

How does it feel for me during Covid 19? - Weekly real-time report

Week Commencing 6th July

Below is a summary of what we are hearing from stakeholder organisations and the public.

Stakeholder organisations Week commencing 6th July

Public Voices: Children and Young People's Health and Well-Being under Lockdown

During the last two weeks in June, we launched a survey asking parents and carers to share their perspective on how the pandemic has affected their children aged 0 to 18. Below are the key findings from the 787 responses we received.

1. What's it like to be a child living under lockdown?

Key finding: For 51% of children and young people in Leeds, life has got worse since lockdown began (compared with 18% whose well-being has improved).

The biggest impact, according to their parents, has been **not being able to go to school**. This has meant that:

- They've not been able to see their friends.

"Struggling with loneliness and not being able to see friends, acting out in response to not seeing them"

- They've lost the routine and structure they got previously.

"The child i care for thrives in the structure of school life but since Covid 19 he has struggled with his regulation and challenging behaviour has been much worse."

- They've felt overwhelmed by the demands of independent learning.

"Despite not being a fan of school my child is missing face to face teaching and isn't finding the motivation to do more than the bare minimum school work wise."

"He has not been able to do school work every day, sometimes missing 2-3 days. The school situation has worried him because he feels like he is falling behind and he has spoken with anxiety about his future"

"Homeschooling has been really difficult. My child loves school but has always got really stressed about homework and during lockdown has found every excuse not to do any schoolwork."

- They've missed "landmarks" that meant a lot to them, especially if they are in their final year of school:

"had everything he was looking forward to pulled away from him, no last day at school, no goodbyes to friends, no prom, no Leeds fest, no athletics meetings [...] at 16 this has been devastating, he's told me he's felt suicidal."

The second biggest impact has been increased **anxieties**.

- Sometimes parents feel that the stresses of losing "normal life" and not knowing what the future holds have triggered = anxiety.

“Feeling anxious Overwhelming feelings of returning to school after not going for so long”

- Other times, children are worried about catching the virus, which has in turn made them fearful of leaving the house.

“very worried about catching the virus, every conversation turns back to ‘will I catch it?’”

“Since lockdown he has left the house once and despite encouragement on my part has no inclination to go out again. [...] He says he feels safe at home.”

- Parents sometimes make a link between their children’s anxieties and their inability to focus on their schoolwork:

“Has seriously regressed in his ability to concentrate, follow a routine and development due to lack of school and anxiety.”

Of course, many of the 40% of children whose wellbeing has been negatively affected are struggling with a combination of all these feelings, and this is having an array of knock-on effects.

For instance, parents very often tell us that their children are **struggling to control their emotions**. They are now quicker to burst into tears or become angry (or even aggressive) and tantrums have become more common.

“Increased tantrums and frustration. Anxious to touch things or people when out due to been made aware theres a nasty virus Change in routine has played a bit part as hes a creature of habit.”

“There are unexpected tears and lots of need for cuddles.”

Disrupted **sleep** has been an issue for a significant minority of children.

“His sleep pattern is messed up (despite being on melatonin to help with this) he is struggling to settle at night and waking up/sleep walking and crying.”

“Anxious around bed time, sleeping in with me even though 9 years old. Emotions are more extreme.”

Demotivation is another part of the lockdown experience for a significant number of children.

- Sometimes young people are demotivated to do their schoolwork without their friends and teachers there to support them:

“she really wants to go back to school and is struggling with motivation and understanding of the online content”

- Sometimes, they have lost their motivation to exercise:

“Before lockdown my son was an active teenager. He loved doing sport and his friends where his whole life. Since lockdown he has left the house once and despite encouragement on my part has no inclination to go out again.”

- Sometimes they are feeling despondent and can’t see the point of going about life’s normal routines:

“Some days almost hibernating.”

“He doesn’t want to get dressed, do his teeth, get washed. Some days he is off his food and other days he just wants snacks. He doesn’t want to leave the house for exercise. He is very emotional.”

“won’t do any educational activities, often refuses to shower”

- Some children have withdrawn from their social circle:

“My daughter is totally spending her time in her bedroom. I have tried talking to her but she shuts me out completely by saying I’m ok leave me alone. [...] Why doesn’t she want to talk to me? [...] What I can do to help her to open up about her depression & encourage her to talk to her friends?”

“He has become very cautious of being around people. He doesn’t like being away from us.”

“Scared of anyone that’s not family”

“he is very reluctant to even go in the garden, his social skills have been affected”

Challenges for our city:

- How can we get the message out to children that they are safe in their schools?
- What tools can we give children of all ages to manage their anxiety?
- What can we do to support parents who are worried about their children’s wellbeing?
- What resources can we use to motivate children and give them structure before all schools resume in September?
- How can we ensure that children who would benefit from support from mental health professionals get it when they need it?
- How can the Health and Well-Being Board influence schools as they get back up and running?

