

# The Parenting Perceptions Report 2013

A survey of Western Australian parents of school age children



## About Anglicare WA

Anglicare WA is a not for profit community service organisation. We support people, families and their communities to cope with the challenges of life by building their resilience and capacity. We assist people with relationship issues, financial problems, and housing difficulties. Ultimately, we want our clients to thrive in today's society.

We work with people from all walks of life – from Kununurra in the north to Albany in the south, from street corners to the halls of Parliament. We seek to influence policy makers and are widely respected for our expertise, leadership and capacity to drive positive and lasting change.

Our philosophy is to support people through each stage of life's journey. Our services are available to all members of the community and our work is achieved in a spirit of reconciliation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Western Australians.

Anglicare WA was the recipient of the WA Community Service Excellence Award for Best Large Organisation in 2012.

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# Executive Summary

The Parenting Perceptions Report provides an opportunity to deepen our understanding of the experiences of Western Australian parents.

The report focused on several key areas of parenting, including:

- challenge and reward
- issues, challenges and concerns
- skills and abilities
- behaviour management
- sources of information, advice and assistance
- desired information, advice and assistance

For most people, being a parent is moderately challenging but also highly rewarding. On a scale of zero to ten respondents reported, on average, the challenge of their experiences to be 6.5 and the reward to be 8.8. Western Australian parents generally feel very confident with their parenting skills and abilities, with six out of ten reporting extreme confidence in their abilities. However, most require external support, help, information or professional assistance at some stage.

Eight hundred and ten parents participated in the survey, coming from all over the state. Four hundred respondents came from Perth, 100 from the Great Southern, 100 from the South West, 100 from the Kimberley and 100 from the Pilbara.

Respondents reported around 2500 challenges they faced as parents during the last 12 months. 27% reported concerns with their children's education and schooling; 22% with their children's respect for adults; 16% with their children's health and body image; 14% with their own balance between work and life; 14% with their children's discipline; 13% with family conflict issues; 11% with bullying; 9% with their children's use of social media and the internet; 8% with financial or monetary problems; and 8% with their children's peers.

Parents most commonly expressed concern over their child's future and safety. The most common problems encountered by parents were communication issues, reported by 55%, having enough time to spend with their children, reported by 52%, and demands for material things, reported by 51%.

Intact family households mostly reported problems with communication, discipline and school work. Families with younger children were more prone to common in house problems, from fussy eating to excessive social media use,

as would be expected. Children in fly in fly out families were found to experience higher pressure to succeed than other demographics.

Single parents were found to be at significantly higher risk of financial problems, with a far higher proportion reporting that they struggle to provide the basic necessities. Single parent families and blended families reported greater problems with bullying, depression and other psychological problems, exposure to cigarettes, alcohol and other drugs, and exposure to domestic violence. These families highlighted a significant need for parenting support services.

Many of these specific issues and concerns align strongly with other recently published studies. They represent the foundation for defining the interventions, information and advice that parents require.

Family members and friends represent a critical support mechanism, being utilised by 64% of respondents. However, there is a defined need for both self-help mechanisms and professional organisations to provide general information and advice, as well as specific specialist information, counselling and services.

Most respondents recognise that their parenting skills were passed on from their parents. An overwhelming 91%

agreed that they talked directly to their children to find out what their needs and wants were.

A factor analysis found five main categories of parental issues and concerns:

- peer conflict and self-esteem
- family dysfunction
- common concerns
- IT and social influences
- pressure to succeed

The Parenting Perception Report showed that around one fifth of families are coping very well and do not report any particularly challenging issues with their parenting. However, the remainder are all subject to a range of concerns in varying degrees. These parents can be segmented to provide a profile of their demographic and their parenting needs. Greater detail is contained in the following report.



## Background & Objective

Effective parenting is important.

For Western Australians the parenting experience not only impacts day to day lives, it can also have long term societal effects. Research has shown that the effectiveness of parenting is a significant determinant in the likelihood of childhood illnesses and accidents, teenage pregnancy, substance misuse, truancy, school disruption, unemployment, juvenile offending and mental illness. Many of these issues act as precursors to further problems in adulthood.

As a provider of parenting services, Anglicare WA strives to understand the issues and challenges of concern to parents across Perth and Regional WA. In order to build upon our existing bank of knowledge, a comprehensive research program was required.

In 2012, we commissioned Painted Dog Research, a market research and strategy consultancy, to conduct a thorough investigation into the experiences of Western Australian parents.



## About the Research

In order to develop our survey, we conducted a four step research scheme.

First we ran an analysis of 2011 ABS Census Data for insight into current family structures and distribution. We conducted a thorough literature review of available research and reports on relationships and parenting. Next, we had an informal consultation with four focus groups. Each focus group consisted of a particular parenting demographic - intact families, single parent families, fly in fly out families, and blended families.

The information gathered in these stages was used to develop the survey questionnaire for the final stage of the project. Once the survey had been developed, Painted Dog conducted 810 surveys from the 17th of October to 7th November 2012. All respondents to the surveys were:

- residents of WA
- single or couple parent families with children from pre-primary to year 12
- parents, foster parents, carer or guardian of the children in the household

Four hundred respondents came from the Perth Metropolitan Region, 100 came from the Great Southern, 100 from the South West, 100 from the Kimberley and 100 from the Pilbara. These are all regions in which Anglicare WA services are located. The data was post-weighted to reflect the population distribution with each region and Metropolitan area based on ABS 2011 Census data.

Of our respondents:

- 72% were female
- 37% reported an annual household income of less than \$75 000
- 71% were working
- 11% were from FIFO families
- 32% were born outside of Australia

The surveys in the metropolitan region were completed online, while the regional surveys were conducted over the telephone. The survey itself took an average of 22 minutes to complete.

In this report, percentages have been rounded. Not all results necessarily add up to 100.

In this report the Australian Institute of Family Studies definition of family types is used:

### Intact family

A couple family containing at least one child who is the natural or foster child of both members of the couple, and no child who is the step child of either member of the couple.

### Blended Family

A couple family containing one or more children at least one of whom is the stepchild of either member of the couple.

