

OCO Children's Survey  
Experiences during Covid-19

NO  
FILTER



ombudsman  
do leanaí  
for children





## Foreword

Throughout the Covid-19 pandemic the Ombudsman for Children's Office has worked hard to ensure that children's voices and opinions were heard and considered, in decisions affecting them. We have always tried to highlight the scale of the impact of the pandemic on children, and to emphasise the extent to which their lives have changed. But we can only do so much.

This survey is an opportunity to hear directly from children about their experiences of the Covid-19 pandemic and how they think their lives have been impacted. I know these are difficult questions to ask of anyone. As an adult, I struggle to explain or comprehend how the past two years, living under the shadow of Covid-19, has changed my life. However, it is important to take stock and to give children a platform to have their say.

While we have heard from some children during the pandemic (most notably the Irish Secondary School Union on the Leaving Certificate),

for the majority of children their stories have been passed on, or brought to us by the adults in their lives.

It is widely accepted that the pandemic has been hard on children; that their childhoods have been interrupted and that there will be long lasting consequences. On the other hand we also know that there were upsides to Covid; that online learning suited some children and many got to spend more time with their immediate family. This is what we have been told.

We find ourselves at a particular moment in time – still dealing with Covid-19 on a day to day basis but with many of the restrictions lifted (hopefully for good). As we plan for life post-Covid, it is vital that those in power and members of the public know how children feel and what they experienced over the past two years.

Hearing directly from children and ensuring their views are given due weight and consideration is part of my role as Ombudsman for Children. I am committed to ensuring that the powerful messages shared as part of this survey inform my work, and are elevated to Government and beyond.

This survey would not have been possible without the support of teachers, principals and the school community. To all of them I extend my thanks. However, the greatest credit and biggest thank you goes to the children who participated in this survey. I thank you for your time, your honesty and your bravery in sharing with us a snapshot of what the last two years has been like for you.



# Children's Covid-19 timeline

**March 12, 2020**  
Schools closed

**March 27, 2020**  
Full lockdown.  
Playgrounds closed.  
2km restriction

**May 5, 2020**  
Travel restriction 5km

**June 3, 2020**  
Leaving Certificate  
2020 calculated grades.  
Junior Certificate  
cancelled

**June 8, 2020**  
Playgrounds reopen

**August 7, 2020**  
Lockdown Kildare,  
Laois and Offaly

**August 26th 2020**  
Schools reopen.  
Masks in post primary  
schools. Pods.  
Staggered breaks.  
Desks moved apart

**October 3, 2020**  
6,100 Leaving Cert  
students impacted by  
errors in the system

**October 4, 2020**  
Six-week lockdown.  
No inter-county travel

**November 27, 2020**  
Restrictions eased

**December 22, 2020**  
Level 5 lockdown.  
Schools closed

**February 11 to April 12**  
Schools and childcare  
reopen on staggered  
basis

**From 26 April 2021**  
Restrictions ease.  
Underage non-contact  
outdoor training back  
in pods of 15

**30 November 2021**  
Face masks for children  
aged nine years and  
above in schools

**Since 28 February 2022**  
Face coverings no  
longer mandatory.  
Other restrictions in  
schools removed



# Methodology

*No Filter* – A survey of children’s experience of the Covid-19 pandemic was carried out by the Ombudsman for Children’s Office (OCO) in conjunction with Amárach Research. *No Filter* was an online survey open to children between the ages of 9-17 years in Ireland. A small number of students aged 18 and over who are still in school also completed the survey.

In order to protect the integrity of the process and to ensure that children themselves were taking part, the survey was carried out through schools. Sixty schools from across the country were invited to take part; based on regional spread, deis, non-deis, gaelscoileanna and private schools, and divided into primary and post-primary schools. Interested schools were invited to apply through social media and the survey was also shared with the OCO Youth Advisory Panel.

The questions included in the survey were drafted based on common issues that were raised with the OCO and in the media. Every effort was made to ensure that questions were simply phrased and understandable to all age groups, and to ensure that children were not led or encouraged to opt for any particular outcome. The survey was piloted in a primary and post-primary classroom in Dublin. Based on the feedback, questions were reviewed and updated before general distribution.

*No Filter* was launched online between 1st and 15th February 2022, running for two weeks. The survey was shared with schools via an individual URL. Consent from parents and assent from the children themselves was sought and secured. Children’s participation was anonymous and voluntary. Children were informed about the survey by their teacher and principals in class, and a video from the Ombudsman for Children, Dr Niall Muldoon was shared with every school.

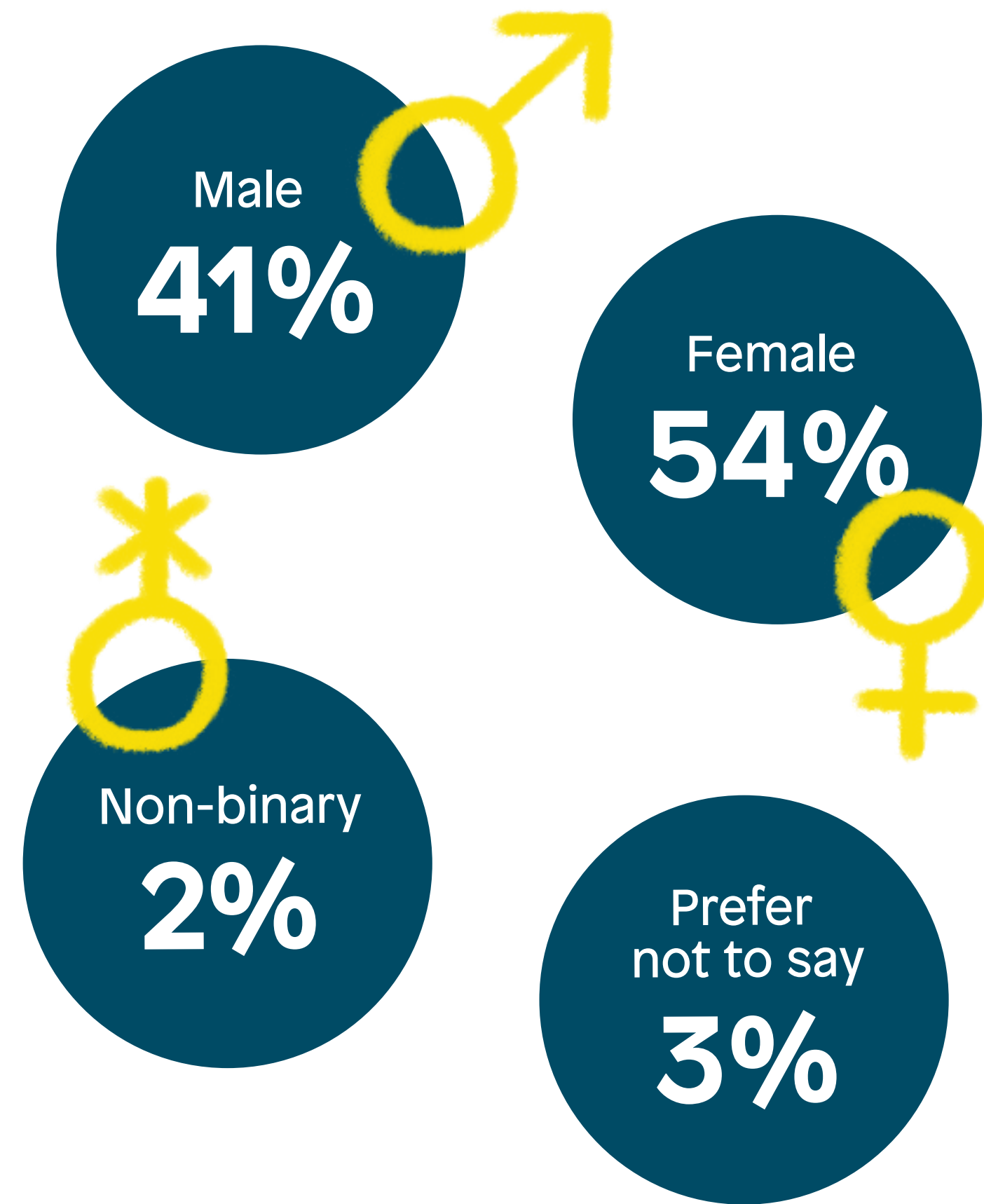


# Summary

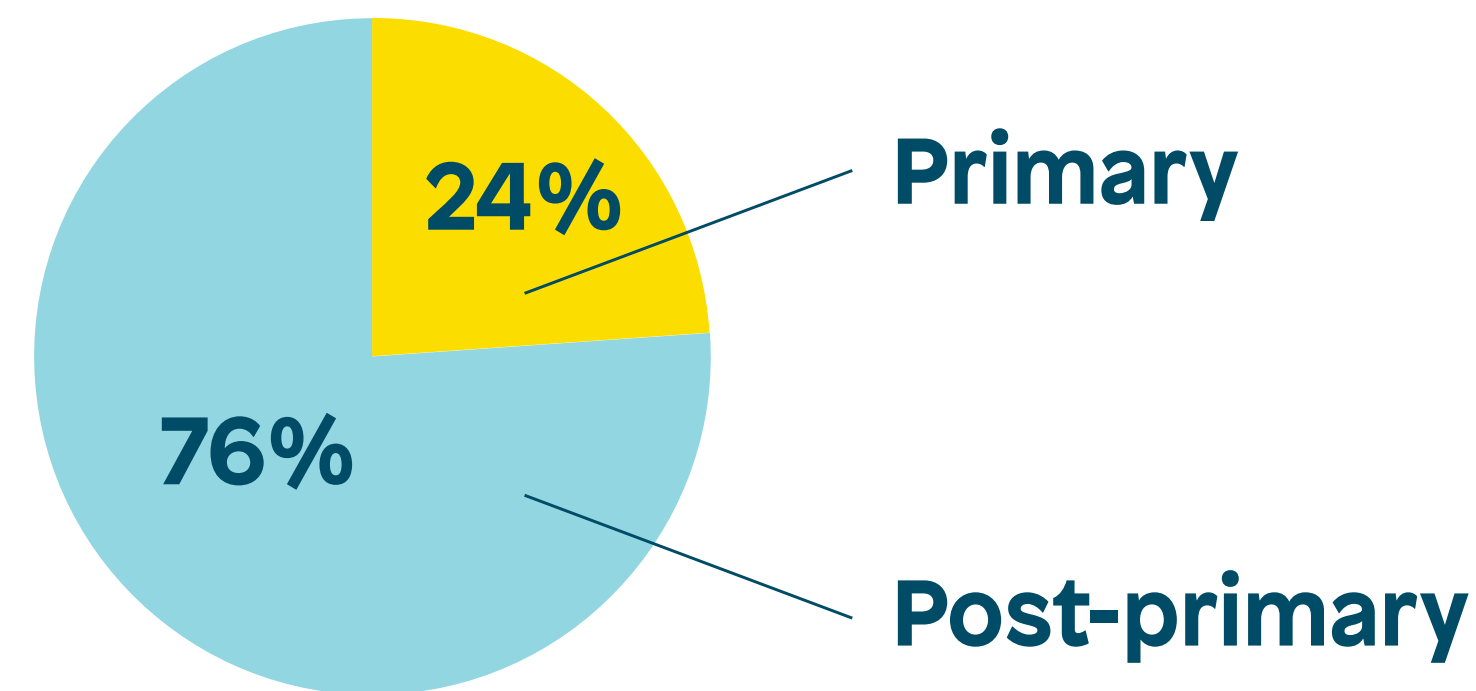
- **1,389** children from **23 schools across Ireland** took part in this survey. Schools that took part were located in Cavan, Donegal, Dublin, Galway, Kerry, Kilkenny, Laois, Limerick, Meath, Monaghan, Sligo, Westmeath, Wexford and Wicklow.
- **48%** of school children said the Covid-19 pandemic has changed their life a lot, rising to **51%** among secondary school children, and **55%** among girls.
- Children told us that they saw a lot more of their **parents, guardians and siblings during the pandemic**, but time with grandparents, extended family and friends both inside and outside of school was more restricted.
- Children said they spent more time with **screens, music, the internet, playing online games**, and less time running, playing football, swimming and cycling. However, children were walking more since the pandemic began.
- Children were conscious they had missed out on a lot of milestones and events over the past two years. **Holidays abroad, school trips, family occasions** and activities outside school featured the most, and these are the things that children are most looking forward to now that people are making plans again.
- Over **one quarter, since September 2021** of children reported having missed more than two weeks of school as a result of Covid-19 and **29% missed 1-2 weeks**.
- **8 out of 10** children felt Covid-19 had some impact on their education. While children acknowledged a negative impact on learning and communication with teachers, **it was the extracurricular activities that were missed most**, with **60%** reporting school restrictions having impacted 'a lot' on activities such as training, trips, choir or drama.
- **Only 14% said they hadn't missed any school.**
- The majority of children said that they had the appropriate environment, **equipment, connectivity and support** for their online studies during the pandemic. There was however a significant minority who did not.
- When children were asked how they feel now, in the Spring of 2022 over **50%** feel happy and almost **40% are hopeful**.
- **48%** never felt scared. However many children experienced feelings of loneliness, worry, anger and unhappiness.
- **47%** of children said they'd lost touch with friends, which made them feel unhappy. However **45%** had made new friends, which they were generally happy with.
- The **final question** of the survey invited children to share any other comments they had about the Covid-19 pandemic. A variety of very honest and heartfelt comments acknowledge some positives of the past two years, but mainly emphasise the negative and potentially **long lasting impact** of Covid-19 for children.

