



What's Worrying America's Kids

A National Survey by
Nemours® KidsHealth®

Prepared by

 The Harris Poll

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Foreword

By R. Lawrence Moss, MD, President and CEO of Nemours Children's Health



Nemours Children's Health cares for 1.8 million children. Our more than 8,000 associates are passionate about transforming how we define health to create a healthier future for all children.

Health encompasses both the mind and the body, and our children's mental health is in crisis. This report explores what worries elementary and middle school-age children – how often they worry, what they worry about, and what coping mechanisms they use – to help identify trends and areas for support that can prevent escalation of mental health challenges.

While the mental health challenges of our nation's children have grown, the resources for addressing these needs are struggling to keep up. Nemours Children's is committed to delivering high-quality, accessible children's mental health care. We are engaged in local initiatives and national advocacy to expand and improve behavioral health services. We also look for ways we can directly help families address children's behaviors and emotions before they become serious problems. That's why Nemours KidsHealth[®], in collaboration with our longstanding partnership with the Michael Phelps Foundation, provides actionable resources for parents and children to address a variety of mental health concerns. To improve the communities where children live, Nemours will continue to collaborate with like-minded partners and communities to achieve our vision of a healthier future for all children by going "well beyond medicine." The creation of Nemours KidsHealth more than 28 years ago was inspired by this vision, with the goal to provide the best health education to parents, children, and teens, that is written and reviewed by our respected clinicians.

We know that up to 80% of the impacts on children's health take place outside medical settings, so it's time to improve their world. Our children are vital to the bright future of our country and their health is a powerful lever for realizing that vision.

R. Lawrence Moss, MD

President and Chief Executive Officer
Nemours Children's Health



Introduction



Introduction

Nemours®, KidsHealth®, commissioned The Harris Poll to conduct the 2023 What's Worrying America's Kids national survey to gain insight into the worry of children, where they go for resources, and their coping mechanisms. The five main themes explored in this research, focused on children ages 9-13, include:

- Frequency of worry
- Sources of worry
- What children do when they worry
- Coping mechanisms for worry
- Support for worry

Research Methodology

The research was conducted online from January 12-24, 2023, in the U.S. by The Harris Poll on behalf of Nemours KidsHealth. Nemours Children's Health is one of the nation's largest multistate pediatric health systems. In addition to providing world-class medical care, Nemours Children's is redefining children's health by going well beyond medicine and improving children's health where it starts — at home, at school, and anywhere you find children. Nemours KidsHealth is one example of these efforts: It is a pioneer and leader in pediatric health content that has been trusted by millions worldwide for more than 25 years.

The poll surveyed 504 youth ages 9-13, with permission to participate from their parent or legal guardian. Throughout this report, results for the total study audience (children ages 9-13) will be referred to as "children."

For additional information on the research method, including weighting variables and subgroup samples sizes, please contact Shari Rosen at shari.rosen@nemours.org.



Key Findings and Implications

People of all ages are exposed to difficult and stressful situations that can impact their mental health and well-being. These experiences often begin in childhood, presenting a unique set of challenges for children at school, at home, and at play.

The [most recent data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) illuminates a decline in many aspects of children's mental health and points to a larger youth mental health crisis. With this information in mind, Nemours KidsHealth set out to understand what pre-teenage children (ages 9-13) worry about and how parents and caregivers can engage with their children during this crucial juncture in their lives. Understanding why kids worry, and the signs to look for, can help with prevention and early intervention – the most effective ways of creating long-term wellness.

The following key findings emerged from our survey:

Frequency of Worry

- 37% of children worry once a week or more.
- Some children (33%) feel like they worry more than most kids their age and feel as though no one usually notices when they feel this way (23%).

Sources of Worry

- Children's worries are most commonly centered around school (64%) and friendships (41%).
- Children who worry about their looks (65%), being bullied (55%), and friends (47%) say they do so once a week or more.

What Kids Do When They Worry

- Being distracted or unable to focus (40%), sad or miserable (36%), and quiet or like they don't want to talk to anyone (34%) are among the top reactions to feeling worried.
- Children most often talk to someone (49%) to try to make themselves feel better when they feel worried.
- However, of the group surveyed, a similar proportion of children rely on technological distractions such as video games (49%), TV (48%), and social media (20%) when they feel worried.

Coping Mechanisms for Worry

- Children report that technology is less effective in helping them feel better.
- Of children who utilize TV, video games, or social media when they are worried, 85% say playing video games makes them feel better, 72% say the same of TV, and 59% say the same of social media.
- More than 9 in 10 children who talk to someone or do something creative — like listen to or play music, draw, paint, etc. — when they are worried say it makes them feel better (96% and 93%, respectively).

