



Child Mind
Institute

2022 Children's Mental Health Report | Supplement

Parent Perspectives on Stress and Trauma

Our 2022 Children's Mental Health Report (childmind.org/2022report) takes a close look at promising treatments designed to mitigate the impacts of trauma on children and young adults. But the research we examine there only tells part of the story of what families dealing with trauma need. Especially in light of the coronavirus pandemic and all the stresses that came with it, we know that trauma means something different for everyone who experiences it.

That's why we initiated a new Child Mind Institute survey with data collection by Ipsos that complements the available research on treatment and provides more personal insights into the ways that trauma affects the lived experiences of American families. We asked parents of children ages 24 and under how their children have fared during the pandemic, how trauma has impacted their families, and whether they have been able to get support when they need it.

This survey was conducted in July and August of 2022 with a nationally representative sample of 3,200 parents of children ages 24 and under. The major findings of the survey are summarized below, and you can access the full results at <https://www.ipsos.com/en-us/news-polls/child-mind-institute-children-mental-health-report>.

Impacts of the Coronavirus Pandemic

Potential traumas are widespread: Though we can't say for sure whether a given experience will prove traumatic for a child, parents reported high rates of stressful pandemic experiences. About half of all parents report that their child experienced a family member's illness with COVID-19, and around 20% say their child experienced the death of a family member during the pandemic. About 20% indicate that their child experienced a parent's loss of work, and between 15% and 21% (depending on the child's age) say their child experienced food insecurity.

School struggles tripled: According to their parents, roughly 1 in 10 children were struggling in school before the pandemic. But during the pandemic, the proportion of children struggling in school nearly tripled, with about one-third of parents reporting that their child struggled during 2020–2021. Since the start of 2022, the proportion of children still struggling in school according to their parents has lessened but has not returned to the pre-pandemic levels.

Challenges with mood and behavior increased: Four in ten parents reported negative changes in their child's mood, and about 25% said that their child's behavior worsened over the course of the pandemic.

Older kids experienced more stress and depression: Parents of children ages 13–24 were more likely than parents of younger children to report that their children showed signs of increased stress and depression during the pandemic.

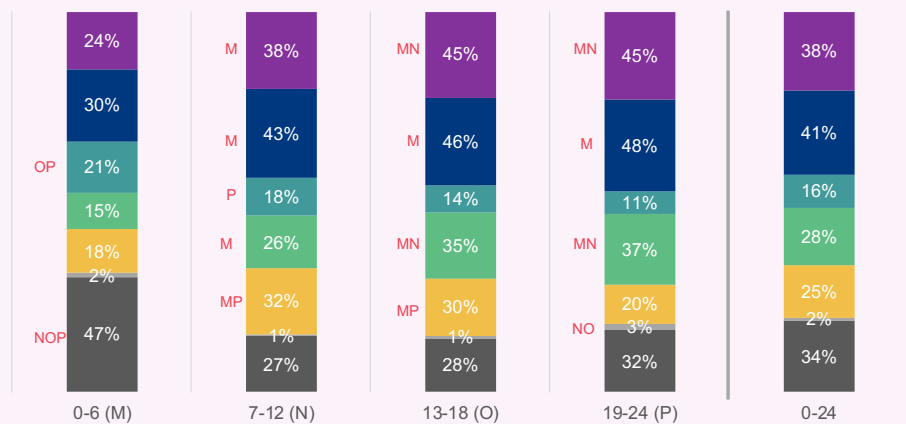
“His social growth has been severely impeded by the lack of contact with other kids his age. He has almost no confidence and won't try new things.”*

— Father of two young children in Ohio

Parents of children ages 13–24 were more likely than parents of younger children to report that their children showed signs of increased stress and depression during the pandemic.

Exhibited During The Pandemic

- Increased stress
- Increased anxiety
- Unusually disruptive behavior
- Depression/Unusual sadness
- Increased learning difficulty
- Other
- None of the above



Base: 0-6 (n=800), 7-12 (n=800), 13-18 (n=800), 19-24 (n=800), 0-24 (n=3200) Q415. Has your child exhibited any of the following during the pandemic?

