

# The Great Collide:

## The Impact of Children's Mental Health on the Workforce

2022 Report



With generous funding from:

**ON OUR SLEEVES<sup>®</sup>**

The Movement for Children's Mental Health



**Nationwide**  
Foundation

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## Foreword

# The Mental Health Crisis Begins in Children

The mental health system in the United States needs additional work before it can adequately serve the families who need it most. Throughout the past 50 years, we have known we need to act quickly and decisively by bringing together government leaders, private corporations and mental health researchers and advocates to address issues of parity and access to mental health services.

Never has this been truer than now, in the third year of an unpredictable pandemic that threatens to upend children’s access to school instruction, child care, routines and mental health resources; and, thereby, their parents’ abilities to cope and contribute as well.

At the Kennedy Forum, we convene organizations that are best positioned to help. We’ve found that the combination of clinical research and priorities with private funding and passion can uncover new needs and innovative solutions.

This report is one example. It’s full of extraordinary findings — starting with the fact that children’s mental health has a large and direct impact on corporate success.

As this movement reminds us, children don’t wear their thoughts on their sleeves. We need to come together and give children’s mental health a voice.

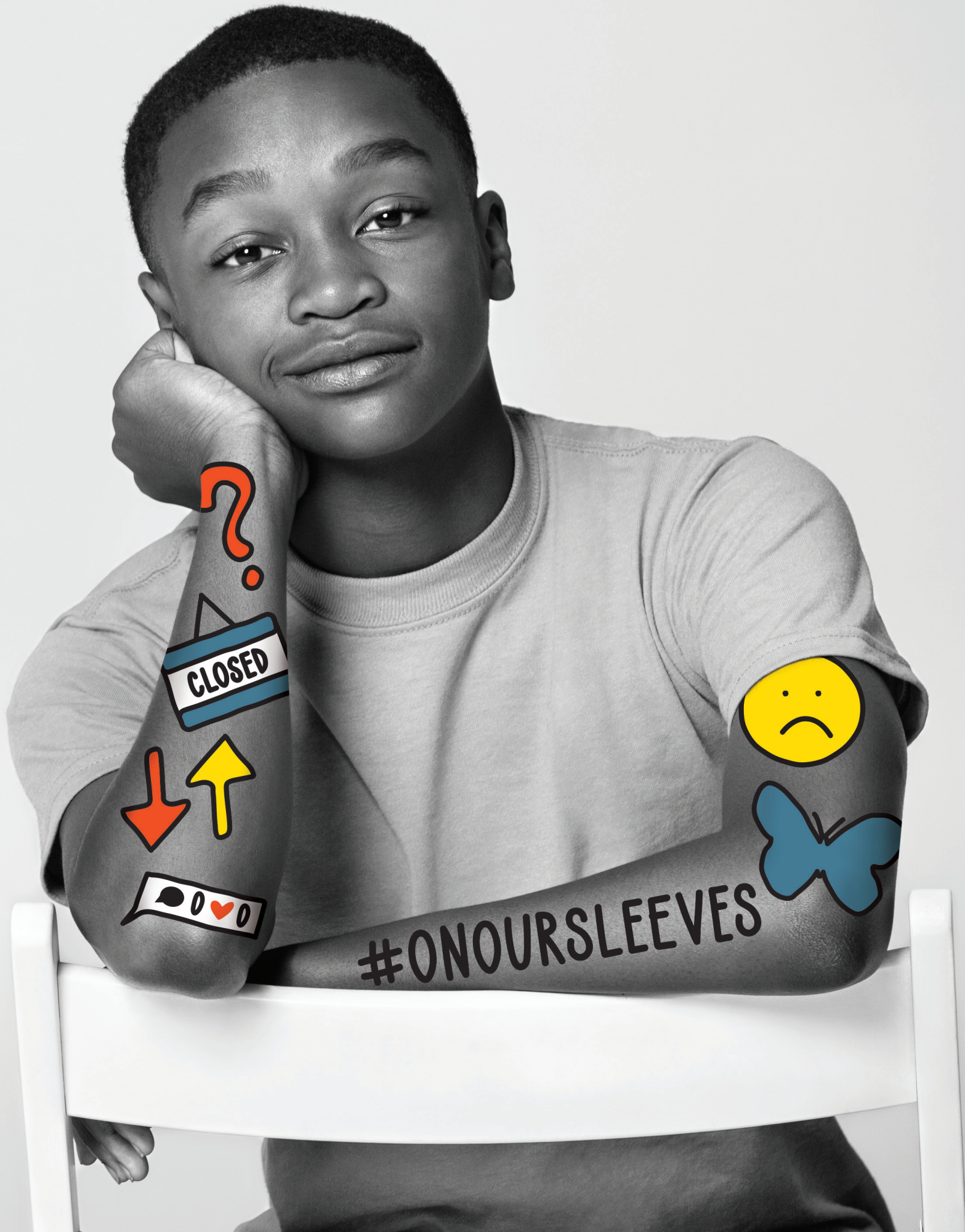
I hope you’ll read on to discover the details on this connection, and how you can help.

With hope,

**Amy Kennedy**  
Education Director of **The Kennedy Forum**

**Patrick J. Kennedy**  
Former U.S. Representative (D-RI)  
Founder of **The Kennedy Forum**





## Introduction

# The Opportunity and the Calling for all Workplaces

The COVID-19 pandemic transformed the workplace as we knew it, and continues to do so, even into its third year. If our experience during this time has taught us anything, it's that companies' success lies in the ability to see and support employees as whole people. This ultimately drives companies' ability to recruit, retain and inspire the best talent in the marketplace.

We are increasingly realizing the impact of mental health and well-being on these efforts to see employee needs holistically. We are encouraged by the new conversations, new studies and new priorities as employers of all sizes and across all industries are learning what it takes to support and protect mental health as a crucial component of the well-being of their teams.

But there is more to consider.

**The pandemic illustrated how family and work overlap, sometimes in the same moment.**

It also showed all employers that one way to support mental health and well-being of their employees is to acknowledge those overlaps, rather than expect parents and caregivers to solve the conflict in silence. [🐦 Tweet this.](#)

We learned that little had been studied or written on this topic, so we were pleased to fund *On Our Sleeves'* research study and help find the answers to better understand these important issues.

### Why was it important to fund this research?

1. Our employees' feedback described an uncomfortable collision of priorities as they saw their children struggling during the pandemic.
2. We are deeply invested in being part of the solution as a Fortune 100 employer with a national footprint and global influence.

We have been a proud partner and supporter of Nationwide Children's Hospital and its children's mental health movement, *On Our Sleeves*, for years. It was natural to turn to them to undertake the study. Their findings have influenced our decisions around additional resources to support a caregiving culture, employee wellness offerings, and our corporate philanthropy.

We hope the business community at large will benefit from these findings as we all navigate the future of work and family.

**Vinita Clements**  
Chief Human Resources Officer  
Nationwide

**Chad Jester**  
President  
Nationwide Foundation



# Executive Summary

Children’s mental health concerns have been hiding in plain sight for many years, surrounded by confusion and stigma. The pandemic brought these issues to the forefront of a national conversation, one that intersects with conversations about health equity and access, educational and community resources, technology advancements and implications, and the role of corporate social engagement to help.



