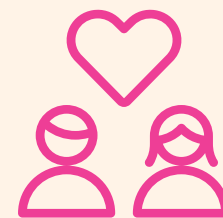




# COVID-19 CHILD AND YOUTH WELL-BEING STUDY: Toronto Phase One: Executive Report



Prepared by Maximum City  
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Maximum City is a multidisciplinary team of designers, teachers, and urban planners who are committed to a better urban future. We have worked on child and youth engagement, urbanism and education issues in Ontario and beyond for over a decade. For more information, please visit: [maximumcity.ca](https://maximumcity.ca)

# Executive Report

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The full report is available for  
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[maximumcity.ca/wellbeing](https://maximumcity.ca/wellbeing)

## Introduction

Children and youth are vulnerable populations whose lives continue to be disrupted in unprecedented ways because of COVID-19. The United Nations has recognized that efforts must be made to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on children and youth to safeguard their well-being, both during and emerging from the COVID-19 pandemic. It is critical that data are collected and used to inform an effective recovery strategy, recognizing the unique impacts of COVID-19 physical distancing, school closures and social disconnection on child and youth well-being.

This study collects and analyzes the experiences and opinions of children and youth in the Greater Toronto Area during the COVID-19 pandemic, as reported by children and youth themselves. The goal of the study is to listen directly to kids and teens in order to help understand gaps in child and youth well-being and supports during and after COVID-19, and to use the findings as evidence to help inform the recovery strategy.

The downstream impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on children and youth must be measured and understood in order to be effectively addressed. More engagement and consultation with children and youth should take place on COVID-19-related matters that affect them so deeply.

A total of 356 nine- to 15-year-olds across the Toronto Census Metropolitan Area participated in this study by completing a thorough online survey in May 2020.

The findings from the study are being provided directly to government agencies, school boards and other organizations that support child well-being and development. They will be submitted for presentation and publication.

## Methodology Highlights

- The online survey was conducted in English from May 8 to 26 using the survey software SurveyGizmo.
- 356 Toronto area residents ages nine through 15, and a parent or guardian, were recruited from Canadian Viewpoint's online panel.
- The online survey included 15 background and demographic questions for a parent or guardian, and over 50 questions for one child or teen per household to self-report on their experiences and opinions during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Survey respondent demographics closely align with household income levels and racial backgrounds across the Toronto Census Metropolitan Area. A breakdown of the household income level and racial background of respondents is available in Appendix A: Methodology of the full report. The survey results have not been weighted at this time.
- The numbers in the report have been rounded to the nearest whole number.
- This Phase One Report presents the overall findings of the study, while a deeper analysis of the data by segments will continue throughout the summer of 2020.
- A parallel Canadian national study was conducted at the same time and will be reported on separately.

For questions, please contact the study lead Josh Fullan  
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## Child and Youth Engagement

A guiding principle of Maximum City's work is to ensure the inclusion and meaningful participation of children's voices in data collection and decision-making processes that can impact their lives. In times of crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic, this principle becomes a deeper moral responsibility. Our study recognizes children's right to participate and be heard<sup>1</sup>, and spells out the urgency and necessity of including their input in COVID-19 recovery policy and practice. While many studies seek participation and input from other demographics and cohorts, this research focuses on collecting and amplifying children's voices so that their authentic lived experience can be used as evidence in the recovery strategy, and their ideas can be considered to inform the best way forward to mitigate negative impacts on their daily lives and enhance their well-being.

## Well-being

For the purpose of this study, well-being is understood as how we see, and feel about, our own lives. It includes our physical and emotional health, our relationships with others, our sense of belonging and purpose, our happiness and satisfaction. It is also critical to recognize, as the World Health Organization and other experts have pointed out, that childhood well-being is not simply an absence of illness or harm; it is a state of flourishing and reaching one's potential<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>

<sup>2</sup> Cultivating Well-being in Challenging Times: Dr. Jean Clinton [https://youtu.be/1JL6mFlfUWE?list=PLHhiAc79sMNqPFqnWL73p\\_mJorm2Dor77](https://youtu.be/1JL6mFlfUWE?list=PLHhiAc79sMNqPFqnWL73p_mJorm2Dor77)

## COVID-19 in Toronto, Ontario

On March 17, 2020 Premier Doug Ford declared a state of emergency in Ontario because of COVID-19, following an announcement a few days earlier that schools would be closed. People were instructed to stay home and only go out for essential needs. The Province's Phase Two: Restart began on May 16 with the first re-opening of businesses, services and public spaces, but schools continued with remote instruction and physical distancing measures remained in place. As of May 26 when the study's survey closed, Toronto had 39% of Ontario's 26,191 coronavirus cases and 761 deaths<sup>3</sup>.



**Listen to kids now  
so we can help  
them later.**

TAKE THE COVID-19  
WELL-BEING SURVEY  
For ages 9-15 and a parent



[maximumcity.ca/wellbeing](https://maximumcity.ca/wellbeing)

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.toronto.ca/home/covid-19/covid-19-latest-city-of-toronto-news/covid-19-status-of-cases-in-toronto/>

## Key Findings

Children and youth want to be engaged and asked about their experiences and opinions during a time of crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic. They have important perspectives to contribute, and the process of talking through and sharing these perspectives in the survey questionnaire was beneficial for many of them.

In terms of what they are feeling during the pandemic, some children and youth are worrying more, and many are specifically worried that someone they care about will get COVID-19. They are also feeling a range of emotions more intensely — boredom, sadness, happiness, calm and worry. Almost a third of kids and teens report positive effects of the pandemic on their lives, such as more time with family or less stress at school.