### Single Parent Family

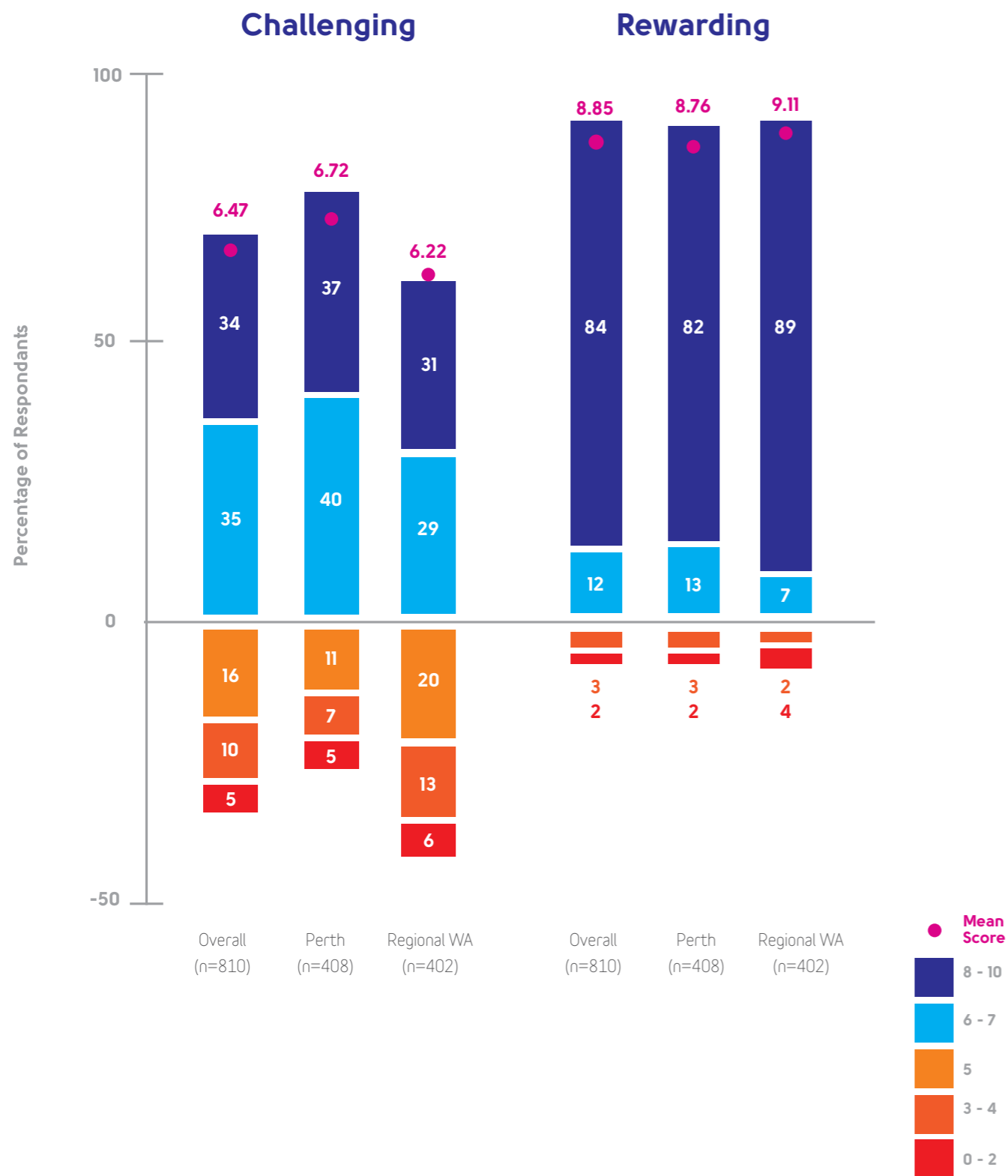
A family consisting of a lone parent with at least one child who is also usually resident in the household.

### Fly in Fly out Family

A family where at least one parent is involved in regularly working away from home for periods of time.

## Key Findings





## Challenge & Reward

Questions: Taking everything into account in terms of being a parent, carer or guardian and your experiences to date as a parent and with your children, using a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is not at all challenging and 10 is extremely challenging, how would you rate your experiences as a parent, carer or guardian?

And taking everything into account in terms of being a parent, carer or guardian and your experiences to date as a parent and with your children, using a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is not at all rewarding and 10 is extremely rewarding, how would you rate your experiences as a parent, carer or guardian?

Parenting was regarded as an often difficult experience, but one that was ultimately worthwhile and satisfying.

Parents in Perth found parenting more challenging and less rewarding, than Regional WA parents.

We asked the respondents to rate on a scale of zero to ten how challenging and rewarding they found their experience as a parent. The results showed that being a parent is moderately challenging, with an average score of 6.5, but also highly rewarding, with an average score of 8.8. While this confirmed the existence of problems and issues for parents, it also proved the value of the experience and the need for investment in parental support.

Parents in Perth were significantly more likely to rate parenting as more challenging and less rewarding, compared to Regional WA.

Blended families rated their experiences as parents as significantly less rewarding than intact families. However, their results were still very positive.

## Issues & Challenges (Unprompted)

Question: Thinking back over the past 12 months or so, what would be some of the parenting issues and challenges that you have faced?

When asked to name concerns unprompted, the most commonly identified issue was with education and schooling - 27% of respondents reporting some sort of challenge in this area. Ensuring that children did their homework was the most prominent of these, being reported by 12% of the total respondents. This was noticeably a higher concern amongst fly in fly out families.

Discipline was a significant concern for parents with children in secondary school.

