

Life at
Home 2020:
Pulse Report
#1



In the Messy Middle

Making
More of this
Temporary
Time

Finding a Way Through the Chaos

This year, we've all experienced a global event like no other. Moving us from freedom into severe restrictions, and now emerging into something else, right now, we're all living in a new and unknown time – one we're calling 'the messy middle'. We've seen that by making more of the uncertain time between two normals, home can be our rock, our stability and our certain place in an uncertain world.

This report explores the impact of the messy middle on the lives of families all around the world. It uses what has worked for them to suggest ways to help everyone make more of their homes and their lives, both right now and once it's all over.

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Exploring Life at Home

Every year, we speak to thousands of people to help us understand what makes a better life at home. This work tells us that we're living in an era defined by the five core emotional needs of home: privacy, security, comfort, ownership and belonging.

This year, as the world around us changes, that work is more timely and important than it's ever been. Because for many of us, home has become everything: our workplace, our school, our sanctuary, our boundary.

To really understand how this experience has influenced our emotional needs and our relationship with home, we're regularly talking to 20 households from some of the world's most affected countries.

They've told us about the big and small ways their lives have changed – sometimes dramatically affecting their everyday wellbeing and future plans in serious and long-term ways.

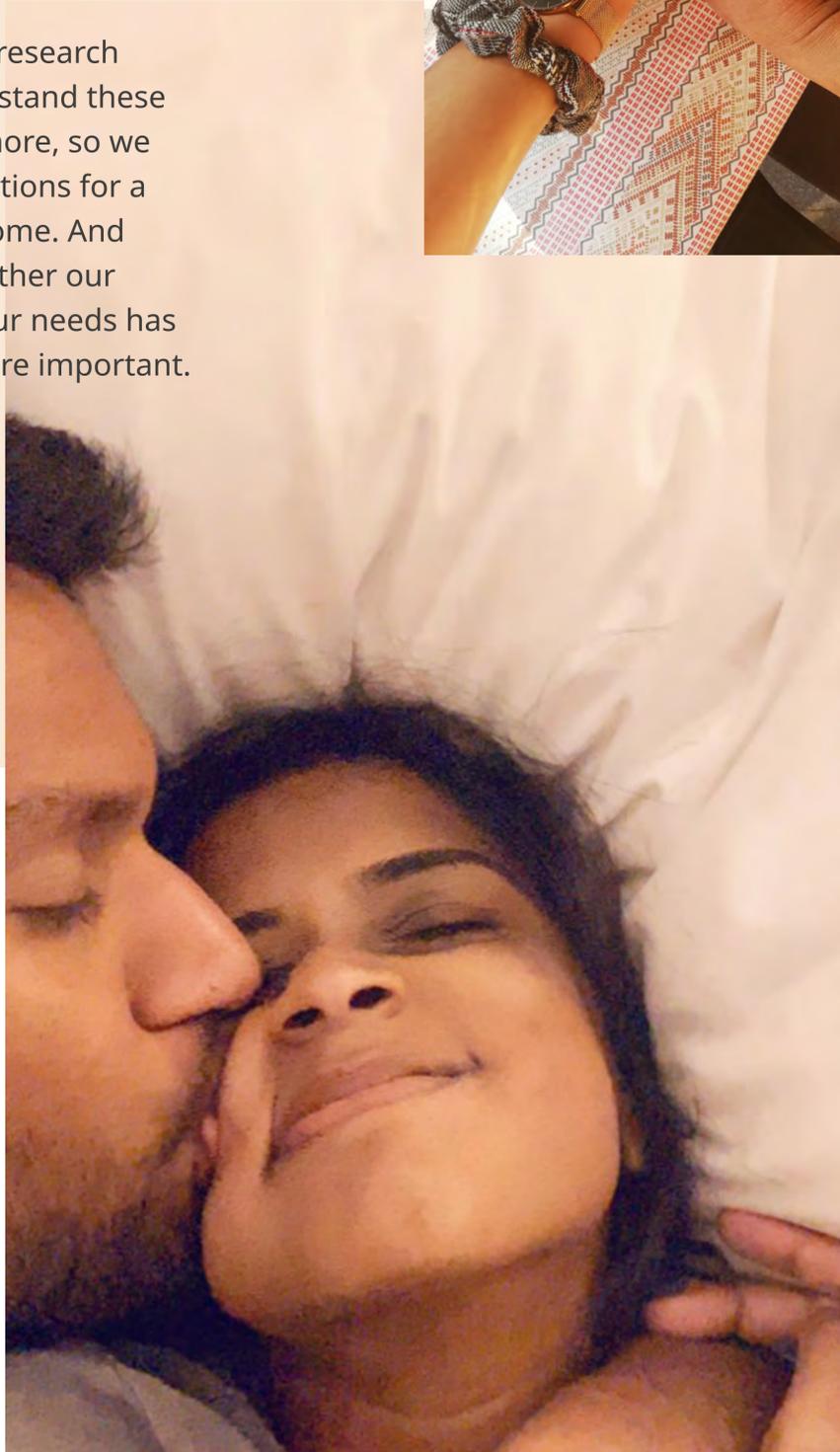


A Mission to Meet our Emotional Needs

Our mission is to help everyone thrive at home. But finding happiness isn't just about the size, location or value of our houses. It's about our homes meeting our emotional needs.

These needs are universal, but they play different roles at different stages of our lives, depending on how old we are, who we live with and where we are in the world.

Each year, our research helps us understand these needs a little more, so we can create solutions for a better life at home. And right now, whether our home meets our needs has never been more important.