Support for Worrying

- Children most frequently turn to parents as their primary resource of information or advice in times of worry (67%).
- More than half of children (53%) think adults don't really understand what they worry about.
- Younger children (age 9-11) are more drawn to their parents as a first resource than their older (age 12-13) counterparts, whereas older children are more likely to seek the advice of their friends first.
- Nearly a quarter (23%) of children admit to feeling like no one usually notices when they worry.

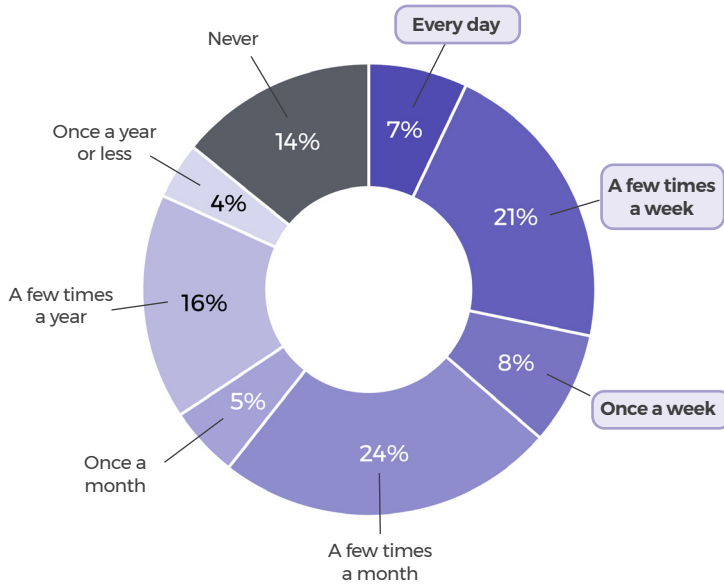


Detailed Findings

FREQUENCY OF WORRY

Key Finding: Children typically worry on a semi-regular basis (i.e., once a week or more) – most commonly about school and friendships. Unfortunately, for some, it feels like they are alone in their troubles – worrying more than other children their age. A majority of children (86%) report that they worry. Less than 1 in 10 (7%) worry every day, while more than 1 in 3 (37%) report they worry once a week or more.

Frequency With Which Children Worry



Responses may not add up to 100% due to computer rounding and/or weighting.

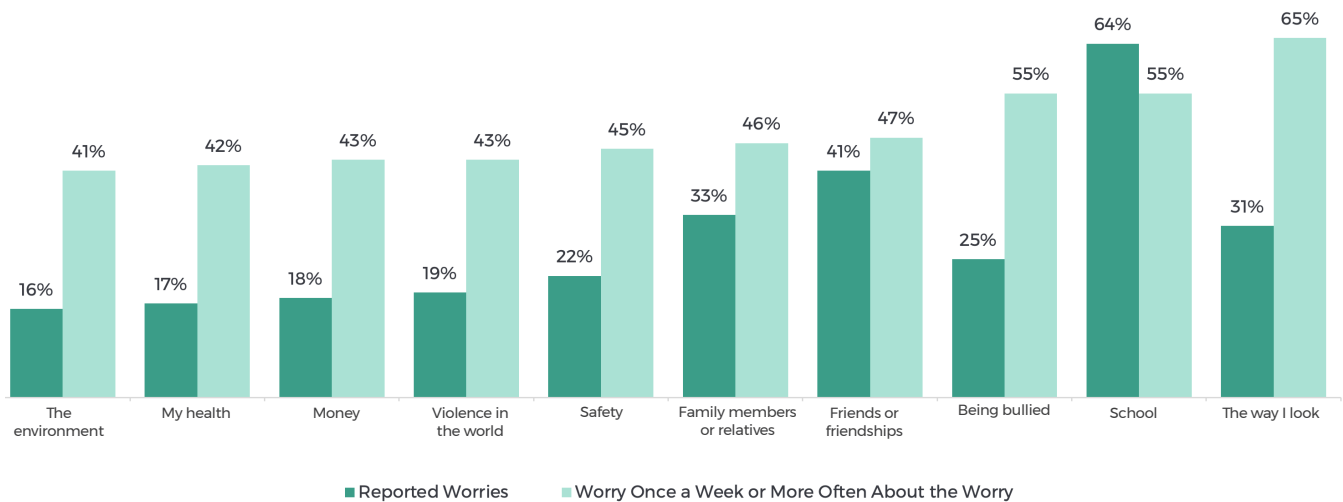
- **37% worry once a week or more often.**
- Girls' and boys' frequency of worry is relatively consistent, yet more girls than boys report worrying once a week or more (39% and 34%, respectively).
- Nearly 1 in 6 children (14%) say they never worry, a trend that appears more common among 9-year-olds than their older counterparts.
- Overall, 1 in 3 children (33%) feel they worry more than most children their age.
- Tendency to worry may progress with age, as older children (age 13) are more likely than their younger counterparts to report feeling as though they will never stop worrying (48% vs. 30% for 12-year-olds, 29% for 11-year-olds, 31% for 10-year-olds, and 22% for 9-year-olds).



