

HeyKiddo: A company dedicated to helping adults gain better control of their children's mental, social and emotional health

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Abstract

Children today are experiencing unprecedented rates of social, emotional, and mental health problems. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, the mental health crisis among children is so dire that it has become a national emergency (2021). But there is hope. Research has consistently shown that early intervention is key when it comes to positive outcomes for childhood mental health disorders or issues. Put simply and powerfully, how we shape our children early on shapes their future. And no shaping is more powerful than what a child learns and models at home. HeyKiddo is a suite of digital solutions that helps parents, caretakers, and educators anticipate, detect and intervene when mental, social, and/or emotional issues or questions arise to prevent a more significant problem or crisis. HeyKiddo is a lifeline. Literally.

Introduction

Children today are experiencing unprecedented rates of social, emotional, and mental health problems.

Suicide is the third leading cause of death in children 5-14 (CDC, 2022), and 1 in 8 children between the ages of 6 and 12 have suicidal thoughts. The implications on children's social, emotional, and mental health functioning related to the current global pandemic of COVID-19 have been and continue to be significant. There has been a 24% increase in mental health-related emergency room visits for things like suicide and extreme behavior by children ages 5-10 throughout COVID-19 (CDC, 2021).

It is estimated that 1 in 6 US children suffer from a diagnosed mental health issue (NAMI), which does not account for undiagnosed children. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, the mental health crisis among children is so dire that it has become a national emergency (2021). The pandemic placed a white-hot spotlight on this public health crisis but it was a crisis that was bubbling well before the pandemic hit. This is more than a hair-on-fire problem at this point. **This is an inferno.**

But there is hope. Research has consistently shown that early intervention is key when it comes to positive outcomes for childhood mental health disorders or issues. Despite these findings,

there has traditionally been an over-focus on academic achievement, when in fact it is the mental, social and emotional skills that are paramount to overall development.

We know that positive mental, social and emotional health, and skill development lead to improved academics, behavior, interpersonal relationships, mental health, and positive wellbeing throughout life (Sancassiani, et. al., 2015). A large multi-year study based on 2016-2019 data found that children facing relational and social risks are more likely to have mental, emotional, or behavioral health problems. However, these negative impacts on child resilience, self-regulation, and school engagement can be offset by protective factors such as strong caretaker-child connection and family resilience (Johns Hopkins University Bloomberg School of Public Health, 2022).

Put simply and powerfully, how we shape our children early on shapes their future. And no shaping is more powerful than what a child learns and models at home.

What if parents, caregivers, and educators could anticipate, detect, and intervene to improve children's mental, social and emotional health?

HeyKiddo is a suite of digital solutions that helps parents, caretakers, and educators anticipate, detect and intervene when mental, social, and/or emotional issues or questions arise to prevent a more significant problem or crisis. HeyKiddo is a lifeline. Literally.

Getting a child into therapy these days means being placed on a long waiting list, as there is a significant lack of resources for children experiencing mental health issues. HeyKiddo aims to ameliorate the situation by providing parents and educators with the tools they need to open up the lines of communication at home and school, the resources to understand normal and abnormal child development, and the ability to be alerted when issues escalate, requiring a higher level of intervention.

We have two solutions to help adults gain better control over their children's mental, social and emotional health.

The *HeyKiddo™ Talk App* is currently in development and expected to drop Fall of 2022. The HeyKiddo™ Talk App will be a fully customized, AI-powered mental, social, and emotional health journey that adjusts to a child's and parent's unique needs while also raising a red flag if issues arise along the way that may require more in-depth intervention.

HeyKiddo™ Huddle is a comprehensive social-emotional curriculum delivered in 15-minutes a day, or 1 hour a week, that requires no prep, no experience, and no training for elementary school teachers and homeschooling parents. Huddle includes a comprehensive parent engagement system and integrated progress tracking to help teachers identify students in greater need of support.

We're helping and we have the proof to show that it works!

Our preliminary outcome studies with teachers using HeyKiddo™ Huddle have resulted in very positive findings after one full year of use. Specifically, teachers report Huddle is easy to use and understand, takes minimal preparation time to implement, and the curriculum has an observable positive impact on students' social-emotional learning and development.

Initial quantitative analysis of Huddle corroborates these findings, suggesting classrooms using the Huddle curriculum experience positive social-emotional changes in their students, over the course of the school year. Equally important, teachers and homeschooling parents love how easy it is to use HeyKiddo™ Huddle!

Although we are just beginning our research on the HeyKiddo™ Talk App, we have a year under our belt using our current version of HeyKiddo™ Talk. We have gained a greater understanding of parents' needs and the kind of support they are looking for. Our team is currently going through the ICORP program through NSF to gain further insights into the needs of parents and caregivers and the people that help (e.g., educators, therapists, pediatricians).

Although we intend on engaging in clinical trials, true success will be a parent or caregiver having increased confidence in their ability to support their child (and themselves), know that they can turn to the HeyKiddo™ Talk App to find developmentally appropriate and evidence-based resources, and feel confident that they will be better able to anticipate, track, detect and intervene to help their child avert more serious issues.

Our ultimate vision is to create an ecosystem where “the village” for a child is communicating together and sharing information so that a child’s experience at home and school has fluidity with support.

We need help to continue tackling the childhood mental health crisis.

HeyKiddo was awarded a Phase I SBIR National Science Foundation grant in August 2021 to do research and development on the Talk mobile app. We will be pursuing a Phase II NSF grant in the Fall of 2022. We are also actively starting our non-grant fundraising journey and looking to partner with investors who want to make an impact on the childhood mental health crisis.

Beyond selling directly to schools and parents/caregivers, we must partner with local, state, and federal agencies to get HeyKiddo into the hands of underserved parents. Given how difficult it is to get a therapy appointment, coupled with the reality of how difficult it is for parents struggling to make ends meet to take an hour out of the day to bring their child to an appointment, we would like to provide this resource for free to families who need support at home but may be unable to access service. We would also like to provide this resource to caregivers in the foster care system. The ability to make a true, meaningful impact on this public health crisis is dependent on our ability to provide these resources to all families and schools, not just those who can afford it.

The childhood mental health problem is now a public health crisis. Parents, caregivers, and educators are critical to the outcome of the social, emotional, and mental health of children. We must equip them with the resources they need to learn how to anticipate, detect, and intervene to stop this crisis from escalating any further.

To learn more visit www.hey-kiddo.com or contact Dr. Nicole Lipkin, Founder & CEO, at nicole@hey-kiddo.com