

Parenting Infants And Toddlers Today

Research Findings

Based On A Survey Among
Parents Of Children Ages Birth To Three Years Old

Conducted On Behalf Of:

ZERO TO THREE

By Hart Research Associates

November 2009

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Research Methodology And Overview Of Sample

Parenting Infants and Toddlers Today is a public opinion poll of parents of children ages birth to 36 months conducted for ZERO TO THREE by Hart Research Associates and funded by MetLife Foundation. From June 4 to 11, 2009, Hart Research conducted 1,615 interviews among parents of infants and toddlers. The full sample includes oversamples of 201 African-American parents and 204 Hispanic parents. The African-American and Hispanic oversamples were weighted to their proper proportions of the overall population. The Hispanic interviews were conducted by a bilingual phone bank in order to ensure that the sample included Spanish-speaking parents and guardians. Based on U.S. Census data, the sample is representative of parents of children ages birth to three years old, as it pertains to basic demographic characteristics such as race, ethnicity, age, and educational attainment.

Hart Research Associates used a mixed methodology, employing both telephone (604 phone interviews) and Internet survey technologies (606 on-line interviews). Because about one in three 18- to 29-year-olds (the prime target ages for this study) now live in households with no wired phone, the Internet survey component was added to ensure these parents would be included. The phone and on-line sample were drawn from panels of households that have children ages birth to 36 months. The phone panel is compiled from a number of direct response sources, including subscriptions, surveys, consumer response cards, Internet sites, and point-of-sale transaction data. The on-line panel is compiled using a double opt-in recruiting process. Data from both panels are regularly verified for accuracy.

Each respondent was asked to answer the survey questions by referring to a specific child age birth to 36 months. Parents who have more than one child in this age range were asked to focus on one of those children, who was selected randomly by the parent. The sample consists of 15% of parents of children age eight months or younger, 28% of parents of children ages nine months to 18 months, and 57% of parents of children ages 19 months to 36 months.

The questionnaire was designed for an interview that would require approximately 20 minutes when administered by phone; the on-line questionnaire was identical to the phone version so the data collected via the two methodologies were easily merged together.

This report highlights the principal findings that emerge from the survey.

Sample Overview

	<u>White Parents</u>	<u>African-American Parents</u>	<u>Hispanic Parents</u>
	%	%	%
Fathers	37	23	28
Mothers	63	77	72
Age: 18 to 24	12	23	17
Age: 25 to 29	26	30	29
Age: 30 to 34	26	20	25
Age: 35 to 39	21	16	18
Age: 40 and over	15	11	11
High school or less	36	47	55
Vocational/some college	31	33	29
Four-year college degree/more	33	20	16
Married/live with partner	89	62	78
Separated or divorced	7	11	12
Single	4	27	9
First-time parent	36	35	39

The survey was designed to meet several objectives, all with the intention of informing the work of ZERO TO THREE:

- Explore the issues and challenges that parents of children ages birth to three confront today;
- Identify what information and support sources parents of young children turn to, where gaps exist, and how to best communicate with parents about important parenting issues and challenges;
- Develop a better understanding of the factors that influence approaches to parenting. This includes understanding perceptions of key social, emotional, and cognitive developmental benchmarks, expectations for when young children are capable of achieving such benchmarks, and understanding cultural influences on parenting such as beliefs, values, and goals; and,
- Better understand how parents interpret and respond to their children's behavior.

Executive Summary

Parenting often is touted as life's most rewarding job. Parenting can be a joyful experience but also can be very challenging. This survey of 1,615 parents of children ages birth to three sheds some meaningful light on the experiences of parents today, what factors they feel shape their approach to parenting, who they rely on for child care assistance, and who or what they value as trusted sources when questions arise regarding childrearing. The survey also reveals important new information regarding parents' beliefs and misconceptions about the factors that foster healthy development and their expectations for when young children are capable of reaching different developmental milestones.

The full report provides a wealth of information that helps us to better understand these areas of exploration in great detail, and across different subgroups of parents. In reviewing the findings, it is important to keep in mind that while this survey can help identify where differences exist, it cannot tell us *why* differences in perspective, attitudes, and knowledge exist among various groups of parents or how these factors impact the parenting experience or individual children's development. We do know that a family's cultural beliefs and values, and their individual experiences, all play a role in the development of these different perspectives. However, understanding how these issues impact parenting experiences is beyond the scope of this research.

Key Findings:

Parents understand the importance of a number of experiences that are critical to young children's development.

This research reveals the good news that parents are getting the message that participating in certain activities and experiences with their young child will help foster the child's healthy development. Virtually all parents (93%) understand the importance of reading to young children in fostering cognitive development and nearly as many parents for whom English is not their primary language appreciate the importance of speaking (88%) and reading (83%) to their baby in their native language. While still a fairly substantial majority, fewer parents see the importance of talking to (74%) and singing to (70%) very young babies or newborns in facilitating cognitive development.

A fairly strong majority of parents also understand the importance of engaging in certain activities and experiences that support their child's social-emotional development. For example, more than 80% of parents believe that letting a child play with other children, comforting a child when upset, and setting and enforcing rules foster social development.

Many parents lack a clear understanding of when young children are capable of reaching certain developmental milestones.

Generally, parents demonstrate less understanding of when children are capable of reaching emotional milestones than cognitive or physical ones. This lack of understanding may lead to parents having unrealistic expectations for their

children, and ultimately frustration. This is demonstrated by the fact that many of the challenging behaviors that parents are vexed by involve their child's emotional development. The most commonly mentioned childrearing challenges that parents face include tantrums, crying, and the child not being able to control his or her emotions.

Parents do not fully understand how deeply babies' and toddlers' social-emotional development is affected by certain early experiences.

A significant majority of parents do not realize that by six months most babies can experience feelings such as sadness and fear (69%) and can be affected by their parents' moods (65%). Many parents also are not aware that most children are capable of feeling good or bad about themselves between ages one to two, with a majority believing that this happens later in a child's development.

Family is critical for parents of young children, both as a source of support and information, and as an underlying influence that shapes their approach to parenting.

Parents who rely on someone other than themselves or their spouse for child care mostly rely on a family member to provide such care. One in four parents relies on the child's grandparent and 9% rely on another family member to provide child care.

When questions arise regarding parenting, parents trust family members, especially mothers, as a source of day-to-day information. Nearly half of parents (47%) turn to their mother or mother-in-law when seeking information about parenting, 16% turn to a relative other than a parent or in-law, and 12% turn to their spouse when parenting questions arise.

Family also plays a very important role in influencing a parent's approach to childrearing. More than eight in 10 parents say that the way their parents raised them has a major (53%) or moderate (30%) influence on their approach to parenting.

Faith has a significant influence on parenting approaches.

Parents also credit their faith and religious background, which often is passed on through family, as having a powerful influence on how they approach childrearing. Two-thirds of parents identify their faith as having a major (41%) or moderate (23%) influence on their approach to parenting. Faith is a more powerful influence than other factors, including input from professionals and information garnered from parenting books and magazines.

