

US surgeon general calls parental stress an urgent public health issue

August 28 2024, by Ernie Mundell



Almost half of American parents surveyed say they face "overwhelming" levels of stress on a daily basis, and in [an advisory](#) issued on Wednesday U.S. Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy called parental stress an urgent

public health issue.

Murthy said he issued the advisory—meant to draw attention to a health issue of national importance—to "highlight the stressors that impact the mental health and well-being of parents and caregivers, the critical link between parental mental health and children's long-term well-being, and the urgent need to better support parents, caregivers and families."

As outlined in the new report, data from 2023 shows a third of parents saying they faced high [levels of stress](#) over the past month, compared to 20% of other adults.

Nearly half (48%) of parents surveyed last year said that, "most days, their stress is completely overwhelming," according to the new advisory. That's compared to 26% of other adults expressing that same level of daily stress.

According to the new advisory, some of the major stressors plaguing moms and dads include:

- Financial strain, [economic instability](#) and poverty
- Time demands
- Children's health
- Children's safety
- Parental isolation and loneliness
- Technology and [social media](#)
- Cultural pressures and children's futures

Murthy believes there's a dangerous trickle-down effect of [parental stress](#), because it can impact the mental health of their kids.

In 2021, Murthy issued an [advisory](#) citing the "alarming" increase in the number of U.S. youth facing [mental health issues](#).

"We know that the well-being of parents and caregivers is directly linked to the well-being of their children," Murthy wrote. "The stresses parents and caregivers have today are being passed to children in direct and indirect ways, impacting families and communities across America."

He cited his own experience.

"I also feel the weight of the daily big and small decisions we have to make as parents that don't come with an instruction manual," Murthy said.

[Parenting](#) has never been easy, but Murthy believes that societal changes have made it even tougher.

"As technological and economic forces have reshaped the world at a dizzying pace, it has also become harder for parents to prepare children for a future that is difficult to understand or predict," Murthy said in the report.

The Internet and social media, especially, have created an intense "culture of comparison," he said, with parents straining to keep up.

This creates "[unrealistic expectations](#)" regarding "milestones, parenting strategies, achievements and status symbols that kids and parents must pursue," Murthy believes.

"Chasing these unreasonable expectations has left many families feeling exhausted, burned out and perpetually behind," he said.

What's needed is an attitude adjustment by society regarding the importance and challenges of parenting, he said.

"The work of raising a child is work, no less valuable than the work

performed in a paid job and of extraordinary value when it comes to the impact on the future of society," the Surgeon General said.

Communities must also do more to help ease the burden on parents.

That could include "programs that will help ensure parents and caregivers can get time off to be with a sick child, secure affordable child care, access reliable mental health care and benefit from places and initiatives that support social connection and community," Murthy explained.

Too often, he added, parents feel shame about their perceived inability to meet financial and cultural expectations when it comes to a child's achievements, exacerbating stress levels. It's time to talk "more openly about the challenges parents face," Murthy said.

"I am hopeful this Surgeon General's Advisory will help catalyze and support the changes we need to ensure all parents and caregivers can thrive," Murthy said.

More information: Find out more about dealing with parental stress at the [University of Pennsylvania](#).

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