

## “WE GO AGAIN”

It's the cliché trotted out by many a footballer after their team has been defeated.

The interviewer asks “so Jurgen, you've lost 7-2, what does this result mean for you and your team?” He responds, “well, we go again next week”.

Whether results are spiralling out of control or an upturn in form is only around the corner; the fixtures will be coming anyway. So we go again. We go again, even in COVID times, because elite sport is about the only thing still continuing!

“We go again” was what many parents may have been thinking during the UK Government announcement on the 4th January. The kids were home after their first day of a new term when suddenly schools were closed to most;

teachers were re-entering the dark world of Microsoft Teams, and hundreds of thousands of parents were running a home school. Again.

We go again.

But perhaps there is at least one advantage to doing this again in that, well, we've done it before.

We have learned some lessons like;

1. You don't need to go and buy a four-year supply of toilet roll.
2. If you haven't got an external structure to our day, you'll probably benefit from setting our own.
3. The challenges facing young people are as great as ever.

At Souster Youth, we spent the early part of December

### In this issue:

- Young people & Digital Technology
- In Focus: Enabling students to thrive
- How you can help us reach more young people

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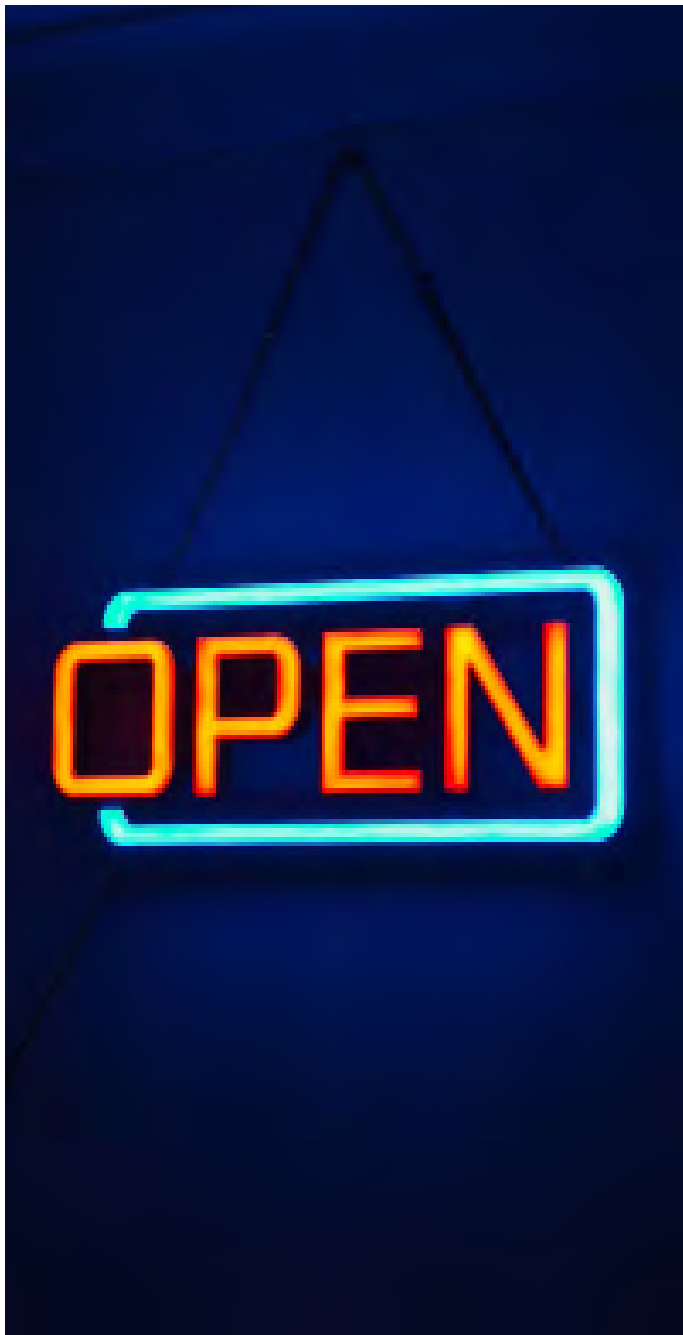
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processing some of the research emerging from the pandemic about young people's mental health and their engagement with screens. You can read about some of our findings in 'The Article'.

Of course the pandemic continues to loom large over our work with young people, but we have managed to keep our doors open, within government guidelines, all the way through. It is no different now. As critical workers we have continued to offer psychological health work in schools, in our centre and online. I am immensely proud that our team has put themselves at personal risk to continue offering support to vulnerable young people.