The research also reveals that parents of young children face a number of challenges today.

Parents find it difficult to strike a balance.

Most parents experience challenges related to balancing their many competing responsibilities. Nearly six in 10 parents feel that there is room for improvement in balancing the priorities of family, work, and other responsibilities. Likely

contributing to this is the fact that a significant proportion of parents (45%) feel they could benefit from more help or support when they are overwhelmed with their parenting responsibilities.

The economy negatively impacts many parents' child care arrangements.

Further compounding the challenges many parents face as they work to find a healthy life balance is that millions of parents are feeling the negative impact of the economic downturn, which is specifically affecting their child care arrangements. The recession has forced one in four parents to make adjustments to their child care arrangements. One in five of these parents reports that they simply cannot afford child care, 11% say their spouse has taken over child care duties due to losing a job, and 10% have cut back on child care hours.

Key Findings: An In-Depth Look

I. Childrearing Challenges That Parents Confront Today

Parenting can be a joyful and rewarding experience. But it can also be quite challenging. From the day-to-day responsibilities inherent in raising young children to the larger pressures that affect many families due to the economic downturn, parents of young children face a variety of challenges in today's world.

Safety tops the list of overall concerns.

Many parents' top-of-mind concerns about childrearing pertain to their child's safety and well-being. One in four parents says that worries about their children getting injured or hurt or their inability to protect their children from injury top the list of things they worry most about, and slightly fewer identify worries about their children getting sick or having health problems (21%)¹. Other concerns that some parents rank at the top of their list include their child doing well in school (13%) and discipline problems, including respecting and obeying authority (12%). Only 9% identify insecurities about their own parenting skills as a top concern.

Challenging behaviors that parents confront.

Temper tantrums (34%) and crying and controlling emotions (15%) top the list of childrearing challenges that parents identify.² Other issues that parents identify as main challenges include biting and fighting (14%), not listening (13%), sleeping and bedtime issues (11%), potty training (9%), and food and eating issues (8%).

Parents Rate Childrearing's Greatest Challenges *Proportion Rating Each As A Most Difficult Behavior*

	<u>All</u>	<u>Mothers</u>	<u>Fathers</u>
	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>
Temper tantrums	34	40	21
Controlling emotions, crying	15	15	16
Biting, fighting, hitting	14	16	9
Not listening	13	13	13
Sleep, bedtime issues	11	8	17
Potty training	9	10	9
Attitude, talking back	9	9	9
Eating, food issues	8	6	11

¹ Open-ended question: What are the two or three things that you worry about most when it comes to childrearing?

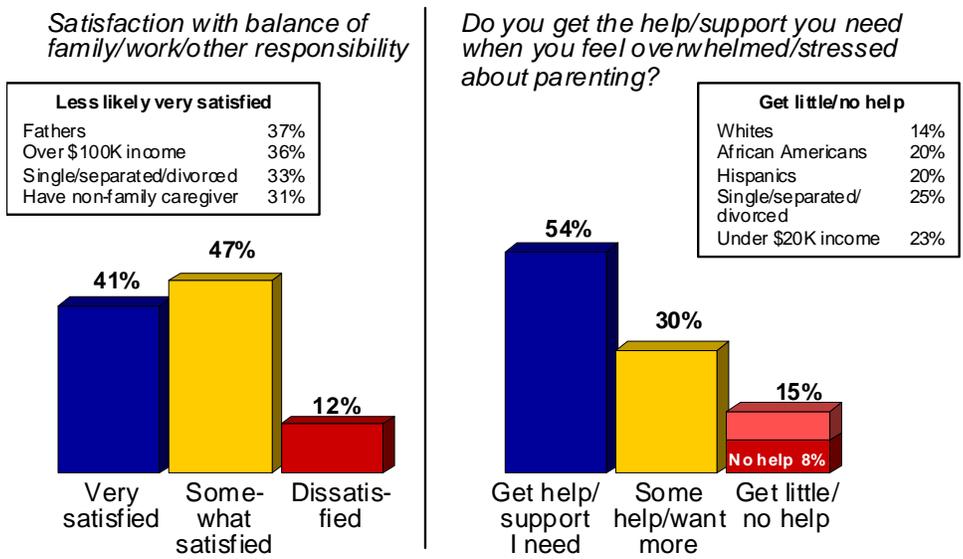
² Open-ended question: What are the two or three behaviors you find to be the most difficult when it comes to childrearing?

- Mothers and fathers have different perceptions of what they find challenging. Twice as many mothers as fathers identify temper tantrums as a top challenge and twice as many fathers as mothers identify sleep and bedtime issues as a top challenge.
- First-time parents are more likely than parents with multiple children to identify issues related to sleeping and bedtime (17% versus 8%) and issues related to eating (14% versus 5%) as top challenges.

Finding a balance is no small feat.

As any parent knows, the challenges of childrearing are not limited to those that are directly related to parenting. Many parents experience challenges related to balancing the many competing priorities of life.

Room For Improvement In Life Balance: More Support Needed



While 41% of parents are very satisfied with their life balance, nearly six in 10 feel that there is room for improvement on this front, with nearly half feeling somewhat satisfied and 12% feeling dissatisfied with their life balance. Some groups report being very satisfied at lower rates than parents overall. These include fathers, parents with household incomes of \$100,000 or more, parents who are single, separated or divorced, and those who rely on someone other than a family member for child care.

Many parents need more support.

An important component of parents balancing their many important priorities is receiving support when it is needed. While just over half of parents receive the help and support they need when overwhelmed or stressed out, the remaining 45% feel they could use additional support at times. Three in 10 parents receive some help and support, but would like more, and 15% either need a lot more help and support or say they do not receive any help and support when they need it. This translates into millions of parents who need additional assistance when they face parenting challenges or are overwhelmed.

Parents who feel that they need a lot more help and support at higher rates than the overall parent population include the following:

- Single, separated, or divorced parents (25%)
- Parents with annual household incomes less than \$20,000 (23%)
- Hispanic and African-American parents (20% each)

Child care arrangements.

A significant proportion of parents rely regularly on someone else to care for their child and most parents are satisfied with these arrangements. Half of parents (51%) have a regular caregiver for their child other than themselves or their spouse or partner and these parents most frequently rely on a family member to provide child care.

Half Have Regular Child Care Other Than Themselves Or Spouse/Partner



Child care provider*	
Grandparent	23%
Other family	9%
Friend/neighbor	3%
Day care center	14%
Day care in child's home	4%
Day care in provider's home	2%
Other	1%

* Volunteered responses to open-ended question

Have regular child care	
Whites	47%
African Americans	71%
Hispanics	55%
Single/separated/divorced	71%
Income \$100K/more	60%

- 23% of parents rely on the child's grandparent
- 14% use a child care center
- 9% rely on a family member other than the child's grandparent
- 4% use in-home child care

Not surprisingly, families in which both parents work (79%) and single, separated, or divorced parents (71%) rely on a regular caregiver at much higher rates.

