

27 January 2022

Four in ten parents have mental health difficulties, nearly 40% more than two years ago

**stem4's Parent Mental Health Day (27th January)
aims to tip the balance to positive mental health**

Nine in ten (86%) parents say the pandemic has left them feeling overwhelmed, unable to cope, and lacking balance in their life. Major factors are the effect of lockdowns and fears of more, the pressures of home schooling (45%), fear over becoming ill (36%), work pressures and lack of work (29%), and financial difficulties (28%).

New survey data, published today by youth mental health charity stem4 and marking Parent Mental Health Day (27th January), finds that most parents and carers have little or no time to take care of their own mental health needs, leaving four in ten in mental health distress.

Of the 1,000 parents and carers surveyed, all with at least one child aged between 0 and 18 living in the home, four in ten (39%) now say they are experiencing mental health difficulties (41% of men and 37% of women), compared just under three in ten at the start of the pandemic. Yet only one in four (26%) are able to access treatment they need.

These difficulties include stress (62%), anxiety (50%), depression (54%), PTSD (13%), anger and behaviour difficulties (9%), eating disorders (6%), and self-harming behaviours (5%). 17% of parents say they are burned out and in a constant state of physical and emotional exhaustion.

• Why so few parents experiencing mental ill health are able to get help

Of the four in ten parents currently experiencing mental health difficulties, 44% say they have not asked for help, either because they don't want to make a fuss (46%), they feel ashamed (30%), they don't want to upset their family (22%) or have their family think less of them (23%), or they fear that help won't be available (13%).

Meanwhile, of the 56% who have asked for help, just half of parents (26%) are receiving treatment. When asked whom they had approached, 65% had contacted their GP, 41% NHS mental health services, 19% their employer, 13% a charity/went online, while 7% presented at an Accident and Emergency Department. 7% paid privately to see a therapist or counsellor.

Three-quarters (77%) of parents and carers with pre-existing mental health difficulties say the pandemic has made their mental health worse. Over a third (36%) directly attribute this to a lack of access to mental health treatment, while other factors include isolation (33%), relationship difficulties (22%), becoming unwell with Covid-19 (25%), changes to work structures (21%), and the prioritisation of the mental health needs of other family members (19%).

• Parents say employers could do more to support their mental health and wellbeing

At least one in five parents now live with a partner (22%) or a child (18%) with mental ill health. Although most working parents (77%) say their employer supports their mental health and wellbeing to a lesser or greater extent (49% say the former, 28% the latter), nine in ten (90%) still struggle to balance the time they



spend on paid work and/or household chores with time spent with other family members. Consequently, parents say they are left with little or no spare time for themselves or for taking care of their own mental health. Meanwhile, parents and carers whose employers allow them to split their work between home and a formal workplace are less likely to experience mental health difficulties (29%) than those whose options are confined either to only working from home or at a formal workplace (40%).

● **Parent groups most likely to have mental health problems**

With so many parents and carers now struggling to find balance in their lives, the preliminary survey findings show that certain groups are now more likely to be experiencing mental health difficulties. These include: carers and parents of adopted children (63%); single parents (52%); people on a low household hold income, i.e. £30k a year or less (49%); parents of children under the age of three (47%), and working parents on temporary contracts (46%).

Parents commented:

- “I felt like I was being swallowed, going down a never-ending hole. Having just gone back to work after 10 months of maternity leave, and then thrown into lockdown, I couldn’t cope.”
- “My partner and I are in the same job - emergency workers. We haven't had a pay rise for at least 7 years. With rising costs, even with all our overtime, we can't afford to complete the necessary works needed to our home and I can't afford childcare. No wonder I am depressed!”
- “The pandemic has affected the mental health of my 16-year-old, who struggles to leave the house and I can't leave her alone for more than two hours. She's still waiting for treatment, and I have to work. I'm so stressed, but no one cares.”

Dr Nihara Krause, Consultant Clinical Psychologist, founder of stem4, said: “It’s highly worrying that four in ten parents and carers say they are experiencing mental health difficulties, with only a quarter willing or able to access treatment. GPs are often the first port of call for parents in mental health distress, but service resources are being both significantly stretched and reduced, and the criteria for acceptance to mental health services are dauntingly high. The consequence is that few parents are getting the help they need. Meanwhile, children’s and young people’s mental health problems are at an all-time high, with these services stretched to breaking point and very few able to access early interventions. Parents are not only struggling to balance all of their responsibilities but are also having to be the supporter of their child’s or young person’s mental health, and that can be especially hard if their own mental health is compromised.”

“stem4’s Parent Mental Health Day is here to shine a light on the challenges facing so many parents and to encourage discussion around these shared issues without feeling embarrassed to do so. Right now, many parents are feeling overwhelmed, negative, and helpless. Collectively we need to challenge the stigma associated with mental ill health by opening the conversation and to start tipping the balance towards positive mental health. A good start would be to highlight the urgent need to enhance family mental health from birth to adulthood, and to work collectively to properly fund a range of child, young person and adult mental health services. This would enable all groups to find resilient ways to deal with challenges that have emerged from the pandemic, and to stop the escalating impact of untreated mental ill health difficulties by improving access to effective treatments.”

