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**Contact**

Alison Cashin

[Alison\\_cashin@gse.harvard.edu](mailto:Alison_cashin@gse.harvard.edu)

617.495.1959



## New data show high rates of anxiety and depression among parents of U.S. teens

*A new report from Harvard's Making Caring Common explores the critical link between parent and teen mental health in America.*

**Cambridge, Massachusetts** – The parents of teens in the U.S. are suffering from high rates of anxiety and depression, according to a new report from [Making Caring Common](#), a project of the Harvard Graduate School of Education. The report argues that it would be just as right to sound the alarm about parent mental health as about teen mental health, which has been in the national spotlight since the pandemic.

The report, [Caring for the Caregivers: The Critical Link Between Parent and Teen Mental Health](#), is based on two nationally representative surveys in the U.S., one with teens and young adults and another with parents or caregivers. While 18% of teens reported suffering anxiety, about 20% of mothers and 15% of fathers reported anxiety. While 15% of teens reported depression, about 16% of mothers and 10% of fathers did, too. Over 1/3 of teens had at least one parent who reported anxiety or depression and almost 40% of teens reported being at least “somewhat worried” about the mental health of at least one of their parents.

“There is a largely untold story about parent mental health in America,” said [Richard Weissbourd](#), lead author of the report, faculty director of Making Caring Common, and Senior Lecturer at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. “Parents and teens’ mental health are deeply interwoven, and we need to do much more in this country to support parents and to promote their mental health. Parents and other primary caregivers also need the knowledge and resources to be able to support their teens’ mental health.”

Our data suggest that, while a significant majority of parents are attuned to their teens' emotional states and perspectives, many parents are not. This disconnect is strongly linked to depression and anxiety in *both* parents and teens.

“We heard from teens time and again that they really just want their parents to listen,” said Weissbourd. “When parents really listen to their teens, it can not only help teens feel heard and valued, it also can motivate them to turn to their parents for emotional support when they need it.”

The report also includes suggested strategies to mitigate parents' mental health challenges, to guide them in listening and providing support to their teens, to reduce the impact of parental depression and anxiety on teens, and to head off damaging parent-teen dynamics. These strategies include:

1. **Listening to teens.** Depressed and anxious teens are much more likely to reach out to their friends (56%) than their parents (32%) for emotional support. Parents need guidance on specific empathic listening skills that can help them become important sounding boards and advisors to their teens.
2. **Guiding parents in supporting teens' mental health.** Parents need basic facts about anxiety and depression and when a teen needs professional treatment, as well as guidance in managing their own anxiety when their teens are anxious or depressed.
3. **Caring for the caregivers: Promoting parents' mental health.** Community institutions and governments at every level can engage in public education efforts that alert parents and caregivers to signs of depression and anxiety and offer resources for alleviating these challenges.
4. **Guiding parents in talking about their own mental health troubles with teens.** Parents and caregivers need culturally attuned strategies for talking appropriately about their own emotional struggles with teens, so that their children don't interpret their parents' harsh moods as a response to their failings or as the withdrawal of affirmation or love.
5. **Helping teens cultivate meaning and purpose.** Thirty-six percent (36%) of our teen survey respondents reported little or no “purpose or meaning in life” and this absence strongly correlated with depression and anxiety. Parents can help stem teens' anxiety and depression by engaging them in activities that focus them on others and/or attach them to principles and goals larger than themselves—both rich sources of meaning and purpose.

To read the full report and recommendations and learn more about Making Caring Common, visit [www.makingcaringcommon.org](http://www.makingcaringcommon.org).

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**About Making Caring Common:** Making Caring Common (MCC), a project of the Harvard Graduate School of Education (HGSE), helps parents, educators, and communities raise children who are concerned about others and the common good, and who work are committed to justice.