

KidsHealth KidsPoll—Worry/Stress Poll: Summary of Findings

KidsHealth KidsPoll is collaboration among the Nemours Foundation/KidsHealth, the Department of Health Education and Recreation at Southern Illinois University Carbondale, the National Association of Health Education Centers, and participating health education centers. The purpose is to gather information (opinions, attitudes, and feelings etc.) about current health issues from children. The information is gathered using handheld data collection devices from children ages 9 to 13 as they attend classes in the health education centers. The information is shared with educators, caregivers, healthcare organizations, the media and other interested parties at the national and local levels. The goal is to provide insightful information that will enable them to develop programs to help children to make healthy life decisions, prevent disease and injury, and understand their bodies. This poll focused on issues related to what kids stress or worry about and how they cope.

Individual Demographics

Individual-level information was collected anonymously from each child who participated.

- 1004 children
- 52% boys, 48% girls
- 9-13 (average age 11)
- 10 centers participated in this poll:
 - Susan P. Byrnes Health Education Center—York, PA
 - Children’s Health Education Center—Milwaukee, WI
 - Robert Crown Center for Health Education—Hinsdale, IL
 - St. Joseph Mercy Health Exploration Station—Canton, MI
 - HealthSpace Cleveland—Cleveland, OH
 - HealthWorks! Kids’ Museum—South Bend, IN
 - Health World Children’s Museum—Barrington, IL
 - Ruth Lilly Health Education Center—Indianapolis, IN
 - Alice Aycock Poe Center for Health Education—Raleigh, NC
 - Weller Health Education Center—Easton, PA

School demographics

School-level information was not collected from each child, but is based on statistics for the public schools that the children were from; school-level data for private or non-school groups were not available and therefore were not included in the school-level analyses.

- 25 schools (12 public)
- 58% White, 14% Black, 25% Hispanic, 3% Asian/Pacific, 0% Native American

- 46% of the schools had student bodies that were 0-33% Black/Hispanic/Asian/Native American combined
 - 9% of the schools had student bodies that were 33-67% of these groups
 - 45% of the schools had student bodies that were 67-100% of these groups
- 46% students in participating schools qualified for free or reduced lunch
 - 40% of the schools had 0-33% of their student body qualifying for free or reduced lunch
 - 24% of the schools had 33-67% of their student body qualifying for free or reduced lunch
 - 36% of the schools had 67-100% of their student body qualifying for free or reduced lunch

The U.S. Census Bureau and the U.S. Dept of Education use a measure of city size and location called a Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA). The categories for MSA are:

- *Large city center = center of a MSA city with population >250,000*
 - *Midsize city center = center of a MSA city with a population <250,000*
 - *Large city fringe = urban fringe of a large MSA city*
 - *Midsize city fringe = urban fringe of a midsize MSA city*
 - *Large town = not within a MSA with a population >25,000*
 - *Small town = not within an MSA with a population 2,500-25,000*
 - *Rural outside = not within an MSA with a population <2,500*
 - *Rural inside = population <2,500, coded rural, with in a census MSA*
- Of the participating schools: 24% large city center, 22% mid-size city center, 21% large city fringe, 13% small town, 6% rural outside MSA, 15% rural inside MSA
 - Average school size—652
 - 13% of participants were from public schools that had enrollment <250
 - 21% enrollment of 250-500
 - 29% enrollment of 500-750
 - 18% enrollment of 750-1000
 - 10% enrollment of 1000+

Significant Demographic Associations

- There was a high correlation between proportion of schools with more non-white students and proportion receiving lunch assistance ($r = 0.91$).
- Non-white students are also more likely to be from more urban locales
- Older kids were more likely to be from large cities or fringe

Statistically Significant Findings—overall

The table below, places the respondents' worries/stressors in order. It must be noted that these eight worries/stressors were selected because they had the highest scores during previous pilot testing. Because of time constraints and concerns about attention span, only eight worries could be included in the survey. The worries not included were (in order): being depressed or anxious, health/death of loved ones, ones own death, classical phobias, parents being too busy, crime, after-school activities, war, bullies, and natural disasters.

	Worry/Stress	Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Once in while	never
1	Grades	42%	11%	11%	19%	17%
2	Looks	34%	9%	7%	24%	26%
3	Problems at home	23%	16%	14%	36%	11%
4	Being liked	26%	7%	6%	27%	34%
5	Shape/weight	25%	7%	6%	22%	40%
6	Future	22%	8%	10%	35%	25%
7	Failure	19%	10%	12%	36%	23%
8	Friends	18%	9%	8%	37%	28%

Below, each is discussed in more detail.

- *Question: How often do you stress or worry about **problems at home**?*
 - A. Never*
 - B. Once in a while, but not every month*
 - C. Every month, but not every week*
 - D. Every week, but not every day*
 - E. Every day*

About half the respondents (53%) worry/stress at least monthly about problems at home; with 16% worrying weekly and 23% daily. With the exception of some 9-year-olds (29%), older kids generally worry more about problems at home (52% of 13-year-olds worry daily compared to 23% at 12, 15% at 11, and 14% at 10). There was no difference by gender.

- *Question: How often do you stress or worry about **being a failure or disappointing loved ones**?*
 - A. Never*
 - B. Once in a while, but not every month*
 - C. Every month, but not every week*
 - D. Every week, but not every day*
 - E. Every day*

Forty-one percent of kids worry monthly or more frequently about issues surrounding failure; with 10% worrying weekly and 19% daily. There were no differences by age or gender.

