



# PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING OF CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Research-based recommendations for schools and children and adolescents

CENTER FOR PSYCHOTRAUMATOLOGY

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2020 Vilnius



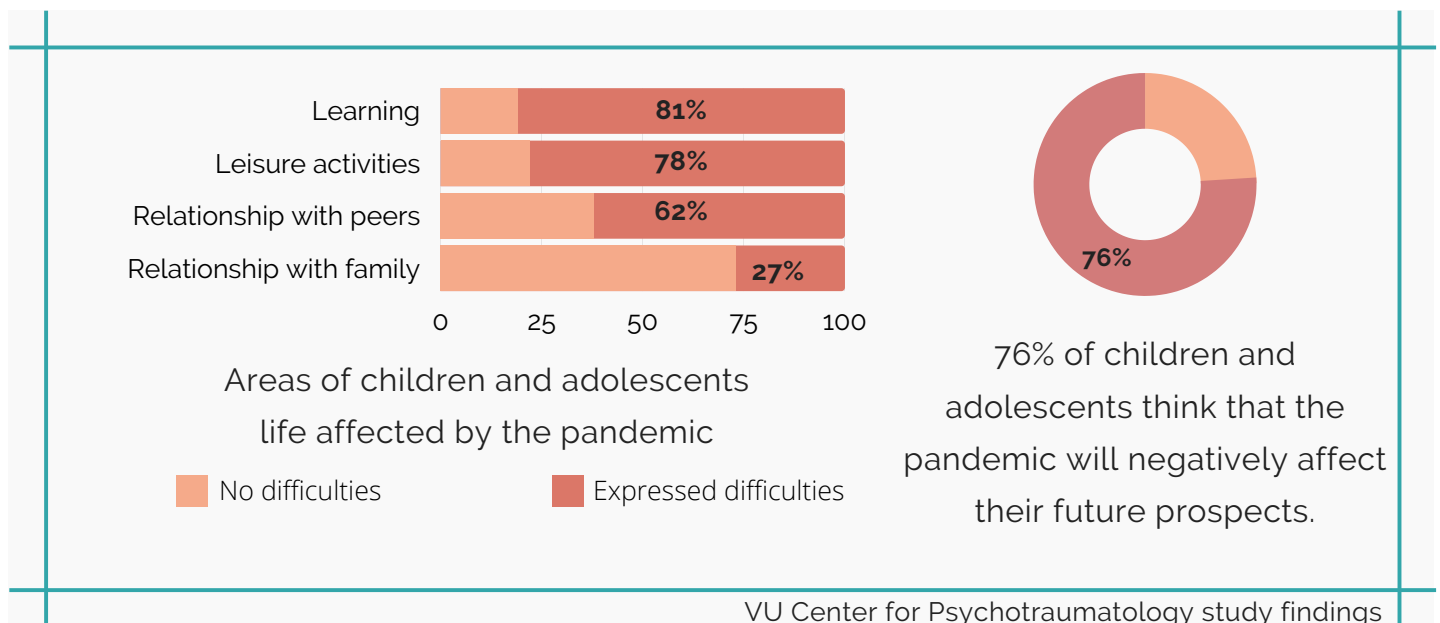
## MENTAL HEALTH DURING THE PANDEMIC

The spread of coronavirus, the accompanying quarantine, restrictions on social contacts and the economic consequences have a significant impact not only on the well-being of adults but also on the well-being of children and adolescents. Changes in family life, learning, non-formal education, and leisure activities can cause children a lot of stress and difficult experiences. Research and reviews from around the world show that adolescents experience more anxiety during this period and are less likely to cope with stress in their usual ways (Ellis, Dumas, & Forbes, 2020; Fegert, Vitiello, Plener, & Clemens, 2020). Also, many children experience isolation and loneliness, which is associated with a higher risk of depression (Ellis et al., 2020; Loades et al., 2020). Children and adolescents who have a disability, experience violence, or psychological or social hardships during a crisis are at greater risk of facing a variety of threats, violence, and mental health problems (Fegert et al., 2020; Lee, 2020; Singh et al., 2020).

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In addition, the psychological well-being of children and adolescents depends significantly on the well-being of parents and carers as well as the family situation, which can also be unstable and vulnerable during a pandemic (Fegert et al., 2020). During the quarantine, professional psychological and social assistance is especially needed; however, it may be even more difficult to access in the present context (Lee, 2020; Singh et al., 2020).

In October 2020, researchers from the Vilnius University Centre for Psychotraumatology conducted a study to examine the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic on the psychological well-being of the country's adolescents. Adolescents aged 13-18 years participated in the study.



The results of the study revealed that 4 out of 5 adolescents experienced learning difficulties due to the pandemic; approximately 3 out of 4 adolescents indicated that their leisure activities were impaired; more than half of the teens reported relationship difficulties with their peers during a pandemic, and about 1 in 4 teens reported relationship difficulties in the family because of the pandemic. The study also found that only 21.7% of adolescents who experience difficulties received psychological help.

The pandemic situation also increases the anxiety level of adolescents. Nearly more than half of the students surveyed worry that the pandemic could affect their family's financial situation, and as many as 3 in 4 adolescents think the pandemic could affect their future prospects.

The study also found a significant increase in the number of adolescents experiencing severe psychosocial difficulties during the pandemic. Approximately 1 in 7 adolescents experienced severe psychological difficulties before the pandemic, and 1 in 5 adolescents - during the pandemic. Thus, the results of the study reveal that the pandemic adversely affected important areas of students' lives, therefore psychological difficulties experienced by them may also increase in the future.

