



2021

THE ROLE OF MEDIA DURING THE PANDEMIC:

CONNECTION, CREATIVITY, AND LEARNING
FOR TWEENS AND TEENS

COMMON SENSE IS GRATEFUL FOR THE GENEROUS SUPPORT AND
UNDERWRITING THAT FUNDED THIS RESEARCH REPORT:

Carnegie Corporation of New York

Craig Newmark Philanthropies

A LETTER FROM OUR FOUNDER

As the coronavirus pandemic wears on, we cannot overlook its impact on our kids. While 2021 saw the return of in-person schooling, many aspects of kids' social lives remain disrupted. Worries about just how much screen time kids have these days have dominated the conversation around media use during the pandemic. But we continue to see just how vital media of all types—entertainment, social, creative—has been for our kids to maintain some sense of normalcy during a decidedly not-normal time.

Our latest report from the Common Sense Census—*The Role of Media During the Pandemic: Connection, Creativity, and Learning for Tweens and Teens*—took a closer look at how tweens and teens have been using entertainment media to keep their connections and their creativity alive when their worlds are so disrupted. And as it turns out, they're using screen media to strategically improve their moods and stay social. That includes using media to create and share with others, and to keep learning, even outside of remote school. Here is some of what they told us:

- 84% of tweens and teens reported they used entertainment media during the pandemic to boost their moods, 81% to stay connected to friends and family, and 91% simply to have fun.
- 70% of tweens and teens played video games with others to connect, 56% hung out with others on video chat, and 40% watched TV shows or movies together online during the pandemic.
- 78% of tweens and teens used a digital device to learn to do something they were interested in during the pandemic.
- Media was even more important to Black kids than to White kids for staying connected with friends (58% vs. 45%) and for keeping their moods up during the pandemic (56% vs. 43%).
- Boys and girls didn't participate in activities equally. Boys played video games online with friends more often than girls (71% said once a month), while girls participated in video hangouts with friends more often (41% said once a month).

This report only reinforces the value of what we do at Common Sense Media—elevating the very best of media by flagging the shows, games, apps, and books that engage, inspire, and empower. Tweens and teens are leaning on screen media for support during a truly difficult time; as parents, caregivers, and educators, we should be careful not to demonize their screen use. And it also serves as a reminder that when kids turn to media, they need to enter a space that is safe, healthy, free of hate speech and misinformation, and representative of the unique stories, faces, and cultures we see in the world.

But the data also shows that no matter how engaging media has been for kids during this time, it has also reinvigorated their desire and appreciation for connecting in person. Nearly half of the kids in this survey reported they wanted to spend time with friends in person more often than they did before the pandemic, and the number-one answer when asked about one upside of the pandemic was more time spent with family.

As we head into a 2022 that will hopefully see continued recovery from the pandemic and more opportunities to make a safe return to some aspects of pre-pandemic life, it should be reassuring for parents, teachers, and caregivers to see that kids are ready to realign their balance of media to make room for other aspects of a healthy life. And as always, we will be here to support them every step of the way.



James P. Steyer, founder and CEO

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jim Steyer". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Credits

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INTRODUCTION

WHEN THE CORONAVIRUS FIRST hit U.S. shores, young people across the country were abruptly ordered to shelter in place. For many, this meant no more going off to school each day; no more playgrounds, playdates, birthday parties, or sleepovers; no more going out with friends for ice cream or boba tea or fast food; no movies, concerts, soccer games, or proms. With so much taken away, the focus shifted to what remained: television, video games, the internet. In other words, screens.

As a nation, we went through a wave of different responses to the changing role of screens in our lives: First we felt relief that at least we had TV shows and online videos to watch and games to play, then gratitude that we could use FaceTime or Zoom to connect with friends and family members. Then there was concern about how our screen time had rocketed into a new dimension. For many, that was followed by screen fatigue and an increasing desire to get out and do things in the real world again, with real people. In particular, much concern has been raised about young people's burgeoning screen use and declining interpersonal interactions during the pandemic as well as the types of lasting effects these changes could have.

This survey gives voice to young people directly to explore the role of media in their pandemic lives: for entertainment, for connection, and for personal growth and creative expression. We dive into the details of *how* tweens and teens used media to build new ways of socializing with their peers, and to keep learning and growing. The survey also explores young people's own concerns about whether they spend too much time with screens, and whether they think their experiences during the pandemic will leave them wanting to continue to socialize online or more eager for interpersonal socialization face-to-face.

We conducted the survey one year into the pandemic in the United States, in April and May 2021—a time when students had had a year's worth of real-world restrictions and increasingly online social lives, but could also begin to see the light at the end of the tunnel and envision what their post-pandemic lives might look like. We interviewed a nationally representative, probability-based sample of more than 1,300 young people age 8 to 18 years old. In addition to collecting quantitative data on their views and experiences, we also asked them to tell us, in their own words, about their individual experiences with media over the previous year. We hope this report provides not only the data, but also the color and texture to help understand the role of media in young people's lives during a truly unprecedented time in our nation's history.



MUSE

MUSE

METHODOLOGY

THIS REPORT PRESENTS THE results of a nationally-representative, probability-based online survey of 1,318 U.S. young people age 8 to 18 years old, conducted from May 7 to June 3, 2021. The project was directed by Michael Robb, senior director of research at Common Sense Media, and Vicky Rideout, president of VJR Consulting. The survey was administered by Ipsos, using their KnowledgePanel[®], a probability-based Web panel designed to be representative of the United States. The survey was offered in English or Spanish. A copy of the complete questionnaire is provided in a separate chapter of this report.

Survey sample

The survey was conducted online among a nationally representative, probability-based sample of 1,318 U.S. young people age 8 to 18 years old, using the Ipsos KnowledgePanel[®]. African American respondents were oversampled to ensure a total sample size of 200 respondents. Unlike the members of most other online survey panels, KnowledgePanel[®] members were recruited using probability-based methods such as address-based sampling and random-digit-dial telephone calls. Households that were not already online were provided with a device and internet access for the purpose of participating in surveys. The use of a probability sample means the results are substantially more generalizable to the U.S. population than are results based on so-called “convenience” samples. Convenience samples include only respondents who are already online and who volunteer through word of mouth or advertising to participate in surveys. Parental permission was obtained for all respondents.

Weighting. The use of probability-based recruitment methods for the KnowledgePanel[®] is designed to ensure that the resulting sample properly represents the population of the United States, including geographically and demographically (e.g., age, gender, race/ethnicity, income). Study-specific post-stratification weights were applied once the data was finalized, to adjust for any survey nonresponse and to ensure the proper distributions

for the specific target population (in this case, 8- to 18-year-olds). Geodemographic distributions for 8- to 18-year-olds were obtained from the U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Survey (March 2019).

Outliers. Seven respondents provided responses that were not deemed credible or valid and were removed from the sample as outliers.

Margin of error. The margin of error for the full sample is +/- 3.2%. The margin of error for subgroups is higher.

Presentation of data in the text

Statistical significance. Where relevant, differences among demographic groups have been tested for statistical significance. Unless otherwise noted, findings are referred to in the text in a comparative manner (e.g., “more than,” “less than”) only if the differences are statistically significant at the level of $p < .05$. In tables where statistical significance has been tested, superscripts indicate whether results differ at $p < .05$. Items that share a common superscript or that do not have a superscript do not differ significantly.

Rounding. Percentages will not always add up to 100 due to rounding or multiple response options, or because those who marked “don’t know” or did not respond are not included.

Descriptions of demographic groups

Income categories. For the purposes of this report, lower-income families are defined as those with incomes of less than \$35,000 a year; middle-income families are those earning from \$35,000 to \$99,999 a year; and higher-income families are those earning \$100,000 a year or more.

Age groups. The report uses the word “twens” to describe the age group of 8- to 12-year-olds and the words “teens” or “teenagers” to refer to the age group of 13- to 18-year-olds.

Race/ethnicity. The term “White” refers to non-Hispanic Whites. “Black” refers to any respondents who self-identify as non-Hispanic and Black. And the term Hispanic/Latino is used to refer to those who self-identify as Hispanic. Where findings are broken

out by race/ethnicity, results are presented for White, Black, and Hispanic/Latino tweens and teens; respondents in the “other” category are included in the total sample but not in findings that are broken out by race, due to the small sample size.

TABLE A. U.S. benchmarks and demographic profile of survey sample

	Benchmark	Unweighted		Weighted	
		n	Percent	n	Percent
Age					
• 8- to 12-year-olds	46%	549	42%	605	46%
• 13- to 18-year-olds	54%	769	58%	713	54%
Gender					
• Boys	51%	669	51%	673	51%
• Girls	49%	642	49%	640	49%
Race/ethnicity					
• White	50%	672	51%	662	50%
• Hispanic	25%	274	21%	335	25%
• Black	14%	206	16%	180	14%
• Other/2+ races	11%	166	13%	141	11%
Income*					
• <\$25,000	12%	154	12%	157	12%
• \$25,000 to \$49,999	18%	223	17%	232	18%
• \$50,000 to \$74,999	16%	214	16%	217	17%
• \$75,000+	54%	720	55%	711	54%

*Income breaks used in data analysis were less than \$35,000, \$35,000-\$99,999, and \$100,000 or more.

