

Young People and Mental Health

The Impact of COVID-19 and Lockdowns in Haringey 2020 / 2021



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Introduction

Young people have been heavily impacted by COVID-19 and the subsequent lockdowns – disruptions to schooling and education, uncertainty over exams and results, fewer employment prospects, not being able to socialise with friends and family, and having to stay in.

This has impacted on young people's mental health and wellbeing, with increased levels of stress, anxiety and mental ill health. We wanted to explore these issues by carrying out a project to look at the impact of COVID-19 and lockdowns on the mental health and wellbeing of young people in Haringey. We launched two online surveys – one for young people, and one for parents and carers. We had 96 responses in total (41 responses from young people and 55 from parents and carers), between October 2020 and March 2021. Most of the young people completing the survey were aged between 14 and 16 years.

This report highlights the key findings and emerging themes from the two surveys, focusing on the impact of COVID-19 and lockdowns on the mental health and wellbeing of young people. The report also gives a valuable insight into the experiences and concerns of parents and carers, and the role schools, colleges, and mental health services can play in addressing the pressures faced by young people and supporting them in improving their mental health in unusual and uncertain times.

Executive summary

While some young people may have found the lockdown period to have its advantages, overall, COVID-19, and the restrictions put in place, led to a deterioration in the mental health, and anxiety levels have increased.

Our research has revealed that young people have found it difficult to cope with isolation, being away from school, friends, and social activities, and have developed fears around their future and aspirations. These factors have also contributed to the rise of new mental health conditions.

Based on the responses to both our surveys, the main themes and findings from our research include:

Mental Health

60% of the respondents to the survey stated the COVID-19 pandemic and the lockdowns have had a negative impact on their mental health.

The most common responses were themed around:

- Isolation, as a result of not being able to socialise with friends and wider family,
- An Increase in anxiety and stress levels,
- Social anxiety,
- Loss of motivation and purpose, and
- Financial concerns.

Nonetheless, participants in the survey also cite positive aspects of the lockdowns and being away from school, mentioning an improvement to their mental health as a result of:

- Having time to do the things they enjoy,
- Spending more time with family,
- Being away from the pressures of a school environment (body image, appearance, relationships etc.), and
- Having their own time and space.

Education and Attainment

Over 35% of the young people taking part in the survey stressed that they feel anxious about their school work and exams and think they may be "failing" in their education.

As well as feeling worried about their exams and attainment, young people have also stated they miss their friends, teachers, and the school routine.

Thinking about the future

When thinking about their future, over 40% of the respondents revealed they are anxious about passing their exams, getting the grades they want, getting into the colleges and universities of their choice, and finding a good job.

Many young people feel apprehensive and uncertain about their future, especially in relation to their education and career. However, on a more positive note, 35% of respondents mentioned they are looking forward to having a good job and working in the career of their dreams.

Mental Health Support

Over 55% of respondents feel they have enough information on how to get care and support for their mental health and are confident that they know where to go to access this support. However, it is important to mention that most respondents reported they would seek support for their mental health from a friend or family member, rather than from a professional. The three most common choices for who they would talk to about their mental health are:

- Family,
- Friends, and
- Online websites or social media.

A very small number of young people (only 6%) stated they would talk to a teacher or a professional about their mental health.

89% of young people said they would like to see an improvement in the mental health care and interventions offered at their school. Suggestions on how this could be improved include:

- Better communication between teachers and students,
- An increased awareness of mental health, and
- Prioritisation of mental health.

Parents and Carers

65% of the parents and carers participating in the survey stated the lockdowns and pandemic have had an adverse impact on the mental health of their children and young people, highlighting the main concern as isolation, stemming from their children or young people not being able to socialise with their friends or participate in educational, social, or extra-curricular activities. Parents and carers also said that being away from school and friends has contributed significantly to the stress and anxiety levels of children and young people. Parents and carers also view the most common anxieties and challenges faced by young people as:

- Catching or spreading the COVID-19 virus,
- Loss of motivation and purpose,
- Worries about the future, and
- Anxiety around schoolwork and exams.

Parents and carers feel that schools and colleges can play a big role in supporting the mental health of young people, and recommend the changes below in improving the mental health of students:

- Information about COVID-19 and a better understanding of the impact among staff and pupils,
- More emphasis on mental health, and young people encouraged to talk about their feelings/thoughts, and
- Recognising the importance of extracurricular and social interventions.