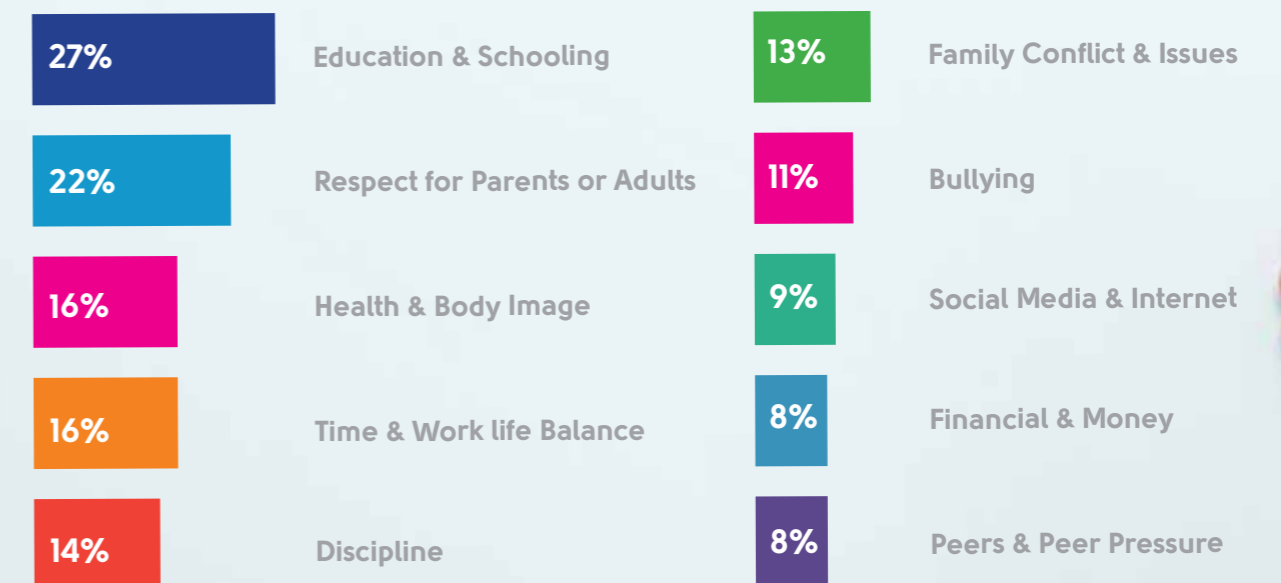
Issues with health and body image were reported by 16% of respondents. Eating issues were a significantly higher concern amongst Perth families and younger, 25-34 year old parents. 79% of these younger parents only had pre-primary to year 6 age children.

Single parent families reported difficulty balancing their time and were more concerned with financial pressures, such as the cost of school fees and social activities for their children.

Discipline was a more prominent concern for older parents, over 55 years old. 75% of this group had children in secondary school.



### Parenting Issues, Concerns & Challenges (Unprompted)



## Issues & Challenges (Prompted)

*Questions: The following is a list of issues, challenges and concerns that have been raised by other parents and for each of them, please rate the extent to which you have personally faced or have had to deal with each one over the past 12 months.*

*Please use a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means you have not experienced this issue at all and 10 means you have experienced this issue a great deal?*

When presented with a list of issues, concerns and challenges associated with parenting, the majority of respondents identified general relationship problems as the most commonly experienced. 55% of overall respondents found that they had experienced trouble with effectively communicating with their children, 34% reported this experience a great deal. 52% expressed concern over having enough time to spend with their children, 28% reported this experience a great deal. 44% reported trouble with finding an appropriate disciplinary method, 21% reported this experience a great deal. These common issues did not represent a serious risk to the families experiencing them, but were representative of the day to day challenges of parenting.

Single parent and fly in fly out families were more likely to experience demands from their children for things like money, technology and clothes. Their children were also more likely to have experienced bullying, both directly and via social media and express concern about their body image.

Issues with media technology affected the respondents diversely. Problems with the amount of time spent on phones, computers and video games were rated on average as 5.27 out of ten. Single parent families and families in Perth were more likely to find this a problem. Parents over 55 with predominantly older children had trouble controlling their children's internet use, and were concerned about the types of content they may be accessing.

Regional families reported significantly less trouble with a number of issues on the list, including: communicating with their children, having enough time to spend with their children, controlling how much time their children spend on media technology, disciplining their children, setting boundaries for their children, and conflict between their children and their peers.

Children in fly in fly out families were more likely to experience pressure to succeed in academic, sporting and other pursuits. These expectations came both externally and from the children themselves.

Parents between 35-44 years of age were more likely to experience conflict with their children.

Serious crises were comparatively less common. Concerns with exposure to violence were reported by 8% of respondents. Difficulty providing the basic necessities was reported by 17%, and was predictably more common amongst families with an income of less than \$75 000.

Of some concern was the finding that the 25% of respondents reported issues with depression and other psychological problems.

Single parent families were at a noticeably higher risk of more serious issues. Single parent families reported far greater economic stress, psychological problems, and exposure to violence. It was clear that single parent households faced highly intense problems at a greater frequency than other family types. This identified them as a group likely to require assistance in their parenting efforts.

**Conflict with their children was common for parents between 35 and 44 years of age.**



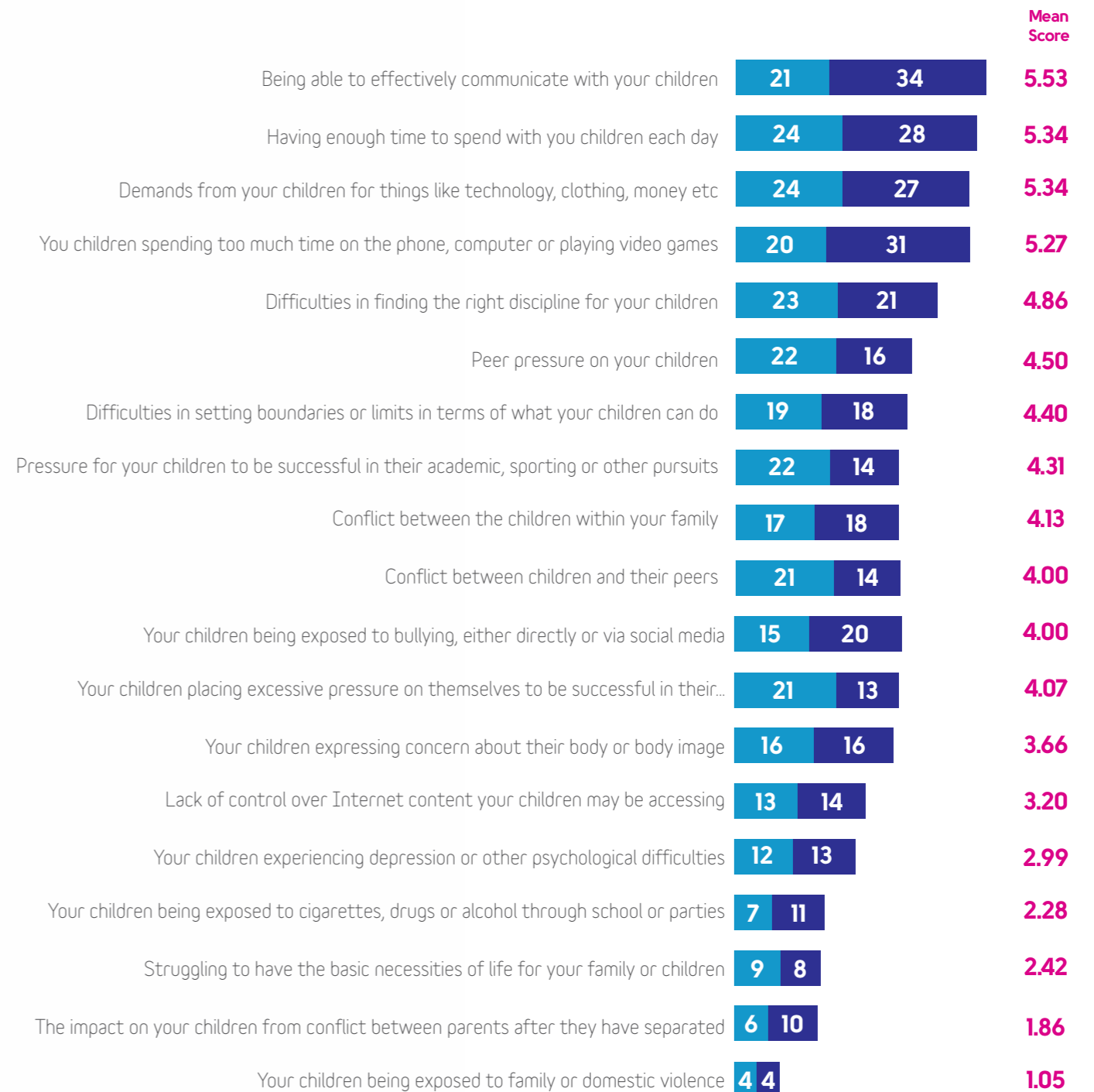
Children in fly in fly out families experience pressure to succeed in academic, sporting and other pursuits.

