

# ON SHAKY GROUND PART 2

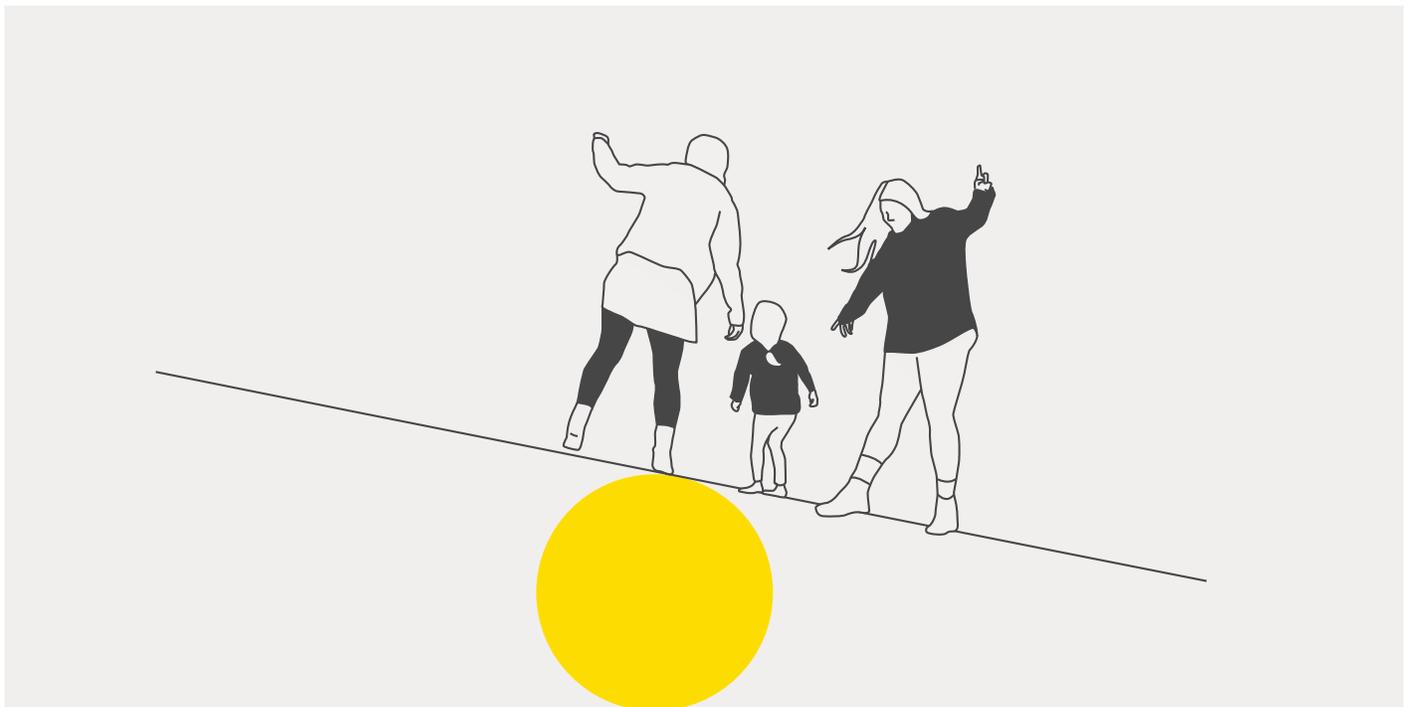
In our recent fact sheet entitled, On Shaky Ground, Part 1, we showed that the unpredictability in paying for basic needs (e.g., housing, food, utility) during the pandemic had a negative impact on caregivers' and children's well-being. In this fact sheet, we focus on other ways that unpredictability in finances affects the lives of families with young children.

We focus on the associations between uncertainty and increased family conflict as well as disrupted family routines. We also document the way in which

the quality time caregivers spend with their children lessens the weight of the uncertainty families are facing in paying for basic needs.

Unpredictability in paying for basic needs week to week disrupts family routines and negatively affects caregivers' and children's well-being; but quality time helps children be okay.

