

For immediate release

## **Parents Not Comfortable with Children Returning to School after COVID-19 Lockdown**

- *Parents from lower income households less comfortable than those with higher incomes.*
- *Parents/carers perceive their children to be most concerned about things being different or uncertain and enjoyable aspects of school not happening.*
- *Primary school children more concerned about being away from home and transitions, secondary school children more concerned about catching Covid-19 and academic pressures.*

Half of UK parents do not feel comfortable about their children attending school following lockdown, according to [early results](#) from a new study asking parents and carers about their children's mental health through the COVID-19 crisis.

More than 10,000 parents have now taken part in the **Co-SPACE (COVID-19 Supporting Parents, Adolescents, and Children in Epidemics)** [survey](#) led by experts at the University of Oxford. Parents, completing the survey since the Government announced the phased return of schools, were asked how they feel about their children returning to school.

Notably, parents from lower income households and those not working felt less comfortable than those with higher incomes or those who were employed. There were particular concerns for parents of children with special education needs and/or neurodevelopmental disorders, such as autism, that their child will not get the emotional, behavioural and educational support that they need, or the support they need with transitions to different groups, classes or schools.

**Andy Bell, Deputy Chief Executive, Centre for Mental Health**, said,

'Parents will naturally be worried about the safety of their children when they go back to school. For many parents and children, especially the most disadvantaged, anxieties that have built up over recent weeks will make the return to school a very worrying time. It's therefore vital that all schools are fully and properly prepared to create a sense of safety when children return. Children's mental health cannot be left to chance.'

Parents and carers are concerned about the practicalities of children returning to school, such as managing social distancing, as well as their children, or them, catching or transmitting Covid-19.

Only a minority of children and young people are perceived by their parents to not feel comfortable attending school. Parents perceive their children to be most concerned about things being different or uncertain and the enjoyable aspects of school not happening. Other worries relate to friendships and social distancing.

While primary school aged children appear to be concerned about being away from home and transitions, secondary school aged children appear to be more concerned about catching Covid-19 and academic pressures.

Parents of children with special education needs and/or neurodevelopmental disorders highlighted particular concerns around their children getting sufficient emotional, behavioural and educational support, around support around transitions to new schools or classes.

These parents, along with those of children with a pre-existing mental health difficulties, report that their children are particularly concerned about things being uncertain or different, changes to routine, the enjoyable parts of school not happening, and being away from home.

**Professor Tamsin Ford, Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist at the University of Cambridge,** said,

'It is really important to understand the concerns of parents about their children going back to school so that schools and local services can best support families, and Co-SPACE provides some really useful data about this. The impact of the lockdown will vary according to the home and school circumstances of the child, as well as their age, as will the support needed. Co-SPACE provides important information about which groups might need additional support such as children with special educational needs or disability, mental health difficulties and neurodevelopmental disorder, such as autism. Children with these conditions may find going back to school particularly difficult.'

The **Co-SPACE (COVID-19 Supporting Parents, Adolescents, and Children in Epidemics)** survey is still open and looking for parents and carers to share their experiences [www.cospaceoxford.com/survey](http://www.cospaceoxford.com/survey). This research is tracking children and young people's mental health throughout the COVID-19 crisis. Survey results are helping researchers identify what protects children and young people from deteriorating mental

health, over time, and at particular stress points, and how this may vary according to child and family characteristics. This will help to identify what advice, support and help parents would find most useful.

This research is supported through UKRI Covid-19 funding, and by the NIHR Oxford Health Biomedical Research Centre, the Oxford and Thames Valley NIHR Applied Research Consortium and the UKRI Emerging Minds Network Plus.

### **Ends**

#### **Notes to editor:**

- This and other Co-SPACE reports can be found online at:  
<https://emergingminds.org.uk/co-space-study-3rd-update/>
- Images accompanying this report are accessible here:  
<https://emergingminds.org.uk/co-space-study-3rd-update/>
- This new survey Co-SPACE (COVID-19 Supporting Parents, Adolescents, and Children in Epidemics) is online at <http://cospaceoxford.com/survey>.
- The UKRI Emerging Minds webinar series is online at  
<https://emergingminds.org.uk/emerging-minds-covid-19-webinar-series/>
- The University Department of Psychiatry's mission is to conduct world-class research, teach psychiatry to medical students, develop future researchers in a graduate programme, teach doctors in training, promote excellence in clinical practice, and develop and provide innovative clinical services. It supports research in four key areas: neurobiology, psychological treatments, developmental psychiatry and social psychiatry. The Department is committed to the translation of scientific discovery into benefits for patients. [www.psych.ox.ac.uk](http://www.psych.ox.ac.uk)
- The University of Oxford's Experimental Psychology Department's mission is to conduct world-leading experimental research to understand the psychological and neural mechanisms relevant to human behaviour. Wherever appropriate, we translate our findings into evidence-based public benefits in mental health and well-being, education, industry, and policy. Key areas of research include Behavioural Neuroscience, Developmental Psychology, Social Psychology, and Psychological and Brain Health.

- Funding for the University of Oxford's coronavirus research is crucial to the development of a vaccine and the subsequent delivery of effective drugs to combat this new virus. Unprecedented speed, scope and ambition is required.  
Please [make a gift](#). Any gift made will help contribute to the fight against coronavirus.
- The NIHR Oxford Health Biomedical Research Centre is a partnership between the Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust and the University of Oxford. We aim to bring the best science to the complex problems of mental health and dementia.  
[www.oxfordhealthbrc.nihr.ac.uk](http://www.oxfordhealthbrc.nihr.ac.uk)
- **For further information, please contact: Genevieve Juillet**, Media Relations Manager (Research and Innovation), University of Oxford, [gen.juillet@admin.ox.ac.uk](mailto:gen.juillet@admin.ox.ac.uk), phone 01865 280534.