A quarter of parents worry about psychological problems.

Single parents are concerned about the more serious issues.



## Issues & Challenges Personally Faced / Dealt With Over the Past 12 Months (Prompted)



%  
■ Experienced (6-7)  
■ Experienced a great deal (8-10)

## Factor Analysis

The list of issues, challenges and concerns faced by parents could be reduced to five factors.

### Peer Conflict and Self-Esteem

These parents see their children being subject to bullying and conflict amongst their peers. Their peers may subject them to pressures to behave in certain ways or undertake undesirable behaviours and they may experience body image difficulties and depression or other psychological difficulties.

### Family Dysfunction

These parents have observed an impact on their children due to family conflict, family violence and domestic violence. They may also struggle to provide the basic necessities for their children.

### Common Concerns

These parents experience a range of issues and concerns driven by the pressures of day to day life, including setting boundaries, finding enough quality time to spend with their children, finding appropriate disciplinary methods, communicating effectively with their children and experiencing conflict between siblings.

### IT and Social Influences

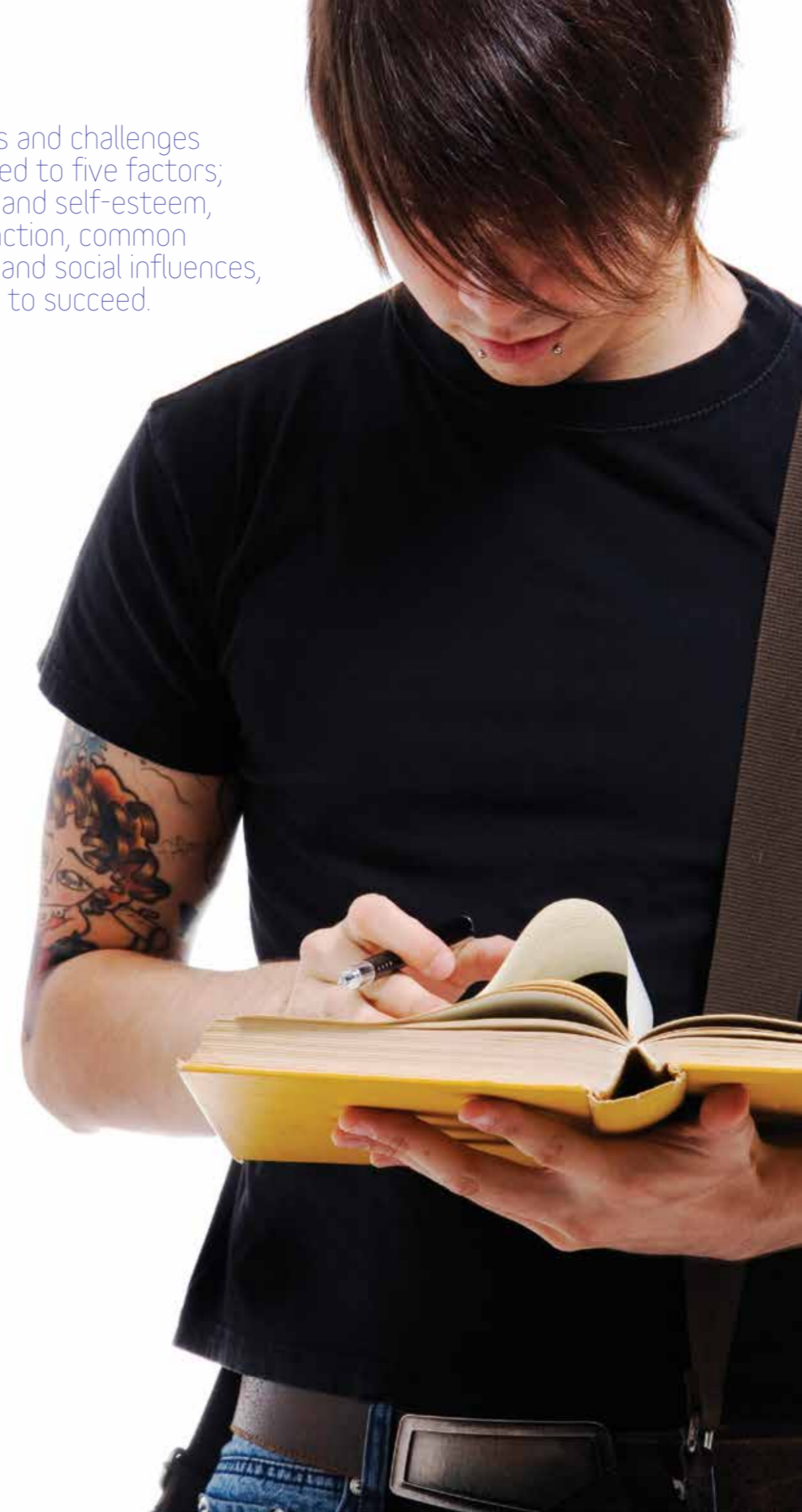
These parents are concerned over the internet content their children may be accessing and the time they spend on mobile phones, computers and video games. In addition, exposure to drugs and alcohol is a major concern.

