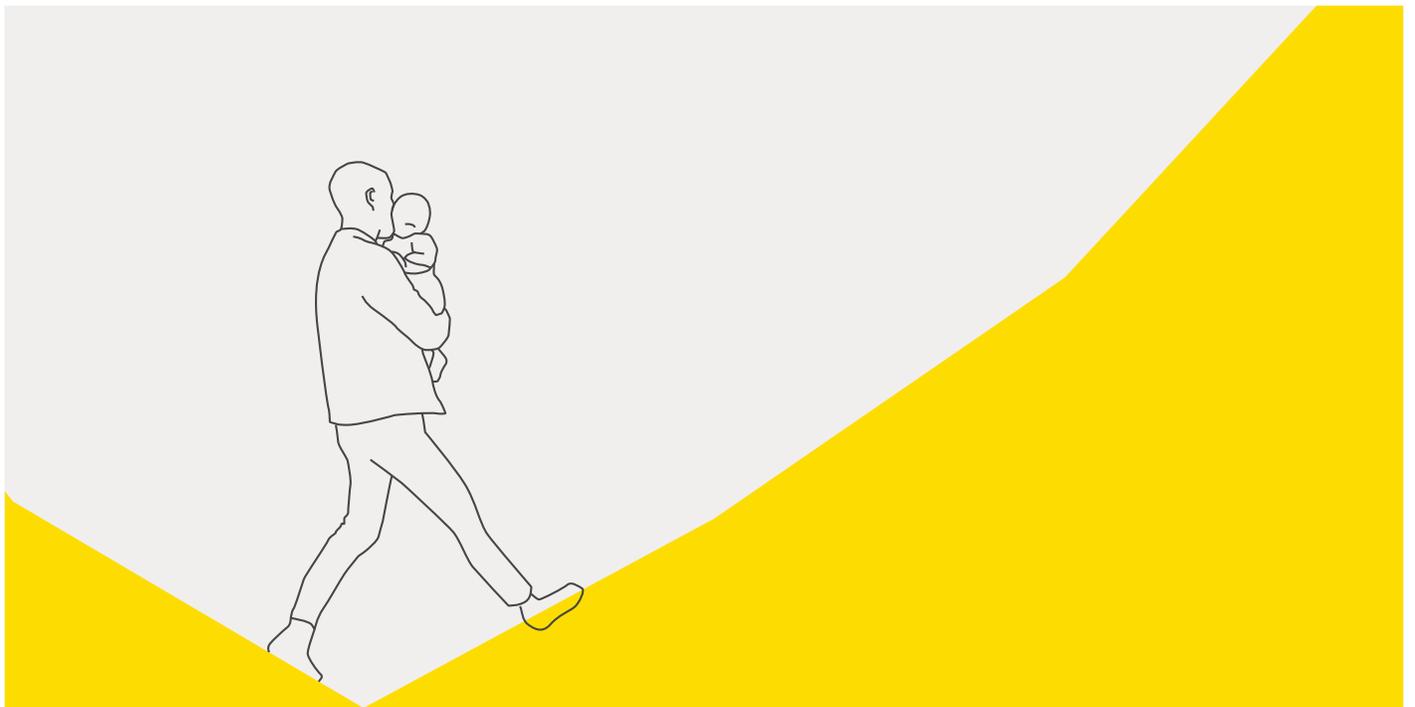


EMOTIONAL DISTRESS ON THE RISE FOR PARENTS... AGAIN

Data from our national survey show that among households with young children, parents' emotional distress (a composite of depression, anxiety, stress, and loneliness symptoms) has been increasing over the last four months. In this fact sheet, we explore the reasons for parents' rising emotional distress.

"My biggest concern right now is my mental health, with the continued stress and isolation and my concern for my son's health until the vaccine is available for young children."

