



Cost of living crisis causing mental health distress for nearly two thirds of families in the UK

stem4's Parent Mental Health Day (27th January)

aims to build back family resilience

The lasting impact of the pandemic, combined with the cost-of-living crisis, has left millions of parents and carers in emotional and mental health distress. Two thirds (63%) say that "the cost-of-living crisis has negatively impacted my mental health and my family's mental health." This has led eight in ten (82%) parents and carers to say they feel overwhelmed and unable to cope and lack the resilience needed to overcome their daily struggles. Three in ten (30%) of them feel this way either all or most of the time.

The findings come from a new nationwide survey of 2,012 parents and carers conducted by youth mental health charity **stem4**, marking [Parent Mental Health Day](#), #PMHD (27th January). stem4 says that that the cost-of-living crisis is more than a question of finance, it is also a crisis of mental health. That is why this year's theme for Parent Mental Health Day is **#BuildFamilyResilience**, focusing on how parents and carers can successfully adapt to challenging situations and deal with their own stress and anxiety, while navigating their family through difficult times.

Nearly all parents and carers say they have been negatively impacted by the cost-of-living crisis. Four in ten (43%) can no longer afford family outings and treats; one third (31%) are struggling to heat their homes, and travel to work, and one in five (19%) are having to work extra hours or take a second job to make ends meet. Meanwhile, one in four (25%) parents and carers say they are struggling to access the health and mental health treatment and services they need.

This has left many parents and carers in a state of anxiety, with daily worries about: the future (49%); paying monthly bills (43%); affording after-school activities (42%), their children's mental health and their own (35%); family arguments (33%), and not being able to put food on the table (29%).

- **A parent in Yorkshire, said:** "I'm just finding it harder to cope. I have to choose to eat or heat my home and pay the bills. It's impossible to do both at the minute."
- **A parent in East of England, added:** "I worked all through Covid, doing extra hours in the NHS. Now with the cost-of-living hike I'm still doing more hours and it's all caught up with me. I feel burnt-out, stressed, and my anxiety levels are high."
- **A parent in the East Midlands, commented:** "I'm completely stressed about everything and so tired, but I keep going for my daughter and having to work to support ourselves for the basics. I feel so bad that my daughter's friends have holidays and nice things, yet we have very little in comparison. I don't really have time for myself"
- **A parent in the North East, said:** "As a nurse during Covid I dealt with a lot which as a result affected my mental health, I then struggled to access support. I still get anxious and struggle financially."

▪ Impact of the cost-of-living crisis on the mental health of families

Over half (55%) of the parents and carers surveyed, all with at least one child aged 12-18 living at home, say that they or one of their immediate family is experiencing mental health difficulties; this compares to 45% a year ago. Only a third (31%) are able to access treatment they need.



Mental health difficulties experienced by parents/carers and their children include stress (59%); anxiety (58%); depression (52%); behavioural and anger management (14%); eating disorders (12%), and self-harm behaviours (10%). One in five (17%) parents say they are burned out and in a constant state of physical and emotional exhaustion, the same number as at the end of the pandemic one year ago.

- **A parent in London, said:** *“It feels like I’m living in Victorian Britain. It’s impossible to access fast and effective mental health treatment unless you are able to pay for it. Teachers are so burnt out that they probably have more school absences than their pupils. While the very people who looked after us during the pandemic – nurses, teachers, carers, ambulance drivers – can’t even feed their families. And then we are expected to be grateful for the scraps thrown at us from Westminster’s plate. This and successive governments have now finally managed to dismantle public services to a point of near collapse, while we watch social media companies dismantle our children’s future one day at a time. There is literally no help when you need it. I just feel like giving up.”*

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

While many parents and carers are currently experiencing emotional struggles, the preliminary survey findings show that certain groups are particularly vulnerable to mental health difficulties. These include: carers of looked-after children (71%); single parents (44%); people on a low household income, i.e. £20k a year or less (46%); parents with a disability that prevents them from working (63%), and working parents on temporary contracts (46%). Parents and carers living in the East Midlands (40%); the South West (40%); and Wales (41%) have higher levels of mental health difficulty than those in other regions, as do those working in social care (52%) or as a nurse, paramedic or healthcare assistant.