As I write this we are making arrangements to continue our work:

- in person support for those most in need, online support for others.
- Workshops for parents
- Online youth groups
- Support and Training for local youth workers

Thanks to your support, we stand ready to help.

Finally, let me say thank you to all of you who support our work! We are grateful for the donations via our Christmas campaign and those who raised money towards our work in December.

**Jason Royce** is the Director of Souster Youth.

## How you can support us

We're on a mission to transform the social, emotional and spiritual wellbeing of young people in east Northamptonshire. You can help us in this goal by supporting us financially, through direct giving either via our [website](#) or by [contacting us](#) for a giving form. You can also give whilst you shop, at no extra cost to yourself - we are signed up with Give as You Live and Amazon Smile.



When you shop at over 4,000 top stores including John Lewis & Partners, Expedia and Marks & Spencer via Give as you Live Online, they'll turn a percentage of your spend into free funds for us! Simply sign up, search for the retailer and start shopping. It's that simple!

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## The Article:

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# YOUNG PEOPLE AND DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY

## Jason Royce on digital technology during lockdown

**I've heard it said: "Parenting is the easiest thing in the world to have an opinion about, but the hardest thing to do."**

**Never has that been more true than in the 21st century Digital Age where we are surrounded by opinions on all sides, and during a worldwide pandemic where both we and our children are facing a host of new challenges.**

Most children and young people are back at home, learning online and, together with parents or carers, have more freedom to choose how they spend their time.

### What does all that mean?

Well, we've been here in lockdown before. And as the research continues to emerge, we wanted to share just a few of the trends from the March lockdown and our best thinking about how parents can help.

### What happened last time?

**1. Screen time increased during lockdown.** You might not need a researcher to tell you this,

but many parents said that they 'relaxed the rules' around screen time during the last lockdown.

One survey found that 82% of parents said that their children's screen time increased during the first lockdown.

This isn't to say that the extra screen time was exclusively down to parents; it seems that young people were quite keen to be on screen too.

**"82% of parents said screen time increased during lockdown."**

As a result of this extra time online, many existing online trends were accelerated.

Applications like TikTok increased in their popularity and young people, especially teenage girls, watched increased amounts of exercise content. However the exercise focussed on achieving a particular physical look, rather than on increasing fitness levels.

## 2. There was a trend towards screen use alone and in private.

This is a trend that many parents seem concerned about. National surveys of parents found common themes in their top concerns:

- Not feeling confident/able to prepare young people for life online.
- 75% of parents are concerned about their child accessing inappropriate material
- 49% of parents are concerned about them oversharing information.
- 61% of parents are concerned that social media is an overwhelming distraction.
- 54% of parents are concerned about unwanted contact by strangers.

## “The concerns of parents seem to increase with the age of their child”

Not only this, but parental concerns seem to increase with the age of their child. As children get older, and seek greater independence, it can become more and more difficult to manage the amount of screen time they have and the content they see.

Whilst there are certainly risks to be managed we shouldn't forget that screen use was, and remains, an important coping strategy for many young people. Many young people use screens to stay in touch with friends when they can't meet in person. As we'll see shortly not all screen use is equal.

## 3. Existing social media trends accelerated.

- More in-app games, and increased popularity
- Young people reported an increased self-consciousness about how they present themselves and their life online. Many say they spend lots of time carefully curating which images they post and using filters and photo editing apps to manage the presentation.
- More and more apps and games are being used to generate revenue from young people.

It seems likely that many of these trends and concerns are likely to be repeated during this current lockdown.



### What does the research say?

There is some controversy in the research about screen use and studies offer conflicting findings and advice. But here is our three point summary of what we think the research DOES show:

1. The type of content that is consumed is more significant than the amount of time spent using screens.
2. Screen use can affect the quality and quantity of sleep.
3. There is a negative impact when activities that offer significant benefits are replaced by screen time.

There is much to think about here. How can you adapt your habits to look after yourself?



## Our online seminars

There is so much more we could say about screen use and we know that parents are keen to get sensible and practical advice. That's why we are running two more of our popular online evening seminars this term.

Details will be on our website in the next few weeks and those of you signed up for information about 'training and events' will be the first to hear about the next sessions.

**Jason Royce** is the Director of Souster Youth.

## With this in mind what can parents do to help?

Set some 'house rules' that apply to everyone in the house. Here are four that we like, but you may want to adapt them for your own home:

**1. No screens at mealtimes** - Take advantage of meals as a chance to engage in conversation, ask good questions and enjoy distraction free time together.

