



50% of Teens Say Pandemic Has Worsened Their Mental Health; Over 70% Believe Pandemic Has Disadvantaged Their Generation

Public Media Survey Identifies Loneliness, Anxiety, Depression as Most Common Feelings Among Teens in 2020

WETA WellBeings.org Mental Health Initiative and PBS NewsHour Student Reporting Labs Hold Town Hall Tuesday, October 20 on Teens, COVID and Coping, Featuring Adolescent Psychologist Lisa Damour, Counselor of the Year Laura Ross and Teens, moderated by PBS NewsHour's Amna Nawaz

October 15, 2020 – The majority of American teens believe that their generation has been disadvantaged by the COVID-19 pandemic, according to a new survey conducted for the WETA mental health initiative [WellBeings.org](https://www.wellbeings.org) and PBS NewsHour Student Reporting Labs released today. 72.4% of the 1,000 respondents aged 16 to 19, which was a representative sample of young Americans, said the pandemic has created a disadvantage for their generation. The national survey, which was conducted the week of October 5, 2020 by DKC Analytics, found that the COVID-19 pandemic has subjected American teens to unprecedented hardship, worsening their mental health, physical health and body image, relationships with family members, social lives, education and future potential.

“This has been an incredibly difficult period for American teens,” said Lisa Damour, the adolescent psychologist and author who is participating in the town hall – Teens, COVID and Coping – hosted by WellBeings.org and PBS NewsHour Student Reporting Labs. “American teens are acutely aware that this pandemic is upending their lives and that they need to adjust to protect their health. But they are also seeking help from families and other adults and are looking for all of us to acknowledge what they are experiencing, along with other concerns they have about the future of the country and the planet.”

The survey, which included high school juniors and seniors and college freshman and sophomores, found widespread dissatisfaction with mental health, with 67% reporting depression during the last year, 22% saying they experienced serious depression. In fact, mental health is the top-ranked concern (27.9%) among those surveyed who ranked their top concerns, followed

by the ability to obtain their desired education (26.3%), physical health (23.0%), and financial health (22.8%).

“American teens are of course impacted by this pandemic,” said Laura Ross, a counselor at Five Forks Middle School in Lawrenceville, Ga., and the 2020 School Counselor of the Year by the American School Counselor Association (ASCA), which has partnered with the sponsors of the Teens, COVID and Coping event. “They are increasingly worried. They are concerned that they will not catch up, that relationships will fail, and that they will fall behind as a generation academically and socially which will impact their futures. This is a very stressful time for a generation of young people who are already confronting tremendous challenges.”

When asked what is having the greatest impact on their day-to-day wellbeing, respondents identified their physical appearance/body image and fitness level (47.4%) and social media (44.4%) suggesting a direct connection between social media usage and perceptions of self.

“We have heard repeatedly from young people that they are spending more time on their devices and feel an even greater sense of social pressure and comparison in a time of social distancing,” said Dr. Damour.

Asked how they felt over the last year, American teens surveyed reported a wide range of feelings, with most reflecting the isolation and uncertainty they are living with:

- 64.1% lonely
- 61.7% worried or anxious
- 54.4% depressed
- 41.1% angry
- 23.3% remained optimistic

American teens in the poll do find comfort in friends and family with 53.3% saying friends have had an overall positive impact on their mental health, and 39.7% say parents have. But the strain caused by the pandemic on relationships is very real for them:

A majority of respondents, 53.4%, report that the pandemic has worsened their social lives, with 53.1% saying they’ve grown away from some friends and 45.7% feeling regret that they have missed out on major life events like proms, weddings and other activities.

School of course has a big impact on a teenager’s life, whether high school or the early years of college. Of those surveyed, 15.2% resumed school in person, 32.5% are in a hybrid situation, 44% have classes exclusively online and 8.3% report no classes or school activity. A majority of

the respondents said their schools have made an effort to help them with their mental health needs (25.8% said a serious effort, 29.8% a minor effort).

