



# Supporting the Whole Family:

**A Guide to Improving Employee Mental Health**



**Supporting employees starts with supporting their families. For parents and caregivers, their mental health and well-being is interwoven with the health and well-being of their family unit as a whole.**

Globally, an estimated 1 in 7 teens (ages 10-19) experience mental health conditions, yet their mental health needs are largely undiagnosed or untreated.<sup>1</sup> With a mental health crisis that disproportionately affects teens, it's critical that employers offer benefits that support caregivers — and enable them to support their dependent teens and children.

When employers provide mental health benefits that support the entire family, it enables caregivers to meet their children's needs and create a more stable environment at home — leading them to also be more present, engaged, and productive in the workplace. In our 2023 Workforce Attitudes Toward Mental Health report, we surveyed more than 4,000 employees, and those who identified as caregivers stood out as a population that values and consistently uses the benefits their employers provide.<sup>2</sup>

**A snapshot of workforce trends relating to caregivers**

- **91% of caregivers** say that their employers support their mental health, in comparison to 68% of non-caregivers
- **76% of caregivers** have taken advantage of their mental health benefits, in comparison to 33% of non-caregivers
- **54% of CEOs** shared that the mental health support programs that center on family care would be most important to their employees

As more companies recognize the importance of employee mental health, they need to provide a comprehensive mental healthcare plan that addresses the unique needs of caregivers and their families. Whether it's providing skill-based mental health resources for parents and kids or access to experts in teen care, a mental healthcare plan that benefits both the employee and their family will create a positive ripple effect, improving everyday life at home and subsequently, driving engagement and productivity in the workplace.

<sup>1</sup>World Health Organization, 2021. "[Mental Health of Adolescents.](#)"

<sup>2</sup>Headspace, 2023. "[Fifth Annual Workforce Attitudes Toward Mental Health Report.](#)"

# Family System support

When addressing mental health at home, what caregivers need most is support: support to find effective and appropriate care for their family, support to better understand what their child or teen might be going through, and support to manage their own well-being.

Our 2023 Workforce Attitudes Toward Mental Health Report shows that caregivers are more likely to be impacted by the rise in economic uncertainty and the ensuing lack of stability in the workplace, which is unsurprising, given their role in the family. This, however, likely impacts the 88% of caregivers who report feeling dread at work at least once a month, compared to 76% of non-caregivers. The better employers can support caregivers' families' mental health, the more empowered, resilient, and prepared caregivers can feel at work and at home to lead healthy, fulfilling lives.

For parents, it's important to be able to ensure their children are getting the mental health support they need. With that comes a careful balance of being involved in care, but also giving dependents the space to independently and privately work through any challenges on their own.



**“It’s so important for employers to offer mental health benefits, not just to their employees, but also to their employees’ families. Our working caregivers are going through a tremendous amount of stress, and at times their children are, too. So if we’re not providing them the opportunity to have care for their whole family system, we’re not making those caregivers feel seen or heard.”**

**— Dena Scott, Director of Adolescent Services**

Care for the whole family means a care team that wraps around both parents and children — enabling coaches, clinicians, caregivers, and dependents to work together to improve mental health, while developing skills to improve inter-familial relationships and better support each other. Every family is unique, so this looks different for everyone — but it starts with a model of collaborative care.

By leveraging different mental healthcare and well-being tools — like tailored, self-guided content, behavioral health coaching, and therapy or psychiatry — each member of the family can find the support they need to improve their mental health and

understand how to support and communicate with each other. Therapy isn't always the right approach for every individual. For many, self-care content can be an effective tool. For others, behavioral health coaching can be effective – which is why we offer coaching for employees and their dependents age 13 and older.

Our Care Team partners with caregivers from the start, asking them for their perspective on their teens' needs and inviting them to be part of the first therapy session, when relevant. While we provide caregivers with ongoing updates about their child's care and progress, we also keep some information confidential to ensure teens' autonomy and sense of safety.

**In a recent survey, 53% of parents said they missed work at least once a month because of concerns for their child's mental health.**

<sup>3</sup> *On Our Sleeves, 2022. "The Great Collide: The Impact of Children's Mental Health on the Workforce."*



**53%**

## Providing Mental Health Resources & Tools for Caregivers

As caregivers support their child or teen's well-being, they can often put their own mental health needs to the side. However, there is a strong correlation between a parent's mental health and the mental health of their child. When parents prioritize their mental health in tandem, they can be their full selves, both at home and in the workplace.

