

SUPPORTING THE WELL-BEING OF PARENTS AND GUARDIANS AMID THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

December 2020

Brief 3

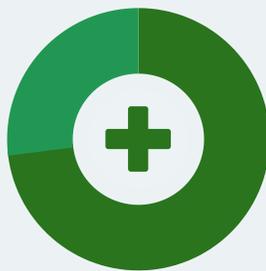
WHAT DO WE KNOW?

Parents and guardians play a crucial role in shaping children’s development and well-being. But high levels of stress, if unaddressed, may overload caregivers, making it more challenging for them to support their families. Our survey of parents and guardians in Massachusetts highlights the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on parent and guardian stress and well-being. Nearly 66% of parents and guardians reported they felt worried, nervous, or on edge about the pandemic. Many parents and guardians were especially concerned about how the pandemic could affect their family’s health (73%), their future well-being (69%), and their ability to balance work and family responsibilities (72%).

“ **The stress on me reworking finances, self-care, and the children is huge. I worry about the mental health ramifications on the family if this continues much longer.** ”



66% of parents felt worried, nervous, or on edge about the pandemic



73% were concerned about how the pandemic could affect their family's health



69% were concerned about their future well-being



72% were concerned about their ability to balance work and family responsibilities

Despite the overall impact of the pandemic on parent and guardian stress and well-being, there were differences in parents’ and guardians’ specific concerns by family income. For example, low-income families were most concerned about the effects of the pandemic on their family’s health and finances than high-income families.

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The virus has impacted my family both financially and psychologically.

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Laid off. Less money. Still have bills and stressed on waiting for food stamps. Fingers crossed I get them.

“

It is beyond stressful; the days just roll into each other.

Low-income families were **four times** as likely as high-income families to say that the pandemic had caused **financial stress**



WHAT CAN WE DO?

Supporting parents and guardians is fundamental for the welfare of communities and the healthy development of children.

In addition to broader policy efforts focused on building families' economic security, the mental well-being of parents and guardians can also be encouraged through a number of effective supports:



Connect parents and guardians to resources that alleviate stress and promote well-being.

Making effective supports known and easily accessible to parents and guardians can promote their well-being. These supports can range from intensive programs, like therapy and other clinical approaches, to low-cost, widely-available resources, like application-based mindfulness programs.



Help families enact daily routines to reduce stress and make time for self-care.

Establishing consistent routines can reduce stress often associated with certain junctures during the day, like bedtime or meals. Having routines in place can also make more time for parents and guardians to take care of their own needs and engage in critical self-care activities. Providing concrete examples of routines and guidance on how to make routines habit can support families in making their days less stressful and more predictable, something we all crave in this often unpredictable time.



Empower families to acknowledge and share pandemic-related burdens.

Living through this pandemic is tough on all of us, but it can sometimes feel like we are weathering the storm alone. Making space for conversations about difficult feelings can help adults process negative emotions and reduce stress. Emphasizing the importance of social connections and creating time for fostering relationships, whether at the start of work calls, during doctors' appointments, or in informal conversations with neighbors and friends, can empower parents and guardians to leverage their relationships, even if at a distance.

Methodology: This brief is based on findings from a survey of 1,172 parents and guardians of five- to seven-year-old children across Massachusetts. These parents and guardians represent 1,209 young children participating in Early Learning Study at Harvard, a statewide study of early education and care. Most parents and guardians responded to the survey in April or May 2020.

For additional information, see the full report: [How are they faring? Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the lives of families and young children in Massachusetts.](#)

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