



The Parent Report

**Hopes and fears
and the support available**

Parent Survey 2017

About the research

The basics of parenting have remained absolute through the ages: to ensure our children are safe and healthy and to give them the tools that will help them flourish.

Our survey, conducted by YouGov on behalf of Spurgeons, aims to discover parents' hopes, fears and aspirations for their children in 2017. And to understand how supported they feel to prepare their children for life in an increasingly pressurised world.

It has given us a finger on the pulse of the issues and concerns perceived by the wider parent population, whilst allowing us to draw comparisons with our internal analysis through service user feedback; safeguarding reporting and our service actions plans. Through this, we are able to give weight and support to the observations of service users and our practitioners. We know from our own service user feedback, that parent confidence, along with challenges to access the right support, are real and current issues.

The total sample size was 1,842 parents with children under 18 years of age. This is broken down into 800 dads and 1,042 mums.

Fieldwork was undertaken between 21st - 27th April 2017.

The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted & are representative of all GB adults (aged 18+).

For reference points please see Appendix 1.

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About Spurgeons

Spurgeons Children's Charity is one of the UK's leading children's charities, supporting vulnerable and disadvantaged children and their families for 150 years.

Inspired by our Christian faith, our mission is to improve the lives of families and children who are struggling to cope and to give every child the opportunity of a hope-filled life.

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#ParentReport

Family Support

With around 400,000 children in the UK classed by the child protection service as being in need, Spurgeons' services ensure vulnerable children and their families can access the support they need for a better future.

We offer family support in many ways, including through our children's centres and prison visitor centres, with both one-to-one and group activities. Our goal is to help families cope better with their difficulties and provide them with resources and support to find long lasting solutions to challenging problems.

**400,000
children**

Classed by child protection as being in need¹

**Over 3.9
million**

Children in the UK living in poverty today²

Foreword

Our Parent Report 2017 highlights growing concerns among parents for the mental health and wellbeing of their children in an increasingly complex world.

Some of the concerns parents expressed are not new - the extent of bullying, for example, has been recognised for some time. But it's clear that parents are also equally concerned about their children's self-esteem and emotional wellbeing.

As a society, we need to take note of what worries parents and why. How much of the 'problem' is due to better understanding leading to diagnosis? How much does modern life - from exam results to body image - put unrealistic pressures on children? Do we equip our children with the emotional resilience they need to handle these pressures?

Whatever the case may be, one of the best things we can do is to give parents access to good information, advice and meaningful support. Naturally, the first place parents will turn for this is friends and family. But sometimes, when the problems are difficult and complex, that isn't enough. Even before there is a crisis, charities like Spurgeons can help to reduce the escalation of worries and problems.

Over 4 in 10 parents surveyed said they feel there is little to no support for them. To those of us working with families, it should be sobering to learn that many parents either don't know where to turn, or don't want to turn, to charities, professionals or institutions for help.



On a more positive note, we should take heart in parents' hopes for their children. In a society where children (and parents) are bombarded with superficial images of success and expectation of what constitutes success, it is encouraging that hopes and aspirations for children are around their wellbeing, welfare, happiness and fulfillment.

This is a profoundly powerful shift in the way we measure success for our children and an important finding for us at Spurgeons, in line with our mission to give every child a better present and a more hopeful future.

A combination of growing pressure on children and the anxieties that parents face has led to many parents questioning what is and what is not important for their child. As a society, we need to do the same. This debate can only be a good thing.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ross Mansely".

Chief Executive,
Spurgeons Children's Charity

Key Findings: part 1

Parents' Concerns

Parents' hopes

“Parents want their children to feel satisfied with their life”

Parents' greatest wish for their child is to feel satisfied with life, be free from illness and to feel empowered.³

“Parents believe their children can feel hopeful if they believe anything is possible⁵”

This is followed by emotional resilience and being able to manage frustrations and being able to ask for help when it's needed.

Parents' roles

“Parents can help by listening, ‘being there’ and acting as a role model”

Mothers are more likely to believe that listening and being there for their children is the most important thing they can do.⁶

Parents' concerns

“Young parents concerned about mental health”

Young parents (18-24) are more likely to highlight self-harm and suicide in their top three concerns for their child.⁴

“Self-esteem is a top concern for parents”

Parent are also worried about bullying and problems at school.

What is worrying parents and why?

