

# Coping During COVID: Experiences and Strategies of Children, Teens, and Older Adults

**Authors**  
The Life in COVID Study research team

## 2. Methodology

This project utilizes a mixed methods approach with research methods tailored to each age cohort:

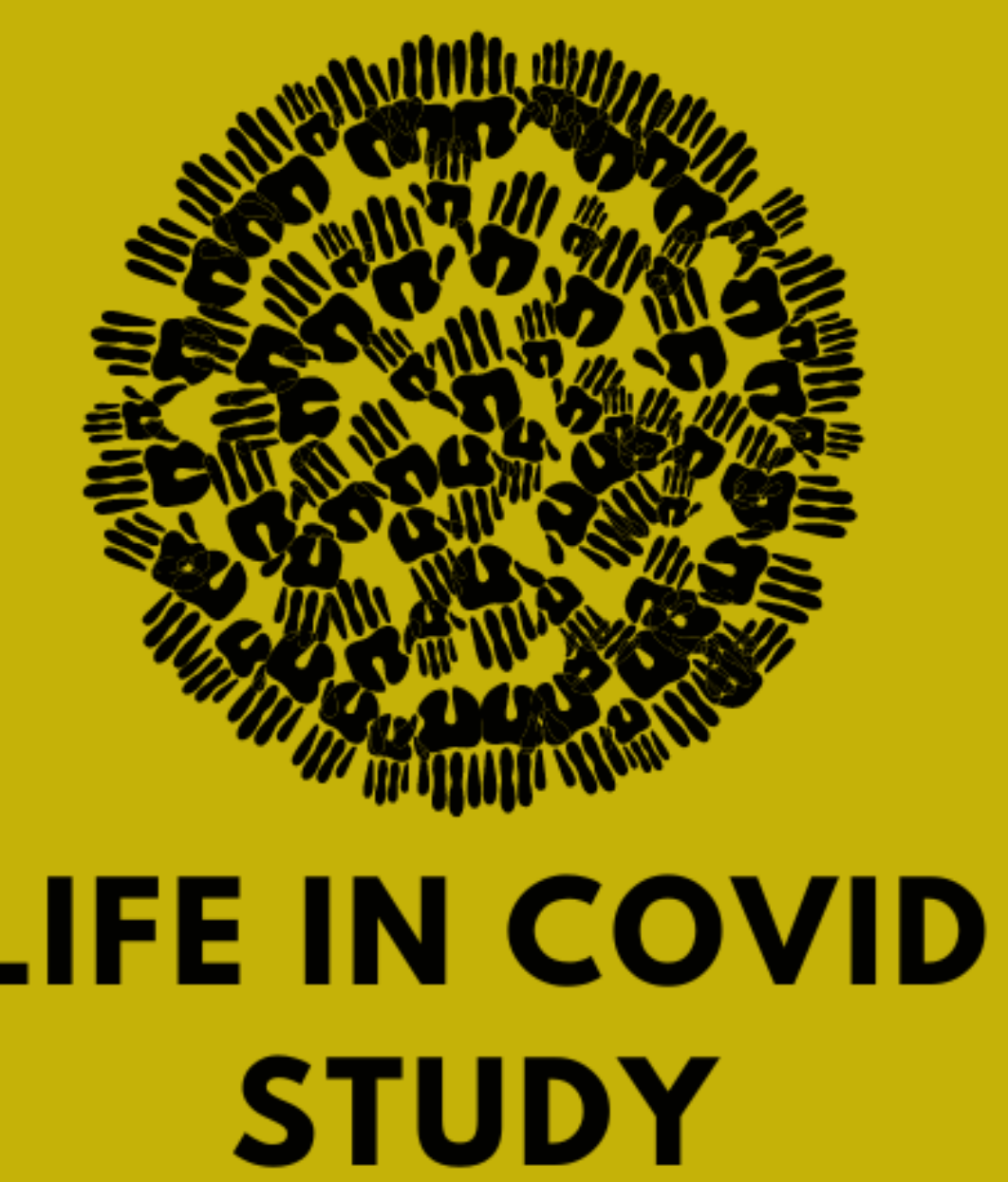
- Online surveys
- Journals
- Drawings and Maps
- Interviews
- Focus groups
- Podcasts
- Research workshops
- Participant observation