Conclusions

Through the research and the information gathered from young people, parents and carers, we can draw some clear conclusions, especially regarding the pressures of the COVID-19 pandemic on the mental health of young people, and their families and carers. The responses to both surveys clearly indicate that young people are struggling with the impact and pressures of the pandemic and lockdowns on their mental health and wellbeing. Key issues, such as isolation, loss of purpose and motivation, and uncertainty towards their education and future has increased.

Schools and colleges should take responsibility for raising mental health awareness and prioritising the mental health of young people, as the importance of pastoral support and mental health interventions in an educational environment clearly came through in our findings.

Recommendations

To ensure young people can access the support they need, and recover from the devastating impact of the pandemic on their wellbeing, lives, and education, we have made the recommendations detailed here.

Schools and colleges:

- Provide better communications and messaging on COVID-19, ensuring young people have a clear understanding of the virus and prevention methods. This could be toolkits or resources for young people, or parents/carers, or COVID-19 focused lessons and 'drop-down' days.
- 2. Raise awareness of mental health and the additional pressures caused by COVID-19. Students need to be more openly encouraged to discuss mental health themes, which should be widely introduced and celebrated in the schools' learning, ethos, and policies. Mental health training for all staff is a must.
- Prioritise mental health and wellbeing provision, and offer this holistically to students, especially to young people who have additional needs, or may be going through transition or exam periods. Regular check-ins with students, break-out times, and open-door policies can encourage young people to talk about their mental health.
- 4. Recognise the need for extra-curricular and social interventions, to improve young people's mental health and wellbeing.

Mental health services, CAMHS*, charities and organisations:

- 1. Raise awareness of services among young people, parents, and carers. Increase understanding of the support that's on offer and how to access it.
- Have more of a presence within educational environments, offering information and advice surgeries, interventions and support for young people, in a safe environment, alongside their academic studies.

*CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services).

Methodology

Working together with several different bodies and agencies in Haringey, we were able to promote and distribute two surveys.

- Survey 1, aimed at young people (Appendix A), and
- Survey 2, aimed at parents and carers (Appendix B).

Both surveys were designed to capture the direct and indirect impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown on the lives of young people and on their mental health.

We promoted and distributed our survey through the following channels:

- We connected with Parkview Academy secondary school, located in the East of the borough where high levels of deprivation and crime are present, sharing our survey with KS4 pupils (aged 14-16).
- We circulated our survey to parents and carers of young people with SEND at Markfield, Haringey.
- We circulated our survey to young service users at the LGBTQI+ charity, Wise Thoughts.
- We promoted our survey on our website, through our monthly newsletter, and through our social media channels.

In total, we had 96 responses to both surveys on Survey Monkey, and the information within this report was gathered between October 2020 and March 2021.

54% of the respondents to the young people's survey were female, and 46% male, with over 80% between the 14-16 age bracket. The majority of respondents identified their ethnic origin as White-British, followed by Turkish, and Mixed-White and Black Caribbean. Only 9% of the participants to the survey considered themselves to be a person with a disability, with the most common response being Autism.

Detailed Findings

Mental Health

We initially wanted to understand how willing the respondents were in answering questions about mental health, as most of the questions in the survey were heavily focused on mental health - a topic which can be difficult for a young person to share. We wanted to ensure the responses we obtained were open and authentic. Our opening question to the survey was 'how comfortable do you feel talking about your mental health?', and over 50% of the respondents gave a positive return, indicating they were happy to share their thoughts and experiences of mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic.

I was crying because everything was over. I couldn't go swimming, which is one of my favourite things to do, and I couldn't see my friends.



Over 60% of the respondents to the survey said the COVID-19 pandemic and the lockdowns have had a negative impact on their mental health. Many reported concerns around isolation, as a result of not being able to socialise with friends and their wider families. These respondents cited the impact of being away from school and friends, as causing an increase in their anxiety levels, and generally feeling frightened, stressed, losing purpose and motivation.

Negative - I was crying because everything was over. I couldn't go swimming, which is one of my favourite things to do, and I couldn't see my friends.

- I'm missing my leisure activities like dance or gymnastics, which are my passion. I'm missing my social meetings with friends (cinema, pizza, shopping).
- As a young person with autism, I found the lack of certainty very stressful and I couldn't concentrate. I started self-harming in lockdown.
- I was bored, and I don't feel motivated. I can't go to clubs/sports.
- Scared and frightening.
- I had a bad sleep schedule. I had a few mental breakdowns before bed.

