

Caring for Each Other

Children's Hopes & Fears Amidst COVID

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Children's Hopes & Fears Amidst COVID.

We would like to thank the children and families who shared their experiences of the world around them, especially amidst a very tumultuous year.

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New York: Sesame Workshop.

While aware of COVID, children demonstrate resilience...

Families' lives were turned upside when the COVID-19 pandemic forced the abrupt shuttering of schools, businesses, and workplaces in the spring of 2020—presenting challenges for everyone, especially families, as they learned to navigate and adapt to a continually changing “new normal.”

The goal of this study was to **listen to and elevate the voices of children** ages 6-11 during the COVID pandemic. We particularly wanted to explore how COVID may be affecting children early in the pandemic in May-June 2020 compared to more than 6 months later in February-March 2021.

COVID appeared to be top of mind for many children. Across both timepoints, COVID-related themes represented top wishes and worries for children in their unprompted responses to general questions.

These **COVID-related responses increased over time**, including children's hope about it.

- + In May 2020, unprompted references to COVID (42% of children) were comprised of mostly concerns about COVID infection and the loss of pre-COVID normal.
- + By February 2021, unprompted references to COVID increased significantly (50% of children), specifically including more mentions of the medical community, vaccines, and the return to pre-COVID “normal” giving them hope.

...with family support and hope!

Children's hope was also evident in the strong child-typical themes of family and school in their unprompted responses, particularly with more positive comments about school in February 2021.

We see a shift in children's responses from May 2020 fears around COVID and concerns that life may not return to normal, to February 2021 hope of reaching some level of post-pandemic normalcy thanks to vaccines and having adapted to changing COVID circumstances. Rather than focusing mostly on what they are missing, they express more excitement looking toward a hopeful future.

Families played a huge role in supporting their children's resilience. They have maintained regular COVID-related conversations with their children, including about how children are feeling, and are frequently engaging in family activities mostly about the same, if not more in February 2021 compared to May 2020.

Children's development of this resilience was likely supported by the culmination of frequent family connection and conversation, and glimpses of a "new normal" with vaccines rolling out and virtual school becoming less of a challenge. Parents also report more positive moods in their children by February 2021.

As children continue adapting to COVID circumstances, **Sesame Workshop can support families with resources** to build children's resilience through connection and conversation.

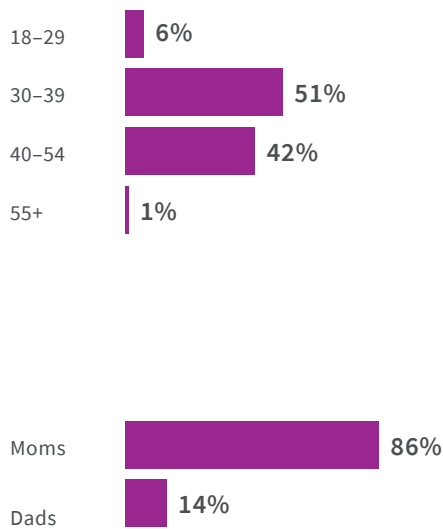
Participants

February 2021

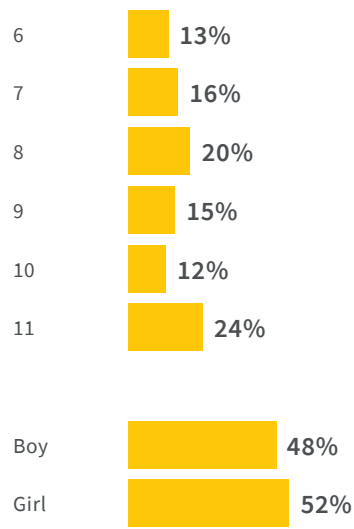
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PAIRS OF PARENTS & CHILDREN

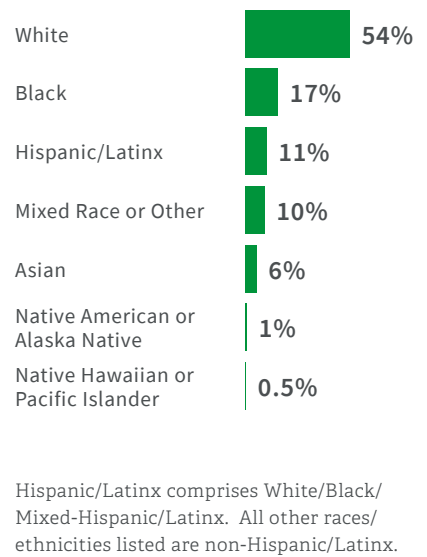
AGE & GENDER OF PARENT



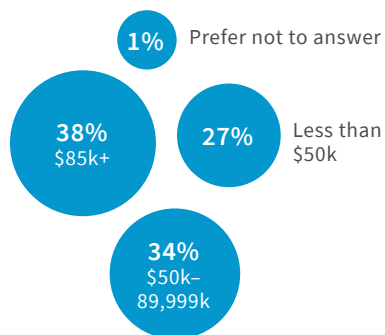
AGE & GENDER OF CHILD



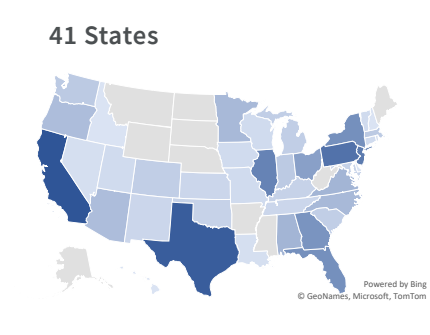
RACE/ETHNICITY OF CHILD



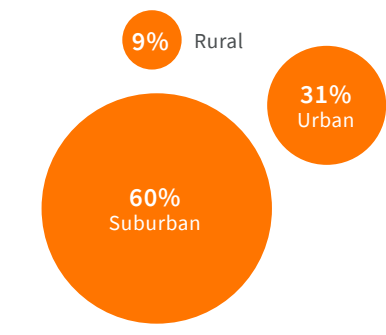
INCOME



LOCATION



URBANACITY



Methods

DATA FOR THIS STUDY WERE COLLECTED IN TWO WAVES: MAY-JUNE 2020 AND FEBRUARY-MARCH 2021

In both waves, children answered the same 5-8 general open-ended questions about their hopes, fears, and the world around them

- - + Children used drawings, photos, and writing and videos to answer these questions.
 - + The diary questions intentionally did not mention COVID to see how salient and top of mind these issues were for children.

