

## **Daily pressures cause many UK families to struggle with their mental health: Many of the country's parents and carers feel overwhelmed, isolated, and unable to cope**

### **stem4's Parent Mental Health Day (27th January) aims to create positive relationships by encouraging families to adopt CPR (Connect, Play, Reset)**

Two-thirds (62%) of parents and carers say that their family's mental health and quality of life has deteriorated over the past 12 months. This equates to a total of 4.5 million families across Britain who are struggling, according to survey data marking Parent Mental Health Day (27th January), published today by youth mental health charity stem4.

Over half (55%) of the 2,012 parents and carers in the survey (they all have at least one child aged 12-18 living at home), say that they (43%), their partner (15%), or one of their children (20%) are experiencing mental health difficulties. Just three in ten (31%) are able to access the mental health treatment they need.

Facing the greatest struggle are the poorest families, those with an income of less than £30,000 a year. Over six in ten (62%) say the continuing cost-of-living crisis is negatively affecting their family's mental health and wellbeing. This compares to just over three in ten (34%) families with an annual income of £70,000+.

- One parent said: *"We have been desperately trying to get mental health treatment for my eldest daughter. In the ten months she's been on a waiting list, she's left sixth form, even though she got 9 A\*s for GCSE. No one seems to care."*
- Another added: *"My son has been referred to the children's mental health services several times. The first time we waited over 2 years, and he was discharged after one meeting. The second time we waited 7 months for an initial appointment, and we've been waiting six months for a follow-up appointment. Lack of access isn't just affecting my son, it impacts the whole family. I feel completely isolated."*

### **■ The cost of living continues to bite**

Despite recent government announcements of falling inflation, economic recovery, and increased investment in education and NHS Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services, many parents and carers say they are yet to feel the benefit. Their day-to-day anxieties continue to mount, and topping their list of worries are:

- accessing health and mental health services (56%);
  - paying bills (43%);
  - ensuring their children attend school (42%);
  - keeping their family safe from digital harm (38%), and
  - putting food on the table (29%).
- One parent commented: *"I have to work extra to earn more money to cope with cost-of-living crisis. This means I spend less time with children. I can't take the kids on holiday or do activities as much as before. I can't save anything and it makes me worried about the future."*

This all means that eight in ten (82%) parents and carers say they feel overwhelmed, isolated from friends, family, and unable to cope. 30% experience these feelings most or all of the time.



These findings come from a study by youth mental health charity **stem4**.<sup>1</sup> It was commissioned to mark Parent Mental Health Day (27 January), which this year, recognising the host of day-to-day anxieties and worries that parents now face, takes the theme **#CreatingPositiveRelationships**. This Parent Mental Health Day, stem4 is encouraging families to **CPR (Connect, Play, Reset)** their relationships.

**Dr Nihara Krause MBE, consultant clinical psychologist, CEO, and founder of youth mental health charity, stem4, commented:**

*“Many parents and carers feel they are being challenged on all fronts. Many families continue to feel the pressures of the cost-of-living crisis and parents and carers are having to work longer hours just to make ends meet. Meanwhile they are unable to access NHS mental health services for their children because of lack of capacity. With around one third of children and young people experiencing significant levels of anxiety, for which school services lack the specialism or resource to deal with, parents and carers struggle to get them to attend school or college. Not being in school has the potential to increase exposure to online harms, which parents and carers feel unconfident to deal with. All of these factors are impacting on parents and carers mental health and wellbeing.*

*“**Parent Mental Health Day** was created to strengthen family connections and wellbeing. With so many parents and carers feeling **overwhelmed, isolated from friends and family, and unable to cope**, we are focusing this year on building strength and resilience through **Creating Positive Relationships**.*

*Positive relationships play a significant factor in a person’s mental health and wellbeing. Since they are rewarding, they contribute to happiness. People who are isolated present with higher rates of mental and physical ill health than people who benefit from positive relationships. We can infer that our connections play a determining role in maintaining good mental health and keeping a person physically well.*

