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Feeding Off Their Parents: New Gallup Survey Shows Close Connection Between the Negative Emotions of Parents and Their Children

Washington, D.C., October 10, 2024 — The Walton Family Foundation and Gallup, in partnership with clinical psychologist Dr. Lisa Damour, released their latest survey results today, which provide greater insight into parents' experiences raising Gen Z, how both parents and children contend with their emotions, and the coping mechanisms and parenting support Gen Z prefers when they are struggling. The survey is part of the *Voices of Gen Z Study*, a multiyear, longitudinal research effort dedicated to improving understanding of the lives and experiences of Generation Z.

The survey found a correlation between negative emotions among parents with their children's emotions. Children whose parents report feeling stressed, anxious, angry or sad the prior day are notably more likely to report feeling those emotions themselves. And among parents, there is a prevalence of negative emotions. As nearly six in 10 (59%) report feeling stressed a lot of the prior day, and nearly half (48%) felt worried. About one in four (26%) felt sad, and one in five felt angry.

One experience most parents share is worrying about their children. The leading sources of parents' worry include their child's plans for the future (42%), mental health (40%), experiences at school (40%), physical safety (40%) and experiences on social media (38%). However, several of these issues are among the subjects they discuss least or find most difficult to talk about.

Although many parents are hesitant to bring up sensitive subjects with their children, Gen Z kids generally find talking with their parents to be beneficial. Between 80% and 93% of children say conversations with their parents about issues such as their feelings, mental health and experiences on social media are helpful.

The survey also shows that the timing and nature of parent-child discussions can be complex.

When Gen Zers are upset, they want their parents to listen, give them space and take their emotions seriously. They are less likely to want parents to provide assurance, advice or physical comfort.

"Our findings underscore the value of having strong lines of communication between kids and the adults who care for them," said Dr. Lisa Damour. "Gen Z *wants* to talk with their parents and caregivers about how they are feeling and what they encounter online. Having these conversations can strengthen key relationships at home, help adults worry less and improve wellbeing for both kids and their parents and caregivers."



A common theme throughout the survey is how children and parents view the former's desire for more independence and freedom. One in 10 Gen Z children say they wish their parents understood that they desire greater freedom and independence. Parents do understand this preference, to an extent, as the most-cited challenge of raising children is balancing supervision with independence and allowing children the freedom to learn from their mistakes on their path to adulthood.

Still, while many Gen Zers may be asking their parents to provide them with space and independence to work through some of the challenges of being a preteen or teenager, they overwhelmingly value the time and opinions of their parents. More than nine in 10 Gen Z children enjoy spending time with their parents (93%) and care what their parents think of them (91%).

Methodology

Results are based on a Gallup Panel™ web survey conducted Mar. 13-20, 2024, with 1,675 parents aged 18 and older, and their 10- to 18-year-old children. The Gallup Panel is a probability-based panel of U.S. adults, living in all 50 U.S. states and the District of Columbia, who are randomly selected using address-based sampling methodology. Gallup also recruits using random-digit-dial phone interviews that cover landline and cellphones.

Parents were eligible to complete the survey if they indicated they had at least one child living in their household between the ages of 10 and 18. If there were multiple children between the ages of 10 and 18 in the household, parents were asked to answer questions about the child who would have the next birthday. After completing their section of the survey, parents were asked to pass the survey to that child, who then completed their section of the survey.

For results based on the total sample of adult parents, the margin of sampling error is +/-3.3 percentage points at the 95% confidence level. For results based on the total sample of 10- to 18-year-old children, the margin of sampling error is +/-3.3 percentage points at the 95% confidence level.

All reported margins of sampling error include computed design effects for weighting. In addition to sampling error, question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of public opinion polls.

About the Walton Family Foundation

The Walton Family Foundation is, at its core, a family-led foundation. Three generations of the descendants of our founders, Sam and Helen Walton, and their spouses work together to lead the foundation and create access to opportunity for people and communities. We work in three areas: improving education, protecting rivers and oceans and the communities they support, and investing in our home region of Northwest Arkansas and the Arkansas-Mississippi Delta. To learn more, visit [waltonfamilyfoundation.org](https://www.waltonfamilyfoundation.org) and follow us on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

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