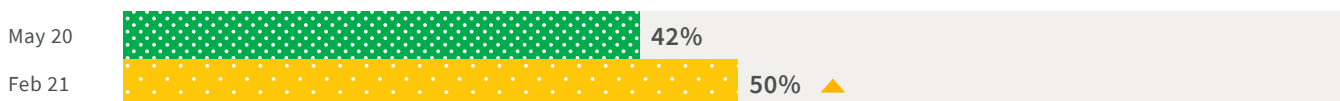
After completing the diary questions, parents and children answered several questions specifically about COVID.

All open-ended questions were manually coded based on categories generated from researcher reviews of responses. The quantitative data presented here are results of this manual coding process.

COVID was top of mind across both timepoints, with children mentioning their concerns around it and missing their pre-COVID normal lives, in addition to more hope by February 2021.

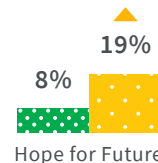
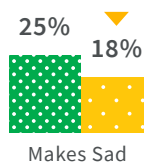
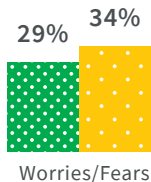
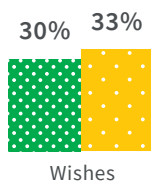
Unprompted, 50% of children mention COVID in at least one response across questions in February 2021, up from 42% in May 2020.

% OF UNPROMPTED COVID MENTIONS ACROSS ALL QUESTIONS



TOP FOUR QUESTIONS WITH COVID MENTIONS

■ May 20 ■ Feb 21



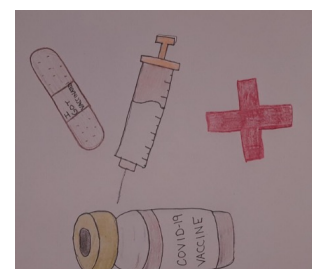
“So many people in the world are dying from Coronavirus and I don’t want to ever be alone without my family.”

GIRL, 11, BLACK/AA, MAY 2020



“I drew a picture of how much the world has changed in just a year... last year life was normal and now it’s just not.”

GIRL, 11, WHITE, FEB 2021



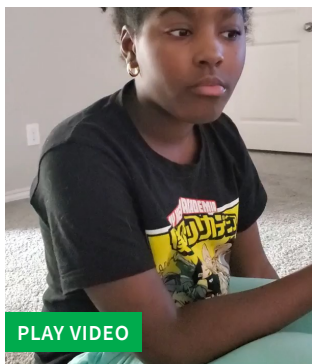
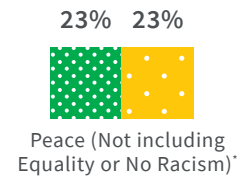
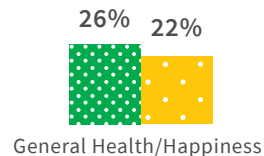
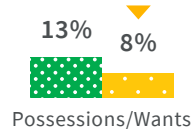
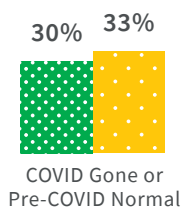
“...I think that when everyone has this shot, we can go back to school again. We can go on vacation again and we wouldn’t have to wear masks anymore. We wouldn’t have to worry about getting sick or dying. We could hug people again...Everything would just go back to normal.”

BOY, 9, WHITE & HISPANIC/LATINX, FEB 2021

Wishes for COVID to be gone and a return to pre-COVID normal were top of mind for children across both timepoints.

TOP FOUR - WHAT DO YOU WISH FOR YOURSELF OR FOR THE WORLD? WHY DO YOU WISH FOR THIS?

May 20 Feb 21



PLAY VIDEO

“Something I wish for the world is to stop coronavirus. (Ok, and why do you wish for this?). Because I don’t want to be sitting at home all day wearing a mask because it’s a little hard to breathe in it...”

GIRL, 9, BLACK/AA, FEB 2021



“I wish that COVID-19 was gone because it’s harder for me and the world to live like this. Ex: getting sick, virtual things, no freedom.”

GIRL, 8, WHITE & HISPANIC/LATINX, FEB 2021



“I wish for world peace because I know there are tens of thousands deaths a day. With world peace people can decrease the number of deaths a day. World peace would also mean no fighting.”

GIRL, 11, WHITE, MAY 2020

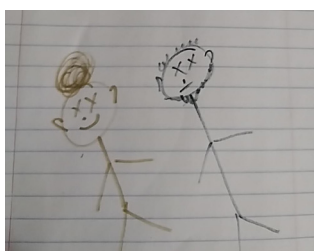
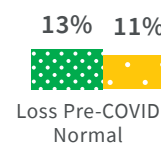
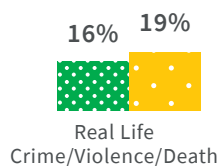
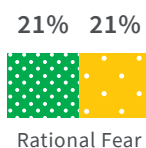
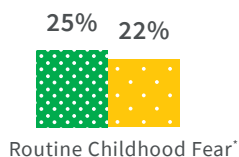
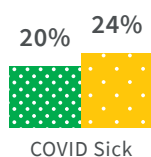
*mentioned more by kids 10-11 years old and those from higher income families \$85K+

▲ Statistically significant difference between May 2020 and Feb 2021.

