

COVID-19 pandemic causing poor mental health in third of children

Submitted by: Definition (formerly Limelight PR)

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More than three million children in the UK could be struggling with poor mental health due to the COVID-19 pandemic, according to new research from not-for-profit healthcare provider, Benenden Health.

Nearly a third of parents (29%) revealed they have seen a negative impact on their children's mental wellbeing since the outbreak of the virus, whilst an additional four in ten (40%) said they never talk about mental health with their children, suggesting there could be even more suffering in silence during the pandemic.

As a result of the findings, Benenden Health has developed a dedicated COVID-19 hub, providing online materials and advice for individuals including children and parents to help them manage their health and wellbeing at this challenging time.

With the long-term impact on wellbeing yet to be fully understood, parents noted an increase in serious physical symptoms of poor mental health in their children since the COVID-19 outbreak began, with 5% of children grinding teeth, a further 5% losing hair and 4% self-harming. More unsurprisingly, the biggest behavioural changes in children include being increasingly agitated, moody or upset (66%), misbehaving more (42%) and crying more than usual (38%).

As many as one in six children (16%) are reported to be suffering by not understanding what is going on, whilst the leading cause of stress was revealed to be missing friends, with four in ten parents (39%) reporting this to be the main contributor to their negative mental wellbeing. Children are reportedly more worried about missing out on education (11%) than their own health (5%) or that of their friends (2%).

Despite these concerns, nearly a fifth of parents (18%) said they haven't been able to access support or resources to help address mental health issues in children, whilst more than a third (37%) have not even tried to source help despite the challenges they and their children are facing at this time.

The organisation's research also found that parents themselves are suffering due to the pandemic, with a quarter (24%) revealing that balancing working from home with childcare is having a negative impact on their mental health. Almost half of these said they were stressing about their children's education (47%) and a third about their lack of exercise (34%). One in ten respondents (9%) also revealed that they do not believe they are being a good parent during the lockdown due to their work commitments.

Cheryl Lythgoe, Head Matron at Benenden Health, said: "COVID-19 is understandably having a significant impact on our physical and mental health, regardless of who we are or how old we are.

"Children across the country are likely to have never experienced anything like this before and the disruption, uncertainty and change is shown to be taking its toll on their mental health, whether worrying about school work and exams, isolation from friends and family or being scared about their health or that of their loved ones.

"It is vitally important that during these difficult times, support is available to everyone –

regardless of age or circumstance – and certainly for parents and children themselves. Taking the time now to talk, seek help and support each other can be crucial in getting through these challenging times together and promoting positive mental health for once we are out the other side.”

Benenden Health has been caring for its community of members every day since 1905, providing access to personal healthcare for just 11.50GBP per month.

The healthcare provider’s dedicated COVID-19 hub also offers advice on how to stay physically and mentally healthy throughout the coronavirus pandemic. For more information, go to <https://www.benenden.co.uk/coronavirus/>.

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Note to Editors

The research was conducted by Censuswide, with 2,455 general respondents including 1,002 parents in UK between 15.04.2020-20.04.2020. Censuswide abide by and employ members of the Market Research Society which is based on the ESOMAR principles.

Benenden Health is a not-for-profit organisation, founded in 1905 with the purpose of people joining together to help pay for medical care. It is one of the UK’s longest serving and most respected mutual healthcare societies, offering an affordable alternative to health insurance to more than 800,000 members.

Many UK businesses have also chosen to offer Benenden Health membership as part of their employee benefits package, with the organisation named as the UK’s most trusted provider of corporate healthcare by Moneywise in 2019.

Further data from the survey is available on request.