

EXCLUSIVE LIFESTYLE LIFE & RELATIONSHIPS LIFE IN LOCKDOWN

Families in lockdown, some struggle while others thrive

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By [Caitlin Fitzsimmons](#)

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Life in lockdown has been a mixed blessing for Australian families, causing stress and anxiety but also creating opportunities for togetherness and bonding.

A national survey of 1000 parents found one in five families are struggling to cope with the stress of COVID-19, the lockdown measures and the economic downturn,

while 27 per cent of parents are worried about their family's mental health.



Caroline Willis and Lionel Bonnafous and their children, Emmanuelle, with home-made bow and arrow, and Theodore, who is learning to ride his new bike. STEVEN SIEWERT

But the same survey, conducted by Catalyst Research for family wellbeing charity Uplifting Australia, suggests 43 per cent of families are enjoying quality time together and using it to invest in emotional wellbeing. Meanwhile, 36 per cent of parents said the lockdown was a chance for the family to function better together.

Paige Williams, a lecturer at the Centre for Positive Psychology at the University of Melbourne and an Uplifting Australia board member, said many families were finding "struggling and thriving go hand in hand".

"We can be in the thick of struggling and recognising that we're under stress and feeling a level of discomfort but then also see that there's a benefit coming out of this," Dr Williams said.

"Parents that are in that homeschooling situation are probably feeling quite a lot of struggle ... but also see how that's helping to build relationships and connection."

Families in metro areas were more likely than their rural counterparts to say that COVID-19 has made it harder to balance home, work and family but also that the crisis has improved the way they function as a family.

Families who were sending their children to school were more likely to say they are coping well than parents supervising home learning but less likely to report the benefit of enhanced family togetherness.

For Caroline Willis and Lionel Bonnafous, it's been a bit of both. The couple from Kensington in the eastern suburbs have been supervising home learning for their daughter Emmanuelle, 7, and son Theodore, 4, while dealing with intense work

situations.

Ms Willis recently started a new job as an IT project manager and has felt pressure to prove herself, while Mr Bonnafous bought a travel agency last year that would normally specialise in European trips but is instead doing nothing but processing refunds.

"The economic impact of this is what makes it really stressful," Mr Bonnafous said. "I have less patience with my kids because I'm constantly thinking about my business and Caroline's thinking about her job."

Ms Willis said the family wasn't functioning well a few weeks ago but the situation was easier now with Theodore back at preschool and Emmanuelle due back next week.

"Now we're almost through it, I'm a bit sad that it's almost over," she said. "It's been nice spending time with the children, getting back to basics like cooking, they're learning how to knit, we just taught the little one how to ride a bike and lots of family, healthy outdoor activities to get our fresh air."

In the survey, families facing job losses or single-parent households were more likely to be struggling. More than one in three parents in families where at least one adult has lost their job were anxious about their own mental health or the health of someone in their immediate family, and these families were also more likely to say that COVID-19 was straining the family's ability to function effectively.

Uplifting Australia, which was founded six years ago and is funded by corporates and family charitable foundations, released the research to support the launch of its [wellbeing program as a digital tool](#). More than 40,000 people have done the program face-to-face, mainly through schools.

Meanwhile, the Australian Institute of Family Studies is also researching family wellbeing during COVID-19 and asking people to [complete an online survey](#).



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