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One of the most important factors that can help overcome emerging difficulties or prevent long-term psychological problems is social support. However, as many as 19.3% of teenagers said they had no one to turn to for help. This is a large percentage of teens who face difficulties or threats and have no one to talk to about it.



# RECOMMENDATIONS FOR **SCHOOLS**, HOW TO HELP STUDENTS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Children and teenagers spend a lot of time at school - learning, building relationships, discovering their strengths and hobbies. The role of the school is particularly important for vulnerable, disadvantaged children and adolescents. In times of crisis, the school and its professionals can be a significant source of stability, social contact, and help for children and adolescents.

- 1. Inform about changes.** Changes, especially when they are unexpected, can cause a great deal of stress and anxiety for students. It is therefore important to keep students informed of any changes that are taking place or are expected to and to do so as early as possible. The more stable the learning process, the easier it is for students to concentrate on learning.
- 2. More time for the same things.** At this point, students may need more time and help to complete tasks and master the learning content. This can be stressful for both the students themselves and the teachers, so it is now crucial to support and say that it's normal.
- 3. Discuss the COVID-19 situation.** The situation of COVID-19 is constantly changing, with a lot of new information about it. Children and adolescents need to discuss the situation with trusted adults. Inform students about the real situation of the pandemic, discuss the issues students have, talk about how they feel and what worries them. Such conversations will build confidence, provide reassurance, and help perform better in learning tasks.
- 4. Inform students where to turn for help.** The need for the help of the school's psychologist, social worker, or special education teacher may currently have increased. Specialist help at school must be available directly or remotely. Make sure students know how to and to whom to turn for help, encourage them.

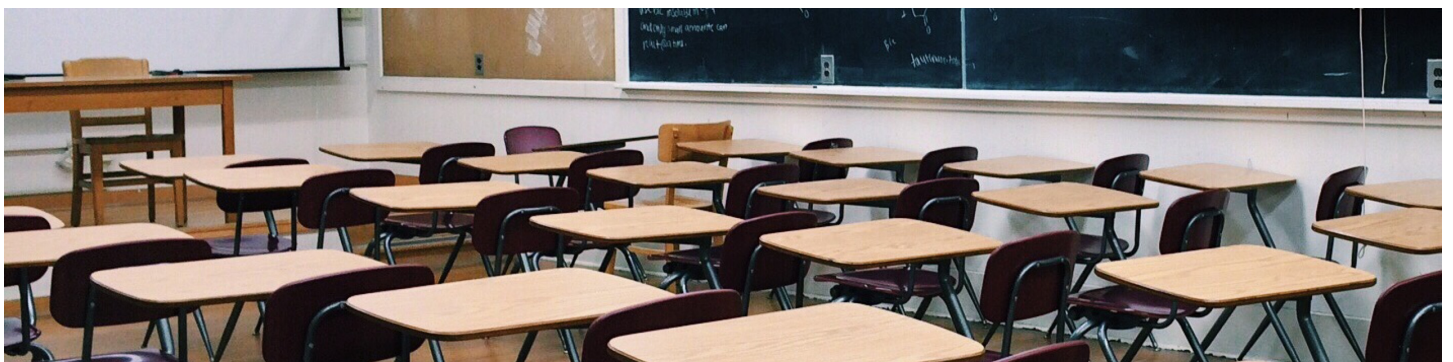
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**5. Monitor students' well-being.** It is important at this time to monitor the well-being of students. If you see a sad, unusually reserved student, hear a hint about suicide, notice impaired learning outcomes, see a student missing a lesson or other disturbing behaviour, pay attention, talk to the student in person and seek appropriate help.


**6. Biggest hardships – for students who already had difficulties.** Children and adolescents who have previously experienced emotional and social difficulties may now be at greater risk for other difficulties. Note that these children and their families may need more help during this period.

**7. Stay optimistic and encourage friendly communication.** Positive communication with both adults and peers can provide students with resilience. Even if it is difficult at the moment, try to maintain and promote friendly communication and care for each other.

**8. Help students help themselves.** Provide information and discuss with students how you can help yourself during this difficult time - how to overcome stress and relax, how to plan your agenda, how to find activities that you like, and keep in touch with important people.



## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS, HOW TO HELP YOURSELF DURING A COVID-19 PANDEMIC

- 1. Take care of yourself.** In a difficult situation, a few simple and very important things help to maintain balance and energy - getting enough sleep, eating, and moving. Rest breaks should be an integral part of your agenda.
- 2. Stick to the agenda.** A daily plan that includes not only learning but also rest time will provide clarity and help maintain motivation. Also mark the time on your agenda when you use your computer, phone, or browse the internet. This will make it easier to concentrate and achieve your goals.
- 3. Discover communication opportunities.** At the moment, communication with people who are important to you - family members, classmates, friends, and other people you like - can provide strength. If you want to talk, call or write a message without waiting for others to write to you. When there are no other options, communicating remotely can still provide fun.
- 4. Do what you like.** Take time for your favourite activities that are not hindered by quarantine restrictions. Activities that are easy or enjoyable for you will help you relax and maintain hope during this period. If you don't have a favourite activity or don't have the opportunity to enjoy it right now, maybe it's worth trying something new?
- 5. Enjoy small accomplishments.** When there is a lot of uncertainty and difficulty in planning for the future, it is important to focus on day-to-day activities. It's worth rejoicing if you've been able to do a job you've planned, found time for a relaxation exercise, tried a new activity, or talked to a friend.
- 6. Seek help.** If you are experiencing severe feelings or are in danger, it is important to talk to a trusted adult, a specialist at school, or call the Children's or Youth Hotline. You can find more information about Hotlines in your country [here](#) or [here](#). 

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Funded by LMTLT (sut.nr. S-COV-20-12)