Parents worry about low self-esteem and bullying

Almost half of parents with children under 18 years of age worry their children have low self-esteem/are unhappy (46%) or are being bullied (46%) according to our report.

Bullying has always been a concern for parents, but it is clear that they also have a wider worry about their children's self-esteem and emotional wellbeing in a society where they are increasingly under pressure to live up to a perfect ideal.

For younger parents, self-harm/suicide is also an issue (20%), perhaps reflecting the increased prominence of these issues in the media. The same can also be said for parents who are separated/divorced with 12% saying that self-harm/suicide is an issue that they are worried about for their child(ren)'s future.

“Parents often don't fully understand the methods their children are using to communicate with each other. We need to support our children to keep themselves safe in the digital world where they increasingly learn and play”

Sarah Smith
Practice Improvement Manager, Spurgeons

As a parent, which THREE issues are you most concerned about for your children, either now or in the future?

46%

Low self-esteem
& unhappiness

46%

Being bullied

39%

Problems
at school

Being there for children and listening is most important

Parents believe that the most important thing they can do for their children is to spend time with them and listen.

Today we all live busy lives and for a parent, multi-tasking between school runs and household responsibilities can lead to feelings of guilt that we aren't there for our children, even when sharing their company.

We know through our work at Spurgeons that children who are listened to and respected are more confident and more likely to have higher self-esteem.

Being a positive role model is also important for parents and particularly dads. For many parents however, living up to this responsibility can be a daunting prospect and many benefit from the support and learning that being with other parents can bring.

What are the THREE most important behaviours a parent should use for their children?

“I felt alone as a single parent and didn't know how I could make things better for my daughter. I knew I needed to help her when she was going to visit her dad, and to get her back into our normal routine when she came home - I just didn't know how to help her though and that's an awful feeling; not knowing how to help your child. Thanks to Spurgeons I am now the person I used to be, I've found the real me again - happy and confident. Thank you.”

Alice, Spurgeons' Children's Centre





Saturdads

Most early years projects focus on maternal parenting. We recognise the important role that fathers play in children's lives. Dads can really make a difference. Saturdads is a Spurgeons initiative which aims to help fathers develop stronger, positive relationships, create peer support networks, build parenting capacity and be more involved in their child's learning.

At Saturdads, fathers can watch their children play and be more involved and confident as a dad, whilst helping them to socialise with other parents.

"As a father especially, I don't think you know where to turn for support if you need it. It's always family and friends who I would reach out to first. We love the sessions though and I get as much out of them as the boys do - I'll keep taking them until they tell me they don't want to go anymore."

Michael Bowers, Saturdads parent

A belief that anything's possible

Having a belief that anything is possible (19%) is the most important factor for children to feel hopeful for the future according to parents with children.⁷

Emotional resilience and being able to manage frustrations (18%) and having the confidence to ask for help (15%), are the next two most important factors in the list. As parents, our bright or gloomy outlook on life plays a major role in shaping how our children think and feel about the future and how well they cope with life's challenges.

Positive role model behaviour was identified in our research by almost half of parents (47%) as one of the three most important things a parent can do to support their child.

“A positive child is a more emotionally resilient one who is more likely to seek help and support as they get older. Parents can foster positive thinking by being a good role model.”

Sally, Spurgeons' Children's Centre

What do you think is the MOST important factor for children to feel hopeful for the future?

**“Just under
1 in 5
Having a belief that anything is possible”**

**“Just under
1 in 5
Emotional resilience & being able to manage frustrations”**

**“1 in 7
Being able to ask for help when it is needed”**

I just want you to be happy

Parents with children aged under 18 are more concerned that their children are satisfied with their life (62%) than have a steady income (17%) or own their own home (8%)⁸.

Mental and physical wellbeing has become an increasing worry for parents over recent years as stories of bullying, substance misuse and child sexual abuse & exploitation are discussed in the media and through social networks.