Headspace provides a curated "Parents" collection that helps caregivers build the skills to face a wide range of parenting challenges. From developing patience and letting go of anger or frustration to helping their kids manage difficult emotions, these clinically validated exercises are proven to not only strengthen parent-child relationships, but also to improve the well-being of everyone involved.

Caregivers who need more in-depth support can also work with their own Care Team, which includes behavioral health coaches and licensed clinicians with family care expertise. A coach is available 24/7 via chat to support employees through common parenting challenges, for example: if they have a child who is having difficulty with their peers, or coping with a big change in their life. Employees can also make video appointments with a therapist or psychiatrist for guidance on more serious issues, such

as if their child is diagnosed with ADHD, or if their teen is experiencing severe anxiety. It's also important to keep in mind that for many, caregiving isn't always parenting a child. To support employees who care for other family members, friends, or elders, tailored mental healthcare is key. Headspace EAP offers connection to eldercare support and further resources that help support both elders and their caregivers.

### Our Care Teams help parents and caregivers learn skills to:

- Have more effective communication with their children or teens
- Recognize their own triggers, strengths, and opportunities to strengthen family relationships
- Regulate their own emotions and set boundaries
- Better understand what their child or teen may be experiencing

## How can you support employees who are caregivers?

**Recognize that caregivers may need occasional flexibility.** Employees report that managers can positively impact their mental health by being flexible with projects or schedules to accommodate personal issues.<sup>4</sup> Allowing a more convenient schedule goes a long way for employee productivity and happiness, and gives caregivers the opportunity to care for their family when they need to.

**Regularly highlight support available for caregivers specifically.** From self-care content to coaching, therapy, and psychiatry – make sure your employees know the tools they have at their disposal. Consider highlighting parenting resources during the back-to-school season, or content that supports caregivers and familial relationships during holidays.

**Let your employees know that you support them – and their dependents.** With the challenges facing teens, it's important to let your employees know that resources are available for dependent minors as well. Engaging dependents in mental healthcare and support can help to ease the burden on caregivers, so they can be present and engaged at work. Providing these resources reduces stigma and normalizes that mental health support is important and needed for all people.

**Don't forget: mental health at work and at home are intertwined.** At the end of the day, it's important to remember that every employee is human, facing different challenges at work and at home. Show empathy toward caregivers and model positive mental health at work, so they feel empowered to take the same steps for themselves.

<sup>4</sup> Headspace, 2023. "*Fifth Annual Workforce Attitudes Toward Mental Health Report.*"



# Responding to the Teen Mental Health Crisis

One of the leading public health concerns in the U.S. has been the mental health crisis that teens of all backgrounds are experiencing. In 2021, the American Academy of Pediatrics, American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, and Children’s Hospital Association declared a pediatric mental health crisis.<sup>5</sup> In a Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) study, it showed that from 2009 to 2019, the proportion of high school students reporting persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness increased by 40%, while the proportion of those considering attempting suicide increased by 36%.<sup>6</sup>

During the COVID-19 pandemic, teen anxiety and depression became more widespread as many teens lost their ability to attend school, interact with their friends and loved ones in person, and receive the care and support they needed. In the U.S., the vulnerability of teens has only been compounded by the larger societal issues they’re continuing to face, such as “climate change, income inequality, racial injustice, the opioid epidemic, and gun violence.”<sup>7</sup>

**At a time when anxiety, depression, self-harm, and suicide among teens are on the rise, we have to make it easier for employees to support their teen’s mental health.**

Caregivers can experience significant burdens when navigating uncertainty of their teen’s mental health, searching for the right provider, and traveling to and from appointments. Our team-based approach takes the guesswork out of finding the right type of care no matter the need, while virtual delivery offers the convenience of care anywhere, saving parents hours of time.

<sup>5</sup> American Academy of Pediatrics, 2021. “*AAP-AACAP-CHA Declaration of a National Emergency in Child and Adolescent Mental Health.*”

<sup>6</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020. “*Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance Data Summary & Trends Report: 2009-2019.*”

<sup>7</sup> U.S. Surgeon General, 2021. “*Protecting Youth Mental Health The U.S. Surgeon General’s Advisory.*”

For teens who need a higher level of support, we connect them with a Care team that consists of a behavioral health coach and a licensed therapist and/or psychiatrist. Our team-based approach ensures that there's a shared understanding of the teen's needs and goals, and that progress can be evaluated across different levels of care. Our proprietary Care Hub (electronic medical record) helps a teen's Care Team to collaborate with each other in real-time, automate notes, and measure progress focusing on clinical efficacy.

