

# The great collide: The impact of children's mental health on the workforce

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The pediatric and adolescent mental health crisis—brought to new attention and made more urgent by the stresses of the pandemic—is now showing to have direct and dramatic implications in the workplace.

On Our Sleeves, the movement for children's [mental health](#), recently conducted a first-of-its-kind national study in spring 2021, funded by the Nationwide Foundation, to specifically evaluate the impact of children's mental [health](#) on [parents'](#) work performance and, in turn, on companies' success. The results were timely and revealing:

- 53% of working parents have missed work at least once per month to deal with their children's mental health.
- 54% of working parents interrupted their work to answer communication about their [child's mental health](#) needs during business hours.
- 30–50% of working parents' thoughts are on their child's mental health and well-being even while they are at work,
- 85% of working parents think it's a good idea to talk about children's mental health, but few talked to their managers (20%), the human resources department (23%) or colleagues (21%),
- Working parents under the age of 40 are more concerned about their children's mental health and are also more likely to choose employers based on access to mental health care benefits and resources.

"Concerns about the mental health of children have always existed, but amid the pandemic, they've become increasingly more visible and more urgent," said Marti Bledsoe Post, lead study author and executive director of On Our Sleeves. "Now, working parents are seemingly stuck in a tug-of-war, trying to focus on their children's needs while also navigating work responsibilities."

More than 3,000 working parents nationwide participated in the survey and answered questions about how their work performance was impacted by their child's mental and [emotional health](#). Results showed that not only are working parents under increased stress because of their concerns over their children's mental health, but it is also affecting them

at work.

The study also incorporated a health equity focus to understand specific needs and differences among diverse ranges of parents based on race, age and socioeconomic status.

"While this data reflects a low rate of mental health disruptions among Black and Latino(a) parents, and parents of lower socioeconomic status, we know, from national data, that this is not the case. Children from underrepresented communities face higher rates of stress and mental illness; however, stigma and barriers to access mental health professionals and information may explain the differences in how mental health concerns were reported in our data.," said Ariana Hoet, Ph.D., a pediatric psychologist at Nationwide Children's Hospital and On Our Sleeves clinical director. "This is why future research into this topic will include further segmentation and address the unique experiences of diverse parents."

This study builds upon existing research of mental health impact in the workplace from organizations like the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) but, this is the first study where pediatric mental health concerns have been evaluated within the context of the workplace. And, it couldn't have come at a better time with rates of adolescent mental health disorders rising at an alarming rate.

Nationally, more than 150 organizations led by the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and Children's Hospital Association are sounding the alarm for kids' mental health in an effort to focus policymakers on children's unique needs. Aware of this and other initiatives, the U.S. Surgeon General declared children's mental health a national crisis. His office reviewed "The Great Collide" findings and provided comment:

"We must all work together to address the youth mental health crisis. This report reinforces the fact that youth mental health impacts not only children but also parents, caregivers and employers," said U.S. Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy. "My Surgeon General's advisory outlines multiple steps that employers can take to support the mental health of their employees and their families, recognizing that employers have a role to play as we work to lay the foundation for a healthier nation. Thank you to Nationwide Children's Hospital for focusing on this critical issue."

More than half of all working parents surveyed have been extremely concerned about their child's emotional health and development, but oftentimes, many suffer in silence and don't seek help from their bosses, colleagues or human resources due to perceptions about company attitudes toward mental health.

"We understand that some parents are hesitant to seek help for emotional and mental support for their children, but it's time for that to change—and that change can be possible if companies take action," said Vinita Clements, Executive Vice President & Chief of Human Resources at Nationwide Insurance whose Foundation funded the study. "It's our responsibility as business leaders to create a safe space in which employees feel comfortable communicating about mental health at work and ultimately receive the help needed to support their families."

**More information:** Report: [www.OnOurSleeves.org](http://www.OnOurSleeves.org)

Provided by Nationwide Children's Hospital

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