**What’s been missing from the conversation — until now — is a clear connection between the mental health and wellness of our children with the success of the nation’s workforce, heavily made up of parents and caregivers.**

As this report explains, the connection is very clear. When company culture is accepting of mental health matters, working parents can focus on their children’s needs while managing their work responsibilities.

Throughout the spring and summer of 2021, *On Our Sleeves*, the movement for children’s mental health, with generous funding from the Nationwide Foundation, surveyed thousands of working parents across the country to find out how children’s mental health may affect employees’ work performance and companies’ success.

## Here is what the study uncovered:

- Working parents are **deeply concerned about their children’s mental health and well-being**, and that concern is growing year-over-year.
- A majority of working parents and caregivers said their **work is affected** by their children’s mental health and behavior.
- A meaningful portion of working parents and caregivers are **significantly disrupted**, including feelings of stress, distraction and even hopelessness.
- Half of those parents who need help the most are **afraid of losing their jobs or facing other negative consequences** if these concerns interfered with their work.

The good news is that survey results showed employers can positively impact employees and their families by shifting their culture and work environment to be more accepting of mental health concerns. These shifts will make employers more appealing to prospective and current employees, while leading the charge on addressing the crisis on children’s mental health.



With a focused effort by the business community at large, parents and caregivers can access resources, learn new skills, and experience the support they need to raise the next generation of mentally well young adults. Along the way, stigmas will continue to crumble as the conversation expands, equalizing access to the necessary health resources for all children.

# Study Approach

*On Our Sleeves*, the team behind the national movement for children’s mental health, partnered with internal and external mental health and research advisors to conduct this research. Research was conducted February through September 2021 with working parents — including surveying 5,406 working adults across the country — **to understand the current state of concern about children’s mental health, parents’ self-efficacy in caring for their children’s mental health, and the impact children’s mental health has on employers.**

The term “working parent” is inclusive of biological parents, step or bonus parents, foster parents and family members who are currently raising at least one child between the ages of 3 and 17. The working parents surveyed represented most sectors of the economy.

**The results showed that working parents are under increased stress because of concerns over their children’s mental health, and it is affecting their work. Further, the data showed that parents want to reach a state of confidence in their ability to help their children meet mental health challenges.**



## The study was completed in three waves:

1. **An online qualitative discussion** with 42 working parents to uncover nuances around stigma, language and parents’ mindset
2. **A nationally representative quantitative survey** with 1,680 working parents to learn about parents’ perceptions, attitudes and behaviors related to children’s mental health and their work
3. **A survey of 3,684 readers of the American City Business Journals** who opted into the study to give their perspective on children’s mental health and employer-based solutions. This wave included 1,581 working parents, 1,067 executives and 1,247 human resource or benefits personnel who provided an employer perspective.

This study directly asked working parents their perception of how children’s mental health impacted their work. In addition, the team looked at parental confidence and its effect on work performance. The authors used verified academic scales for measuring parental confidence (MaaP) and productivity/presenteeism (Stanford Presenteeism Scale).

The study authors consulted with subject matter experts in diversity, equity and inclusion to ensure that the sampling plans, survey questions and data analysis were all conducted with an eye on inclusion and representation across socioeconomic status, job position, racial and ethnic background, gender identity and sexual orientation, age, household composition, and education level. The pattern of results in Wave 2 revealed that job position level and race/ethnicity are closely interrelated in this sample. Those detailed findings are included in the final chapter of the report on page 24.

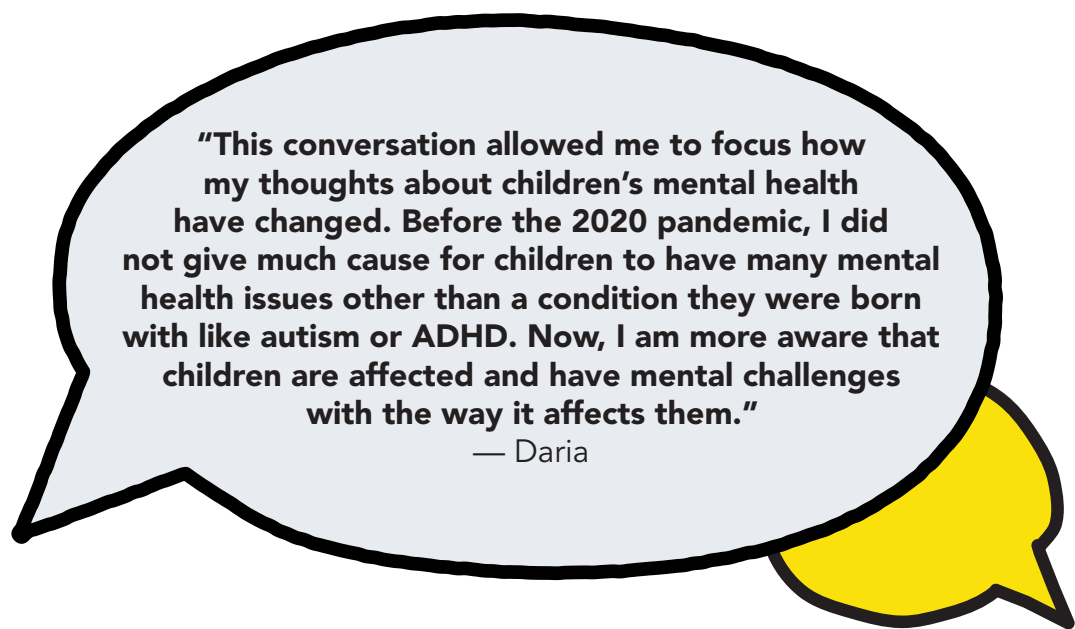
NOTE: As the research progressed, the authors identified some parents who qualified as “more concerned” and “more disrupted” by their children’s mental health than others and opted to look at them versus a control group.

# Defining “Child Mental Health” on a Continuum

Even before COVID-19, data from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention showed one in five children in America was living with a mental health disorder or illness that impacted their daily living.

However, the earliest results in the *On Our Sleeves* study clearly showed that parents didn’t have a common definition of the term “mental health” with equal numbers saying it did and did not mean the same thing as “mental wellness.” Further, some associated mental health with the presence of mental illness.

In fact, parents used alternate terms to describe mental health concerns in their children such as feelings, well-being, social-emotional learning, mood, sadness, worry, stress, anxiety, needing help, not feeling good or confident about yourself, and physical symptoms like stomachaches.



Because of this lack of a common interpretation of the term “mental health” among parents, the researchers used a more specific preliminary definition. In the quantitative survey waves, the researchers used a preliminary definition of “my child’s emotional health and development or behavior,” and later directed survey respondents to read the phrase “mental health” to mean any issue related to their child’s emotional health and development or behavior.

This means the findings are related to any aspect of mental health, including, but not limited to, emotions, behaviors, mood disorders, attention disorders or developmental concerns related to any of these.

