Snapshot

Checking in with children and young people on the impacts of COVID-19

Lockdowns 5 and 6 2021

The Commission for Children and Young People is an independent body that advocates for the rights, safety and wellbeing of all children and young people in Victoria.

This snapshot summarises what 989 children and young people told us between 19 June and 15 November 2021, during the periods of Victoria's fifth lockdown (16 July – 27 July 2021) and sixth lockdown (5 August – 21 October 2021). The survey touches on young people's reflections on mental health and wellbeing, education, safety and security at home and the future.

About our snapshots

Since early 2020, we have been asking children and young people about the impacts of COVID-19 on their lives. This includes their education, mental health and feelings of safety. We have been publishing what we hear in a series of snapshots and use the feedback to tell government and the broader community about what children and young people need to feel supported during this time. We have an online survey that children and young people can complete during different periods, recognising that things will continue to change.

Our last snapshot reported on responses we received from children and young people between November 2020 and February 2021. That snapshot reported on responses during lockdown four, in June 2021, and included comparisons with results from our previous snapshot.

Our survey and snapshots provide a general 'temperature check', rather than a conclusive view. This is because the survey sample is not always representative of the diverse backgrounds and circumstances of children and young people. Some questions are also optional, which can lead to lower response rates. It also relies on those surveyed feeling comfortable to answer honestly. It is important to remember every young person's experiences and circumstances are different.

For this latest snapshot, due to the survey being promoted at one particular school, many of our responses are from that school.

Our consultations

Between 19 June and 15 November we heard from **989** young people

Age

Age range of participants: **10** to **25** years

798
aged
18 and under

15
aged between
19 and 25

176
Unidentified

18%
identified as
culturally diverse

Disability/long term health

444 told us they have **a disability** or **long-term health condition.**

Of these, **363** gave **further details:**

85 described their condition as including **mental ill health** (short periods of stress, feeling down or depressed)

116 described themselves as having a **mental illness**, such as **anxiety, depression, eating disorder, borderline personality disorder**

26 described having a **physical disability**

55 had a **chronic health condition** such as **diabetes** or **asthma**

52 were **neurodiverse** and

29 described themselves as having **a learning disability**.

Gender

63.8%
female

32.3%
male

3.9%
non-binary

2.2%
described themselves in **another way**

1.6%
didn't want to say*

* The survey invites respondents to tick 'all that apply'. Hence the percentages do not add up to 100%.

Location

n=858
87%
Metro

n=28
3%
Regional

n=101
10%
Not provided

1.6%
identified as
Aboriginal

Living situation

945
(95.5%) at home with parent or parents

4
Foster care

16
Kinship care

9
On their own

11
with a friend or partner

**1**
residential care

3
homeless

Summary

Key themes

- Although the proportion of children and young people reporting feeling either 'terrible' or 'bad' was lower than reported during previous lockdowns, their struggles with poor mental health as a result of COVID-19 was again a dominant theme. Descriptions included feelings of anxiety, depression and loneliness as well as loss of motivation and energy due to the length of the lockdowns.

- Children and young people were particularly concerned about the impacts of COVID-19 and multiple lockdowns on their education, particularly those doing VCE.

- Some children and young people told us that they didn't feel safe at home due to family violence, and others felt unsafe out in the community due to the virus and sometimes due to bullying and harassment.

- Children and young people told us that they are very concerned about their future, including what will happen to them because of the pandemic, as well as due to climate change.

- Children and young people asked to be involved in decisions and processes around recovery from the pandemic.

- Children and young people said they wanted better and more youth relevant information about COVID-19 and more activities for young people to do.

How are children and young people feeling overall?

Responses to 'how are you feeling overall?'