The questions highlight the main topics of the project, such as:

- Daily experiences,
- Mobilities
- Connections with others
- Challenges faced
- Coping strategies
- Access to COVID information
- Being helped and helping others

## 4. Conclusion

The pandemic had comparable impacts on children, teens, and older adults, with isolation being the most prevalent feeling. The most common challenges among respondents were the inability to socialize with people outside their immediate household and disruptions to normal routines. Despite generational differences, participants generally coped with these challenges by connecting with friends and family online and spending more time using the Internet and watching TV. Participants also found ways to help others in the pandemic. They assisted in tangible ways—such as making meals and running errands for others—and also did the emotional labor of checking in on loved ones.



## 1. Summary

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the particular vulnerabilities of children, teenagers, and older adults. Generally, children and teenagers experienced disruptions to education, and older adults faced medical vulnerability and increased threat of exposure to the virus. Concerns about isolation, financial instability, and psychoemotional wellness were also reported across generations. Our multidisciplinary research team explored pandemic-related experiences and mobilities through mixed-method data collection (i.e., interviews, journals, drawings, surveys, podcasts, focus groups) of the experiences of children (i.e., 5-11), and their guardians, teens (i.e., 12-18), older adults (i.e., over 65), and key informants as part of a multi-year study in the United States and Canada. This poster explores how different age groups used similar coping strategies in diverging ways to manage pandemic challenges.

Fig. 1 - Emotions Experienced by Children, Teens, and Older Adults in the United States and Canada During the COVID-19 Pandemic

