

RAISING KIDS &gt; BETTER PARENTING

# Gen Z Understands First-Hand the Importance of Mental Health and It Will Make Them Great Parents

Generation Z is more likely to report mental health issues than previous generations and screen time has a lot to do with that. But here's how experts say that might influence how they raise their kids.

By [Maressa Brown](#) | Updated on May 20, 2022

✔ Reviewed by [Stacey Young, LCSW](#)



Gen Zers—those born after 1996 and the most technological generation—may already be parents or are years away from having their first child. But either way, experts believe Generation Z parents might have an upper hand in parenting than previous generations.

A standout characteristic: Gen Z is significantly more likely to seek professional help for mental health issues, according to the American Psychological Association's (APA) Stress in America Survey. The survey also found that Gen Z is more likely than some other generations to report they have been diagnosed with an anxiety disorder (18 percent) and depression (23 percent).

What does that mean for their parenting? Experts break down where the generation's mental health awareness stems from and the positive influence it may have on their children.

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## The Story Behind Gen Z's Mental Health

There are several factors that might account for Gen Z's increased anxiety. For one, says [Rebecca Rialon Berry, Ph.D.](#), clinical associate professor in the department of child and adolescent psychiatry at NYU Langone Health in New York City, "academics and the nature of work have become more stressful and competitive, resulting in more external and self-imposed pressure and less downtime."

This group also spends an increased amount of time using their screens. According to research from the [Institute of Business Management](#), more than 74 percent of Gen Z respondents said they spend their free time online, and 25 percent of respondents said they spend more than five hours on their mobile devices every day. This "might therefore account for less face-to-face time with others and generally fewer social interactions—leading to isolation and reduced confidence—particularly those involving physical activity or play," says Dr. Berry.

Research published in the [Open Journal of Depression](#) echoes this, noting that social connectedness offers adolescents protection against loneliness and depressive symptoms. And Dr. Berry points out that Gen Z's mental wellness is likely also influenced by how impacted they've been by current events, including reports of mass shootings, climate change, and deportation/immigration issues. "They are more worried about housing and debt," she adds.

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## Why Gen Z Is More Likely to Seek Help

The good news is that Gen Zers are more likely to tackle their mental health challenges by getting treatment or therapy from a mental health professional than previous generations, according to the APA. "Gen Z are far more conscious of mental health issues—and more able

to articulate them—than their parents were," explains Dr. Berry, who notes Millennials (anyone born 1981 to 1996) tend to also be more open to mental health treatment than previous generations.

A big reason is they've benefited from reduced mental health stigma that exists in today's society. Previous generations have laid the groundwork to make mental health issues less challenging to address and taboo, according to Jason Woodrum, ACSW, therapist at [New Method Wellness](#) in San Juan Capistrano, California. "Our understanding of conditions, such as anxiety, along with effective evidence-based ways to treat it are rather new," he notes. "Gen X and Millennials also grew up in a time where larger social stigmas around seeking assistance with mental health symptoms were still largely shared. Zoomers have inherited a world in which not only do we know more on how to treat anxiety, but we are also less inclined to feel judged by others for seeking help in the first place." This also allows them to be more in tune with what they need.

Experts also credit social media for helping to normalize mental health issues. "Celebrities and social media influencers have used their platforms to share their own struggles," says [Bonnie Compton](#), a child and adolescent therapist, parenting coach, and author of *Mothering With Courage*. "This has helped it become more acceptable to reach out for help—to see it as a strength rather than a weakness."

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The ongoing conversations about mental illness also offer a better understanding of the impact it can have on daily life. "Gen Zers want the energy and ability to travel, have new adventures, and make great friends. Having a mental health issue can stifle that dream and they would rather deal with the issue and hopefully move forward from it than to let it stop them from what they desire," says Keshia Brooks, supervisor of prevention education and family wellness at [Pathways, Anne Arundel Medical Center's](#) substance abuse and mental health treatment facility in Annapolis, Maryland.



There will be less wounded adults walking the earth.