Parent from Maryland



designbysoapbox.com

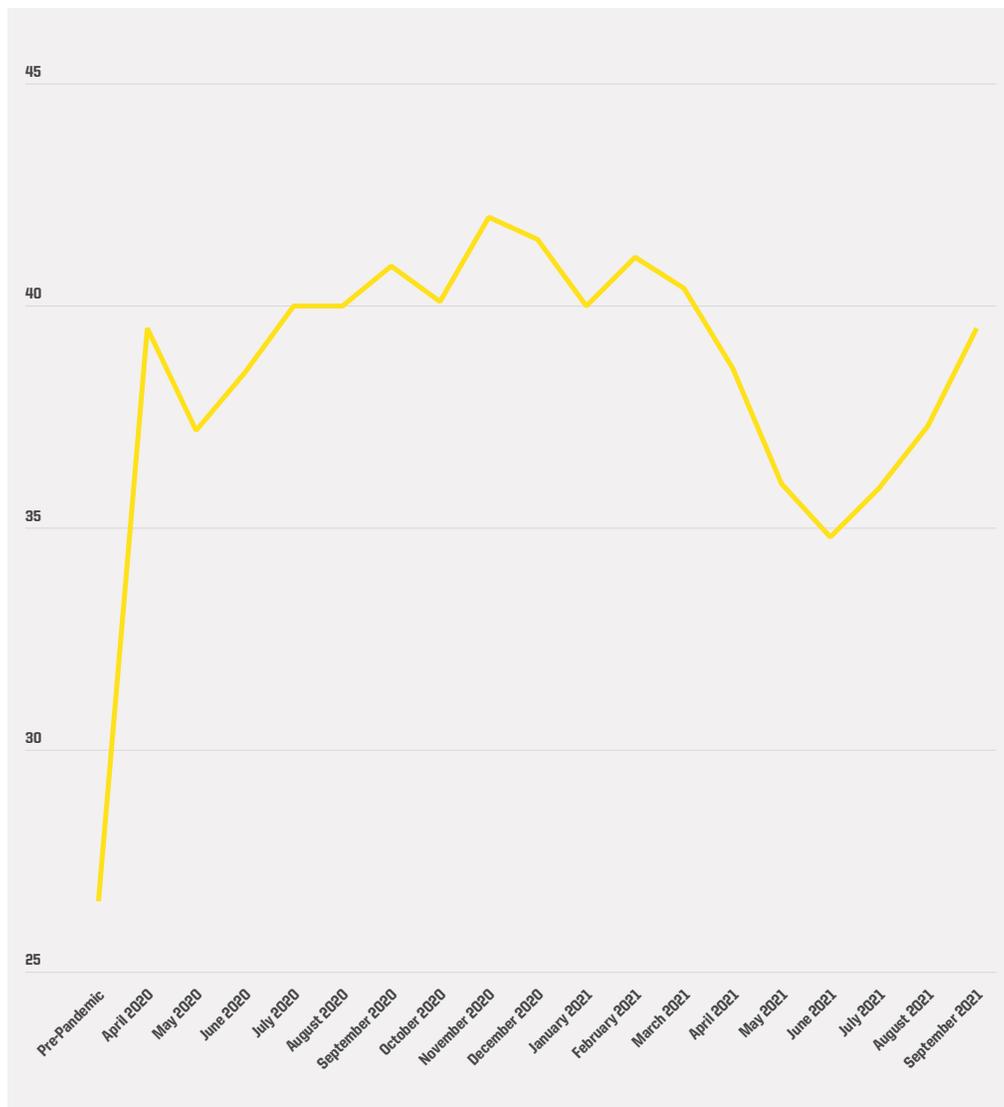
SINCE SUMMER 2021, PARENTS' EMOTIONAL DISTRESS HAS BEEN ON THE RISE AGAIN

Parents in our survey reported decreasing levels of emotional distress during spring 2021, but this trend has since reversed. Starting in June 2021 parents have been reporting steadily increasing levels of emotional distress.

- This trend reveals the persistent weight and burden that living in the “COVID-19 era” is having on parents’

emotional well-being. According to reports in spring 2021, with the arrival of the COVID-19 vaccine there was a growing sense of hope that the pandemic would soon be over. However, the Delta variant surge has reminded us all that the pandemic is an era rather than an event, and its negative consequences on individual well-being are likely to linger.

Trend of parents' emotional distress*



*

We ask parents about their experiences with four symptoms of emotional distress: stress, loneliness, anxiety, and depression. Responses for each symptom were averaged to create a single score and transformed to a range of 0-100 for each parent.