Terrible	Bad	Meh	Good	Great*
96	213	391	196	37
(10%)	(23%)	(42%)	(21%)	(4%)
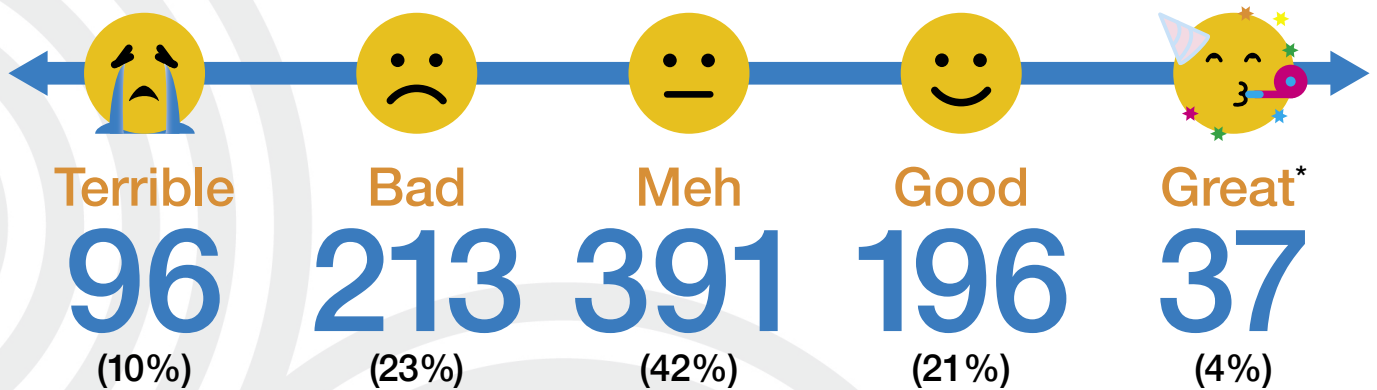
* *The total answers do not sum to 989 as it was not a compulsory question. There were 933 responses.*

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Mental health and wellbeing

Some children and young people reported feeling good or that their moods were improving over time and over the course of different lockdowns. However, three times as many children and young people reported negative feelings. They frequently used words such as anxious, stressed, depressed and lonely as well as describing themselves as tired or having limited energy.

Positives

Around one quarter of those who provided extra comments about how they were feeling, said they either felt good or that they had improved over the course of the lockdowns. Factors such as the support of family and friends were identified as helping.

> *During this time, sometimes I feel bored or like nothing will change. But then I realise how lucky I am to have the things I need with the people I love, even when everything is closed and when we can't go anywhere.*
> *(Child, 12 years old, female, culturally diverse background)*

A few young people reported feeling better because of a sense that things were improving, that lockdowns were over, and that lockdown had been a time for reflection.

> *I am feeling good, I am happy most of COVID-19 and it's lockdowns are over.*
> *(Young person with chronic health condition, 13 years old, female, culturally diverse background)*

> *But I am grateful that I had heaps of time to focus on myself and cut out toxic people from my life and being able to be at peace with myself whilst in my bedroom for months on end and I got to do things I couldn't have done without lockdown. And for that I do miss it. But I have come out of it stronger and more confident as a person and I do believe you have to go through some bad shit to get there.*
> *(Young person, 16 years old, female, culturally diverse background)*

Others reported that lockdown slowed down otherwise stressful lives:

> *I have been managing pretty well. Not having to be on the run all the time [has] been pretty good!*
> *(Young person, 13 years old, female, culturally diverse background)*

> *Online school is hard, but I look forward to painting and relaxing afterwards.*
> *(Young person, 13 years old, female)*

Challenges

Most children and young people described feeling stressed and anxious.

> *Being anxious and detesting the lack of freedom with a fiery passion. Feeling disconnected with an empty soul.*
> *(Young person, 13 years old, female, culturally diverse background)*

> *Constantly stressed and anxious. I hate being stuck at home and my depression sky rockets.*
> *(Young person, 18 years old, female, Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander)*

> *The constant changes, and not knowing when we can do different activities was quite stressful.*
> *(Young person with mental ill health, mental illness, neurodiverse, learning disability, 17 years old, female)*

> *During COVID-19 lockdown caused a lot of mental problems for me. My depression and anxiety got higher.*
> *(Young person, 15 years old, female)*

> *Lockdown hasn't been good in Melbourne. I really struggled last year missing out on the things I was looking for and only living near one of my friends and not being able to be a teenager. It took a massive toll on my mental health and I was at my worst.*
> *(Young person, 16 years old, female, culturally diverse background)*

Many children and young people talked about feelings of sadness and loneliness.

