

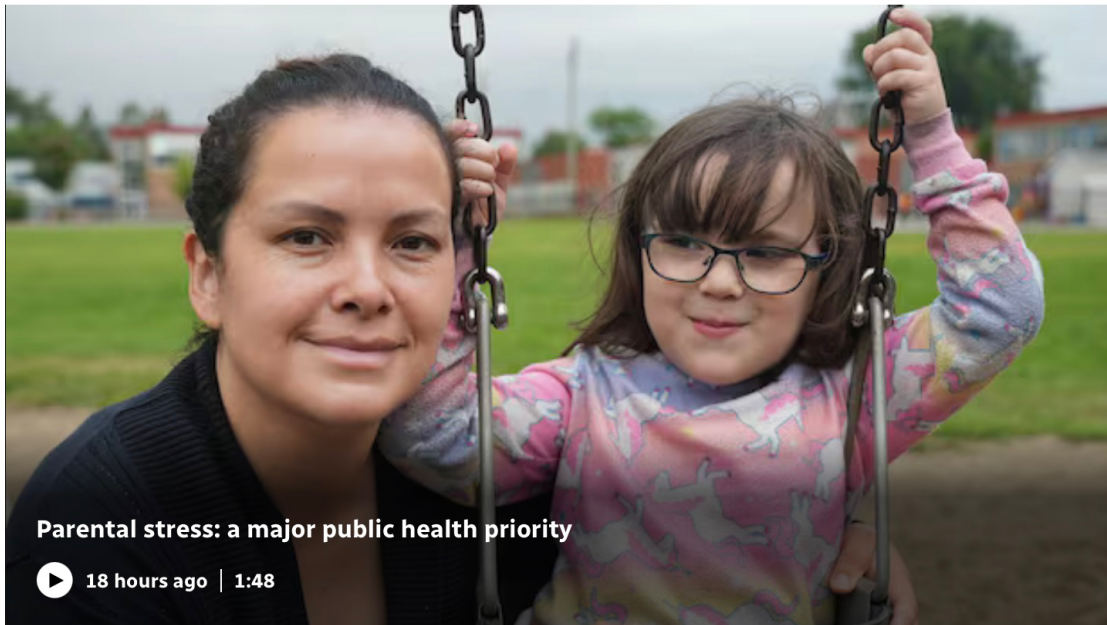
Canada

Modern parenting is so stressful that the U.S. issued a health advisory. Parents say it's overdue

New public health advisory about stress and parenting is long overdue, many say

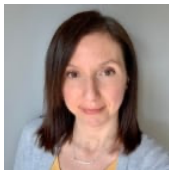


[Natalie Stechyson](#) · CBC News · Posted: Aug 30, 2024 12:33 PM CST | Last Updated: 2 hours ago



The U.S. surgeon general has warned that stresses on parents and caregivers — from financial burdens, time demands as well as cultural and societal expectations — are a major mental and physical health risk. He also called out social media as fuelling a 'culture of comparison' between parents, adding to that mental health burden.

<https://www.cbc.ca/player/play/video/9.6496013>



[Natalie Stechyson](#) · CBC News · Posted: Aug 30, 2024 12:33 PM CST | Last

Parenting these days can often feel like treading water, begging for someone to throw you a rope. But instead of pulling you out, a passerby gives you a high-five and says, "I don't know how you do it all!"

The answer? Poorly, according to many parents. Evidently, the stress is taking a toll.

On Wednesday, the U.S. surgeon general [issued a public health advisory](#) about the impact of modern stresses on parents' mental health. Considering that previous surgeon general advisories have included the risks of [gun violence](#), and [smoking](#), the public is paying [attention](#).

In addition to the traditional challenges of parenting — like protecting children from harm and worrying about finances — there are new stressors that previous generations didn't have to consider, said Surgeon General Vivek Murthy.

These include social media, the youth mental health crisis, and increased financial strain as the cost of some necessities, like [child care](#), have boomed, he said.

"Guilt and shame have become pervasive, often leading them to hide their struggles, which perpetuates a vicious cycle where stress leads to guilt which leads to more stress," Murthy said in his report.

In his advisory, Murthy also cited data from a [2023 study from the American Psychological Association](#) (APA) that surveyed 3,185 U.S. adults about post-pandemic stress.

After breaking out responses from people with children under age 18, the APA reported that 48 per cent of those parents and caregivers describe themselves as completely overwhelmed. Only 26 per cent of the non-parents — that is, respondents over age 18 who didn't have children — said the same.

The [parent-specific breakdown](#) also found that 41 per cent said most days they "were so stressed they couldn't function" — double the number reported by non-parents — while 42 per cent said they were so stressed they felt numb.

Numb's a good word for it, said Rebecca Morin, 34, a daycare provider and mom living in Smiths Falls, Ont. Morin has two children, ages four and six. One has autism, and Morin says advocating for her is a full-time job on top of the pressures of daily parenting, the cost of living and work.

"There's always something to do for the kids. A school fundraiser, a dance fundraiser, Scouts events, family commitments and so many other things.

Having hobbies is a thing of the past," Morin told CBC News. "I even struggled to take a shower the other day because I was just so completely exhausted. "We are an extremely stressed-out generation of parents."



Rebecca Morin, centre, with her two children, Maizy, left, and Maverick. Morin says the warning about the stresses of parenting is long overdue. (Submitted by Rebecca Morin)

Comparison culture

Part of modern parenting's unique struggles are what the U.S. surgeon general calls our "culture of comparison," propagated by influencers and online trends that create unrealistic expectations for parents to pursue.