**In these challenging times, teens need personalized support that responds to their unique needs, which can change from day to day.**

While traditional teen mental health solutions often lead with therapy whether or not clinical care is needed, it's critical to provide a comprehensive toolkit that includes self-care resources and behavioral health coaching, both of which help teens build the skills to better manage their mental health. By focusing on prevention as well as treatment, we're able to connect teens with the level of care they need and support them as they work to improve their overall well-being. Headspace uniquely provides behavioral health coaching for teens, and its text-based format is designed to engage teens in a modality they feel comfortable and familiar with.



## Through the Headspace virtual platform, teens have access to:

### MINDFULNESS & MEDITATION EXERCISES

Teens can access mindfulness and meditation exercises that help them prepare for the school year ahead and learn skills to feel confident in the classroom, stay focused, cultivate self-love, and sleep better, among others. They can also listen to focus music or engage in mindful movement.

### GUIDED CONTENT

Through our self-care library, teens can read about and engage in clinically validated exercises to build healthier habits and patterns of thinking. Topics include mood management, identity and belonging, conflict resolution, sexuality and sexual identity, and more.

### ONE-ON-ONE COACHING

A behavioral health coach is available via chat to help teens navigate common issues, such as academic stress, time management, and conflict in friendships. Teens can choose to meet their coach through regularly scheduled sessions or get in-the-moment support during dedicated teen care hours (7 am – 10 pm PT).

### THERAPY AND PSYCHIATRY

A therapist or a psychiatrist can be added to a teen's Care Team if a higher level of support is required. Through video sessions, these clinicians can help teens manage more serious mental health concerns, such as anxiety, depression, and ADHD. If needed, psychiatrists can also prescribe medications that target the reduction of mental health symptoms.

Today's teens are digital natives, making virtual mental healthcare a natural fit, given their comfort with technology and smartphones. 88% of teens own a smartphone and 75% spend more than four hours daily engaged with it.<sup>8</sup> Virtual services also reduce the primary barriers to engaging younger populations in mental healthcare, compared to in-person options. Virtual mental healthcare offers teens access to confidential and convenient support – when and where they need it – without missing school, without feeling uncomfortable in an office setting, and ensuring confidentiality.

Teens also need access to trained providers who have expertise in teen care. Through Headspace, teens are matched with a specialized care team with experience working specifically with children as mental health professionals, and our psychiatrists are board-certified in child and teen psychiatry. In addition, the team is required to complete a specialized Adolescent Training Series. This comprehensive series includes

<sup>8</sup> Common Sense Media, 2021. "[The Common Sense Census: Media Use by Tweens and Teens.](#)"



strategies to support teens and families, evidence-based practices for teen care, and training on diverse teen mental health needs.

As part of our integrated system, our coaches are trained to escalate teens into therapy or psychiatry if needed, and to provide ongoing support between their clinical appointments. At the same time, a teen working with a therapist and coach may make great progress over a few months, and then continue working with the coach alone.

**Our Care Teams support teens on topics that include, but are not limited to:**

- Anxiety about relationships with peers
- Identity and belonging
- Stress about getting into college
- Academic issues like time management and building effective study skills
- Diagnoses such as major depressive disorder, generalized anxiety disorder, and obsessive-compulsive disorder

## **How can employers ensure their employees can support the mental health of teen dependents?**

**Encourage open conversation about the challenges facing teens, and teens' caregivers.** Teens today are facing a unique set of challenges that look very different than they did only a few short years ago. Consider using caregiver Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) and other forums to enable employees to discuss teen mental health and leverage the support available to them.

**Offer mental health support tailored to the needs of teens.** Mental healthcare for teens may look very different from the support that a caregiver or adult employee needs. Ensure that care offered for dependents is specialized for teens and meets them where they are with discreet, digital modalities.

**Make sure employees have the tools — and time — they need to be involved in their teen's care.** Consider regularly communicating the availability of family mental healthcare and teen mental healthcare benefits to your employees, while also encouraging employees to take the time they need to care for their family's mental health. Model these behaviors, so employees feel comfortable doing the same.