MATERIAL HARDSHIP IS STILL NEGATIVELY AFFECTING PARENTS' EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING

We previously reported a hardship chain reaction, where material hardship (i.e., difficulty paying for basic needs) negatively affected parents' well-being and, in turn, had adverse effects on young children's emotional health. Analysis of our data since June 2021 shows that this hardship chain reaction persists; parents experiencing more

difficulty paying for basic needs report higher levels of emotional distress, which, in turn, predicts young children's increased behavioral problems (a composite of fear/anxiety and fussiness/defiance). However, the strength of this hardship chain reaction is weaker than in earlier phases of the pandemic (before June 2021).

OTHER SOURCES OF EMOTIONAL DISTRESS HAVE BEEN ADDED TO THE SCALE

To more deeply explore the causes of parents' rising emotional distress, we analyzed parents' responses to the open-ended survey question "What are the biggest challenges and concerns for you and your family right now?" Using a type of analysis called topic modeling, we identified a set of factors that have been increasing in parents' responses in a way that mirrors the increases in emotional distress that we have been seeing since June of 2021.

There are three major factors, or themes, from parents' open-ended response that help explain rising levels of emotional distress: (1) concerns about they or someone they care about getting sick with COVID-19, (2) the spread of the Delta variant and worries about unvaccinated people, including

children, and (3) fear of losing child care due to COVID-19 and impacts on parents' ability to work.

As the pandemic continues into another season and another school year, emotional distress among parents of young children is rising once again. Parents continue to balance work and the need to earn an income with increased and unpredictable child care responsibilities, as the US child care workforce is in crisis and schools and classrooms close or shift operations due to COVID-19 exposure. With a vaccine for young children not yet available, many parents in the survey are worried about their child's vulnerability to the virus. We will continue to monitor trends in parental emotional distress through this fall and winter.

"Being scared to get sick. Or having a loved one get sick and not being able to see them."

Parent from Alabama

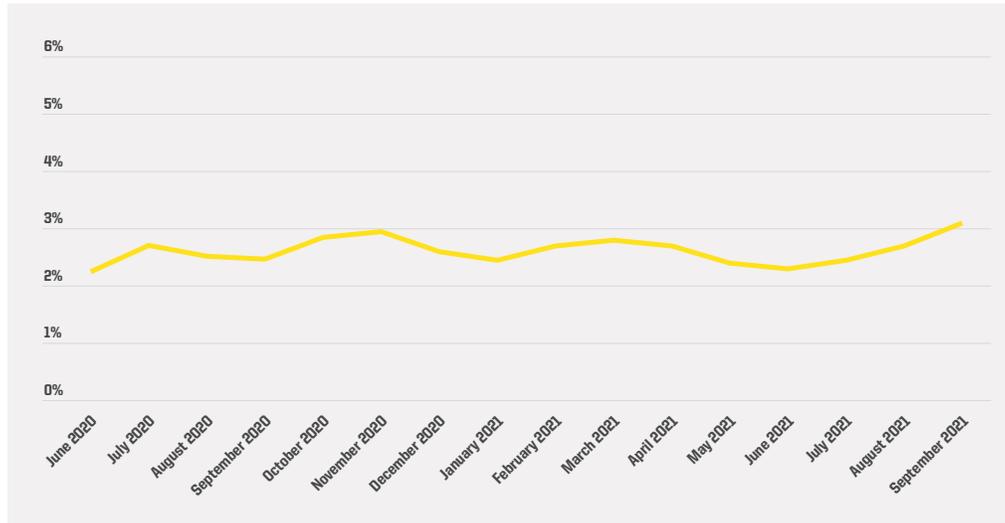
"We are still concerned about getting sick and missing work, as it will be unpaid."

Parent from South Dakota

"Catching the virus and getting sick. I'm pregnant and my 2-year-old cannot get vaccinated."

