
IN THEIR OWN WORDS: PARENTS SPEAK ON HOW THEIR CHILDREN ARE DOING, THEIR FAMILY'S SUPPORTS, AND THEIR GOALS

Clear patterns emerged
in what parents said
has been helping them
and their families.

In the Summer and Fall of 2022, we asked parents to answer open-ended questions about the things they look at to know how well their children are doing, the supports and services they rely on, and what their long-term goals are for their children. We received nearly 2,000 answers to these questions. Our analysis showed a set of key themes in what parents shared.



In this fact sheet, we use an innovative analytical approach called Structural Topic Modeling, to identify the most commonly occurring themes in

parent responses. We also include quotes from parents to help illustrate each theme.

PARENTS LOOK TO CHILDREN'S DAILY BEHAVIORS, EMOTIONAL STATE, AND INFORMATION FROM THEIR PEDIATRICIAN TO UNDERSTAND HOW WELL THEIR CHILDREN ARE DOING.

Seven themes emerged from parents' answers to the following open-ended question: "What are ways you know whether your child age 3 or under is doing really well or thriving?"

The following three themes were most prevalent:

- **Parents gauge how their children are doing by observing their behavior in daily activities, including eating, sleeping, and interacting with peers.**

"She's eating and sleeping well, she's happy and using her imagination. She is active and talkative, and is affectionate to us and her sister."

"Shows interest in things we do day to day and engages in activities with me whether that is coloring, play, helping with chores. Their fussiness level usually tells me a lot about how they're feeling."

"My child is thriving because she is happy, kind, and plays well. She loves books, has an abundant vocabulary, and can safely tell me how she feels."

- **Regular visits to the doctor to discuss any concerns and assess progress toward developmental milestones also help parents know whether their children are thriving.**

"He is healthy, in all the correct percentiles for his age, breastfeeds often, has a good diet, and is on his way to becoming trilingual."

"He meets all his age-appropriate benchmarks and is healthy."

"My older child learns and applies new words regularly in two languages. Well-child visits at the doctors confirm that they're physically well, too."

- **Parents look to children's curiosity and attitudes toward trying new things and learning new skills as evidence that their children are prospering.**

"She interacts with others, eats a variety of foods and is willing to try new things, communicates needs and wants, tests boundaries, shows emotion."

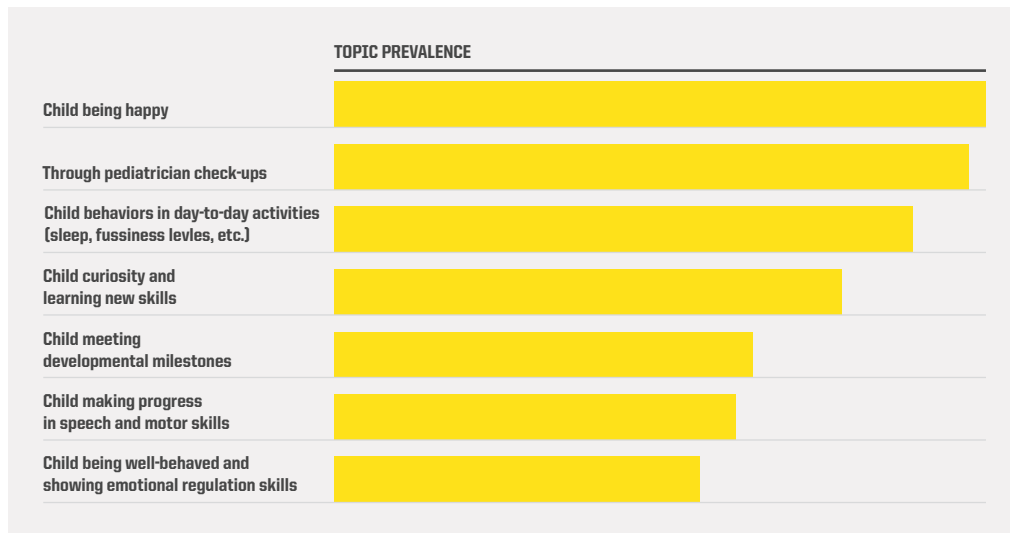
Parents know their children best. They consider a number of factors to gauge their children's overall well-being.

“His general demeanor and ability to grasp new concepts and apply them to the world around him. He spent hours yesterday singing the

alphabet song. I think he’s doing really well.”

“She isn’t afraid to try anything.”

Ways parents know children are doing really well or thriving



PARENTS SAY THAT GOVERNMENT ASSISTANCE, EMPLOYER SUPPORT, AND FAMILY AND COMMUNITY RESOURCES ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT SOURCES OF HELP FOR THEM AND THEIR YOUNG CHILDREN

Parents proactively seek support from different corners of their communities, and come to depend on these people, programs, and resources.

We asked parents about the supports or services they are relying on and that they are finding most helpful. Eleven topics emerged, with the following three being most prevalent:

– **Assistance from the government helps parents meet their families’ needs.**

“The housing subsidy provided by the government gave us a stable place to live without leaving us homeless.”

