



**MetLife Foundation**



# Parenting Infants and Toddlers Today

Survey among parents of children from birth to 3 years  
conducted for ZERO TO THREE by Hart Research Associates,  
made possible by a generous grant from MetLife Foundation

# Welcome



Matthew E. Melmed  
Executive Director of ZERO TO THREE



A. Dennis White  
CEO and President of MetLife Foundation

MetLife Foundation was established in 1976 by MetLife to carry on its longstanding tradition of corporate contributions and community involvement. Grants support education, health, civic, and cultural programs. For more information about the Foundation, visit [www.metlife.org](http://www.metlife.org).



## Geoff Garin President of Hart Research Associates

Founded in 1971, Hart Research Associates is one of the leading survey research firms in the United States and has been at the cutting edge of change in the field of public opinion for more than three decades. In that time, they have conducted well over 5,000 public opinion surveys and have administered and analyzed interviews among more than three million individuals.

- Explore the issues and challenges that parents of children from birth to 3 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
- Better understand how parents interpret and respond to their children's behavior

Survey of 1,615 parents of children from birth to 36 months, conducted June 4 – 11, 2009

- Full sample includes oversamples of African American and Hispanic parents. (Hispanic parents were given the option to take the survey in Spanish.)
- Based on U.S. Census data, the sample is representative of parents of children from birth to 3 years, as it pertains to basic demographic characteristics such as race, ethnicity, age, and educational attainment.
- Mixed-methodology of phone and on-line interviews.

- 33% fathers, 67% mothers
- 73% married, 11% living with partner, 8% separated or divorced, 8% single
- Two-thirds under age 35, 97% under age 50
- 41% high school degree or less education, 30% four-year college degree or more education
- 77% one child and 23% more than one child from birth to age 3 in household
- 70% more than one child under age 18 in household
- 36% first-time parents

**Good News:** Parents understand the importance of the kinds of experiences that are critical to young children's development.

- 93% of parents understand the importance of reading to young children in fostering cognitive development
- 74% understand the importance of talking to very young babies or newborns in facilitating cognitive development
- 70% understand the importance of singing
- 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



