For the First Steps children

Thank you and update

We want to say a massive THANK YOU to all of you for completing questionnaires from us for home last year. Most of you have completed the age 13 questionnaire for us this year, if you haven’t completed it yet then we would be very grateful if you could do that. It’s so important for us to keep getting information on you as you grow up and we are really grateful for your help!

Your experiences of the Covid-19 pandemic

Recently we’ve all experienced a major disruption and source of stress in our lives from the Covid-19 pandemic. For young people this involved school closures and separation from friends and family as well as increased family stress and worry about the virus. You provided important information on how Covid-19 was impacting you in your questionnaires during the first lockdown last year and we thought we’d share some of the results with you.

Worry about the virus...

- 28% of you were worried you would catch the virus
- 61% of you were worried friends or family would catch
- 42% of you worried you might transmit the virus someone else

Things you missed...

- 85% of you were missing spending time with your friends
- 75% of you were missing your usual activities such as sports, youth club, scouts or guides
- 57% of you were missing going to school

Some positives...

- 56% of you were enjoying spending more time at home
- 78% of you were enjoying spending more time with your families
- 68% were enjoying talking to friends and family electronically

What we’ve learned is that the impact of the pandemic has been different for different people. Overall we found an increase in feelings of depressed symptoms in both young people and mothers from before to during the first lockdown. We are now conducting further research to examine the impact of the pandemic a year on.
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Your future aspirations

We also asked you what job you would like to have in the future. Here’s the top 5 choices:

1. Footballer
2. Teacher
3. Vet
4. Actor/actress
5. Police officer

Many of you hadn’t decided yet, and we’re sure many of you will change your minds over time too!

Spotlight on inhibitory control

In the assessments we completed with you at multiple times throughout your life we asked you to complete a range of tasks to assess your abilities and your personality. One important ability we assessed is called “inhibitory control”.

Inhibitory control is what helps us to stop and pause before we act or think. For example, if you know the answer to a question in class but you put your hand up rather than saying it straight away, that’s using your inhibitory control. Or if a plate of cakes is being offered around and you need to wait your turn rather than grab one, that’s also using your inhibitory control. We’ve assessed this multiple times in your life using these tasks:

The “Whisper” task—when you are age 2 and 3 we showed you a box of toy animals and asked you to whisper the name of each animal, meaning you needed to hold back the urge to speak in a normal voice and shout.

“Snack delay”—when you were age 5 we asked you to sit and wait in the lab for 5 minutes with a bowl of sweets and a bell. If you rang the bell you could eat the sweets straight away, but if you managed to wait 5 minutes you could have double the amount of sweets.

“Delay discounting” - was a similar task we did at age 7 where we asked if you wanted to have some stickers or sweets now or wait until the end of the game or the end of the assessment to get more.

Being able to wait our turn and “think before acting” is important. It helps us to follow rules and helps us in social situations by, for example, allowing us to take turns in conversation. However as with most things, there are also positives to having lower inhibitory control, as if we hold back too much we may miss out on opportunities to get involved in things.

Your inhibitory control develops and changes over time, influenced by your environmental experiences and your other abilities, personality traits and behaviours. That’s why we have assessed inhibitory control multiple times through development, and will look at it together with other information about your lives to understand when higher or lower inhibitory control can be a weakness or a strength.