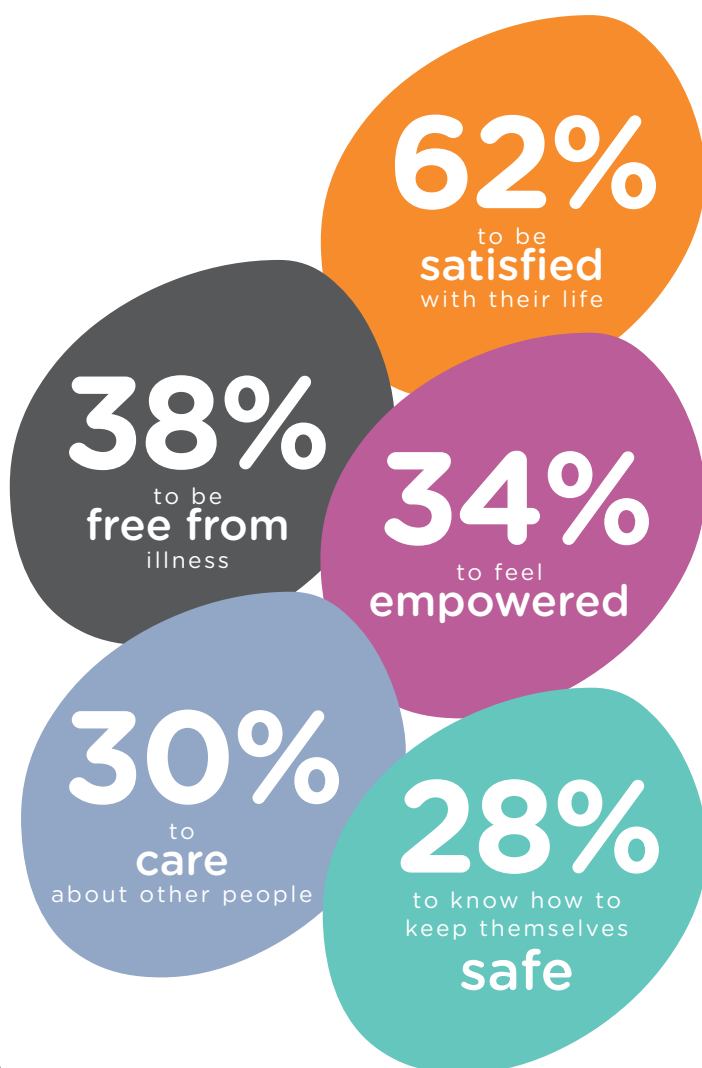
Significantly this was a big concern for younger parents (18-24) in our survey, who were far more likely to prioritise safety and keeping out of harm's way for their children.


This echoes a growing concern in this report that parents are becoming increasingly concerned about keeping their children safe online as well as the physical world.

“Parents want their children to be satisfied with life and this means knowing how to keep themselves safe. Unfortunately, many concerns go unreported and we know that young people often don’t speak up, even when abuse is taking place.”

Kelly Walker, Children’s Service Manager

What are your THREE biggest hopes/aspirations for your children’s future?





The Phoenix Project

The Phoenix Project is a confidential service to support children, young people and their families who are at risk of or affected by Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE).

The project supports children and young people aged 8 - 17 to make positive choices about healthy relationships and personal safety. We also provide a package of support for parents and carers to help them understand child sexual exploitation and to safeguard the children and young people in their care.

Spurgeons has been running the project across Birmingham since 2013, with funding support from Comic Relief, the Big Lottery and The Esmée Fairbairn Foundation.

Key Findings: part 2

Support Services

“Only a third of parents surveyed have ever used a support group or social care service.”

Older parents (55+) are less likely than younger ones (18-24) to use a support group. Parents who are separated/divorced (34%) and parents who work part-time (29%) or don't work/ other (30%) are more likely to see the benefits of using parental support groups than the total population.

“60% of parents don't currently use parental support groups and don't think they would benefit from doing so.”

Parents who are divorced/separated (34%), working part time (29%) and those who are not working/other (30%) are more likely to see the benefits of using parental support groups than the general population.

“42% of parents think there is little to no support to help with family challenges (e.g. divorce, family conflict).”

Younger parents (18-24) are less likely to take this view than those aged 55+.

“Only 1 in 10 parents would turn to a children's charity for support.”

Younger parents (18-24) are the least likely age group to ask for help from charities, with 33% turning to their doctor/ health service for support.

“4 out of 10 parents think there is not enough support to help with family challenges”

Parents say not enough support is available

42% of parents think there is little to no support available to families with children who are struggling to cope.