Well COVID has made me sad and has change me and being lock up for months at a time affects you as human are made to talk to people not to be stuff isolated for each other.
(Young person, 14 years old, male)

Stressed, isolated, lazy and a bit sad to be honest.
(Young person with mental ill health, 14 years old, female, culturally diverse background)

Now I have been feeling better after the multiple snap lockdowns but during the lockdowns, I was feeling tired, bored and lonely from the separation of family and friends.
(Young person, 14 years old, female)

It's made me feel a little sad when we have school lockdowns etc.
(Young person, 16 years old, male)

I've felt more distant from others in the past year, and the lack of interaction with friends and family has made me more quiet and seclusive as a person.
(Young person, 14 years old, non-binary)

Because of COVID-19 I have felt quite lonely at times as there were not many people to talk to in person.
(Child, 12 years old, female)

Disconnected from everyone. Empty, because lack of communication with people. Depressing because this is a serious time. Sad, because it's like stuff has been taken from us.
(Young person, 13 years old, female, culturally diverse background)

Isolation and loneliness has really impacted my health especially not being able to visit family overseas and being an only child.
(Young person, 13 years old, female, culturally diverse background)

Some described feelings of frustration, exhaustion and lack of motivation.

Sometimes I feel extremely down and unmotivated to do anything. I feel stuck often. This feeling usually passes. But it comes regularly and I don't have any outlet for it.
(Young person, 16 years old, female, culturally diverse background)

I feel like I've gotten into a pattern of laziness and lack of work ethics. Getting into a good routine and study habits again has proven to be quite hard. I also feel like my mental health deteriorated during the lockdown especially last year so just trying to focus on my mental health and being more kind to myself in general.
(Young person, 14 years old, female, culturally diverse background)

idk just really tired and angry and bored but also scared because things are changing really fast but also happy because idk I have good friends who make me feel happy so yeah lots of feelings and they annoy me.
(Young person with a chronic health condition, mental ill health, mental illness, 14 years old, female, culturally diverse background)

I just want it to end. I am exhausted by the ongoing uncertainty and ever-changing restrictions.
(Young person, 25 years old, female)

It's definitely really annoying as we have a lot of lock-downs, and we don't get to live freely and travel where we want.
(Child, 12 years old, female)

What children and young people said they need

Overall, children and young people spoke about the need for more mental health supports including more funding and access to mental health services, but also more education for parents and children and young people, so they are able to identify issues and respond to them.

> *Rather than only having days like 'R U Okay?' day we should have things that would educate young children maybe ages 11-12+ on how to spot mental illness for them or their friends because many children or teenagers may have a mental illness.*
> (Child, 12 years old, female)

> *I think there is an underestimate of how many young people struggle mentally, because a lot of people don't reach out, and isolate themselves from talking to other people and friends during lockdowns. So making schools check in with students and make sure their parents are too because most kids won't want to say how they're feeling.*
> (Young person, 14 years old, female)

> *I want to see more coverage of our issues. I see in depth analysis of the cost to business on the news every single day, with surface level touching of "mental health struggles" and I feel invalidated. I want to hear from young people and hear that I am not alone from young people.*
> (Young person, 16 years old, female, culturally diverse background)

Education

As with previous snapshots, some children and young people reported enjoying online learning, because they didn't enjoy face to face learning and found that online learning suited them better, or because they felt safer at home where they were not exposed to the virus. A far greater number, however, reported being unhappy with online learning.

Positives

In a small number of survey responses where children and young people left comments about education, they reported enjoying online learning, preferring staying at home to study.

> It doesn't bother me if I go into online learning.
> *(Child, 12 years old, male)*

> Have been happy because i hate school and i have loved lockdown.
> *(Young person, neurodiverse, 13 years old, male)*

> I'm feeling happy about the goals of the lockdowns and the reduced spread of the virus my education has taken a hard hit and it feels hard to catch up but ik it was for a greater course.
> *(Young person with mental ill health, neurodiverse, 16 years old, male)*

> During COVID I met many friends online and they make me feel very safe, I felt like in school and face to face speaking to friends there was many problems and I wasn't that happy.
> *(Child, 12 years old, female)*

Challenges

However, a significant majority of respondents expressed negative feelings in relation to online learning, particularly students at VCE level.