COVID-related fears—sickness and loss of pre-COVID normal—are among children’s top 5 worries and at similar levels from May 2020 to February 2021.

TOP FIVE - DO YOU HAVE ANY WORRIES OR FEARS? WHAT ARE YOU WORRIED ABOUT? WHY DOES THIS WORRY YOU?

 May 20
  Feb 21



“I drew a picture of my family dead. I am afraid of my mom and dad dying. This worry’s me because my dad has diabetes and I know coronavirus can kill people.”

GIRL, 8, BLACK/AA, FEB 2021



“I’m afraid of spiders. They are scary. Spiders make webs everywhere. Spiders have fangs.”

BOY, 10, WHITE, MAY 2020



“My worries and fears are that COVID-19 will never end and we will have to be like this forever and that we cannot ever get out of our house.”

GIRL, 9, WHITE & HISPANIC/LATINX, FEB 2021

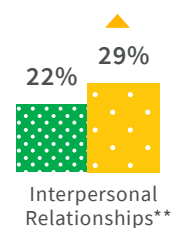
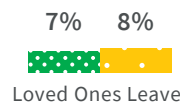
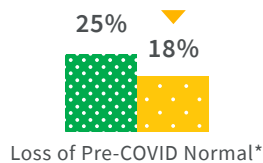
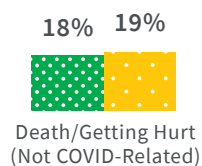
*mentioned more by kids 6-7 years old

▲ Statistically significant difference between May 2020 and Feb 2021.

Children express significantly less sadness over the loss of “normal” times in February 2021 than in May 2020, with a more child-typical topic—navigating interpersonal relationships—rising to the top.

TOP FOUR - DO YOU GET SAD SOMETIMES? WHAT MAKES YOU FEEL SAD? WHY DOES THIS MAKE YOU SAD?

May 20 Feb 21



“I can’t play with my friends like before corona because we have to wear masks playing.”

BOY, 6, BLACK/AA, MAY 2020



PLAY VIDEO

“I get sad because sometimes I can’t play sports because of COVID.”

BOY, 8, WHITE, FEB 2021



“I draw the picture of me and my brother. I get sad when I am getting my toys back from him and he doesn’t want to give it back to me.”

GIRL, 8, MULTIRACIAL, FEB 2021

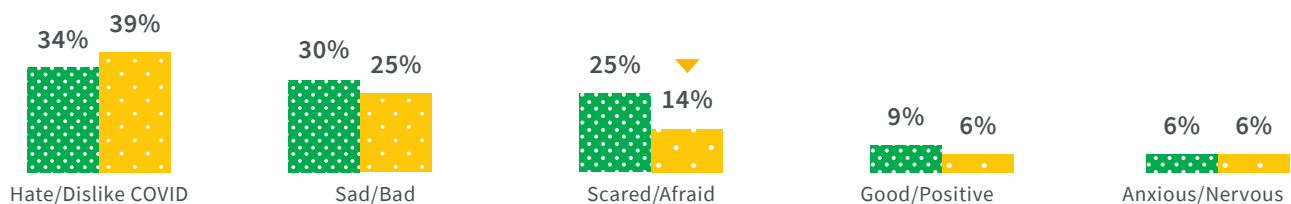
*mentioned more by kids 10-11 years old **mentioned more by kids 6-7 years old

▲ Statistically significant difference between May 2020 and Feb 2021.

Children seem to be tired of the pandemic. When asked specifically about it, they mostly share how much they dislike and feel sad about COVID, and express significantly less fear about it in February 2021 than in May 2020.

HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT COVID?

May 20 Feb 21



“I don’t really care for it, but it does affect my school and I hate it. And I feel like I can’t breathe when wearing my dumb mask.”

GIRL, 10, WHITE, FEB 2021

“I hate it and wish that it would go away forever and never come back.”

GIRL, 7, BLACK, FEB 2021

“I think it is bad and I don’t like to wear masks.”

GIRL, 7, WHITE, FEB 2021

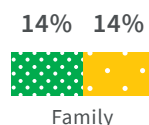
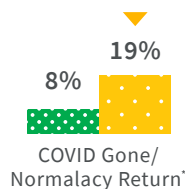
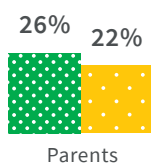
“It’s not the best, but it’s not like really, really, really bad. I don’t like the lockdown, but I can kind of still see some of my friends (at school and in our pod). I know it’s not good, but to me it’s kind of ok.”

BOY, 10, ASIAN, FEB 2021

Despite their COVID fatigue, children continue to draw hope from parents and family—and, increasingly, from anticipating an end to COVID.

**TOP THREE - WHO OR WHAT GIVES YOU HOPE FOR THE FUTURE?
WHY DOES THIS MAKE YOU FEEL EXCITED ABOUT THE FUTURE?**

May 20 Feb 21



“I drew a doctor because they will help covid-19 go away and I look forward for covid-19 to go away.”

GIRL, 10, WHITE, FEB 2021



PLAY VIDEO

“Something that gives me hope in the future is the coronavirus going away and getting to play with my friends in person and having in person school.”

BOY, 8, WHITE/ASIAN, FEB 2021



“My sister Hope makes me feel excited because she reminds me for when I will go to college.”

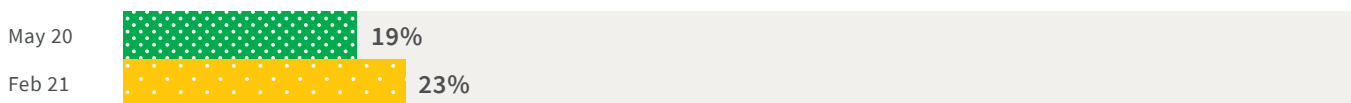
GIRL, 9, MIXED RACE, MAY 2020

*mentioned more by those with higher incomes \$85K+

▲ Statistically significant difference between May 2020 and Feb 2021.