SOURCES OF WORRY

Key Finding: School and friendships are the most cited worries for children. However, they are not necessarily what children worry about most frequently. Children worry about their looks and being bullied at the highest frequency.

Children’s Worries vs. Frequency With Which They Worry About Each

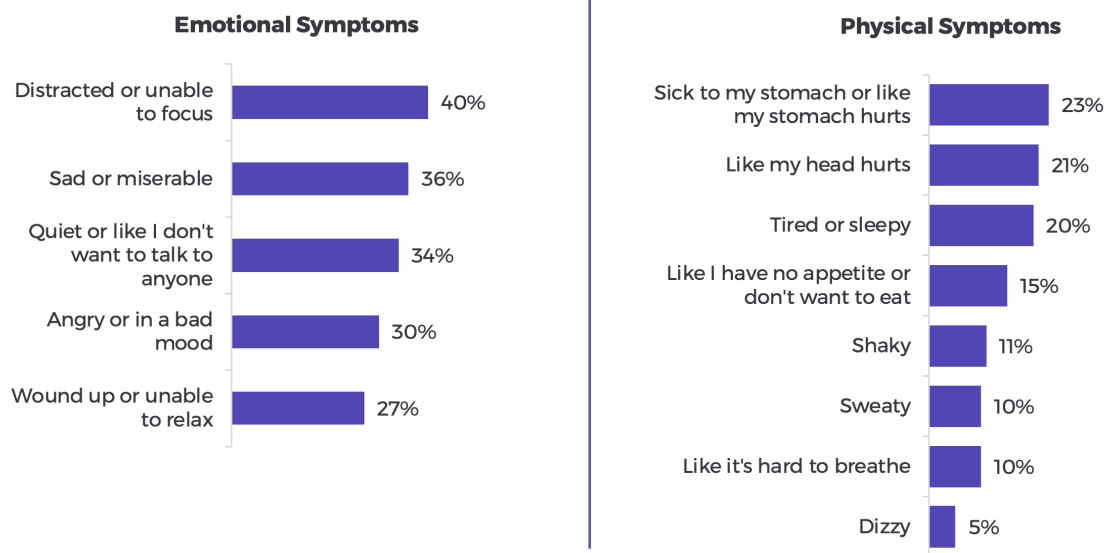


- The most common sources of children’s overall worries include school (64%) and friends or friendships (41%) – girls are more likely than boys to say they worry about friends or friendships (50% vs. 32%).
- Approximately 1 in 3 children report that they worry about the health of the people they love (35%), their family members or relatives (33%), and the way they look (31%), with girls more likely than boys to report being worried about their looks (39% vs. 24%).
- However, there appears to be a disconnect between the most common sources of children’s worries and what they worry about most frequently.
- Worries that occur once a week or more often are about their appearances. This is followed by school (55%), being bullied (55%), friends or friendships (47%), family members or relatives (46%), and safety (45%).
- More than 1 in 5 children say the way they look (28%) and being bullied (23%) is a daily worry for them.
- For 1 in 5 children, their worries extend to the world around them. These children are worried about money (21%), violence in the world (20%), and the environment (19%) and worry about these topics at least once a week.
- Around two-thirds of children (64%) say that when they feel worried, they don’t always know why they feel that way.

WHAT KIDS DO WHEN THEY FEEL WORRIED

Key Finding: While a child's worry or anxiety may not always be apparent to them, their bodies often send emotional and physical alerts, such as being distracted or unable to focus, or feeling sick to their stomachs or like their stomachs hurt.