● **The PMHD survey**

The survey was carried out ahead of **Parent Mental Health Day (PMHD)**, a new annual campaign launched by Youth Mental Health Charity stem4. The theme of this year’s campaign, focused on 27th January, is **#TiptheBalancetoPositive**. As we tentatively explore emerging from a prolonged period of COVID-19 restrictions, impacts and uncertainties, PMHD 2022 will focus on practical ways in which parents and carers can regain equilibrium in their lives and start to tip the balance towards positive mental health.

stem4's PMHD encourages **understanding** and **awareness** of the importance of parents' mental health and its impact on the whole family system. Throughout the campaign, stem4 is providing interested organisations, corporates, and parents' groups with information packs filled with ideas to shine a spotlight on parents' mental health. PMHD will encourage people to reflect on the impact of mental health on their own and their families' lives and to share thoughts on how to #TipTheBalance towards positive mental health, and take positive steps to make change.

The PMHD survey also explores what has had the biggest negative impact on parents' mental health and wellbeing during the pandemic, and what would improve it going forward.

What has negatively impacted parents' mental health and wellbeing during the pandemic.

1. Effect of lockdowns, e.g., home schooling, loss of income (45%)
2. Fear of a family member becoming ill (36%)
3. Fear they (the parent) would become ill (33%)
4. Work pressures (29%)
5. Financial worries (28%)
6. Effect of not being able to work (20%)
7. Loneliness (19%)
8. No time for their own mental health (18%)
9. Family relationship difficulties (15%)
10. Putting family first (14%)

What would improve parents' mental health and wellbeing going forward

1. Increase monthly income to pay essential bills (36%)
2. A guarantee that schools will remain open over the next year (32%)
3. Better work-life balance (28%)
4. More time to look after their own mental health (26%)
5. Better access to health services generally: GP, mental health services, and hospital appointments (25%)
6. Free/affordable childcare (23%)
7. Equal distribution of unpaid chores in the home (21%)
8. Better home living conditions (19%)
9. Access to more paid work (17%)
10. Better access to children's mental health services (17%)

How working parents rate their employers' support of their mental health and wellbeing

Profession	A lot	Somewhat	Not at all
Journalism/media	68.10%	31.90%	0.00%
Insurance/pensions	64.60%	35.40%	0.00%
Marketing/PR	46.90%	53.10%	0.00%
Property/construction	41.30%	34.00%	24.70%
Law	30.20%	43.80%	26.00%
Engineering/Manufacturing	29.50%	36.70%	33.80%
Scientific services	28.50%	71.50%	0.00%
Transport/logistics/distribution	28.10%	24.90%	47.00%
Charity/Not for Profit	25.10%	55.20%	19.70%
Retail (buying and selling)	21.90%	50.40%	27.70%
Hospitality/events	19.80%	47.00%	33.20%
Public services/Government	19.80%	49.80%	30.40%

Technology/IT	19.30%	57.40%	23.40%
Energy and Utilities	15.60%	63.90%	20.40%
Healthcare (doctor/nurse)	15.30%	58.70%	26.00%
Leisure/sports/tourism	13.30%	0.00%	86.70%
Social care	11.10%	54.70%	34.20%
Performing arts	10.20%	51.80%	38.00%
Creative arts and design	10.10%	61.20%	28.60%

Notes to editors

About the research

*Survey of 1028 regionally representative parents (with children aged from 0 to 18 living in the family home) carried out between 10th and 12th January 2022.

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

Penny Lukats, Director, SENSO Communications
 Mobile: +44 (0) 7775 992350
 Email: penny@sensocommunications.com

<https://stem4.org.uk/parentmentalhealthday/>

About Parent Mental Health Day #PMHD & #TiptheBalance to Positive

stem4's Parent Mental Health Day (PMHD) encourages **understanding** and **awareness** of the importance of parents' mental health and its impact on the whole family system. With this year's theme being 'balance', the day aims to get parents and carers to take a moment to reflect on the balance they have in their lives and to take positive steps to make change.

The past two years have been like no other, with a huge impact on the population's mental health. With ever-changing restrictions, it is easy for parents to overlook their own mental health as they juggle daily tasks. Parent Mental Health Day is here to shine a light on the unsung heroes who have parented under changed circumstances throughout the pandemic, but now need some focus on themselves. By getting parents, carers and employers engaged in discussions, PMHD aims to challenge the stigmas surrounding parents' mental health, promote steps to positive mental health, and lend its voice to campaigning for early intervention and more resources for mental health services for all age groups.

stem4, a charity that supports young people to build positive mental health, is proud to be the founder of Parent Mental Health Day in the UK, which started in 2022.

<https://stem4.org.uk/parentmentalhealthday/>

#PMHD 2022: #TiptheBalance to Positive

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, early digital intervention through its suite of 4 mental health apps, and 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 digitally-delivered workshops suitable for PHSE in schools. The stem4 digital portfolio of mental health apps has widespread use nationally and internationally. **stem4** is also included in the Royal College of GP toolkit, the NHS Good Thinking Website, NHS App Library and Orcha Library.