- *Question: How often do you stress or worry about **being liked or fitting in at school**?*
 - Never*
 - Once in a while, but not every month*
 - Every month, but not every week*
 - Every week, but not every day*
 - Every day*

Only 39% of respondents say they worry monthly or more frequently about being liked at school, but 2/3 of these (26% of the total) say the worry about it daily. There were no differences by age or gender.

- *Question: How often do you stress or worry about **your future**?*
 - Never*
 - Once in a while, but not every month*
 - Every month, but not every week*
 - Every week, but not every day*
 - Every day*

Forty percent of all the respondents worry monthly or more frequently about their futures. Eight percent worry weekly and twenty-two percent worry daily. Boys are more likely to worry daily (26%) than girls (18%). There was no difference by age.

- *Question: How often do you stress or worry about **your friends and their problems**?*
 - Never*
 - Once in a while, but not every month*
 - Every month, but not every week*
 - Every week, but not every day*
 - Every day*

Only 35% of the respondents worry frequently (monthly or more often) about their friends; 9% weekly, and 18% daily. Boys are more likely to say the never worry (33%) than girls (22%) and Girls are more likely than boys to say they worry daily (21% vs 17%). There was no difference by age.

- *Question: How often do you stress or worry about **being out of shape or overweight**?*
 - Never*
 - Once in a while, but not every month*
 - Every month, but not every week*
 - Every week, but not every day*
 - Every day*

Only 38% of the respondents worry monthly or more frequently about their weight/shape, but 2/3 of these (25% of the total) say they worry daily. Boys are more likely to say the never worry (45%) than girls (34%), and girls are more likely than boys to say they worry daily (29% vs 22%). Older kids are more likely to say they worry weekly or more frequently (13 years old = 52%, 12 = 36%, 11 = 28%, 10 = 24%, 9 = 27%).

- *Question: How often do you stress or worry about **your looks or appearance**?*
 - Never*
 - Once in a while, but not every month*
 - Every month, but not every week*
 - Every week, but not every day*
 - Every day*

Half of the kids surveyed say they worry monthly or more frequently about their looks, and more than 2/3 of these (34% of the total) say they worry daily. Girls are more likely than boys to worry daily about their looks (39% vs. 30%). Older kids are also more likely to worry daily about their looks (13 years old = 47%, 12 = 41%, 11 = 32%, 10 = 31%, 9 = 17%).

- *Question: How often do you stress or worry about **school grades**?*
 - Never*
 - Once in a while, but not every month*
 - Every month, but not every week*
 - Every week, but not every day*
 - Every day*

A large proportion of the respondents (63%) say they worry monthly or more frequently about grades; 11% weekly, and 42% daily. There was no difference by age or gender.

We also asked two additional questions about how they deal with their worries:

- *Question: When you are stressed or worried about something, what do you usually do?*
 - Talk to my parent(s)*
 - Talk to friends*
 - Keep my worries to myself*
 - Do something about what's causing my worries*
 - None of the above*

One-fourth (25%) selected talking to parents as their usual choice, ¼ (25%) talking to friends, ¼ (24%) keeping it to themselves, only 9% try to do something, and 17% none of the above. Girls are more likely than boys to talk to friends (33% vs. 19%). Boys chose “none of the above” more often (21% vs. 11%). Younger kids are more likely to talk to parents (9 years old = 33%, 10 = 32%, 11 = 24%, 12 = 24%, 13 = 10%). Whereas, older kids are more likely to keep their worries to themselves (13 years old = 30%, 12 = 36%, 11 = 22%, 10 = 23%, 9 = 17%).

- *Question: If you want to learn more about a topic that is worrying you, which of the following is the best source for that information?*
 - A parent*
 - A teacher*
 - friends*
 - a doctor or nurse*
 - the internet*

The most popular source is parents (42%) followed by the internet (24%). Seventeen percent turn to friends first; 13% teachers, and only 4% a doctor or nurse. With the exception of 9 year olds, older children were more likely to turn to friends or the internet and younger children were more likely to name parents (see Summary Table)

Other findings worth highlighting

With every worry except *grades* and *fitting in at school*, those who turn to parents for information also had less daily worries than those who turn to teachers, friends or the internet. The same is true of those who listed doctors/nurses (although only 4% of respondents chose this answer). Those who had the most daily worries about *grades*, were also those who turned to teachers the most for information. Those who believe friends or the internet is the best place for information are also the least likely to talk to parents when stressed. Those who talk to friends when stressed are more likely to say they never worry about their friends.

The pattern of responses is bi-modal (see table above). With one exception (*grades*), about 50-60% of the respondents typically said they *never* worry or only *once-in-a-while* worry about each of the topics. Typically, about 20-30% say they worry daily about each topic. Very few chose the options *monthly* or *weekly*. This appears to show that two different groups of kids are responding; the majority who have minimal worries and a minority who worry regularly. This observation is supported by the discovery of moderate to high correlation among the worries (.5-.7). The contrast is more obvious, if the students marking *every day* are counted. For example, 60% of the total selections of worry *every day*, were marked by only 24% of the respondents. This seems to suggest that the majority of kids are coping relatively well with common worries and stressors, but a minority may need some special attention.

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