

Parents and Their Children's Mental Health:

Where to Go and Who to Trust

Four in Ten (40%) Parents are Frustrated that There's No Single Place to Get Information on Children's Mental-Health Issues

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Where to Go and Who to Trust

Four in Ten (40%) Parents With Children Who Exhibit a Mental-Health Illness are Frustrated that There's No Single Place to Get Information on Children's Mental-Health Issues

Toronto, ON – Nearly one quarter (22%) of parents of children age 18 and under say that the prospect of mental illness among their children is a source of 'concern' (7% very/15% somewhat), according to a new Ipsos Reid poll conducted on behalf of RBC. Moreover, a majority (54%) of parents spend time (15% very often/39% occasionally) thinking about mental health problems as they affect their children, but just one in ten (11%) parents consider themselves to be 'very knowledgeable' about children's mental health issues, compared to most who consider themselves to be either 'somewhat' (45%), 'not very' (37%) or 'not at all knowledgeable' (7%) about children's mental health.

Despite the apparent concern and frequent thoughts about the issue, just 15% of parents say they actively seek out information on the subject, while others usually just read information about it if they come across it in a newspaper or an article (37%). Two in ten (22%) only pursue information on children's mental health occasionally and only as needed, while many (26%) parents rarely or have never sought out this type of information.

Among those who see mental health as a source of some concern, a wide variety of situations prompted them to become concerned including a personal experience with a mental-health challenge in their immediate family (32%), media coverage (32%), the experience of a mental-health challenge in their extended family or a friend's family (22%), a professional experience or working in the field (3%), and their own child's behaviour (2%).

Canadian parents do not agree on what the most pressing mental-health illnesses are faced by parents today: while a majority (61%) believe that attention-deficit disorders and behaviour disorders (55%) are among the top-three issues, others believe that depression (41%), autism (34%), eating disorders (34%), substance abuse disorders (33%) anxiety (30%), bipolar disorders (8%) or schizophrenia (3%) are among the top-three mental-health issues faced by parents.

That no consensus exists suggest Canadian parents are lacking a definitive source for authoritative information on the topic of mental health. In fact, four in ten (40%) parents who have a child who has been diagnosed with or exhibited signs of a mental health condition 'agree' (13% strongly/27% somewhat) that they're 'frustrated that there is no single place to get information on children's mental health'. Further, a majority (54%) of these parents 'agree' (20% strongly/34% somewhat) that 'it is terrible trying to navigate the health and social-services sectors for children's mental-health help and information'. Moreover, seven in ten (69%) agree that it is important to be able to obtain information anonymously so that their child will not be stigmatized.

Among those parents who actively seek out information on children's mental-health issues, the most commonly-used source is a doctor (82%), followed closely by the internet (79%). Other sources that they've utilized include a health-related organization (68%), school

personnel (55%), friends or family (42%), community organizations (39%), magazines (33%), newspapers (24%), faith-based organizations (11%) and other forms of media (10%).

While these parents have utilized many sources, there are two that they trust significantly more than others, with most (74%) saying that doctors and health-related organizations (69%) are the two sources that they trust most. Fewer say that distinction belongs to the internet (19%), school personnel (13%), community organizations (10%), friends or family (10%), newspapers (2%), magazines (2%), faith-based organizations (2%) or other media (1%).

The data also reveal that parents who would seek out information if the need arose would go about it in much the same way as those who have already sought it out. They would disproportionately seek information from doctors (72%) and health-related organizations (54%) and they also indicate that these are the sources that most Canadian parents trust the most (doctors 81%, health-related organizations 71%) for this type of information. Six in ten (60%) are aware of programs or services in their community to help them if they might be in need of assistance with a child's mental-health issue. Interestingly, one quarter (24%) of parents consider a personal blog to be a credible source of information on children's mental health or mental illness.

When it comes to their children's mental health, most Canadian parents wouldn't be satisfied until they sought out a second or third opinion, or even more. A majority (62%) said they would reach out to between three and five different sources of information on children's mental health before they began to feel confident about the issue, while some (9%) would consult between six to nine or even 10 or more (6%) sources. Just one quarter (24%) would feel comfortable consulting one or two sources.

These are some of the findings of an Ipsos Reid poll conducted between September 3 and 13, 2010, on behalf of RBC. For this survey, a sample of 2,075 parents of children aged 18 years of age or younger from Ipsos' Canadian online panel was interviewed online. Weighting was then employed to balance demographics and ensure that the sample's composition reflects that of the adult population according to Census data and to provide results intended to approximate the sample universe. A survey with an unweighted probability sample of this size and a 100% response rate would have an estimated margin of error of +/-2.2 percentage points, 19 times out of 20, of what the results would have been had the entire population of parents in Canada been polled. All sample surveys and polls may be subject to other sources of error, including, but not limited to coverage error, and measurement error.

Children's Mental Health Across the Country...

The following statistics highlight interesting demographic trends relating to parents and their children's mental health:

- Interestingly, mothers (59%) are more likely than fathers (47%) to say they at least occasionally think about mental health problems that might affect their children.
- Quebecers (40%) are much more likely than those living in Ontario (32%), British Columbia (29%), Alberta (28%), Atlantic Canada (27%), or Saskatchewan and Manitoba (27%) to say that media discussions and coverage prompts them to think about this issue.
- Parents in British Columbia claim to be the most knowledgeable about children's mental health issues (63%), while fewer parents living in Ontario (60%), Atlantic Canada (60%), Saskatchewan and Manitoba (57%), Alberta (56%) and Quebec (44%) claim to be knowledgeable about this topic.



- Residents of British Columbia (20%), Alberta (20%) and Saskatchewan and Manitoba (19%) are most likely to say they actively seek out information on the subject, compared to fewer Ontarians (15%), Atlantic Canadians (12%) or Quebecers (9%).
- Parents over the age of 55 are much more likely (26%) than middle-aged (14%) parents or parents between the ages of 18 to 34 (13%) to say they actively seek out information on mental-health.
- Parents in British Columbia (66%) and Alberta (65%) are most likely to say they're aware of programs or services in their community to help them if they need assistance with a child's mental-health issue, while fewer parents living in Atlantic Canada (62%), Ontario (61%), Saskatchewan and Manitoba (57%) or Quebec (55%) know about these types of programs or services.
- Interestingly, older parents are more likely to be aware of these types of services in their community (71%) compared to middle-aged (62%) and younger (51%) parents.

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