When Kids Answer Back

Parenting Today Through Young Eyes





Acknowledgement of Country

Sonia Sadler (Torres Strait Islands)
Their Own Way 2026, acrylic on canvas

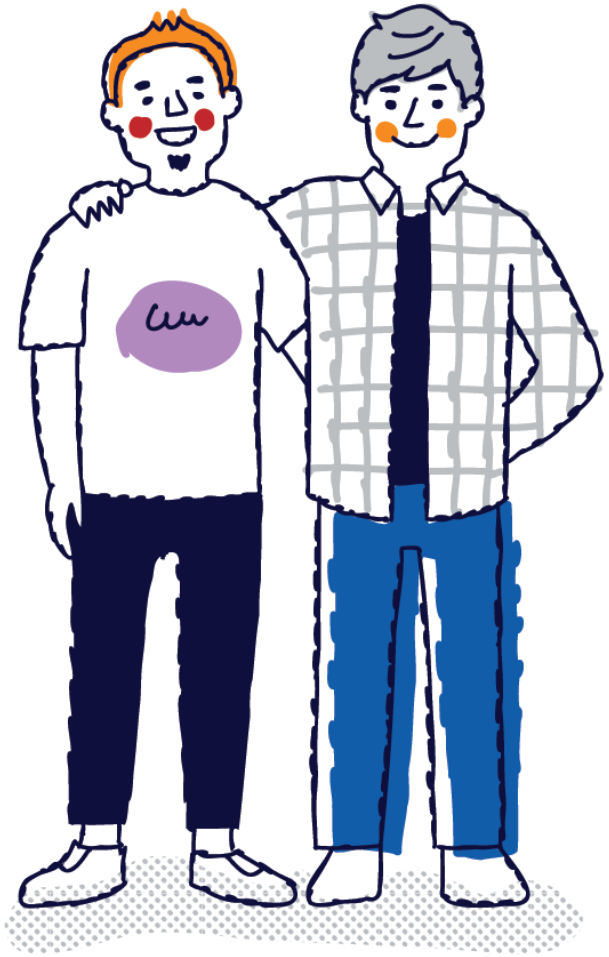
This artwork was created through The Torch,
a not-for-profit organisation that provides art, cultural and arts industry support to First Nations people currently in, or recently released, from Victorian prisons.



About the survey

Parenting Today is **Australia's** most comprehensive and largest survey of parents

- An initiative of the Parenting Research Centre
- **10,049** parents answered **294** questions across **122 items**
- First in a series of repeated cross-sectional surveys (next 2028)