# A Mindfulness and Mental Health Toolkit for Children

Children as young as 4-5 years old have the ability to learn skills that improve their focus, sharpen their emotional intelligence, and support their mental health. Studies are increasingly showing that kids who are taught to improve their own learning or thinking process early on are more resilient and become better learners.

The rapid development that happens during these early years opens the door for parents and caregivers to proactively teach their children to care for their mind. By engaging in mindfulness and meditation exercises from a young age, children can build the skills needed to calm their minds and regulate their bodies – allowing them to better process their feelings, retain new information, and stay in the present moment.



**“It’s almost as if meditation was designed for kids. They just ‘get it.’ There is this elasticity and freedom in their minds which allows them to be present in that moment and free from any external thoughts or pressures. By introducing meditation and mindfulness at an early age, not only can we build on this and help nurture their mind development, but we are also making meditation simple and accessible.”**

**– Andy Puddicombe, Headspace co-founder and mindfulness expert**

In Headspace’s “Kids” collection of mindfulness and meditation exercises, we help families with young children build healthy habits that foster more compassion, communication, and support. We provide expert guidance on mindful parenting and engage children in learning how to regulate their emotions, cope with difficult situations, and find positivity in their everyday lives.

In addition, Headspace has partnered with leading experts in the child development space to make mindfulness and meditation fun and easily digestible for children under 13. We’ve collaborated with Sesame Street on the award-winning “Monster Meditations” books and animated series, as well as on expert-guided mindfulness exercises featuring popular Muppets like Big Bird, Elmo, and Abby Cadabby – a big hit among parents and caregivers.

We've also worked together with Star Wars™ to produce an animated series called “Star Wars: Find Your Force” hosted by Samantha Snowden, a family and parenting expert. The series consists of four chapters that guide children to practice mindfulness techniques proven to improve their well-being, such as checking in with their emotions, doing a body scan, and practicing gratitude.

## How can caregivers encourage better mental health for young children?

**Model positive behavior.** Demonstrate how you care for your mental health to your family. Do you go for walks, take a few minutes to meditate, or meet with a therapist? Share these practices with the kids in your life to help destigmatize mental health and demonstrate what being kind to your mind looks like.

**Build mindfulness and mental health into daily routines.** Take time with children to do a meditation together in the mornings, pause and be present before school, or talk about emotions during dinner. Building healthy habits into your day helps you connect with your children and encourage them to consider how to care for their own mental health.

**Find time to care for yourself, too.** It's important to fill your own cup before serving others in order to be your best, and to best support children. Take advantage of mental health support available for you, engage in meditations focused on caregiving, or simply take a few moments to be present so that you can be your full self with your family.



# Transforming Mental Healthcare for Employees and their Families

For parents and caregivers, family concerns are often top of mind, even while they're at work. If their child is going through a difficult time, they feel it acutely, and it can have a negative impact on their mental health. Many caregivers also feel a sense of urgency to provide their child with the care and resources they need to overcome the obstacles in front of them and arrive at a better place.

During a time when teens in particular are facing unprecedented challenges to their mental health, we can help transform how effective, quality care is delivered, so it is readily available for employees and their families.

At Headspace, we believe supporting employee mental health is intrinsically linked with supporting family mental health. Through our virtual care platform, we help the family unit as a whole overcome their everyday challenges and improve their well-being over the long-term. We're also tackling the teen mental health crisis head-on, with a collaborative, team-based approach that meets teens where they are. By helping families care for their mental health, caregivers can find a sense of calm at home, show up to work focus-ready, and find more purpose and passion in the activities they engage in on a daily basis.

**Interested in learning more about how holistic family mental healthcare can improve employee mental health?**

**[Contact us here](#)**

# A Broad Spectrum of Care for Parents, Teens, and Kids

Through our virtual care platform, we provide comprehensive mental healthcare services that are science-backed and tailored for parents or caregivers, teens, and children under 13.

## Headspace mental healthcare services

### PARENTS

- Mindfulness & meditation exercises for parents
- Library of self-care resources for parents
- Behavioral health coaching
- Therapy
- Psychiatry

### TEENS

- Mindfulness & meditation exercises for teens
- Library of self-care resources for teens
- Behavioral health coaching
- Therapy
- Psychiatry

### CHILDREN UNDER 13

- Mindfulness & meditation exercises for kids, including age-adapted videos
- 3 animated mindfulness series
- Referrals to a therapist as needed

