

For immediate release

## Children show increase in mental health difficulties over COVID-19 Lockdown – but same pattern not seen in teenagers

Over a one-month period in lockdown:

- Parents/carers of primary school age children taking part in the survey report an *increase* in their child’s emotional, behavioural, and restless/attentional difficulties.
- Parents/carers of secondary school age children report a *reduction* in their child’s emotional difficulties, but an increase in restless/attentional behaviours.
- Adolescents taking part in the survey report *no change* in their own emotional or behavioural, and restless/attentional difficulties.
- Parents/carers of children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) and those with a pre-existing mental health difficulty report a *reduction* in their child’s emotional difficulties and no change in behavioural or restless/attentional difficulties.

	Emotional difficulties	Behavioural difficulties	Restlessness & attention difficulties
Children (parent report)	Increased	Increased	Increased
Adolescents (parent report)	Decreased	No change	Increased
Adolescents (adolescent report)	No change	No change	No change
Children with SEN & mental health difficulties	Decreased	No change	No change

Press Release

Parents/carers of children aged 4-10 years of age reported that over a one-month period in lockdown, they saw increases in their child's emotional difficulties, such as feeling unhappy, worried, being clingy and experiencing physical symptoms associated with worry, according to [early results](#) from the Co-SPACE 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/carers also reported that their children's behaviour had got worse over time, with an increase in behaviours such as temper tantrums, arguments and children not doing what they are asked. Parents/carers in the survey also reported that their children showed greater levels of restlessness/fidgety behaviour and difficulties concentrating over the one month period.

Perhaps surprisingly, the same pattern was not seen in the older age group of 11-16 year olds. Teenagers themselves reported no change in their emotional difficulties between the two time points and their parents/carers reported that they felt that their child's emotional difficulties had actually improved. Neither teenagers nor their parents reported any changes in their behaviour over this time but parents felt that their children were more restless and had more difficulty concentrating over time.

**Tom Madders, Campaigns Director at YoungMinds**, said:

"This research suggests that many younger children have found it increasingly hard to cope as the lockdown period has gone on, which may be because of loneliness, fears about the coronavirus or a loss of the routines and support that come with school. The picture appears to be more variable for older children in this study. Following the anxiety and uncertainty of going into lockdown, some are likely to have found the restrictions more difficult as time as gone on, while others - including those who feel safe and secure at home but who find school challenging – may have adapted well to their new reality. For those young people, going back to school after a long break may well be tough, and it's vital that there's a re-adjustment period where wellbeing is prioritised.

"It's also important to recognise that some of the most vulnerable young people in our society - including those who have experienced abuse, violence or neglect - are often the hardest to identify. We need to ensure that effective support is available for all children who need it now and as restrictions lift."

**Professor Cathy Creswell, Professor of Developmental Clinical Psychology, University of Oxford, and co-leading the study, said,**

“Prioritising the mental health of children and young people throughout the Covid-19 pandemic and beyond is critical. These findings highlight that there is wide variation in how children and young people have been affected, with some finding life easier but others experiencing more difficulties. Our findings have identified some sources of variation but we need to continue to gain a better understanding of which families are struggling and what they need to help direct the right advice and support going forward to ensure that this does not have long-lasting consequences.”

The **Co-SPACE (COVID-19 Supporting Parents, Adolescents, and Children in Epidemics) survey is still open and keen 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 Rapid Response 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-4th-update/>
- Images accompanying this report are accessible here: <https://emergingminds.org.uk/co-space-study-4th-update/>
- The Co-SPACE (COVID-19 Supporting Parents, Adolescents, and Children in Epidemics) survey 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/>

Press Release

- 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.