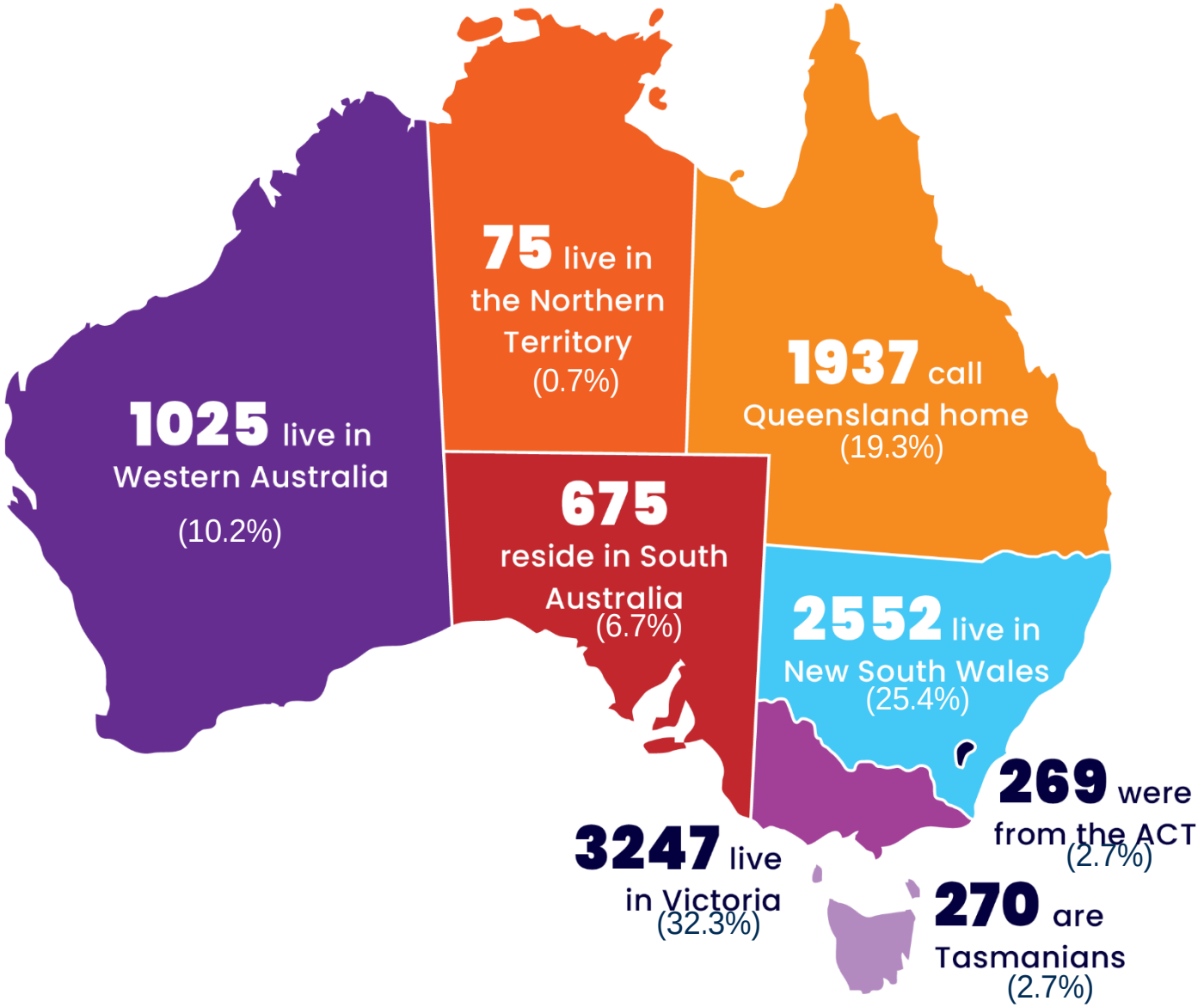


VICTORIA State Government

MINDEROO FOUNDATION

Parenting Today

Survey reach



Survey domains

Parenting experience

- Emotions
- Confidence
- Challenges

Demographic and social context

Parent support

- Sources of advice
- Access to support
- Child mental health

Environmental and social impacts

- Cost of living
- Access to resources
- Social cohesion
- Environmental engagement

Parenting practices

- Discipline strategies
- Praise & reasoning
- Punishment
- Engagement in learning

Parenting in the digital age

- Social media
- Mediation/monitoring
- Parental controls

Parent wellbeing

- Physical/mental health
- Stress, guilt, self-care
- Work-life balance & loneliness

Parenting shapes the future

Parent mental health
Parent concerns

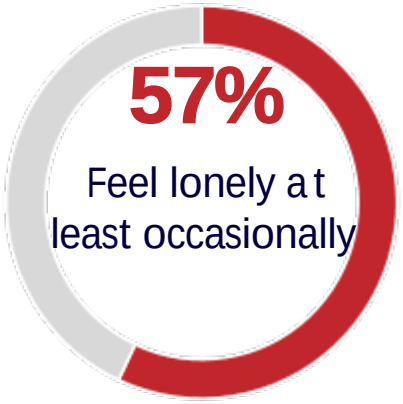


Results













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The broader context

Parent distress has tripled in a decade (from Victorian data)

Social expectations contribute to parent feelings of self-doubt

Cost-of-living pressures and shrinking informal networks increase the strain

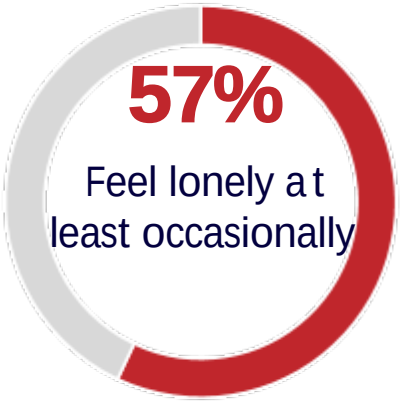


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Drivers of psychological distress

Loneliness

- **Most powerful association**
- Lonely parents have **3.6 times higher** odds of reporting high distress