- African Americans (71%) also have a regular caregiver at significantly higher rates than other parents. This is likely due to the fact that African-American parents are single, separated, or divorced at higher rates and therefore are more likely to need child care assistance.
 - 27% of African-American parents rely on the child's grandparent
 - 24% use a child care center
 - 20% rely on a family member other than the child's grandparent
- Parents with household incomes of \$100,000 or more also rely on a regular caregiver at higher rates (60%).
 - 22% rely on a child care center
 - 21% rely on the child's grandparent
 - 8% have a child care provider who comes to their home

Roughly six in 10 parents who do not rely on regular child care other than themselves, their spouse, or partner are stay-at-home parents, students, or unemployed. Approximately one in three has a spouse who is a stay-at-home parent, student, or is unemployed.

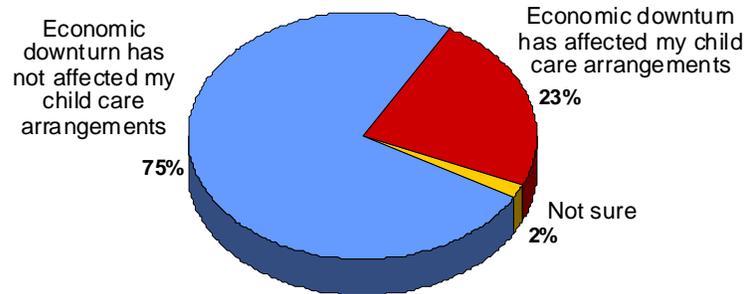
Parents report very high levels of satisfaction with their current child care arrangements, with more than nine in 10 feeling very (71%) or somewhat (23%) satisfied. High rates of satisfaction can be found among most subgroups. Only 5% of parents feel dissatisfied, and those who feel dissatisfied at much higher rates include the following:

- Parents who are not satisfied with their life balance (21% dissatisfied with their child care arrangements)
- Single, separated, or divorced parents (13%)

Impact of the economic downturn on child care arrangements.

The economic downturn has forced one-quarter of parents to make a change in their child care arrangements. This translates into millions of parents experiencing child care-related hardships across the country.

Economic Downturn Affects Child Care For One In Four Parents



Economy has affected child care arrangements			
Single/separated/divorced	32%	Whites	21%
Immigrants	32%	African Americans	27%
Income under \$20K	28%	Hispanics	27%

Some parents face these hardships at even higher rates:

- Single, separated, or divorced parents (32%)
- Low-income parents with household incomes less than \$20,000 (28%)
- African-American parents (27%)
- Hispanic parents (27%)

The most common ways in which the economic downturn has affected child care arrangements include the following:

- Not being able to afford child care (21%)
- A spouse who has lost a job assuming additional child care duties (11%)
- Cutting back on child care hours (10%)
- Making other child care arrangements (7%)
- The price of child care increasing (5%)
- Changing work schedules or splitting shifts to be able to care for the young child (5%)

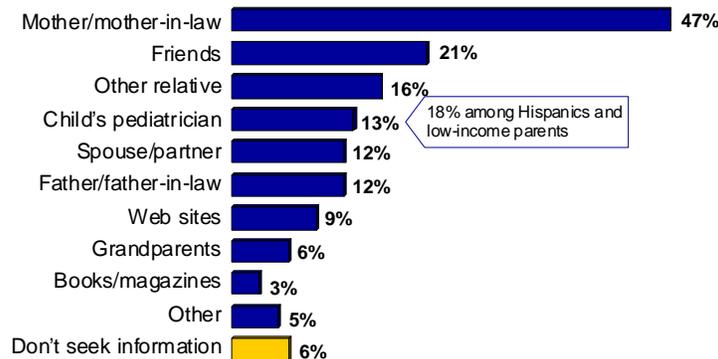
II. People And Sources Parents Rely On For Parenting Information

Who parents turn to for day-to-day input on parenting.

Given the degree to which many parents rely on family to help care for their children, it is not surprising to learn that family is a very important day-to-day source of information for parents of young children.

Family Is Important Day-To-Day Source Of Information

In your day-to-day life, to whom do you usually turn for information about child development and parenting?



Mothers are the family members most parents turn to for regular input. In fact, 47% of parents regularly turn to their mother or mother-in-law for information about child development and parenting.³ Mothers are an important source of parenting information across demographic subgroups, and especially for parents under age 25, 55% of whom turn to their mothers regularly for parenting information.

One in five parents turns to friends, 16% turn to relatives other than parents, in-laws, or grandparents, 13% turn to their child's pediatrician, 12% turn to their spouse or partner, and an equal proportion turn to their father or father-in-law for parenting information.

- Men are three times more likely than their female counterparts to turn to their spouse or partner for parenting information, with 21% of men doing so compared with only 7% of women.
- Hispanic parents (18%) and low-income parents with annual incomes less than \$20,000 (18%) are more likely than others to turn to their child's doctor for information.

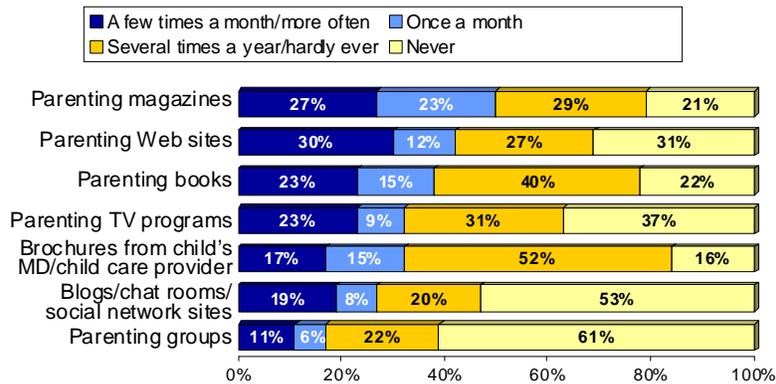
³ Open-ended question: In your day-to-day life, who do you usually turn to for information about child development and parenting?

Sources parents turn to for parenting information.

In today’s world there are myriad sources to which parents of young children can turn when they have questions or need information about parenting—from more traditional sources such as parenting books and magazines, to the many new resources the Internet provides, such as blogs and social networking Web sites.

Parents Turn To Magazines And Web Sites Most Frequently

How often do you turn to these sources for information on parenting?



Parenting magazines and Web sites are the sources to which parents turn most frequently. Half of parents turn to parenting magazines at least once a month and 42% turn to parenting Web sites with the same frequency.

- Parents with household incomes of \$100,000 or more are more likely to get information from Web sites, with 52% turning to Web sites for parenting information at least once a month.

While parents may not turn to parenting books with the same frequency as magazines or Web sites, they still are an important source of information. Thirty-eight percent of parents turn to parenting books at least once a month and 56% turn to books several times a year or more often. Similarly, most parents do not turn to brochures or fliers from pediatricians or child care providers with great frequency, but two-thirds access these kinds of resources several times a year or more.

Approximately one-third of parents turns to parenting TV programs at least once a month.

