

# The Pandemic Is a ‘Mental Health Crisis’ for Parents

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Paige Posladek is pregnant, and stressed. She has two [children](#), ages 2 and 4, works part time as a copywriter, and has seen a therapist on and off for several years to help her deal with the loneliness and loss of identity that can come with being a new mom.

Before the pandemic, Posladek, who lives in Kansas City, Mo., felt she had figured out ways to support her mental health: participating in group exercise classes, or meeting up with friends and getting her kids outside. But those mundane joys disappeared when the shutdown started in March. “There’s already so much pressure on parents, even pre-pandemic, to make the right choices for our children,” Posladek, 30, said.

To now be in a situation where she doesn’t know what the right choices are for her children’s health and education has only exacerbated her anxiety. She still has virtual sessions with a therapist, but it’s not as helpful when her kids are popping in and out of frame. “Even therapy has been tainted a little in its ability to provide relief,” Posladek said. “How are we going to help grow and nurture them in this environment, when we’re not even nurturing ourselves?”

As we slouch into Month 7 of the pandemic, the mental health impact on parents remains significant and shows no signs of abating. Though the pandemic has certainly affected the mental health of all demographics, research from [the American Psychological Association](#) showed that in April and May, parents with children at home under 18 were markedly more stressed than non-parents.

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Over the course of the pandemic, the biggest stressor for parents surveyed by the University of Oregon’s RAPID-EC project has been an inability to sufficiently feed, clothe and house their children, said Philip Fisher, Ph.D., the director for the Center of Translational Neuroscience at the university, who is leading the project. “We thought early on that fear of getting sick would be the biggest source of stress,” he said, but as time went on, it was clear that parents struggling to meet their children’s basic needs were feeling the greatest ongoing emotional turmoil. Over 60 percent of caregivers who are experiencing extreme financial problems [reported emotional distress](#), compared with just over 30 percent of caregivers who have no financial issues.

So what can parents do to help bolster their mental health in this time of difficulty? Lucy Rimalower, a licensed marriage and family therapist in Los Angeles, recommends asking yourself: What kind of self-care is realistic for you *now*, not six months ago? The old coping mechanisms you had may not be available any time soon, so if you can even take a tiny break for yourself every day, that’s better than nothing. “Is that a five-minute yoga video on YouTube? Is it a five-minute text exchange with an old friend?” Rimalower said.

“Traditional therapy is fantastic,” but it’s not realistic or accessible for everybody, she added. Rimalower said asynchronous options like therapy apps that allow you to message therapists, rather than have a 50-minute video session, may be helpful for parents strapped for time.

Research shows that [exercise](#) (like that five-minute yoga video) and [emotional connection](#) (that simple text exchange) are also helpful in reducing stress. The RAPID-EC study found that [high levels of emotional support](#), particularly from local sources, can help mitigate stress levels for families up and down the socioeconomic ladder, and that parents are finding a great deal of solace in their partners, parents and even their own children.

At first, Dr. Fisher said, the researchers thought that when parents said they got emotional support from their children, they meant older children who were potentially helping care for the under-5 set. But when they dug into their data, they found that “people were finding their little ones to be a source of comfort,” he said.

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