Self-doubt

- Parents who doubt that they are doing a good job are **2.4 times more likely** to report high distress



Low self-compassion

- Parents who forgive themselves when they make mistakes have **46% lower odds** of reporting high distress



Parent concerns

Parent concern	Combined % small, moderate or large problem	Sample size (n)
Child's worries, fears or anxiety (if child is 2+ years)	67.3	5,989
Child's use of social media (if child is 6+ years)	56.1	3,745
Child being bullied (if child is 4+ years)	38.3	2,977
Child not attending school (if child is 6+ years)	24.7	1650
Child being violent or aggressive towards parent/s (if child is 6+ years)	18.7	1,248
Child bullying others (if child is 4+ years)	16.7	1,297

Funded by the Australian Government
Department of Health, Disability and Ageing's
Health Peak and Advisory Bodies Program

9 x 90 minute ARACY-facilitated online Roundtables

with 13-25 year olds

via an EOI and self-identifying as belonging to one of 5 priority populations:

Rural, Regional and Remote	n=14
LGBTIQA+	n=18
Culturally & Linguistically Diverse	n=15
Neurodivergent	n=8
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander	n=5

+

Online National Survey	n=171

Q1

What should parents and caregivers focus on most to support young people?

Ranking 8 Options from Parenting Research Centre

BEAU, VIC

Valued, Loved and Safe

Rank the below to help us understand what parents and caregivers should focus on in order to support LGBTQIA+ children?



Bullying impacts for LGBTIQA+

JAQUELINE, VIC



Mental and Physical Health

Mental and Physical Health

Chances to have a say and be listened to on things that affect your life

Mental and Physical Health

Chances to have a say and be listened to on things that affect your life

Family relationships (including conflicts or stress)

Mental and Physical Health

Chances to have a say and be listened to on things that affect your life

Family relationships (including conflicts or stress)

Education (quality, support, workload, pathways)

Mental and Physical Health

Chances to have a say and be listened to on things that affect your life

Family relationships (including conflicts or stress)

Education (quality, support, workload, pathways)

Discrimination, harassment and bullying (online and offline)

Mental and Physical Health

Chances to have a say and be listened to on things that affect your life

Family relationships (including conflicts or stress)

Education (quality, support, workload, pathways)

Discrimination, harassment and bullying (online and offline)

Friendships and belonging

Mental and Physical Health

Chances to have a say and be listened to on things that affect your life

Family relationships (including conflicts or stress)

Education (quality, support, workload, pathways)

Discrimination, harassment and bullying (online and offline)

Friendships and belonging

Money stress (affording to do fun stuff others do)

Mental and Physical Health

Chances to have a say and be listened to on things that affect your life

Family relationships (including conflicts or stress)

