

Early research results show impacts of pandemic on children and youth

May 15 2020, by Dan Dakin



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Two girls passing notes to each other through their shared backyard fence. A boy breathing a sigh of relief for not having to face unpleasant classmates at school.

These are some of the stories being captured in Brock University

research on the experiences of [children](#) and [youth](#) during the COVID-19 pandemic.

When she started her study at the end of March, Professor of Child and Youth Studies Rebecca Raby was concerned—and curious—about how young people are coping with the pandemic.

"Clearly, there are children who are in a lot of distress out there," she said. "But I suspect we're also going to hear stories about really cool, compelling things that kids have started to initiate at home with parents, siblings, on their own or online."

She and her six-member student team have been conducting bi-weekly, online interviews with 25 children and youth from ages eight to 16 from a wide range of backgrounds and living arrangements. In between the structured, formalized interviews are informal check-ins via text or other messaging.

The research team is compiling some interesting stories.

One of the six children Brock Ph.D. student Laurel Donison has been surveying is an eight-year-old girl whose friend, also eight, lives next door. Not having access to social media or a smartphone, the two were playing in their respective yards when they figured out a way to communicate despite the tall fence that separated them.

"The girl showed me during our video call the hole she made in the fence between her yard and the yard beside her so that she and the other girl were able to pass each other notes, draw each other pictures and talk through the fence this way," says Donison.

Raby says that although it's difficult to generalize the diverse experiences of children and youth while sheltering at home, some broad

trends are starting to emerge.

These include activities such as building, cooking, baking, writing, making art, videos and fake fingernails, sewing, gardening and playing instruments.

"What I found most surprising is the significance of the arts in helping the [young people](#) to cope," says Raby.

Also notable to Raby was the number of children and youth who have reported having difficulties with online learning, specifically when they need to ask questions about things they don't understand. Children with learning disabilities, English as a second language or for those whose parents are working during the day and are thus unable to answer questions find it especially challenging.

Not so unexpected is that children and youth are missing face-to-face interaction with friends and peers.

"Clearly, a really important component to their lives is hanging out with friends," says Raby. "Many have expressed sadness about not being able to hang out together."

An overwhelming majority also miss being at school, although one 13-year-old boy reported feeling relieved that he didn't have to face his peers, who he felt ignored him.

Raby says most children and youth seem to know "a lot about what is going on," mostly through [news reports](#) and school lessons, likely adding to the worries they widely expressed about their parents and grandparents getting sick and stress over people not physical distancing.

Other common patterns among the child and youth research participants

include:

- An appreciation for how schoolwork and other tasks provide structure to the day and, at the same time, enjoying the ability to schedule their own time and order of tasks.
- Challenges with self-motivation, especially if schoolwork isn't interesting or if there are too many distractions online and in their surrounding environment.
- Girls seem more likely to be doing chores than boys, especially in terms of taking care of younger siblings or helping them with homework.
- Frequent connection with friends and other activity online; a relaxing of family rules about online time and overall less regulation of online activities.

The research team's interviews will proceed for another few months and then the team will more deeply analyze the data collected from the interviews.

Provided by Brock University

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