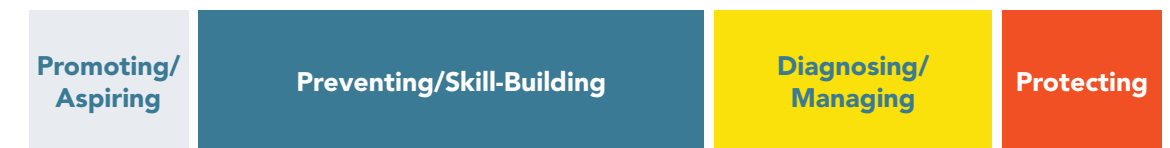
In March of 2021, **54% of working parents report having sought professional help** from a pediatrician, psychologist, counselor, therapist or other professional for concerns related to their child’s emotional health and development or behavior. Of these parents, **72% continue to be connected to a professional for these concerns** and **56% of these parents received a formal mental health diagnosis for their child.**

These working parents most often mentioned receiving mental health diagnoses for their child related to attention problems (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD); approximately 28%) and mood-related disorders (social anxiety or depression; approximately 27%). Other diagnoses included autism spectrum disorder, oppositional defiance disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, as well as anger management issues.

**This data show a higher incidence of diagnosis than the commonly cited “1 in 5” statistic.**

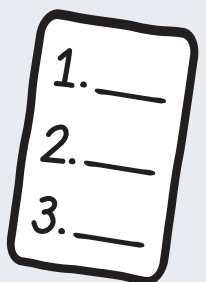
Just like physical health, mental health and well-being can exist on a continuum. The concerns addressed in this study could fall at any point on the spectrum and are not limited to diagnosed mental health conditions.

## Mental Health — On a Continuum



### How Employers Can Help: Define Mental Well-Being

- 1. Break stigmas** by referring to “mental wellness” or “mental health” rather than mental problems or issues and use specific diagnoses rather than saying “mental illness.”
- 2. Seek external resources around mental health topics**, whether adult-, family- or child-focused, and provide them to employees via a variety of formats (articles, videos, classes, speakers, books, etc.) that can be accessed inside and outside the workplace.
- 3. Include mental health and well-being** any time physical health and well-being, or overall well-being topics, are being discussed.
- 4. The *On Our Sleeves* Advocacy 101 Course has additional suggestions** for employers and managers to incorporate mental health into the workplace. [Tweet this.](#)



# From Concern to Crisis

Parents' levels of concern about children's mental health are high — and rising. And parents are not alone in their worries.

Among parents who had sought professional help for their child's mental health, **59% said their child had experienced the concerns before the pandemic began.** In this sense, certain child mental health concerns had been "hiding in plain sight" for a while, pushing some parents to worry and seek help on their own, rather than as part of a collective experiencing societal stresses.

Then the pandemic piled on. Forty-one percent of parents in the study said their concerns about their child's mental health had developed in the past year, since the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic.

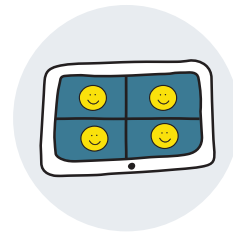
[Tweet this.](#)



Noted examples of collective stressors on children since March of 2020 include:



Pandemic-related social isolation



Difficulties with remote learning



Fears about the virus



Exposure to news coverage of racial injustice and a divided political landscape



Socioeconomic pressure on families

The research showed that as of 2021, **most working parents (86%) believe children struggle with mental health and need support, and 78% of working parents believe mental health challenges in children have increased in recent years.** [Tweet this.](#)

**In fact, six in 10 working parents reported being "very" to "extremely concerned" about their child's emotional health and development or behavior in the past two years.**

These factors, on top of growing awareness and concern about children's mental health in general, prompted a coalition composed of the American Academy of Pediatrics, the Children's Hospital Association and American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP), which represents more than 77,000 physicians and 200 children's hospitals, to **declare** children's health **a national emergency** in October of 2021.

"We were concerned about children's emotional and behavioral health even before the pandemic. The ongoing public health emergency has made a bad situation worse. We are caring for young people with soaring rates of depression, anxiety, trauma, loneliness and suicidality that will have lasting impacts on them, their families, their communities, and all of our futures. We cannot sit idly by. This is a national emergency, and the time for swift and deliberate action is now," said AACAP President Gabrielle A. Carlson, MD.

Even further, the U.S. Surgeon General declared children's mental health a national crisis in December 2021 in his *Protecting Youth Mental Health Advisory*.

**"Mental health challenges in children, adolescents and young adults are real and widespread. Even before the pandemic, an alarming number of young people struggled with feelings of helplessness, depression and thoughts of suicide — and rates have increased over the past decade. The COVID-19 pandemic further altered their experiences at home, school and in the community, and the effect on their mental health has been devastating. The future well-being of our country depends on how we support and invest in the next generation."**

— Vivek H. Murthy, MD, MBA, Surgeon General of the United States

## How Employers Can Help: Meet the Crisis

- 1. Extend the view of employee well-being to include family well-being.** This shift in thinking among human resource leadership is essential for employers to fulfill their promise as an important player in meeting the national crisis.
- 2. Stay vigilant in the fight against the mental fatigue of the pandemic.** While the situation is continuing to evolve, many believe the mental health concerns will continue to surface long after the virus itself is part of normal life.
- 3. Allow working parents a place and space to share concerns** — this could take many formats, such as an Employee Resource Group, an informal parent support network or formal parent-to-parent mentoring experiences. [Tweet this.](#)

# Parents Crave Confidence

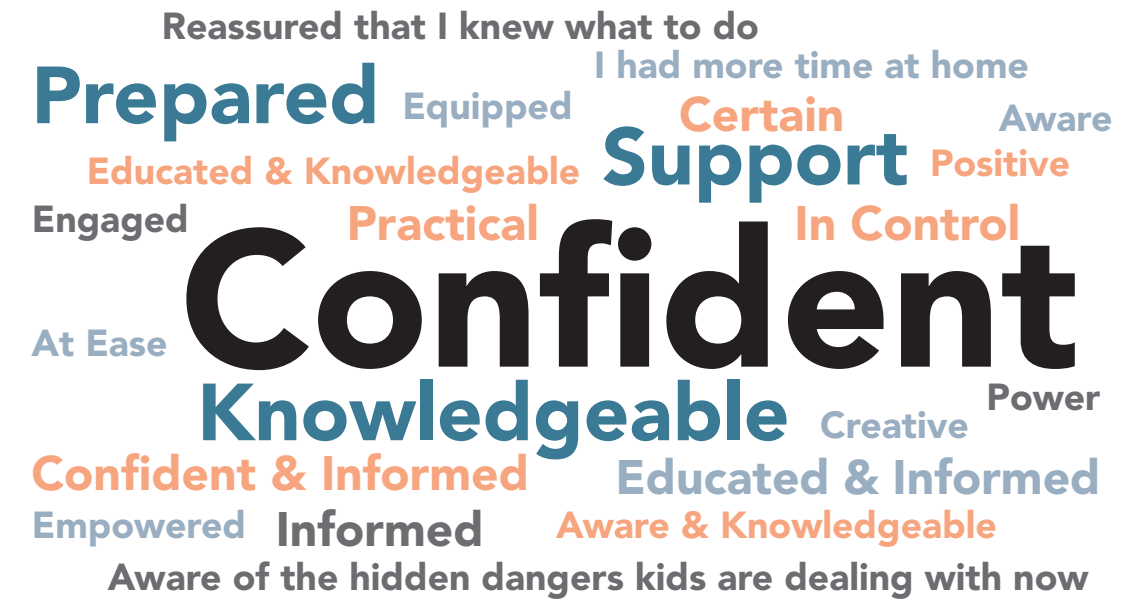
There's no doubt working parents have been under increasing pressures related to the pandemic. Working parents shared what it's like for them to be working and raising kids during the spring of 2021. Their comparisons are shown here:

**It's like...**

N=40

Working parents reported that they would feel like **better working parents** if they could reach a desired state of "confidence" in their ability to help their children with a mental health need.

**I would be a better working parent if I felt more \_\_\_\_\_ about caring for my child(ren's) mental health.**



N=40

## Measuring Parental Self-confidence

To measure parental self-confidence, the researchers utilized the Me as a Parent (MaaP) scale, a series of questions designed to measure parents' perceptions of their own self-regulation, personal agency and more.

Overall, working parents in this study demonstrated a total mean score of 61.84, which is slightly below parent norms on the MaaP (63.76). This difference was driven by a group of parents whose concerns and experiences were more disruptive than a control group of parents. These parents, who were more disrupted by their child's mental health concerns demonstrated a Total Mean Score of 59.33, significantly lower than the control group and parent norms for the MaaP.

*Hamilton, V.E., Matthews, M.M. & Crawford, S. B.(2015). Development and Preliminary Validation of a Parenting Self-Regulation Scale: "Me as a Parent." Journal of Child and Family Studies, 24, 2853-2864. The MaaP is a valid and reliable instrument that measures parent self-regulation perceptions by assessing global beliefs about self-efficacy, personal agency, self-management and self-sufficiency. Total scores on the MaaP range from 16 to 80 and individual subscale scores range from 4 to 20.*



**Two-thirds of working parents described dealing with any issue related to their child’s mental health as “challenging.”**

Level of Challenge		
Question: How challenging do you find it to be when dealing with any issue related to your child’s emotional health and development or behavior?		
	Total	Percent (%)
Extremely challenging	319	19%
Somewhat challenging	792	47%
Neutral	260	15%
Not too challenging	231	14%
Not at all challenging	78	5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,680</b>	<b>100%</b>

*Differences were observed between working parents according to age as well as position level. Parents over age 45 were more likely to report being less challenged, as did Individual Contributors and lower level managers and supervisors (see more on pages 20 and 21).*

Qualitative data showed **multiple challenges facing working parents** as they try to support their children’s mental health needs, and why these mental health challenges seem more difficult than physical health challenges.

**Parents’ reported challenges include:**

- Each child’s unique situation, problem and responses
- Stress and pressure from society on children today
- Influence of technology and the internet
- Navigating and supporting children through the lifestyle changes due to COVID-19
- Factors outside of a parent’s control
- Lack of professional training for parents about children’s mental health
- Difficulty distinguishing between “phases” and actual disorders or diagnoses in younger children
- Split households in which children divide their time between parents and have less consistency
- Lack of openness from children about how they are feeling
- Parent’s own mental health concerns

Despite their reported challenges and lack of confidence in managing children’s mental health concerns, many working parents seemed overly optimistic about certain aspects of caring for their child’s mental health: **72% of working parents believe they would know if their child was struggling with mental health** while **56% believe their child would let them know if they were having mental health challenges.**

Internalizing disorders (depression, anxiety) are often missed by parents since there are less outward behaviors than externalizing (ADHD). Children, especially from diverse backgrounds, tend to keep their symptoms private due to concern of stigma from parents, making them angry, or making them worry, **according to Mental Health America.**

**Parents also face continued stigma around seeking help related to their children’s mental health as demonstrated by the varied levels of comfort they feel in talking to other adults about their concerns.**

Overall, **85% of working parents believe that talking to another adult about their child’s mental health could be helpful.**

Comfort Level: Talking to Others About Children’s Mental Health		
	Total	Percent (%)
Your spouse/partner or child’s parent	1,244	74%
Your child’s doctor or health care provider	1,073	64%
Your doctor or health care provider	994	59%
Your close friend	889	53%
Your family members	784	47%
Your clergy or spiritual leader	723	43%
Your child’s school resource (e.g., teacher, counselor, nurse)	657	39%
Human resources at your employer	388	23%
Your co-worker(s)	357	21%
Your boss/supervisor	335	20%

*Base = Parents who agreed that talking to another adult would be helpful*

However, 65% of respondents in the American City Business Journal survey agree there are stigmas around discussing a child’s mental health in the workplace. This finding is reinforced by the finding that fewer than one in four working parents reported feeling comfortable talking to human resources, a co-worker or their boss/supervisor about their child’s mental health.



While equal proportions of White and historically underrepresented groups of parents agree that it would be helpful to talk to an adult about their child's mental health, White parents are significantly more likely to report feeling comfortable talking to family members, close friends, co-workers, their boss/supervisor or human resources at their employer. The degree of difference was 5-6 points, **suggesting that parents from historically underrepresented groups may feel even more isolation when they are concerned about their child's mental health.**

One reason these data are so important is that human resources professionals, bosses and supervisors, or even co-workers might be able to help direct a worried working parent toward tangible resources to help their child. Such resources could include a formal benefit offering, such as a care research option from an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) or even an informal benefit such as flexibility with scheduling.

### How Employers Can Help: Instill Confidence

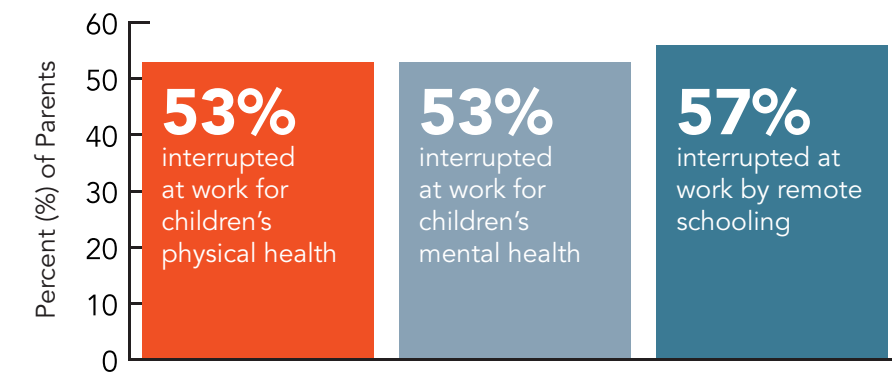


- 1. Address stigma directly in the workplace** by encouraging use of paid time-off or other benefits to care for a family's overall physical and mental well-being. Help employees understand they may need to access extended leave benefits if needed.
- 2. Protect the roles of workers who are facing family crises** — just as parents who take leave for newborn or baby care, parents who take advantage of flexibility or leave benefits for family mental well-being or crisis situations should have awareness of options, and whether their roles can be protected while they are out.
- 3. Create a culture of transparency around mental health concerns**, for both employees and their families. For example, leaders and managers can point out the prevalence of mental health concerns for employees and families. If they are comfortable, they can share personal experiences. Organize a fundraiser or join an event to support a mental health cause and promote it internally. [Tweet this.](#)

# The Confidence-Performance Connection

Parents reported they are torn between focusing on their children's needs and managing their work responsibilities. As a result, their quality of work may suffer in the face of rising absenteeism and falling presenteeism and engagement.