What have been some of the positives of lockdown for our young people?

Key finding: For a significant minority of children in Leeds, lockdown has been a welcome change from life’s usual pressures

18% of children featured in our survey have seen their wellbeing improve under lockdown.

- Most often, parents tell us that this is because the usual anxieties and pressures of school have been alleviated.

“She is less stressed by things happening in school. [...] We are less rushed which also helps”

“As her GCSE were cancelled, a lot of tension and worry has gone.”

“my daughter is shy and finds busy school situations tiring and difficult.”

- Home schooling (or, in some cases, reduced class sizes) has given some children the opportunity to learn in helpful new ways.

“School anxiety has reduced greatly as my daughter is attending school part time only and has access to one to one support in smaller class sizes than at regular school”

“My son had severe dyslexia and despite being on SEN register is not supported in the school environment. He has flourished under home schooling and confidence has soared”

“lots of time for imaginative play and experiential learning”

- Some children have benefitted from the extra family time, which seems to have had a particularly positive effect on sibling relationships:

“Slowing down the pace of life. Quality family time and companionship. Emotional development through exposure to family feeling which may have been more hidden pre lock down.”

Challenges for our city:

What can we do to build on the progress some children have made during lockdown and make sure the transition back to school is as smooth as possible for them?

How has lockdown been for children with SEND and other conditions?

Key finding: Many children with special educational needs and disability and other conditions have found lockdown hard, but they are also very anxious about returning to normal while the virus is still a threat.

41 parents told us about both their children's additional needs and their lockdown experiences. 78% of these parents said that their child's emotional wellbeing had been made worse by lockdown.

Almost a third of children have seen their anxiety increase, and 22% have struggled with a lack of routine:

"My child has Aspergers / autism. Being out of his routine and not attending school has had a very negative impact on his wellbeing and overall happiness. His anxiety levels are extremely high as a result of not being able to mix with his peers and friends."

Some autistic children remain particularly fearful of leaving the house, making the prospect of returning to school very worrying.

"He is becoming more anxious as we are coming out of lockdown."

"very anxious and very upset about returning to school"

"he is very anxious as is aware the virus is still around."

Challenges for our city:

- **What messages do we need to get out to children with SEND and other conditions to reassure them that they are safe in school and beyond?**
- **What specialist services can we offer young people with autism and other conditions who are trying to manage anxiety?**

Have Children's Ages Affected How They've Coped with Lockdown?

Key Finding: The older children are, the more likely they are to be struggling emotionally with lockdown

Young people aged 16 to 18 are more likely than any other age group to have seen their well-being negatively affected by lockdown. In 67% of cases, parents have noticed their child is feeling worse than at the start of the year, compared to 53% of children aged 12-15 or 6-11 and 37% of children aged 0-5.

These findings bear interesting comparison with the results of Healthwatch Leeds' earlier engagement about mental health. During the first two weeks in May, 69 young people aged 11 to 25 told us about how lockdown was affecting their mental health.

Again, we found that people in their late teens and early 20s were most likely to be struggling with their well-being; not only are they more likely to report negative feelings, but those feelings are more likely to be severe.

Children from white British or Irish backgrounds are more likely to have been negatively affected by lockdown than their peers from BAME backgrounds. 53% of white British and Irish children are feeling worse than before, compared to 38% of BAME children.

Challenges for our city:

How can we offer targeted support for young people aged 16-18 and young adults who are dealing with anxieties about the virus and an uncertain future?

How has lockdown affected care home residents' wellbeing? Relatives' perspectives

Healthwatch Leeds recently asked relatives of people living in care homes to share their observations of how their loved ones are coping with lockdown.

The report has now been published and indicates that:

- 50% of relatives think their loved one's well-being is now "a bit" or "a lot" worse than before lockdown. One of the key reasons for this is that residents have missed out on the emotional support they usual get from their family.
- Residents with dementia have sometimes found it particularly difficult to adapt to the changes in routine that lockdown has brought.
- Relatives very much value getting regular, timely and personalised communications from care homes. We heard examples of good practice such as 'Friends and family' closed Facebook groups, emails and weekly newsletters with pictures of residents
- Relatives and residents alike are very much looking forward to visiting being made easier. Care homes are aiming to facilitate family contact in a variety of ways, including "window visits" and "drive thrus".

To read the report in full, please go to healthwatchleeds.co.uk/reports-recommendations/2020/what-relatives-of-care-home-residents-in-leeds-are-saying/

These reports are designed to support decision makers during this time. If you find them useful, we would love to hear from you! Please do drop us a line at hannah@healthwatchleeds.co.uk to tell us what you have found most useful.