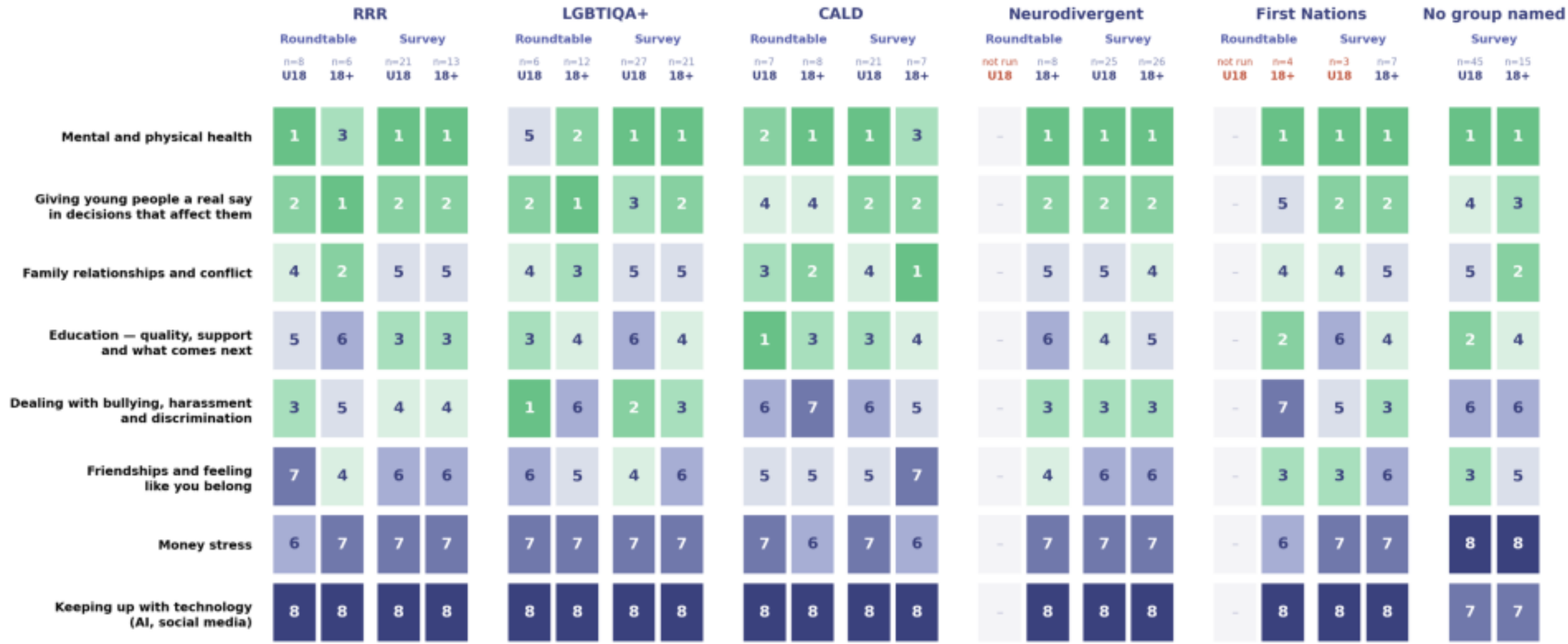
Education (quality, support, workload, pathways)

Discrimination, harassment and bullying (online and offline)

Friendships and belonging

Money stress (affording to do fun stuff others do)

Rapidly changing technology (including AI and social media)


RRR
Roundtable
n=8 U18
n=6 18+
Survey
n=21 U18
n=13 18+
LGBTIQA+
Roundtable
n=6 U18
n=12 18+
Survey
n=27 U18
n=21 18+
CALD
Roundtable
n=7 U18
n=8 18+
Survey
n=21 U18
n=7 18+
Neurodivergent
Roundtable
not run U18
n=8 18+
Survey
n=25 U18
n=26 18+
First Nations
Roundtable
not run U18
n=4 18+
Survey
n=3 U18
n=7 18+
No group named
Survey
n=45 U18
n=15 18+
Mental and physical health
1 3 1 1 5 2 1 1 2 1 1 3 – 1 1 1 – 1 1 1 1 1
Giving young people a real say in decisions that affect them
2 1 2 2 2 1 3 2 4 4 2 2 – 2 2 2 – 5 2 2 4 3
Family relationships and conflict
4 2 5 5 4 3 5 5 3 2 4 1 – 5 5 4 – 4 4 5 5 2
Education — quality, support and what comes next
5 6 3 3 3 4 6 4 1 3 3 4 – 6 4 5 – 2 6 4 2 4
Dealing with bullying, harassment and discrimination
3 5 4 4 1 6 2 3 6 7 6 5 – 3 3 3 – 7 5 3 6 6
Friendships and feeling like you belong
7 4 6 6 6 5 4 6 5 5 5 7 – 4 6 6 – 3 3 6 3 5
Money stress
6 7 7 7 7 7 7 7 7 6 7 6 – 7 7 7 – 6 7 7 8 8
Keeping up with technology (AI, social media)
8 8 8 8 8 8 8 8 8 8 8 8 – 8 8 8 – 8 8 8 7 7

Q2

Thinking about your parents/care givers. What are you most concerned about *their* wellbeing in 2026?