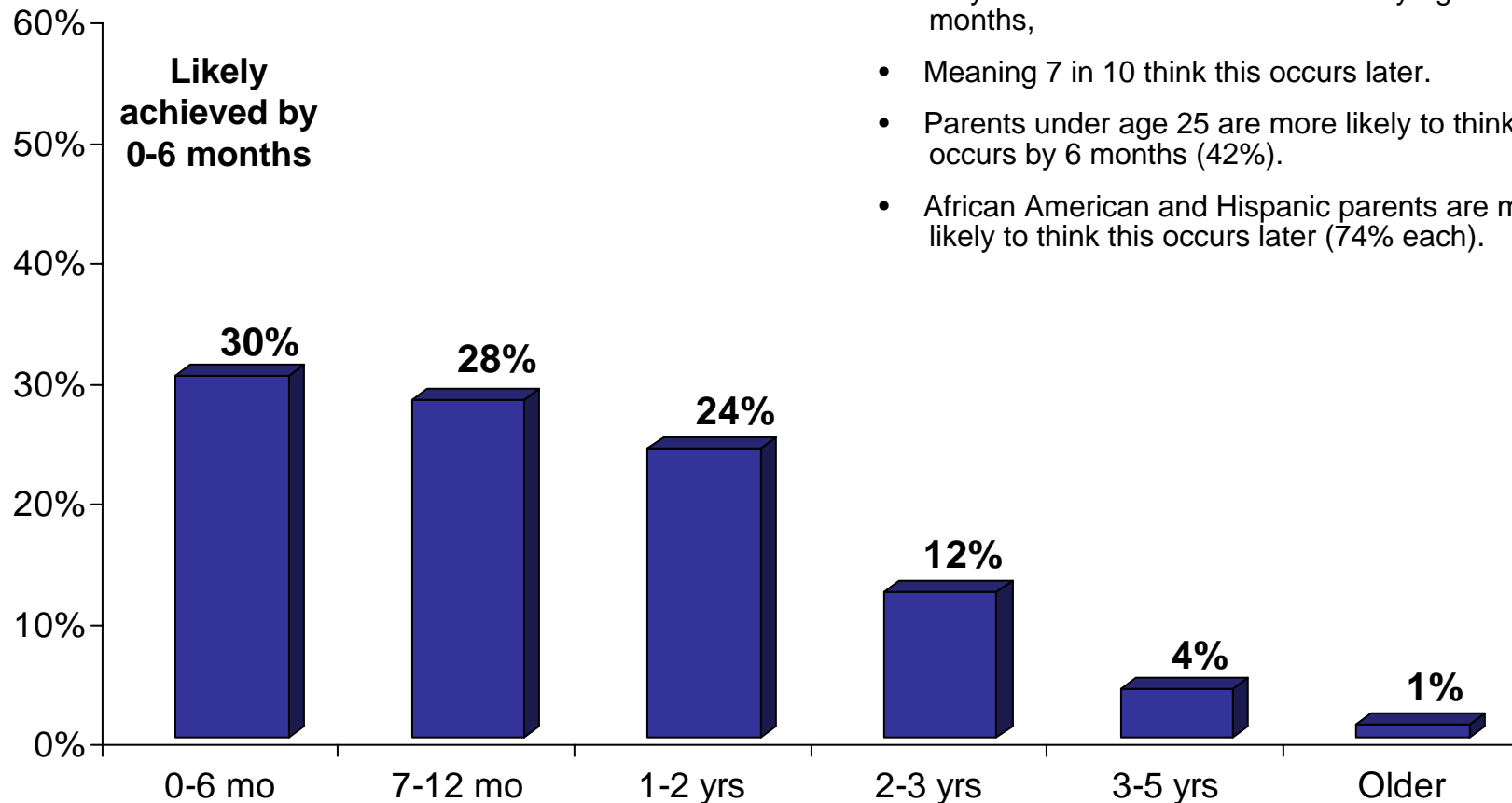
## **Two Obstacles to Parents' Promoting Healthy Development**

- Lack of understanding of how deeply babies and toddlers are affected by their earliest experiences
- Economic downturn's impact on parents' ability to provide stable child care