“I don’t know how I would be feeding my kiddos without food stamps.”

“My oldest is in speech therapy and none of us would be here if it wasn’t for Medicaid.”

– **Parents said that they rely heavily on family members, employers, and local community resources for emotional, social, and financial support.**

“We have a pretty good church family. We also have our daughter in dance

to give her some peer interactions. My internship has given me emotional support. Our family is also good about supporting us from afar.”

“We love the local library. We usually go there once a week and borrow more than 10 books. We can’t afford new books every week!”

“Soon I will go closer to full-time and my boss will be offering me a 401k, so I can take the worry of my own future off their shoulders.”

– **Therapy, play-centered educational and extracurricular activities, and preschool programs offer children opportunities to socialize and grow while meeting parents’ child care needs.**

“My son’s usual preschool is a really amazing place that teaches the same values that we want to instill in him at home as well.”

“We have Parents As Teachers visits to keep them on track. They teach lots of great skills to help them succeed.”

“We love the preschool we send our 4-year-old daughter to, as it fulfills the need of childcare and continues our efforts of teaching kindness and respect.”

Many parents take advantage of early learning opportunities for their children and find them valuable.

What support or services parents rely on



PARENTS HAVE WIDE-RANGING ASPIRATIONS FOR THEIR CHILDREN, BUT FOCUS ON THE DESIRE FOR THEM TO BE SAFE, HAPPY, AND HEALTHY

Parents answered the following open-ended question: “As a parent, what are the long-term goals that you have for your child(ren) in areas such as school, friends, money, future career, or any other area?” The following were some of the most common goals parents mentioned:

– **Parents care deeply about children’s safety, health, and well-being.**

“I want them to feel safe and comfortable in the community and have empathy for other humans. I want them to have a fun childhood where they can look back and it was a magical experience and not be traumatized by me or the era we live in.”

“I want my children to be kind and considerate. I want them to be emotionally healthy individuals who love others well and generously. I want them to have healthy boundaries in relationships. I hope they choose to be lifelong learners.”

“I would love my kids to always believe in themselves, never try to be someone they aren’t just to please their friends.”

– **Parents want their children to find success, stability, and fulfillment in their academic, professional, and personal relationships and endeavors.**

“I want her to be open to learning what she feels would be a good career for her to be both successful and happy. I am teaching her about plants and nature and how to be self-sufficient and love our land.”

“I want him to have a positive experience with schooling. For him to make friends that are great connections. That he will learn smart and healthy money habits early. And have a career that pays decently but also fulfills him on a deeper level.”

“Have as many healthy relationships as she can. Enroll her in a great school so that she may learn as much as possible and have the opportunities that will come along with good education and become whatever she chooses to be.”

– **Parents also hope their children work to address inequities.**

“I’d like them to be aware of hardships others have and to work to dismantle white supremacy.”

“I want them to be kind and good friends and to stand up for their friends and themselves when they see injustices. I want them to make the world better by being in it.”

“I want them to cry out against injustice and care for the widow and the orphan and the marginalized.”

When thinking about what the future holds for their children, parents generally hope their children are content, connected, and compassionate.

SUMMARY

- Parents are attuned to signs that allow them to evaluate how well their children are doing, paying particular attention to their children’s emotional state and daily behaviors, information from a pediatrician, and their children’s interest in learning or trying new things.
- Parents rely on a variety of supports and services to help them meet their children’s needs and realize the goals they have for both their children and themselves as caregivers. Parents focus on the importance of support from the government, employers, family and friends, child care providers, and other local resources. It is clear that parents are finding ways to support themselves and their children.
- Every parent wants the best for their children, in all facets of their life. Beyond health and safety, strong relationships, a sense of self fulfillment in personal and professional endeavors, and helping to better the world are important desires that parents have for their young children.
- While parents with young children face countless challenges, their responses to these open-ended questions make clear that they are profoundly attentive to their children’s well-being, resourceful, and optimistic about the future.

ABOUT THE RAPID PROJECT

Data presented in this fact sheet are based on parents' open-ended responses to RAPID household surveys.

Analyses are based on responses collected from 1,008 caregivers between July 2022 and November 2022. These caregivers represent a range of voices: 14.7% are Black/African American, 20.4% are Latinx, and 37.6% live at or below 200% of the federal poverty level.

Proportions/percentages are calculated based on the item-level response rates, not on the total sample. The data for these analyses are not weighted.

The RAPID project includes a survey of caregivers with children under age 6 and a survey of child care providers and other adults who care for children under age 6.

These surveys are designed to gather essential information continuously regarding the needs, health-promoting behaviors, and well-being of children and their families and important adults in their lives.

RAPID collects data monthly from 1,000 caregivers and child care providers in all 50 states. The surveys are national in scope, though not technically nationally representative. RAPID collects snapshots of data across time and can also assess trends longitudinally.

For more information about RAPID study design and methods, [see here](#).

RAPID is under the direction of Philip Fisher, PhD, Director of the Center on Early Childhood at Stanford University

1,000

surveyed monthly

115

surveys

16,000+

households

50

US states