## Children's Mental Health is Nearly as Disruptive as Remote Schooling



N=1,680

**53%** of parents have missed work at least once per month because of concerns for their child's mental health.

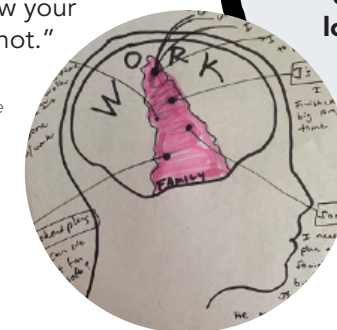
Even when parents are at work, it is hard to stay focused.

**30 – 50%**

of working parents' thoughts are on their child's mental health and well-being **even while they are at work.**

A working dad summed it up this way: "How is it possible to focus 100% of your attention on work when you know your child is struggling? Answer: it is not."

We asked parents to show us their brains while at work. Here is a drawing from Crystal, who showed a "family" wedge going through the center of her mind while she's working.



"No one does their best work when they are worried or stressed, or when there is something that competes for their time, attention, and emotional capacity. Not only is there the emotional piece of being worried for your child's well-being, but managing appointments, communicating with teachers/ doctors/co-parents can be logistically complicated and really tough."

— Molly

[Tweet this.](#)

## Some parents felt more disrupted than others.

Segmentation of the Wave 2 data showed parental concern to be widespread, but parental disruption to be quite variable.

- In this wave, parents were classified into one of two groups, based on the combined level of concern and work disruption.
- In comparing the profiles of “Mental Health-Disrupted” parents and parents in the Comparison Group, several statistically significant differences were observed, including that the average age of Mental Health-Disrupted parents was statistically significantly lower than that of the Comparison Group parents:

*Working parents in the study were classified into a “Mental Health-Disrupted” group (N=676) or a Comparison Group (N=1,004) based on their responses to three questions. To be classified as Mental Health-Disrupted, a parent reported that 1) their work has been interrupted to take care of issues due to their child’s emotional health and development or behavior, 2) they reported being somewhat, very or extremely concerned about their child’s emotional health and development or behavior in the past two years, and 3) in the last two years, their child’s emotional health and development or behavior has been somewhat or extremely disruptive to their ability to work on most days.*

	Mental Health-Disrupted Parents (N=676)	Comparison Group Parents (N=1,003)
Non-Hispanic White	69%	62%
2 biological parents in the home	69%	62%
Males	49%	41%
Urban/metropolitan area	43%	28%
Household income over \$100K	36%	22%
Director or VP level position	22%	13%
Senior-level executive position	12%	7%
Individual contributor position	29%	44%
Some high school/HS graduate/ some college/technical school	24%	41%
Small town/city/rural area	20%	33%
Household income under \$50K	18%	31%
Black/African-American	9%	15%

Read as: 69% of parents in the Mental Health-Disrupted group were Non-Hispanic White, whereas just 62% of parents in the Comparison Group were Non-Hispanic White.

These observed differences, taken at face value, may appear to suggest that disruption of work due to children’s mental health is more an issue of affluent Non-Hispanic White men, holding middle or senior-level management positions in their organizations.

## But data from the American Psychiatric Association indicates there’s more to consider:

- African American and Hispanic/Latino(a) children have **1.5 to 3 times greater odds of having an unmet mental health need** than White children.
- Asian Americans/Pacific Islanders are **least likely to seek mental health services** than any other racial/ethnic group and are **three times less likely to access mental health services** than their White counterparts.

It’s likely that behind our numbers lurks something that has emerged repeatedly in studies of mental health in America: cultural and structural barriers that contribute to markedly different experiences in identifying and reporting mental health concerns.

## Such barriers noted by the American Psychiatric Association include:

- **Associated stigma and lack of understanding about mental health.** For instance, often, among Asian Americans/Pacific Islanders, mental illness is considered a weakness and source of shame/burden among the community.
- **Problems identifying psychiatric symptoms** when the chief complaint is somatic, or physical symptoms, especially in the Latinx community.
- **A shortage of bilingual or linguistically trained mental health professionals**, which can decrease engagement with mental health professionals.
- **Lack of cultural competency** — understanding of cultural norms in behavior, expression and tradition — among service providers may lead to misdiagnosis and underdiagnosis of mental health concerns.

## Employers can play a role in addressing these cultural and structural barriers.

1. By not assuming lower reported disruption by historically underrepresented populations means there’s no need for help.
2. By assessing the cultural competency of the mental health resources your company provides so all working parents who need help feel more confident that those resources will meet their needs.