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

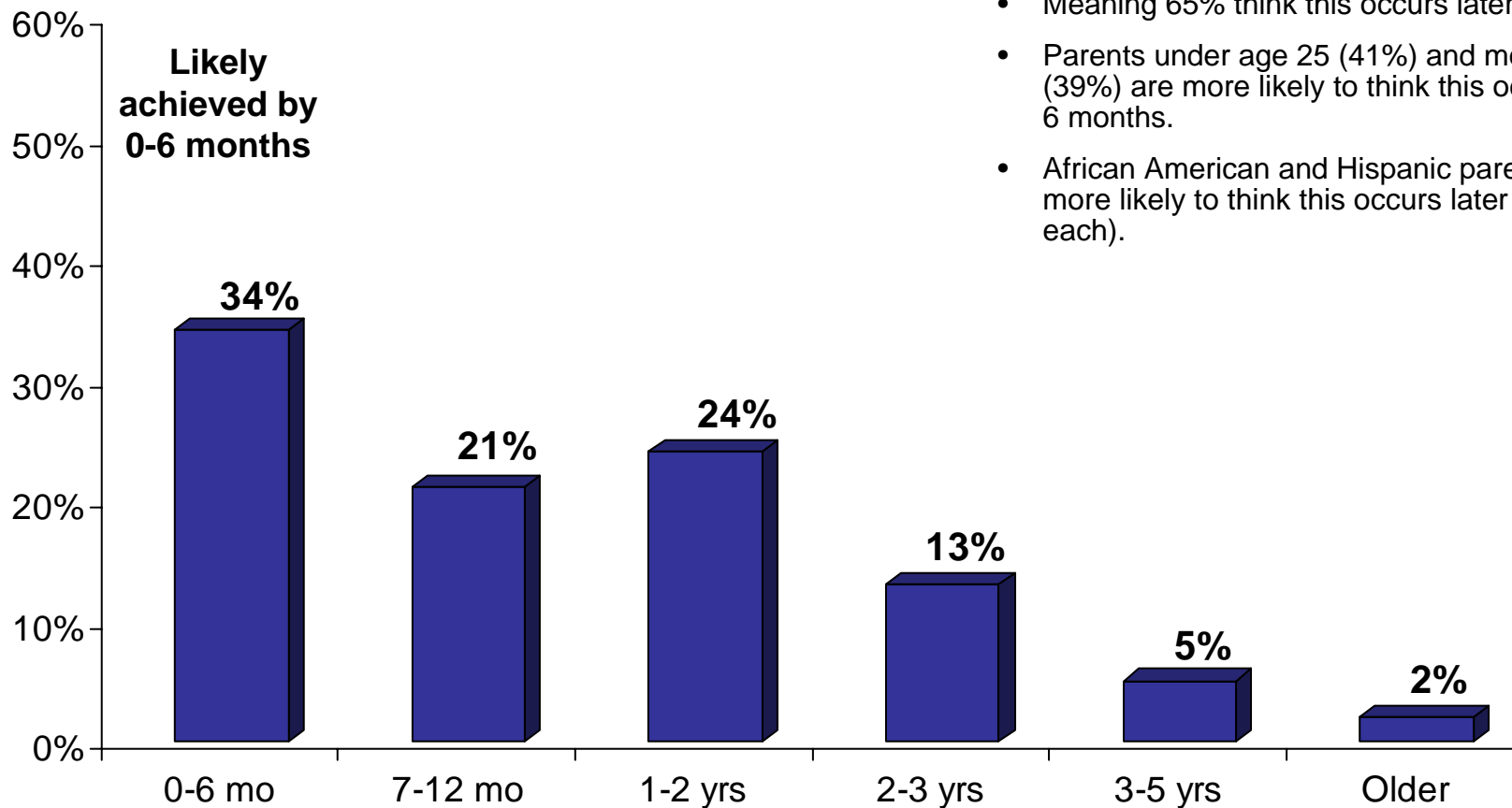


# Child Can Experience Feelings Like Sadness and Fear



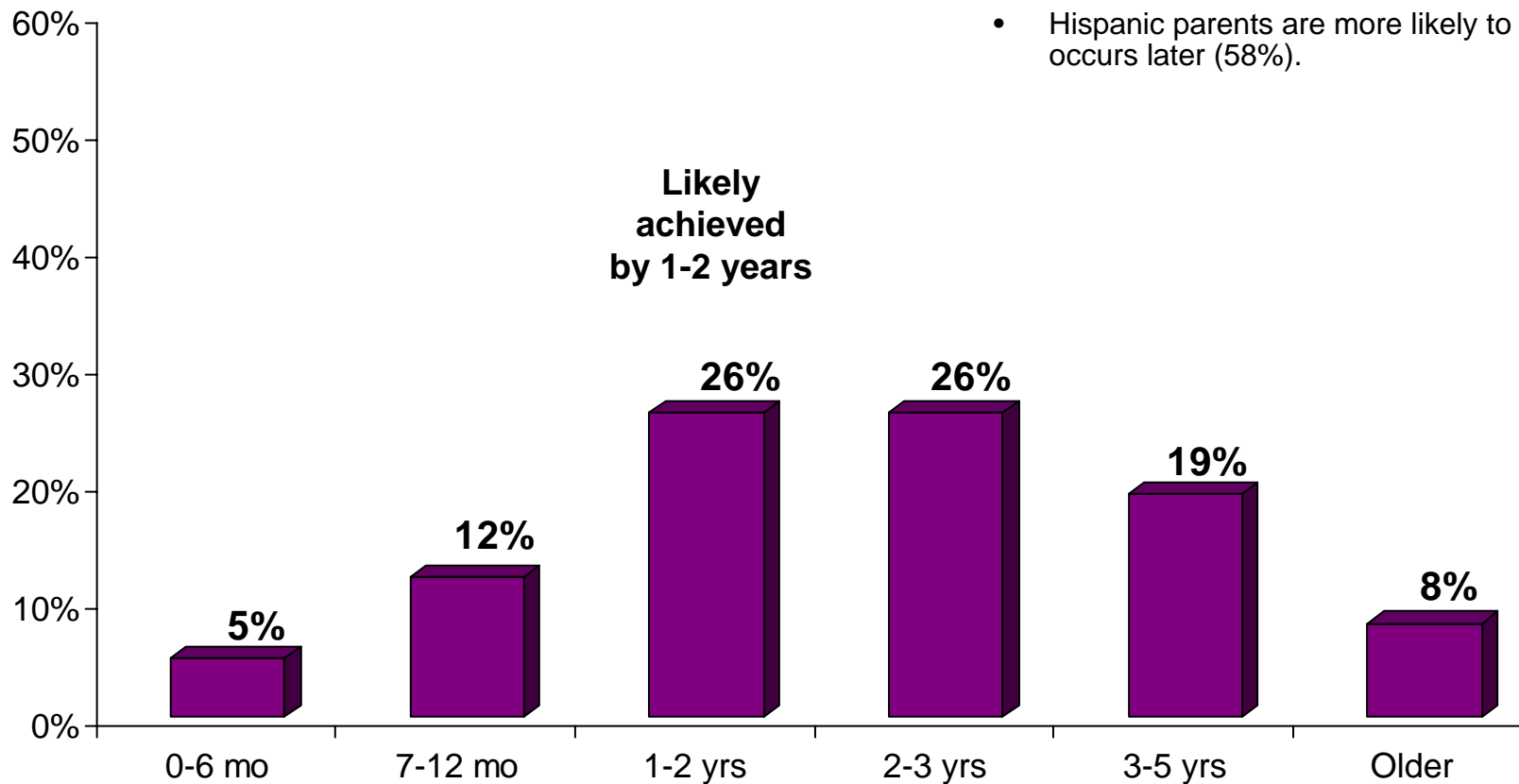
- Only 30% think a child can do this by age 6 months,
- Meaning 7 in 10 think this occurs later.
- Parents under age 25 are more likely to think this occurs by 6 months (42%).
- African American and Hispanic parents are more likely to think this occurs later (74% each).

# Child Senses If Parents Are Angry or Sad and Can Be Affected by Moods



- Only 34% think a child can do this by age 6 months,
- Meaning 65% think this occurs later.
- Parents under age 25 (41%) and mothers (39%) are more likely to think this occurs by 6 months.
- African American and Hispanic parents are more likely to think this occurs later (72% each).