# Who took part

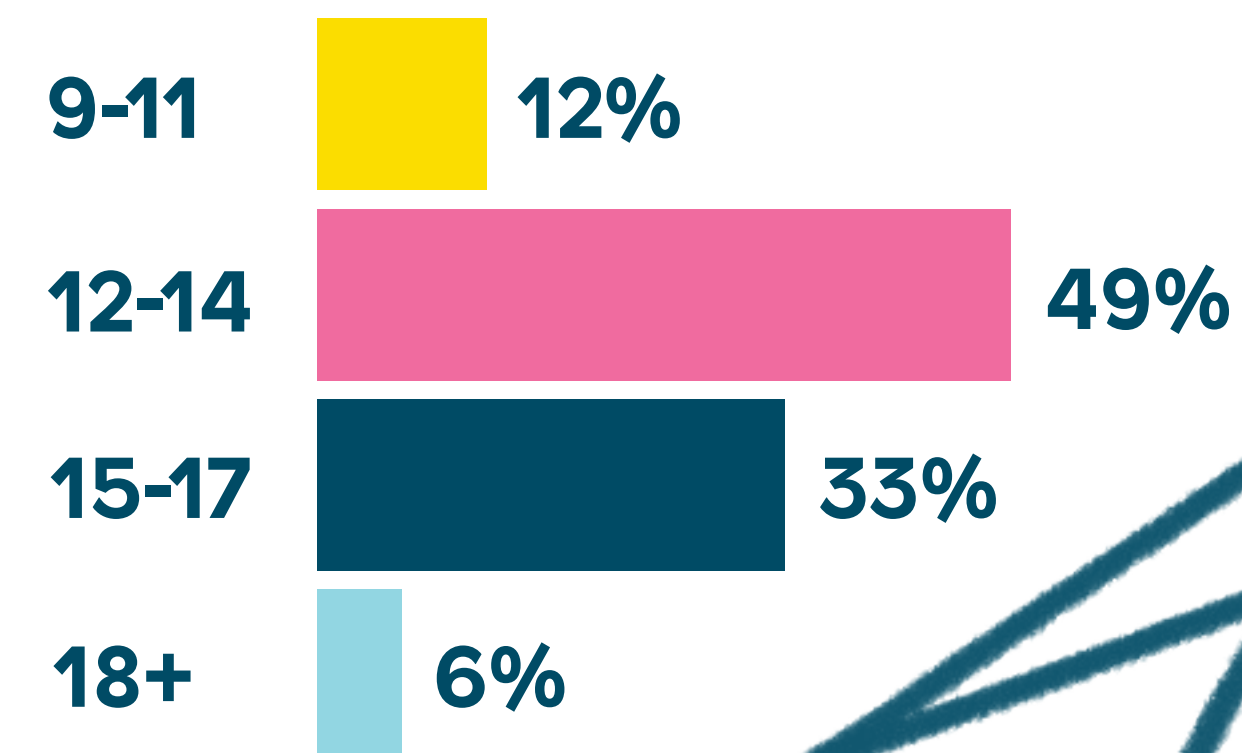
## Gender



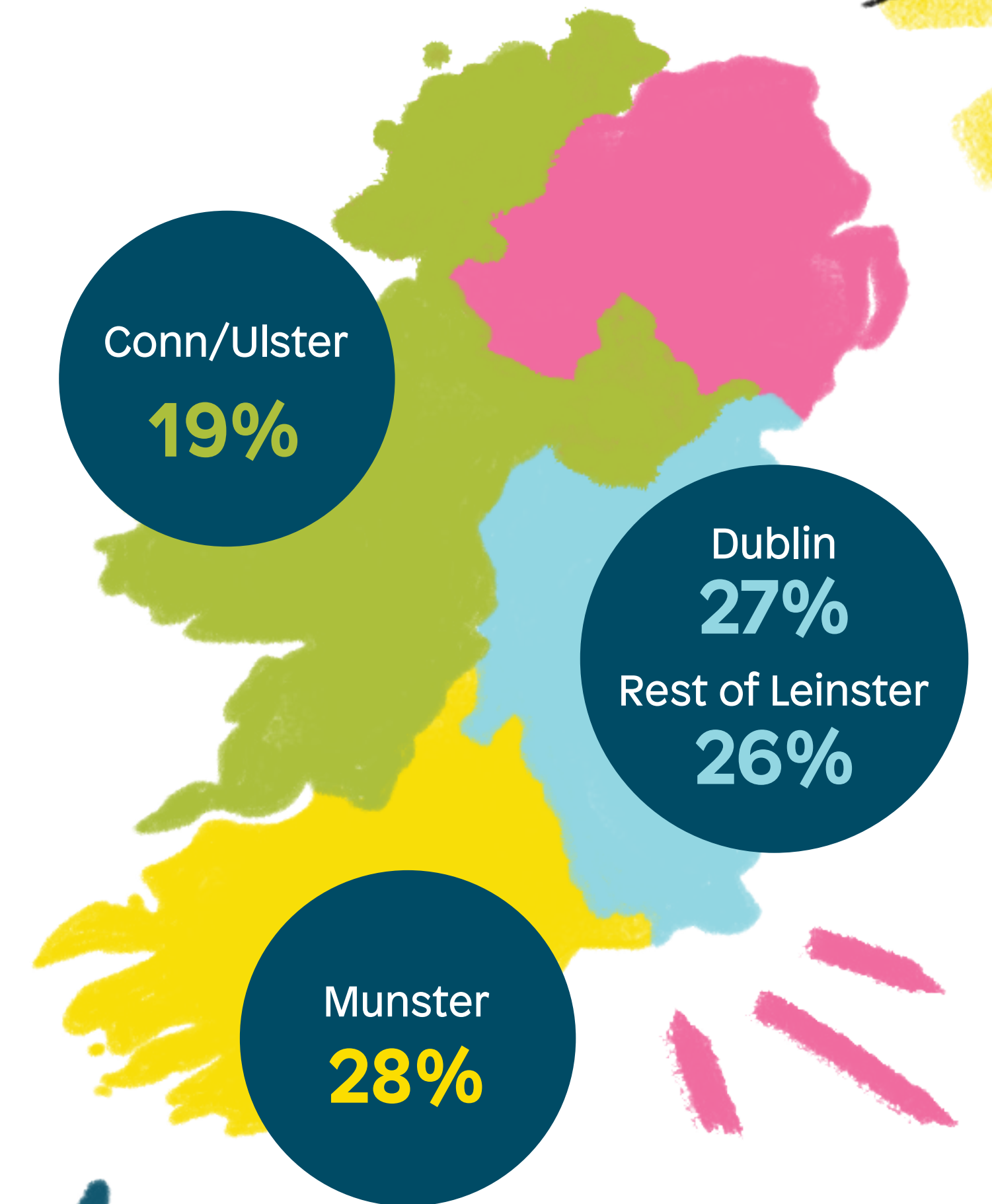
## School



## Age



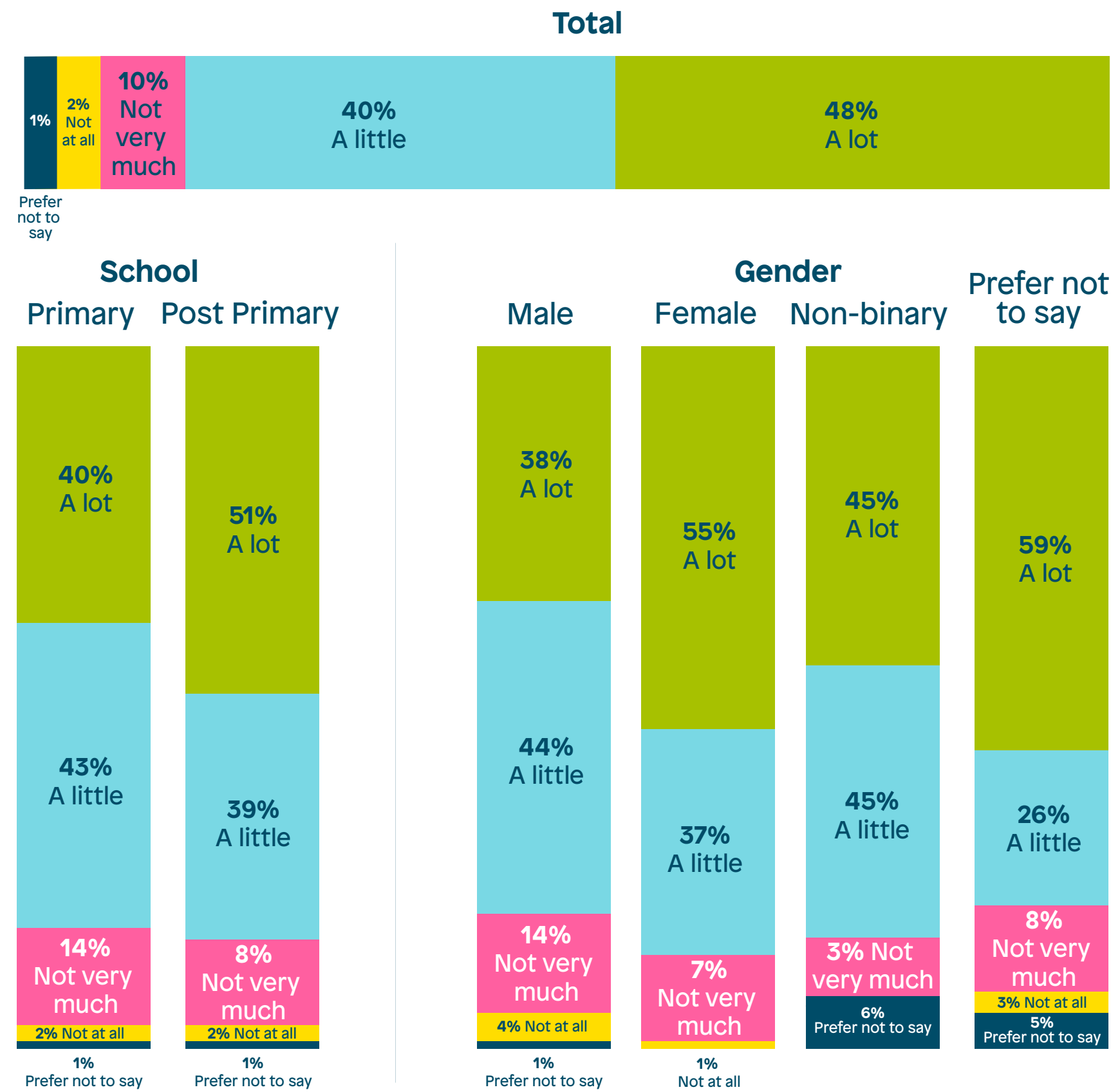
## Region





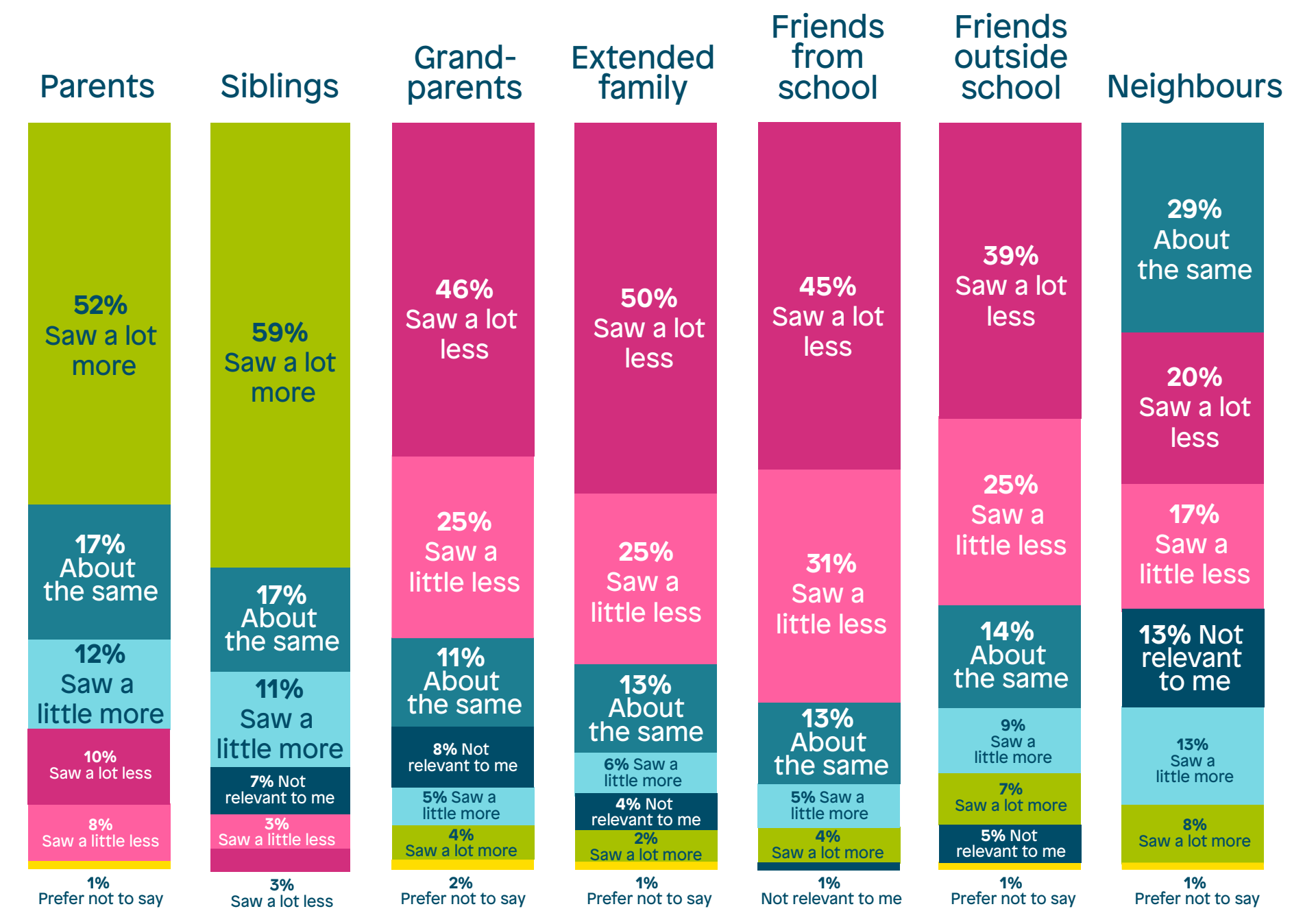