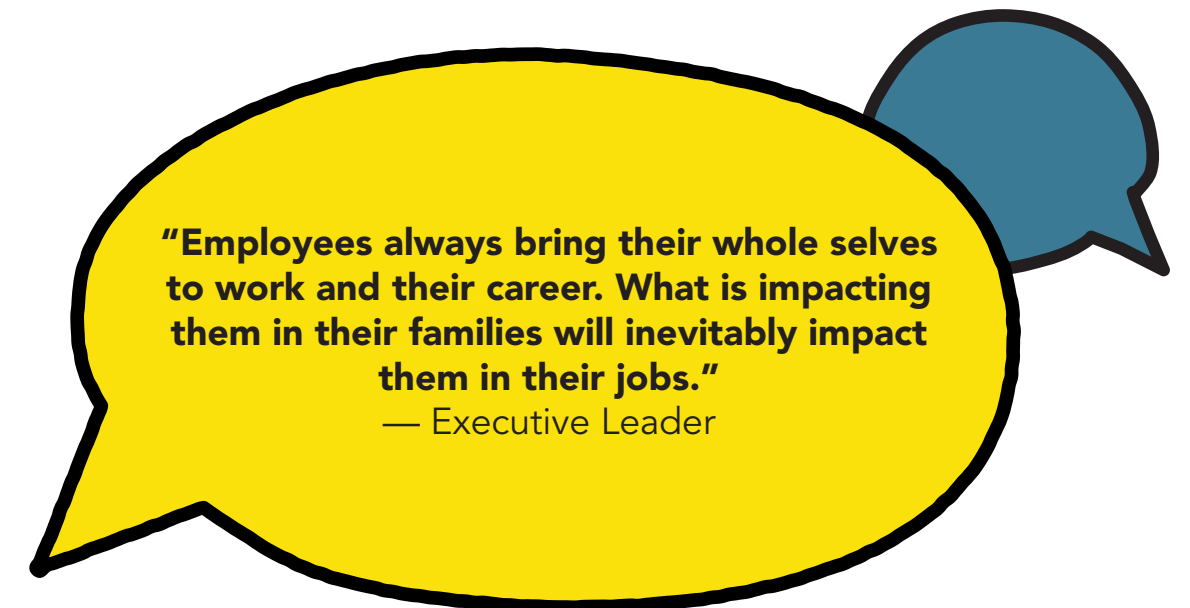


## Disruption exerts great impact on parents' work.

- Parents classified as "Mental Health-Disrupted" scored significantly lower on the Stanford Presenteeism Scale (SP-6) than working parents in the Comparison Group.
- The SP-6 scale measures the ability of an employee to concentrate and accomplish work despite having to cope with concerns related to an impairing condition, in this case concerns for their child's mental health. Total scores range from 6 to 30, with higher scores suggesting stronger presenteeism. Mental Health-Disrupted parents scored just 17.94.
- Specifically, within the SP-6, the largest differences between Mental Health-Disrupted Parents and their Comparison Group counterparts were observed in attitudinal measures that could possibly be more related to their level of engagement:

In the past month...	Mental Health-Disrupted Parents (N=676) (Somewhat/Strongly Agree)	Comparison Group Parents (N=1,003) (Somewhat/Strongly Agree)	Δ
Because of my child's emotional health and development or behavior status, <b>the stresses of my job were much harder to handle.</b>	71%	33%	38 points
My child's emotional health and development or behavior status <b>distracted me from taking pleasure in my work.</b>	68%	30%	38 points
<b>I felt hopeless about finishing certain work tasks</b> due to my child's emotional health and development or behavior status.	51%	23%	28 points
At work, I was <b>able to focus on achieving my goals</b> despite my child's emotional health and development or behavior status.	58%	69%	11 points
Despite my child's emotional health and development or behavior status, <b>I felt energetic enough to complete all my work.</b>	54%	64%	10 points

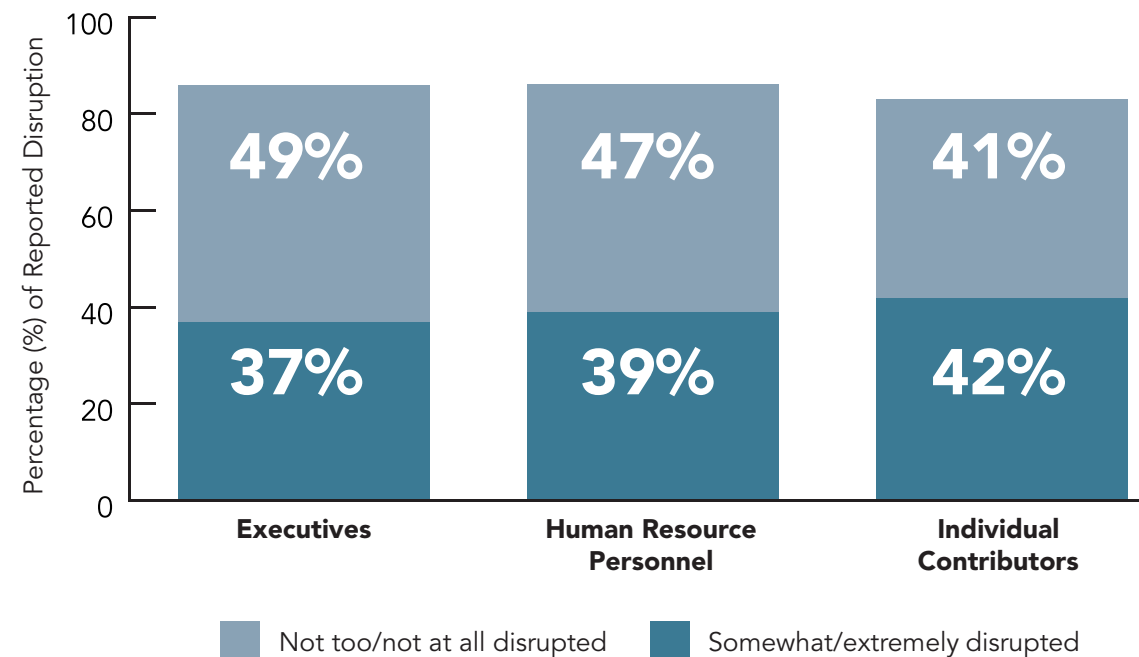
At least once a month related to my child's emotional health and development or behavior status...	Mental Health-Disrupted Parents (N=676) (Somewhat/Strongly Agree)	Comparison Group Parents (N=1,003) (Somewhat/Strongly Agree)	Δ
<b>Missed work</b> (partial or full day; arrived late, leaving early; left for appointment)	75%	38%	37 points
<b>Had work interrupted</b>	72%	41%	31 points
<b>Felt like the quality of my work was affected negatively</b>	58%	20%	38 points
<b>Felt unprepared in a meeting</b>	50%	17%	33 points
<b>Fallen behind on workload</b>	50%	21%	29 points



## Most parents are feeling some degree of strain.

- Before it's concluded that the impact is isolated to a small, especially-disrupted subgroup of working parents, it should be noted that in the Wave 3 study among subscribers of American City Business Journals, disruption and its impacts were felt across a meaningful segment of all working parents.
- This strain was observed across all positions in the organization, although to a slightly lesser (yet statistically significant) degree among executives and human resource personnel.

### Level of Work Disruption Due to Child's Mental Health



**56%**

of working parent American City Business Journal readers **said the stresses of their job were much harder to handle** because of their child's emotional health and development or behavior status.

**51%**

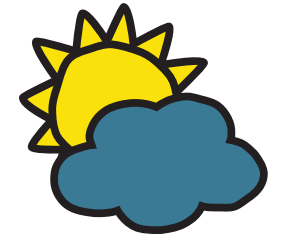
of non-executive/human resource working parent American City Business Journal readers reported their child's emotional health and development or behavior status **distracted them from taking pleasure in their work.**

**Just 55%**

of all non-executive/human resource working parent American City Business Journal readers reported **feeling energetic enough to complete all their work**, despite their child's emotional health and development or behavior status.

## Families are the Future of Work

These efforts by employers will help with the retention of the current workforce and the recruitment of the next generation of employees, as evidenced in several other pertinent studies.



According to family benefits provider Cleo, "The State of Working Parents Study" showed **one in four people are considering finding a new job to better accommodate their dual role as a working parent.**

## Younger Employees Value Their Mental Health

As the generational composition of the workforce shifts toward Gen Zers and Millennials, more of the workforce may tend to prioritize their mental health. **Half of Millennials and three-quarters of Gen Zers have left work positions for mental health reasons**, compared to one-third of respondents from all age groups, according to the "2019 Mental Health at Work" report from the nonprofit Mind Share Partners.