### Pressure to Succeed

These parents have seen their children exposed to external pressures to succeed academically or in sporting pursuits. Their children may also put excessive pressure on themselves to succeed in these pursuits.

Two additional elements raised unprompted but not included in the prompted list relate to respect for adults and personal safety - these would most likely fall within the Common Concerns Factor.

The 19 issues and challenges can be reduced to five factors; peer conflict and self-esteem, family dysfunction, common concerns, IT and social influences, and pressure to succeed.



## Confidence & Influencers on Parenting Skills & Abilities

Questions: On a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is not at all confident and 10 is extremely confident, how confident would you say you are with your parenting skills and abilities?

Using a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is strongly disagree and 10 is strongly agree, which of the following would you say have influenced your parenting skills and abilities?

Despite the barrage of issues, concerns and challenges that they face, parents generally feel very assured with their parenting skills and abilities. Six out of ten respondents reported that they are extremely confident with their parenting skills. They said talking to their children about their needs and wants is the most influential factor in their parenting skills and abilities. Communication was critical.

An overwhelming 91% of respondents agreed that they talked directly to their children to find out what their needs and wants were.

Most respondent's parenting skills and knowledge were passed on from their parents, with 70% reporting their parents as an influence and 66% reporting that they were strong influences. 64% reported general family and friends as influences.

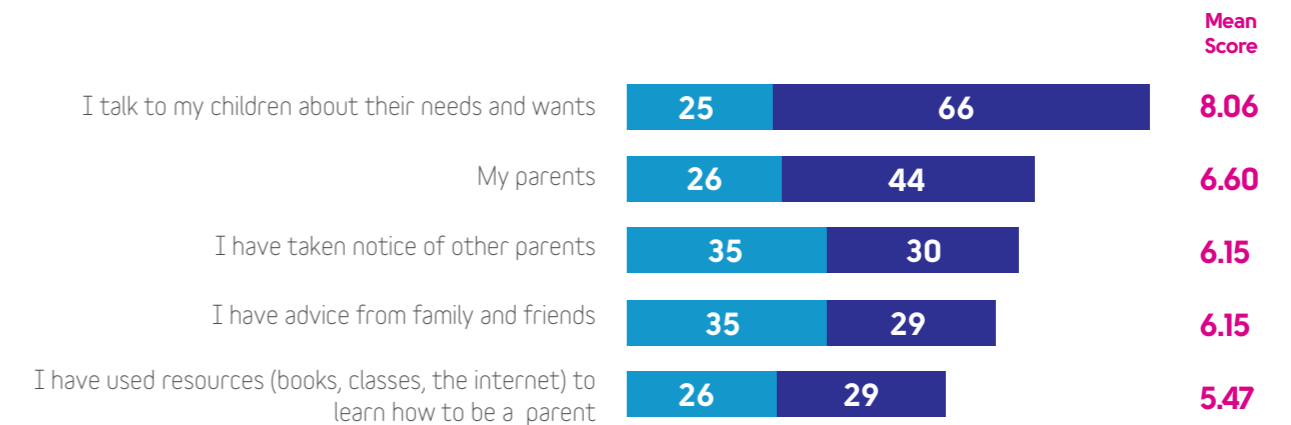
65% of respondents said that they learn by taking notice of other parents.

55% of respondents said that they utilised resources such as classes, books and the internet to develop their parenting skills and knowledge. Thirty five to 44 year old parents were more likely than other ages to have used parenting resources.

More than half of parents use external resources to help them with parenting.

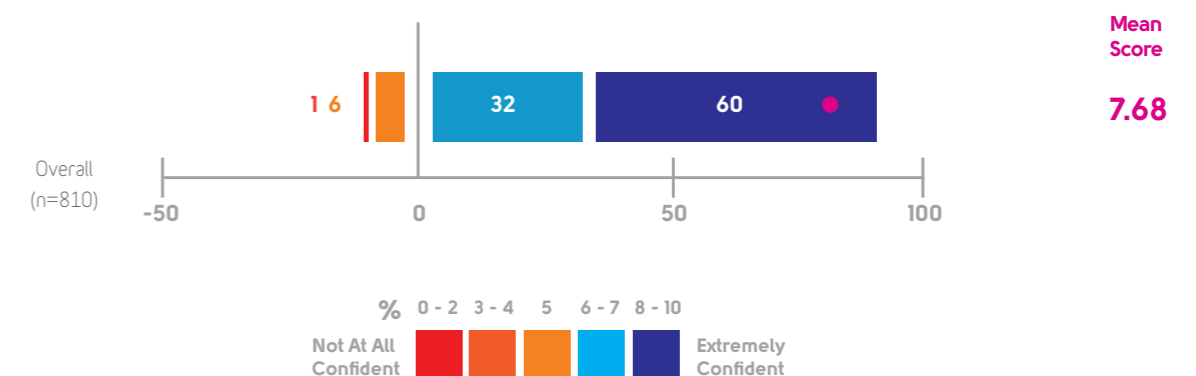
## Influencers of Parenting Skills & Abilities

Parents are influenced by talking to their children.



## Parenting Skills & Abilities Confidence

Most parents are extremely confident with parenting.



# Behaviour Management

Question: Using a scale of 0 to 10 where 0 is never and 10 is quite frequently, how often do you use the following forms of behaviour management with your children?

Negative methods of discipline were more common than positive methods.

The two most common forms of behavioural management were verbal reprimands and giving rewards. 74% of respondents said that they often managed their children's behaviour with verbal reprimands, with 47% doing so frequently. 66% often used rewards such as treats or computer time, with 37% doing so frequently.