## Question 1:

Overall, do you think that the Covid-19 pandemic has changed your life a lot, a little, not very much or not at all?



## Question 2:

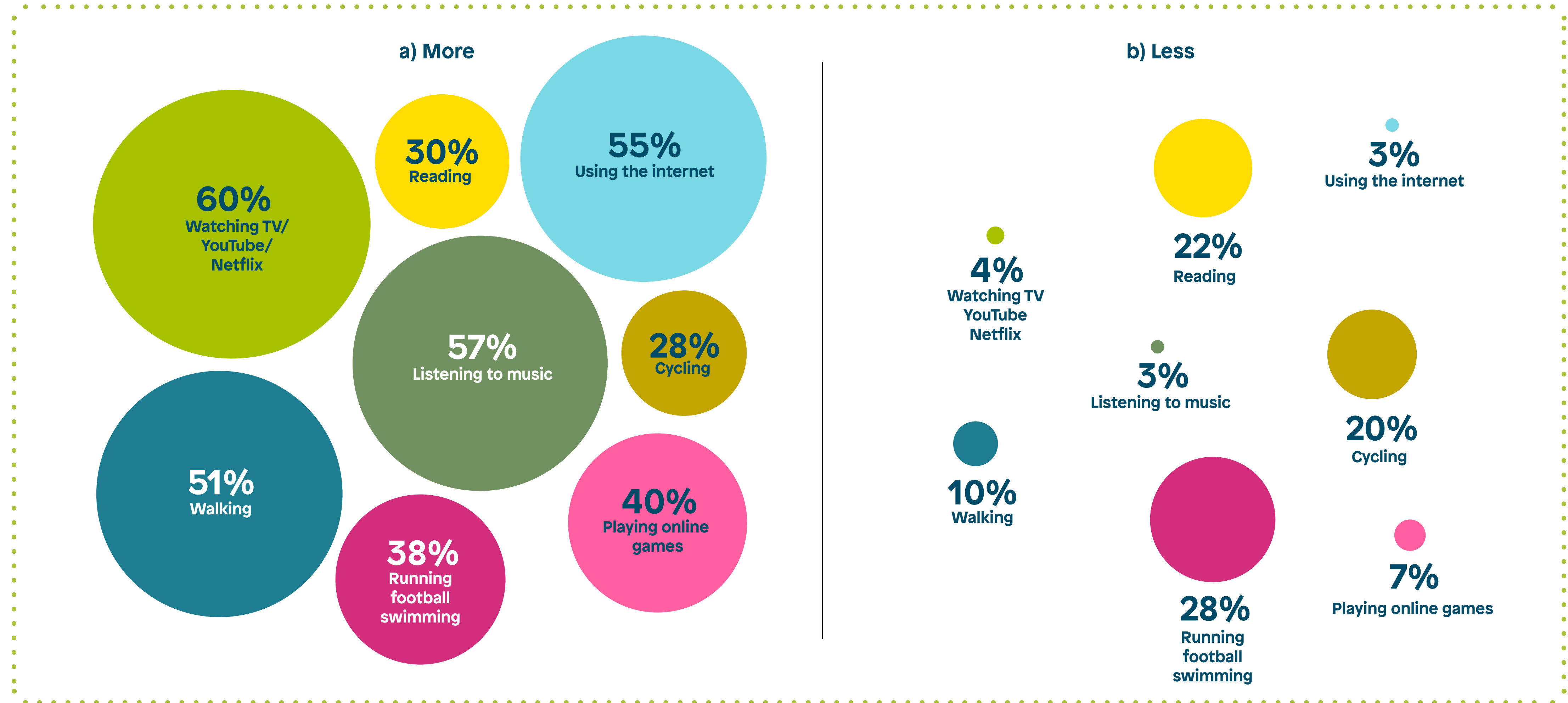
Did you see more or less of close friends and family during the Covid-19 pandemic?



