

# Survey finds loneliness epidemic runs deep among parents

April 24 2024

---



It can be difficult to understand how busy parents often feel lonely. But a new survey by The Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center finds it is a widespread issue that most parents experience. Credit: The Ohio State Wexner Medical Center

A new national survey conducted by The Ohio State University Wexner

Medical Center finds that a broad majority of parents experience isolation, loneliness and burnout from the demands of parenthood, with many feeling a lack of support in fulfilling that role.

The survey of parents conducted this month found:

- About two-thirds (66%) felt the demands of parenthood sometimes or frequently feel isolating and lonely.
- About 62% feel burned out by their responsibilities as a parent.
- Nearly 2 in 5 (38%) feel they have no one to support them in their parenting role.
- Nearly 4 in 5 (79%) would value a way to connect with other parents outside of work and home.

"I work from home full time and I actually have a job where I'm on camera a lot and I'm Zoom calling people very often," said Anne Helms, a mother of two young children in Columbus, Ohio. "However, you don't get the small talk, so you don't get the, 'How are your children? How's it going?' And you don't get a lot of genuine answers when you do ask, 'How is it going?' There are some days where the most chit-chat or idle talk that I get is with my dog because I work alone."

"It's pretty obvious that there is a huge difference between a virtual meeting and being in person," said Kate Gawlik, DNP, associate clinical professor at The Ohio State University College of Nursing, a researcher on parental burnout and a mother of four [young children](#). "You miss a lot of those small interactions that you'd have in the hallway. Just a lot more of that personal touch has been eliminated, and in many regards it's just never been infiltrated back into our society."

"Even the places that I do try and seek out other parents, it's kind of like we're lost in the shuffle because it's at daycare drop-off or pick-up where everyone just has tunnel vision," Helms added. "And I think it's

hard to make friends when you're feeling vulnerable."

Gawlik pointed to the ancillary negative impacts of loneliness.



Experts at The Ohio State University College of Nursing say parental loneliness and burnout are two growing problems that are closely intertwined. Kate Gawlik, DNP, leads a remote support group through the Ohio State College of Nursing where parents can connect and find support. Credit: The Ohio State Wexner Medical Center

"Loneliness has been shown to affect both your physical and [mental health](#)," Gawlik explained. "So anything from [cardiovascular disease](#) to

depression, anxiety, [cognitive decline](#), even your immune system can be affected when you're lonely. In fact, one study showed if you are in [social isolation](#) for a prolonged amount of time, it's equivalent to smoking about 15 cigarettes a day."

In response to the realities of parental isolation, loneliness and burnout, Gawlik created a six-week parenting program that brings parents together to be vulnerable, commiserate about challenges they face and find support. It's where Helms realized she wasn't alone.

"I think the biggest thing is she validated that if you're working and you have children and you're a conscientious parent, it would be wild if you weren't burned out," Helms said. "So I felt very validated when she said, 'It's okay that you're here.'"

Gawlik also stressed the need for [self-care](#) and the value of connection.

"To have somebody that you can relate to and that feeling of connection that somebody else is dealing with what you are dealing with can be so powerful when it comes to combating feelings of loneliness," Gawlik said.

"I think it equips us to create better futures for our children; I think it makes us healthier," Helms said. "I think that the ripple effect from connecting with other parents and getting support when you need it is immeasurable. It makes you a better employee. It makes you a better spouse, parent, friend. I think that it just enriches our lives ... just like parenting does, but it just makes you level up."

Gawlik recommends doing an online search for parent groups in your community, whether they are hosted at community centers or through your employer. Parents can also look for playgroups, book clubs, recreational sports leagues or initiate talking to parents about scheduling

playdates with their little ones' friends from childcare.

"Parenting can feel very lonely at times, but it will be easier if you have people around who can support you," Gawlik said. "It can be hard to start seeking out connections, because to some degree, you will have to be vulnerable, and sometimes, it will take time and effort. But just take the first step."

Provided by Ohio State University Medical Center

Citation: Survey finds loneliness epidemic runs deep among parents (2024, April 24) retrieved 6 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2024-04-survey-loneliness-epidemic-deep-parents.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.