Privacy

This is being able to disconnect, reflect and choose how you interact with others.

Comfort

This isn't about a comfy bed or a fluffy throw, it's about feeling content and at ease in your surroundings.

Ownership

This means having a sense of control over the space and place where you live.

Belonging

This means feeling part of a group that accepts you, in a place that reflects who you are.

Security

This isn't about physical or financial security, but about feeling safe and grounded when you're at home.



When Home Became Everything

As news of the coronavirus swept across the world, government-imposed restrictions did too. Country after country announced never-before-seen measures to contain its spread, by limiting the movement of their people. As the outside world became threatening, our homes became our sanctuaries.

In different countries, people found themselves in varying levels of quarantine, and many looked to their homes to support them with every aspect of their lives: family, work, school, entertainment, socialising and everything else.

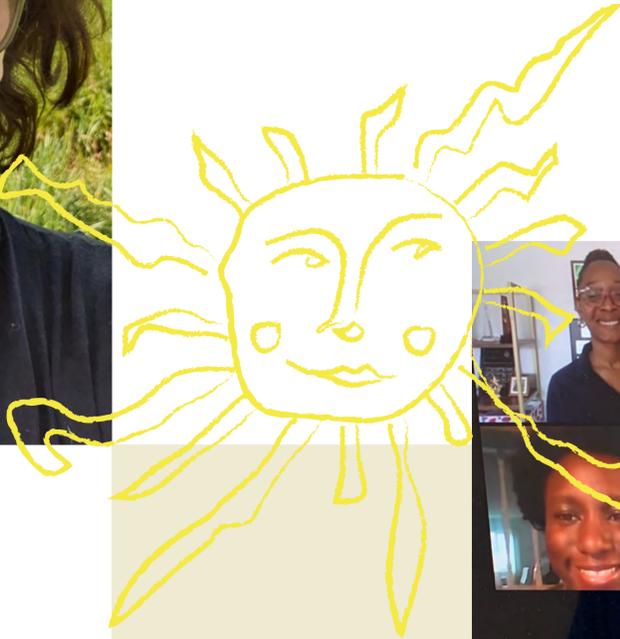
In what was for some an uncertain and volatile world, life at home became a much-needed source of comfort, security and relief. Feeling grateful, people reconnected with their homes and loved ones in new and unexpected ways.



Ashley, USA

“My home is basically the only place that feels safe to me right now, it’s the only place where I have control. I know that everything is clean, and I have the ability to ensure my safety. Outside of here I don’t have that control, so that uncertainty over whether other people are taking it as seriously as me highly impacts my security.”

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Living Differently

At IKEA, we've believed for many years that home exists beyond four walls. It's a network of spaces and places inside our walls and outside in our communities.

With so many restrictions in place, especially in the early stages of the crisis, this network was interrupted, and home became very different. While some people told us about surprising positives and others described real negatives, there were some common experiences that our households from around the world repeatedly spoke of.

