



National Center for Infants,
Toddlers, and Families

KEY FINDINGS FROM A 2009 NATIONAL PARENT SURVEY: IMPLICATIONS FOR INFANT-TODDLER PUBLIC POLICY

Hart Research Associates conducted a national public opinion poll of 1,615 parents of children age birth to three years for ZERO TO THREE in June, 2009. To ensure the sample included a full range of individuals who are parents of children age birth to 36 months, Hart Research Associates used a mixed technology, employing both telephone (604 phone interviews) and Internet survey technologies (606 on-line interviews). Based on United States 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.

The survey was designed to explore issues and challenges that parents of young children confront today, where gaps in knowledge of early development exist, identify what sources of information and support these parents turn to, and what factors influence their approach to parenting. Many of these survey findings have implications for policies and programs for infants, toddlers and families. Highlights include:

Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG)

A significant portion 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.

- 23% of parents rely on a 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

The economic downturn has forced millions of parents to make a change in their child care arrangements. According to a national survey, one in four parents (25%) are experiencing child care-related hardships that they attribute to the economic downturn. The most common ways in which parents reported the economic downturn affecting child care included:

- 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%)

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)

Although the majority of parents understand some important ways to promote development, their understanding of the developmental milestones related to social and emotional development is less consistent.

- While research 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. A majority of parents (53%) do not think a child can experience these feelings until they are older.
- Although research shows that babies as young as 6 months can experience feelings of sadness and fear, a large majority of respondents (69%) think this developmental milestone occurs later in a young child's life.
- 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.
- Between the ages of three and five most children develop the capacity to control their emotions (i.e. asking for help when frustrated rather than having a tantrum or biting). While slightly more than one in three parents hold 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 believe that children can control their emotions by age three, and 20% expect this by age two.

The Safe Babies Act

We know that family history and input from professionals have a powerful influence on approaches 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.
- 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 on parenting.