Word Cloud

Rural
Mental Health

ASPEN, NSW



Therapising & Filtering

JESS, QLD

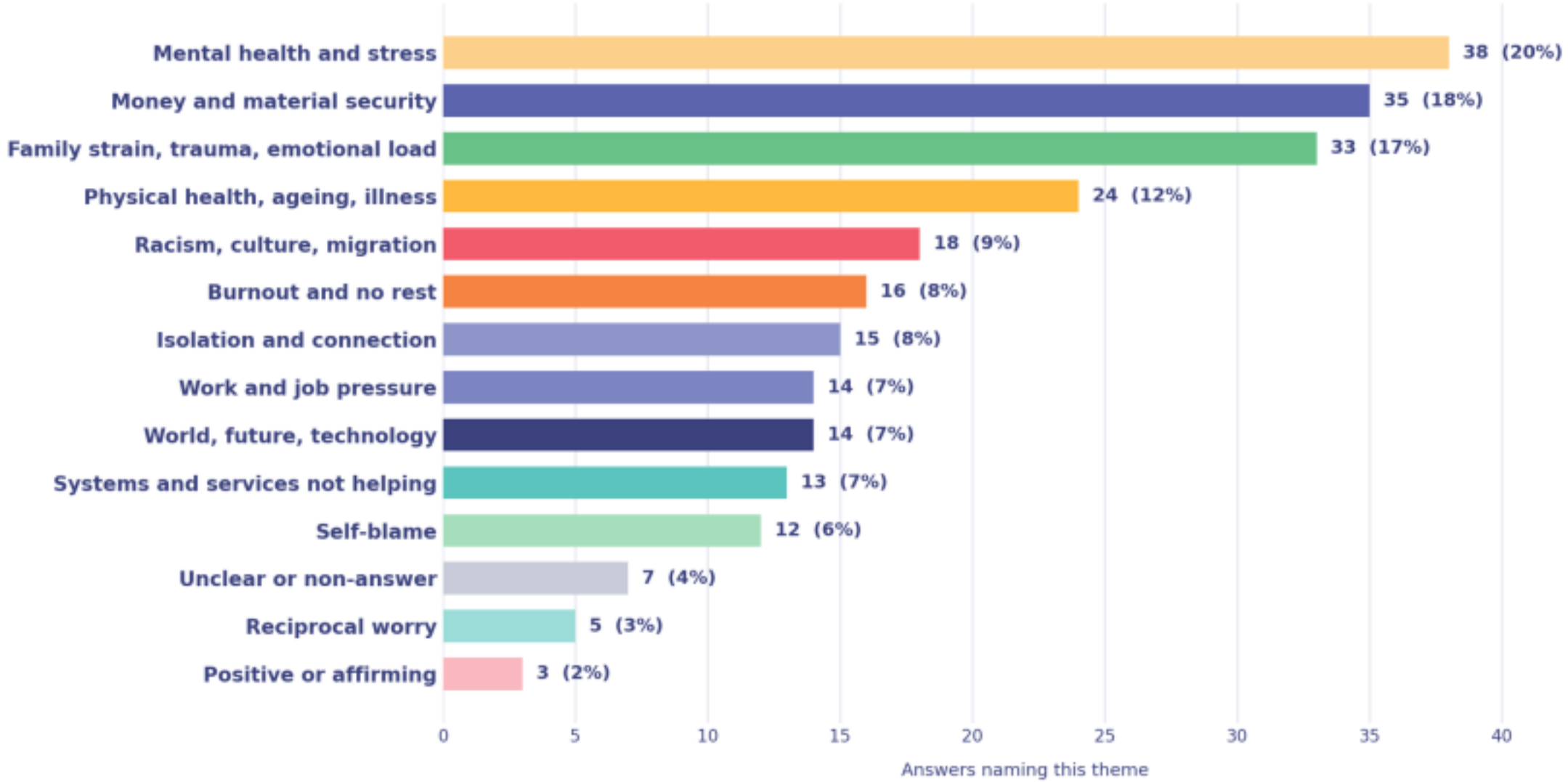


Your stress is
my stress

ABBEY, VIC




Caring for my grandparent
Getting old health
Familial pressures
Mental health
Support through hardship
Work life balance
How what I do impactsthem
Racism and discrimination
Not having time to rest
Hormones gone wild
Overworking
Instability
Dependent family members
Me and work
Lack of acknowledge
Overwhelming news
Financial pressures
Multiple religion
Not taking a break
Lack of trust
Emotional stress
Physical health
Racism at work
Injuries and illness
Job stability
Housing
Not looking after themsel
My ATAR in the future
Being able to afford food
Social media
Worries about my future
Racism
Health fears
Lack of family support
Work
Job stress
Lack of connections
Retirement
Family conflict or stress
Patiarchy
Adapting to australia
Unhealthy relationships
Mental and financial stat
Refugee trauma
Money stress retirement
Fear of the future
Connections
Grades
Burnout
Not feeling helped
Stressed about me
Fearing judgement
Family struggles
Battling new technologies
Lack of freindships
Attachment to kids
Homesickness
Overload
Health and stress
Job security
Culture
Lack of own identity
Not having resources
Finances
Lack of support
Dealing w the ndis
Getting use to a new area
Worry abt family overseas
Health had cancer
Intergenerational trauma
Isolation
