



THE TRUE STORY OF CHRONIC PAIN IN KIDS AND TEENS



FROM THE U.S. PAIN
FOUNDATION'S 2025 SURVEY FOR
KIDS, TEENS, AND YOUNG ADULTS

WHAT THIS REPORT IS ABOUT

A lot of people think that when kids and teens say they're in pain, they're just exaggerating or going through "growing pains." But for many young people, the pain is **real**, it **doesn't go away**, and it affects their **whole life**—school, friends, sleep, and emotions. And even though it has a big impact, chronic pain in kids is often ignored, not taken seriously, and not studied enough.

In 2025, 79 kids and teens (ages 8 to 17) answered a survey from the U.S. Pain Foundation about their pain. They shared their stories about what it's like to live with pain all the time—and how hard it is when adults don't believe them or don't help.



**KIDS DESERVE
TO BE BELIEVED
WHEN THEY SAY
THEY HURT.**



THE SURVEY'S BIG TAKEAWAYS

Chronic pain doesn't stop.

Almost half (**41%**) said they've had pain for **more than 5 years**. And more than half (**53%**) said their pain is there **every day**.

Most kids don't feel believed.

Only **9%** felt like adults **always believed them**. Teachers and doctors often don't understand.

School is tough when you have pain.

70% said they **miss a lot of school days**. Some **didn't get help** from their teachers or schools.

Pain is hard emotionally.

Most said they feel **lonely, frustrated, stressed, and sad**.

Doctors don't always get it.

Even though nearly everyone (**98%**) had seen a doctor, many said it was hard to find one who **really understands** their pain.



WHAT IS PAIN LIKE?

Kids' pain shows up in a lot of ways—it's not always the same.

Types of Conditions

Kids had headache, EDS, POTS, back pain, chronic migraine, dysautonomia, nerve pain, stomach pain, CRPS, AMPS, mast cell or MCAS, and others.

Where Pain Happens

Their pain is in the joints, head, back, stomach, muscles—and for many, even **all over the body**.

How It Feels

Kids **describe their pain** as achy, stabbing, burning, freezing, shocking, squeezing, drilling, twisting, radiating, and more.

When It Happens

More than half said their pain **never stops**. Others said it **comes and goes**.

What Makes Pain Worse

Moving, standing, stress, the weather, sitting too long, not sleeping enough, lights, sounds, some food, types of clothes, and using screens too much can all **set off pain**.

HOW PAIN AFFECTS LIFE

Chronic pain affects almost everything in a young person's day—it can make them feel sad or worried, make it harder to hang out with friends or family, and stop them from doing things they enjoy or need to do.

Physical Impacts

Pain makes it harder for many kids to do sports or hobbies, go to school, and even sleep.

Feelings

Most young people with pain felt **frustrated, stressed, and sad**. Many felt **like they were alone**—some said they had **no one to talk to**.

Support From Others

- Most said their **parents or guardians** believed them **the most**. Many said **teachers and doctors** often **don't believe them**.
- They said that **other kids** often **don't understand** their pain—but that some of them **really try to understand**.

1 out of every 5 said they had **no one to talk to** about their pain.



HOW YOUNG PEOPLE DEAL WITH PAIN

- Watching TV or movies
- Doing art projects, coloring, sewing, or crafting
- Playing with Legos, Play-Doh, clay, or slime
- Playing video games, board games, or card games
- Reading, writing, or journaling
- Playing an instrument, singing, or listening to music
- Acting or dancing
- Using stuffed animals or weighted blankets
- Spending time with family, friends, or pets
- Taking breaks or resting



SCHOOL & PAIN

60% go to school **in person**. Others are **homeschooled**, do a **mix of home and school**, or get school support while learning **at home or in the hospital**.

- Most miss **multiple days of school** every month because of their pain.

75% got some type of **help or accommodations** at school, but many said **they needed more**. These things helped:

- Less physical activity
- Flexible schedules
- Extra time on assignments
- Breaks during the day
- Extra support from teachers, nurses, or counselors
- Using elevators

But 1 out of every 5 **didn't get any support** at school.



WHY GETTING CARE IS HARD



Even though most young people had been to a doctor because of their pain, many still said they're not getting the help they need.

Kids often had these problems:

- Doctors **didn't understand them**
- It was hard to **explain their pain**
- Wait times were long
- Their pain kept changing
- Some things just cost too much

More than 1 out of every 3 said that **adults just didn't believe them**.

TRYING DIFFERENT TREATMENTS

Most kids tried:

- **Medications**, like pills or creams
- **Therapies to help the body feel better**, like heat or cold, massage, or physical therapy
- **Self-guided strategies to do on their own**, like taking breaks or using helpful tools



Kids also tried **mental health or mind-body support**, like talking to someone or biofeedback. Some tried acupuncture, yoga, gadgets like TENS units, CBD, or shots or injections.

Different kids found some of these treatments helpful—but **10% said nothing helped their pain**.



UNDERSTANDING CARE & FEELING INCLUDED

- 42% said their doctor **explained things clearly**
- 42% said **they got to help decide** what treatments to try
- Others said they felt **confused or left out** of decisions



WHAT KIDS HAD TO SAY

Not Being Believed

- “I’m not just being dramatic. Something is wrong.”
- “Just because I look fine on the outside doesn't mean that's how I feel on the inside.”

Talking About Pain

- “No one wants to hear about my suffering.”
- “It’s hard to know how to describe it at times because I get so used to having it.”

Challenges with Medical Care

- “We need doctors that believe patients. There has to be more out there to help me.”
- “Some doctors talk only to parents. The kids are experiencing the issue. They know what is going on. PLEASE address the kids.”

Problems in School

- “A long school day is extremely painful, and I'm pushing myself every day.”
- “Schools need to give more options and make it known that there are accommodations.”

Connecting with Kids who Get It

- “Opening up is hard, but when you do it, it's very helpful and rewarding.”
- “Going to chronic pain camp made me feel seen.”



WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE

- **Train doctors** to understand kids' chronic pain
- **Give more options** for treatment (physical and emotional), and do more research
- **Include kids** in decisions about their care
- **Help schools** support students with pain
- **Create groups** where kids with pain can connect and not feel alone



FINAL THOUGHTS

Chronic pain in kids is **real**. It's **not fake**, and it's **not rare**. Kids who live with pain need adults who believe them, support them, and make sure they can still learn, play, and feel OK.

This report shares real kids' and teens' stories about what it's truly like to live with chronic pain.

**THEY DON'T WANT
PITY—THEY WANT
HELP, HOPE, AND
TO BE HEARD.**

