



## A Message from Thomas P. Royer President/CEO

Chronic and persistent stress. That is what this pandemic is causing.

The Covid-19 pandemic has created a lot of pressure on families, and their kids have now been dealing with this pandemic for a full year. It seems like people have hit a wall. I am now frequently getting calls from my friends who are concerned parents. And they should be concerned. Their families and children are living under different circumstances than they are accustomed to. Some parents have lost jobs. Nearly everyone is more isolated than they were a year ago. Most children are being schooled at home, and I am hearing that children are regressing, not only academically, but emotionally. It's a lot of stress and some families are not faring well.

Is anyone in your family becoming easily agitated or frustrated? Are you moody? Or maybe you feel overwhelmed and are having trouble relaxing and quieting your mind. Some of my friends report that they are concerned that their children are feeling bad about themselves, lonely, worthless and depressed.

The pandemic has even caused physical symptoms. Low energy, headaches, upset stomach, insomnia, clenched jaw and grinding teeth are just a few of the more common symptoms.

Have you noticed anyone around you who has been experiencing any cognitive symptoms? These may include constant worrying, forgetfulness and disorganization, inability to focus, poor judgment and being pessimistic.

How about changes in behavior? Changes in appetite (either not eating or eating too much), procrastinating, increased use of alcohol, nail biting, fidgeting or pacing?

If any of these things sound like you or someone in your family, you are not alone.

I did not get this list of symptoms from a publication about the pandemic.

*(Continued)*

I got the list of symptoms from publications on poverty and the chronic stress it causes, often for generations.

I am going to say something hard, and it may make some people mad. But it needs to be said.

For the first time in my 30 years in behavioral health, I hear the alarm being sounded about children's mental health being an important issue for the average person. It's because of the pandemic. It's because middle and upper-class children are now suffering, too. Many of the over-generalizations I have heard over the years regarding the families we work with are starting to fall away. "If their parents did better" or "The schools need to improve" seem a lot less like certain antidotes now. Maybe those are not really root causes after all.

Children's mental health has always been a problem. And it impacts children whose lives are spiraling out of control for reasons beyond their capability of changing those things. And it doesn't end in childhood. A person does not turn 18 or 21 and magically know how to function in the world.

As I have documented many times before, chronic stress from any cause can lead to long-term mental health problems, such as depression, anxiety and personality disorders. It can also lead to long-term physical problems such as cardiovascular disease, high blood pressure, obesity and other eating disorders.

Poverty elevates a child's risk of experiencing behavioral, social, emotional and health challenges. Child poverty also reduces skill-building opportunities and academic outcomes, undercutting a young student's capacity to learn, graduate high school and more.

And while I regret and would never choose the way this awakening has come about, I am hopeful that after this is over, we will have more empathy and a greater understanding of how chronic stress impacts children and families. We have now all had a little taste of what it's like to be in that boat.