Over 50% of the respondents also touched on the difficulties of adjusting to a routine, developing social anxiety, and the impact this has had on their lives and relationships.

I have started getting really anxious around people (social anxiety). I find it hard to speak to new people and think of things to say, and sometimes hard when I am in public spaces. I only feel safe with my friends. My dad pushes me a lot to do productive stuff which I do but not enough of it, so it makes me anxious sometimes.

Once I fall out of a routine, I lose motivation and energy for certain things.

It's withdrawn us from a social environment. Can't even have proper conversation or gain help in general. Respondents also mentioned how the lockdown has affected them financially, the stress of losing their jobs, and financial instability within their family incomes.

Affected everyone in my house mentally as my parent's business doesn't have money.

My parents' business is going badly and we are nearly losing the house.

Job loss and even more debt now as I can't afford my bills.

We also wanted to explore if there were any positive aspects to life in lockdown, as well as the negatives, and although 20% of respondents stated 'no', the most common answers from the 80% who said 'yes' were:

- "having time to do the things I enjoy" (60%)
- "spending more time with family" (60%)
- "having my own time and space" (55%)

20% of respondents mentioned an improvement in their mental health during the lockdown, and of those respondents, the majority felt that not being in school was a major factor. The respondents revealed the pressures faced in a school environment, especially around body image, appearance, and relationships with peers. They were also able to quote positive memories from the lockdown, of families coming together.

(Respondents were given multi-choice options)

Not as much stress as being in school. Too much competition there, too many fights between boys and girls. Pressure of being careful who you look at or talk to or bump into, how you look, etc.

It was very helpful to not go to school as the environment is too intense for me.

I enjoyed spending my time with myself and understanding the person I want to be.

Getting to know my loved ones better.

A positive memory was spending time with my family and we baked.

Education and attainment

The responses to the survey around returning to school following a lockdown indicate that young people feel ambivalent about their education and have differing views on the matter. Respondents expressed fears around returning to school/college, falling behind in their studies, grades, and uncertainties around their exams. However, they also acknowledged the challenges with homeschooling and have said they miss their school/college and their friends and teachers.

I am worried about school and how I won't be able to succeed in the upcoming exams and I have just lost motivation to do a lot of things.



During the lockdown I didn't meet my friends, teachers and I'm missing the school.

I hated home schooling. It's very hard to teach yourself.

Educational attainment is a concern which appears in many responses. Over 35% of the young people taking part in the survey said they feel anxious about their schoolwork and exams and think they may be 'failing' their education.

Exams - if I have to do them I think I might die of exam stress.

One of my main concerns are my GCSE exams that are coming up. I'm not sure how it will be due to COVID-19 and if I will even get to do them.

I am worried I will fail my studies and won't be able to find a job with the current situation of employment.

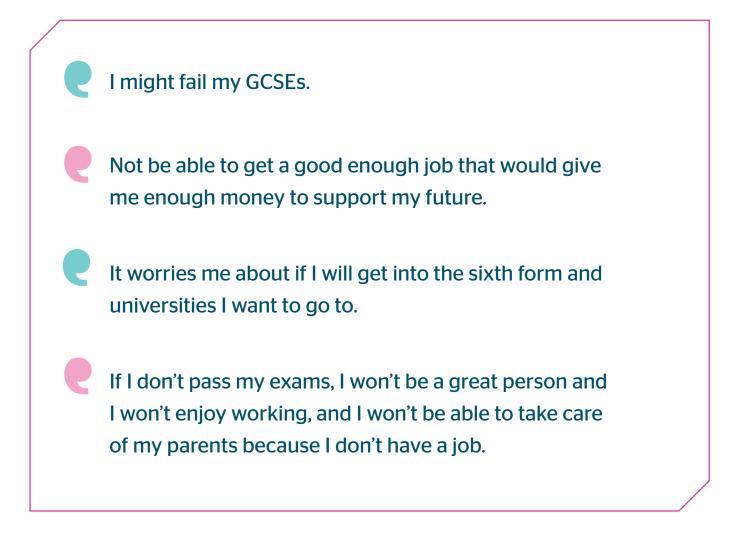
I am worried about school and how I won't be able to succeed in the upcoming exams and I have just lost motivation to do a lot of things.

Thinking about the future

We asked young people what worries them most about their future, and over 40% said they are concerned about passing their exams, getting the grades they want, and finding a good job in the future. The responses suggest there is a huge amount of anxiety around the uncertainty of exams, and the challenges this may bring to future educational and career prospects.