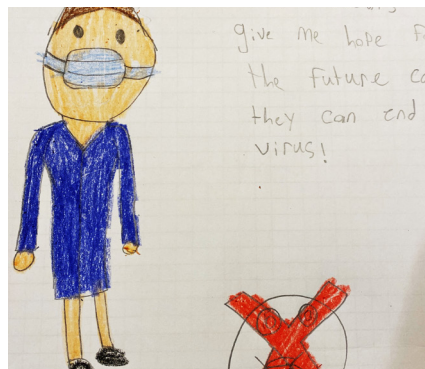
This may be connected to their hopes around medical staff and vaccines expressed in unprompted responses (about 23%) and when asked directly about vaccines (43%).

% OF UNPROMPTED MENTIONS OF MEDICAL STAFF OR VACCINES ACROSS QUESTIONS



“I drew a photo of scientists and doctors inventing a new, cheap, efficient and reliable vaccine to help fight the coronavirus, it makes me feel excited to realize that they will probably make it in a short amount of time.”

GIRL, 10, ASIAN, FEB 2021



“I think doctors give me hope for the future cause they can end the virus!”

GIRL, 9 WHITE, MAY 2020



“Some thing that gives me hope for the future is the covid vaccine because a lot of people have already gotten it and if enough people get it, everyone will be able to go back to normal and it will be normal.”

GIRL, 9, WHITE, FEB 2021

WHEN ASKED DIRECTLY ABOUT VACCINES, 43% OF CHILDREN EXPRESS POSITIVE EMOTION

“I am happy that they have it because you have a 95% chance of not getting COVID.”

GIRL, 10, WHITE, FEB 2021

“Its a great invention, I can go back to school after I take the vaccine. But I don't know when will it happen.”

BOY, 10, ASIAN, FEB 2021

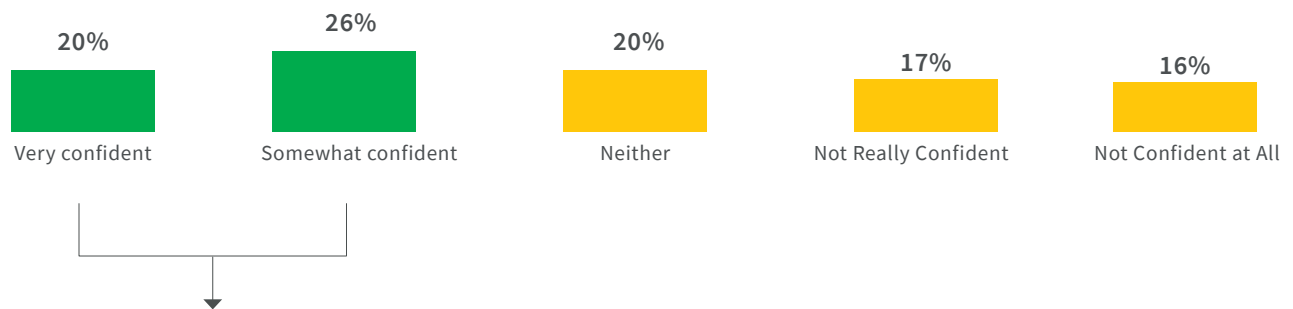
“I'm cool with it, and I want my whole family to get vaccinated and maybe me too if they have one for children.”

GIRL, 10, WHITE & BLACK/AA, FEB 2021

*Significantly more children mentioned the vaccine across questions in February 2021

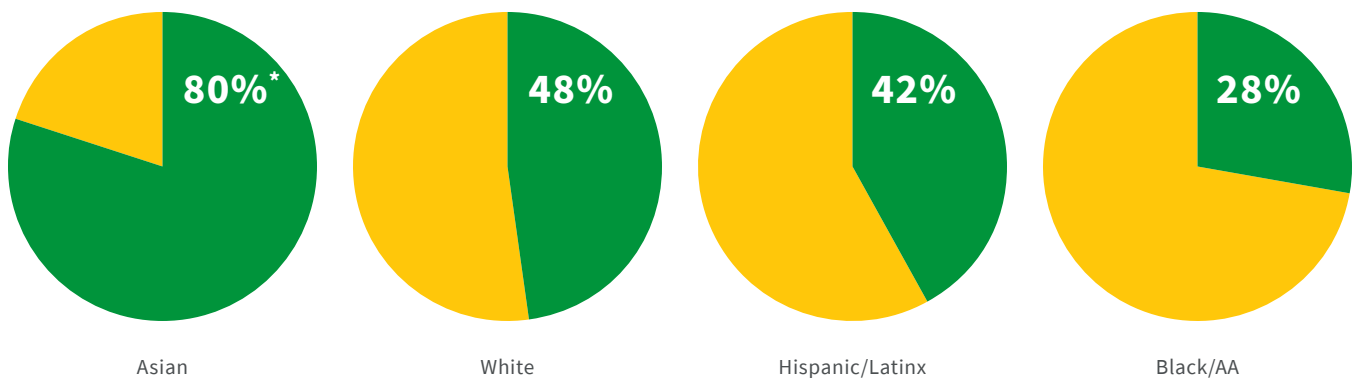
Almost half (46%) of parents also report that they are confident about the vaccine, with parents of Asian children reporting significantly higher confidence.

% OF PARENTS WHO ARE CONFIDENT THE VACCINE IS SAFE AND EFFECTIVE



CONFIDENCE BY CHILD RACE

■ Very + Somewhat Confident
■ Neither, Not Really, or Not Confident




* Parents of Asian children have significantly higher confidence
 ^ Questions about vaccine access were not included in the survey.