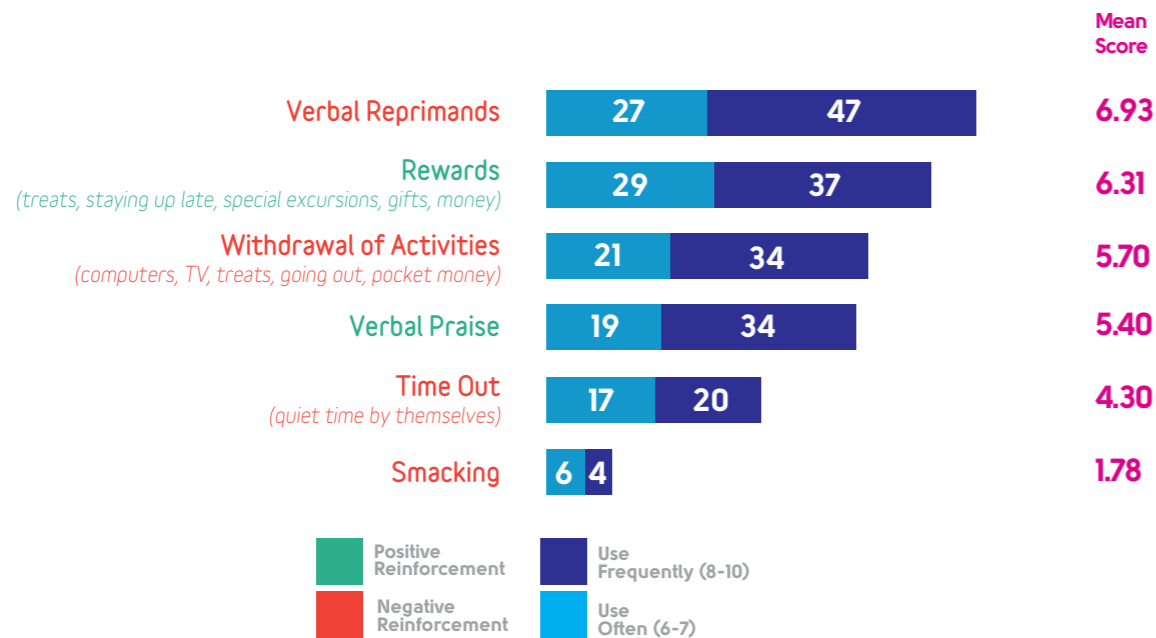
Physical methods were noticeably far less common. Only 4% of respondents smacked their children frequently, and 74% reported never smacking their children.

Forty five to 54 year old parents, who were more likely to have older children, were the most likely to use verbal reprimands and withdrawal of activities such as computers, television and going out.

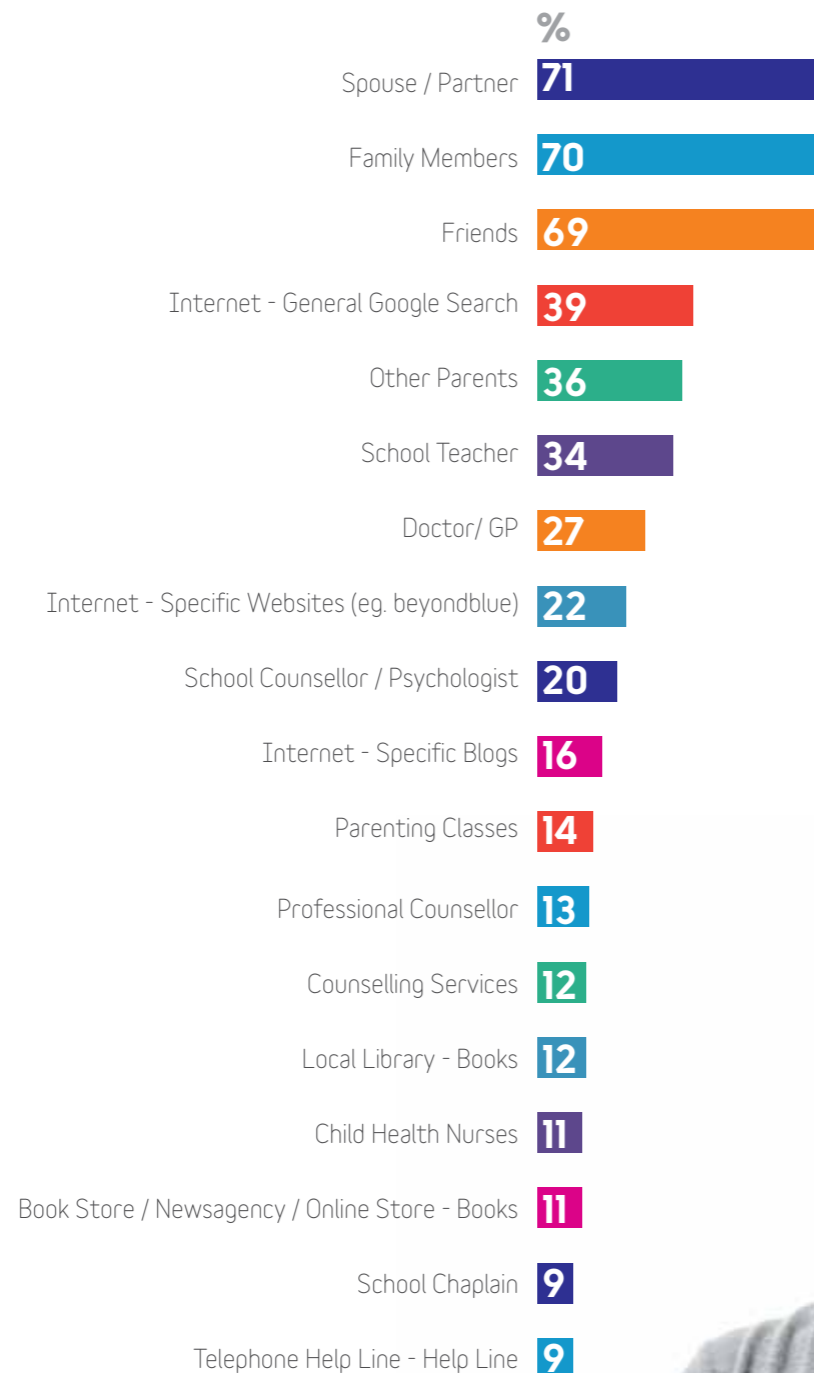
Fly in fly out families were more likely to offer rewards and treats.