**50% of Millennials and 75% of Gen Zers have left work for mental health reasons.**

**Nearly twice as many Millennials as Baby Boomers (62% versus 32%) are comfortable discussing their mental health with bosses and colleagues**, according to the American Psychiatric Association's 2019 public opinion poll. Additionally, **80% of 18- to 39-year-old workers at small and medium-sized businesses say that they value the presence of mental health benefits and support programs** when applying for or considering new jobs. And **60% of all small and medium-sized business employees report that they'll choose their next job with an eye toward employer mental health benefits.**

**This held true in our study. Working parents under 40 were:**

- More likely to be concerned about their child's emotional health and development or behavior
- More likely to report spending more time during their workday thinking about their child's emotional health and development or behavior
- More likely to have taken a partial/full day off or left work for their child's appointments
- More concerned about losing their job or not being considered for promotions if their child's mental health issues interfered with work
- Even more likely to choose a children's mental health course over a course focused on their own physical or mental health

**73%** of all American City Business Journal subscribers in Wave 3 agreed that "The topic of children's mental health is of significant concern to me personally."



## Parents feel varying levels of employer support.

A majority (72%) of working parents who had been disrupted by issues related to their child's mental health agree that their employer is "understanding of needing to take care of a child's issues, including mental health."

However...

- Just 40% of Mental Health-Disrupted parents said their company offers mental health resources for their child, if needed.
- Twenty-five percent of all working parents were not sure if their employer offered mental health resources for children.
- About half of Mental Health-Disrupted parents indicated that, at their level, they cannot leave their job early to take care of concerns related to their child's mental health without losing pay or facing negative consequences such as warnings.

**Almost half of Mental Health-Disrupted parents felt they could potentially lose their job (45%) or would not be considered for promotions (43%) if their child's mental health concerns interfered with their work.**

### How Employers Can Help: Increase Productivity & Focus

- 1. Encourage all employees to act on their concerns for each other.** If they see a co-worker struggling, they should feel empowered to ask how that employee is really feeling, and then help them access support.
- 2. Raise awareness of access to mental health benefits from the employer.** Review those benefits with employees. For example, if companies provide an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) benefit that can help employees find mental health resources, consider highlighting this benefit in repeated communications.
- 3. Encourage the use of mental health and self-care practices into the workday** to help employees stay focused. Examples could be deep breathing and meditation. Provide these resources on your organization's intranet and newsletters. [Tweet this.](#)



## Conclusion

# How Employers Can Help

According to the U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory, *Protecting Youth Mental Health*, "Employers can play an outsized role in supporting the mental health of children and young people."

Companies can help mitigate the continued crisis felt by working parents by providing more resources and building a culture that is more open to discussing, accepting and supporting mental health concerns. This, in turn, has promise to benefit the company in other ways, according to working parents in the study.

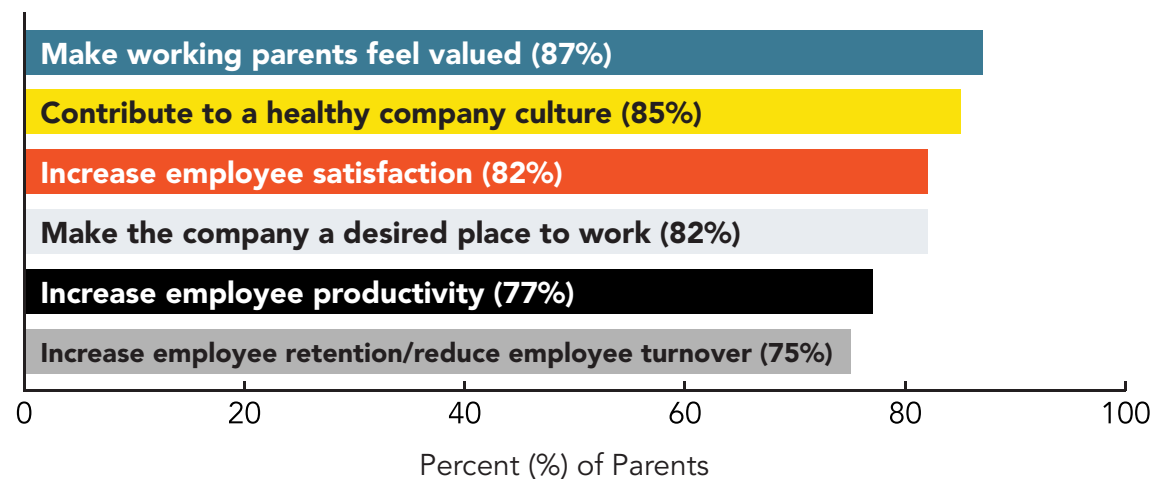
"I think when employers show that empathy, it shows they value that employees," said a working parent participant.

In the *On Our Sleeves* study, working parents who were given a choice of employer-offered education and wellness programs. Their top choices for such offerings were courses on:

- Children mental health (47%)
- Employees' mental health (38%)
- Employees' physical health (15%)

In addition, 88% of working parents said they are interested in having access to a course and resources about children's mental health offered through their workplace, with 54% saying they were "very interested."

## Education Programs Would be Highly Valued by Working Parents



N=1,680

Employers can do even more than offer courses on children's mental health. Companies are more likely to see improvement when parents have the time to participate in such a course and feel safe doing so.

According to the *On Our Sleeves* survey, **38% of working parents indicated a lack of time to participate in a course about children's mental health** (perceived permission) and **34% indicated concerns about privacy** (trust in employer) as barriers to participation. Lack of time to participate was especially cited by individual contributors, as were concerns about losing pay if completing the course during work hours.

"I think being proactive about mental health is vital. Parents need education and people need to normalize these kinds of topics. Armed with an increased awareness and more information, parents can guide children and teens when there are challenges rather than waiting to react when there is a crisis," said one working parent in the study.

## Future Considerations

The study authors have identified additional areas of analysis and research that can further illuminate and influence the conversation. For instance, understanding whether the demographic and position-level differences among Mental Health-Disrupted parents are in any way affected by perceived freedom or the actual inability of certain working parents to be concerned or disrupted (e.g., the inability to miss work due to potential penalties or lost wages, access to paid time off or insurance coverage).

Further release of these data and future waves of this study will continue to inform the business community at large. In the meantime, the recommendations included in this report provide a foundational understanding of this never-before studied connection, and where to start.





