



Mental health of children and parents —a strong connection

The mental health of children is connected to their parents' mental health. [A recent study](#) found that 1 in 14 children has a caregiver with poor mental health. Fathers and mothers—and other caregivers who have the role of parent—need support, which, in turn, can help them support their children's mental health. CDC works to make sure that parents get the support they need.



A child's mental health is supported by their parents

Being mentally healthy during childhood includes reaching developmental and emotional milestones and learning healthy social skills and how to cope when there are problems. Mentally healthy children are more likely to have a positive quality of life and are more likely to function well at home, in school, and in their communities.

A child's healthy development depends on their parents—and other caregivers who act in the role of parents—who serve as their first sources of support in becoming independent and leading healthy and successful lives.

The mental health of parents and children is connected in multiple ways. Parents who have their own mental health challenges, such as coping with symptoms of depression or anxiety (fear or worry), may have more difficulty providing care for their child compared to parents who describe their mental health as good. Caring for children can create challenges for parents, particularly if they lack resources and support, which can have a negative effect on a parent's mental health. Parents and children may also experience shared risks, such as inherited vulnerabilities, living in unsafe environments, and facing discrimination or deprivation.

Poor mental health in parents is related to poor mental and physical health in children

A recent study asked parents (or caregivers who had the role of parent) to report on their child's mental and physical health as well as their own mental health. One in 14 children aged 0–17 years had a parent who reported poor mental health, and those children were more likely to have poor general health, to have a mental, emotional, or developmental disability, to have

adverse childhood experiences such as exposure to violence or family disruptions including divorce, and to be living in poverty.

Fathers are important for children's mental health

Fathers are important for promoting children's mental health, although they are not as often included in research studies as mothers. The recent study looked at fathers and other male caregivers and found similar connections between their mental health and their child's general and mental health as for mothers and other female caregivers.

Supporting parents' mental health

Supporting parents, and caregivers who act in the role of parent, is a critical public health priority. CDC provides parents with [information about child health and development](#), including [positive parenting tips](#), information and support when parents have [concerns about their child's development](#), or [help with challenging behavior](#). CDC supports a variety of programs and services that address [adverse childhood experiences](#) that affect children's and parents' mental health, including programs to prevent [child maltreatment](#) and programs that support [maternal mental health during and after pregnancy](#). CDC also examines [issues related to health equity](#) and [social determinants of health](#), including racism, that affect the emotional health of parents and children. More work is needed to understand how to address risks to parents' mental health.

To help parents and other adults with mental health concerns in times of distress, CDC funded the web campaign [How Right Now](#) [↗](#) as a way to find resources and support. CDC is also funding the [National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine](#) [↗](#) to develop an online resource for parents to learn skills to cope with emotions and behavior using evidence-based approaches to improving mental health, which will be released this summer.

More Information

- [CDC's Children's Mental Health](#)
- [CDC's Child Development](#)
- [CDC's Positive Parenting Tips](#)
- [CDC's Information on Adolescent Mental Health](#)
- [CDC's Information on Parenting Teens](#)
- [CDC's Information on Depression During and After Pregnancy](#)
- [CDC's Information on Managing Stress and Anxiety during a Pandemic](#)
- [HHS Information on Supporting Families](#) [↗](#)
- [HHS Information on Engaging Fathers](#) [↗](#)

Reference:

Wolicki SB, Bitsko RH, Cree RA, et al. Associations of mental health among parents and other primary caregivers with child health indicators: Analysis of caregivers, by sex—National Survey of Children's Health, 2016–2018, *Adversity and Resilience Science: Journal of Research and Practice*. Published online April 19, 2021 [[read summary](#) [↗](#)]

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