- Parents with household incomes less than \$20,000 are even more likely to turn to TV programs regularly, with 20% reporting that they do so at least once a week.

While parents do not rely on interactive social networking and communication Web sites as frequently as other information sources (68% of parents hardly ever or never access them), they are an important source of parenting information for certain subgroups of parents, and likely will grow in importance as computer and Internet use increasingly becomes a part of people's daily lives. Approximately one in four parents uses parenting blogs, chat rooms, or social networking Internet sites once a month or more frequently. Parents who turn to these sources for information once a week or more often include the following groups:

- Parents under age 25 (18%)
- Hispanic parents (18%)
- West Coast parents (17%)

First-time parents and parents of very young babies (less than nine months old) turn to most of the sources listed below more frequently than the overall parent population.

Proportion Who Turn To Each Source At Least Once A Month		
	<u>First-Time Parents</u>	<u>Parents Of Children Birth To 8 Months</u>
	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>
Parenting magazines	60	62
Parenting Web sites	55	53
Parenting books	47	53
Parenting TV programs	35	37
Brochures from child's MD/child care provider	42	47
Blogs/chat rooms/ social network sites	37	34
Parenting groups	22	16

This research also reveals variation across racial and ethnic groups, regarding the sources parents turn to regularly for parenting information.

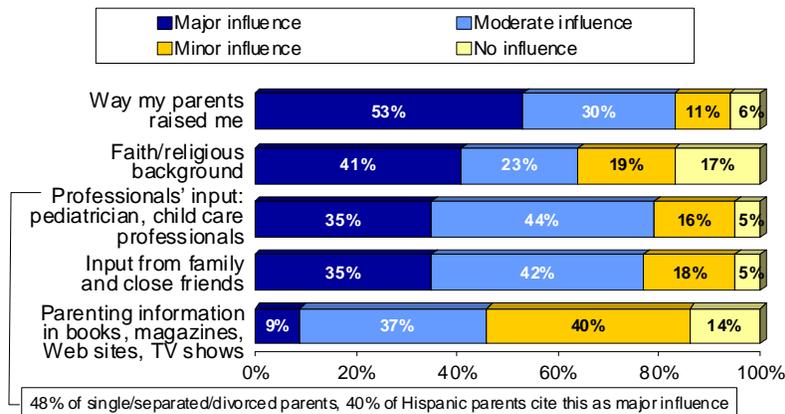
Proportion Who Turn To Each Source At Least Once A Month			
	<u>White Parents</u>	<u>African-American Parents</u>	<u>Hispanic Parents</u>
	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>
Parenting magazines	48	52	55
Parenting Web sites	41	39	47
Parenting books	34	45	42
Parenting TV programs	25	41	47
Brochures from child's MD/child care provider	26	49	43
Blogs/chat rooms/ social network sites	24	28	32
Parenting groups	14	17	18

III. Influences On Parenting

Family is the primary social building block across cultures. It is through family that values, customs, faith, and cultural traditions are passed to the next generation. Therefore, when exploring the factors that influence parents' general approach to childrearing (not whom they turn to when they have a question or need information), it is not surprising that family history, culture, and faith emerge as the most powerful influences.

Family History And Faith Are Powerful Influences On Parenting

How much influence does this have on your approach to parenting?



How a person was raised has a powerful influence on their approach to parenting.

More than half of parents (53%) say the way their parents raised them has a major influence on their approach to parenting and another 30% say it has a moderate influence.

- African Americans are substantially more likely than Hispanic or white parents to identify the way they were raised as having a major influence on their approach to parenting—61% of African-American parents report this compared with 52% of white parents and 49% of Hispanic parents.
- Fathers are more likely than mothers to identify the way their parents raised them as a major influence on their approach to parenting, with 59% of fathers reporting this compared with 50% of mothers.

Faith and religion also are powerful influences on parenting.

Two-thirds of parents say their faith or religious background has a major (41%) or moderate (23%) influence on their approach to childrearing.

- African-American parents (49%) are substantially more likely than Hispanic (35%) or white (42%) parents to identify this as having a major influence on their approach to parenting.

The influence of professionals on parenting.

Input from professionals, such as pediatricians and child care professionals, also influence the approach parents take to raising their children. One-third identifies these professional sources as having a major influence and 44% say they have a moderate influence on their approach to childrearing. Some notable subgroup differences include:

- Parents who are single, separated, or divorced (48% say major influence), and Hispanic parents (40% major influence) are more likely than others to identify input from professionals as a major influence.
- Parents of babies less than nine months old are more likely than parents of older children to rely on input from professionals; 39% and 34% respectively identify such input as having a major influence.
- First-time parents are more likely than parents who have multiple children to identify input from professionals as having a major influence on their parenting decisions; 38% and 33% respectively identify such input as having a major influence.

Other influences on parenting.

Given that many parents rely on family and close friends to care for their young children, and the significance that a majority of parents place on the way they were raised on influencing their approach to parenting, it is not surprising that three in four parents identify input from family and close friends as a major (35%) or moderate (42%) influence on their approach to parenting.

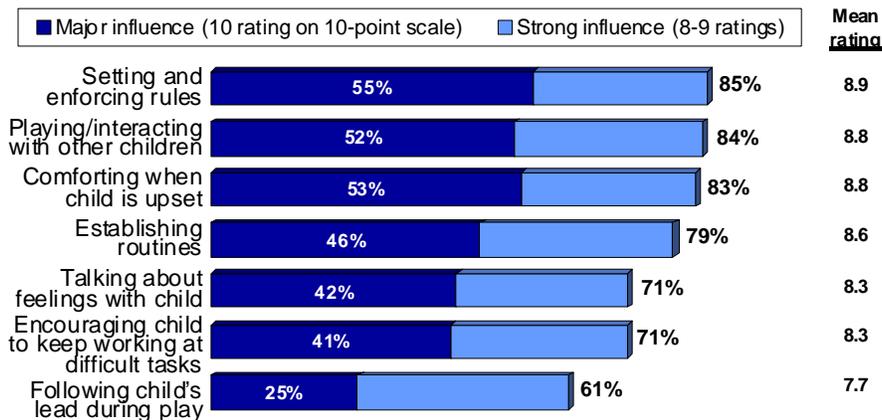
Slightly fewer than half of parents identify parenting information from books, magazines, Web sites, or TV shows as having a major (9%) or moderate (37%) influence on their approach to parenting.

IV. Parents' Perceptions Of Experiences That Influence Social, Emotional, and Cognitive Child Development

This research examines parents' perceptions of factors that influence young children's social, emotional, and cognitive development. The good news is that efforts over the years to help inform parents' understanding of child development and the experiences that play a positive role in fostering healthy growth may be paying off. However, there also are indications that these efforts may not be reaching all parents. This may be due to the fact that this information is not readily available, or because the information parents do receive is not consistent with their family's cultural beliefs or values. While this research does not shed light on why these differences exist, it does indicate that there is additional work to be done to improve outreach and dialogue on the experiences that influence child development with some parents.