\* Caution low base. Not included in subsequent slides –is available within data tables for reference

## Question 3:

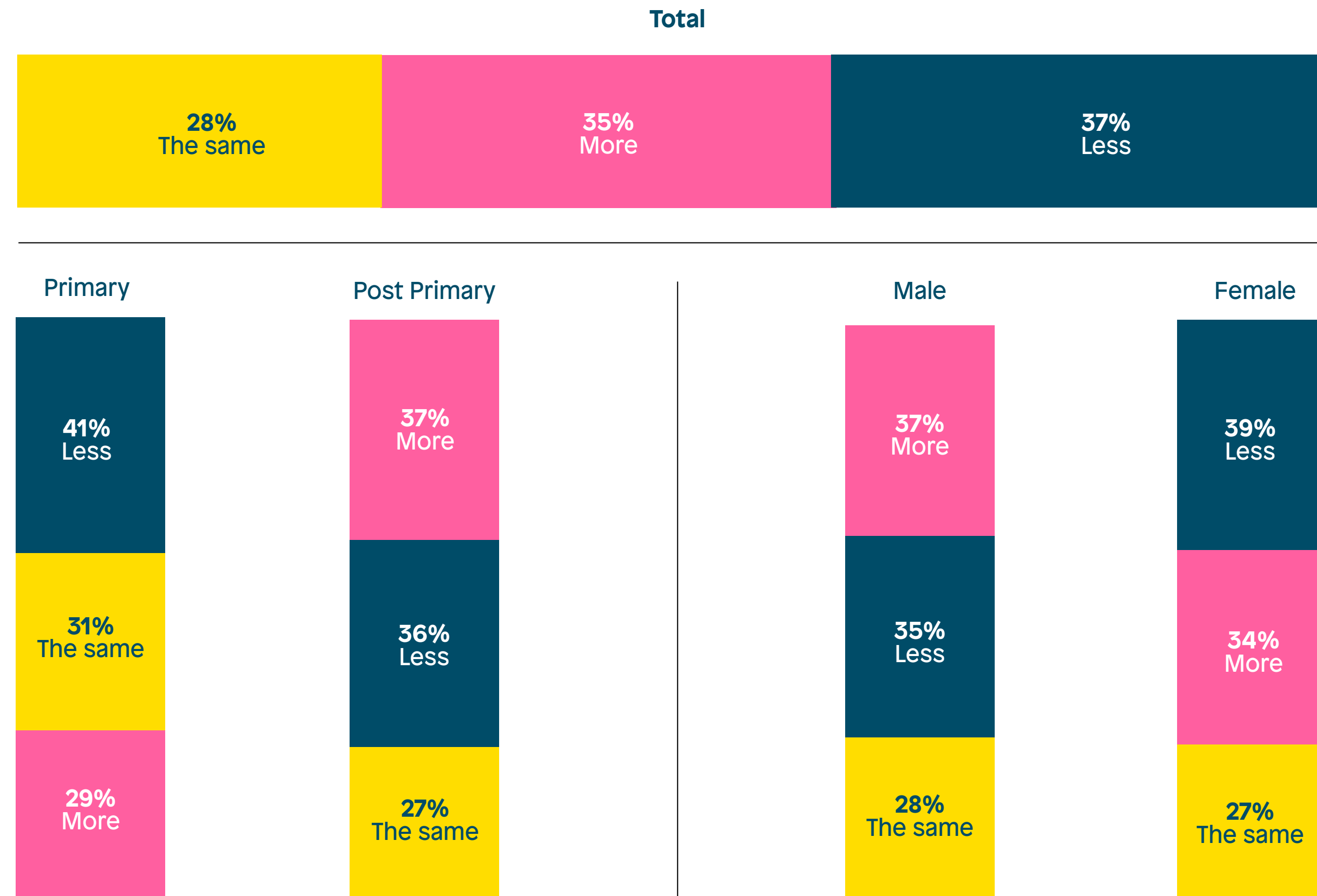
Since the Covid-19 pandemic began which of the following activities, if any, are you doing a) MORE of and b) LESS of





## Question 4:

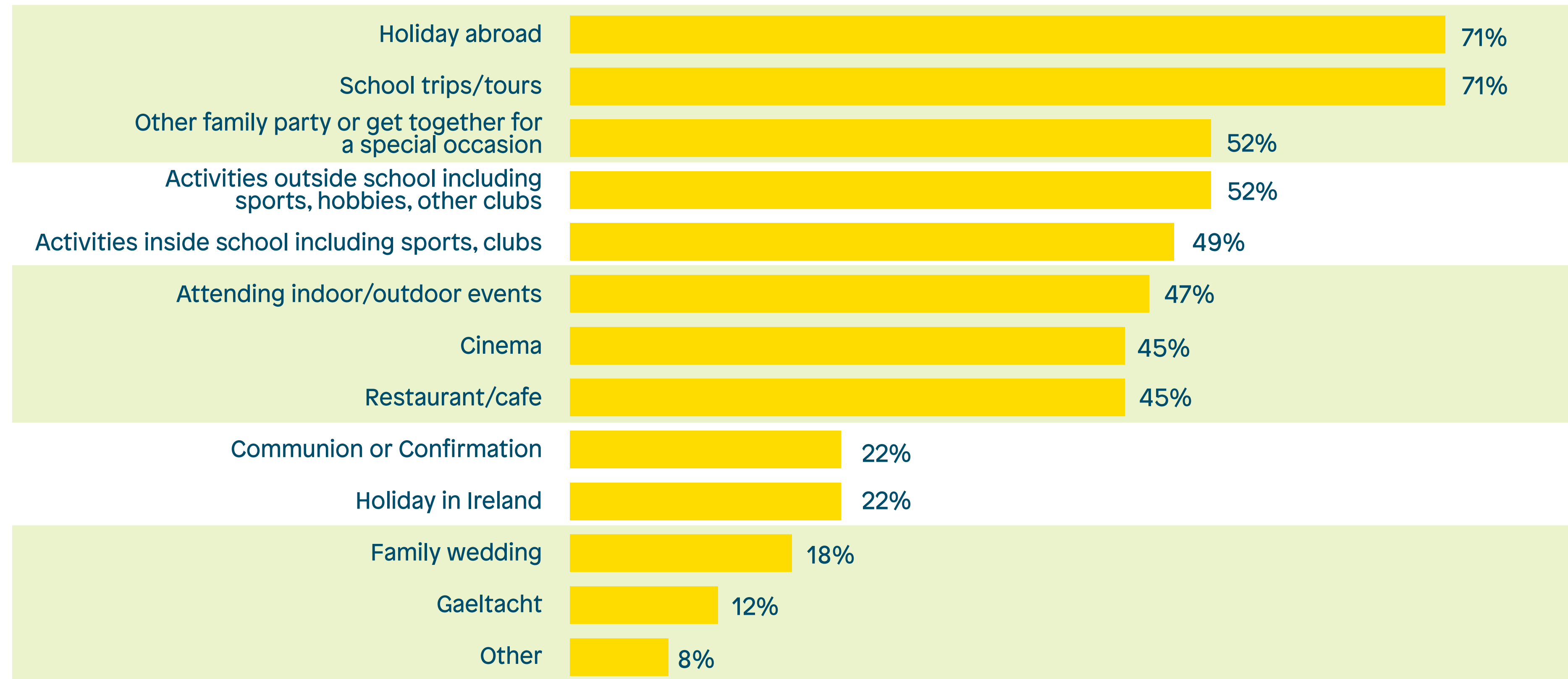
During the Covid-19 pandemic would you say you were more active, less active or about the same as before?





## Question 5:

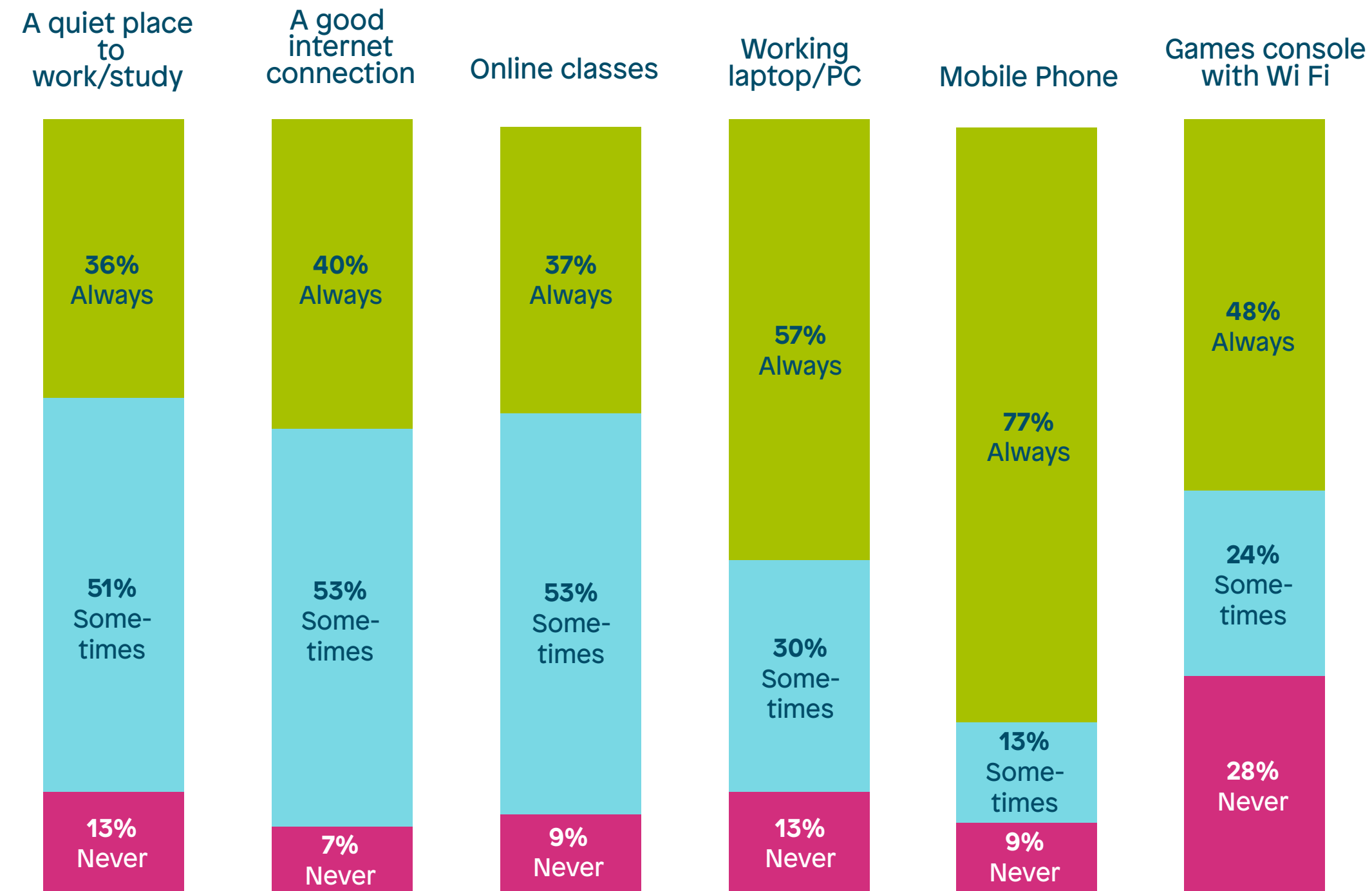
Which of the following have you missed out on **because of the pandemic?**