**"Everything is very uncertain right now and that makes us uncertain."**  
Parent in Florida



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## THE PANDEMIC ADDED NEW CHALLENGES FOR FAMILIES WITH YOUNG CHILDREN

Raising young children in the US has never been easy, but the pandemic added new challenges for families with young children. One of the biggest challenges for parents has been difficulty paying for basic needs. At the height of the pandemic in the summer of 2020, we found that as many as one in three families with a child under age 6 was having difficulty affording food, housing, and/or utilities. We found that this sort of hardship caused parents (and their children) emotional distress.

Rates of hardship were even higher for Black and Latinx, single-parent, and special needs households, as well as households that were lower-income before the pandemic started.

When this stress was **unpredictable**, it added even more weight onto families. As we reported in a prior fact sheet, **not being sure** if they would have enough money for food and shelter was a significant added source of emotional distress for parents in our survey.

**“Mental health, finances ... we are stressed, extremely stressed. The pandemic is crushing me financially and I barely sleep. Finding childcare or support that doesn’t close before 3pm ... it’s been hard.”**

Parent in Illinois

## UNPREDICTABILITY IN PAYING FOR BASIC NEEDS DISRUPTED FAMILY ROUTINES

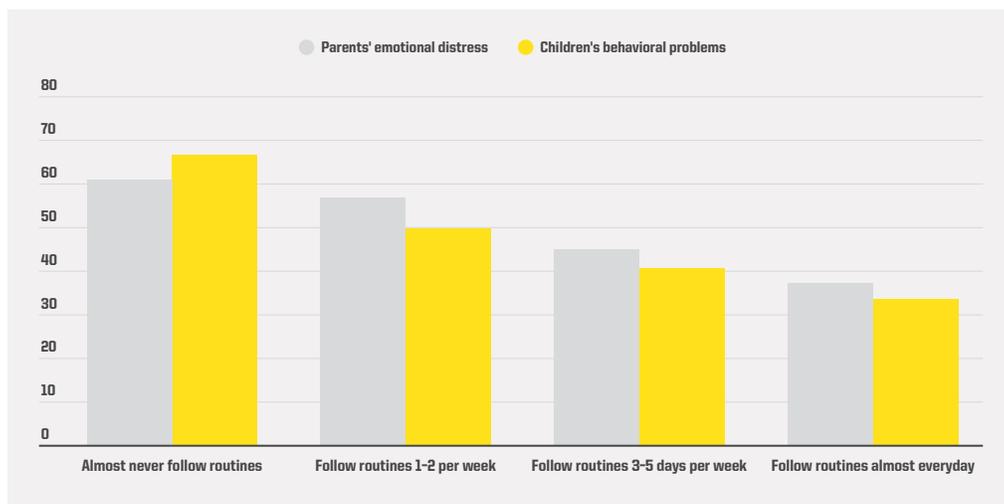
Unpredictability in paying for basic needs disrupted family routines, such as regular bedtime, morning activities, and meals.

And, interruptions in regular family routines were associated with lower well-being among caregivers and young children.

**“[The pandemic] has caused a lot of stress and fearfulness for many families. Our family is dealing with homelessness and no way to find help.”**