Source: March 2019 American Community Survey, U.S. Census Bureau.

1. Entertainment screen media played an important role in helping young people make it through the pandemic.

About half of all young people said that screen media, such as TV shows, movies, video games, and social media, were “very important” to them for having fun, staying connected to friends and family, and keeping their moods up during the pandemic (see Figure A). This survey is a reminder not to overlook the very basic role of media in simply helping tweens and teens get through each day, providing occasional respites of entertainment or humor.

2. During the pandemic, almost four in five 8- to 18-year-olds went online to learn—outside of school.

Young people used digital tools as a way to keep learning, creating, and sharing their creativity and interests during the pandemic. Seventy-eight percent went online to learn how to do something they were interested in (see Figure B). Half (53%) used digital devices to actually create, such as making photographs, editing videos, or making digital art or music. And nearly four in 10 (39%) used digital media to share something they had created or accomplished.

Among the things 8- to 18-year-olds learned how to do online during the pandemic ...

- Crochet
- Juggle
- Do nail art
- Do needle felting
- Build a Lego car
- Build a computer
- Practice yoga
- Make origami
- Do BMX tricks
- Learn a new dance
- Fix a go-cart
- Do card tricks
- Make jewelry
- Build a playhouse
- Make doll furniture
- Make a worm farm
- Make a sweet potato pie
- Make homemade frosting
- Build a marble run
- Sew a stuffed turtle

FIGURE A. Importance of media to tweens and teens

During the pandemic, how important have media like TV shows, movies, video games, and social media been to you for ...

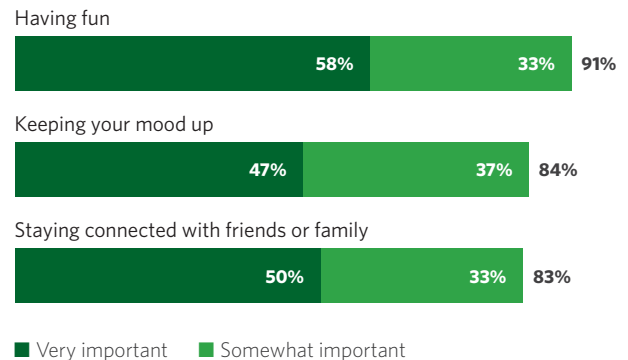
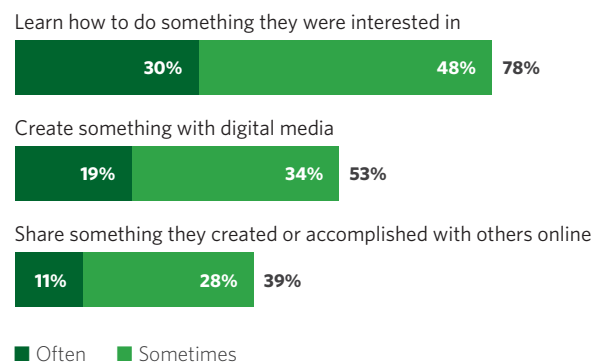


FIGURE B. Using digital media for creative expression

Percent of 8- to 18-year-olds who used digital devices during the pandemic to ...

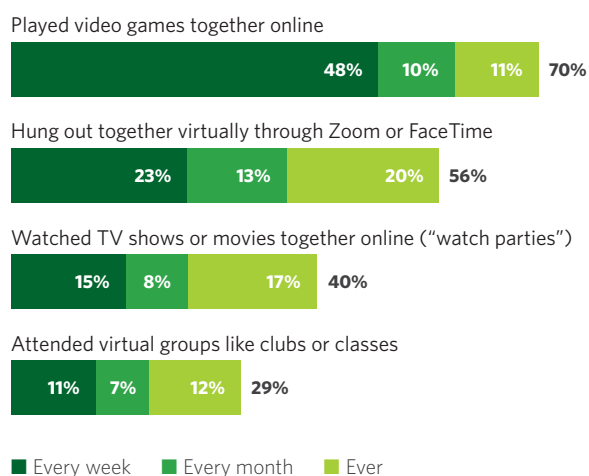


3. Playing video games together was the top way that young people hung out with friends online during the pandemic, but there were significant differences in the ways boys and girls connected.

Many teens and tweens took advantage of new ways of socializing with friends online (see Figure C). Seventy percent played video games with friends online, half (56%) used video hangouts to get together with friends, and 40% had virtual watch parties (getting together online to watch movies or TV shows at the same time). Boys and girls did not do these activities equally, however. More than seven in 10 (71%) boys played video games with friends online at least once a month, compared to 41% of girls. Perhaps more starkly, a third (32%) of boys played online games every day, compared to 9% of girls. Girls were more likely than boys to participate in video hangouts with friends (40% did so at least once a month, compared with 31% of boys), and they also participated more often than boys in virtual clubs or non-school-related classes online (20% did so at least once a month vs. 15% of boys).

FIGURE C. Socializing online during the pandemic

Percent of 8- to 18-year-olds who ...



4. Black tweens and teens made the most use of virtual socializing, learning, and creating during the pandemic, and White young people the least, with their Hispanic/Latino peers in the middle.

Media was even more important to Black kids than to White kids for staying connected with friends (58% vs. 45% said "very" important) and for keeping their moods up during the pandemic (56% vs. 43% said "very" important). Black tweens and teens were twice as likely as their White peers to participate in online watch parties with friends (34% vs. 17% did so at least once a month) and were more likely to participate in video hangouts with friends (42% vs. 33% at least once a month). Twenty-seven percent of Black tweens and teens played video games with friends online every day during the pandemic, compared with 20% of White young people. And Black tweens and teens were more likely to go online to learn how to do something they were interested in (39% vs. 26% of Whites), create digital art or music (28% vs. 18%) and share something online that they had created or accomplished (16% vs. 9%). In all of these cases, the responses of Hispanic/Latino young people fell in between their White and Black peers.

5. The majority (52%) of 8- to 18-year-olds said they spend the right amount of time on screen media (outside of school), but 41% felt they spend too much time on screens (and 7% said too little).

The proportion of young people who said they think they spend too much time with screens didn't vary significantly by gender, race/ethnicity, or household income. Teenagers were more likely than tweens to say they spend too much time on screens outside of schoolwork (44% vs. 37%).

6. Tweens (age 8 to 12) were more likely than teens (age 13 to 18) to use media during the pandemic for fun and entertainment, but less likely than teens to socialize online.

Tweens enjoyed using all types of media more than teens (except for social media), including watching television (48% enjoy it “a lot,” compared with 31% of teens), reading (42% enjoy “a lot” vs. 30% of teens), and playing mobile games (53% vs. 31% enjoy it “a lot”). All told, 61% of tweens said media was “very important” to them for having fun during the pandemic, compared with 55% of teens. But tweens were less likely than teens to socialize online through functions like virtual watch parties (15% did at least once a month during the pandemic, vs. 29% of teens), online groups or clubs (15% vs. 20% did at least once a month), or daily online gaming (17% vs. 23%). Indeed, 30% of tweens said that after the pandemic, they want to get together with friends online less often than they did before (compared to 24% of teens).

7. Tweens and teens said spending more time with family was an upside to the pandemic.

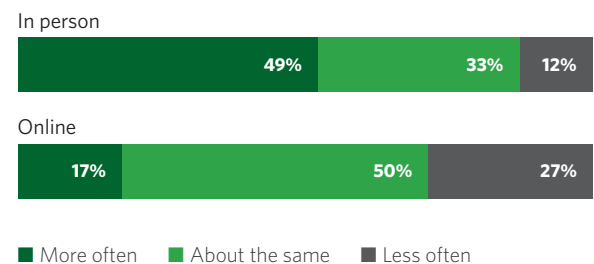
When asked “What’s one thing about your life, if any, that changed for the better during the pandemic?” the most common response—by far—was getting to spend more time with their family. Nearly a third (32%) offered some version of this response, ranging from a simple “more family time,” to a heartfelt “Spending time with my family has been great.” Respondents mentioned having more family meals, game nights, and deeper conversations. “Actually bonding with my parents,” was the main benefit for one young person, and “getting closer to my family” for another.

8. Despite their creative use of digital media to stay connected during the pandemic, most tweens and teens are ready to get back to in-person socialization and want to spend even more time together with friends than they did before.

About half (49%) said they want to hang out with friends in person even more often than they did before the pandemic, while 12% said they wanted to get together face-to-face less often than before (see Figure D).