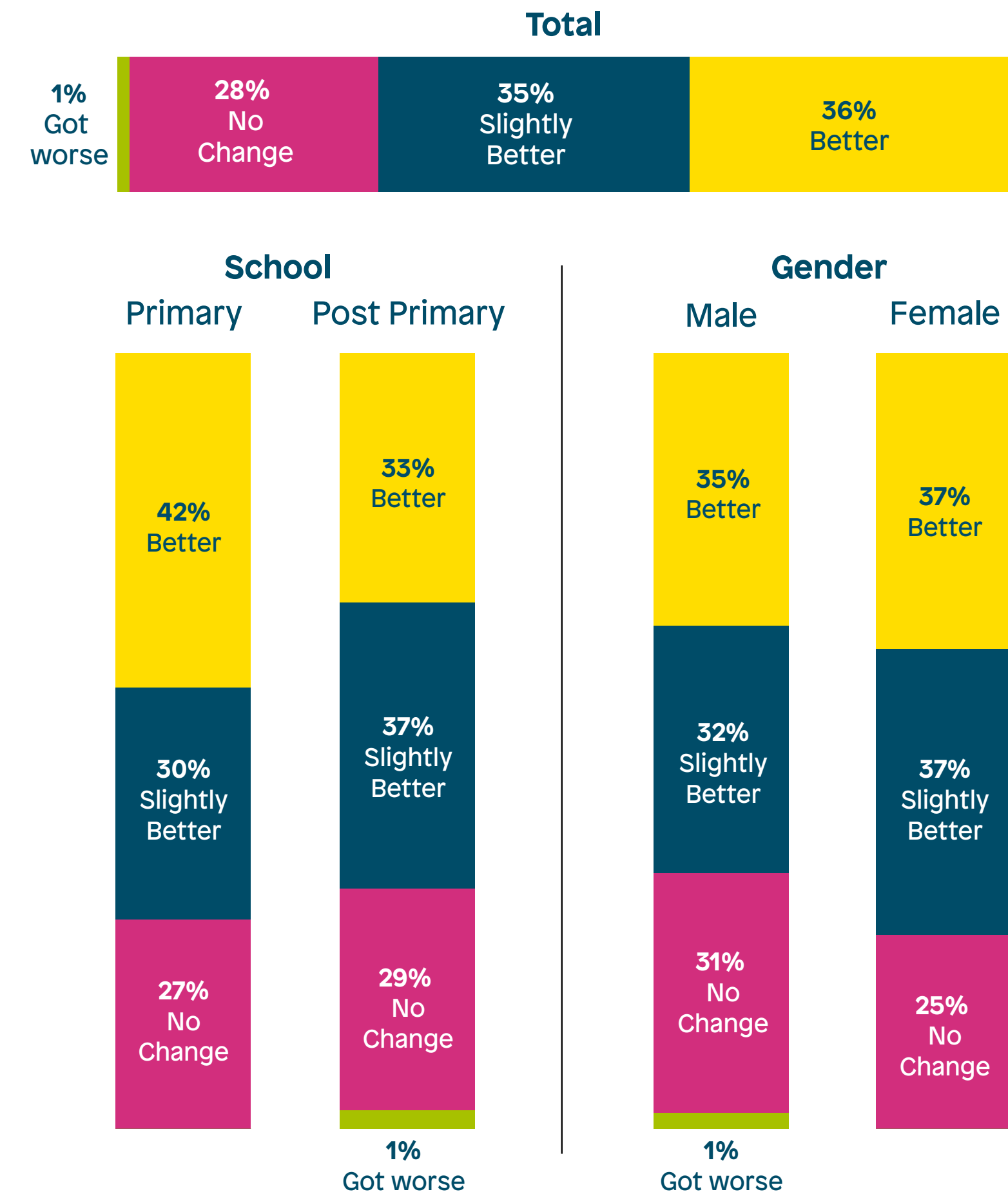
## Question 6:

While doing schoolwork online from home during the Covid-19 pandemic, how often did you have the following?



## Question 7:

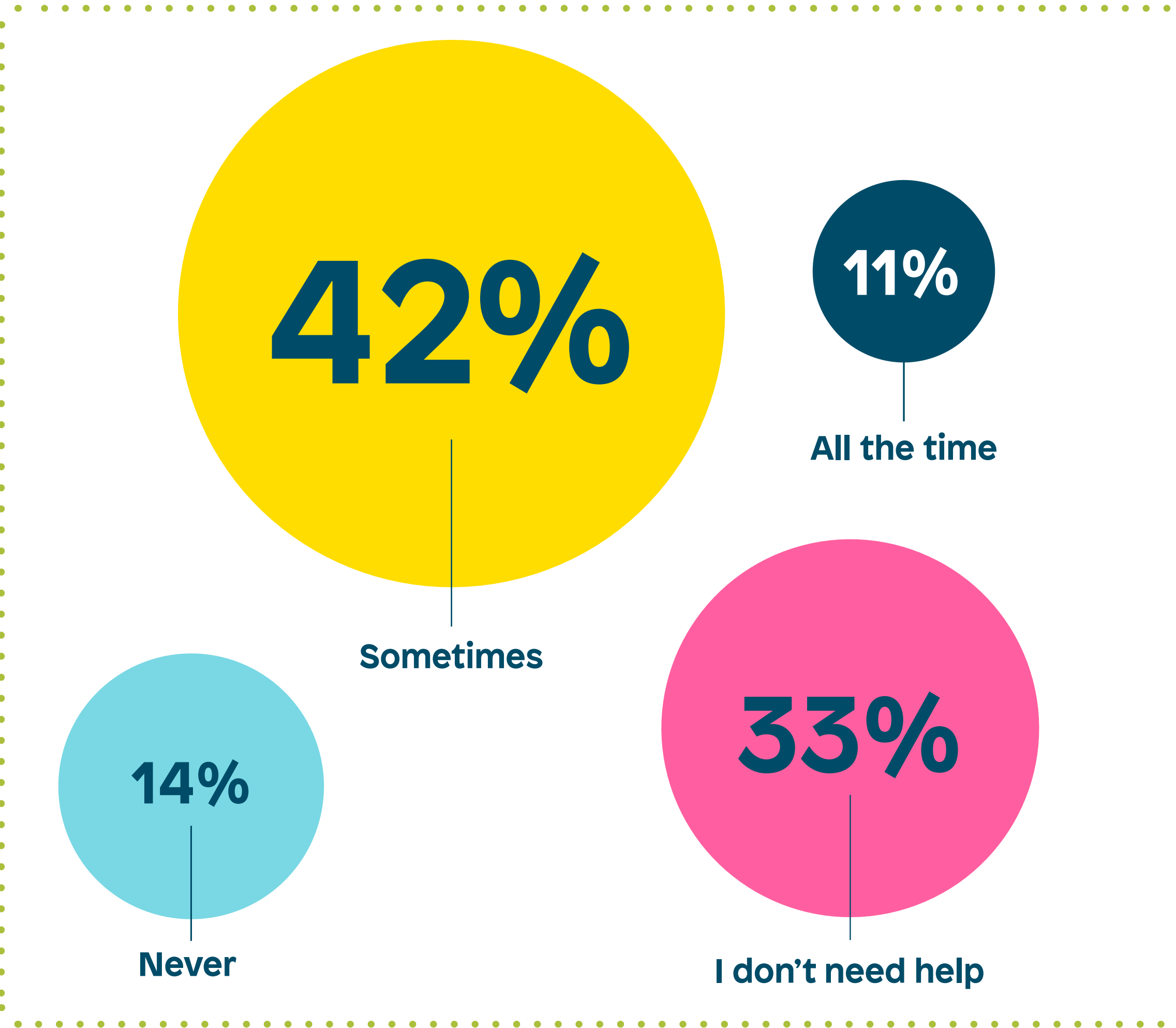
Overall, would you say that you got better at using technology for doing schoolwork during the Covid-19 pandemic?





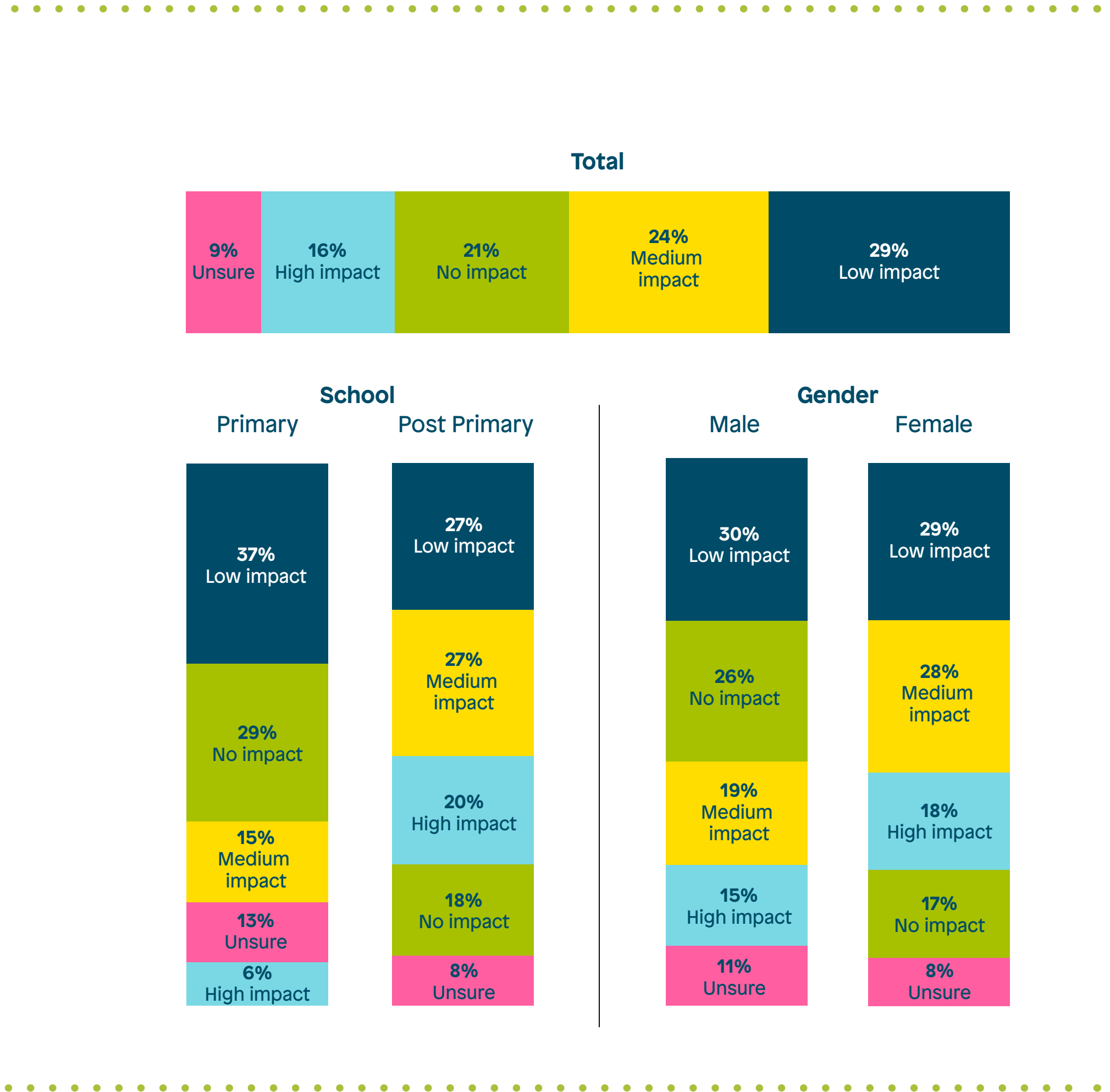
Question 8:

How often, if at all, could your parent/guardians help with your online schoolwork?