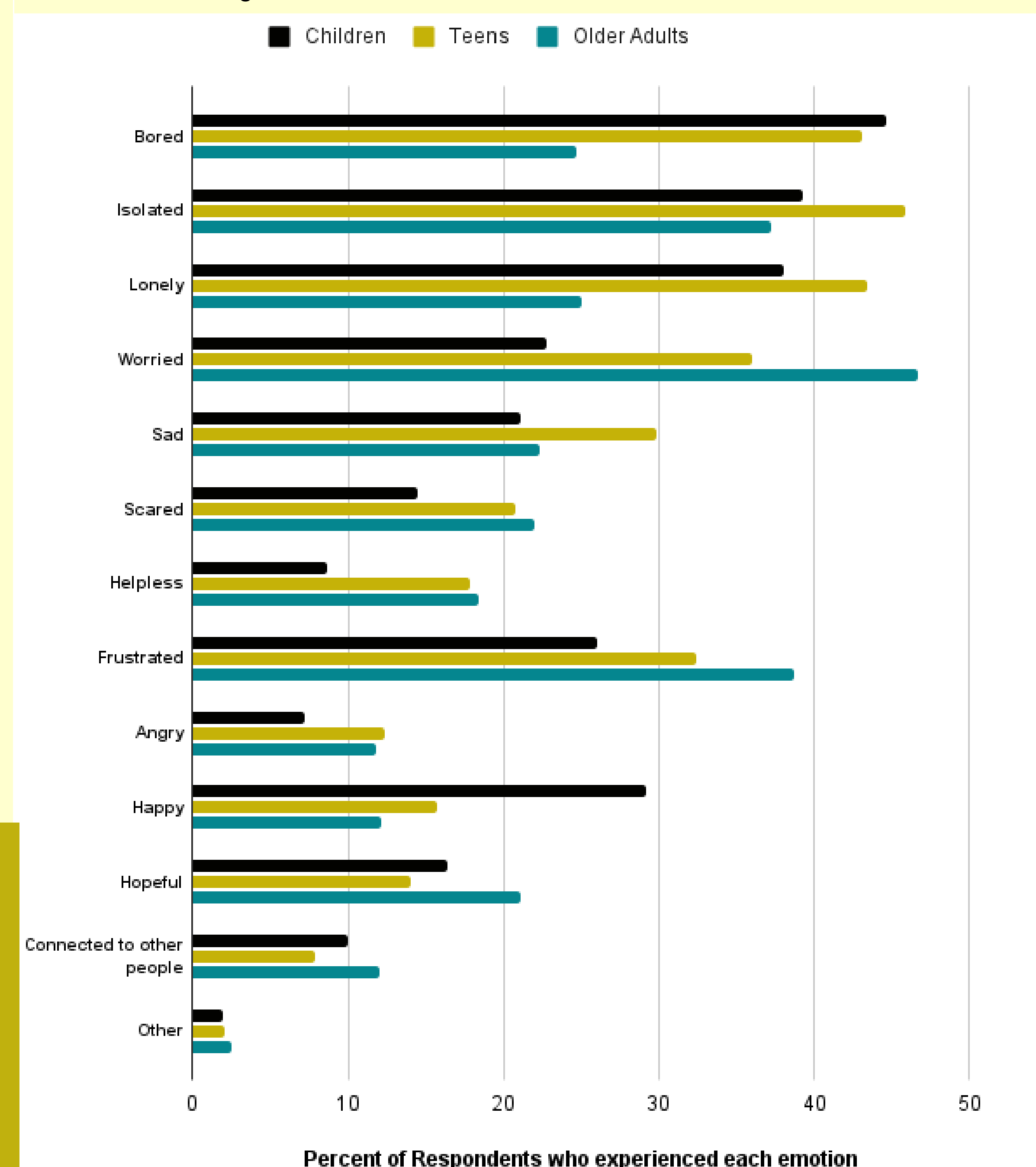
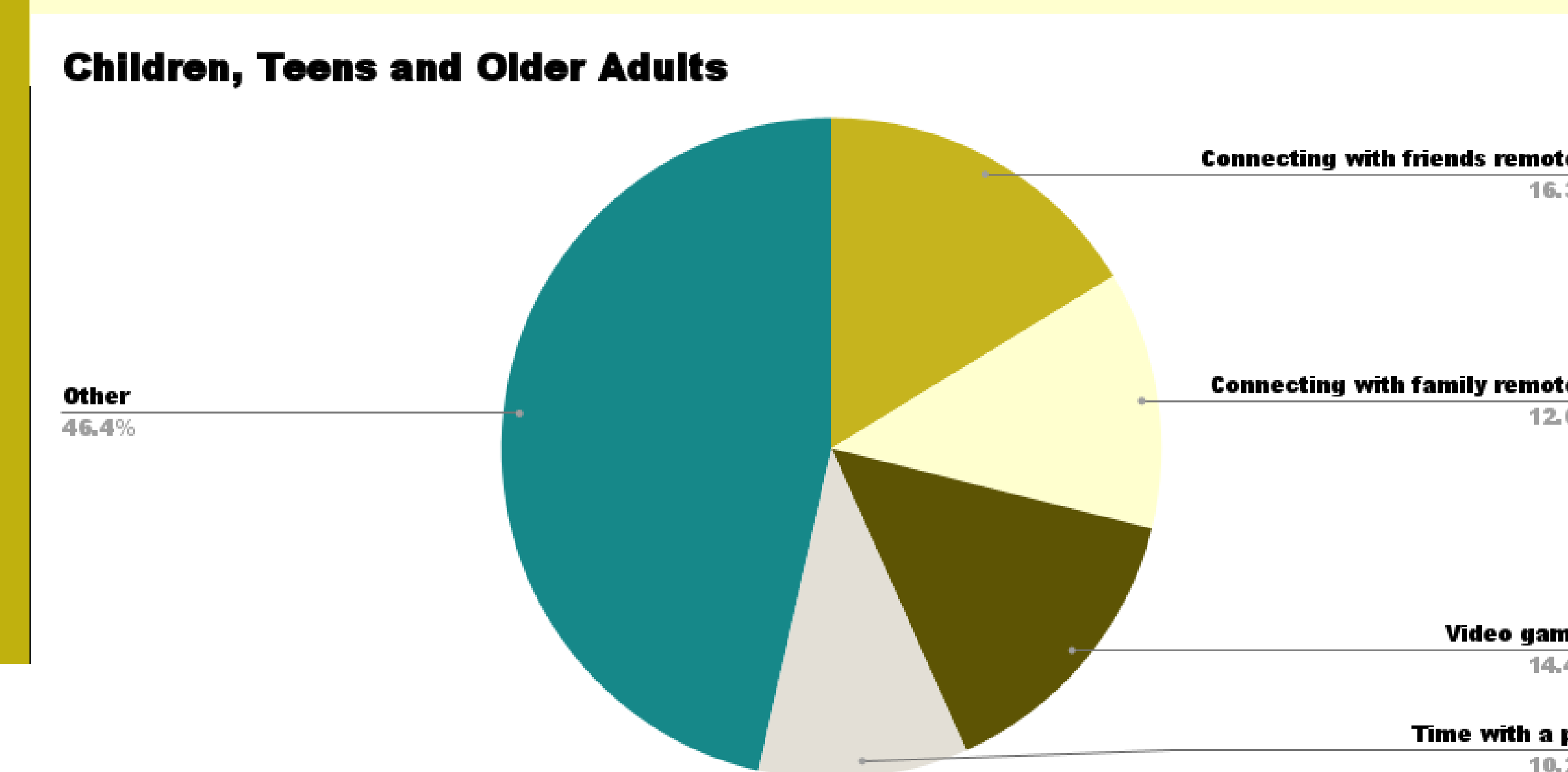