FIGURE D. In person and online socialization after the pandemic

Proportion of 8- to 18-year-olds who say they want to get together with friends in person or online “more” or “less” often than they did before the pandemic

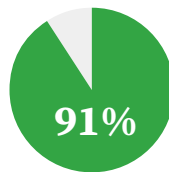


Note: Bars don't sum to 100% due to rounding and the exclusion of those who didn't respond to the question.

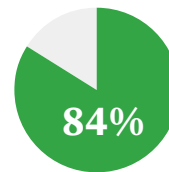
The Role of Media During the Pandemic: Connection, Creativity, and Learning for Tweens and Teens

Entertainment screen media has played an important role in helping young people make it through the pandemic.

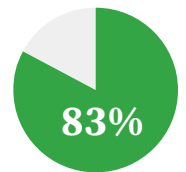
Percent of 8- to 18-year-olds who say that during the pandemic, media like TV, movies, video games, and social media has been important for:



Having fun



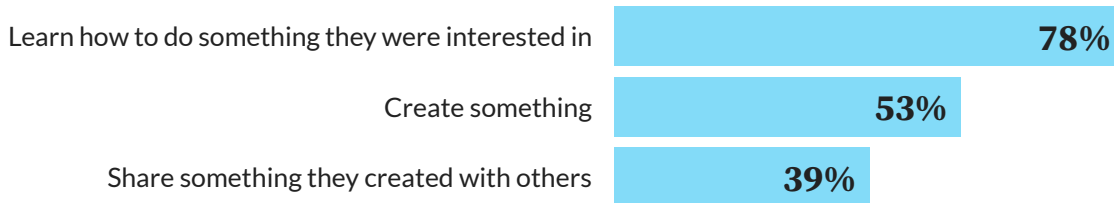
Keeping my mood up



Staying connected with family and friends

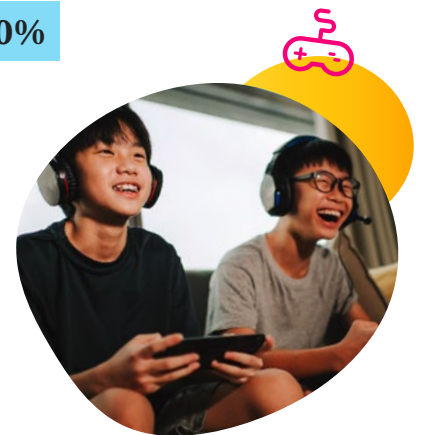
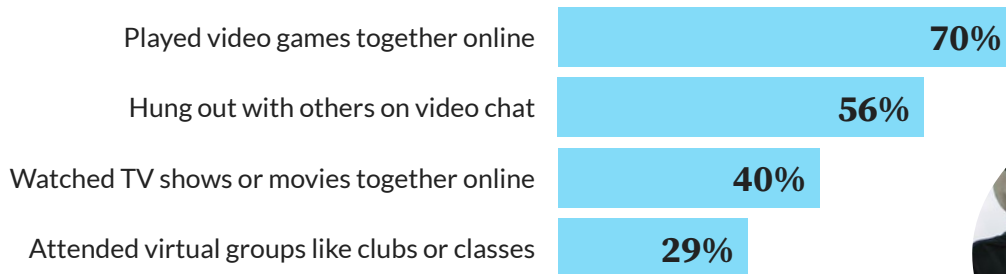
Teens and tweens use digital media to learn and create outside of school ...

During the pandemic, percent of 8- to 18-year-olds who have often or sometimes used digital devices to:



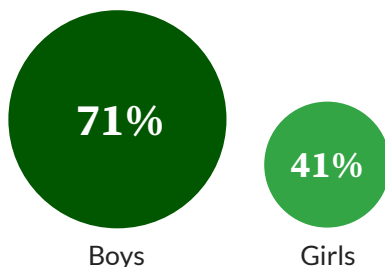
... and spend time socializing with others online (especially playing video games)!

During the pandemic, percent of 8- to 18-year-olds who have:

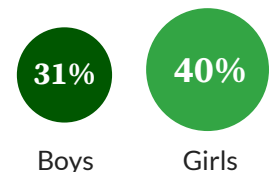


Boys and girls have not participated in activities equally.

Percent who have played video games with friends online at least once a month:

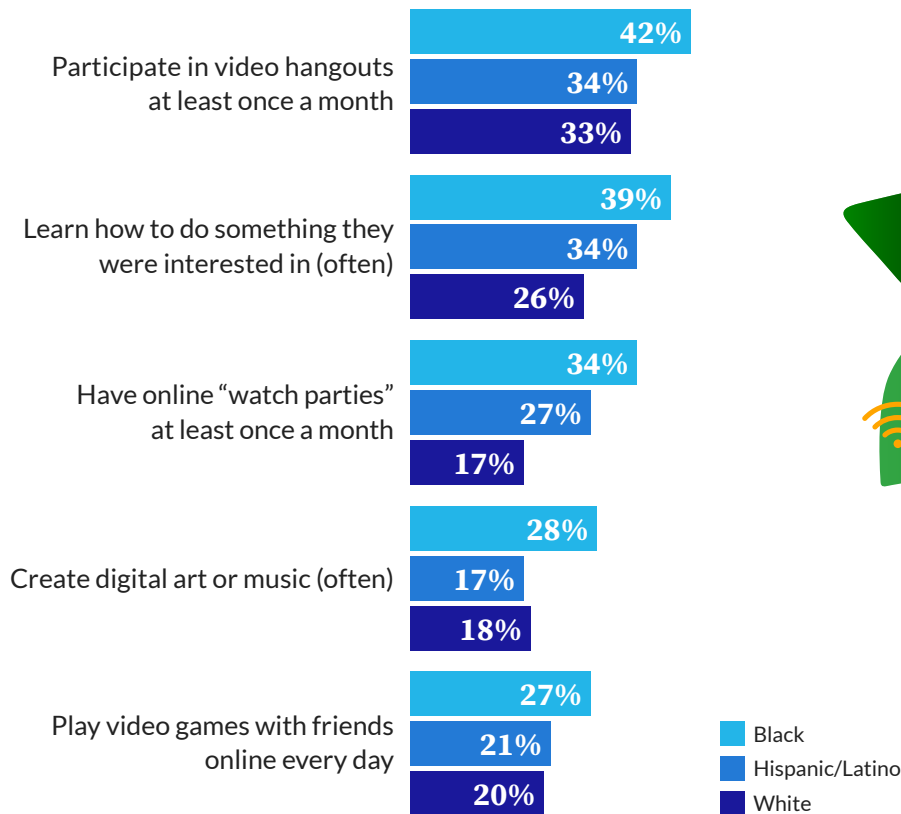


Percent who have participated in video hangouts with friends at least once a month:



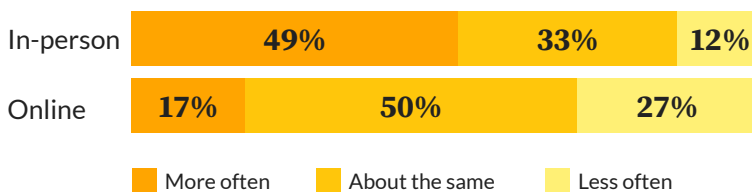
Digital media has played an especially important role for Black tweens and teens in the pandemic.

Percent of 8- to 18-year-olds who have gone online to:



Many tweens and teens want to spend even more time socializing with friends in person now than they did before the pandemic.

Percent of 8- to 18-year-olds who want to get together with friends in-person or online "more" or "less" often than they did before the pandemic:



Note: Bars don't sum to 100% due to rounding and the exclusion of those who didn't respond to the question.

A sample of things tweens and teens said they learned to do online during the pandemic:

- Build a computer
- Practice yoga
- Do needle felting
- Make a worm farm
- Learn a dance
- Make slime
- Do BMX tricks
- Make homemade frosting
- Tie-dye clothes
- Build a playhouse
- Do card tricks
- Wash a rabbit
- Sew a stuffed turtle
- Make doll furniture
- Juggle
- Crochet
- Build a marble run
- Play the ukulele
- Find morel mushrooms
- Make stop-motion videos
- Fix a go-cart
- Build a Lego car
- Drop into a skate bowl without crashing

An unexpected upside to the pandemic? More time with family was the #1 thing tweens and teens said changed for the better.*



*As reported in an open-ended question.

Methodology: The data in this report is from a nationally representative, probability-based online survey of 1,318 young people (age 8 to 18) in the United States. The survey was conducted from May 7 through June 3, 2021 by Ipsos Public Affairs for Common Sense Media, using Ipsos's KnowledgePanel®. The survey was offered in English or Spanish.