Question 9:

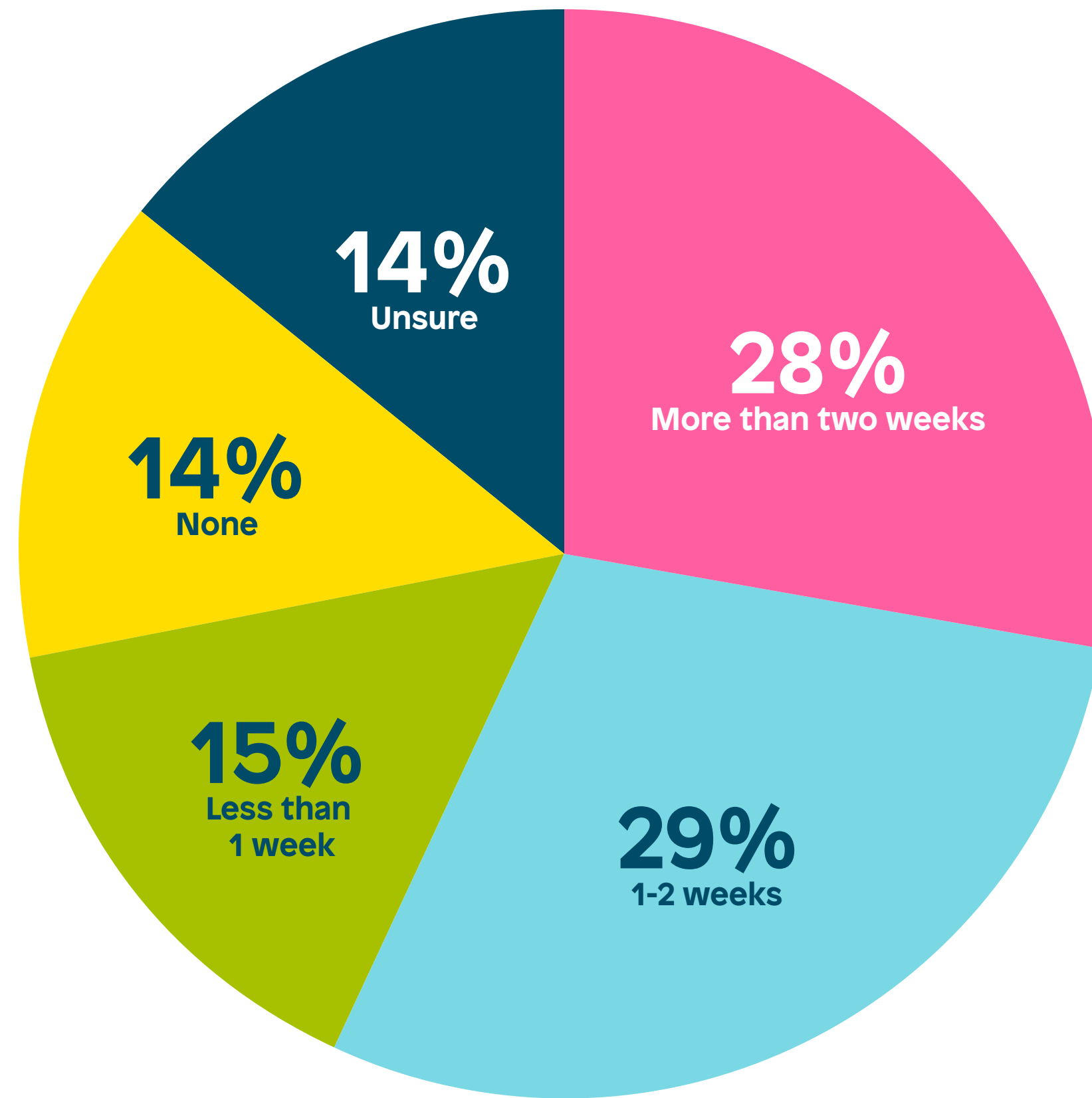
To what extent, if any, do you feel the Covid-19 pandemic has impacted your education?





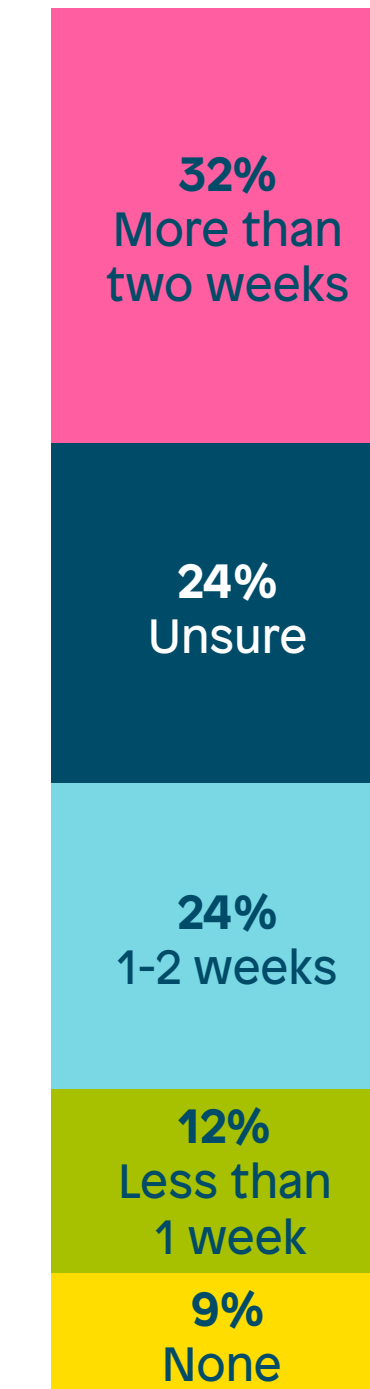
## Question 10:

How many days of school have you missed since Sept 2021 due to Covid-19 restrictions, testing positive or isolation rules?



### School

#### Primary

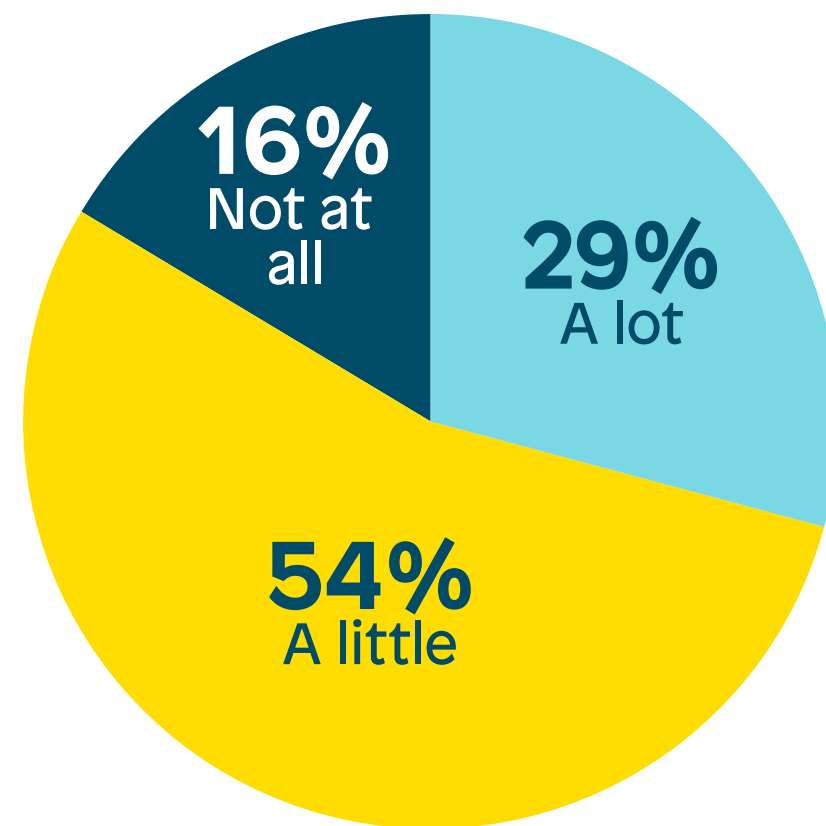


#### Post Primary

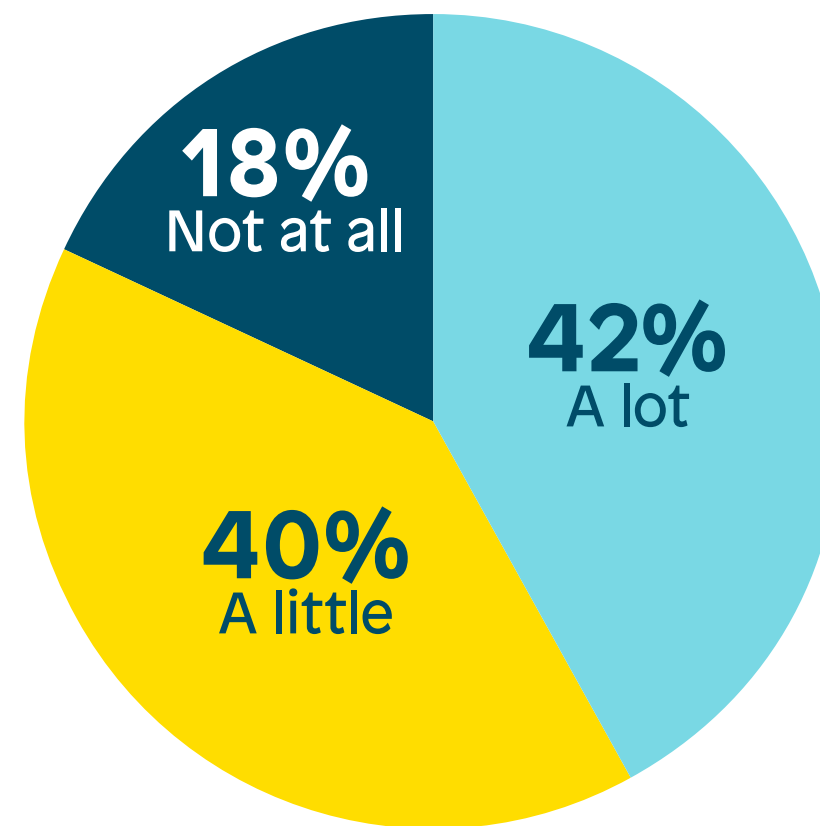


## Question 11:

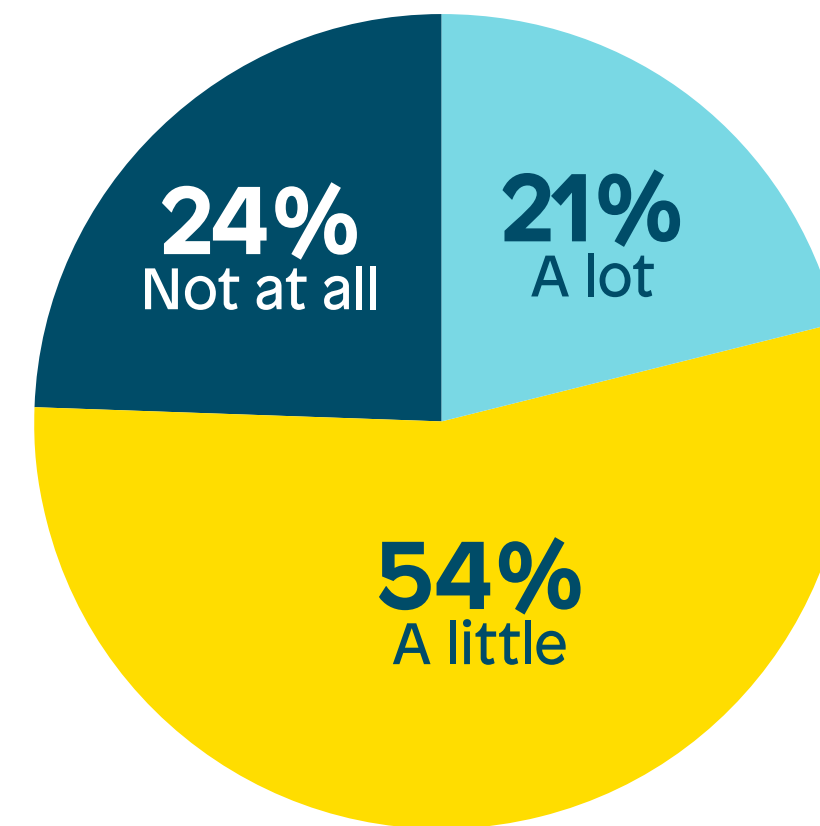
To what extent, if any, have restrictions in school during the Covid-19 pandemic had a negative impact on:



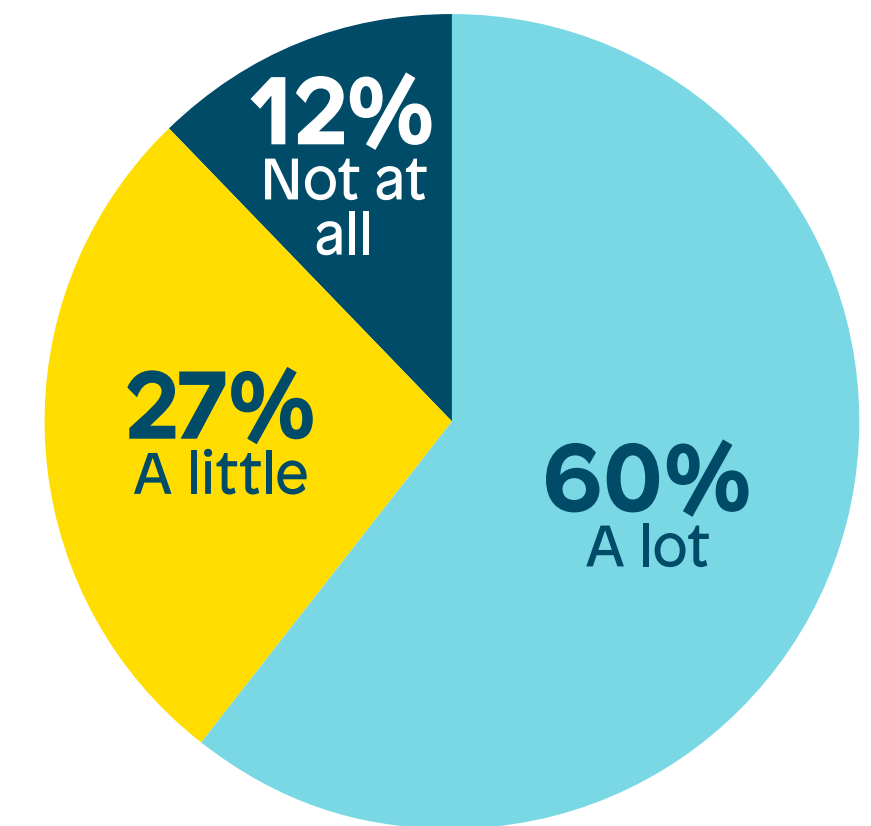
Learning



Mixing with friends



Communicating with teachers

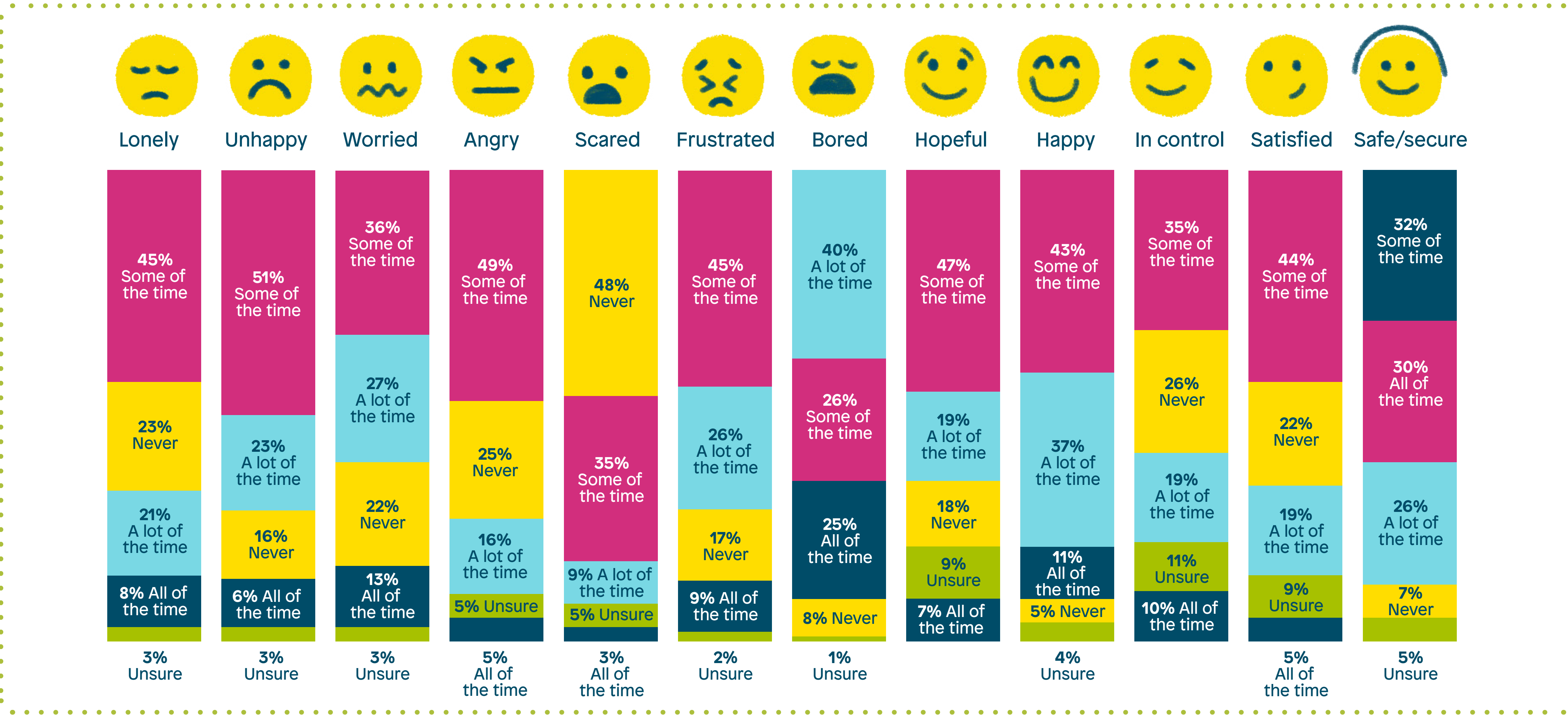


School activities



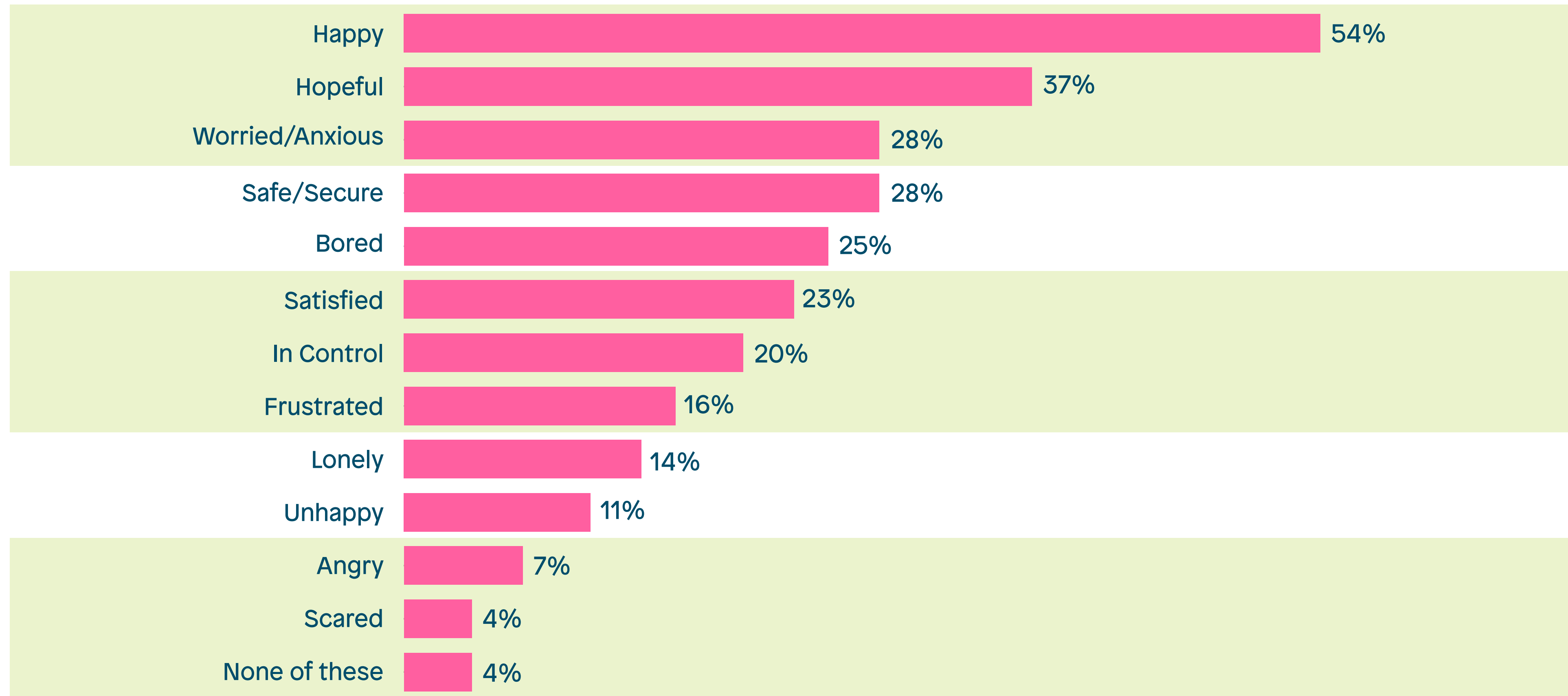
# Question 12:

During or because of the Covid-19 pandemic how often, if at all, have you felt each of the following?