How Feeling Worried Feels in Children's Bodies or Minds



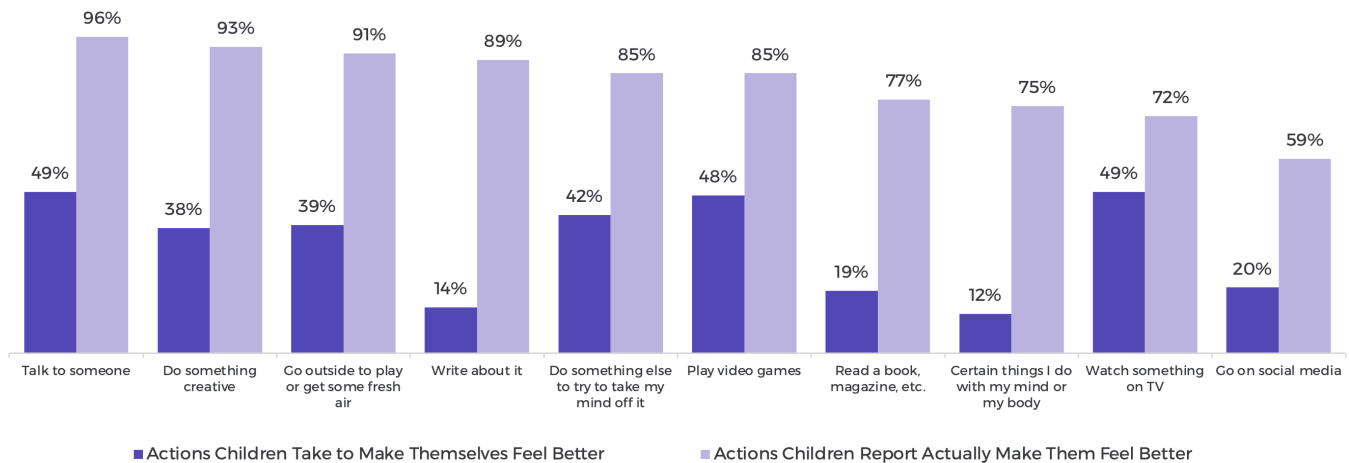
*Response items: 'Something else', and 'I don't notice a difference' are not included in this chart

- The most common symptom when worried is feeling distracted or unable to focus (40%). Additional emotional cues include feeling sad or miserable (36%), quiet or like they don't want to talk to anyone (34%), angry or in a bad mood (30%), wound up or unable to relax (27%).
- It is important that parents know that physical symptoms can be a sign of worry. In this survey, when they are worried, children reported feeling sick to their stomach or like their stomach hurt (23%), like their head hurt (21%), tired or sleepy (20%), lack of appetite/don't want to eat (15%), shaky (11%), sweaty (10%), like it's hard to breathe (10%) or dizzy (5%).

COPING MECHANISMS FOR WORRY

Key Finding: While children use a variety of methods to lessen their worries, not all outlets are created equal. Distracting oneself, specifically through technology, is quite common – yet this often does not make children feel better, especially when compared to talking to someone or utilizing creative outlets.

Children’s Actions to Make Them Feel Better/Stop Worrying vs. the Proportion Who Report the Action Makes Them Feel Better