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THE IMPORTANCE OF MEDIA FOR FUN, SOCIALIZATION, AND MOOD

DURING THE FIRST YEAR of the pandemic, as young people's worlds narrowed to the confines of their homes and the content on their screens, entertainment media became a linchpin in their collective effort to find pleasure, maintain connection with other humans, and keep their moods up. About half of all 8- to 18-year-olds said they consider media to have been "very" important to them for having fun (58%), staying connected with friends or family (50%), and keeping their moods up (47%) during the pandemic (see Figure 1).

The importance of media was high across all age groups, races, income levels, and among both boys and girls. Tweens (age 8 to 12) were even more likely than teens (age 13 to 18) to say media were "very" important for having fun during the pandemic (61% vs. 55%), perhaps because their options were even more limited than those of older kids. The social aspects of media during the pandemic were even more important to girls than to boys, with 55% saying media was "very" important for staying connected with friends and family, compared to 45% of boys. Black young people were the most likely to cite media's importance in keeping their moods up during the pandemic (56% vs. 43% for Whites and 49% for Hispanics/Latinos), and both Black and Hispanic/Latino young people were more likely than their White peers to say media was "very" important for staying connected (58% and 53% respectively, compared with 45% of Whites).

FIGURE 1. Importance of media during the pandemic

During the pandemic, how important have media like TV shows, movies, video games, and social media been to you for ...

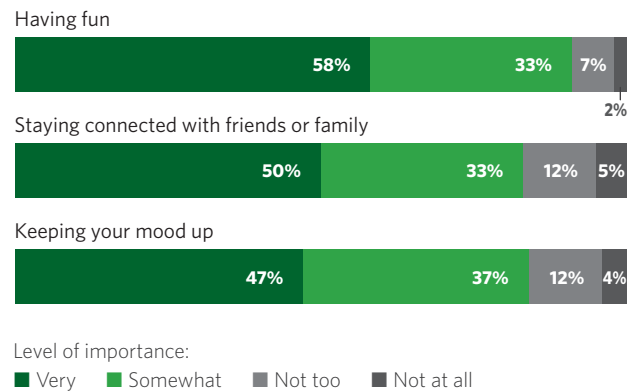


TABLE 1. Importance of media during the pandemic, by demographics

Percent of 8- to 18-year-olds who say media was "very" important for ...	All	Age		Gender		Race/Ethnicity			Income*		
		8 to 12	13 to 18	Male	Female	White	Black	Hispanic/Latino	Lower	Middle	Higher
Having fun	58%	61% ^a	55% ^b	57%	59%	58%	59%	59%	61%	57%	58%
Staying connected with friends or family	50%	53%	48%	45% ^a	55% ^b	45% ^a	58% ^b	53% ^b	50%	50%	49%
Keeping their mood up	47%	49%	45%	45%	48%	43% ^a	56% ^b	49%	51%	47%	44%

* Lower is defined as \$34,999 or less in annual household income, middle is \$35,000-\$99,999, and higher is \$100,000 or more.

Note: Items with different superscripts (a, b) differ from one another at the level of $p < .05$.

Types of media used and enjoyed by tweens and teens during the pandemic. Although young people engaged with a wide variety of media during the pandemic, online videos were clearly the most popular form of entertainment—73% of 8- to 18-year-olds said they watched them every day, and 65% of those who watched said they enjoyed them “a lot” (see Table 2). A majority (59%) also said they watched television every day, although their enjoyment was lower (39% of viewers enjoyed it “a lot”).

There were some wide variations in the types of media young people used most often during the pandemic. Tweens were more likely than teens to watch television and play mobile video games, while teens were more likely to watch online videos and use social media. A majority (59%) of teens said they used social media every day; this is far higher than the 17% of 8- to 12-year-olds who said they were daily social media users, but it is perhaps still surprising that nearly one in five of the 12-and-under age group claims to use social media every day.

Likewise, girls and boys gravitated to different types of screens as well. Nearly half (47%) of girls said they used social media every day, compared with 33% of boys. But the biggest difference was with video games: Forty-five percent of boys said they played video games on a console, computer, or portable device every day, compared to just 12% of girls.

As mentioned above, online videos provided the most enjoyment to those who watched, with 65% of viewers saying they enjoy them “a lot” (see Table 3 on page 9). Video games also brought a lot of enjoyment to those who played, with 56% saying they enjoyed playing “a lot.” Enjoyment was much higher among boys than girls (72% of boys enjoyed playing “a lot,” compared with 35% of female players). On the other hand, girls took more pleasure from social media and reading than boys, with 53% of users saying they enjoyed social media “a lot,” twice the rate as male users (25%), and 43% of readers saying they enjoy reading “a lot” (vs. 27% of male readers). Watching online videos was incredibly popular across the board, but especially among lower-income young people (75% enjoyed a lot vs. 62% of middle- and higher-income young people). Reading brought most enjoyment to young people from higher-income families, with 41% of readers in higher-income households saying they enjoyed it “a lot,” compared to 25% of readers in lower-income homes.

TABLE 2. Types of media used during the pandemic, by demographics

Percent who engaged in ... “every day”	All	Age		Gender		Race/Ethnicity			Income*		
		8 to 12	13 to 18	Male	Female	White	Black	Hispanic/ Latino	Lower	Middle	Higher
Watching online videos	73%	66% ^a	79% ^b	72%	74%	70% ^a	77%	77% ^b	78% ^a	73%	71% ^b
Watching television	59%	65% ^a	55% ^b	56% ^a	63% ^b	55% ^a	73% ^b	63% ^c	58%	64% ^a	54% ^b
Playing mobile games [†]	42%	47% ^a	38% ^b	51% ^a	33% ^b	38% ^a	55% ^b	43% ^a	49%	44%	38%
Using social media	40%	17% ^a	59% ^b	33% ^a	47% ^b	38%	38%	41%	40%	39%	41%
Playing video games [‡]	29%	26%	31%	45% ^a	12% ^b	27% ^a	37% ^b	31%	37% ^a	32% ^a	22% ^b
Reading for enjoyment	28%	37% ^a	21% ^b	23% ^a	34% ^b	28%	26%	30%	20% ^a	28% ^b	33% ^c
Listening to podcasts	5%	3% ^a	8% ^b	6%	5%	4%	6%	6%	5%	6%	5%
Using virtual reality	4%	3%	4%	5%	3%	2% ^a	5% ^b	6% ^b	4% ^{ab}	5% ^a	2% ^b

* Lower is defined as \$34,999 or less in annual household income, middle is \$35,000-\$99,999, and higher is \$100,000 or more.

[†] Playing video games on a smartphone or tablet.

[‡] Playing video games on a console, portable player, or computer.

Note: Items with different superscripts (a, b, c) differ from one another at the level of $p < .05$.

TABLE 3. Enjoyment of media during the pandemic, by demographics

Among those who do each type of activity, percent who enjoy it "a lot"	All	Age		Gender		Race/Ethnicity			Income*		
		8 to 12	13 to 18	Male	Female	White	Black	Hispanic/Latino	Lower	Middle	Higher
Watching online videos	65%	69% ^a	62% ^b	64%	65%	63%	67%	67%	75% ^a	62% ^b	62% ^b
Playing video games [†]	56%	61% ^a	52% ^b	72% ^a	35% ^b	56%	54%	63%	60% ^a	59% ^a	52% ^b
Playing mobile games [‡]	41%	53% ^a	31% ^b	46% ^a	35% ^b	40% ^a	52% ^b	38% ^a	44%	42%	38%
Using social media	40%	32% ^a	42% ^b	25% ^a	53% ^b	39%	47%	39%	44% ^a	43% ^a	34% ^b
Watching television	39%	48% ^a	31% ^b	36% ^a	42% ^b	35% ^a	52% ^b	42% ^b	37%	41%	37%
Reading	35%	42% ^a	30% ^b	27% ^a	43% ^b	37% ^a	28% ^b	36%	25% ^a	34% ^b	41% ^c
Using virtual reality	28%	36% ^a	24% ^b	38% ^a	15% ^b	32%	§	§	§	30%	30%
Listening to podcasts	14%	16%	13%	15%	12%	15%	§	9%	§	14%	15%

* Lower is defined as \$34,999 or less in annual household income, middle is \$35,000-\$99,999, and higher is \$100,000 or more.

[†] Playing video games on a console, portable player, or computer.

[‡] Playing video games on a smartphone or tablet.

[§] Sample size too small for reliable results.

Note: Items with different superscripts (a, b, c) differ from one another at the level of $p < .05$.

Time spent with media: too much, too little, or just right. Amid the public concerns about the amount of time young people were spending on screens during the pandemic, we asked tweens and teens themselves what they thought about their screen time. Not counting the time they spent using screens for school, a majority of 8- to 18-year-olds said they think their screen time is just right, but 41% felt they spend too much time on screens (and 7% said too little). Interestingly, the proportion of young people who said they think they spend too much time with screens didn't vary significantly by gender, race/ethnicity, or household income. Teens were more likely than tweens to say they spend too much time on screens outside of schoolwork (44% vs. 37%).