**2. No screens at bedtimes or in rooms at night** - Children and young people need at least 9.5 hours sleep per night. When we surveyed year 8 students at a local school, many were getting around 6-7 hours with screen use being a significant factor.

**3. Structure the day and include time not using screens** - Parents can help their children set structures for each day. You might want to include the recommended 60 minutes per day of moderate to vigorous exercise each day in a schedule. Other activities with proven benefits include; doing something to help someone else, reading a book, learning something new, social interactions and practising thankfulness. A couple of these each day can make a real difference.

**4. Talk about how you use devices and screen time** - Not all screen use is equal. Four hours doing a geography project doesn't have the same impact as four hours comparing ourselves to unrealistic images of the 'perfect body'. It seems better to encourage productive activities on screens than to place blanket restrictions and cut-off points.

## Here is what parents said after our December sessions:

"Thank you very much, most useful!"

"Thank you for this session"

"Very helpful supporting information."

"Thanks all, such a difficult subject and we appreciate the support."

"Really helpful, thanks. So many important reminders of how to speak with your children when they're down. So helpful!"

"Thank you for taking the time to help and deliver such useful info."

"Thanks so much. This was brilliant!"

"Thank you so much, a really informative and helpful session."

"All very helpful, thanks!"

## We have two more events coming up this term:

- February 4th, 8-9.30pm
- February 23rd, 8-9.30pm

You can secure your **FREE** ticket here:

**TICKETS**

# IN FOCUS:

## ENABLING STUDENTS TO THRIVE

One of our key priorities is supporting the emotional wellbeing of students. Because of the pandemic many students are facing increased difficulties and challenges; anxiety and stress, exam pressures, friendship issues, low mood and depression. We want to do everything we can to help schools, parents and young people themselves.

During the autumn term we partnered with Youthscape, a national youth charity based in Luton, to provide an emotional wellbeing resource for students in local secondary schools here in Northamptonshire.

The resource is called 'Thrive' and is based upon engaging, real-life video stories from young people about their experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic. As well as watching these video stories, the students complete worksheets to help them reflect upon their own emotional wellbeing and COVID-19 story. They also hear advice from acclaimed author and adolescent mental health specialist Dr. Kate Middleton about the effects of the pandemic upon our emotional wellbeing and what we can do to counteract it.

Thrive aims to help students take steps to look after their own emotional wellbeing, as well as informing them of where they can access further support should they need it.

We were able to deliver this support to around 300 students aged 14-18 this term and we hope to do more in the future. The sessions have been overwhelmingly positively received by both staff and students.

It's difficult for students to open up about their emotional health. Some students fear how it will be perceived by their peers. Yet in one memorable session, a student took the risk to share vulnerably about the relational difficulties their family had faced because of lockdown. Sadly those challenges had led to a break-up in the family, and the student shared about the emotional impact this had upon them.



It was a risky thing to share. But their vulnerability paved the way for another classmate to share how their parents had made the decision to get a divorce. They received that news during the first lockdown.

These are difficult situations with no quick and easy fixes. But the students drew encouragement from one another that they were not the only one facing tough times. Likewise staff members have commented how helpful they found both the time to think these things and the advice shared within the session.

“We’ve not had a chance to have anything like this until now”, said one teacher.

We will be following-up on these Thrive sessions with schools during the spring term. There’s much more work to be done. But the Thrive resource has started a conversation about emotional health during, and following, the pandemic.

**Tim Sandford** leads on formal education for Souster Youth.

**If you would like to discuss inviting Souster Youth to speak at your school, please get in touch with us:**

- [hello@sousteryouth.org](mailto:hello@sousteryouth.org)
- [sousteryouth.org/invite-us-to-speak](https://sousteryouth.org/invite-us-to-speak)





# Before you go...

**Souster Youth is on a mission to transform the social, emotional and spiritual wellbeing of young people aged 11-19 in east Northamptonshire.**

**Why?** Because we know from recent academic studies that in the UK 1 in 7 young people have a mental health disorder; 1 in 5 girls, and 1 in 10 boys, self-harm and 40% of young people often feel lonely.

We see the incredible potential of young people , but many won't achieve that potential without the help they need right now. We would like to increase what we are doing locally to help young people.

**Would you help us by giving to the work of Souster Youth? To do this, click [here](#) or [contact us](#) so we can send you a giving form.**