M, N, O, P: Indicates statistical differences at the 95% level versus Parents 0-6 (M), Parents 7-12 (N), Parents 13-18 (O), and Parents 19-24 (P)

“ I feel my child is much more depressed and I have trouble with her drinking alcohol and vaping, which all began during the pandemic.”*

— Mother of four in New York

Struggles continue, especially for young adults:

30 percent of parents of young adults (ages 19–24) who exhibited mood issues during the pandemic said that their child continues to struggle with depression, compared to 20% of all parents of children who exhibited mood issues during the pandemic. Forty-four percent of parents of young adults who exhibited mood issues during the pandemic said that their child continues to struggle with anxiety, compared to 34% of all parents of children who exhibited mood issues during the pandemic.

Over half of parents reported that either they, or both they and their children, have experienced a traumatic event.

But coping tools help: Twenty-nine percent of parents said they sought help for their child from a mental health professional. Of those, 86% found it at least a little helpful and almost half (49%) said that it “helped a lot.” Many parents also reported that their children tried deep breathing exercises and mindfulness practices to support their mental health during the pandemic. Of those who said that their children tried these practices, the majority reported that doing so had a positive impact on their children’s mental health.

Lifetime Experiences of Trauma

Because the definition of the word “trauma” varies so much in colloquial use, we asked parents to describe how they define trauma. Then we asked about their own (and their children’s) experiences with events that they consider traumatic.

What parents mean by “trauma”: In general, 40% of parents described the word “trauma” in the context of mental health as something that affects a person’s psychological well-being or mental state. Over one-quarter mentioned a negative response to an event or experience.

Self-reported trauma is common: Over half of parents reported that either they, or both they and their children, have experienced a traumatic event. Only 41% said that neither they nor their children had ever experienced a traumatic event.

Other mental health challenges are also common:

Around 30% of parents of kids ages 7–24 reported that, even before the pandemic, their child had been diagnosed with a mental health or learning disorder. Anxiety disorders and ADHD were the most commonly reported diagnoses across most age groups.

Families go through a range of traumatic events:

Traumatic events experienced by parents and children vary quite a bit, with multiple mentions of the loss of loved ones, physical or psychological abuse, and witnessing violence or other upsetting events.

Doctors often don’t talk about trauma: Increased screening for trauma by health care providers could improve outcomes for those dealing with its impacts. But our survey found that fewer than half (45%) of respondents reported that a pediatrician, doctor, or mental health clinician had ever asked if their child had experienced traumatic stress.

Some families get help: Twenty-one percent of parents surveyed report that their child has received professional help for traumatic stress.

But many families lack support: Among parents who said that their child has not received professional help for traumatic stress, 26% said that either they or their child has experienced traumatic stress or acute stress without receiving treatment.

“ His anxiety increased dramatically to the point that he wouldn’t even leave the house without me. He dropped out of school his senior year. He became very withdrawn.”*

— Mother of two in Michigan

Some parents who have experienced trauma or whose children have experienced trauma (or both) felt comfortable sharing their experiences:

“We had a house fire where we lost everything including a good friend who died in that fire.”

— Parent of an elementary schooler in Georgia

“Death of sibling in childhood”

— Mother of a teenager in Arkansas

“My husband suffered a life-altering disability that has affected our whole family.”

— Parent of a young adult in Ohio

“Witnessed a shooting”

— Parent of a young adult in Pennsylvania

“One of my older children struggled with drug addiction.”

— Mother of two in Virginia

“Deployed to Iraq with the Army”

— Father of five in New Jersey

These survey results reflect the reality that trauma and stress can have profound impacts on children and families. But at the same time, they also highlight families’ resilience and the positive effects that treatment and other coping strategies can have.

For more on these topics and the latest treatments for symptoms of trauma in children and teenagers, read the full 2022 Children’s Mental Health Report at childmind.org/2022report.

The Child Mind Institute is dedicated to transforming the lives of children and families struggling with mental health and learning disorders by giving them the help they need to thrive. We’ve become the leading independent nonprofit in children’s mental health by providing gold-standard, evidence-based care, delivering educational resources to millions of families each year, training educators in underserved communities, and developing tomorrow’s breakthrough treatments. Together, we truly can transform children’s lives.

SPONSORING PARTNER

The Child Mind Institute and Blue Shield of California are collaborating to share the latest research on youth mental health as part of Blue Shield of California’s BlueSky initiative. Blue Shield of California is an independent member of the Blue Shield Association.

These are the findings of a Child Mind Institute survey with data collection by Ipsos conducted between July 21 and August 31, 2022. For this survey, a sample of 3,200 parents with children ages 24 and younger were interviewed online in English. The poll has a credibility interval of plus or minus 2.1 percentage points for all parents.

* Parent response when asked to elaborate on the challenges their child experienced during the pandemic.