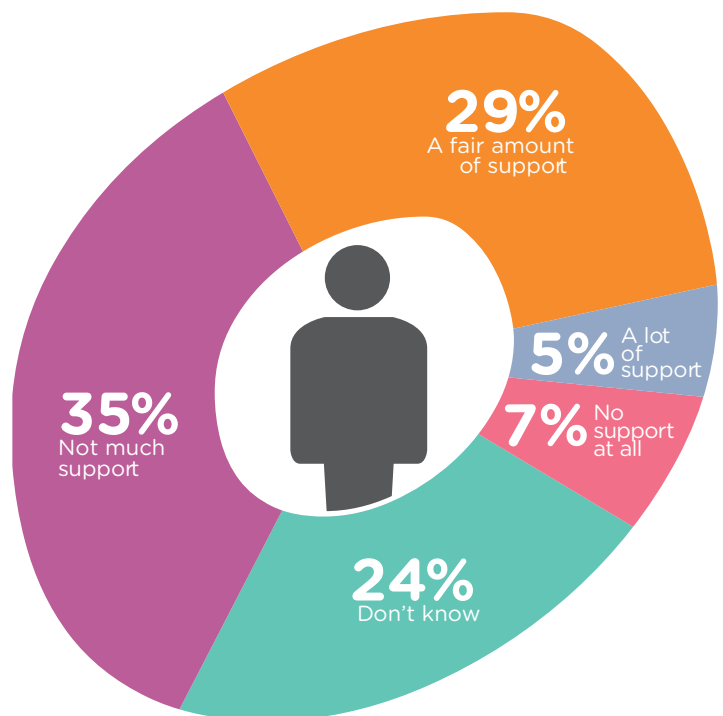
Divorced/separated parents are more likely to say that statutory, community or voluntary services provide little - or no - support in times of need (56%). More than 1 in 5 (21%) said they don't currently use parental support groups but would benefit from doing so.

These results could point to a lack of information and knowledge about support services among parents, but could also signal a reluctance to engage with charities and social services - or a lack of trust and belief in the support provided.

“Charities and children’s services support the most vulnerable children in our society. We need to ensure we are as accessible as possible to those who need us.”

Ross Hendry,
Chief Executive

How much support do you think is available to help with family challenges?



Parents reluctant to seek help

Only a third (34%) of parents with children aged 18 and under have ever used social care/parental support group for their children. And thinking specifically about parental support groups - only 26% of parents think they would currently benefit from attending a parental support group.

Parental support groups include services where parents can learn and share alongside other people with similar goals, challenges and experiences.

Emerging from the research, however, is a clear message from separated and divorced parents with children under 18 years of age who feel they would benefit from parental support groups in their current situation (34%).

Most parents who have attended a support group are positive about the benefits and in particular the opportunity to learn from other parents in a safe community space.



26% Of parents think they would benefit from a support group⁹



78% Of parents who attended support groups said they benefited

“Before having a Family Support Worker, I felt like giving up on everything, including life, but afterwards I felt like living again. I felt more confident as a parent and I have gone from having no routines or boundaries in place for my children, to having a routine again.”

Natalie, Birmingham Children’s Centre



Sarah's Story

Sarah lives with her military husband and their three children in Wiltshire. Sarah felt isolated in her community and struggling with depression and anxiety, she felt trapped in an abusive relationship, which she felt unable to share with anyone. She had little support from family who were so far away and had no friends to turn to.

A referral to the Spurgeons' Children's Centre was the turning point Sarah needed to move forward and to forge a safe and secure life for her and her three children.

Parents turn to friends and family

Their partner, family members and GP's are likely to be the first port of call for parents with children under the age of 18 who are struggling, with only 1 in 10 turning to a children's charity or social service for support.

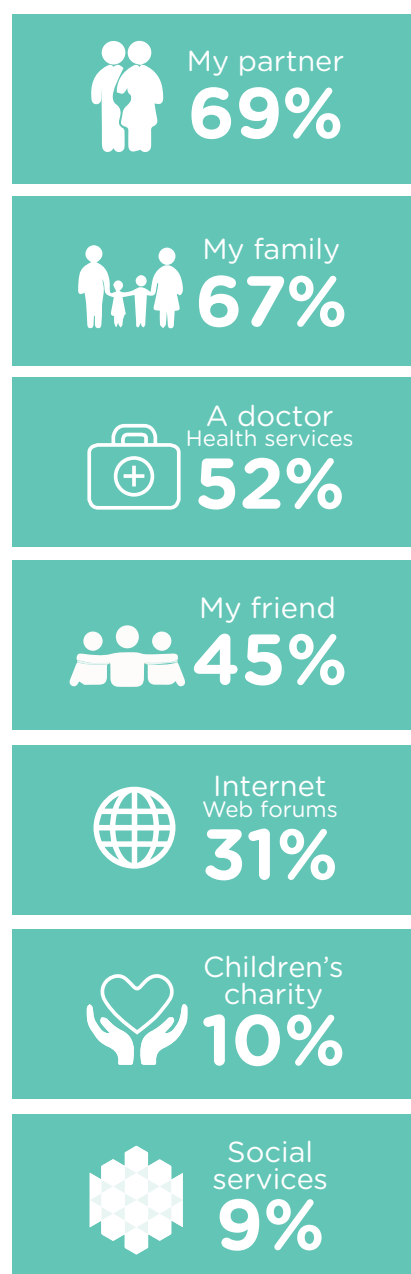
A parent's social network, including friends and school, are the next to turn to, with Internet and web forums trusted by just under 1 in 3 parents as a source of support and advice.