Children and youth feel they are not spending enough time outside or being physically active, and that they are spending too much time using technology. A critical part of the recovery strategy must focus on rebalancing this trend for the sake of their mental and physical health. Kids and teens want more time outside, more time playing and exercising, and more time simply hanging out with friends in person, once it is safe.

Schooling during the pandemic is missing the mark for many children and youth, while others are enjoying remote learning. The reasons are complex and mostly beyond the scope of this study. Some simply do not have everything they need to effectively complete their schoolwork at home, while many others keenly miss the contact with

teachers and friends, extra- and co-curricular activities, structure and routine. Others still are finding that remote learning is not the best way for them to learn; a number of kids and teens requested better remote instruction strategies to reach and engage all learners.

Quality family time is increasing across many households during the pandemic, resulting in better relationships. Many children and youth appreciate the extra time and deeper connection with family members and are getting along within their household more than before COVID-19.

Kids and teens want their leaders to do what they can to keep people safe, even if this means keeping physical distancing measures in place longer. Though some suggested opening places like parks and schools, this was often followed by a condition that either physical distancing be maintained or that, more generally, safety be foremost.

When providing advice to their peers, kids and teens suggested the three most important strategies to get through this challenging time are to follow rules to stay safe and healthy, to keep calm and maintain a positive mindset, and to make time to have fun or do something you enjoy. Many kids and teens showed empathy and a desire to help their peers and, more broadly, society. Their wisdom is authentic and expressed directly, such as this advice from a fifteen-year-old study participant for her peers: "Be calm. Find something you like to do. Get outside."

## Key Findings

### Feelings and Emotions

- 79%** Many kids and teens are **worried** that someone they care about will get COVID-19.
  - 28%** Some kids and teens report that the COVID-19 pandemic has had some **positive effects** on their lives, with the most commonly cited positive effect being **more time with family**.
  - 6%** Few kids and teens prefer to get information about COVID-19 from **social media**.
- Kids and teens are feeling a range of emotions more intensely during COVID-19. Some kids and teens report feeling more;
- 36%** **bored,**
  - 29%** **worried,**
  - 29%** **calm,** and
  - 28%** **happy**
- than before the pandemic.
- 81%** Many kids and teens feel like they are **missing important life events** or moments.

### Activities

- 58%** Many kids and teens are **sleeping more**.
  - 61%** Many kids and teens are spending **less time being physically active,**
  - 73%** and **more time with technology**.
  - 49%** Nearly half of kids and teens feel like they are **spending too much time with technology**.
  - 72%** Many kids and teens are **going outside less than once a day**.
  - 3%** When they do go outside, **few kids and teens are going outside with friends**.
- Many kids and teens feel like they are
- 58%** **not spending enough time outside,**
  - 56%** **or connecting with nature**.
- Many kids want more help staying physically active to improve their time at home.
- Many kids want more access to activities and things to do to improve their time at home.

## Key Findings

### School and Learning

- 42%** Some kids and teens find school **less interesting**.
  - 33%** Some kids and teens find schoolwork **less stressful**;
  - 31%** while some find it more stressful.
  - 23%** Some kids do not have everything they need to complete their schoolwork and learning at home; and what is **often missing is a computer or high-speed internet**.
  - 92%** Many kids and teens **have someone who can help with their schoolwork** to some degree, and the helper is usually a parent or guardian.
  - 71%** Many kids and teens **have a space at home** where they can concentrate, work on their schoolwork, and learn.
  - 61%** Many kids and teens are **worried about missing school** because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Kids and teens who are worried about missing school are most worried about missing their friends. They are also worried about falling behind in their studies or failing a class or grade.
- Many kids and teens want time to connect with their peers during online learning and want synchronous lessons where they can see and interact with their teachers.
- Some kids and teens would like more learning strategies that reach and engage all learners.
- Many kids want more structured and personalized support to improve remote learning.

### People and Relationships

- 88%** Many kids and teens have an **adult family member they can talk to** about how they are feeling.
  - 74%** Many kids have a **friend they can talk to** about how they are feeling.
  - 63%** Many kids report **feelings of empathy** for others during the COVID-19 pandemic.
  - 32%** Some kids and teens are **getting along more** with their household during the COVID-19 pandemic;
  - 13%** while others are **getting along less** with their household during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Many kids and teens want to help their friends by talking and listening to them.

### Needs

- 20%** Some kids and teens **do not have enough** places to play or exercise outside their home; or
- 13%** enough **space to play** inside their home.
- 25%** Some kids and teens **do not feel safe when they go outside**.
- 29%** Some kids and teens are worried about their family **having enough food and a safe place to live**.



# Child and Youth Voice Map

"Being at home makes it harder to take things seriously like at school. Also some subjects need face to face interaction with the teacher."

"I don't like crowds and people that aren't careful and I'm scared of catching the virus and getting sick."

"Open the parks for families to be able to go together and they can still social distance from others."

"I am spending more time with my family and extra time for my hobbies. My dad is working from home, so I sort of get to see what he does everyday and it has made me feel more respect and appreciative for what he does for our family."

"All of us are at home. My mom works from home and she is always on conference calls. My brother is also home and we fight quite a bit."

"Do something fun every day as a treat to yourself."

"I can help my friends by making them laugh."

"I can understand that my mom is trying her best and is also worried and anxious right now about money and losing her job."

"We live in a condo, and sometimes other family members need to use the computer room for work at the same time as me."

"I miss my friends and my teacher."

"Am I getting as much learning as I would need to pass next year?"

"I don't like that everyone seems afraid of everyone else, no one is friendly anymore."



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