



# TRANSITIONING BACK-TO-SCHOOL

## PRIORITIZING CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH IN THE AFTERMATH OF COVID-19

For many kids, the COVID-19 pandemic will probably be the most defining event of their generation. After suffering through a year marked by social isolation, stresses at home, losing school and sports, widespread fear and panic, grief and loss of loved ones, it is no surprise the pandemic has taken a dramatic toll on kids' mental health, well-being, and livelihood.

The Wall Street Journal just published, "Loneliness, Anxiety, and Loss: the Covid Pandemic's Terrible Toll on Kids," by Andrea Petersen, that explores spikes in mental health issues, including depression, anxiety, and suicidal thoughts, as well as major social and family challenges, kids are facing as a direct result of COVID-19 and the response to the pandemic. In many ways, it is as if the children have suffered through multiple widespread traumas, with long-term effects still to be determined. A few key findings reported in the WSJ article include:

### MENTAL HEALTH SUFFERING

"Harvard University researchers who have been following 224 children aged 7 to 15 found that **about two-thirds of them had clinically significant symptoms of anxiety and depression**, and the same number had behavioral problems such as hyperactivity and inattentions, between November 2020 and January 2021. That is a huge jump from 30% with anxiety and depression symptoms and the 20% with behavioral problems before the pandemic."

"Between mid-March and mid-October 2020, **the number of mental-health-related ER visits per 100,000 total visits rose from the year-earlier period by 24% for 5- to 11-year-olds and by 31% for 12- to 17-year-olds**, according to data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Those increases are on top of the already rising incidences of anxiety, depression, and suicide among children and teens from before the pandemic."

### STRESS AT HOME

"The biggest driver of child well-being during COVID is how the parents are functioning. 'There's more family conflict because of the pandemic. That is leading to stress, acting out, increased suicidal thoughts in kids,' says David Axelson, Chief of Psychiatry at Nationwide Children's Hospital in Columbus, Ohio. Dr. Axelson says **visits to his hospitals' psychiatric crisis department for emergencies, including suicidal thoughts, aggression and psychosis, were up 14% this fall and winter from a year earlier.**"

### REMOTE LEARNING STRUGGLES

"**25% of parents of children attending school remotely said their kids' mental or emotional health worsened**, compared to 16% whose kids were attending in person only, according to a CDC survey of more than 1,200 parents with children aged 5 to 12, conducted in October and November 2020."

"Remote learning caused children's education to suffer. **In the fall of 2020, math performance among third to eighth-graders was 5 to 10 percentile points lower than it was in the fall of 2019**, according to a report by Brookings Institute."

As everyone looks to recover, rebuild and restore life in the aftermath of COVID-19, supporting kids' mental health and well-being needs to be a top priority. Mental health is not just an individual issue, it is a family issue. Professional help is available through the Assistance Program. Your program provides mental health sessions with clinicians, and the program is free to use and open to all family members, including children.