Blurred Boundaries

At the same time home, office, school, gym, playground and social space, the lines between family, work and social life disappeared. As one activity ran into the next, and the next, people struggled to feel in control of the different modes of life and their days felt increasingly endless.

"At the beginning I felt like a superwoman. I'd managed to get the kids to complete all of their schooling and to do my work. Though I felt like crying at the end of the day."

Nicole, Australia

Monotonous Days

Every moment spent at home made the days, weeks, even months, feel repetitive. With no chance of meeting friends or marking moments with outdoor hobbies, every day felt the same, motivation dropped and energy for to-do lists and home renovations disappeared. Even getting out of bed, or ready for work, was a struggle for some people.

"I feel very, very tired. So, when the bell rings in the morning to get up, it feels like you haven't slept even though you have."

Margareta Italy

Shared Spaces

Everyone had to adapt, often quickly, to brand new restrictions. Despite this, many surprised themselves with how resilient and adaptable they actually were. Where they'd expected household tensions, they actually found new respect and consideration for each other's needs, space and schedules.

"My husband has been so mindful about me having to spend more time at home and he's gone out of his way to make it more comfortable for me. When I get stressed he works with me to work it out and he's taking the lead on some projects so I feel more comfortable."

Ashley, USA

Virtual Connections

From conference calls and board meetings, to birthday parties and exercise classes, digital communication quickly filled the gap left in people's social and work lives. For some, it helped them feel together and part of a shared experience. For others, it couldn't give them the human connection that they needed most.

"I miss building and maintaining that personal connection with clients, friends and colleagues. I use Zoom and Teams a fair bit, but it is nowhere close to the actual experience of meeting people."

Shai, Australia

SECURITY

A Search for Comfort and Security

In 2018, privacy and security were the most important emotional needs of home – 90% of people wanted privacy, and a quarter said they didn't have enough.

But this year looks a bit different: as people get to grips with the messy middle, their need for comfort is really important too.

When homes have given people the comfort and security they needed, they have felt like sanctuaries. Other homes have fallen short, leaving their residents feeling uneasy, overwhelmed and isolated.

Dilip, Sweden

“When you feel safe, you want privacy, but when you are worried, you want to talk more and find out more about what people are doing.”

Comfort



Lockdown

Finding What we Needed

More Structure in Routine

Providing much-needed control and boundaries between work, family and social time, people used routines to bring structure and comfort to their monotonous days.

“My workload has gone up. With the kids around, and given they had holidays, they’ve been up late. We have one TV, so there is always a battle to get hold of the remote... After a meal, I usually go for a walk. That gives me space and time alone to go through my day.”
Shai, Australia

“I’m cooking way more and always take time to prepare a proper lunch for myself. Every evening I finish the day with an aperitivo at my window – then I know it’s time to relax and it gives me a moment to appreciate what I have.”
Illenia, Italy

More Purpose in Positive Activities

By focusing on what they knew and could control, people found a sense of agency, purpose and comfort in new activities that made them feel good.

“I went to find things to do, like my garden, which is pretty new. Every evening I’m like ‘oh, need to check on the garden!’. It’s become a part of my day now, a sense of purpose. It’s a good excuse to get out.”
Ashley, USA

“I finally got the pet fish I had wanted for a long time.”
Kennith, China

“You’ve got to do your bit to support all business – so I buy a coffee I wouldn’t normally buy, pop to the kebab shop, the garage.”
Alan, Australia

More Comfort in Changed Space

A corner of the kitchen became a study, or a sunny living room became a gym. People had time to adapt their homes to better suit their more restricted lives, giving them more control and comfort.

