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Report Shows More Than 13% of Utah Children Struggle with Anxiety or Depression

Depression and suicide rates highest amongst LGBTQ+ and Children of Color, Annie E. Casey Foundation finds

SALT LAKE CITY — Children in the United States are facing an unprecedented mental health crisis, according to a new 50-state report from the Annie E. Casey Foundation. While the **2022 KIDS COUNT® Data Book** ranks Utah as fourth in the nation in child well-being and first in the family and community domain, the report also highlights how youth are struggling with anxiety and depression like never before.

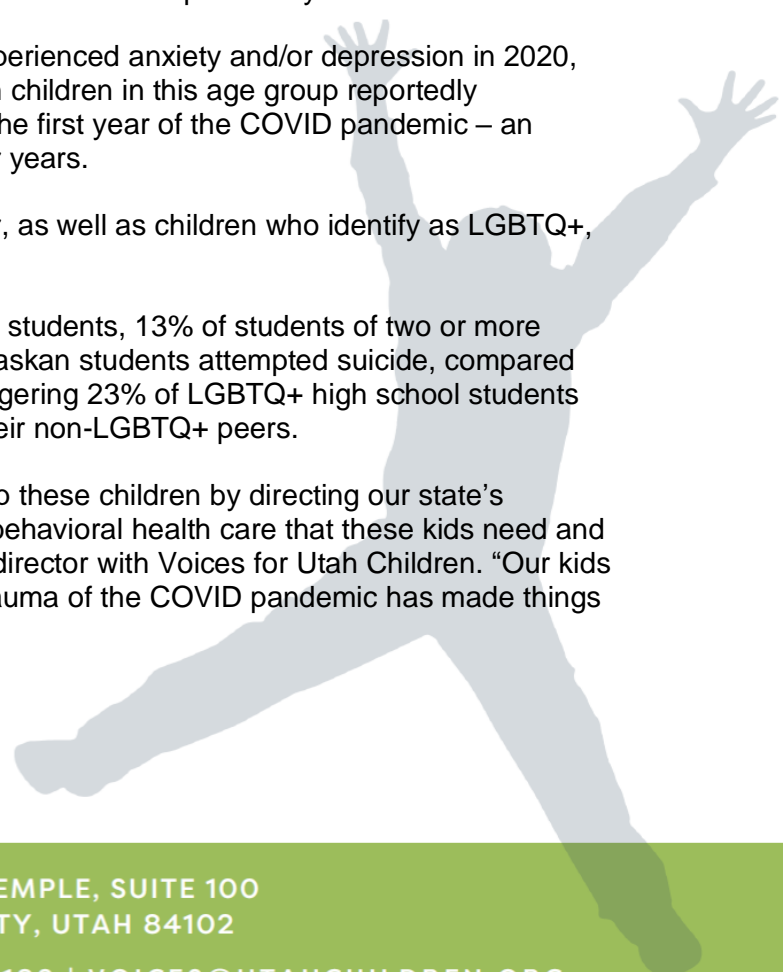
The **Data Book** reports that nationwide, children were more likely to experience anxiety and/or depression during the first year of the COVID-19 crisis than in previous years:

Nearly 12% (11.8%) of children ages 3 to 17 experienced anxiety and/or depression in 2020, compared to 9.4% in 2016. Currently, 7.3 million children in this age group reportedly experienced these mental health challenges in the first year of the COVID pandemic – an increase of 1.5 million children (26%) in just four years.

This mental health crisis has hit children of color, as well as children who identify as LGBTQ+, harder than their peers.

Among high school-aged children, 12% of Black students, 13% of students of two or more races, and 26% of American Indian or Native Alaskan students attempted suicide, compared with 9% of high school-aged kids overall. A staggering 23% of LGBTQ+ high school students report attempting suicide, compared to 6% of their non-LGBTQ+ peers.

“Utah’s policymakers have an opportunity to help these children by directing our state’s budgetary surpluses to provide the mental and behavioral health care that these kids need and deserve,” said Martín C. Muñoz, KIDS COUNT director with Voices for Utah Children. “Our kids have been struggling for far too long, and the trauma of the COVID pandemic has made things even worse.”



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Each year, the *Data Book* presents national and state data from 16 indicators in four domains — economic well-being, education, health and family and community factors — and ranks the states according to how children are faring overall. The data in this year's report are a mix of pre-pandemic and more recent figures and are the latest available.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation calls for lawmakers to support programs and policies that ease mental health burdens on children and their families. This includes concerted efforts to:

Meet kids' basic needs. Youth who grow up in poverty are two to three times more likely to develop mental health conditions than their peers. Children need a solid foundation of nutritious food, stable housing and safe neighborhoods — and their families need financial stability — to foster positive mental health and wellness.

Ensure every child has access to the mental health care they need, when and where they need it. Schools should increase the presence of social workers, psychologists and other mental health professionals on staff and strive to meet the 250-to-1 ratio of students to counselors recommended by the American School Counselor Association.

Bolster mental health care that takes into account young people's experiences and identities. Such care should be trauma-informed, culturally relevant, informed by the latest evidence and research, and should be geared toward early intervention.

RELEASE INFORMATION

The 2022 *KIDS COUNT® Data Book* will be available at www.aecf.org. Additional information is available at www.aecf.org/databook. Journalists interested in creating maps, graphs and rankings in stories about the *Data Book* can use the KIDS COUNT Data Center at datacenter.kidscount.org.

About Voices for Utah Children

Voices for Utah Children advocates and advances policies and practices that are good for all of Utah's children. At Voices for Utah Children, we believe every child deserves the opportunity to reach their full potential. And to achieve this vision, we ensure all kids are ready to learn, and they and their families are healthy and economically secure. For more information, visit www.utahchildren.org.

ABOUT THE ANNIE E. CASEY FOUNDATION

The Annie E. Casey Foundation creates a brighter future for the nation's young children, youth and young adults by developing solutions to strengthen families, build paths to economic opportunity and transform struggling communities into safer and healthier places to live, work and grow. For more information, visit www.aecf.org. KIDS COUNT® is a registered trademark of the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

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