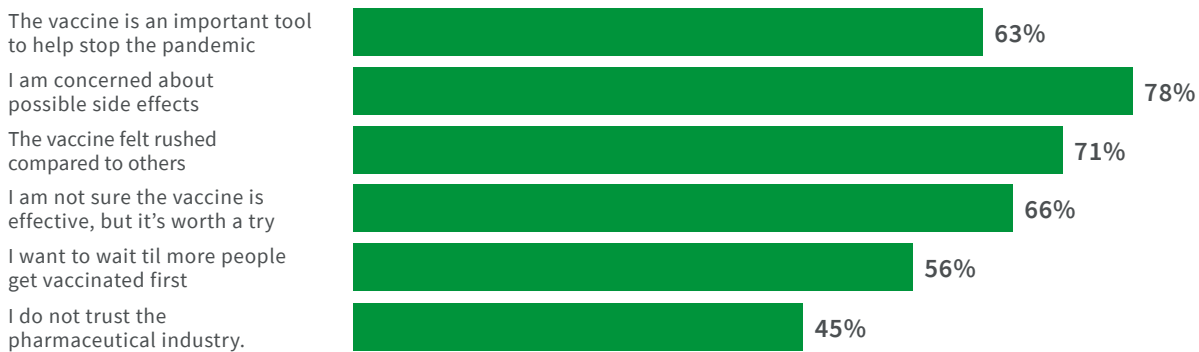
Parents recognize the value of vaccines and still express concerns over their safety, with parents of Asian children expressing less concern and parents of Black children expressing more concern.

Parents of Asian children more strongly agree that the vaccine is an important tool and report less concern about waiting for others to get vaccinated or about the vaccine being rushed.

Parents of Black children are more concerned about side effects and have less trust in the pharmaceutical industry.

% OF FAMILIES FREQUENTLY DOING EACH ACTIVITY RIGHT AFTER THE PANDEMIC BEGAN

 Somewhat + Strongly Agree



Despite the longevity of the pandemic, kids are resilient - they are still typical kids, evident in the strong themes of family and school across their responses

Across general questions, children demonstrate that they are still sweet and silly typical kids doing the work of growing up.



“I want to get another dog so it can lay with me and play. She will make me feel happy every day.”

BOY, 7, WHITE & BLACK/AA, FEB 2021



“My superpower is time traveling. I drew me going into the past from the modern world to when the Declaration of Independence was signed. I want this superpower because I can go back in time and see what really happened in history.”

GIRL, 8, ASIAN, FEB 2021



“I helped an old lady with long hair at church. I opened the door when she was on crutches. She was happy and me too.”

GIRL, 6, WHITE, MAY 2020



PLAY VIDEO

“I wish for the world that the world is made out of cotton candy. (Why do you wish for the world to be made out of cotton candy?). So that people can have cotton candy.”

GIRL, 6, WHITE, FEB 2021

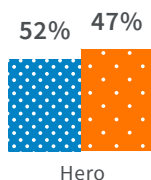
Family are the center of their lives. Across both timepoints, family, particularly parents, serve as beacons of courage, hope, and heroism.

% OF UNPROMPTED FAMILY MENTIONS ACROSS ALL QUESTIONS

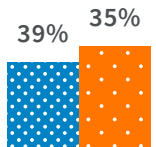


TOP THREE QUESTIONS WITH FAMILY MENTIONS

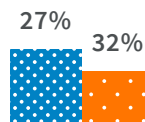
May 20 Feb 21



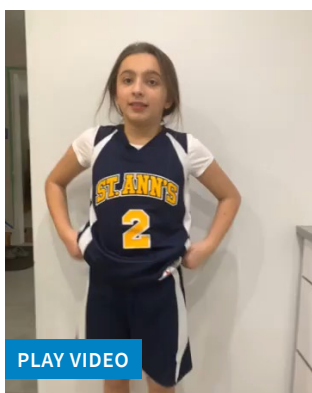
Hero



Hope for Future



Do Tomorrow



PLAY VIDEO

“What gives hope to my future is my parents because they always have my back, and they always make sure my future is going to be bright and colorful.”

GIRL, 10, WHITE, FEB 2021



“My mom gives me hope for the future. She gives me hope for the future because she is a really good mom, and she gives me a lot of advice and she is there for me.”

GIRL, 9, BLACK/WHITE, FEB 2021



“Take a nap and visit my Great Grand parents who I haven’t seen in a year. I want to visit them because they are nice and old.”

BOY, 7, WHITE, FEB 2021

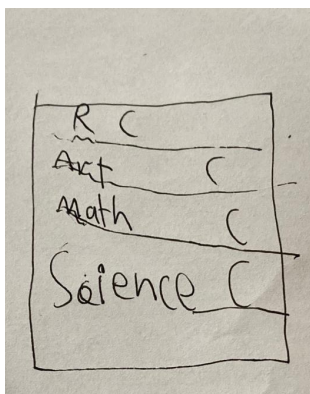
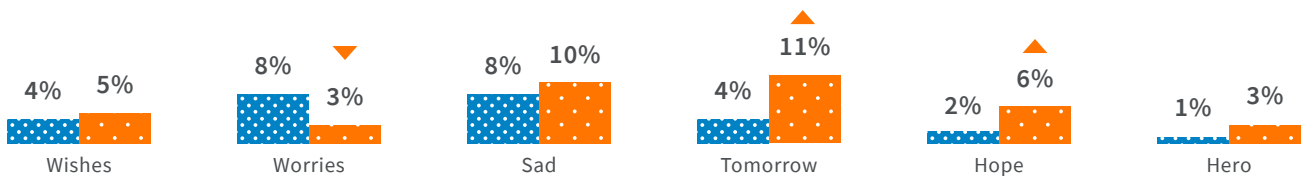
School is also a prominent theme across both timepoints, with significantly more mentions in Feb 2021 than May 2020. Perhaps this reflects children’s excitement to return to school as we get closer to a new “normal.”