## Question 13:

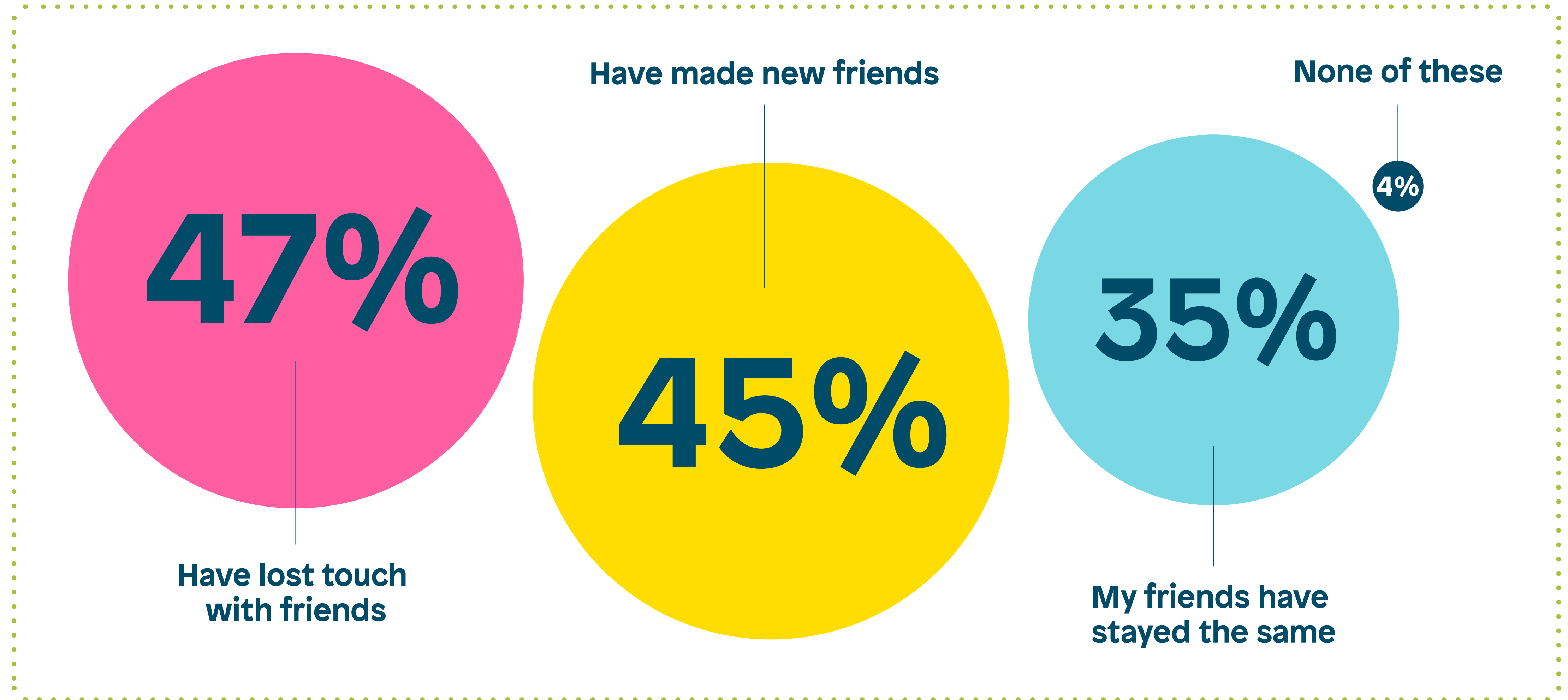
How do you feel now, in the Spring of 2022? Please pick up to 3 words that best describes how you feel about the Covid-19 pandemic now?





## Question 14:

As a result of the pandemic, a) which of the following apply to you?



\*children could select more than one option \*Numbers have been rounded to the nearest decimal point

## Final Question:

Is there anything else you would like to add about how Covid-19 has affected school children in Ireland?

# POSITIVES

**Covid has honestly make me more confident and I now have a better relationship with my family and friends.**

Girl, Age 12-14, Cavan

**I spent much more time outdoors with family and life was much more simple which I enjoyed a lot.**

Girl, aged 15-17, Cavan

**It impacted on how we saw the world and made us way more responsible, free and mature than we'd normally be.**

Girl, aged 12-14, Dublin

**I think it was a chance for me to realise what I enjoyed doing and I really found myself.**

Girl, aged 9-11, Wicklow

**COVID was a good experience for me as I loved home schooling and spending time with my family I hope it was the same for everyone else.**

Girl, aged 9-11, Donegal



With covid-19 we have missed out on so much including our junior certificate and are worried about the leaving certificate especially how points are crazy high. This is very stressful since we missed out on so much learning and this is a disadvantage since we have never sat a state exam and a lot of teachers were out for most the year with Covid-19 of some sort.

Girl, Age 15-17 Wexford

The pods made school not as fun as you could not interact as much as we used to and the masks made it very hard for me as you could not see peoples faces during class which mad it hard to understand people especially the teachers during class time.

Girl, Age 9-11, Wicklow

The pandemic has made the school environment extremely difficult. Large amounts of students and teachers are absent from school at a time due to Covid. Therefore progress in the curriculum can't be made and it seems impossible to catch up. Inflated points have increased the stress on students and we have grown unsure of what our future looks like regarding college courses.

Girl, Age 15-17, Dublin

# EDUCATION

It's harder going to school in person now since doing online school.

Girl, Age 15-17, Galway

I feel that more children felt stressed at home than they did at school as they had no support and maybe no one at home could help them leaving them feel hopeless.

Age 12-14, Limerick

It has affected children a lot due to the amount of school missed, it has also made some children less social while in the pandemic because we couldn't see our friends only on call and online school.

Boy, Age 12-14, Kilkenny

Everybody is kinda behind now because of homeschool.

Non-binary, Age 12-14, Cavan



## Ruined my work ethic.

Girl, Age 15-17, Cavan

**Classroom:** We have been moved to a temporary classroom in the canteen affects our learning as cars passing and noise outside and we can't hear the teacher.

Boy, Age 15-17, Limerick

A lot of students have a lot less knowledge since some people were very unmotivated which has caused them to be behind in their learning and their motivation seems to be gone.

Girl, Age 15-17, Limerick

Personally, I feel education wise im not at a 3rd year level because we've missed out on so much school and doing schooling online and at home just felt like an online workshop during the summer.

Girl, Age 15-17, Limerick

I just think it was a bit hard to do homeschooling with the phone and family shouting and yeah it was just a mess.

Girl, Age 12-14, Sligo

I feel the pandemic has caused a lot of uproar, I was never able to properly experience 1st Year in Secondary School. A lot of the teachers are doing their best to teach us, but some of us, are struggling, others just don't care anymore, others never did care. To be honest, sometimes I feel like I'm drowning, underneath all the work, social pressure and self-doubt. I like to start each day by thinking that each problem is a snowflake, small and easily dealt with, but they keep coming and coming faster than I can beat them, until, before long, I'm buried underneath an avalanche. Sometimes, I feel overwhelmed just talking to someone for too long, I don't let it show but, I don't even know anymore. The only certainty is that I believe to always look on the bright side of life. Things will get better, I just have to hold on until then.

Boy, Age 12-14, Cavan

We have missed a lot of school we cannot catch up on. I don't think it's very fair because we are in 3rd year doing junior cert, and we haven't had a full year or school since 6th class :(

Female, Age 12-14, Dublin

Due to teachers also being out most of the time due to covid-19 and isolation we missed out on so much work and teaching and still having to move on because we don't have the time to go back. It is very frustrating and loads of students are on overload stress including myself.

Girl, Age 12-14, Wexford



It was to always hard to talk with friends at the covid stage.

Boy, Age 12-14, Kilkenny

I feel like it has separated a lot of friends and has really effected our lives with school and socially.

Girl, Age 12-14, Dublin

Became more socially awkward, don't know how to talk to new people and thinking what to say.

Girl, Age 12-14, Galway

I think that it has had an impact on socializing with other people.

Boy, Age 12-14 , Kerry

I have felt tired of being stuck in **ENDLESS** lockdowns.

Boy, Age 9-11

Covid 19 has affected children of Ireland because loss of training time and big events ,competitions and effects their social skills and their mental health people have also lost a lot of loved ones during the pandemic but on the bright side people have picked up new skills and families have become closer together.

Girl, Age 12-14,Wicklow

# SOCIAL IMPACT

My social skills have deteriorated a lot and I get very anxious in crowded places, get burnt out quicker in the company of others. I care less about school.

Non-binary, Age 15-17, Limerick

Made me more insecure because of having masks all the time.

Girl, Age 12-14, Westmeath

I couldn't talk to my good friends and I couldn't see them for a little while

Girl, Age 9-11, Wicklow

Covid 19 has affected a lot of children in Ireland because they have lost most of their social skills and their mental health could be down a lot.

Girl, Age 12-14, Galway



**I feel I missed a lot of good memories with friends.**

Girl, Age 12-14, Dublin

**Lost contact with people. Forgot how to socialise and extremely anxious all of the time. It's very hard to catch up on work and I hated lockdown.**

Non-binary, Age 15-17, Limerick

**I lost contact with friends I've known for years and ended up losing all of them including some secondary school friends that I planned on staying in contact with when I got out of school.**

Girl, Age 15-17, Limerick

**I feel as though we are more addicted to technology because we stayed at home for so long and that we have lost some important communication/social skills as well.**

Girl, Age 15-17, Laois

**I don't feel I know my classmates that well because we were in lockdown and I didn't see them**

Girl, Age 15-17, Dublin

**The restrictions impacted me more than the virus.**

Boy, Age 15-17, Cavan

**It felt impossible to be safe during the peak of the pandemic in a school. I was terrified on a daily basis and tried to distance as much as possible this cause hardship on making friendship because no one else was really distancing.**

Girl, Age 15-17, Dublin

**I feel like the Covid-19 pandemic has affected school children quite a lot because we were isolated for so long and now with things going back to normal I think a lot of people are still very unsure and possibly feel unsafe and uneasy. I also think it has affected our learning quite drastically as we missed about 1.5 years of school and now i think that the pressure is really being applied especially to senior cycle students like 5th and 6th years.**

Girl, Age 15-17, Limerick



**I have gotten a lot more overwhelmed and I'm not as happy anymore.**

Girl, Age 12-14, Dublin

**It made me feel lonely and sad a lot of the time.**

Girl, Age 9-11, Dublin

**Huge impact on mental health and ability to communicate with people in real life**

Girl, Age 15-17, Kerry

# MENTAL HEALTH

**Has given many anxiety and some people struggle now with communication a bit and has been very harsh on those who are shy or have developed anxiety as people don't really care.**

Girl, Age 12-14, Dublin

**Had a huge impact on my mental health, I developed depression and was later diagnosed with an eating disorder. I do not believe that the pandemic was the sole reason for this but it certainly contributed.**

Boy, Age 15-17, Kerry

**It has effected a lot of our mental health and education but it seems like everyone is just ignoring that especially with the leaving cert.**

Girl, Age 15-17, Limerick



Ombudsman for Children's Office  
Millennium House  
52–56 Great Strand Street  
Dublin 1  
D01 F5P8

T: 01 865 6800  
F: 01 874 7333  
E: [oco@oco.ie](mailto:oco@oco.ie)  
[www.oco.ie](http://www.oco.ie)  
🐦 @OCO\_ireland



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