Perth families were substantially less likely to verbally praise their children than regional families.

Younger parents, 25 to 34 years old, with predominantly younger children, were far more likely to give their children a time out when they misbehaved.



Perth parents are using online, school and professional services more than regional parents.



## Sources for Information, Assistance & Advice

*Questions: If you needed any information, assistance or advice in relation to a parenting issue or concern, where would you go, how would you obtain the information or who would you talk to?*

*And where else would you go, how would you obtain the information or who would you talk to if you needed any information, assistance or advice in relation to a parenting issue or concern?*

When we asked the respondents where they go for information, assistance and advice we found that parents' primary support networks were centered around spouses, family members and friends. 71% of respondents said they consulted their spouse or partner for parenting advice, 70% said they consulted family members and 69% said they consulted friends. These three sources were reported with significantly more frequency than any other, indicating that parents prefer to stay within their trusted inner circle when discussing their children.

Parents living in the Kimberley were significantly less likely to receive support from their wider family, possibly due to their remoteness or relocation for work purposes.

In comparison, professional channels represented secondary mechanisms, used only during a crisis or when other most likely advice was not available. Professional counselling services were only utilised by 12% of parents and telephone helplines by 9%. These resources were used significantly more amongst Perth parents.

Interestingly, while parenting professionals were underutilised, school teachers were approached relatively frequently. 34% of respondents reported that they would speak to a school teacher.

Kimberley parents were less likely to receive support from their extended family.

# Desired Parenting Information & Advice

Question: *What parenting-related information or advice would you find most useful, including any information or advice you can't currently access or don't know where to find?*

We asked the respondents what kinds of parenting related information they were seeking. One third of parents did not feel that they needed any information or advice beyond what they currently had access to. However, seven key areas of desired information were identified.

First and foremost was the desire for greater knowledge of where information can be accessed.

14% of respondents reported that they would like to know about more parenting resources. 7% of the total respondents said they would like to know about resources hosted by other parents, such as blogs, groups and forums.

9% of respondents desired greater knowledge of mental illness and psychological difficulties, with 5% wishing to gain a better understanding of their children's behavioural problems.

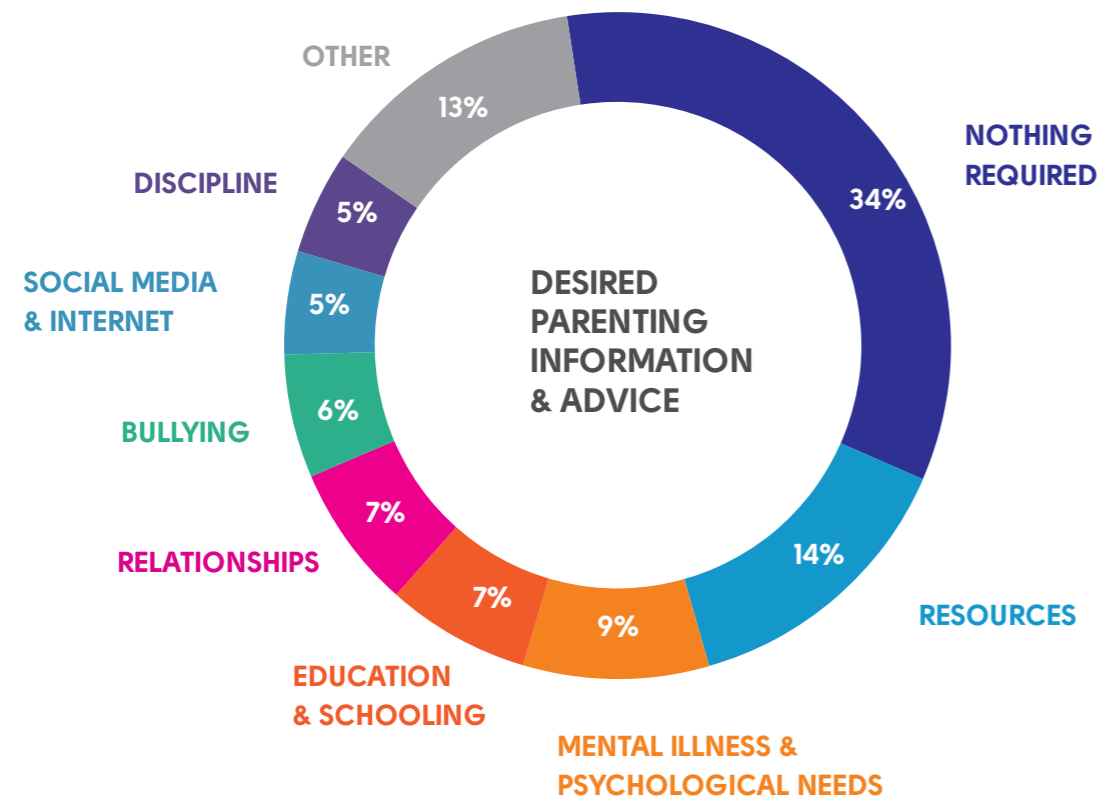
7% of respondents desired greater information about education and schooling, with the majority of these wanting to know about school-sponsored parenting classes.

7% of respondents desired greater knowledge of how children deal with relationships. Of these, the majority of respondents said they wanted to know more about how to deal specifically with teenage relationships.

6% of respondents desired greater knowledge about bullying, particularly about the effectiveness of school policies.

5% of respondents desired greater knowledge of social media and the internet. Much of this desire was focussed on internet safety, with 4% of respondents wishing to know more about general safety and the remaining 1% wishing to know more about the dangers of social media.

5% of respondents desired greater knowledge about discipline. 4% of the total respondents wanted to know about appropriate disciplinary methods.



**correct ways to discipline children/  
successful methods**

**mental health/behavioural issues/child  
psychology/communication**

**general advice on dealing with  
teenagers/relationships**

**resources/specialist  
orgs/internet/google**

**internet safety /limit usage/restrict sites**

**school sponsored parenting classes/  
seminars/lectures**

**advice and help from other parents/  
spouse/family and friends with kids**

**website/research knowledge/safety/  
effective use of internet**

**advice and guidance on specific issues/  
professional counselling**

**dealing with bullying/  
school policies that  
actually work**

**health/eating disorders/build  
self-esteem/confidence**



# Cluster Analysis

A cluster analysis is a class of statistical techniques used to find patterns in data. It determines if data exhibits "natural" groupings or clusters of relatively homogeneous observations. Objects in a cluster are similar to each other and dissimilar to objects outside the cluster, particularly objects in other clusters. Cluster analysis is an interdependent technique;

it makes no distinction between dependent and independent variables. The entire set of interdependent relationships is examined.