If I don't pass my exams, I won't be a great person and I won't enjoy working, and I won't be able to take care of my parents because I don't have a job.





We also wanted to understand what hopes and expectations young people have when they think about the future, and we asked what excites them about their future. We received a mixture of responses to this question, and most young people mentioned their own personal ambitions. Over 35% of young people stated they look forward to having a 'good job' and working in the career of their dreams.

Having a job and having the freedom to do what I like.

Getting my dream job.

Mental Health Support

When asked 'what does good mental health mean to you?', over 68% of participants were able to articulate what 'good mental health' looks like, and what their needs are in relation to achieving a healthy mindset and positive wellbeing.

Being happy majority of the time, not hitting/punching myself, blaming myself for things, and not looking down at myself.



Understanding my own mindset, keeping it positive and taking time to rest my feelings and emotions, as well as talk about them with others. Being happy majority of the time, not hitting/punching myself, blaming myself for things, and not looking down at myself. Good mental health means to be accepting of your emotions, not let them control you. At peace with body and mind, good balance of mind. Encouragingly, over 55% of respondents feel they have enough information on how to get

care and support for their mental health and are confident they know where to go to access this support. However, it is also important to mention that most respondents reported they would seek support for their mental health from a friend or family member, rather than from a professional.

Who would you talk to about your mental health?
33% said family
27% said friends
9% said an online website or social media
6% said teacher/lecturer
6% said CAMHS, or a mental health service provider

It is not surprising that only 6% of respondents cited Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) or a mental health service provider as somewhere they would go for support. Most of the comments signalled that many young people do not know much about the service in Haringey, or other organisations who provide mental health support. Of the 21% of respondents who mentioned that they were receiving a mental health intervention, therapy, or care, less than half of those were through CAMHS.

We also wanted to find out how the mental health support and care they were receiving continued during lockdown, or whilst they were away from school, and 28% stated the support stopped or was postponed, with a further 25% indicating the support continued virtually. Some mentioned they did not engage well with the virtual or the telephone sessions which were offered.

> I was offered online therapy, but I declined because I don't like talking to people over the phone about important things.

The results indicate the majority of young people who participated in this survey would prefer to speak to their families or friends about their mental health and have highlighted the reasons for this as finding it easier to trust their families and friends as they may be going through similar issues.

I felt I can relate to a lot of people that are going through the same things as me or similar things as me and they give advice on how my mental health could be better.

It's easy to talk to your friends when you are going through a lot of stuff.

My parents are great at talking to me about my feelings and emotions..

My friends are also going through the same issues and stress as me, so it helps talking to them. In line with the responses we got for the support networks around young people, and who they would choose to talk to about their mental health, 89% said they would like to see an improvement in the mental health care and interventions offered at their school or college. Young people suggested that better communication between teachers and students, and an increased awareness and prioritisation of mental health was necessary.

I would like the school to also care about our mental health as well as our exams.

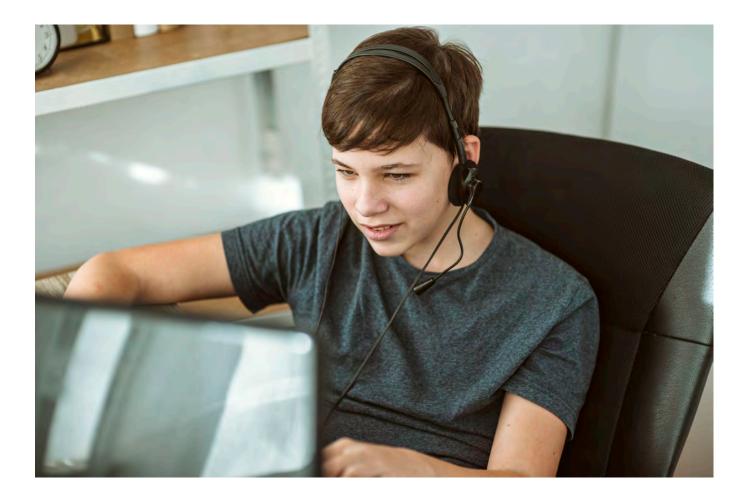
More mental health awareness.

I would like our form tutors to stop and just chat to us sometimes instead of being like "DO THIS", "BE QUIET", "STOP READING YOUR BOOK".