One young person in the survey said that at first she spent lots of time on her phone, but then cut back her screen time in favor of physical activity: "Since quarantine started, I would spend more time watching TikTok because I was bored, but eventually I got bored of the internet and I started doing workouts at home ... so now instead of being on the phone I work out at home or go to the gym with my brother." But another teen (a 16-year-old boy) commented that "I kind of wasted my [time during the] pandemic, spending all my time playing video games and watching movies."

On the other hand, a number of young people mentioned that one benefit of the pandemic was being able to spend more time with screens without parental interference. Some even got a Switch or a new phone thanks to the pandemic, which they were grateful for. When asked about any possible silver linings to the pandemic, one 13-year-old girl wrote "more screen time" and a 14-year-old boy answered, "I got to play video games more because we only had school two days a week."



SOCIALIZING ONLINE DURING THE PANDEMIC

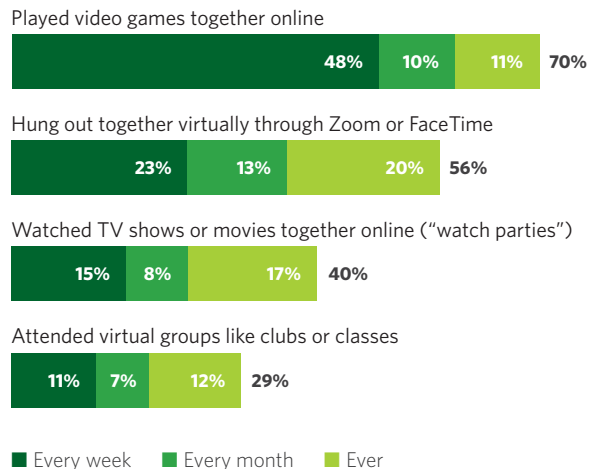
ONE OF THE CONCERNS about the enduring impact of having to shelter at home for a year or more is how the sudden lack of face-to-face contact with peers affected young people. This survey sheds light on some of the many ways tweens and teens managed to hang out together—virtually.

Seventy percent of all 8- to 18-year-olds socialized by playing video games with friends online, including nearly half (48%) who did so at least once a week (see Figure 2). Half (56%) spent time with groups of friends over video apps like Zoom or FaceTime, including nearly one in four (23%) who said they did so at least once a week. And 40% of young people participated in online “watch parties” with friends, meaning a group of people in different locations all watch a movie or TV show together at the same time, using a platform such as Hulu Watch Party. About one in seven (15%) said they did this at least every week. A smaller number (29%) participated in live online activities such as book clubs or non-school-related classes (like a cooking or yoga class), including about one in 10 (11%) who did so every week.

Teens were more likely than tweens to participate in watch parties (29% vs. 15% did so at least monthly) and to attend live events online (20% vs. 15% at least monthly). Teens were also more likely than tweens to play video games online with friends that often, although both tweens and teens did this frequently (61% of teens and 56% of tweens). Both tweens and teens were equally likely to hang out with friends online through applications such as FaceTime or Zoom, with about one in three doing so at least every month (38% of teens and 33% of tweens, not significantly different).

FIGURE 2. Socializing online during the pandemic

Percent of 8- to 18-year-olds who ...



There was a huge difference by gender when it comes to video games (see Table 4 on page 12). More than seven in 10 (71%) boys played video games with friends online at least once a month, compared to 41% of girls. Perhaps more starkly, a third (32%) of boys played online games every day, compared to 9% of girls. Girls were more likely than boys to participate in video hangouts with friends (40% did so at least once a month, compared with 31% of boys), and they also participated more often than boys in virtual clubs or non-school-related classes online (20% did so at least once a month, vs. 15% of boys).

Black tweens and teens made the most use of virtual socializing during the pandemic, and White young people the least. For example, Black tweens and teens were twice as likely as their White peers to participate in online watch parties with friends (34% vs. 17%).

TABLE 4. Socializing online during the pandemic, by demographics

Percent who engaged in ... at least once a month	All	Age		Gender		Race/Ethnicity			Income*		
		8 to 12	13 to 18	Male	Female	White	Black	Hispanic/ Latino	Lower	Middle	Higher
Watch parties	23%	15% ^a	29% ^b	21%	24%	17% ^a	34% ^b	27% ^b	33% ^a	23% ^b	18% ^a
Video hangouts	35%	33%	38%	31% ^a	40% ^b	33% ^a	42% ^b	34%	36%	33%	37%
Groups/clubs/classes	18%	15% ^a	20% ^b	15% ^a	20% ^b	15% ^a	21% ^b	21% ^b	19%	17%	18%
Online gaming	59%	56%	61%	71% ^a	46% ^b	58%	63%	58%	64%	57%	58%
Online gaming (daily)	20%	17% ^a	23% ^b	32% ^a	9% ^b	20% ^a	27% ^b	21%	26% ^a	22%	17% ^b

* Lower is defined as \$34,999 or less in annual household income, middle is \$35,000-\$99,999, and higher is \$100,000 or more.

Note: Items with different superscripts (a, b) differ from one another at the level of $p < .05$.

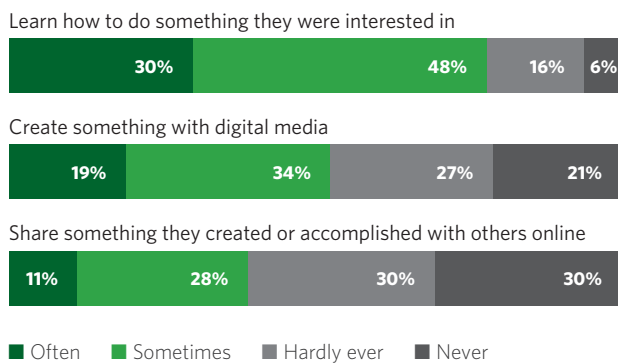
LEARNING, CREATING, AND SHARING THROUGH DIGITAL MEDIA

DURING THE PANDEMIC, MOST young people have had to spend a substantial period of time unable to go to school, participate in clubs, or engage in extracurricular activities in person. For many, there were no face-to-face art classes, sports clubs, theater groups, dance classes, or band practices to attend. In this survey, we explored how young people used digital media during the pandemic to further their creative pursuits.

Young people can use digital tools to pursue their nonacademic interests in several ways: First, they can go online to *learn* how to do something they are interested in; second, they can *create* content using digital devices such as smartphones, laptops, or tablets; and third, they can *share* content they have created (or things they have accomplished) with others online. In short, digital devices offered young people a way to keep growing, learning, creating, and sharing, even during the pandemic.

FIGURE 3. Using digital media for learning, creating, and sharing

Percent of 8- to 18-year-olds who used digital devices during the pandemic to ...



Note: Segments may not sum to 100% due to rounding

Learning. More than three out of four (78%) 8- to 18-year-olds went online during the pandemic to learn how to do something they were interested in, such as sewing, cooking, or building Legos (see Figure 3). Thirty percent said they did so “often.” We asked respondents to give us examples, and among the astonishing array of things young people learned how to do by searching out the information themselves online were:

- Juggle
- Hunt deer
- Draw/Paint
- Roller skate
- Do nail art
- Cook/Bake
- Decorate a cake
- Tie shoelaces
- Make jewelry
- Stitch a wound
- Build a maze
- Throw a football
- Do needle felting
- Build a Lego car
- Build a computer
- Practice yoga
- Make origami
- Do BMX tricks
- Tie-dye clothes
- Make a volcano
- Learn a new dance
- Apply eye makeup
- Create hairstyles
- Play Minecraft
- Learn Japanese
- Do a somersault
- Make a flip book
- Do card tricks
- Crochet/Knit/Sew
- Build a playhouse
- Make soap/candles
- Make slime/fidget spinners
- Make doll furniture
- Make a worm farm
- Make a paper airplane
- Do snowboard tricks
- Make wood carvings
- Dribble a basketball
- Make a water rocket
- Build a marble run
- Find morel mushrooms
- Make stop-motion videos
- Learn new cat’s cradle moves
- Play the ukulele/guitar/drums
- Use wood-working tools
- Clean a bass clarinet
- Install a plumbing pipe
- Live-stream video games
- Assemble an alarm clock
- Install mods for a video game
- Complete a video game mission
- Fix a car/go-cart/motorcycle
- Solve a Rubik’s Cube
- Find cheats for a game
- Drop into a skate bowl without crashing

In other words, a lot.

TABLE 5. Using digital media for learning, creating, and sharing, by demographics

Percent who ... "often"	All	Age		Gender		Race/Ethnicity			Income*		
		8 to 12	13 to 18	Male	Female	White	Black	Hispanic/Latino	Lower	Middle	Higher
Go online to learn how to do something you're interested in	30%	33%	29%	27% ^a	34% ^b	26% ^a	39% ^b	34% ^b	31%	28%	32%
Share something you created or accomplished with others online	11%	10%	12%	8% ^a	14% ^b	9% ^a	16% ^b	12%	13%	10%	12%
Create content with a digital device	19%	18%	20%	14% ^a	24% ^b	18% ^a	28% ^b	17% ^a	20%	19%	19%

* Lower is defined as \$34,999 or less in annual household income, middle is \$35,000–\$99,999, and higher is \$100,000 or more.