Parent from Michigan

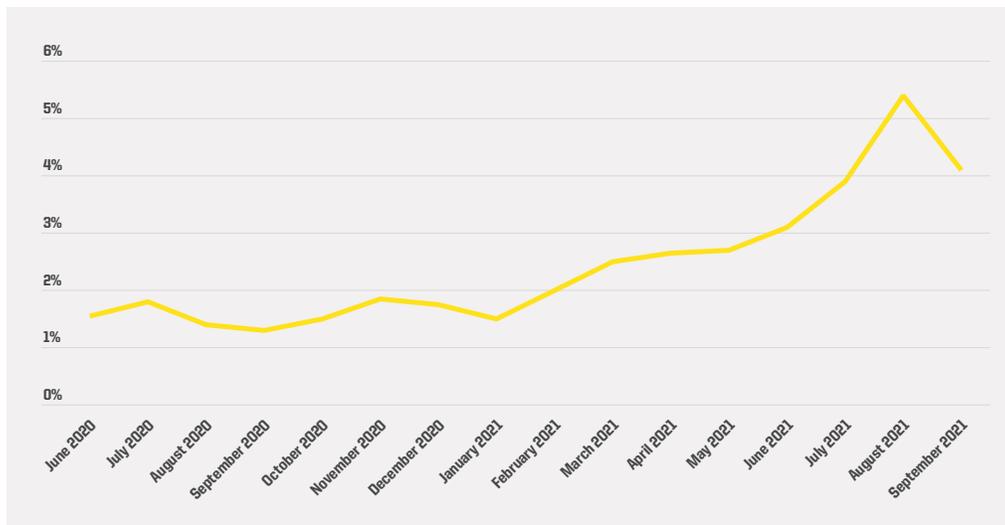
Concern about getting sick with COVID-19



“Realizing how many people are still unvaccinated, no one is wearing masks anywhere, and wanting to keep my kids protected until they’re vaccinated.”

Parent from Indiana

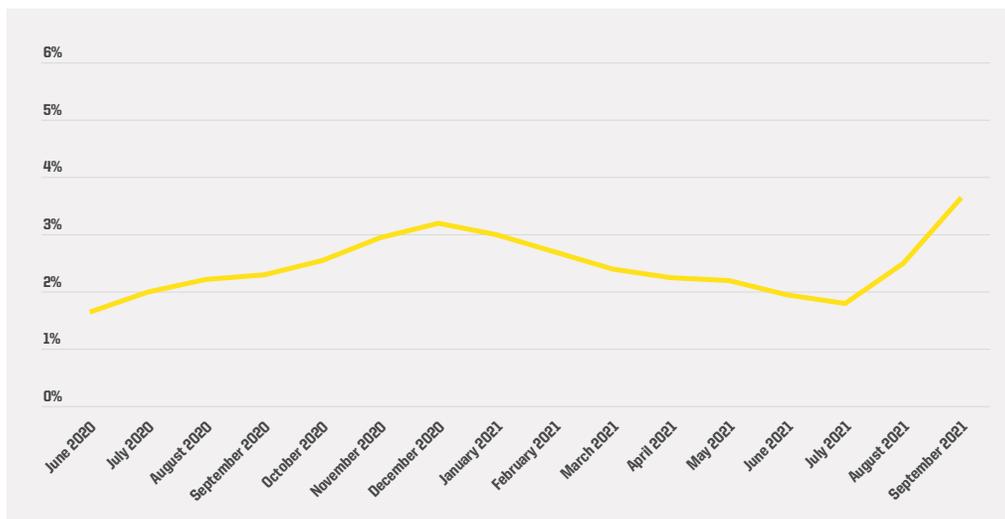
Concern about the Delta variant surge and unvaccinated/unmasked people



“Fear of Delta variant with my unvaccinated children.”

Parent from Georgia

Concern about losing child care because of exposure to COVID-19



“My child potentially being exposed to COVID-19 at school. We had to weigh the risk of catching COVID with the risk of not being in-person for preschool.”

Parent from Missouri

“That our childcare center closes due to outbreaks and we have to scramble or I have to forgo work.”

No state given

ABOUT THE RAPID-EC PROJECT

These analyses are based on text from 27,738 open-ended question responses from 11,605 caregivers with children under age 6 between the dates of April 6, 2020 and October 1, 2021. These caregivers represent a range of voices: 8.22% are Black/African American, 17.00% are Latinx, and 50.12% live at or below 200% the federal poverty level. Proportions/percentages are calculated based on the item-level response rates, not on 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

82

surveys

11,000

unique
households

50

US states