% OF UNPROMPTED SCHOOL MENTIONS ACROSS ALL QUESTIONS

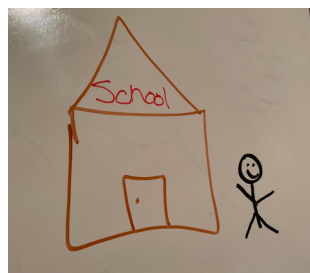


% OF UNPROMPTED SCHOOL MENTIONS PER QUESTION

Wave 1 Wave 2



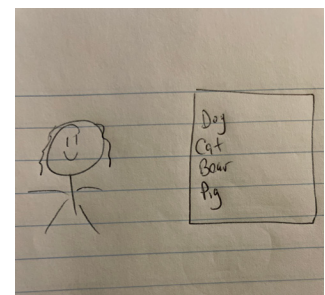
“I want to go to school to see and play with my friends.”
BOY, 8, ASIAN, FEB 2021



“I want to go to school to see and play with my friends.”
GIRL, 8, WHITE, FEB 2021



PLAY VIDEO
“The thing that gives me hope for the future, is I’m looking forward to going back to school because I can see all my friends and I can be out of the house more and I can learn more and have a better understanding of many things.”
GIRL, 10, WHITE, FEB 2021



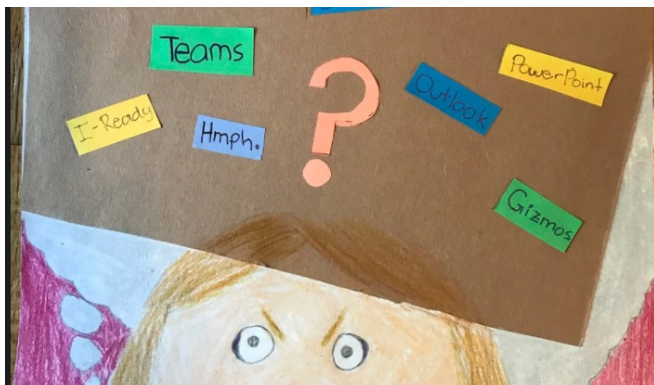
“My teacher makes me feel excited because I learn from her.”
BOY, 10, BLACK/AA, FEB 2021

KIDS ARE STARTING TO GO BACK TO SCHOOL, WITH 52% IN SOME SORT OF IN-PERSON SCHOOLING (SOME, HALF, OR ALL), AND 48% IN ALL VIRTUAL LEARNING STILL IN FEBRUARY 2021

▲ Statistically significant difference between May 2020 and Feb 2021.

For example, their responses are focused less on disliking virtual or missing in-person school, and more on love for their teachers and excitement to return to in-person schooling.

MAY 2020



“I hate doing distance learning. It makes me so mad when the system does not work.”

GIRL, 11, WHITE, MAY 2020



“I drew my friends and my teacher. I feel sad because I really miss them a lot.”

GIRL, 6, MULTIRACIAL, MAY 2020

FEB 2021



“I have hope because my school is opening again this week, so I get to see my friends. I have not been to school since last Fall. I only get to go for two days a week but I'm still excited. I guess since it is opening it must be safer to go again.”