Understanding Of Experiences That Foster Social/Emotional Development

Perceived influence of activities on supporting social and emotional development of children ages birth to three



A significant majority of parents understand that the following experiences have a strong or major influence on helping a child to develop socially and emotionally:⁴

- Setting and enforcing rules (85%),
- Giving a child opportunities to play and interact with other children (84%),
- Comforting a child when upset (83%),

⁴ Using a 10-point scale, parents were asked to rate the influence of a number of activities on helping a child age birth to three to develop socially, emotionally, and cognitively (10 means a major influence and one means little or no influence).

- Establishing routines (79%),
- Talking about feelings with a child (71%),
- Encouraging a child to keep working on a difficult task (71%).

Differences exist among various parent subgroups in their perception of the importance of these early experiences.

- Mothers are substantially more likely than fathers to believe that these experiences have a strong or major influence on the social and emotional development of a young child.
- Parents with multiple children are more likely to indicate the importance of many of the experiences (setting and enforcing rules, comforting a child when upset, and establishing routines).
- White parents are more likely than their African-American or Hispanic counterparts to identify setting and enforcing rules, comforting a child when upset, and encouraging a child to keep working at a difficult task as strong or major influences.
- African-American parents are less likely than their white or Hispanic counterparts to identify establishing routines and talking about feelings as having a strong or major influence on the social and emotional development of a young child.

Understanding Of Experiences That Foster Social/Emotional Development

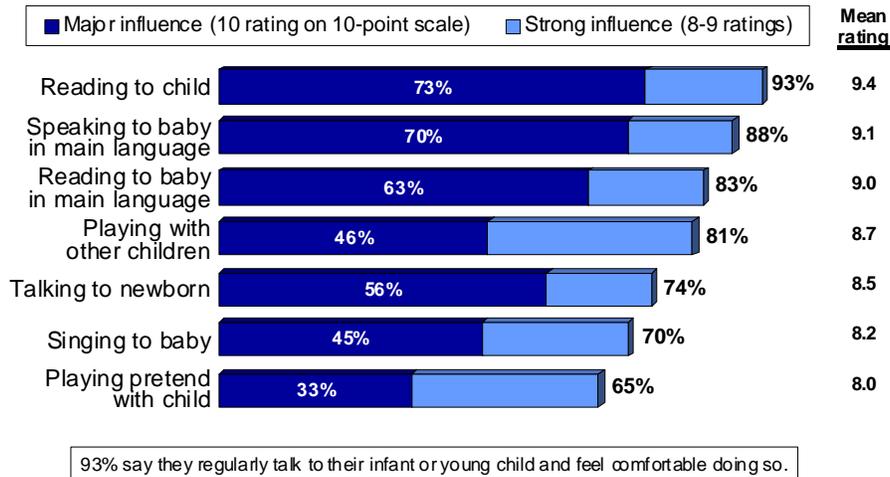
Perceptions Vary Among Subgroups

% rating each as a major/strong influence (ratings of 8, 9, 10)

	Whites	African Americans	Hispanics	First-time parents	Repeat parents
Setting and enforcing rules	87%	77%	77%	81%	86%
Comforting when child is upset	85%	75%	74%	80%	85%
Playing/interacting with other children	84%	79%	82%	85%	84%
Establishing routines	80%	72%	82%	75%	82%
Talking about feelings with child	70%	65%	74%	71%	71%
Encouraging child to keep working at difficult tasks	75%	66%	64%	69%	73%
Following child's lead during play	60%	59%	59%	62%	61%

Strong Understanding Of Experiences That Facilitate Learning

Perceived influence of activities on helping children ages birth to three learn



Parents demonstrate an even stronger understanding of the experiences that can help a young child develop cognitive skills. An overwhelming majority of parents (93%) understand that reading to a child has a strong or major influence on their cognitive development (73% of parents rate this a “10” on the 10-point scale).

- Parents for whom English is not their primary language understand the importance of speaking and reading to their young children in their native language. More than four in five parents understand that these experiences have a strong or major influence on helping young children develop cognitive skills.
- Parents who immigrated to the United States (15%) and Hispanic parents (12%) are more likely than others to sometimes feel uncomfortable talking to their young children because they do not understand or talk back.

There still is work to be done in helping parents to understand the importance of talking and singing to newborns or very young babies. While virtually all parents (93%) say they talk to their infant or young child regularly and are comfortable doing so, fewer recognize these experiences as important to the cognitive development of young children. Three in four parents identify talking to a newborn and 70% identify singing to a baby as strong or major influences on learning. This means that 25% to 30% of parents do not think these experiences have strong or major influences on a young child’s healthy development.

Mothers are substantially more likely than fathers to think that these experiences have an important influence on the cognitive development of young children.

Understanding Of Experiences That Facilitate Learning

Perceptions Vary Between Mothers And Fathers

% rating each as a major/strong influence (ratings of 8, 9, 10)

	<u>Mothers</u>	<u>Fathers</u>
Reading to child	94%	89%
Playing with other children	83%	77%
Talking to newborn	80%	65%
Singing to baby	76%	60%
Playing pretend with child	70%	54%

Research on the impact of media on young children shows that the range of media designed for babies and toddlers, including TV, DVDs, and computer games, have limited positive impact on cognitive development, and in some cases may have a negative impact, impeding language development. Parents' perceptions about the influence of different forms of media on children's development vary. Half of parents (49%) identify watching educational TV shows and DVDs with a young child as an experience that has a strong or major influence on helping a child learn and only 30% assess using computer programs and Internet Web site activities or games as a strong or major influence.

- Parents who do not have a four-year college degree are substantially more likely to rate these media as having a strong or major influence on learning, as are African-American and Hispanic parents, when compared with their white counterparts.

By far, parents cite the educational value (61%) as the primary reason they use different forms of media with their child. Other reasons include the following:⁵

- Their child enjoys specific programs (18%)
- It keeps the child quiet or occupied in the car or allows the parent to do other things, such as chores or just get a break (17%)
- Entertainment or downtime for the child (16%)

⁵ Open-ended question: What are the main reasons you use different forms of entertainment, such as TV, DVDs, music, or computer games with your young child?