Note: Items with different superscripts (a, b) differ from one another at the level of $p < .05$.

Tweens and teens were equally likely to pursue their interests online (33% of tweens and 29% of teens said they do so "often," not a statistically significant difference; see Table 5). Girls were more likely than boys to say they "often" go online to learn how to do something they're interested in (34% vs. 27%). Black and Hispanic/Latino young people were also more likely to teach themselves new activities online than their White peers. More than a third of Black (39%) and Hispanic/Latino (34%) tweens and teens said they "often" used their devices to learn how to do something they are interested in, compared with about a quarter of White young people (26%).

In Their Own Words: "Please give us an example of a time when you went online to learn how to do something you are interested in."

"I learned how to set up my fishing pole for catfishing. It worked great."

—12-year-old boy

"How to win a pinewood derby race."

—10-year-old boy

"Learned to make a worm farm. It turned out good."

—8-year-old girl

"Learned how to cook a meal. First try was OK, second try was good."

—15-year-old boy

"I learned how to wash my rabbits. It was fine."

—10-year-old boy

"Build some things in Roblox. It came out great, and I'm also able to sell a lot of the items I create."

—14-year-old boy

"I went online to learn how to build a Lego set. It was cool."

—11-year-old boy

"I learned how to beat a level in a game I was playing. It went great."

—9-year-old boy

"I learned how to knit blankets using thick yarn, which I turned into a small business briefly."

—17-year-old girl

"I learned to make slime and it is fun and easy."

—10-year-old girl

"I went online to learn about robotic parts. I learned how to hook up parts for electronics. I figured [it] out and got it done."

—14-year-old boy

"One time I went on YouTube and searched up how to do a somersault. I almost had it but then I gave up."

—10-year-old girl

"Learned how to use a tomagachi (didn't really help). Learned how to ride a Razor scooter. GREAT!"

—8-year-old girl

"I learned how to draw dragons and was able to make my own chapter story."

—13-year-old girl

"Make a cardboard candy dispenser. It took a whole week and worked!"

—10-year-old nonbinary child

"Learned how to catch snakes behind the neck so they don't bite. Caught a garter snake today."

—8-year-old boy

Creating. In addition to using the internet to learn how to pursue their interests, many young people used their devices directly to make art or music, such as taking and editing photos, making videos, or composing music. About half (53%) of all 8- to 18-year-olds said they did so, including 19% who did so “often.” Again, girls were more likely than boys to create digital content (24% vs. 14% do so often), and Black tweens and teens were more likely to do so than their White or Hispanic/Latino peers (28% often do so, compared with 17% of Hispanic/Latino and 18% of White young people).

Among the many ways tweens and teens in the survey used their devices to create content were:

- Using a DJ app
- Making anime
- Writing poems
- Making memes
- Making beats
- Doing Pixel art
- Filming workouts
- Using coloring apps
- Creating concept art
- Creating a photo collage
- Taking nature photography
- Assembling photo books
- Shooting and editing movies
- Making dance videos on TikTok
- Using Photoshop/Lightroom
- Writing music in GarageBand

In Their Own Words: "Please give us an example of how you used a smartphone, tablet, or computer to create something, such as digital art, photography, videos, or music."

"I make stop-motion battle scene videos with Legos."

—12-year-old boy

"Created a gymnastics routine with music."

—9-year-old girl

"I used the computer to create a video of my favorite cartoon characters."

—9-year-old boy

"I record my own songs I play on the piano."

—18-year-old boy

"I created music for my own video games."

—17-year-old boy

"I created a t-shirt design that I sold on a website."

—16-year-old boy

"I like taking pictures and making videos of insects on my phone and iPad."

—17-year-old boy

"The art app on my tablet lets me create something, and I will create something beautiful and colorful."

—8-year-old girl

"I use a website called Noteflight to compose music."

—13-year-old girl

"I like to do digital art. I like to use Google Slides. I also like to do a coding website. I cannot remember the name of it, though."

—9-year-old girl

"I started animating a cartoon then got bored."

—14-year-old boy

"I made designs for stickers, t-shirts, posters, cards, and ads."

—16-year-old girl

"I use Microsoft Word to make books to publish."

—10-year-old boy

"I make music/beats on the computer EVERY DAY."

—13-year-old boy

"I like to create drawings online that I learn from YouTube. Then I make videos of me making them on TikTok."

—10-year-old girl

"I create computer games using Scratch."

—10-year-old boy

"I used my computer to create a video game which I shared on my YouTube channel."

—13-year-old boy

Sharing. The other way tweens and teens used digital media for creative expression was by sharing something they had created or accomplished—whether online or offline—with others. Nearly four in 10 of all 8- to 18-year-olds (39%) said they had used digital media to share something they had created or accomplished with others online.

Although not many young people shared such content “often” (11%), it is interesting that tweens were no less likely than teens to do so, despite their more limited access to most social media platforms (12% of teens and 10% of tweens often share their creations or accomplishments online). Again, girls (14%) were more likely than boys (8%) to share such content online, and Black tweens and teens (16%) were more likely than White young people (16%) to do so.

We asked young people to give us examples of what they’ve shared with others online—things they accomplished or created. Responses included:

- Sharing poetry or stories
- Posting pictures of drawings or collages
- Selling paintings online
- Announcing that they’d made the honor roll or won a track medal
- Sharing pictures of foods they’d prepared
- Making videos of gymnastics routines
- Posting songs they’d written

In Their Own Words: "Please give us an example of the types of things you share online that you have accomplished or created."

"I share poetry through a vlog. It is important for me as it is an outlet where I could express myself."

—17-year-old girl

"I often share videos of me singing."

—16-year-old boy

"Fanfiction (writing stories) is very important to me because I enjoy the process of sharing my creative works to the world and hearing the feedback I receive. I especially like fanfiction because I am a part of a community of people who will respond."

—17-year-old girl

"I paint with acrylic paint on canvas and share it with my friends on my family Discord."

—8-year-old boy

"I share the flowers I have grown, and I share my drawings. I like to show others what I can do."

—12-year-old girl

"I have a YouTube channel where I post some of my accomplishments when I pass a certain level in video games."

—17-year-old boy

"I am a music producer and singer/songwriter, so I share my music on YouTube and streaming platforms such as Spotify, iTunes, Apple Music, etc."

—15-year-old girl

"I share books that I write on Google Docs. I share them with my friends so they can see my work and give me ideas also. Sometimes we write stories together online."

—9-year-old girl

"I like to draw and share my drawings."

—17-year-old boy

"Culinary creations."

—18-year-old boy

"Art and chapters from a book that I am writing."

—12-year-old girl

"Stock tips."

—16-year-old boy

"Legos. Pixel art. I like people to see my work and make comments."

—14-year-old boy

"Videos on YouTube and Picsart. Sharing is important by a lot because I really, really want to grow on my YouTube channel and on my Picsart!"

—8-year-old girl

"It's important to share dancing for fun."

—10-year-old girl



THE PANDEMIC AND FACE-TO-FACE SOCIALIZATION

ANOTHER CONCERN ABOUT THE impact of the pandemic on young people is the increase in screen time and decrease in face-to-face socialization. The experience of having to shelter in place and miss extended periods of in-person school and social activities has the potential to have a lasting effect on how all of us socialize, including young people. This section of the report includes survey findings that relate to those issues.

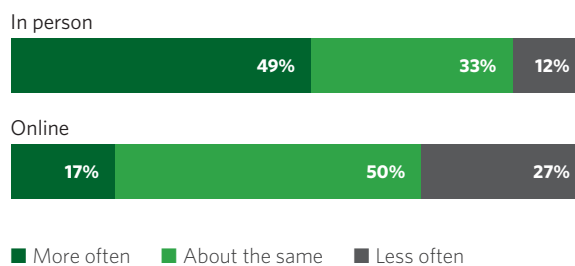
Post-pandemic socialization preferences: in person and online.

Now that many of us have become more accustomed to working and socializing online, it remains to be seen whether this will permanently alter how we “gather.” Many adults may decide to attend future conferences virtually or continue working from home; others may be eager to get back to water cooler conversations and meeting colleagues for lunch. The same is true for young people: Having become adept at having virtual slumber parties and online hangouts, some young people may decide that they feel more comfortable socializing online, while others may be more eager than ever to see their friends face-to-face.