— BONNIE COMPTON, A CHILD AND ADOLESCENT THERAPIST

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## How Gen Z's Mental Health Awareness Could Shape Their

# Awareness Could Shape Their Parenting

Gen Z's willingness to identify and address their mental wellness—even long before they have children—may only enhance their parenting. Young adults who seek treatment before having kids will have a greater chance at being emotionally healthy parents, says Compton.

Whether a parent is excited about a promotion or steaming from a fight with an in-law, even the youngest children are able to pick up on emotional ups and downs in the household. "If a parent is able to speak openly—appropriately for the child's developmental level—the child will learn to do the same. Children will no longer need to 'fill in the blank' about why Mommy or Daddy is so sad or mad. Or are present and then suddenly disappear," says Compton.

Similarly, parents will have developed emotional regulation and be able to teach that to their children. "Discussion of emotions will be normalized within the family," says Compton. "Children and teens will understand that all feelings are accepted and that it is perfectly normal to reach out for support. They will also be able to create and nurture deep authentic relationships with their children through honest conversations."

Much of this boils down to kids seeing healthy behaviors and perspectives demonstrated by their parents. "As children see their parents modeling openness, help-seeking, and a value for authenticity, they are learning that it is all right for them to practice these tenets as well," says Lauren Cook, a San Diego-based family and child therapist.

Because of their own positive experiences with treatment and therapy, Gen Z parents will also be more likely to identify symptoms of mental illness and seek it for their children, notes Niro Feliciano, LCSW, a psychotherapist and anxiety specialist in Wilton, Connecticut. "I often have to talk parents into the reality that their kids can benefit from therapy. I think there will be fewer of these conversations in the future when Gen Zers enter parenthood. They have seen the value of support and treatment," she says.

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On the flip side, being hyperaware of mental health issues could be problematic if it is used as a crutch. "Sometimes people can become enmeshed with a mental illness and use it as a reason for not getting better," says Cook. "For example, they may say, 'My depression makes me do this' or 'My anxiety limits me.'" That's why it's critical to be



honest about the impact mental illness can have on a person's life but it's also essential to recognize that treatment can make all the difference.

## The Bottom Line

Gen Z's awareness and approach to mental health can have a positive influence on their parenting by allowing them to be emotionally healthy and drivers of open communication. It can also help shape a future generation that will understand, accept, and seek to treat their own mental health issues. As Compton puts it: "There will be less wounded adults walking the earth."

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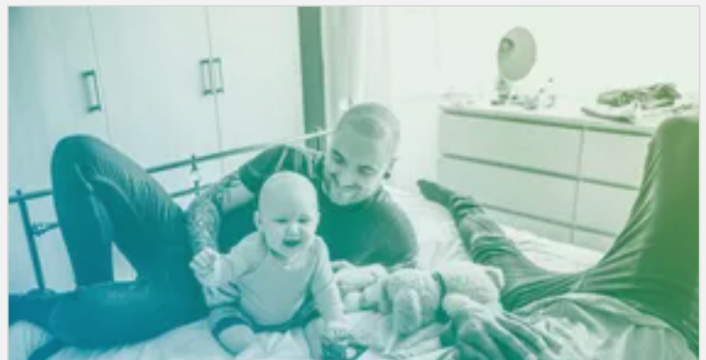
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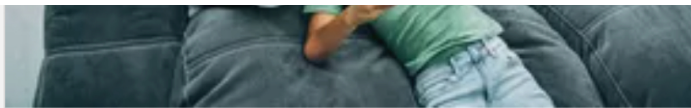


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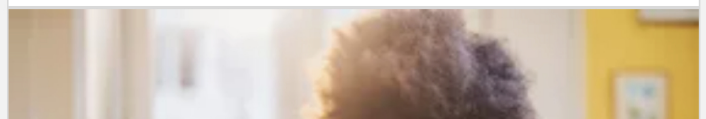
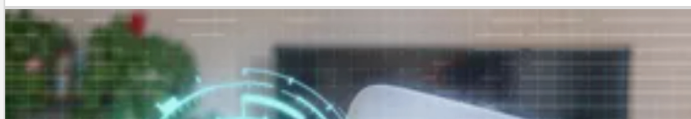
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