.

School is building a good community online, spreading positivity and we all are checking up on each other.

I have signed up for the [Region] youth Commission. I never would of done this when I was in school.

I have enjoyed going out on long walks

I am cooking a lot more and I think I have definitely improved my art skills!

The art department have set an optional task for everyone to make a covid 19 sketchbook so every week we have to draw something which has been set by our teacher, anyone can get involved and it's helping me remember how fast the days are passing.

Teachers sharing funny videos

I have been thinking about my future and have found some walks I didn't know existed

We are making a rainbow collage from pictures from our homes to show our respect for the NHS



SPREADING POSITIVITY

With friends, family, teachers and neighbours

My family are looking on the bright side of things and we are doing lot of things together and TALKING MORE about our feelings

Donating baked goods to surgeries, pharmacies and care homes

me and my friends face time everyday to check on each other and just to talk to each other, we also play online games together

My family signed up for kindness by post which is where you are paired up with someone and you exchange letter or kind messages.

I have been playing chess with my Grandad twice a week on Zoom.

A woman who lives just round the corner has been giving flute lesson to a little boy in the neighbourhood through a window and recently they have both been coming onto the green I live on and playing for my whole neighbourhood, people stand around to watch even passersby and the green is full of pretty flowers!

We have a weekly routa of people who have to bake , and one of my family members cheated and bought cake from iceland

The teachers did do a video about how to stay healthy and safe during quarantine.

me and my friends on video games are sticking up for people who are being bullied