We asked tweens and teens what they thought their own preferences were going to be. About half (49%) said they think they will want to hang out with friends in person even more often than they did before the pandemic, 33% said the same amount as before, and 12% said they wanted to get together face-to-face less often than before (see Figure 4). Despite discovering a multitude of new ways to hang out virtually, 50% of young people said they wanted to hang out with friends online about the same amount as they did before the pandemic, 27% said less often, and 17% said more often. In other words, most tweens and teens are ready to get back to in-person socialization, with many wanting to spend even more time together than they did prior to the pandemic.

FIGURE 4. In-person and online socialization after the pandemic

Proportion of 8- to 18-year-olds who say they want to get together with friends in person or online “more” or “less” often than they did before the pandemic



Note: Bars don't sum to 100% due to rounding and the exclusion of those who didn't respond to the question.

As has been shown throughout this report, female tweens and teens were more likely to use and to value non-game-related ways of socializing online, such as watch parties, virtual hangouts, social media. But at the same time, they were even more eager than boys to leave the online socializing behind. A third (33%) of girls said that when pandemic-related restrictions are lifted, they want to get together with friends online *less* often than they did before the pandemic, compared to 21% of boys (see Table 6 on page 26). On the other hand, Black and Hispanic/Latino tweens and teens were more likely than their White counterparts to say they want to hang out with friends online *more* often than they did before the pandemic (24% of Black young people and 20% of Hispanics/Latinos, compared to 12% of Whites). A plurality still said they want to hang out in person even more than they did before, but many tweens and teens of color also want to add more online get-togethers to their social lives.

TABLE 6. In-person and online socialization after the pandemic, by demographics

After the pandemic, do you think you will want to get together with friends ...	All	Age		Gender		Race/Ethnicity			Income*		
		8 to 12	13 to 18	Male	Female	White	Black	Hispanic/Latino	Lower	Middle	Higher
In person											
• More often than before the pandemic	49%	51%	47%	47%	51%	52%	49%	46%	44% ^a	45% ^a	55% ^b
• Less often than before the pandemic	12%	11%	13%	12%	12%	8% ^a	15% ^b	14% ^b	17% ^a	13% ^a	8% ^b
Online											
• More often than before the pandemic	17%	16%	18%	16%	18%	12% ^a	24% ^b	20% ^b	19%	18%	15%
• Less often than before the pandemic	27%	30% ^a	24% ^b	21% ^a	33% ^b	29%	23%	25%	26%	26%	28%

* Lower is defined as \$34,999 or less in annual household income, middle is \$35,000–\$99,999, and higher is \$100,000 or more.

Note: Items with different superscripts (a, b) differ from one another at the level of $p < .05$.

Valuing in-person time with family and friends. While the pandemic hindered the ability to engage in face-to-face relationships for many young people, it also meant more in-person time with family members and neighbors. In fact, one surprising twist of the pandemic was that many young people said that one thing that changed for the better in their lives was the opportunity to spend more time with their parents and siblings.

The survey included an open-ended question asking respondents to tell us, in their own words, “What’s one thing about your life, if any, that changed for the better during the pandemic?” By far the most common response was getting to spend more time with their family (see Table 7). Nearly a third (32%) offered some version of this response, ranging from a simple “more family time,” to a heartfelt “Spending time with my family has been great.”

In the hustle and bustle of pre-pandemic life, parents were working outside the home, students were commuting to school, and time was taken up with clubs and other outside activities. During the pandemic, many parents began working from home, and students no longer had to leave the house at the crack of dawn to catch the bus. Family meals and game nights became much more common. And it turns out these changes were important and meaningful to many tweens and teens.

TABLE 7. What’s one thing about your life, if any, that changed for the better during the pandemic?

(open-ended question)

More time with family	32%
Nothing changed for the better/it was all bad	20%
More time to do/learn other things	8%
Online school	6%
More time at home	4%
Better priorities, values	4%
Mental or physical health improved	3%
Better relationships (online/in person)	2%
More sleep	2%
More time with pets	1%
More relaxed, less busy	1%
Stayed healthy (didn’t get Covid-19)	1%
My life wasn’t affected by the pandemic	1%
Other	8%
Don’t know/no response	7%

Response after response mentioned getting to spend more time with a parent, including one from a 9-year-old girl who said, “I got to spend a lot of time at home with my mom. She taught me how to cook with her.” A 9-year-old boy wrote, “I got to stay home with my mom for a few months, and we went camping.” Some mentioned family meals in particular, and others said it was fun to have family game nights. One 18-year-old girl commented that “I got closer to my immediate family. We ... didn’t talk that much before,” and a 12-year-old boy said the best thing about the pandemic for him was a “better friendship with my sister.”

Families had meals and played games together more than they had before the pandemic, and it turns out many kids enjoyed that a lot. A 10-year-old boy said “My family started a game night. We play board games, and we also compete with video games,” and a 17-year-old boy said one thing about his life that changed for the better was “more time at home playing games with the family.” A 13-year-old boy noted that he is “closer to my parents after spending so much time at home.”

A number of young people spoke about “bonding” more with their parents, as with the 9-year-old girl who said the positive change for her was “actually bonding with my family and my mom” or the 15-year-old who said, “stronger bond with my family and best friend.” One 16-year-old boy commented that “I appreciate my parents more.” Several specifically mentioned having the chance to spend more time with siblings: a 14-year-old boy wrote, “I got to be better friends with my brothers,” and a 14-year-old girl said that “My older sister, who had to come home from college, and I became much closer. And I got to spend more time with my dog.”

After family time, no other response about pandemic silver linings reached double digits (besides “nothing changed for the better,” which 20% of respondents offered). A number of young people talked about having the opportunity to get to know people in their immediate neighborhoods better. One 8-year-old girl said that one thing in her life that changed for the better during the pandemic was that she “made new friends in our neighborhood,” and a 10-year-old girl said that, for her, the benefit of the pandemic was that she “got to play with the kids that live by me more.”

In fact, many young people say they grew to value and appreciate their friendships even more. One 16-year-old girl said that, for her, the silver lining of the pandemic was “realizing how much friends and family mean to me,” and an 18-year-old girl commented that “It makes seeing my friends that much more special.” Another young girl noted that “I was able to better understand just how much I cared about my friends, and it made me realize that I should take advantage of the time that I do have.” Boys also said the pandemic helped them appreciate their face-to-face relationships more. A 12-year-old said one thing that changed for the better during the pandemic was “the way that I appreciate being able to see friends in person,” and an 18-year-old boy said, “I realize the importance of being able to hang with my friends face-to-face.” A 13-year-old boy noted, “I realized just how important friends are and I have worked at spending more time with them.”

In Their Own Words: "What's one thing about your life, if any, that changed for the better during the pandemic?"

"I'm closer to my mom."

—13-year-old boy

"Got closer with my family and immediate friends."

—14-year-old girl

"Getting closer to family and close friends."

—9-year-old girl

"I got to stay home with my brother who is my best friend."

—10-year-old girl

"More time with my parents."

—18-year-old girl

"Spending time with my mom, dad, and sister."

—15-year-old boy

"Family time."

—14-year-old boy

"The closeness I gained to my family."

—16-year-old boy

"Have gotten closer with my family."

—14-year-old boy

"More family meals together."

—9-year-old girl

"My family started a game night."

—10-year-old boy

"We spent more time with parents playing board games."

—18-year-old boy

"I play more games with my family."

—11-year-old girl

"I've gotten closer with my family and figured out who my real friends are."

—17-year-old girl

"Great time spent with my family."

—18-year-old boy

"It makes seeing my friends that much more special."

—18-year-old girl

"Realizing how much friends and family mean to me."

—16-year-old girl

"The way that I appreciate being able to see friends in person."

—12-year-old boy

CONCLUSION

FOR MANY OF US, restrictions imposed due to the coronavirus pandemic meant more time than ever spent at home, on screens. We Zoomed for work. We Zoomed for school. We Zoomed to socialize. We went to virtual concerts, virtual doctor's appointments, and virtual book clubs. Sometimes it seemed that every aspect of our lives was lived online.

When it comes to the tweens and teens in our lives, we have had mixed emotions about their relationships with screens. When the pandemic restrictions were new, we threw our screen time concerns out the window and thanked our lucky stars that kids could at least go to school and keep themselves entertained online. But as the pandemic dragged on, we began to worry again: Will children ever want to put their screens down? Will they remember how to socialize? Will they be interested in anything besides watching and playing on screens anymore?

This survey—conducted in the late spring of 2021—was designed to bring young people's voices into this discussion. Our purpose was to gain insight into *how* they used screens during this national emergency, and how they feel about their screen use and face-to-face socialization going forward.

There has been a lot of important public discussion about the possibility that screen use contributed to an increase in depression among young people during the pandemic. This survey is a reminder not to overlook the very basic role of media in simply helping tweens and teens get through each long and lonely day, providing occasional respites of entertainment or humor.