Parent in Maryland

Associations between family routines and emotional distress



### Note

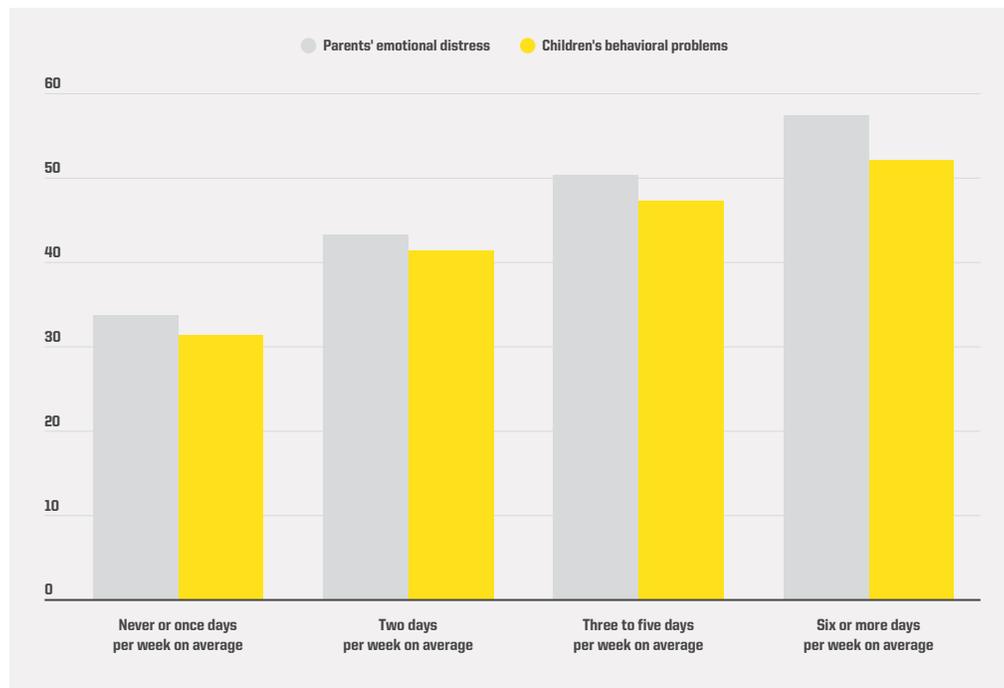
We ask caregivers about their experiences with four symptoms of emotional distress: stress, loneliness, anxiety, and depression. We also ask caregivers how well the phrases “fussy or defiant” and “too fearful or anxious” fit their child’s behavior in the last week. Responses for each adult symptom were averaged to create a single score and transformed to a range of 0-100 for each adult. Child emotional well-being was calculated in the same manner.

## UNPREDICTABILITY IN PAYING FOR BASIC NEEDS ALSO ADDED TO FAMILY CONFLICT

Unpredictability in paying for basic needs also added to family conflict (a composite measure of disagreements among parents and between parents and children). Family conflict, in turn, contributed to elevated distress in both caregivers and children.

Notably, when we compared the impact of family conflict and disrupted routines on well-being, our analyses show that disrupted routines contribute even more to parent and child emotional distress than family conflict.

Associations between family conflict and emotional distress



## PARENT-CHILD QUALITY TIME SERVED AS A PROTECTIVE FACTOR

Importantly, parent-child quality time lessened the weight of these challenges and served as a protective factor: For parents who spent greater amounts of **quality time** with their children since the pandemic, disrupted family routines did

not lead to elevated emotional distress; for parents who spent lower amounts of quality time with their children during the pandemic, disrupted family routine was linked to more emotional distress for both parents and children.

**“There really needs to be a safety net for people. Currently, my family lives stressed constantly because [of finances]. Our parental stress has also greatly affected our children despite our attempts to prevent that.”**

Parent in Oregon

**“Not having any free time to spend together as a family is a challenge. Either my husband or I work each day of the week and it is stressful.”**

Parent in Oregon

**“We are enjoying listening to each other, and spending quality time and doing the little things we love.”**

Parent in North Carolina

# ABOUT THE RAPID-EC PROJECT

These analyses are based on responses collected from 711 caregivers with children under age 6 between the dates of April 28th, 2021 and May 6th, 2021. These caregivers represent a range of voices: 9.42% are Black/ African American, 16.88% are Latinx, and 40.42% live at or below 200% the federal poverty level. Proportions/ percentages are calculated based on the item-level response rates, not out of the total sample size. The data for these analyses are not weighted.

The RAPID-EC project includes a survey of caregivers with children under age 6 and a survey of child care providers and other adults who care for children under age 6.

These surveys are designed to gather essential information continuously regarding the needs, health-promoting behaviors, and well-being of children and their families and important adults in their lives during the COVID-19 outbreak and recovery period in the United States.

Twice per month, RAPID-EC collects data from 1,000 caregivers and child care providers in all 50 states. The surveys are national in scope, though not technically nationally representative from an epidemiological perspective. RAPID-EC collects snapshots of data across time and can also assess trends longitudinally.

For more information about RAPID-EC study design and methods, see [here](#).

RAPID-EC is under the direction of Philip Fisher, PhD, Director of the Center for Translational Neuroscience at the University of Oregon

**1,000+**

**surveyed bi-weekly**

**79**

**surveys**

**11,000**

**unique households**

**50**

**US states**

