

On Our Sleeves survey reveals many parents need support in starting mental health conversations with children

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Between the challenges of everyday life and more than two years of the COVID-19 pandemic, kids face more pressure and distraction than ever

before, a combination of factors that has led to a mental health crisis among children in the United States. That crisis means that, more than ever, caregivers need to be equipped to talk daily to their children about thoughts, feelings and emotions, which in turn can help caregivers better support children if they have a mental health concern.

Results of a new [national survey](#) conducted online by The Harris Poll on behalf of *On Our Sleeves*, the national movement for children's mental health, found that while most parents of kids under 18 know it's important to talk with their children about mental health, many are unsure of where to begin. Furthermore, less than half of respondents say they experienced open conversations about mental health while growing up, likely leaving many unsure of how to start—and continue—the conversation with their kids.

"We know that conversation is one of the simplest, most effective ways to make an impact, break stigma and give kids a voice when it comes to their mental health," said Ariana Hoet, Ph.D., clinical director of *On Our Sleeves* and a pediatric psychologist at Nationwide Children's Hospital. "Our research shows that parents know this, too and they've shared that they need additional support in starting and maintaining these important mental health conversations."

The national survey from *On Our Sleeves*, powered by behavioral health experts at Nationwide Children's, found that:

- The vast majority of parents of kids under 18 (93%) say it is important for parents and caregivers to talk to their children about mental health.
- More than half of parents of kids under 18 (59%) need help knowing how to start the conversation around mental health with their children.

- Less than half of Americans (43%) say their family talked about mental health openly when they were growing up

To help parents, caregivers and educators take the first step, *On Our Sleeves* has launched Operation: Conversation, a campaign to encourage adults to sit down with the children in their lives to start—and most importantly continue—the conversation to support mental health.

Allowing children to have a regular, [open space](#) to share their thoughts, feelings and emotions can increase the likelihood that parents and caregivers will notice when their children need support with a mental health concern.

As part of Operation: Conversation, experts from *On Our Sleeves* are offering parents advice for kick-starting conversations, including:

- **Set the stage.** The work begins before you even start the conversation. If your family creates a daily habit of checking in and talking with each other, it will make conversations about their mental [health](#) or concerns easier.
- **Ask open-ended questions.** These conversations can include all kinds of topics, not just emotions or behaviors. Remember, your goal is to create the habit of feeling comfortable sharing with you.
- **Find the right time for difficult conversations.** Pick a time when everyone is calm and emotions are not high. Ask permission to start the conversation and if your child is not ready, ask them when a good time would be. Make sure you're in a private area with low interruptions.

"After more than two years living through a global pandemic that has been difficult on children's [mental health](#), these conversations are more important than ever," Dr. Hoet added. "*On Our Sleeves* is here to support adults on how to create an environment where children in their lives feel

comfortable coming to them and talking about their day to day or any obstacles that come up."

Operation: Conversation features free [conversation](#) starters, tip sheets and educational resources to open the lines of communication between caregivers and children. It also shows caregivers how to react to conversations in a positive way that won't lead [children](#) to shut down, feel worse or not be open to talking in the future.

Survey Method:

This survey was conducted online within the United States by The Harris Poll on behalf of **On Our Sleeves** from April 5-7, 2022 among 2,063 U.S. adults ages 18 and older, among whom 686 are parents of kids under 18. The sampling precision of Harris online polls is measured by using a Bayesian credible interval. For this study, the sample data is accurate to within + 2.8 percentage points using a 95% confidence level.

More information: For more information and resources to start conversations with children that promote mental wellbeing, visit [OnOurSleeves.org](https://onoursleeves.org).

Provided by Nationwide Children's Hospital

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