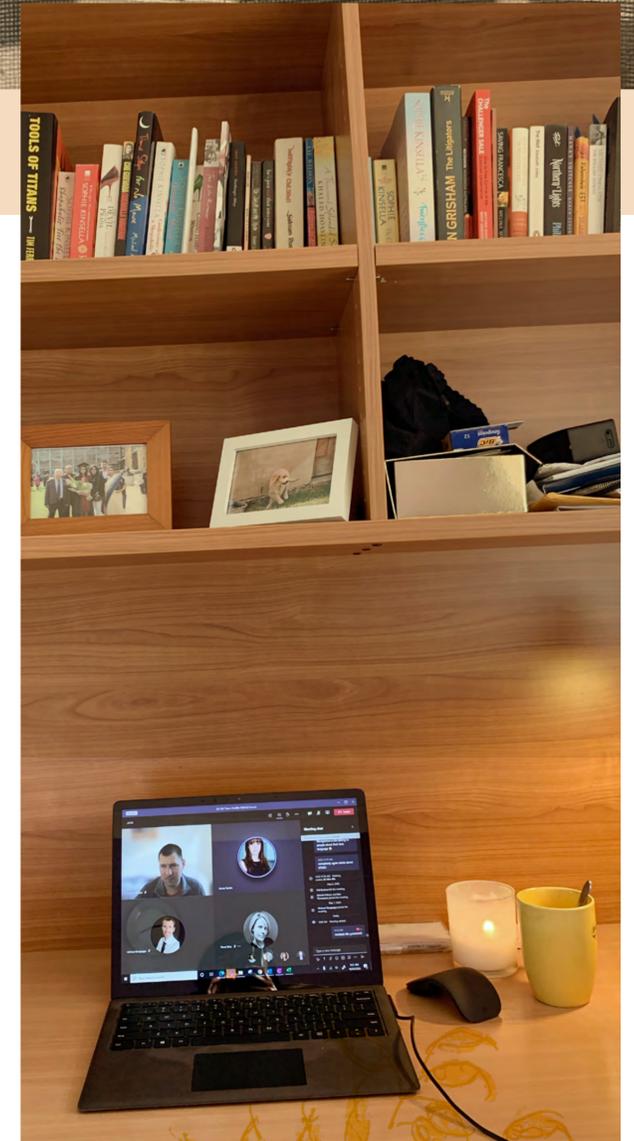
“I’ve set up a home office and created a separate bedroom for my daughter. It has been very difficult to make changes during lockdown.”
Mauro, Italy

“I have my space on my balcony where I go in the evening – that’s MY space. It has lights and a water fountain, and I sit and have a drink and unwind.”
Allison, USA

“This table has brought me optimism, allowing a functioning work-from-home environment, however also a place of relaxation... I have a work-from-home set-up on one side of the table, and I have been completing puzzles and artworks on the other side.”

Rachel, USA

“Because I think maybe before I didn’t feel like I had a comfortable home, so that’s why I never want to stay at home. But because of this pandemic I have time to tidy up my room and I feel it’s actually kind of comfortable to stay in.”
Kennith, China



The Messy Middle

Stuck Between Two Normals

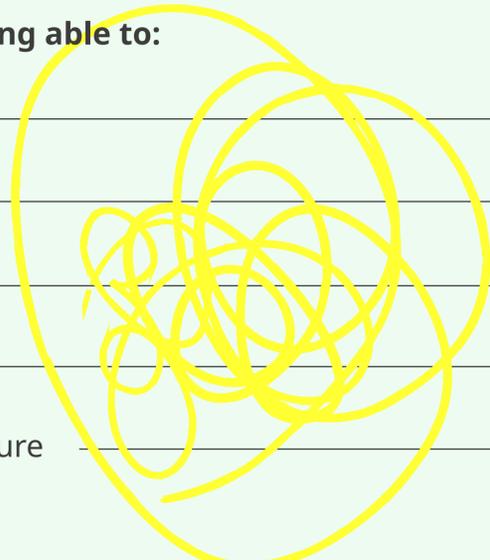
As restrictions loosen, the world beyond our front doors looks very different. Economic difficulty. Conditional freedoms. A changed and uncertain future. There hasn't been the return to normal life that many had hoped for, so the initial relief has been replaced with a realisation: we'll be living half in, half out of lockdown for a long time to come. We're calling this strange time 'the messy middle'.

The Messy Middle

This is a time of regained and reduced freedoms. In lots of ways it's more uncertain and unstable than lockdown, so is making people feel more anxious and stressed. No one can say for sure how long it will last or what changes are coming, so people are temporarily adjusting for the much longer term.