Worried about me online
And physical health too
Lack of friendships
Living authentically
Cost of living
Getting old
Money
Sport
Societal change
Discrimination
Over reliance on tech
Health
Lots of effort no rest
Stress
Past trauma
Multiple cultures
Maintaining friendships
Traumatic events
I think mom's depressed
No money for retirement
Aging
Mental health tabboo
Financial stress
Loss and grief
Unequal parenting
Trump
Future stabiliy
Poor cognition
Them seeking healthcare
Mental health and wellbei
Mental health n finances
Anxiety
Global instability
Relationship with kids
Overly worried about me
Work stress
Emptynesting sadness
Worried I won't have house
Access to medical care
Anxiety 4 childrens welbe
Homelessness cos dv
Powerlessness
Retirement money stress
Lack of community
No cultur approp services
The war


Mental health and stress
38 (20%)
Money and material security
35 (18%)
Family strain, trauma, emotional load
33 (17%)
Physical health, ageing, illness
24 (12%)
Racism, culture, migration
18 (9%)
Burnout and no rest
16 (8%)
Isolation and connection
15 (8%)
Work and job pressure
14 (7%)
World, future, technology
14 (7%)
Systems and services not helping
13 (7%)
Self-blame
12 (6%)
Unclear or non-answer
7 (4%)
Reciprocal worry
5 (3%)
Positive or affirming
3 (2%)
0
5
10
15
20
25
30
35
40
Answers naming this theme

Q3

What’s one piece of advice you would give all parents and caregivers based on your experience?