Parents and Carers

We asked parents and carers how COVID-19 has affected them, their children, and young people, and 65% of respondents identified a negative impact of the lockdowns and the pandemic. The main issues and themes emerging highlighted that parents and carers are mostly concerned about the isolation stemming from their children, and young people not being able to socialise with their friends or participate in educational, social, or extra-curricular activities. Parents and carers also said that being away from school and friends has contributed significantly to the stress and anxiety levels of children and young people.

Not being at school was a lonely, isolating time for my child. I think it was mainly grief he was feeling for the things he was missing and not knowing when normal life would return.



It has created many challenges for us, the isolation and the worry during the pandemic put stress on the family, particularly when the schools were closed, and we struggled as a family to juggle our work and the educational needs of our children.

It's been extremely challenging for my child, so much that she is still unable to access full time education. It has contributed to her anxiety.

Not being at school was a lonely, isolating time for my child. I think it was mainly grief he was feeling for the things he was missing and not knowing when normal life would return.

Generally, COVID-19 is a disaster that has cost a serious problem to every home. Happiness and freedom were capped to an extent that everyone is uncertain of what the future will look like. Financial and social wellbeing is highly affected. In addition to isolation, parents and carers view the main concerns affecting young people as:

39%: Catching or spreading the COVID-19 virus

35%: Loss of motivation and purpose

32%: Worries about the future

30%: Anxiety around schoolwork and exams

Although parents and carers acknowledge that young people are anxious about returning to school and a 'normal' routine, 66% of respondents also said their child or young person looked forward to going back to school/college and to face to face education. Parents and carers acknowledge the negative impact of the lockdowns on the learning and academic progress of young people and understand the challenges that may arise when young people return to school following a lockdown. However, they have also expressed a critical need for young people to learn among their peers and have stability in their education.

I think they are mostly happy to be back at school. I think it has had a positive effect on her mental health as during the 1st lockdown, it was hard being at home for months without seeing her friends/peers.

Although happy to be back with peers and friends (and out of the house/away from us!), he is feeling stressed about the work missed due to lockdown and what happens next, if the exams will be cancelled or not and the amount of work he is facing.

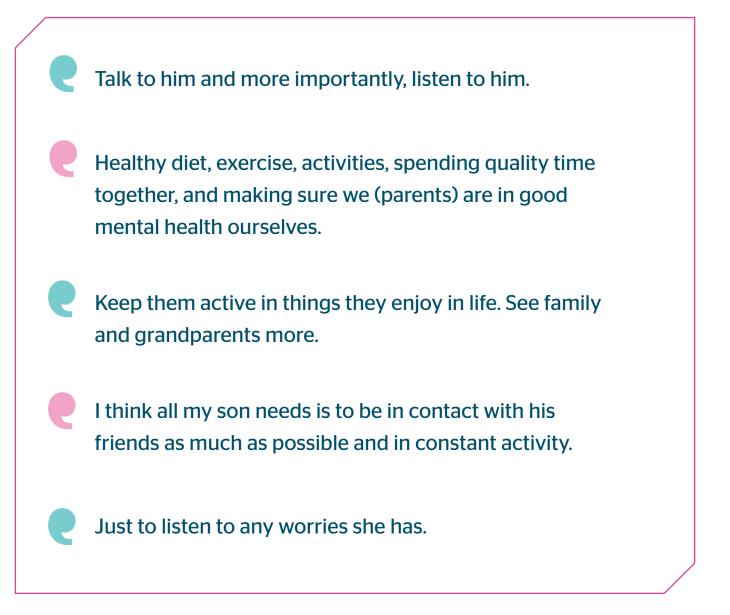
School provides safety.

It has been a positive experience to spend time with friends his own age and in person, not online.

50% of parents and carers participating in the survey said they have enough information and understand how to get support for the mental health of their child or young person. A further 38% also commented on the changes they would like to see happen, to improve the mental health care their child or young person receives at school. The key changes or improvements noted are:

- Isolation, as a result of not being able to socialise with friends and wider family,
- An Increase in anxiety and stress levels,
- Social anxiety,
- Loss of motivation and purpose, and
- Financial concerns.

Additionally, when parents and carers were asked what they think their child or young person needs generally to improve their mental health and maintain a healthy mindset and wellbeing, the main responses were themed around social interactions, especially with friends and family, and activities which keep them active and engaged. Many have also commented on the importance of listening and talking to their children or young people.