The messy middle is being able to:

- go outside → but staying socially distant
- see friends and family → but in only certain sized groups and contexts
- eat in restaurants → but with a regulated experience and changed atmosphere
- restart life again → but with personal and global financial worries
- feel excited about the future → but fearing it could all be lost again



Alfred, China

“My wife and I wanted to have lunch at the shopping mall just downstairs from my flat but...nearly all shops were closed, leaving one takeaway fast-food house and one café open for business. People were waiting in line to be seated, but the maximum seats were four persons in the same table under the COVID-19 restrictions. We brought our takeaway food home instead.”



Living with Uncertainty

Day-by-day and country-by-country, restrictions are changing, with even slight adjustments having a big effect on life at home and beyond it.

Back to work, back to school, back in the same

room as extended family – all at social distance – lots of people are thinking about the things they want to continue with when it's finally all over.



Living with Uncertainty

More Habits to Take Forward

Whether it's time with the kids, a new exercise habit or just the space to self-reflect, lots of people have learnt things about themselves, and what makes them happy, that they want to take forward.

"The kids and I are happy that our 'routine' is getting back to normal... However, it is a little sad as I know I will not be able to spend as much time with them as I have in the past six weeks."
Shai, Australia

"[I've] discovered that I love outdoor exercise and naps at lunchtime."
Kennith, China

"Take the opportunity of less travel time, to spend more time on your self-care and fitness. Be present and happy in the moment. Take a positive from every day."
Rachel, Australia

More Snippets of Joy

The sun on their faces. Watching their gardens grow. It's the little things that are giving many people fragments of hope and joy in their socially distant worlds.

"Long baths and music playing in our newly-renovated home gives me the time out I so badly need at the moment."
Nicole, Australia

"Today I finally took action in transforming my tiny balcony [into] something that I hope will make me happy. I ordered flowerpots in different sizes, seeds and soil. Everything will arrive on Wednesday and then I will transform my balcony in a mini vegetable garden."
Margareta, Italy

More Financial Anxiety

Focus has shifted from a global health emergency and a collective fight against the virus, to an international economic crisis and a personal battle to make ends meet. The reality of being out of work in a world that could re-enter lockdown at any time is tough – and being felt by many.

"For me it is a struggle every day, because I have to struggle with the economic situation...I am applying for jobs. I am still stressed about being unemployed."
Susannah, Sweden

"Private tutorial classes have been postponed for more than three months. I need to economise on food and clothing because I earn less these months."
Abe, China

"The economy is really on my mind – the impact on small businesses."
Rachel, Australia

"The fear of the economic crisis...has pushed many people to lower their guard, as if they thought, 'so much has passed, [it] cannot get worse'. This worries me because... people don't understand that you have to be cautious anyway, we risk another lockdown but this time I don't know if we can economically react."
Illenia, Italy

More Future Planning

So much time at home has also prompted a re-evaluation. People are setting up workspaces, starting wellness routines and thinking about more permanent changes to help balance work and family life today, and in the future.

"I have now reached a stage where I am adapting to this new way of living and have started to think [about] what will be required or how I can equip myself and my family for what life is going to be post-COVID."
Shai, Australia

"The important thing is not just about how the outside world is going to change, but also how I am going to react to the situation. I will become more careful [with] how I conduct myself in public places."
Dilip, Sweden



How to Make More of the Messy Middle

This is a unique moment in our relationship with home, where we've had to ask more of it than we ever have before. For some of us, it was able to answer brilliantly, but for others it struggled.

Where it met our emotional needs, home comforted us, secured us and even helped us renew our relationships with family. Our need for privacy reduced, and we found comfort in it and in each other.

But where our homes couldn't meet our needs, they became a source of anxiety and dissatisfaction – a place we couldn't escape.

What can we take into our own lives beyond the messy middle, from the people who thrived in it? However you're feeling right now, why not try some of what's worked for people all across the world?



Notice the Little Things

When every day felt the same, the little things had extra special meaning. A home-baked loaf of bread. The smell of flowers in the kitchen. That extra-snuggly blanket. As our lives get busier and our days fill up, remember to search for – and notice – little moments of joy. Sometimes really feeling the sunshine on your face can be enough to brighten even the most difficult day.