Open Ended

See Me,
Trust Me

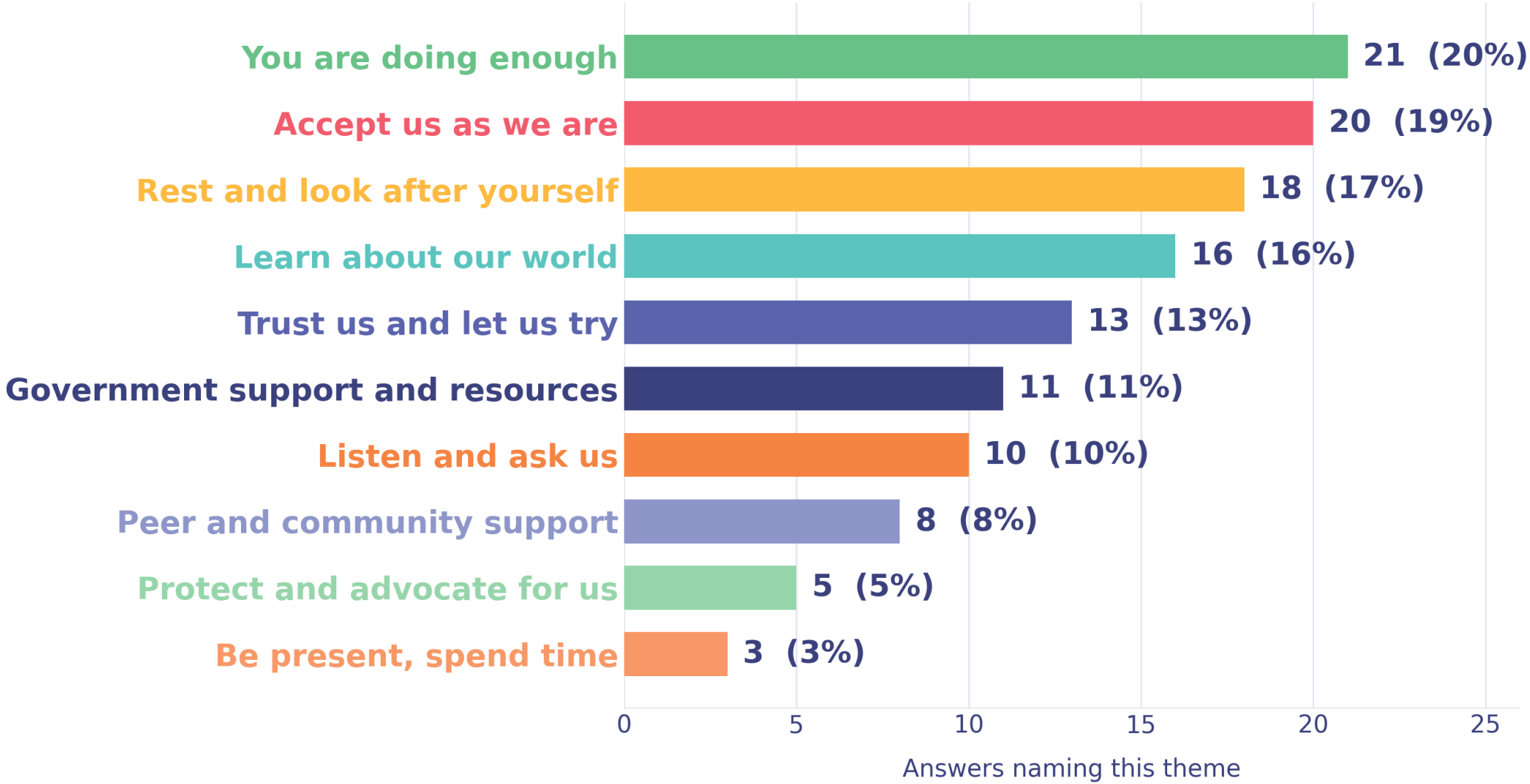
JAY, WA




every child thriving
aracy
Darcie, Victoria
LGBTIQA+ 18+ Roundtable
aracy.org.au

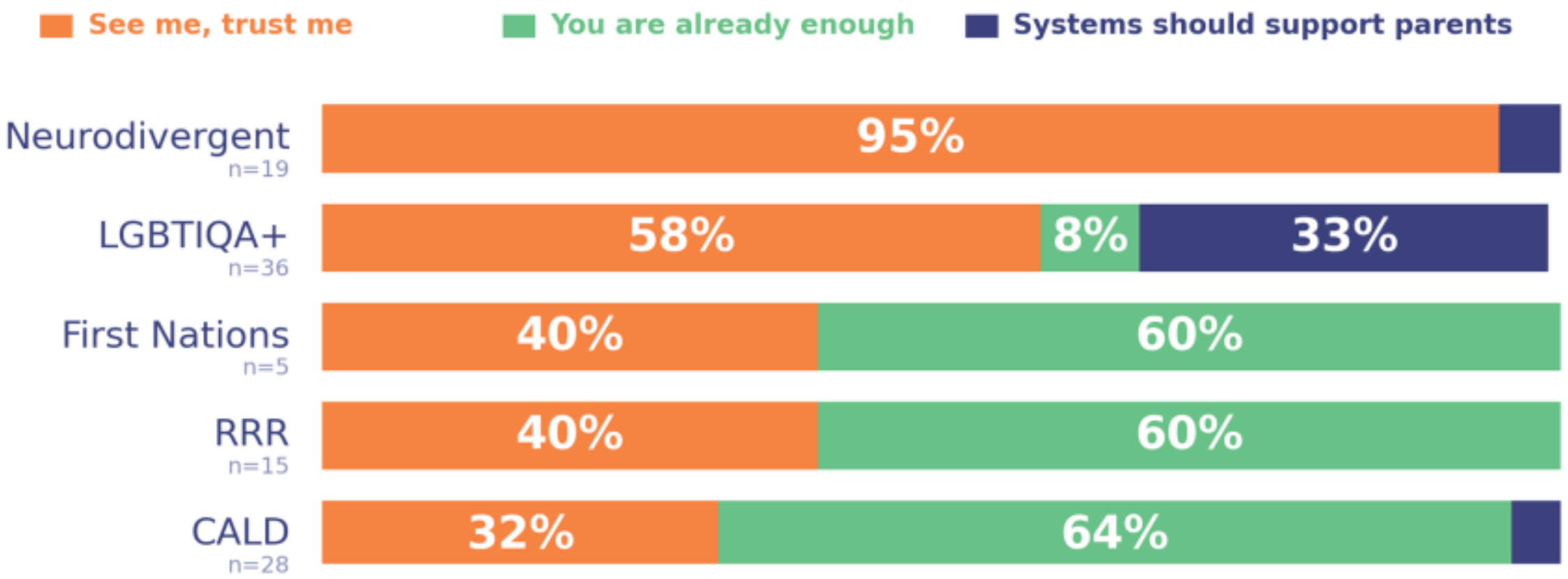
You are already enough




You are doing enough
21 (20%)
Accept us as we are
20 (19%)
Rest and look after yourself
18 (17%)
Learn about our world
16 (16%)
Trust us and let us try
13 (13%)
Government support and resources
11 (11%)
Listen and ask us
10 (10%)
Peer and community support
8 (8%)
Protect and advocate for us
5 (5%)
Be present, spend time
3 (3%)
0
5
10
15
20
25
Answers naming this theme

What's one piece of advice you would give all parents and caregivers based on your experience?

103 answers can be summarised into 3 groups



WHAT DOES THIS ALL MEAN?

Parents are concerned about their **child's** mental health, and children are worried about their **parents'** mental health.

Use of social media, AI & tech



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What does all this mean?

Younger young people = censored dependents

