



WE DISCOVER, WE GROW

Girlguiding

Back in lockdown:

Girls' and young women's hopes
and fears for the future

February 2021

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Introduction

For over a decade, Girlguiding's research has captured girls' and young women's lives, highlighting their views, experiences, and the challenges they face. From gender stereotypes to body image concerns, girls and young women continue to face unequal pressures and barriers to living confident and full lives. Now, as well as these, they are confronting the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. It has radically changed their lives and opportunities and shaped their perspectives.

Through this research, girls' and young women's voices reveal how they're coping with the profound changes that have occurred in their lives over the past year. They tell us about the things they're finding hard, what they're concerned about and their hopes for the future. This research builds on our previous survey with girls and young women in May 2020. It looked at how they were coping in the first lockdown and at the start of the pandemic.

Executive summary

In January and February 2021, Girlguiding surveyed just under 2,000 girls and young women aged 4 to 18 across the UK to determine how the pandemic and the national lockdown that began in December 2020, has affected them. The findings show that the pandemic has caused tremendous changes that have deeply impacted their lives. It has taken a toll on their mental health and shaped their views on the world - bringing a new appreciation of the things they've had to go without.

Girls and young women have found this lockdown hard. Many say they feel more sad, lonely, bored and fed up this time than the first lockdown in March 2020. Their multiple concerns include the impact of missed opportunities on their future and how the pandemic will affect wider society.

But the research also shows girls are feeling hopeful now vaccines are being rolled out. And, where they can, they're actively trying to keep well through digital contact with others and via their hobbies.

The findings reveal the profound impact the pandemic has had on their perspectives about the world around them. They have a greater appreciation for things many of us took for granted - spending time with family and friends, technology's benefits, the NHS, and being outdoors in nature.

Girls and young women want direct and relevant information about the lockdown and feel the government isn't listening to their concerns and recovery ideas.

Our young members reveal that being part of Girlguiding has provided invaluable support throughout the pandemic. Doing virtual guiding has helped them feel supported, connected and part of a community during this challenging year.

Finally, girls and young women outline the significant value extracurricular activities have had on them. They call on the government to ensure youth clubs and groups are supported so that children and young people have this vital space both now and in the future.

1. Mental health and wellbeing

Girls and young women have encountered huge changes, sacrifices and worries over the past year because of the pandemic, resulting in a negative effect on their mental health. But they are struggling more in the latest lockdown. They feel sadder and more worried, lonely, bored and fed up than the first lockdown in March 2020. Girls worry about everything from the health and wellbeing of family and friends to jobs and the economy.

Yet girls and young women are also feeling hopeful because there's light at the end of the tunnel. The rollout of vaccination programmes and the lockdowns' positive effects on the environment and communities are reasons for hope.

Girls have also been proactive in keeping happy and well during this challenging time by keeping in touch with family and friends, trying a new hobby, getting outdoors, and taking part in extracurricular activities.

How girls and young women are feeling this lockdown

Over half (53%) of girls and young women across all age groups say the pandemic and latest lockdown has negatively affected their mental health. The feeling increases as girls get older (44% aged 4 to 7; 40% aged 8 to 10; 52% aged 11 to 15, and 75% aged 15 to 18).

When we asked girls how they were feeling in the latest national lockdown compared to the first in March 2020, they told us about its toll on their wellbeing. Two out of five (41%) girls aged 4 to 18 feel less happy than the first lockdown. They're feeling sadder this time around across all the age groups, with 43% reporting this.

Girls report feeling more anxious and worried in this lockdown, with 44% across the age groups saying this (37% aged 4 to 7; 34% aged 8 to 10; 43% aged 11 to 14; and 62% aged 15 to 18). The older age group was also feeling more disheartened (47%) and overwhelmed (61%).

Loneliness has increased for girls this lockdown with 42% agreeing they feel this

more compared to how they felt in March 2020 (46% aged 4 to 7; 35% aged 8 to 10; 37% aged 11 to 14, and 50% aged 15 to 18).