Fix Up Your Home for the Future

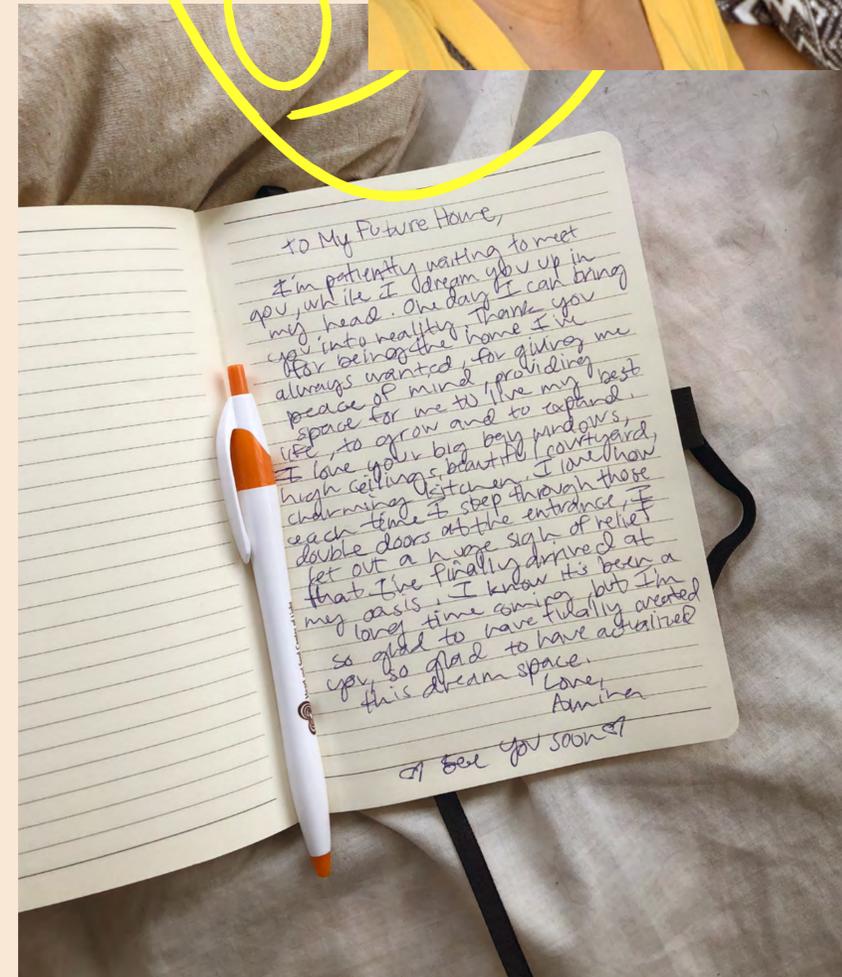
When home was all we had, what it offered – and what it didn't – was our only focus. Keep hold of that. Do you want to set up a home study? Sort out the spare room? Or move to a new home entirely? Don't lose sight of what you need from your home to make you happy, and maybe reprioritise investments you've planned, to make it fit for the future.

Plan with Perspective

When we had time to think – rather than relentlessly do – we all had time to re-evaluate. Our lifestyles, our careers, our families, our futures. Did you decide to exercise more? To eat less meat? To move to a new city or country? To spend more time with family? Don't forget the plans you made in between your old life and your new one. Soon the time will come to make them happen.

Conclusion

We want to help everyone thrive at home. And in this strange and uncertain time, that's never been more important. Through reporting the ups, downs and plans of families living in different ways in different places, we hope you'll be inspired to make more of this messy middle time between the life we knew and the life that's waiting for us.



To My Future Home,
I'm patiently waiting to meet you, while I dream you up in my head. One day I can bring you into reality. Thank you for being the home I've always wanted, for giving me peace of mind, providing space for me to live my best life, to grow and to expand. I love your big bay windows, high ceilings, beautiful courtyard, charming kitchen, I love how each time I step through those double doors at the entrance, I let out a huge sigh of relief that I've finally arrived at my oasis. I know it's been a long time coming, but I'm so glad to have finally created you, so glad to have actualized this dream space.
Love,
Amika
A see you soon!



For more information please visit
lifeathome.ikea.com



Alternatively you
can contact Jenny at
jenny.lee@ingka.ikea.com