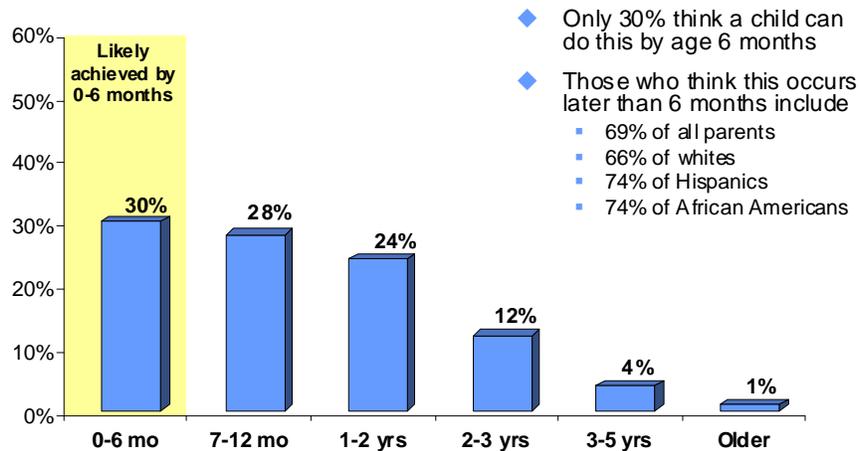
Hart Research Associates

- Teaching coordination or motor skills (i.e., dancing, exercise) (5%)
- Teaching social skills and manners (5%)
- Exposing children to different cultures and languages (3%)

V. Parents' Expectations For Reaching Developmental Milestones

While parents by and large value the different activities and experiences that facilitate the social, emotional, and cognitive development of young children, they are less clear on the timing of when different developmental milestones are reached. Generally, parents demonstrate less understanding of when children attain emotional milestones (e.g., experiencing certain feelings) than cognitive (e.g., following basic instructions) or physical (e.g., being toilet trained) milestones.⁶

Child Can Experience Feelings Like Sadness And Fear

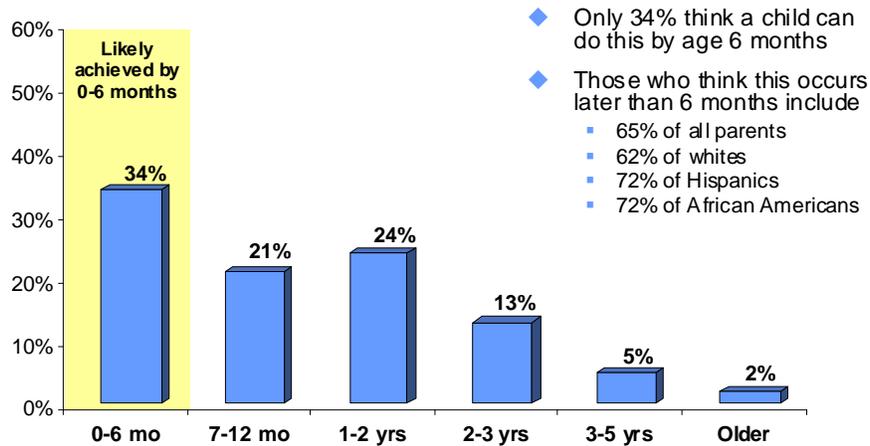


Early child development research shows that by six months, most babies can experience feelings such as sadness and fear, and can begin to sense whether their parents are angry or sad and can be affected by their parents' moods. Only 30% of parents think that a child can experience these kinds of feelings at such a young age, and a large majority (69%) think this developmental milestone occurs later in a young child's life.

- Younger parents (under age 25) are more likely to think this occurs between birth and age six months (42% say so).
- Hispanic and African-American parents think this developmental milestone occurs later than six months at higher rates than their white counterparts.

⁶ Parents were provided with a number of developmental milestones and asked at what age, on average, they think a child is capable of doing each. Age ranges were provided as response options.

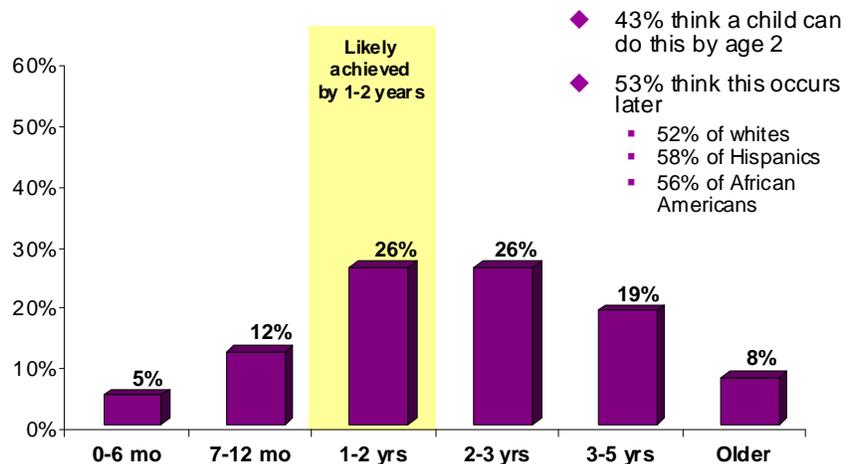
Child Begins To Sense If Parents Are Angry Or Sad And Can Be Affected By This



Similarly, only 34% of parents think a young child can begin to sense whether their parents are angry or sad and can be affected by their parents' moods by the time they reach six months. Therefore, two-thirds of parents do not fully understand that babies can be affected in this critical way at such a young age.

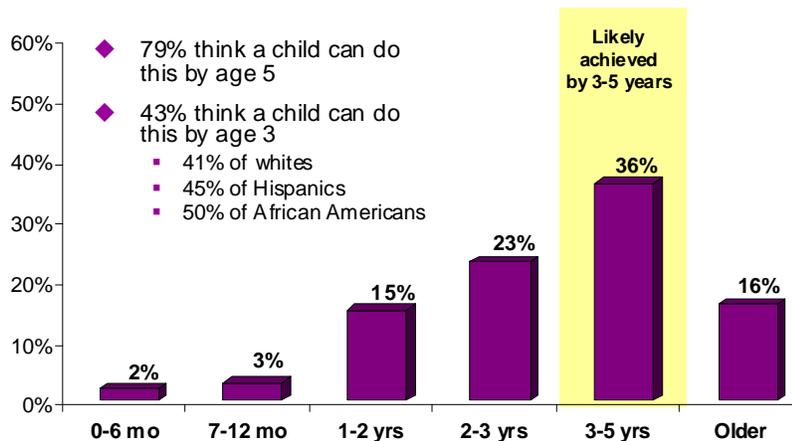
- Parents under age 25 (41%) and mothers (39%) are much more likely than older parents (33%) and fathers (24%) to think that this generally occurs by age six months.

Child Can Feel Good Or Bad About Him Or Her Self



Research also shows that most children are capable of feeling good or bad about themselves between ages one and two. Only 43% of parents think a child is capable of such feelings by age two, and a majority of parents (53%) do not think a child can experience these feelings until they are older.

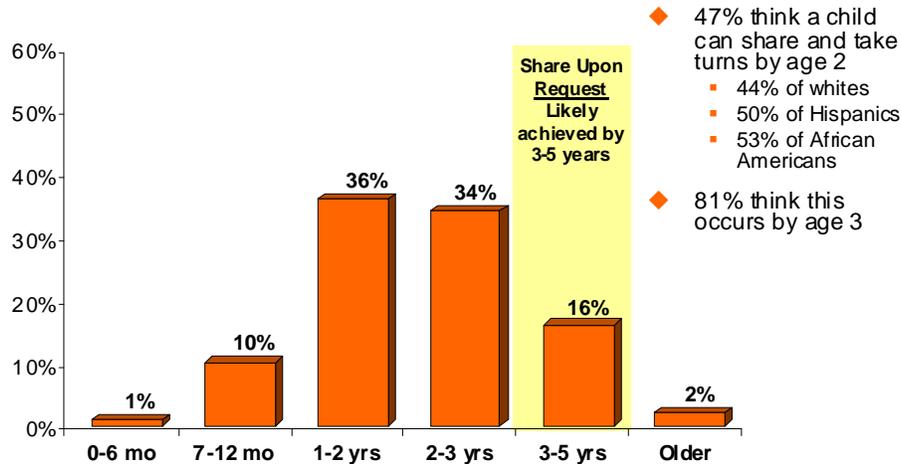
Child Can Control Emotions, Such As Not Having Tantrum When Frustrated



Between the ages of three and five most children develop the capacity to control their emotions, such as asking for help when frustrated rather than having a tantrum. While slightly more than one in three parents holds this expectation, a significant proportion of parents expect a young child to be capable of exerting this kind of self control at a much younger age.