> Angry, upset, frustrated, can't do anything, school has been terrible, the most important years 11&12 have for most part been spent in lockdown. Parents aren't qualified to home school. I've lost motivation. I'm seeing a psychologist re ADHD. I feel restless.
> *(Young person, 18 years old, male, culturally diverse background)*

> Everyday sucks. I used to be a very high achieving student and go to a selective school. I no longer have motivation to study for exams despite all my efforts. Living with my family is hard emotionally. I no longer can express my frustrations without arguing with my sister, mum or dad. I rarely chat with my close friends as I don't have the energy. Sometimes I get bursts of energy but it is so unsustainable. I am jealous of the states that have not been going in and out of lockdown for 2 years. I am mad at the misinformed idiots ruining everyone else's chance of getting out. I am mad at the media as I feel invisible and my struggles feel unheard. I am mad that NSW gets to get out of lockdown so soon because our government didn't promote vaccination before lockdown 5 and 6. I am mad at myself for not being tough like everyone seems to be.
> *(Young person, 16 years old, female)*

> Being in year 12 is hard enough as it is, but COVID-19 has only exacerbated a very trying year. The constant back and forth between lockdown and freedom has been tough, putting pressure on me and my teachers to remain always flexible with assignments. Essentially, I have had to work twice as hard to make sure that I'm prepared for the worst.
> *(Young person, 17 years old, female)*

Annoyed with ruining the VCE year 12 system, moving SACs to be closer together limiting time to completely understand the subjects. If we're to stay home, keep us at home, if we are to be back at school, keep us at school. Completely understandable of it being all over the place, if need to be more cautious be cautious don't risk it.
(Young person, 17 years old, female)

Well the year 12s of 2021 feel extremely disadvantaged we had to endure COVID in year 11 and now also I'm year 12 and our study design was not even slightly altered I'm sorry but how is that even fair in the slightest?!?!?!?!
(Young person with mental ill health, mental illness, 18 years old, male)

I am scared that I am going to experience my high school years in and out of lockdown. That I will have my senior years (of high school) in lockdown. The way senior students have been treated since COVID is horrid. All going in lockdown, big changes, new hurdles and then school expects them and us to bounce back straight away? Give us exams straight away? Assignments? With no consideration for how hard things have been. I just wish that students weren't expected to get back to normal in such little time when adjusting to the 'new normal' had taken months.
(Young person with a chronic health condition, 14 years old, female, culturally diverse background)

Students also spoke about finding online learning tiring and about losing motivation due to repeat lockdowns.

When we go into remote learning, my eyes get sore from being on screens too much. It would be nice if we could have some time off during remote learning to give our eyes a rest.
(Young person, 13 years old, female, culturally diverse)

Not being in school has been really hard, it's been hard on friendships, our schooling and our families.
(Young person with a chronic health condition, 16 years old, male, culturally diverse background)

Exhausted and tired, not looking forward to anything or getting my hopes up because lockdown or restrictions constantly get in the way. …. It's just day by day at the moment doesn't really feel exciting or like I'm living, basically have missed out on the best years of my life.
(Young person, 17 years old, female, culturally diverse)

I just feel like the snap into and out of lock down is very quick and super hard to prepare for a load of SACs in sort periods of time due to only knowing the day before we are returning to online.
(Young person, 18 years old, female)

School is super stressful because of constantly being on edge about if a lockdown will occur.
(Young person, 18 years old, female)

Bored. I don't like missing out on meeting friends at school and weekends. There is a lot less to do.
(Child, 12 years old, male)

What children and young people said they need

Children and young people said they want decision-makers to take the impacts of COVID-19 into account in assessing course work and exams, particularly in relation to VCE students.

Remember how big of a toll it is taking particularly on VCE students, provide lenience and understanding to the struggles this has all caused for us. Provide support, we haven't received any and we need help and hope.
(Young person, 17 years old, female, culturally diverse background)

Reduce the VCE coursework or trim down the actual course due to the lockdown as even though it hasn't been a big lockdown, it has had an impact.
(Young person with a chronic health condition, mental ill health, 17 years old, male)

Being at a home for most of last year doing home based learning impacted the way we learn and schools and government need to take this into consideration and realise we can't go back to "normal" school education.
(Young person, 17 years old, female, culturally diverse background)

Some children and young people suggested the need to increase supports in schools in relation to mental health, including mental health services, while others suggested the need to foster a better understanding among teachers and school staff about mental health and the impacts of COVID-19 on students. Some respondents spoke of the need to support children and young people to understand and be sensitive to the impacts of COVID-19 on peers.