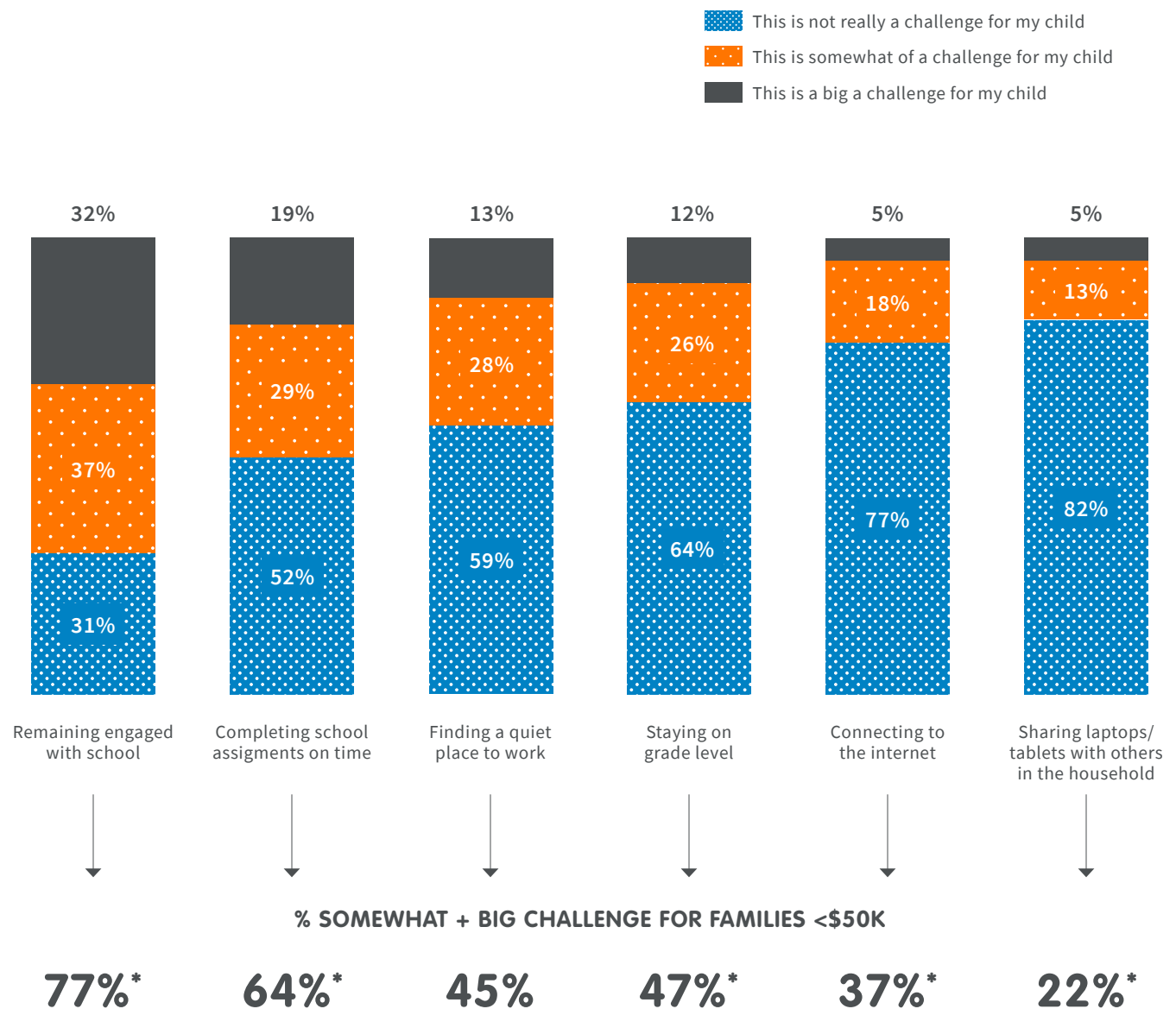
BOY, 11, MULTIRACIAL, FEB 2021



“My hero is my teacher because with her, anything is possible... she makes learning fun for everybody, it's entertaining to watch her teach and I can learn a lot. Last year, I didn't like math, but now I like math because of what she has done.”

GIRL, 10, WHITE, FEB 2021

School may also be more hopeful because families have worked through the logistical challenges of virtual schooling. The biggest challenge in 2021 is more typical—remaining engaged with school.



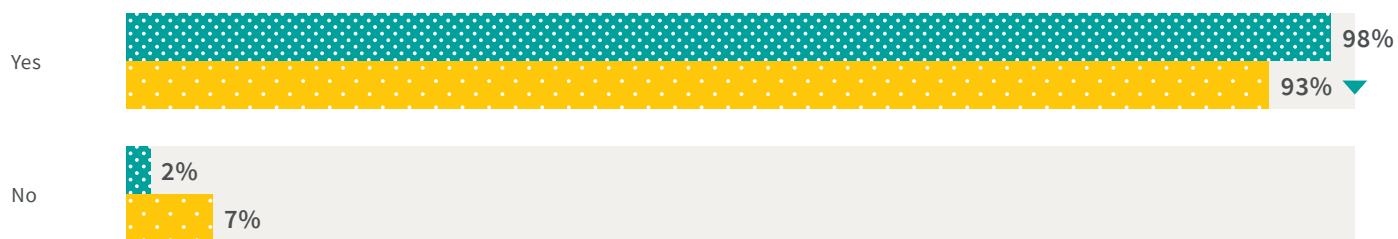
*Note: Most challenges are reported significantly more by lower-income families

Family and personal connections aid in children's resilience, with parents being fundamental in giving their children support.

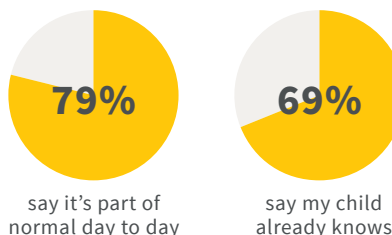
Nearly all parents are talking to their children about COVID across both timepoints—just slightly less frequently in February 2021, as it’s become part of kids’ normal.

% OF FAMILIES WHO HAVE TALKED ABOUT COVID

May 20 Feb 21

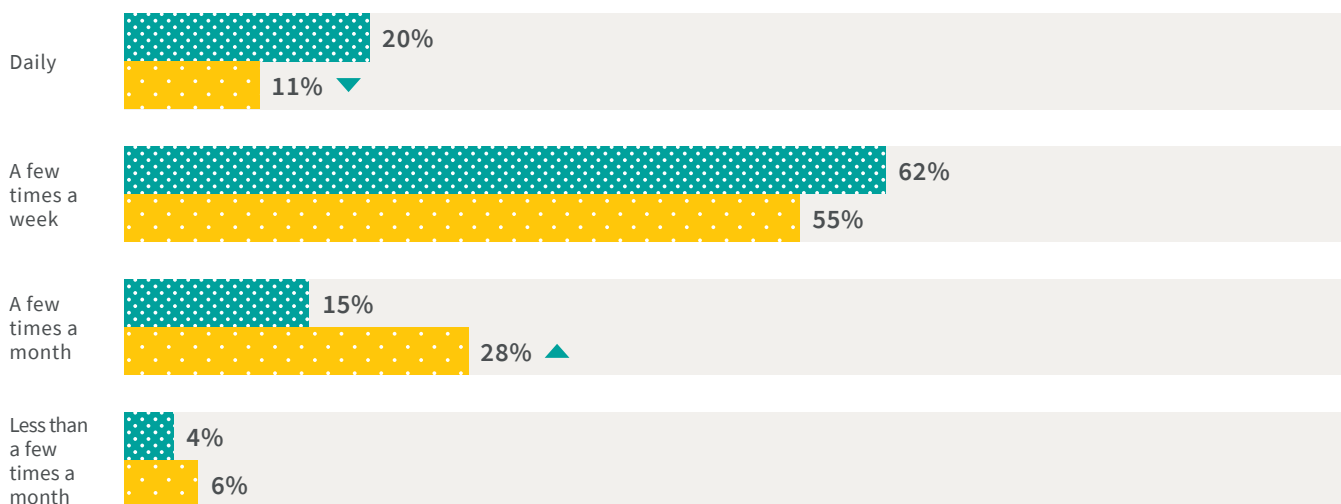


Top two reasons for not talking/talking about it less Feb 2021:



% FREQUENCY OF COVID DISCUSSIONS

May 20 Feb 21



*Note: Most challenges are reported significantly more by lower-income families

Across both timepoints, practical topics remain in the top five for parents when talking about COVID, with their children's feelings and vaccines moving up to top topics in February 2021.