Beyond simple entertainment, it's inspiring and eye-opening to document the myriad ways young people used their time online to keep learning, to try new things, to nurture their social connections, and to express themselves creatively. The young people in our survey confirmed our suspicions about the essential role media played in helping them keep their moods up during the pandemic, have fun, and stay connected to friends and family. But they surprised us with the huge diversity of their online experiences. From cowriting books with friends or learning to cook, to sharing

digital music or starting businesses, young people clearly yearned to continue to learn and grow during this challenging time. With many extracurricular activities either cancelled or seriously restricted, digital technology helped them do so.

Staying as connected to others as possible was also a clear priority for many tweens and teens, whether that meant sharing poetry or artwork online, or just hanging out in virtual get-togethers. They built new relationships and maintained old friendships playing games online and "going to" watch parties. There were differences in *how* they socialized online—for boys it was mainly through video games and for girls mainly through social media.

It is worth noting that young people of color were the most likely to cite the value of media in helping them get through the pandemic. Media were even more important to Black tweens and teens than to others their age for staying connected with friends and keeping their moods up during the pandemic. Black adolescents participated in video hangouts, watch parties, online gaming, and virtual groups or clubs the most often; and they were the most likely to use digital devices to pursue informal learning, create digital art or music, and share their creations and accomplishments with others online.

At this point, a sizeable number of young people—tweens and teens, male and female, White, Black and Hispanic/Latino—think they spend too much time online, and most are eager to get back together with their friends in person. In fact, many of them value face-to-face time and deep friendships more than ever. As difficult as the pandemic restrictions were, many young people deeply appreciate having developed closer ties with their parents, siblings, and neighbors. They used media to maintain contacts as best they could, but value in-person contact even more than before. How all this will translate to a "new normal" in terms of the use of screen media post-pandemic remains to be seen.

QUESTIONNAIRE

Q1. Which of the following items do you or someone else in your family have in your home?

- a. TV set
- b. Tablet
- c. Smartphone
- d. Video game player (such as Xbox, Switch, or PlayStation)
- e. Laptop or desktop computer
- f. A virtual reality headset (such as Oculus Rift, Google Cardboard, or PlayStation VR)
- g. None of the above

Q2. Which of the following items do YOU PERSONALLY have?

- a. Tablet
- b. Smartphone
- c. Laptop or desktop computer
- d. None of the above

Q3. How often do you do each of the following activities?

- a. Use social media (such as Snapchat, Instagram, Discord, Reddit, or Facebook)
- b. Play video games on a mobile device (like a smartphone or tablet)
- c. Play video games on a console (like Xbox or PlayStation), portable player (like Switch), or computer
- d. Watch television
- e. Watch videos online (such as on YouTube, TikTok, or Twitch)
- f. Listen to podcasts
- g. Read for your own enjoyment (not for school or homework), such as books, ebooks, magazines, online articles
- h. Use a virtual reality headset
 - 1. Every day
 - 2. At least once a week
 - 3. At least once a month
 - 4. Less than once a month
 - 5. Never

Q4. [If ever play video games] How often, if ever, do you play video games with friends online?

- a. Every day
- b. At least once a week
- c. At least once a month
- d. Less than once a month
- e. Never

Q5. [If ever do each activity] How much do you ENJOY doing each of the following activities?

- a. Reading
- b. Watching television
- c. Watching videos online (such as on YouTube, TikTok, or Twitch)
- d. Using social media (such as Snapchat, Instagram, or Facebook)
- e. Playing video games on a console (like Xbox or PlayStation), portable player (like Switch), or computer
- f. Playing video games on a mobile device (like a smartphone or tablet)
- g. Using a virtual reality headset
- h. Listening to podcasts
 1. A lot
 2. Somewhat
 3. Only a little
 4. Not at all

Q6. Some people go online or use devices like smartphones, tablets, and computers to express their creativity or learn how to do things they are interested in that aren't for school. This could include learning about Legos, makeup, dancing, building, sewing, cooking, doing skateboarding tricks, drawing, or any other thing you like to do. How often, if ever, do YOU:

- a. Go online to *learn* how to do something you are interested in (things that aren't for school, such as for a hobby or something you like doing)
- b. Use the internet to *share* something you've accomplished or created that wasn't for school
- c. Use a smartphone, tablet, or computer to *create* something that's not for school, like digital art, photography, videos, or music
 1. Often
 2. Sometimes
 3. Hardly ever
 4. Never

Q7. [If go online to learn things] Please give us an example of a time you went online to learn how to do something you are interested in. What did you learn how to do? How did it turn out?

Q8. [If share accomplishments or creations online] Please give us an example of the types of things you share online that you have accomplished or created. Is it art, baking, gymnastics, poetry, playing music, building stuff, or something else (please tell us what)? How important is it to you to share it, and why?

Q9. [If create art/music on digital devices] Please give us an example of how you have used a smartphone, tablet, or computer to create something like digital art, photography, videos, or music. What types of things do you create? Are there specific programs you use to create them?

Q10. Thinking about how you've used media during the past year, while we've been going through the pandemic, how often, if ever, have you done each of the following:

- a. Watched online videos with friends who were in different locations (watch parties)
- b. Got together to hang out with a group of friends on Zoom or other video chat program
- c. Attended online groups that aren't related to classes you're taking for school (like a book club or cooking class)
 - 1. Every day
 - 2. At least once a week
 - 3. At least once a month
 - 4. Less than once a month
 - 5. Never

Q11. Since the beginning of the pandemic, how important have media, like TV shows, movies, video games, and social media, been to you for:

- a. Keeping your mood up
- b. Staying connected with friends or family
- c. Having fun
 - 1. Very important
 - 2. Somewhat important
 - 3. Not too important
 - 4. Not important at all

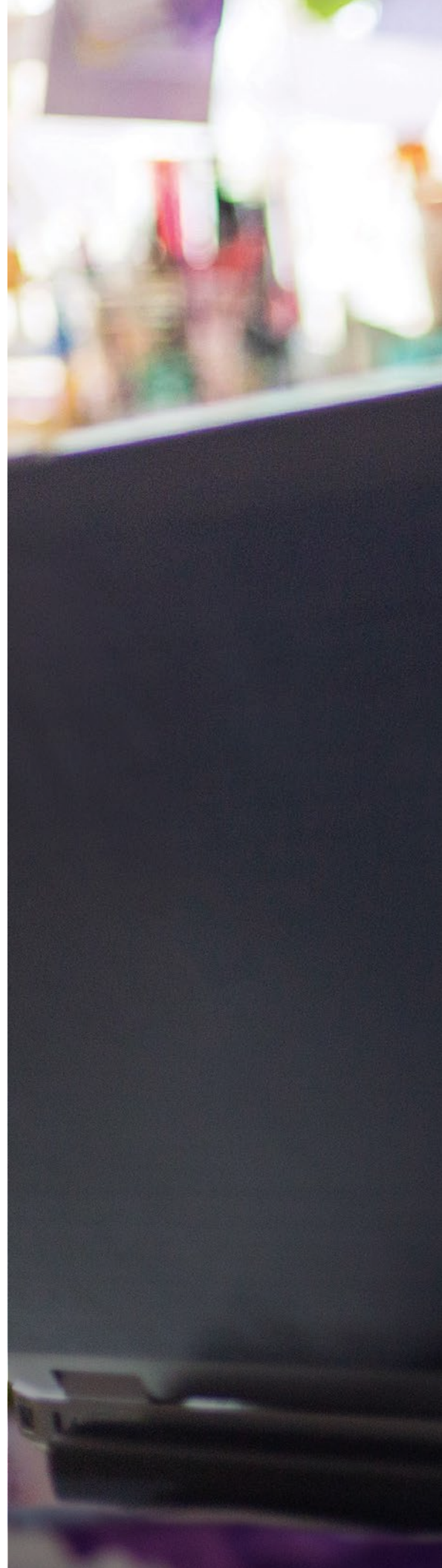
Q12. Not counting the time you spend using screens for school, do you think you spend too MUCH time, too LITTLE time, or the RIGHT AMOUNT of time with screen media?

- a. Too much time
- b. Too little time
- c. The right amount of time

Q13. After the pandemic restrictions are totally lifted, do you think you will want to get together with friends:

- a. *In person* more often, less often, or the same amount of time as you did before the pandemic;
- b. *Online* more often, less often, or the same amount of time as you did before the pandemic
 - 1. More often
 - 2. Less often
 - 3. The same amount of time as before

Q14. Finally, what's one thing about your life, if any, that changed for the better during the pandemic?



About Common Sense

Common Sense is the nation's leading nonprofit organization dedicated to improving the lives of all kids and families by providing the trustworthy information, education, and independent voice they need to thrive in the 21st century. Our independent research is designed to provide parents, educators, health organizations, and policymakers with reliable, independent data on children's use of media and technology and the impact it has on their physical, emotional, social, and intellectual development. For more information, visit commonsense.org/research.

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