Fig. 2 - Most Common Coping Strategies Reported by Children, Teens, and Older Adults in the United States and Canada During the COVID-19 Pandemic



## 5. Authors and Acknowledgements

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Children and teens predominantly struggled with an inability to visit friends, whereas more older adults identified challenges associated with fears of being exposed to COVID-19. Results indicate that groups employ both age-specific coping strategies (e.g., remote connection with classmates/teachers, pets; video games; television/reading) and shared coping strategies (e.g., remote connection with friends, family; hobbies). The use of technology for videoconferencing, video games, and media consumption contributed to a greater ability to cope with the pandemic but was associated with consequences related to self-reported overuse for some groups. Identification of age-specific challenges and coping strategies will serve to inform best practices for disaster recovery through the promotion of safe and resilient communities.

## 3. Findings

### Emotions

The emotional impacts of the pandemic were evident across all age groups. Most commonly reported emotions were:

- |                           |                     |
|---------------------------|---------------------|
| <b>Children and Teens</b> | <b>Older adults</b> |
| • Boredom                 | • Isolation         |
| • Isolation               | • Worry             |
| • Loneliness              | • Frustration       |

### Challenges

Participants encountered various challenges during the pandemic. These challenges were associated with:

- |                                      |                                    |
|--------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| <b>Children and Teens</b>            | <b>Older adults</b>                |
| • Remote schooling                   | • Fear of COVID-19                 |
| • Decreased social connections       | • An inability to visit loved ones |
| • Uncertainty about school reopening | • Limited activities               |
|                                      | • Issues with video calls          |



A painting of a rainbow made by the hands of older adult residents at a long-term care facility in Quebec, Canada. In many parts of Canada, the rainbow was a symbol of hope and solidarity. Photo by Christine Gibb, June 3, 2020.

In addition, the digital divide worsened feelings of isolation for older adults without internet access, highlighting the shortcomings of online interactions.

### Coping Strategies

Children, teens, and older adults shared similar coping strategies (Fig. 2), such as remote socializing and engaging in recreational activities. In addition, participants engaged in various helping behaviors during the pandemic. Most of the coping strategies reported by participants were positive, though some did report engaging in harmful behaviors. Most commonly reported strategies were:

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>Children and Teens</b>   | <b>Older adults</b>   |
| • Cooking   | • Video-conferencing  |
| • Science experiments   | • Watching TV   |
| • Engaging in helping behaviors (e.g., creating artwork or running errands) | • Reading   |
| • Substance use   | • Engaging in helping behaviors (e.g. reaching out to others) |
| • Excessive screen time   | • Substance use   |
|   | • Overeating  |

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