This lockdown is also sapping their energy, with seven in ten saying they feel fed up and tired - 57% aged 4 to 7; 69% aged 8 to 10; 71% aged 11 to 14, and 81% aged 15 to 18. Girls and young women are also feeling more bored, with 56% agreeing across all the age groups.

Some girls feel more hopeful, especially the younger age groups (39% aged 4 to 10 compared to 24% aged 11 to 18).

While half of those aged 4 to 14 say they feel as calm and relaxed as they did in the first lockdown, older girls aged 15 to 18 are more likely to be less (48%).

Some girls and young women feel more able to cope in this lockdown as they've done it before - 56% of all girls and young women say they feel this way. However, a significant number of young women aged 15 to 18 disagree with this (57%).

Table 1: Girls tell us what they’re feeling more in the latest national lockdown compared to the first in March 2020

	4-7 age	8-10 age	11-14 age	15-18 age	All ages
Sad	43%	31%	40%	58%	43%
Anxious or worried	37%	34%	43%	62%	44%
Fed up or tired	57%	69%	71%	81%	70%
Lonely	46%	35%	37%	50%	42%
Bored	56%	56%	57%	54%	56%

Girls’ and young women’s worries

The pandemic and lockdown have created new worries for girls and young women, including about their family and friends’ health and wellbeing (84% across all the ages). They’re also concerned about the effect the pandemic has on jobs and the economy, particularly as they get older - 82% aged 15 to 18 are concerned about this compared to 56% of those aged 4 to 14. The higher percentage among older girls could be because they are more aware of the news or are thinking about their prospects more. Girls are also worried that the lockdown will continue for longer than expected (77% across all the age groups).

Girls’ and young women’s hopes

News of the Covid-19 vaccines helps girls and young women feel more hopeful, with 82% of all ages saying this. They also see some positive impacts, including on the environment as fewer people are flying (70% agree). More than half (57%) say they feel optimistic that the pandemic has brought people together.

What girls and young women are doing to keep happy and well

Girls and young women are doing various activities to keep happy and well during the pandemic and lockdown. Keeping in touch with family and friends, including through video calls, tops their list - almost 9 in 10 (88%) across the age groups do this. A similar number (88%) watch TV/films and videos to help their mood.

For the youngest girls aged 4 to 10, doing something creative such as art, cooking or gardening helps 87% feel better and playing games helps 78%.

Being outdoors and in nature has helped girls and young people feel better - 74% aged 4 to 7; 69% aged 8 to 10; 56% aged 11 to 14; and 48% aged 15 to 18 said this.

Three in five say extracurricular activities such as youth groups and clubs have had a positive influence on them (59% across all the age groups), as has keeping physically active for 59% of all girls and young women.

Focusing on schoolwork (52%), having a routine (49%) and learning something new (34%) has helped girls of all ages. And for a quarter of all girls (24%), practising mindfulness, mediation, yoga and other ways of relaxing has benefited them.

Table 2: Top things girls and young women are doing to keep happy and well

	4-7 age	8-10 age	11-14 age	15-18 age	All ages
Speaking to family and friends	88%	89%	91%	84%	88%
Watching TV, films and videos	89%	87%	88%	86%	88%
Being creative (art, cooking, gardening)	89%	85%	75%	60%	77%
Playing games	78%	78%	59%	44%	65%
Getting outdoors and being in nature	74%	69%	56%	48%	62%
Extracurricular activities and youth clubs	62%	59%	60%	55%	59%
Moving and doing something physically active	66%	63%	57%	51%	59%

2. Learning and connecting

The latest lockdown means many girls and young women are back to learning at home. While some feel more prepared this time, most still find it challenging. As girls get older, they are increasingly concerned about falling behind in their schoolwork and its impact on their future opportunities.

Unsurprisingly, older girls are spending more time online and on social media. The benefits range from keeping in touch with friends they're unable to see, to keeping up-to-date with current affairs. Yet for some, being online more also brings pressures, including feeling they need to be online constantly and concern over body image issues.

The pandemic has resulted in girls and young women helping in their communities and for some, feeling a greater sense of belonging and connection.