While 58.7% of those surveyed say the pandemic has impacted the quality of their schoolwork, and 48.5% the quality of their education overall, 64.7% said their school administrators have strongly or somewhat adapted to COVID-19 with the students' best interests in mind.

Societal concerns remain hugely important to those surveyed. According to the survey, 23% of respondents rank the environment as the most important societal issue, followed by 21.8% racial strife. An ineffective government is not far behind, with 20.5% saying that is a major concern.

While American teens are experiencing the pandemic similarly, they are not a monolithic group. White and non-white students have had significantly different experiences, according to the survey. Nearly half (49.6%) of white respondents say they are dissatisfied with the state of their mental health, compared to 40.5% of the non-white respondents. Additionally, 72.7% of the white respondents say they experienced depression in the last year, compared to 62.8% of those who identified as non-white.

Highlights of the survey, as well as more detailed crosstabs and an exploration of the methodology, can be found here: <https://wellbeings.org/covidandcoping/>

The organizations hosting the Teens, COVID and Coping forum note that there are many resources for teens (and others) experiencing depression. For a discussion about mental health and to read and share stories about how young people are dealing with these issues, please visit [WellBeings.org](https://wellbeings.org).

If you are in crisis, or experiencing thoughts of suicide, please text the [Crisis Text Line](#) (text HELLO to 741741) or call the [National Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#) at 1-800-273-TALK (8255). Both services are free and available 24-hours a day, seven days a week.

About WETA Well Beings

Well Beings is a multi-platform, multi-year campaign from public media to address the critical health needs in America through original broadcast and digital content, engagement campaigns and impactful local events. The campaign begins with the **Youth Mental Health Project**, engaging youth voices to create a national conversation, raise awareness, address stigma and discrimination, and encourage compassion. Well Beings was created by WETA Washington, D.C., the flagship public media station in the nation's capital, and brings together partners from across the country, including youth with lived experience of mental health challenges, families, caregivers, educators, medical and mental health professionals, social service agencies, private

foundations, filmmakers, corporations and media sponsors, to create awareness and resources for better health and wellbeing. The public can join the conversation on youth mental health by using #WellBeings, visiting WellBeings.org, or following @WellBeingsOrg on [Instagram](#), [Facebook](#), or [Twitter](#).

About Student Reporting Labs

Now in over 160 middle and high schools, Student Reporting Labs (SRL) is a national youth journalism program and public media initiative that trains teenagers across the country to produce stories that highlight the achievements, challenges, and reality of today's youth. SRL creates transformative educational experiences through video journalism that inspires students to find their voice and engage in their communities. Since 2009, SRL youth media producers have helped students place over 100 video news reports on PBS NewsHour's nightly broadcast and more on local media outlets. SRL is supported by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, a private corporation funded by the American people, and the MacArthur Foundation. Visit www.studentreportinglabs.org to learn more.

About WETA

WETA is the flagship public media station the nation's capital, serving Virginia, Maryland and the District of Columbia with high-quality television, radio and digital content and educational initiatives. The second largest producing-station of new content for public television in the United States, WETA creates news and public affairs programs including *PBS NewsHour* and *Washington Week*; documentaries by filmmaker Ken Burns and scholar Henry Louis Gates, Jr.; and performance specials from such venues as the U.S. Capitol and the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. The company's newest campaign, *Well Beings*, addresses the critical health needs of Americans through broadcast content, original digital content, and impactful local events. Classical WETA 90.9 FM brings classical music, concerts and specials to the region. As the largest PBS station serving Greater Washington, WETA broadcasts on five channels: WETA PBS, WETA UK, WETA PBS Kids, WETA World and WETA Metro. Embracing the educational mission of public media, WETA develops local and national community engagement programs for people of all ages to inspire the joy of lifelong learning and creates award-winning public service websites such as ReadingRockets.org, ColorinColorado.org and BrainLine.org. More information on WETA and its programs and services is available at weta.org. Sharon Percy Rockefeller is President and CEO of WETA.