The government can educate teachers about what some students might be going through at home so that teachers understand the students and do what's best for them.
(Young person, 13 years old, female)

Having online webchats that are accessible to youth through school platforms or perhaps having a mental health class that facilitates a support system and people learning to be more open with themselves and comfortable with their peers. Something that will support us, as a growing youth with the pressures from society, would definitely be more social environment wise. During COVID-19, the government could also support young people by promoting healthy lifestyles and encouraging them.
(Young person, 14 years old, female, culturally diverse background)

The government needs to do way more to ensure that everyone is coping with the uncertainties of these times. They are doing very little to support school students especially those in VCE who are already dealing with added pressures.
(Young person, 18 years old, female)

Put in proper mental health services into schools and have more of an open discussion about mental health.
(Young person with mental ill health, mental illness, 15 years old, female, culturally diverse background)

No more lockdowns !!!!!!!
(Young person, 15 years old, female)

I want to see more coverage of our issues. I see in depth analysis of the cost to business on the news every single day, with surface level touching of "mental health struggles" and I feel invalidated. I want to hear from young people and hear that I am not alone from young people. This is probably a media thing though. Also GET US BACK TO SCHOOL SOON. OUTDOOR CLASSES? I DON'T KNOW. PLEASE I BEG YOU.
(Young person, 16 years old, female, culturally diverse background)

Getting back to school. It won't solve the traumas of lockdown that will linger forever but it gives me hope. I used to value taking care of myself and academics but I no longer have the energy due to it being the 6th lockdown. COVID has taken away everything and getting out of this hell hole is all I care about right now.
(Young person, 16 years old, female, culturally diverse)

Can't keep shutting schools down, absolutely destroying many people around me, I myself have not been affected as much this time around because I am comfortable at any stage, but the constant stop starting of lockdowns is killing way too many people. Mental health has been shattered for many young people and may not want to reach out to the services offered to the government. There has just been too much mess around everything going on in the last year or so and it has too change.
(Young person, 17 years old, male)

Safety and Security

Some children and young people identified feeling safer due to vaccine availability, while others expressed fear about the vaccine.

As with previous survey responses, there were concerning reports of children and young people feeling unsafe due to family violence. Other unsafe places included workplaces where some young people in employment experienced harassment and school, where some young people experienced bullying and discrimination.

Positives

A few young people commented on feeling safer as a result of the vaccine roll out.

There obviously have been many negatives during COVID such as the many lives lost, but there have also been positives during the lockdown. Lockdown wasn't just to keep us inside without anything to do or leaving some people jobless. The whole point of lockdown is to keep us safe and yes money is an important part of our life but our safety should be taken into more importance. Because what's the point to keep working outside if one has COVID.
(Young person, 15 years old, female, culturally diverse background)

Young people also nominated places and activities where they felt safe including at home with family, out with friends, doing sport, and in youth groups.

Challenges

Concerningly, the issue of family violence remained a feature in this survey with some young people reporting feeling unsafe at home due to increased tensions or violence between family members.

My family have been impacted by COVID-19. family violence and emergency services had to come to my house a few times but some stuff has been fixed since then and its getting better now.
(Young person, 13 years old, female)

Things at home have also been made worse as everyone is confined in a shared space. There is support, but nothing that will fix the problem because it's not like someone else can make my parents learn to live with each other. So, because of COVID-19, school has been demanding and home hasn't been the most welcoming place.
(Young person, 17 years old, female, culturally diverse background)

My parents are in an abusive relationship where my dad is the perpetrator. On the days when things are bad, home is tense, interactions with him are less than comfortable and sometimes they verge on threatening. In the past year we (myself, mum and my brother) have had to leave home twice and stay at a friend's house until we felt it was safe to come back.
(Young person, 17 years old, female, culturally diverse background)

A small number of respondents identified feeling unsafe when leaving home due to the virus.

I feel like now with this uncontrollable sickness, I feel unsafe in places where I don't know who is possibly carrying the disease and who is safe. In saying this, I also just feel distanced from school and the community due to constantly being in lockdown.
(Young person, 15 years old, female)

The community is COVID infected and getting out there feels like I'm jeopardizing months of staying at home away from COVID. It's mostly a mental thing rather than individual actions. People may be flouting restrictions and I don't want to risk getting COVID in any way.
(Young person, 16 years old, female, culturally diverse)

Young people in employment also reported feeling unsafe sometimes at work due to customer abuse or harassment – in one case this was to do with having to explain limits on products.

> *I've been verbally abused at work multiple times doing lockdown as I work in a supermarket and crazy customers have cussed me out due to having limits on products.*
> *(Young person, 17 years old, female, culturally diverse background)*

A few respondents identified feeling unsafe out of lockdown both in the community and school due to being a member of the LGBTQI+ community. They reported that COVID-19 had exacerbated that feeling because it increased feelings of not being safe.