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Young People's Survey:

About your mental health

1. How comfortable do you feel talking about your mental health?

On a scale of 1-10 1 - Not at all comfortable 5 - Do not mind 10 - Very comfortable

- 2. How has COVID-19 affected you, or your loved ones?
- 3. How have you coped with negative thoughts and feelings during the lockdown, and what has helped improve your mental health?
- 4. Have there been positive aspects to life in lockdown?
 - No
 - Yes

If yes, what have these been?

- Spending more time with family
- Spending more time at home
- Better mental health
- Having your own time and space
- Having time to do the things you enjoy
- Not being in school/education
- Not being at work
- Other (please specify)

5. Would you like to share a positive, or negative memory from life in lockdown?

- 6. Did you care for anyone during the lockdown?
 - Yes
 - No

Was this a positive or negative experience? Please explain your answer.

- 7. What are your main concerns at the moment, and why? For example, family, relationships, exams etc.
- 8. Has your mental health been affected by any of these issues?
 - Returning to school
 - Anxiety about schoolwork/exams
 - Adjusting to a routine
 - Impact of social distancing
 - Social anxiety
 - Friendships/peers
 - Catching or spreading the COVID-19 virus
 - Decline in mental health
 - Developing a new mental health condition
 - Employment
 - Worries about the future
 - Loss of motivation and purpose
 - Social Media
 - Other (please specify)

Please explain your answer

9. How do you feel about returning to school/college/university?

On a scale of 1-10 1 - Not at all comfortable 5 - Do not mind 10 - Very comfortable

Why? Please explain your answer.

Mental health support and services

10. Before the lockdown, were you receiving care and support for your mental health, for example from school or CAMHS?

- Yes (please specify)
- No
- 11. How did the mental health support and care you were receiving change during the lockdown, or whilst you were away from school?
 - The support stopped
 - The support continued face to face
 - The support continued virtually

- The support was postponed
- Other (please specify)
- 12. Do you have enough information on how to get care and support for your mental health?
 - Yes
 - No
 - Not sure

13. Where do you go or who do you talk to for help and support with your mental health?

- Teacher/lecturer
- Member of school/college/university staff
- Employer
- Family
- Friends
- GP
- CAMHS
- Online e.g. website or social media
- Other (please specify)

Why? Please explain your answer.

- 14. What changes would you like to see happen, to improve the care and support you get for your mental health?
 - At school
 - At home
 - At a mental health support provider, for example CAMHS, or a youth centre
 - Online

Please explain your answer.

Thinking about the future

- 15. When you think about your future, what worries you the most?
- 16. When you think about your future, what excites you the most?
- 17. What does good mental health mean to you?
- 18. What do you need to improve or maintain good mental health?

Appendix B

Parents and Carers Survey

Mental Health

- 1. How has COVID-19 affected you, and your child/young person?
- 2. Would you like to share a positive, or negative memory from life in lockdown?
- 3. What are the main concerns your child/young person is facing at the moment?
 - Returning to school
 - Anxiety about schoolwork/exams
 - Adjusting to a routine
 - Impact of social distancing/social anxiety
 - Friendships/peers
 - Catching or spreading the COVID-19 virus
 - Decline in mental health
 - Developing a new mental health condition
 - Employment
 - Worries about the future
 - Loss of motivation and purpose
 - Social Media
 - Other (please specify)

Please explain your answer.

4. How does your child/young person feel about returning to school/education?

On a scale of 1-10 1 - Not at all comfortable 5 - Do not mind 10 - Very comfortable

5. Now that your child/young person is back in school, how might this affect his/her mental health, and what can the school do to support?

Mental health support and services

- 6. Has your child/young person previously received, or currently receiving mental health support and care from any of the following?
 - School
 - Family
 - Friends
 - GP
 - CAMHS
 - Online
- 7. If your child/young person was receiving support and for his/her mental health prior to COVID-19, for example from school or CAMHS, how did this change during the lockdown?
 - The support stopped
 - The support continued face to face
 - The support continued virtually
 - The support was postponed
 - Other (please specify)
- 8. Do you have enough information on how to get support for his/her mental health?
 - Yes
 - No
 - Unsure
- 9. What changes would you like to see happen, to improve the support your child/young person gets for his/her mental health?
 - At school
 - At home
 - From your GP
 - From a mental health support provider, for example CAMHS, youth centre etc.
 - Online

Please explain your answer

Thinking about the future

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- 10. What do you think worries your child/young person the most about the future?
- 11. What do you think excites your child/young person the most about the future?
- 12. What do you need to improve or maintain good mental health for your child/young person?



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