Older young people = participating dependents



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Overall message

Opportunity for more parent-child collaborative relationships as children grow older.

Parents are doing enough.

Young people value connection, understanding, and genuine dialogue.

Call to consider how to strengthen family wellbeing.



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01 PARENT WELLBEING IS A CHILD WELLBEING ISSUE. **BIDIRECTIONAL RESEARCH TO CHALLENGE PARENTING ASSUMPTIONS/DEMANDS.**

02 SILOED WELLBEING INITIATIVES - TO - **FAMILY WELLBEING INITIATIVES. THE HIDDEN BURDEN OF PROTECTION (EVERYONE IS TRYING TO PROTECT EVERYONE ELSE).**

03 YOUNG PEOPLE ARE ACTIVE CONTRIBUTORS TO FAMILY WELLBEING - THEY NOTICE, THEY UNDERSTAND. **Q. WHAT ARE WE MISSING WHEN WE ONLY LISTEN TO PARENTS?**

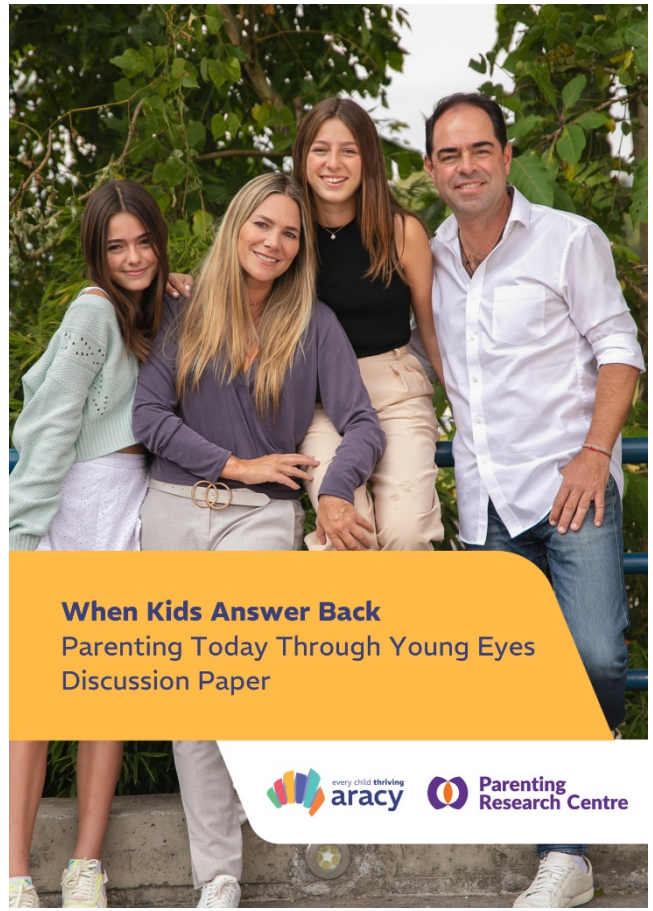
04 A CHALLENGE TO CURRENT SERVICE DESIGN. **Q. HOW DO WE SUPPORT CONVERSATIONS, UNDERSTANDING AND RELATIONSHIPS IN FAMILIES, RATHER THAN INDIVIDUALS ALONE?**

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