

WHY WE CHOSE THIS TOPIC

Some students returning to in-person learning may be anxious about getting back into a routine and about what to expect in an altered classroom environment. They may feel disconnected from teachers and peers, and their families may still be coping with household challenges related to the pandemic. Students will need extra support to ensure positive emotional well-being and successful school outcomes.



WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS ^{1,2,3}

For children already struggling with a mental health or family issue, the pandemic is especially challenging. Children with special education needs, low-income, and children in rural areas are disproportionately affected by COVID-19, and require additional support upon return to in-person learning.

Insurance companies report a **100% increase** in the percentage of **self-harm, substance use, and mental health claims** for teens in 2020 as compared to 2019.

Hispanic adults report the highest level of depression and suicidal thoughts among racial and ethnic groups in 2020 due to not having enough food or stable housing, putting their children at risk of stress and worry.



WHAT'S HAPPENING IN WISCONSIN?



The **Voices of Wisconsin Students' Project** was developed by the Wisconsin Department of Health Services in partnership with the University of Wisconsin's Wisconsin Institute for Public Policy

and Service (WIPPS) Research Partners and the Medical College of Wisconsin (MCW) to gather more insight about how middle and high school students are coping with school, learning, sources of stress, and life in general during COVID-19.

The valuable input from students, gathered from 23 different focus groups, can help inform discussions among families, schools, and policymakers about how to support students' ongoing learning either virtually, in-person, or in hybrid/blended models.

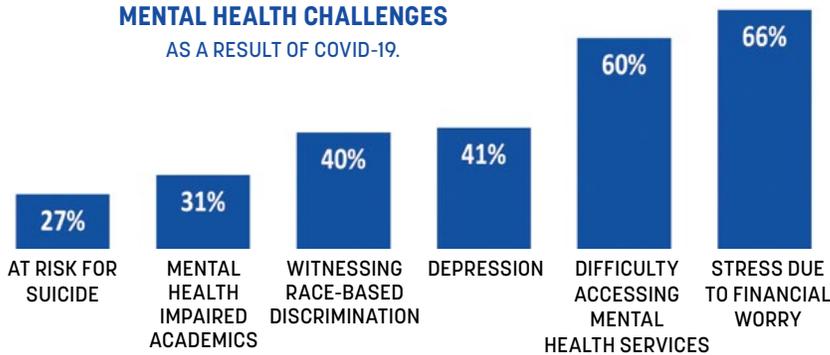
Do you think your child needs mental health services and don't know where to start? View our guide of **how to access children's mental health services.**



- continued -

IMPACT ON COLLEGE STUDENTS⁴

PERCENTAGE OF COLLEGE STUDENTS REPORTING
MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES
AS A RESULT OF COVID-19.



Levels of depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation, and the demand for mental health services in college students age 18-24 was trending up even before the pandemic. Now, students report increased depressive symptoms, which are negatively affecting their academic performance. Adding to their psychological distress, college students have missed many important milestones such as graduation, participation in athletics, and other opportunities for social interaction which also likely impacts their well-being.

WHAT WE CAN DO^{5,6}

➔ PARENTS:

- Talk to your child about what to expect as they return to school. To help guide the discussion and for some tangible take-aways, watch this short video [Parenting during the Pandemic: Managing Stress and Anxiety](#).
- Encourage your child to engage in healthy self-care like taking small breaks from homework to go for a walk and having regular engagement with peers.
- If your child has an Individualized Education Plan (IEP), contact school counselors and teachers to reiterate what your child needs in order to succeed in school.

➔ SCHOOL / TEACHERS:

- Partner with families to learn more about their child's particular needs.
- Foster a sense of belonging and create space especially for students of color and those with special needs, to reflect on the effects of the pandemic.
- Focus on strengths-based interventions that work to maintain a healthy mindset.

- Explore Mental Health First Aid training opportunities to learn how to talk to youth about their mental well-being.

➔ POLICY MAKERS:

- Support expansion of school mental health funding to include psychologists, counselors, and nurses.
- Support funding to expand school staff training in trauma-informed practices.
- Increase funding for school mental health collaboration grants to assist schools in connecting students to mental health services.
- Increase the Earned Income Tax Credit to further reduce the number of children in poverty and reduce their behavioral health challenges.

➔ COMMUNITIES:

- A serious stressor for families is not having enough food. Hold fundraisers to assist your local food pantry.
- Focus COVID-19 funding to provide equitable solutions to assist neighborhoods who have the most low-income renters and housing instability.

REFERENCES:

- ¹ Lee J. Mental health effects of school closures during COVID-19. *Lancet Child Adolesc Health* 2020; 4: 421 Retrieved from: <https://www.thelancet.com/action/showPdf?pii=S2352-4642%2820%2930109-7>
- ² McKnight-Eily LR, Okoro CA, Strine TW, et al. Racial and Ethnic Disparities in the Prevalence of Stress and Worry, Mental Health Conditions, and Increased Substance Use Among Adults During the COVID-19 Pandemic – United States, April and May 2020. *MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep* 2021;70:162-166. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm7005a3external icon>
- ³ Fair Health. Whitepaper. The Impact of COVID-19 on Pediatric Mental Health: A private study of healthcare claims. Mar 2021.

⁴ The Healthy Minds Network in collaboration with the Amer. College Health Association. The Impact of COVID-19 on College Student Well-Being. May 2020.

⁵ Casel. Reunite, Renew, Thrive. A Social Emotional Learning Roadmap for Re-opening Schools. July 2020.

⁶ Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction. Policy and Budget Team. Summary of 2021-23 Biennial Budget Request & Governor Evers' 2021-23 Biennial Budget Proposal. (page 8).