Parents are inundated with elaborate school lunch ideas, strategies for breaking generational cycles, videos on back-to-school party themes and influencers baking their own goldfish crackers.

"That's the poison. That's pure poison. Comparing to anyone, whether or not you're a parent or have children, is toxic," said Julie Romanowski, a parenting coach and consultant based in Vancouver.

"Social media is not helping that. It has tanked so many parents' mental health."



‘Mommy bloggers’ are turning parenting posts into a lucrative business

6 years ago Duration 3:29

<https://www.cbc.ca/player/play/video/1.5022430>

‘Mommy bloggers’ are catching the eye of advertisers, as they turn their parenting posts into a lucrative business.

Studies have linked comparing your own parenting to what you see on social networking sites with higher rates of [maternal depression](#), higher [cortisol levels](#) and increased [envy and anxiety](#) in mothers specifically.

But it's hard not to compare, said Meenakshi Sharma-Vadnais, 35, of Ottawa. Sharma-Vadnais, a mom of three, says this generation of parents is overloaded by online information. She jokes that as an [influencer](#) and parenting blogger, she's part of the problem.



Meenakshi Sharma-Vadnais, 35, of Ottawa, is pictured with her husband Mathieu Vadnais and their children, from left, Amia, Adira and Aliza. (Submitted by Meenakshi Sharma-Vadnais)

But even though she tries to focus on her own family, and resist the urge to "doom scroll," the stress of parenting, she says, is constant. Even now, just a few months into her maternity leave from her job with the federal government, Sharma-Vadnais says she's worrying about her return to the office a year from now.

"Ever since the pandemic I think it's just been one thing after another and I don't feel like we're being supported or even provided with supports or resources," she told CBC News.

"It's just constant, like 'go, go, go.'"

Has parenting really become harder?

Many of the long-standing challenges of parenting — keeping your children safe, meeting their needs, the division of labour, time constraints — aren't unique to this generation, note experts including the surgeon general.

But several [studies](#) in recent [years](#) have noted some new pressures. For example, there are [more women working full-time](#), but women still [consistently take on a larger share of unpaid household work](#), including chores and child care.

At the same time, parents are spending more time with their children each day than previous generations, according to [Pew Research](#).



Why working moms are still struggling

1 year ago Duration 8:40

<https://www.cbc.ca/player/play/video/1.6770019>

Moms are still giving up record-high numbers of working days to care for their families, according to Statistics Canada, and therapists say burnout is becoming more common. CBC Newfoundland's Caroline Hillier talks to one workplace about how it supports working moms.

[The Economist](#) calculated in 2017 that parents spend twice as much time with their children as parents did in the 1960s.

Society hasn't been successful in supporting parenting young children, said Lisa Strohschein, a sociology professor at the University of Alberta and the editor-in-chief of the journal *Canadian Studies in Population*.

This is true whether you consider the number of spaces where children (or their noise) aren't welcome, or whether you look more broadly at the reality of the [school day being shorter](#) than the average workday, Strohschein told CBC News.

- [Many Canadians in their 20s and 30s are delaying having kids — and some say high rent is a factor](#)
- [Moms long for time alone, but research suggests an unfair division of labour means they seldom get it](#)

That said, she questions the statistic cited in the [surgeon general's report](#) that 70 per cent of parents say parenting now is more difficult than it was 20 years ago.

There just isn't the definitive data to support that, Strohschein added.

"Of course, parents are going to say it's harder today."

One issue may be the framing of it, she said, where we believe that our children's success depends on how we parent them, and the idea that there's one (best) way to parent every child.

"This is now creating these mental health crises where people feel that they're not doing enough, or that they're not successful, or that they're in danger of not succeeding and it seems like a recipe for trouble," Strohschein said.

WATCH | Why adjusting to parenthood is so stressful:



Adjusting to parenthood can be stressful for new parents, social worker says

10 months ago

Duration 0:56 <https://www.cbc.ca/player/play/video/1.7014526>

Registered social worker Chizor Vasquez tells BC Today host Michelle Eliot that expectant parents should expect a greater level of stress as they adjust to parenthood.

'Barely hanging on'

Romanowski agrees the advisory is long overdue — and somewhat bittersweet. "It was about time, that's what I thought. We should have been talking about this 20 years ago," Romanowski told CBC. "It's almost like it's so far gone that his recommendations barely scratch the surface."

- [Men are more likely than women to want kids, study says. But has that always been true?](#)
- [Scientists think they know why humans live so long: Moms](#)

Fidelia Cabrera, a mom of four living in Ottawa, says she thinks part of the stress is how much parents are over-scheduled. There's never enough time, everything always feels rushed, and you feel like you're never doing things right, she told CBC as she was leaving a meeting at her child's school.

"You want to give so much of yourself, but at the same time, where are the moments for yourself?" she said.

The parents Romanowski works with generally have one or two fairly typical children, good jobs, partners and co-parents, nice houses in good neighbourhoods and still feel like they're barely making it, she said.

"Physically they look like they're fine. On paper, they look great. But the everyday reality, living day in and day out with children ... they're barely hanging on."

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Natalie Stechyson has been a writer and editor at CBC News since 2021. She covers stories on social trends, families, gender, human interest, as well as general news. She's worked as a journalist since 2009, with stints at the Globe and Mail and Postmedia News, among others. Before joining CBC News, she was the parents editor at HuffPost Canada, where she won a silver Canadian Online Publishing Award for her work on pregnancy loss. You can reach her at natalie.stechyson@cbc.ca.

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/parent-stress-warning-1.7307945>