> *Being queer in Australia is a constant struggle and with the addition of aggression due to COVID, anywhere that isn't my room doesn't feel very safe to me.*
> *(Young person with a chronic health condition, mental ill heath, mental illness, 16 years old, non-binary)*

What children and young people said they need

As in previous survey responses, children and young people asked for more youth relevant information about COVID-19.

> *I think it's extremely important that the government is relaying information regarding COVID-19 to children in child mind ways, where we are told info in ways that keep us safe, make us feel safe and in a way we can comprehend and not get us worried, information we can see and understand!*
> *(Young person, 16 years old, male)*

They also asked for more opportunities for young people to get together in a variety of ways.

> *PLEASE consider more creative festivals or opportunities for young people particularly in the south east community. E.g. arts centres, food stalls, hubs, outdoor movie sessions. To enable young people to connect face to face and have fun.*
> *(Young person, 17 years old, female, culturally diverse background)*

> *I think if the government wants to keep the younger parts of the population happy they need to let us do things like sport and hang out with friends.*
> *(Young person with a chronic health condition, 13 years old, female, culturally diverse background)*

The future and having a say

Overwhelmingly, children and young people's comments about the future expressed frustration and anxiety due to uncertainty about what that future would look like.

> *I am … concerned about the future. I'm not really sure about things and I'm annoyed how I have to go through this uncertainty and annoyance during my teenage years when the government and adults didn't have to when they were our age.*
> *(Young person, 16 years old, female, culturally diverse background)*

> *Young people are not going to be able to experience things that their parents or older family members have. We are not getting a proper education, we aren't allowed to play community sport, socialize with our friends, have family members in our house and at this rate will not be able to travel after finishing school. At this rate the rest of our lives will be living the same day over and over again. Going to work and going home.*
> *(Young person, 17 years old, female)*

> *I was supposed to start a new apprenticeship, but because lockdown forced construction work to stop, I am unable to start. I'm anxious about the future and what my job prospects will look like. At this current point, I fundamentally have no hope for the future- it seems so bleak.*
> *(Young person, 20 years old, male)*

What matters to children and young people

Children and young people were asked what mattered to them as part of the survey.

Given the difficulties faced over the past two years, some children and young people were focussed on their own mental health and recovery.

> *Trying to hold myself together through this chaos.*
> *(Young person with a mental illness, neurodiverse, 16 years old, male)*

> *I feel I need to make sure I am okay before I continue on other parts of my life.*
> *(Young person, 16 years old, female)*

Many young people touched on global issues, and in particular climate change as something that mattered to them.

> *Climate change is an existential threat to children and young people. The COVID-19 pandemic has only exacerbated pre-existing issues that we cannot simply turn a blind-eye to. In the way, it feels even more necessary to address this now. It makes me really worry about my future and who we can possible progress as a society.*
> *(Young person, 18 years old, female)*

> *This doesn't have ANYTHING to do with COVID-19, but could you please set some rules in place for our other world catastrophes (after COVID is dealt with) and take action in things like Pollution, Climate change, animal endangerment, poverty etc. etc. ?*
> *(Child, 12 years old, female)*

> *Focus on the environment more and our future rather than promoting fossil fuels and coals just for money.*
> *(Young person with a chronic health condition, 17 years old, female)*

Support our beliefs and take action on problems we feel strongly about like climate change, don't just ignore all our protests, actually take action and do something to help our future rather than keep killing our planet.
(Young person, 17 years old, female)

Climate change is an existential threat to children and young people. The COVID-19 pandemic has only exacerbated pre-existing issues that we cannot simply turn a blind-eye to. In the way, it feels even more necessary to address this now. It makes me really worry about my future and who we can possible progress as a society.
(Young person, 18 years old, female)

A small number of responses included advice about ensuring children and young people be involved in decisions impacting them.

Involve children and young people in the designing phase of the recovery from the pandemic. It offers a sense of control and agency for young people as ultimately, they are the experts in their own lives. The way Australia recovers will be deciding their future and they should therefore have a role to play in decision-making.
(Young person, 18 years old, female)

Give children more of an opinion on things that do affect us. It feels like everything we say is ignored.
(Young person, 13 years old, male)

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