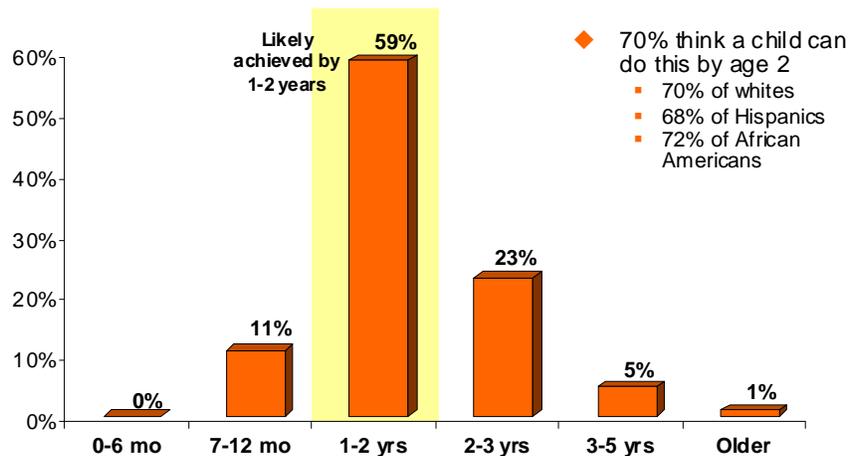
- 43% of parents think children can control their emotions by age three, and 20% expect this by age two.
- 30% of African-American parents expect this to occur by age two, compared with 24% of Hispanic and 17% of white parents.

Child Can Share And Take Turns With Other Children



While experts agree that children generally master the art of sharing between three and five years, eight in 10 parents expect children to achieve this milestone by age three and nearly half of parents (47%) expect children to be capable of sharing by age two.

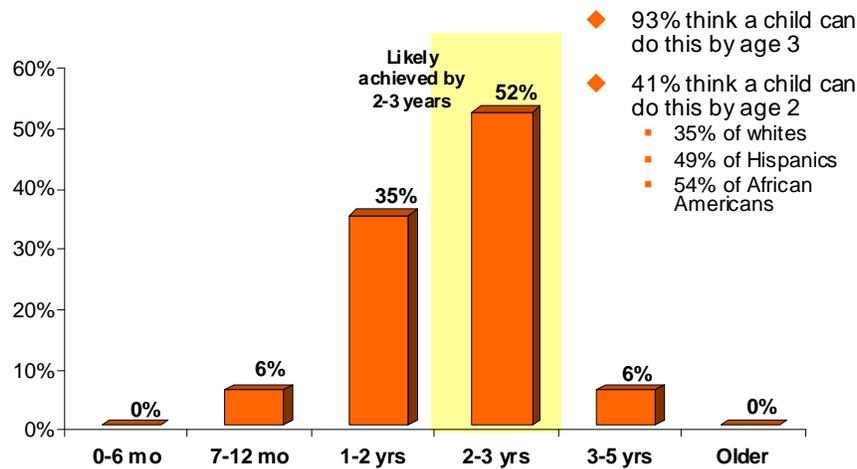
Child Can Follow Instructions Like, "Go Pick Up Your Shoes"



Most children develop the capacity to follow basic instructions such as, “go pick up your shoes” between ages one and two. A majority of parents (59%) understand this.

- Very few parents (11%) expect children to be capable of following basic instructions at a younger age.
- However, a significant proportion of parents (29%) do not think children are capable of this until they are older than age two.

Child Can Be Toilet Trained



Most U.S. child development experts agree that developmentally, it is appropriate for children to be toilet trained between ages two and three. While half of parents expect young children to achieve this milestone within this time frame, more than four in 10 parents expect children to be toilet trained at a younger age, with 35% believing this occurs between one and two years, and 6% believing a child is capable of being toilet trained by age one.

- African-American and Hispanic parents are more likely than their white counterparts to believe that a child can be toilet trained at an earlier age, with 54% of African-American and 49% of Hispanic parents believing that this skill is achievable by age two, compared with 35% of white parents.

Looking to the future: school readiness.

When parents are asked to think into the not-so-distant future and identify the qualities and skills they believe to be most important to prepare their young child for kindergarten, a range of opinions emerges.

Perspectives On Preparing Children For Kindergarten

One/Two Most Important Skills for Child Entering Kindergarten to Have

	All Parents	Whites	African Americans	Hispanics
Plays well with others, shares	46%	48%	34%	45%
Curious, likes to learn	44%	47%	30%	39%
Respects adults	36%	37%	38%	32%
Can sit still, pay attention	25%	23%	30%	30%
Knows most of alphabet	16%	14%	25%	17%
Can separate easily from parents	14%	14%	14%	12%

Playing well with other children and sharing, and being curious and liking to learn are viewed as top qualities or skills by most parents across most different demographic groups—mothers and fathers, college-educated parents and parents with a high school degree or less education, and parents under age 25 and those age 40 and over, just to name a few.

VI. Three Vignettes: Parents' Interpretations Of Child's Behavior And How They Would React

Another objective of the research was to explore how parents interpret certain challenging behaviors and how they would react to that behavior. To this end, parents were presented with a number of vignettes briefly describing common situations that a parent may experience with a young child. After each description, parents were asked how they would most likely react to the situation and why they think the child is behaving in the manner described. In general, parents demonstrate a solid understanding of the underlying cause of a range of behaviors and most report an appropriate response to the challenging behavior. Few differences exist among subgroups.

Vignette 1

An 18-month-old is playing with a puzzle with a parent. The toddler can't figure out how it fits together, gets upset, starts to cry, and throws the pieces; one piece hits the parent.

<i>How would you react?</i>		<i>Why is the child behaving this way?</i>	
Acknowledge child's frustration and firmly tell him/her that throwing isn't allowed	78%	Child is frustrated because he/she can't do puzzle	73%
Distract child with another activity	10%	Child isn't old enough to control his/her emotions	18%
Hold child or offer comforter, like blanket/pacifier	5%	Child wants attention	6%
Scold and put child in timeout	3%	Child is acting spoiled	2%
Swat or spank child on hand or bottom	2%	Child is angry at and trying to hurt parent	0%
Offer child a favorite food	1%		

A large majority of parents (78%) say they would acknowledge the child's frustration and firmly tell the toddler that throwing is not allowed; a response that child development experts deem appropriate.