Women (54%) are more likely than men (35%) to turn to friends. Older parents (55+) are more likely to not turn to anyone for support on issues affecting their children (13%).

“Children's Centres are key to ensuring vulnerable children get a better start in life and parents can access the support they need. We shouldn't underestimate the profoundly positive impact that peer support can have at the earliest point on their journey with what is the most important job in the world.”

Paul Ringer,
Deputy Chief Executive

Who would you turn to for support on any issues affecting your children?





Jade's Story

During a Family Day visit at HMP Wandsworth, Spurgeons staff noticed that 14 year old Jade, visiting her imprisoned father Mark, was sitting with him crying and in obvious distress. Staff mentioned this to Jade's mother Carol, and asked how things were going. Carol confided that the family were having a difficult time. Jade was upset and struggling to cope emotionally with her dad being in prison and her school work was suffering. Carol had asked the school for help, but they seemed unable to do anything.

Staff identified which school Jade attended and recognised that it was linked to another Spurgeons' service in the local community. Jade attended the service and completed a series of one to one sessions with the Spurgeons link support worker. Carol was extremely grateful for the intervention and told Spurgeons that although she had been asking for help since Mark was convicted, this was the first time anyone had been able to offer the family any support for their situation.

Looking to the future

Our research shows that parents of all ages and backgrounds are concerned for their children. And many of the most vulnerable are struggling. This is true across society. But for youngsters facing challenges, who are caring for a relative or who have a parent in prison, it's much worse. These are the children we work with, day in, day out and the need for services like ours is increasing.

It's true that support has reduced in recent years and there's a lot more pressure on agencies to pull back from early intervention spending.

What's important however is that families get the support they need when they need it, and we must all – government, charities, schools and GPs included – do much more so people know where they can turn to.

But we also need to take note of parents' aspirations for their children. There is a message in our report which has important implications for public policy – the idea that more and more parents want their children to be satisfied with life and have a strong belief that anything is possible.

For a long time we have been reductionist in the way in which we have measured success for services and what a good outcome looks like for a child or young person (i.e. chased averages on league tables).

As a society, we have measured success in terms of how well our children do at school, or success in finding a well-paid job, or living up to an ideal. This has led to pressure leading to anxiety.

Wanting our children to have a satisfied and contented life is normal and mundane on one level, but it's a profoundly powerful shift in the kind of future we want for our children and the outcomes we should be driving through our public policy.

**“Hope itself is like a star
- not to be seen in the
sunshine of prosperity, and
only to be discovered in the
night of adversity.”**

Charles Haddon Spurgeon
(Spurgeons' founder - 1867)



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Appendix 1

The Parent Report

1. Characteristics of children in need: 2015 to 2016, Department of Education
2. Analysis of the income distribution 1994/95 – 2015/16, Department for Work & Pensions, 2016
3. When asked to select/pick their top three biggest hopes/aspirations for their child(ren)'s future.
4. When asked to select/pick their top three concerns for their child either now or in the future.
5. When asked to select/pick what they think is the most important factor for children to feel hopeful about their future.
6. When asked to select/pick the top three behaviour that they think are the most important for a parent to use on their children.
7. When asked to select what they think is the most important factor for their child to feel hopeful for their future.
8. When asked about the three biggest hopes/aspirations they had for their child(ren)'s future.
9. 26% of parents think they would/currently benefit from a parental support group. 21% don't currently use a parental support group but think they would benefit. 5% currently use parental support groups and benefit from doing so.



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