*Parent Mental Health Day cannot presume to achieve an immediate change in government policy, but we hope to shine a light on the challenges faced by so many of today’s parents and carers, while also providing families with practical support and advice so that they can strengthen their relationships and get back on track.”*

#### **Dr. Nihara Krause’s Tips on Making Positive Relationships**

- *To make and maintain strong or positive relationships, the first step is to ditch the self-critic and build on being positive and self-accepting. Low self-esteem often leads to making poor choices in relationships since it’s hard to let anyone else like you if you don’t like yourself.*
- *Next, be clear about why you want a relationship and what you want from it.*
- *Relationships, like houses, need building. Lay the foundations to a good connection by being open and honest, connecting on values, interests, and emotions. Have a common goal and be committed and willing to be flexible about each other’s needs.*
- *It’s important to both talk and listen. Communication, however hard, is key. Good relationships turn-take in focus and care.*
- *Both self-value and relationship-value is about getting to know yourself and each other, to be kind, to stop comparing or competing, to respect yourself and each other, to be happy and enjoy being together and to persist in overcoming challenges as and when they arise.*

#### **Notes to editors**

##### **About the survey**

\*Survey of 2,012 regionally representative parents (with children aged from 0 to 18 living in the family home, of which at least one child is between 12 and 18) carried out in January 2024.

**For more information, regional breakdowns and case studies, contact:**

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**About Parent Mental Health Day #PMHD, #CreatingPositiveRelationships.** The survey was carried out for **Parent Mental Health Day (PMHD)**, an annual campaign launched by youth mental health charity **stem4**, to encourage **understanding** and **awareness** of the importance of parents' mental health and wellbeing and its impact on the whole family system.

The theme of this year's campaign, focused on Saturday 27th January, is **#CreatingPositiveRelationships**. Against a backdrop of the still rising cost of living, and of growing concerns about digital harms, rising rates of mental ill health and stretched NHS services, PMHD 2024 will focus on practical ways in which parents and carers can create positive family relationships, minimising negative impact on the mental health of parents, carers, children and young people.

Throughout the campaign, stem4 is providing interested organisations, corporates, parents' groups and families with information packs filled with tips and advice on how to strengthen relationships and get them back on track, while shining a spotlight on parents' mental health. On PMHD stem4 will encourage people to reflect on the impact of mental health on their own and their families' relationships to share thoughts on how to #CreatingPositiveRelationships and take positive steps to make change.

### **About stem4**

stem4 is an award-winning charity that supports teenagers with their mental health. It provides evidence-based education, builds resilience, enhances motivation to change, and provides signposts to ensure early intervention and action. stem4 focuses on commonly occurring mental health issues in teenagers including eating disorders, anxiety, depression, self-harm and addiction.

The charity works with students, parents and teachers in secondary schools and colleges, and with health professionals such as GPs and school nurses through its conference programme and through its digitally delivered workshops suitable for PHSE in schools. **stem4** is also included in the Royal College of GP toolkit.

### **■ stem4's free, evidence-based, smartphone apps**

With children and young people experiencing difficulty and long waiting times in accessing effective treatments, **stem4** has developed four NHS-approved smartphone apps, all based on evidence-based strategies, to help young people in the treatment of and recovery from their mental health difficulties. These apps have been downloaded and used over 2 million times. These apps include

- **Clear Fear**, which uses the evidence-based treatment Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) to help manage the symptoms of anxiety;
- **Calm Harm**, which uses the basic principles of an evidence-based therapy, Dialectic Behaviour Therapy (DBT) to help manage the urge to self-harm;
- **Move Mood**, which uses Behavioural Activation Therapy to help improve low mood and manage the symptoms of depression;
- **Combined Minds**, which uses a Strengths-Based approach that has been shown to be effective in recovery, providing practical strategies for families and friends to support teenage mental health;
- **Worth Warrior**, which uses the principles of Cognitive Behaviour Therapy for Eating Disorders (CBT-E) to overcome issues of negative body image, low self-worth, and related early-stage eating difficulties or disorders.

[www.stem4.org.uk](http://www.stem4.org.uk)