- Hispanic parents (14%) and parents who immigrated to the United States (17%) are slightly more likely than parents overall (10%) to distract the toddler with another activity.

Nearly three in four parents say that the toddler is acting this way because he or she is frustrated about not being able to do the puzzle. The second most frequently cited reason is that the toddler is not old enough to control his or her emotions (18%). Again, child development experts agree that these are likely causes of such behavior.

Vignette 2

A 14-month-old has been told repeatedly not to climb stairs because it isn't safe. He/she sometimes stops when told to do so, but often climbs the stairs when parents turn away.

How would you react?		Why is the child behaving this way?	
Put up a baby gate	53%	Child is curious	54%
Stop child from climbing and explain that climbing isn't safe	17%	Child is excited about learning to climb	28%
Distract child with another activity	15%	Child isn't old enough to know how to stop doing what he/she wants to do	10%
Put child in a timeout	7%	Child wants attention	4%
Swat or spank child on hand or bottom	6%	Child doesn't respect his/her parents	1%
Offer child a favorite food	1%	Child is acting spoiled	1%

A solid majority of parents report a reaction to this behavior that child development experts deem appropriate. Just over half of all parents (53%) would address this behavior by putting up a baby gate.

The next most frequent response is to stop the toddler from climbing and explain that climbing is not safe (17%). Certain groups report that they would react in this manner at higher rates, including the following:

- Men (21%) compared to women (15%)
- First-time parents (20%) compared to parents who have multiple children (15%)
- African-American (21%) and Hispanic (22%) parents compared to white parents (15%)

Another 15% of parents say that they would distract the child with another activity.

Parents for whom faith or religion is a major influence on their approach to parenting (11%) and African-American parents (12%) are twice as likely as all parents (6%) to say that they would swat or spank the toddler on the hand or bottom.

Most parents (54%) believe that the child continues to climb the stairs because the child is curious, while another 28% of parents think it is because the child is excited about learning to climb; both reasons that most experts would agree are likely causes of such behavior for a 14-month old child.

Vignette 3

A 2½-year-old sits alone watching other children play. When his/her parent encourages the child to play with others, he/she holds back and tries to hide behind the parent.

<i>How would you react?</i>		<i>Why is the child behaving this way?</i>	
Take child's hand and lead him/her over to the other children	55%	Child is shy	83%
		Child is afraid of other children	9%
Continue to encourage child to play with others	36%	Child is too young to play with others	2%
Stop encouraging child to play with others	5%	Child is unfriendly	1%
Leave area so child can't hide behind you	1%	Child doesn't want to cooperate with parent	1%
Scold child for not playing with the others	1%	Child is acting spoiled	1%

Most parents (55%) would respond to this situation by leading their child over to the other children and more than one-third of parents (36%) would continue encouraging the child to play with the other children. These responses are fairly consistent across all subgroups, and comport with what child development experts would deem appropriate responses to such behavior.

A large majority of parents (83%) believe that the child is not playing with the other children because he or she is shy and approximately one in 10 believes that the child is afraid of the other children. Again, reasons that child development experts would cite as likely explanations for such behavior.

Implications

This survey among parents of children from birth to 36 months provides a wealth of information that helps us better understand the situations parents face today, their knowledge and awareness of factors that influence child development, where they turn for information on parenting, and their approaches to parenting and the factors that influence it. Findings from this research that can help inform the important work of ZERO TO THREE are outlined here.

Parents need greater understanding about the importance of experiences that foster healthy development.

While parents for the most part have a solid understanding of many of the experiences that are important for fostering healthy social, emotional, and cognitive development of young children, there still is work to be done.

- Virtually all parents understand the value and importance of reading to young children. However, parents could benefit from information about the importance of reading and talking to very young babies and newborns, as roughly one-quarter of parents do not consider these experiences to have a strong or major influence on babies' healthy development.
- Generally, parents are less aware of the importance of the experiences that foster social and emotional development than those that influence cognitive development. Therefore, educational efforts pertaining to social-emotional development could prove helpful to parents of young children.
- Perspectives vary on the importance of a range of experiences in fostering social and emotional development (e.g., setting and enforcing rules, comforting a child when upset, encouraging a child) based on racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds. This points to the need for a broader dialogue with diverse communities to better understand parents' perspectives on these issues. This will ultimately help professionals more effectively partner with parent groups and other professionals to support early social and emotional development that incorporates culture and reflects this range of different views and perspectives.
- Fathers could benefit from educational efforts that are specifically targeted to them to increase their understanding of the kinds of experiences that promote healthy early development.

Parents need more information about when young children are capable of reaching certain developmental milestones.

A significant proportion of parents hold misconceptions regarding when young children are capable of reaching certain developmental milestones. Generally, parents demonstrate less understanding of when children are capable of reaching emotional milestones than cognitive or physical ones.

- A significant majority of parents do not understand when babies reach certain emotional milestones (e.g., experiencing feelings like sadness and fear and being capable of feeling good or bad about themselves.) Without the awareness of how deeply affected babies and toddlers are by their earliest experiences, parents may not be as sensitive and responsive during their interactions with their young children. Research shows that this is especially concerning when a child has suffered a significant loss, such as a prolonged separation from a parent, or trauma, such as exposure to domestic violence or being victimized by neglect or abuse. Both parents and children could benefit from efforts to educate parents about when young children are likely to achieve various developmental milestones.
- Given that there are different expectations for when young children can achieve certain developmental milestones among different racial and ethnic groups, educational efforts and communication strategies should be designed with cultural considerations in mind.

Outreach and communication to parents of young children should go beyond traditional sources.

The study findings offer numerous ways to inform outreach and communication efforts to parents of young children.

- Parenting magazines and Web sites are the sources that parents turn to most frequently and therefore are likely to be an effective outlet to provide educational information.
- Other outlets emerge as valued information sources that can help ZERO TO THREE target communication to specific groups:
 - Parenting books and TV programs are likely to be effective sources for communicating with Hispanic and African-American parents, as they turn to these sources at high rates.
 - Online sources including Web sites, blogs, chat rooms, and social networking sites are good ways to reach Hispanic and younger parents.
 - Professionals are a good source of information for African-American and Hispanic parents, as well as younger parents.

Findings regarding factors that influence approaches to parenting also have important implications for outreach and communication efforts and opportunities.

- Faith and religion have a powerful impact on how many parents approach parenting. This points to the need for professionals to look beyond traditional partners to different kinds of entities and organizations such as churches and faith-based organizations to reach parents of young children or help provide them with information, support, and resources.

- Family is an important resource for many parents of young children. Given that so many parents turn to other family members—especially their mothers—as a source of childrearing information and for child care, tapping into extended family as another target audience in educational communication likely will provide an important avenue for reaching parents.
- Family history and culture are powerful influences on the approach many parents take to childrearing. Developing culturally appropriate and sensitive educational materials is critical.