MAY 2020

RANK	TOPIC	% OF FAMILIES
1	How to Stay Safe	94%
2	Changes in Your Daily Life	90%
3	How to Interact with People	77%
4	How Your Child Feels	72%
5	What Virus Is	66%
6	Ways that people are helping in the community	59%
7	Stories heard or seen on the news	46%
8	How you feel	42%

FEB 2021

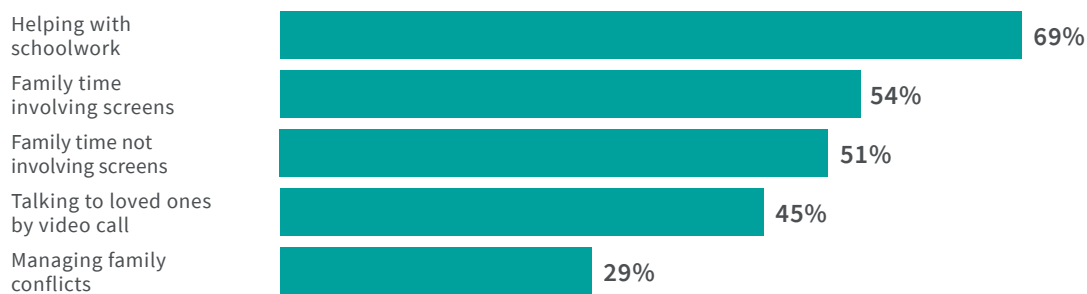
RANK	TOPIC	% OF FAMILIES
1	How to Stay Safe	87% ▼
2	How Your Child Feels	68%
3	Changes in Your Daily Life	67% ▼
4	Vaccine[^]	62%
5	How to Interact with People	62% ▼
6	Stories heard or seen on the news	47%
7	Ways that people are helping in the community	47% ▼
8	How you feel	45%
9	What the Virus Is	44% ▼

[^] Vaccine only given as closed-ended option in Feb 2021. It was not a closed-ended option in May 2020 and did not appear in "Other" open-ended category

▲ Statistically significant difference between May 2020 and Feb 2021.

In addition to parent conversations, overall family connection played a central role in children’s lives early on in the pandemic and continues to do so in February 2021 with parents reporting engagement with family activities more frequently or the same as right after the pandemic began.

% OF FAMILIES FREQUENTLY DOING EACH ACTIVITY RIGHT AFTER THE PANDEMIC BEGAN



% OF FAMILIES FREQUENTLY DOING EACH ACTIVITY RIGHT AFTER THE PANDEMIC BEGAN

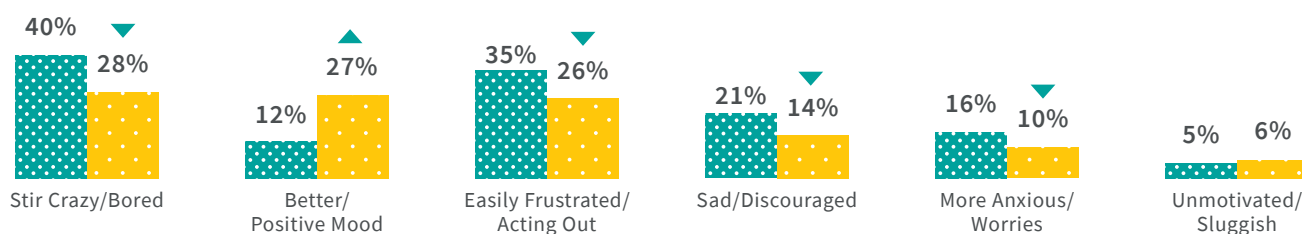


Most of the remaining %'s are mostly the same (46% - 62%) and very few are doing these things less than before (7% - 14%)

More parents report their children being in a better mood and fewer report them being bored, frustrated, sad or anxious in February 2021 compared to May 2020.

% OF ANY PARENT REPORTED CHANGES IN CHILD'S MOOD

May 20 Feb 21



“His mood has changed for the better. He’s more active and happier all the time. Loves to do things again like prior to Covid.”
PARENT OF BOY, 7, WHITE, FEB 2021

“They have been able to adapt well and are used to school at home and the hybrid model. We talk about feelings at least once a week.”
PARENT OF BOY, 11, WHITE, FEB 2021

“So, at the beginning of the pandemic, my child was frustrated at having to be home and going to school online; however, over time as we have adjusted, and I have been able to find creative home activities his mood has been more normal...”
PARENT OF BOY, 6, BLACK/AA & ASIAN, FEB 2021

“She’s happy! She has virtual interactions with school friends, and we have lots of family play time which is what she loves to do.”
PARENT OF GIRL, 8, WHITE, FEB 2021

Children are aware of COVID and are demonstrating resilience. Let's continue to support their adapting to these changing times.

COVID is top of mind for many children.

This was evident in their expressions of wishes for COVID to be gone and excitement about the return to normalcy in the future.

Despite awareness of COVID and its impact on their lives, **kids are still kids**. Fear or anxiety over COVID has not completely overwhelmed them. Children have adapted and are beginning to express even more hope for a post-pandemic future.

The role of the family is just as big, if not bigger, several months into the pandemic compared to early on at its beginning. Parents' continued engagement in COVID-related conversations with their children, particularly touching on the medical community and vaccines, as well as children's feelings, help children adapt and feel reassured everything will be okay.

The **added effects** of increased vaccine distribution, businesses and schools reopening, and children getting used to virtual school challenges have also likely contributed to children's resilience.

We recognize that some populations may be more vulnerable than the more general sample in this study. Still, our findings suggest that supporting all children with connection and conversation can help them continue to be kids with silly wishes, love for their families, and thoughtful hopes for the world.



Sesame Workshop is the nonprofit media and educational organization behind Sesame Street, the pioneering television show that has been reaching and teaching children since 1969. Today, Sesame Workshop is an innovative force for change, with a mission to help kids everywhere grow smarter, stronger, and kinder. We're present in more than 150 countries, serving vulnerable children through a wide range of media, formal education, and philanthropically funded social impact programs, each grounded in rigorous research and tailored to the needs and cultures of the communities we serve. For more information, please visit sesameworkshop.org.



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