# Methodology

On Our Sleeves commissioned three research studies with funding from The Nationwide Foundation to fully explore how children’s mental health affects working parents and their job performance:

1. **Working Parents Qualitative Study: Report.** On Our Sleeves and a’parently. February 25, 2021. This qualitative research explored working parents’ attitudes toward children’s mental health with 42 working parents/guardians sharing input within an online research platform over a three-day period.
2. **Working Parents Quantitative Study: Final Report.** On Our Sleeves and Sprout Insight. April 9, 2021. On Our Sleeves surveyed 1,680 working parents while conducting quantitative research exploring working parents’ perceptions, attitudes and behaviors toward children’s mental health and the impact of their children’s mental health on work performance. Working parents in the study were classified into a “Mental Health-Disrupted” group (N=676) or a Comparison Group (N=1,004) based on their responses to three questions. To be classified as Mental Health-Disrupted, a parent reported that 1) their work has been interrupted to take care of issues due to their child’s emotional health and development or behavior, 2) they reported being somewhat, very or extremely concerned about their child’s emotional health and development or behavior in the past two years, and 3) in the last two years, their child’s emotional health and development or behavior has been somewhat or extremely disruptive to their ability to work on most days.
3. **Nationwide Children’s Hospital On Our Sleeves Research Results.** On Our Sleeves and American City Business Journals. September 2021. On Our Sleeves partnered with American City Business Journals to survey 3,684 readers. Of those respondents, 1,581 were working parents, 1,067 were executives (including owners, partners and C-suite executives) and 1,247 were human resources or benefits personnel nationwide about children’s mental health concerns and its impact on employers. Working parents in both quantitative studies represented most areas of the economy including, but not limited to: professional, scientific and/or technical services; construction and/or manufacturing, healthcare, non-profit organizations, banking and/or financial services, education, real estate, consulting, government (local, state or federal), retail, hospitality (restaurant, lodging, tourism); arts, entertainment and/or recreation; transportation and/or warehousing and utilities.

## Who We Talked To

Parents	Parents	Parents
<b>Qualitative*</b> (Feb 2021) <b>N=40</b> <b>Working Parents:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 21 Caucasian</li> <li>• 19 Historically underrepresented groups</li> </ul>	<b>Quantitative**</b> (March 2021) <b>N=1,680</b> <b>Working Parents:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1,082 Caucasian</li> <li>• 598 Historically underrepresented groups</li> </ul>	<b>Quantitative</b> (Sept. 2021) <b>N=3,684</b> <b>ACBJ subscriber survey</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1,067 Executives</li> <li>• 1,247 Human Resources</li> <li>• 1,581 working parents</li> </ul>

\*To define terms and understand emotions, mindsets  
 \*\*A nationally representative sample of 1,680 working parents participated in a 25-minute online quantitative survey between March 15 – 26, 2021. Participants completed a purpose-built survey comprised of both closed- and open-ended questions asking about demographics and perceptions, attitudes and behaviors related to child mental health, workplace performance and the idea of an employer-sponsored curriculum providing support to working parents around child mental health.

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# About Nationwide and The Nationwide Foundation

Nationwide, a Fortune 100 company based in Columbus, Ohio, is one of the largest and strongest diversified insurance and financial services organizations in the United States, providing a full range of insurance and financial services products.

The **Nationwide Foundation** is a nonprofit, private foundation to which Nationwide companies are the donors. Founded in 1959, the Nationwide Foundation has contributed more than \$550 million since 2000 to help nonprofit organizations in communities where Nationwide associates and their families live and work.

## About On Our Sleeves®

**On Our Sleeves**, founded by behavioral health experts at Nationwide Children's Hospital, aims to provide every community in America with free resources necessary for breaking child mental health stigmas and educating families and advocates, because no child or family should struggle alone. *On Our Sleeves* is based off the idea that kids don't wear their thoughts on their sleeves, so we don't know what they are going through. Since the inception of *On Our Sleeves* in 2018, more than 3 million people have interacted with our free pediatric mental health educational resources and our educator curriculums have reached by more than 2.7 million students across the United States.

As a national leader in pediatric behavioral and mental health, Nationwide Children's comprehensive, team approach brings together psychiatry, psychology, pediatrics, advanced practice providers, nursing, counseling, social work, clinical therapies and parent support specialists to help with every aspect of a child's treatment. Part of that includes the Big Lots Behavioral Health Pavilion, America's largest treatment and research center on a pediatric medical campus. Featuring inpatient and crisis stabilization units, partial hospital and intensive outpatient programs, a Psychiatric Crisis Department, and research all under one roof, this integrated pediatric behavioral health center serves as a model for other health care systems across the nation. Nationwide Children's is one of America's largest not-for-profit freestanding pediatric health care systems providing wellness, preventive, diagnostic, treatment and rehabilitative care for infants, children and adolescents. Named to the Top 10 Honor Roll on *U.S. News & World Report's* 2021-22 list of "Best Children's Hospitals," Nationwide Children's has a staff of more than 13,000, including 1,100 in Behavioral Health, providing state-of-the-art pediatric care during more than 1.6 million patient visits annually. The Abigail Wexner Research Institute at Nationwide Children's Hospital is one of the Top 10 National Institutes of health-funded freestanding pediatric research facilities.

# Additional Resources

**#AloneTogether**  
[AloneTogether.com](https://www.alonetogether.com)

**American Psychological Association Workplace Resources**  
[APAExcellence.org/Resources/](https://www.apa.org/workplace-resources)

**Center for Workplace Mental Health | American Psychiatric Association**  
[WorkplaceMentalHealth.org](https://www.workplacementalhealth.org)

**How to Find a Culturally Informed Therapist | On Our Sleeves**  
[OnOurSleeves.org/Mental-Health-Resources/Minority-Mental-Health/Culturally-Informed-Therapist](https://www.onoursleeves.org/mental-health-resources/minority-mental-health/culturally-informed-therapist)

**Kennedy Forum**  
[TheKennedyForum.org](https://www.thekennedyforum.org)

**Mental Health America**  
[MHANational.org](https://www.mhanational.org)

**Mental Health Coalition**  
[TheMentalHealthCoalition.org](https://www.thementalhealthcoalition.org)

**Mental Health Disparities: Diverse Populations | American Psychiatric Association**  
[Psychiatry.org/Psychiatrists/Cultural-Competency/Education/Mental-Health-Facts](https://www.psychiatry.org/psychiatrists/cultural-competency/education/mental-health-facts)

**Mind the Workplace 2021 | Mental Health America**  
[UnCrushed.org/Content/2021/5/10/Mind-the-Workplace-2021-Report](https://www.uncrushed.org/content/2021/5/10/mind-the-workplace-2021-report)

**NAMI**  
[NAMI.org](https://www.nami.org)

**One Mind at Work**  
[OneMindAtWork.org](https://www.onemindatwork.org)

**On Our Sleeves: The Movement for Children's Mental Health**  
[OnOurSleeves.org](https://www.onoursleeves.org)

**Promoting Positive Mental Health Among Racial/Ethnic Minority Children: Ensuring and Enhancing Services, Programs, and Resources | American Psychological Association**  
[APA.org/pi/Families/Resources/Positive-Mental-Health.pdf](https://www.apa.org/pi/families/resources/positive-mental-health.pdf)

**Protecting Youth Mental Health: The U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory**  
[HHS.gov/Sites/Default/Files/Surgeon-General-Youth-Mental-Health-Advisory.pdf](https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/surgeon-general-youth-mental-health-advisory.pdf)

**Sound the Alarm for Kids**  
[SoundTheAlarmForKids.org](https://www.soundthealarmforkids.org)

**Speak Now for Kids**  
[SpeakNowForKids.org](https://www.speaknowforkids.org)







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The Movement for Children's Mental Health



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