

First steps Study



Updates for teens

As always we would like to say a massive THANK YOU to you for continuing to take part in the study, we couldn't do it without you! I know we haven't seen many of you in person for several years, but we are very grateful to you all for filling out the questionnaires. We hope to gain funding to see you all again for face to face assessments but until then the questionnaires are helping us to discover things which will help young people in the future.



We know how busy life can get and you have exams coming up, so we really appreciate you taking the time to support us!

What's next? Phase 18

The last time everyone filled in a questionnaire was between 12-13 years of age. As you grow so many changes happen, particularly in relationships with your friends and family, and in how you manage emotion or stress. Now you are older, we would like you and your parent to fill out another questionnaire. This will be sent out as a link by email in the next couple of months, or you can request a paper copy. For your time we will give you a £20 voucher.



What's ongoing? Teencam!

We've had lots of fun running the "teencam" pilot study, testing a new method to record parent-teen relationships at home using head cameras. Our lovely researcher Alice has been doing home visits to show families how to use the cameras and play the card game "sussed" - with questions on how well you know each other.

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Why are we doing teencam?

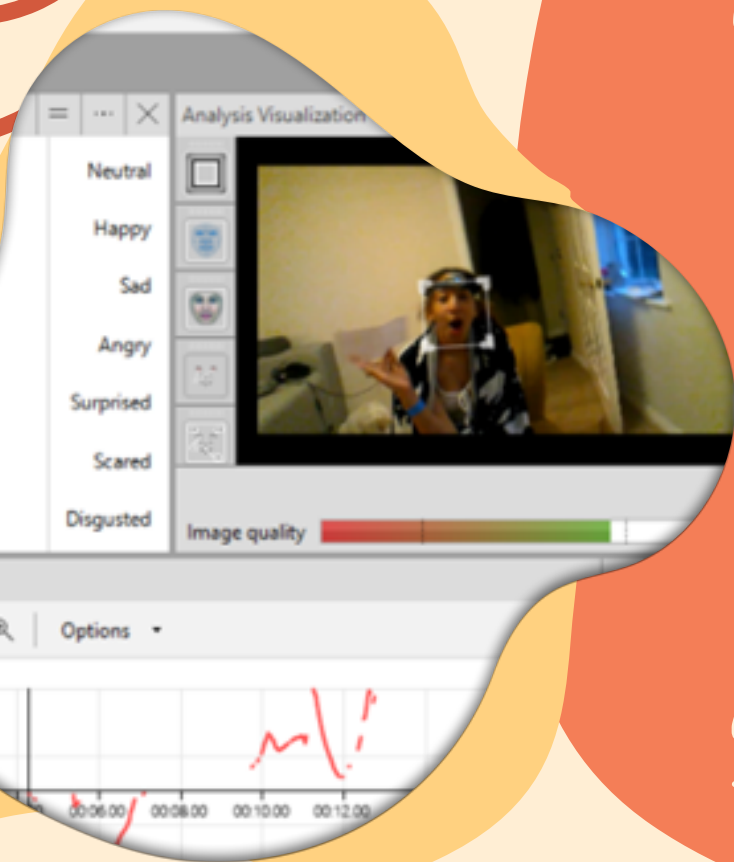
The main purpose of the pilot study is to test out if families find using head-cameras at home to be acceptable. So far the feedback has been very positive - parents and teens have said they enjoy playing the game and feel more comfortable being at home.



Why study parent-adolescent relationships?

The relationships we have with others are incredibly important in our lives. They can be sources of strength and support but also sources of stress. In adolescence, relationships with parents change. Parents and teens often experience difficulties in understanding each other and this can lead to relationship difficulties. For example, a teen may be feeling upset, but their behaviour or facial expression appears angry, and so the parent mis-understands how the teen is actually feeling.

We want to use observed/recorded behaviour to identify when miscommunications arise or moments of understanding appear. This can help to develop therapy to improve relationships and support young people with their emotions.



What are we doing with the footage?!

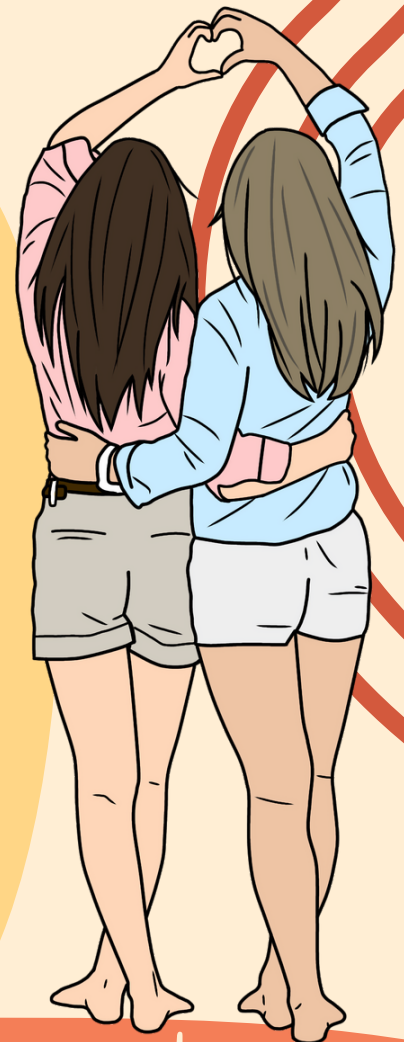
We will apply coding schemes to the video footage to identify characteristics or behaviours (e.g. facial expression, eye gaze, body position) and speech. We are using both human and artificial intelligence (AI) to code facial expression. AI identifies more subtle expressions and where someone shows a mix of expressions. It works by identifying the positions of different parts of the face and matching it to a set of rules - we don't yet know how well this corresponds to what a human ACTUALLY sees.

There's a lot of work to be done, and we've been running some workshops with young people to get their input (we may also ask for your help in the future) but it does provide some exciting possibilities for helping support young people.

Study findings

Turning to friends ahead of parents for support in early adolescence may be associated with higher depression symptoms

Adolescence is a time when friendships become increasingly important and young people begin to turn to their friends for support. Using the questionnaire you filled in when you were aged 12-13 years, we found that girls who turned to their friends for emotional support more than their parents had higher depression symptoms. This could be part of the explanation for why adolescent girls experience an increase in depression. The findings show the importance of young people continuing to seek emotional support from their parents in early adolescence, when they can.



Boys' depression increased as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic

Using the questionnaires you filled in just before, during and late in the pandemic we have been able to show that the COVID-19 pandemic has led to an increase in depression symptoms and difficulties in managing behaviour in boys aged 11-14 years. The pandemic has not led to an increase in girls' depression (but this is mainly because as girls get older their depression symptoms tend to increase anyway, and the pandemic has not added to that) but difficulties managing behaviour have increased in girls. The takeaway message is that more boys may be struggling with depression, and more boys and girls may be struggling with managing their behaviour, as a result of the pandemic, and parents, teachers and clinical services need to be aware of this need to support young people.



Getting in touch

If you have any questions or comments, you can call us on 0151 795 1114, text us on 07956297412, email us at first.steps@liv.ac.uk or write to us at First Steps Study, The University of Liverpool, Eleanor Rathbone Building, Bedford Street South, Liverpool, L69 7ZA Don't forget to look at our website: <https://www.liverpool.ac.uk/population-health/research/groups/first-steps/about/>



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