When running a cluster analysis on the 19 issues and challenges (as can be seen on page 14 of this report) faced by parents, a six cluster solution emerged.

## The Six Parenting Segments

### NO WORRIES

I am yet to experience any of the five issues and concern factors to any significant degree at this stage.

I rate being a parent as more rewarding compared to others.

22%

### PRESSURE TO SUCCEED

My main issues and challenges centre around seeing my children exposed to external pressures to succeed academically or in sporting pursuits, or my children putting excessive pressure on themselves to succeed in these pursuits.

I rate being a parent more rewarding compared to others.

18%

### SOCIAL ACCEPTANCE & MENTAL HEALTH

My main issues and challenges centre around external, peer influence concerns involve seeing my children being exposed to bullying and conflict amongst their peers. Their peers may subject my kids to pressures to behave in certain ways or undertake undesirable behaviours and as a result, my kids may be experiencing issues concerning their body image and depression or psychological difficulties.

18%

### COMMON IN HOME CONCERNS

My main issues and challenges centre around a wide range of common in-home issues and concerns driven by the pressures of day to day life, including setting boundaries for my kids, finding enough quality time to spend with my children each day, finding appropriate disciplinary methods, communicating effectively with my children and I experience conflict between my children.

17%

### IT & ANTI SOCIAL INFLUENCES

My main issues and challenges centre around the internet and the content my children may be accessing, as well as the time spent on mobile phones, computers and video games. In addition, exposure to drugs and alcohol at school or parties is a major concern.

14%

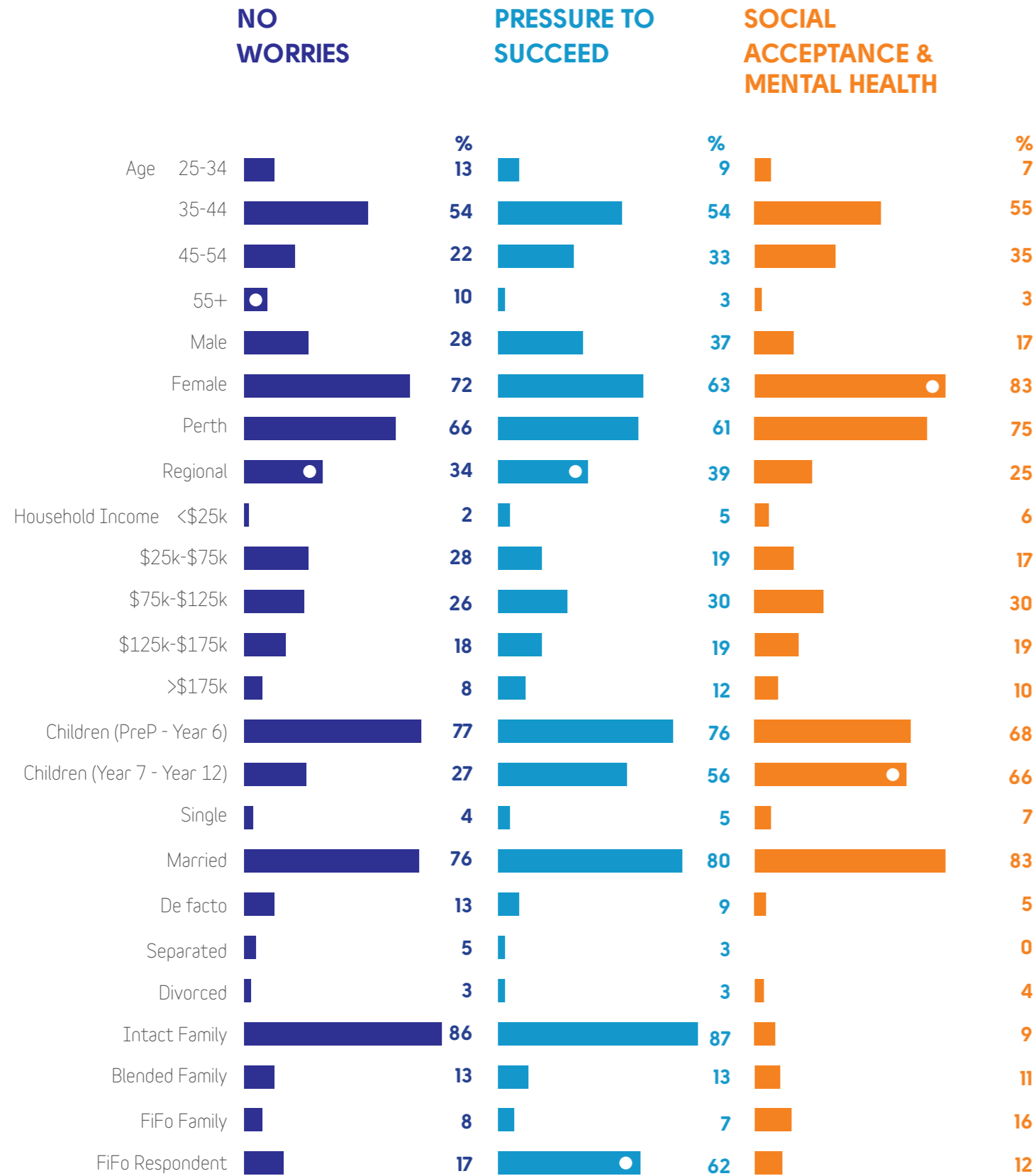
### FAMILY CONFLICT

The issues and challenges I experience, cut across all five issue and concern factors, but my main concern is that I am a parent who has observed an impact on my children due to conflict between separated parents. I also struggle to provide the basic necessities for my children and in some cases, my children have been exposed to family or domestic violence.

I rate being a parent more challenging and less rewarding compared to others.

11%

# Segment Profiles - Demographics



Statistically higher significance



# FOR TODAY, FOR TOMORROW



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