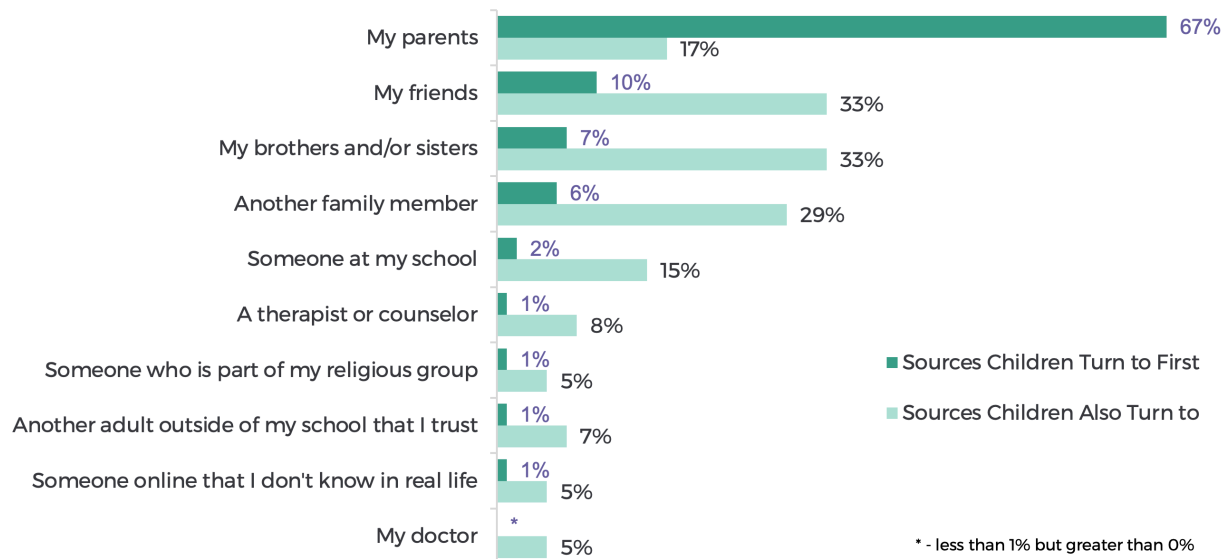


- Overwhelmingly, children report actively working to make themselves feel better when they’re worried (97%). Nearly half of children (49%) say they talk to someone when they feel this way. However, a similar proportion use technological distractions in the hopes of counteracting their worries – 49% say they watch something on TV and 48% play video games.
- Boys are more likely than girls to turn to video games to make themselves feel better or to make themselves stop worrying (61% vs. 35%).
- Around 2 in 5 children say they do something else to take their mind off their worries (42%), go outside to play or get some fresh air (39%), or do something creative (38%).
- Around a fifth turn to social media (20%) or reading books or magazines (19%).
- Only around 1 in 10 (12%) say they have certain things they do with their mind or body to make themselves feel better or stop worrying.
- Of children who take these steps to make themselves stop worrying, talking to someone (96%), and doing something creative (93%) top the list of actions that actually make them feel better.

SUPPORT FOR WORRYING

Key Finding: Children most commonly turn to their parents in times of worry, yet this appears to diminish with age.

Source of Information and Advice Children Turn to When Worried



- Overwhelmingly, children report that when they are worried, they talk to someone to get information or advice (95%) – with more than two-thirds saying they turn to their parents first (67%).
- Younger children (ages 9-11) are seemingly more drawn to their parents as a first resource than their older counterparts. Whereas older children (ages 12-13) are more likely than their younger counterparts to seek the advice of their friends first.
- More than half of all children (53%) think that adults don't understand what they worry about. Middle school-age children are more likely than elementary school-age children to feel this way (59% vs. 45%).
- Around 3 in 10 children who talk to someone when they feel worried will also turn to their brother and/or sister (33%), their friends (33%), or another family member (29%) for information and advice.
- However, less than 2 in 5 (35%) 13-year-olds report that no one else usually notices when they feel worried.

Who Child Goes to First When Worried	Age 9	Age 10	Age 11	Age 12	Age 13
Parents	83%	74%	77%	59%	42%
Friends	1%	3%	6%	18%	22%



**Recommendations
and Next Steps**

Recommendations and Next Steps

Understanding what children worry about presents an important opportunity for parents and legal guardians. They can learn more about their children's concerns and how to have productive conversations to help their children develop healthy coping mechanisms.



There are some immediate steps parents and caregivers can take to help their children better cope with worry. These include:

- **Ask what's on their minds.** Help kids label what they think and feel. They might not always have a lot to say. And they might not always want to talk about what's on their minds. But let kids know you're open to listening and talking any time.
- **Listen with patience.** When kids and teens want to talk, listen with your full attention. Give them time to put their thoughts and feelings into words. Ask questions to hear more. Don't be too quick to give advice. Let them confide. Listen calmly to what they have to say.
- **Validate.** Let kids know you understand. Say it's okay to feel how they feel. Tell them their feelings are normal. Try not to say, "There's nothing to worry about." This can make kids think they shouldn't feel the way they do. Instead, listen calmly and accept how they feel. That makes it easier for kids to share.
- **Help kids think of how to handle things.** Help them feel capable. Don't jump in to solve things for them. Instead, invite kids and teens to think of what they can do. Support their good ideas. Talk it through together. Remind them of times they tried something new and it went well. Offer to help as needed.

To provide helpful advice and education on worry and stress, Nemours has developed Resource Centers for children and parents on Nemours KidsHealth. The website also has articles about social media, school, bullying and other topics mentioned in the survey.

Nemours believes the best hospital bed is an empty one, which is why it has worked for so many years to provide easy-to-understand, doctor-vetted health information to as many families as possible. Since its founding in 1995, Nemours KidsHealth articles, videos, animations, print publications and health instructions have been viewed billions of times. Nemours KidsHealth is one of the world's most-visited sites for dependable information on children's health, behavior, and development with articles and other health advice created specifically for parents, kids, teens and teachers. Nemours KidsHealth education is the trusted resource used by nine of the Top 10 Children's Hospitals, as named by *U.S. News & World Report* (2022-2023).

Learn More

For additional information on this survey along with resources from Nemours KidsHealth visit [Nemours.org/WhyKidsWorry](https://www.nemours.org/WhyKidsWorry) or scan the QR code below.