Learning at home

With most girls and young women back to online learning in this lockdown, they face several challenges. Almost two in five (39%) feel they and their schools are better prepared than in the first lockdown. Yet only a fifth (22%) say they find working at home easier than at school. For more girls (58%), working at home is more challenging and can be stressful. However, they're proud of the teachers and teaching assistants who support them, with 56% across all ages saying this. A quarter of girls and young women across the age ranges (25%) don't feel their education has been affected as they get online classes.

Yet a significant number of girls are concerned about falling behind with schoolwork - 38% aged 4 to 10; 51% aged 11 to 14 and 64% aged 15 to 18. The older girls aged 15 to 18 face additional concerns about how cancelled exams will affect their future (66%) or if they will be able to have the same opportunities for work experience as they'd hoped for (62%).

They're also concerned about the impact of other missed opportunities, such as going on school trips or attending events and celebrating with their peers with 64% of all ages feeling this way. They are also worried about others falling behind, including children without access to reliable internet or a device with 38% saying this.

One of the toughest elements of many children not going to school is missing their friends again - seven in ten (70%) agreed.

'I feel like my age group has missed out so much due to the pandemic.'

Girl, aged 15 to 18

Social media

Unsurprisingly, most young women aged 15 to 18 are spending more time on social media during the pandemic and as a result of the lockdown (86%). For many, this has provided an opportunity to keep in touch with friends when they can't meet face-to-face (84%). It has helped them keep entertained (77%) and kept them informed about what's going on globally (72%). But along with these benefits, there are some downsides. Three in five (59%) feel an increased pressure to be 'productive' and do a lot, and a third (34%) say social media is negatively affecting their sleep and mood. Also, 27% say the pressure to be online all the time has intensified and a quarter (25%) feel under more pressure to look a certain way.

Girls in their communities

The pandemic has had a positive effect on some girls' and young women's sense of belonging in their local communities and across the world. Almost half of girls and young women across the age groups (47%) say they've played their part in the local communities (such as making posters or delivering food packages). Just under a third (31%) say they feel part of their local community more now than before the pandemic and have gotten to know people in their neighbourhood. More than half (54%) say they feel more part of a global community because we've all been through something together. In future, two in five (40%) girls want to continue to help their local communities.

3. Reflections on the pandemic

Reflecting on decision-making during the pandemic, most girls and young women don't feel the concerns of children and young people have been adequately heard by government. They want more relevant and direct information alongside better engagement to ensure children and young people can be involved in the decisions that will affect their futures. They'd also like the government to support youth clubs and groups and the benefits they provide.

Following the huge changes and restrictions in girls' and young women's lives, they reveal a new appreciation of spending time with family and friends, being at school, nature and the outdoors, technology and NHS care workers. For some, this has influenced their career options with a new interest in the health sector and sciences. They also reflect that they've learnt new things about themselves, including what they enjoy and their capabilities.

Looking towards the easing of restrictions, girls are most looking forward to seeing family and friends that they haven't seen, going back to school and having fun out and about including through extracurricular activities.

Decision-making and youth voice

Most young women aged 15 to 18 don't think the government has done enough to listen to the concerns of children and young women (79%). They want more information from the government to go directly to children and young people about the virus, lockdown and what to expect in the future (86%). They also want their voices to inform recovery by government consulting with children and young people on decisions that affect their future (91%). They believe the government should support youth clubs and groups to help children and young people at this time and in the future (93%).

New appreciations and aspirations

The pandemic has led to girls and young women developing a greater awareness and appreciation of the things in life they've had to go without. The vast majority (87%) across all ages say they appreciate spending time with family and friends more. Three-quarters of all girls and young

women (74%) say they appreciate being at school more.

Most girls and young women say the pandemic has meant they have a new appreciation for the NHS and care workers (89%). And more than a quarter (28%) say they feel inspired to consider working in the health sector (such as a nurse or doctor). The pandemic has inspired a fifth (21%) of the older girls aged 15 to 18 to work in science (for example, in virology or immunology).