Dr Nihara Krause, Consultant Clinical Psychologist, CEO and founder of youth mental health charity stem4, said:

“It’s shocking to see just how many families are unable to put food on their table, heat their homes, or afford after-school activities, and it’s concerning to note increasing anxiety, exhaustion, and family discord. Unsurprisingly, families in the most vulnerable circumstances such as carers of looked-after children or parents with a disability, are amongst the most impacted by the cost-of-living situation. With half of families now saying that at least one family member – a parent and carer or a child, is experiencing mental health difficulties, this survey shows that this isn’t just a cost-of-living crisis, but a mental health crisis too. This will affect education, work, and interpersonal relationships, which were already impacted by the pandemic, as well as future wellbeing. With increasing need and decreasing health resource, and with burnout being reported in those who provide many essential services such as in education and health, there is now real concern about how escalating needs can be supported effectively.

“We urgently need an effective short-term plan to minimise the immediate impact of the cost-of-living crisis on children and young people’s mental health. At the same time, we need a sustainable and informed long-term strategy to improve mental health intervention, develop community health hubs, strengthen social and economic care, recruit and retain human resource in education and health, whilst also providing evidence based, effective digital health support and a clear plan of how to reduce waiting lists.

*“**Parent Mental Health Day** was created to strengthen family connections and wellbeing. By focusing this year’s theme on **#BuildFamilyResilience**, we hope to shine a light on the challenges facing so many of today’s parents and carers and provide practical support and advice on the day on how family resilience can be built. By strengthening both family and community resilience we can work towards minimising some of the negative impact on parent/carer mental health, and that of their children and young people.”*

• About Parent Mental Health Day #PMHD, #BuildFamilyResilience

The survey was carried out ahead of **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 27th January, is **#BuildFamilyResilience**. We've emerged from the pandemic, but now the cost-of-living crisis is causing parents to face new uncertainties and challenges. PMHD 2022 will focus on practical ways in which parents and carers can build family resilience, minimising negative impact on the mental health of parents, carers, children and young people.

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 **#BuildFamilyResilience** towards positive mental health, and take positive steps to make change.

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 on 16th and 17th January 2023.

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

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Parents commented:

- "Schools are ill equipped to deal with the amount and severity of self-harm, anxiety & depression and there are 18 months - 2 year waiting lists for counselling. Some school counselling services are restricted to 20-minute slots due to the demand and are offering after school appointments to cope with the numbers. Parents are being threatened with court/legal action by schools as they cannot manage to get their child(ren) into school. The effect of 1 child struggling with mental health has a monumental effect on the rest of the family. Parents are juggling full time work, cost of living crisis, their child's mental health and their own mental health. Something has to give."
- "Accessing mental health services for children and young adults is very hard. I could only get help after my child had overdosed and self-harmed. Until then you don't get much help, and the help quickly drops off, so you are forced to go private."
- "I feel I have a much shorter fuse and I live with constant and immediate regret. I simply cannot see a future."
- "Our family has gone through so much and this has made the cost-of-living crisis even worse for us having extra outgoings. We were sent to a hospital 60 miles away as no beds were available for my infant son nearer by. We've subsequently got into debt, and childcare is a nightmare."
- "The waiting list to be seen by a psychiatrist was 2 to 3 years. We couldn't wait so we had to borrow money to go privately to get my son assessed."
- "My son has been referred to the children's mental health via the doctors several times. The first time we waited over 2 years, and he was discharged after one meeting. The second referral took over 7 months and we're still waiting for an update after his first meeting in August 2021."
- "Every day has some sort of struggle, be it emotional or physical, it is hard to talk to anyone who might be able to help, that's if you can even get an appointment. Keeping in touch with and helping other family members helps me to somewhat cope and gives me a positive purpose."

- “I’m struggle with isolation of working from home and my OCD has increased quite significantly in response. I Listen to the radio, look at news online, switch on tv for a break.....and all you hear is bad news.”
- “I have to work extra hours to earn more money to just cope. This means I spend less and less time with children. I can’t take the kids on holiday or do fun activities. I can’t save any money and it makes me worried about the future.”

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