Girls and young women have an increased appreciation of the outdoors and nature, with 67% of girls aged 4 to 10 and 58% aged 11 to 18 feeling this way. They also have a new appreciation of technology and what it has enabled during this time, such as Zoom calls (70%).

Across all the ages groups, over half (55%) say they have taken away a new understanding about themselves and the things they enjoy, and a similar number (53%) say they've learnt a new skill. Girls and young women also feel they've learnt how to cope with difficulties better (49%).

Life after lockdown

Beyond lockdown, and with the easing of restrictions, girls and young women are looking forward to many things they've had to put on hold. Top of the list is seeing family and friends they haven't been able to see (97%) and being able to hug them without worrying about the virus (92%). They're also looking forward to a change of scenery by going on trips or holidays (90%) and going out to the cinema, a concert or event (71%).

Five in seven girls and young women (71%) are looking forward to going back to school, 63% to doing extracurricular activities. 82% are looking forward to going back to their Girlguiding face-to-face meetings.

'People not wearing masks so I can see them smile.'

Girl, aged 4 to 7

'Being able to do normal things without worrying.'

Girl, aged 11 to 14

4. Being in guiding

Throughout the pandemic, Girlguiding has continued to provide girls with opportunities to have fun, stay connected and build their resilience through activities and virtual meetings. Girls tell us this has provided them with the chance to see friends, feel supported and learn new things. It's also offered girls the opportunity to feel part of something and a greater sense of belonging.

Virtual guiding

During the pandemic, Girlguiding has adapted its offer to deliver virtual guiding to girls and young women across the UK. Of those that responded to this survey, 67% aged 4 to 7; 75% aged 8 to 10; 84% aged 11 to 14, and 84% aged 15 to 18 said they had taken part.

Continuing to be part of Girlguiding virtually has offered girls and young women important benefits, including:

- Doing activities that help them to have fun (78%)
- Giving them something to look forward to (73%)
- Helping them to feel part of something that brings people together (64%)
- Seeing friends and having a space to be together (62%)
- Getting support from their leader (50%)
- Doing activities that help them to learn new things (47%)
- Having the opportunity to challenge themselves (38%)

'Keeping up with Girlguiding has made things feel more normal.'

Girl, aged 11 to 14

Other guiding activities and resources

Girlguiding has also created various activities and resources for girls, their families and volunteers during the pandemic. They include our Adventures at home activities for all children and young people, virtual events, and when allowed, face-to-face outdoor and some indoor meetings. Girls and young women that have taken advantage of these, along with virtual guiding, say the impact of Girlguiding on their lives has been significant. Girls say guiding has helped them to:

- Have fun and keep entertained (88%)
- Feel more connected to others and less lonely (65%)
- Learn new things and develop their skills (57%)
- Get support for their mental health and wellbeing (47%)
- Feel more confident (44%)
- Feel more supported because of their leader (43%)
- Cope with the pandemic (40%)
- Have the opportunity to help others (31%)

'I look forward to my meeting every Monday.'

Girl, aged 11 to 14

Methodology

A total of 1,881 girls and young women completed the online survey from 28 January to 3 February 2021. The respondents were Girlguiding young members from across the UK. Parents and carers were asked to support girls to complete the survey from ages 4 to 13. From age 14 and above, girls and young women were encouraged to complete the survey themselves. Questions were tailored for the age groups 4 to 7 (258 responses), 8 to 10 (353 responses), 11 to 14 (341 responses) and 15 to 18 (510 responses).

About Girlguiding

Girlguiding is the leading charity for girls and young women in the UK, with almost half a million members. Thanks to the dedication and support of 100,000 amazing volunteers, we are active in every part of the UK, giving girls and young women a space where they can be themselves, have fun, build brilliant friendships, gain valuable life skills and make a positive difference to their lives and their communities. We build girls' confidence and raise their aspirations. We give them the chance to discover their full potential and encourage them to be a powerful force for good. We give them a space to have fun. We run Rainbows (5-7 years, 4-7 years in Ulster), Brownies (7-10 years), Guides (10-14 years) and Rangers (14-18 years).



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