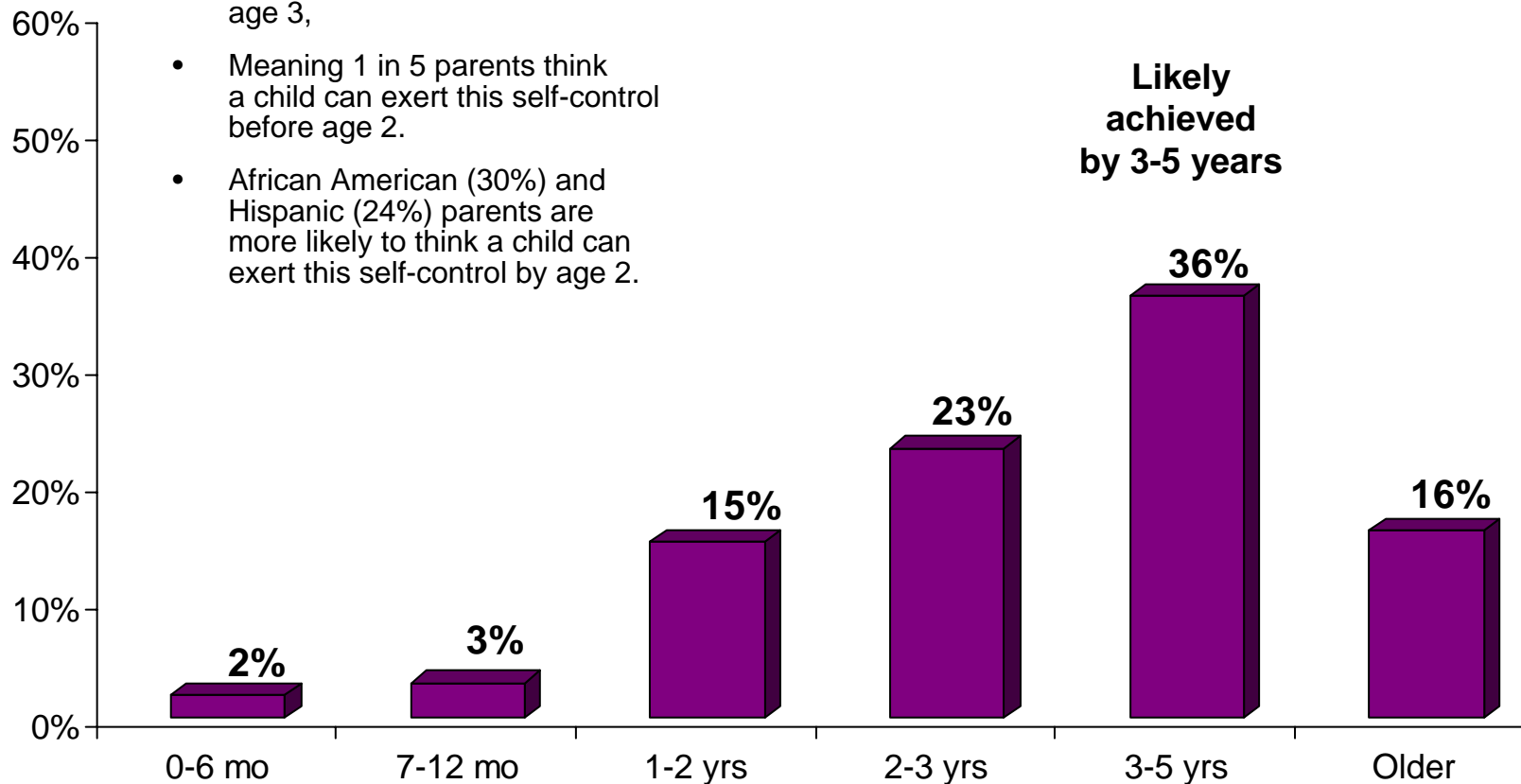
# Child Can Feel Good or Bad About Himself or Herself



- Only 43% think a child can do this by age 2,
- Meaning over half think this occurs later.
- Hispanic parents are more likely to think this occurs later (58%).

# Child Can Control Emotions, Such as Not Having Tantrum When Frustrated

- 79% think a child can do this by age 5, and 43% think a child can do this by age 3,
- Meaning 1 in 5 parents think a child can exert this self-control before age 2.
- African American (30%) and Hispanic (24%) parents are more likely to think a child can exert this self-control by age 2.



# Presenter



Ross Thompson, PhD  
Professor of Psychology, University of California, Davis  
Member of ZERO TO THREE Board of Directors

# Implication: Lack Understanding of Influence of Early Experiences



- By 6 months, infants are already showing a full range of emotions, including joy, sadness, anger, and fear.
- In the early months, infants also respond emotionally to the feelings of other people. This is especially apparent when the baby's mother is depressed.
- Emotional self-control is still very limited in young children – partly because brain regions governing self-control are very immature.

Izard, C. E., and colleagues (1995). The ontogeny and significance of infants' facial expressions in the first 9 months of life. *Developmental Psychology*, 31, 997-1013.

Tronick, E., & Reck, C. (2009). Infants of depressed mothers. *Harvard Review of Psychiatry*, 17, 147-156.

Diamond, A. (2002). Normal development of prefrontal cortex from birth to young adulthood. In D. Stuss & R. Knight (Eds.), *Principles of frontal lobe function*. New York: Oxford.



# Presenter



Claire Lerner, LCSW-C, Licensed Clinical Social Worker,  
Child Development Specialist and  
Director of Parenting Resources at ZERO TO THREE

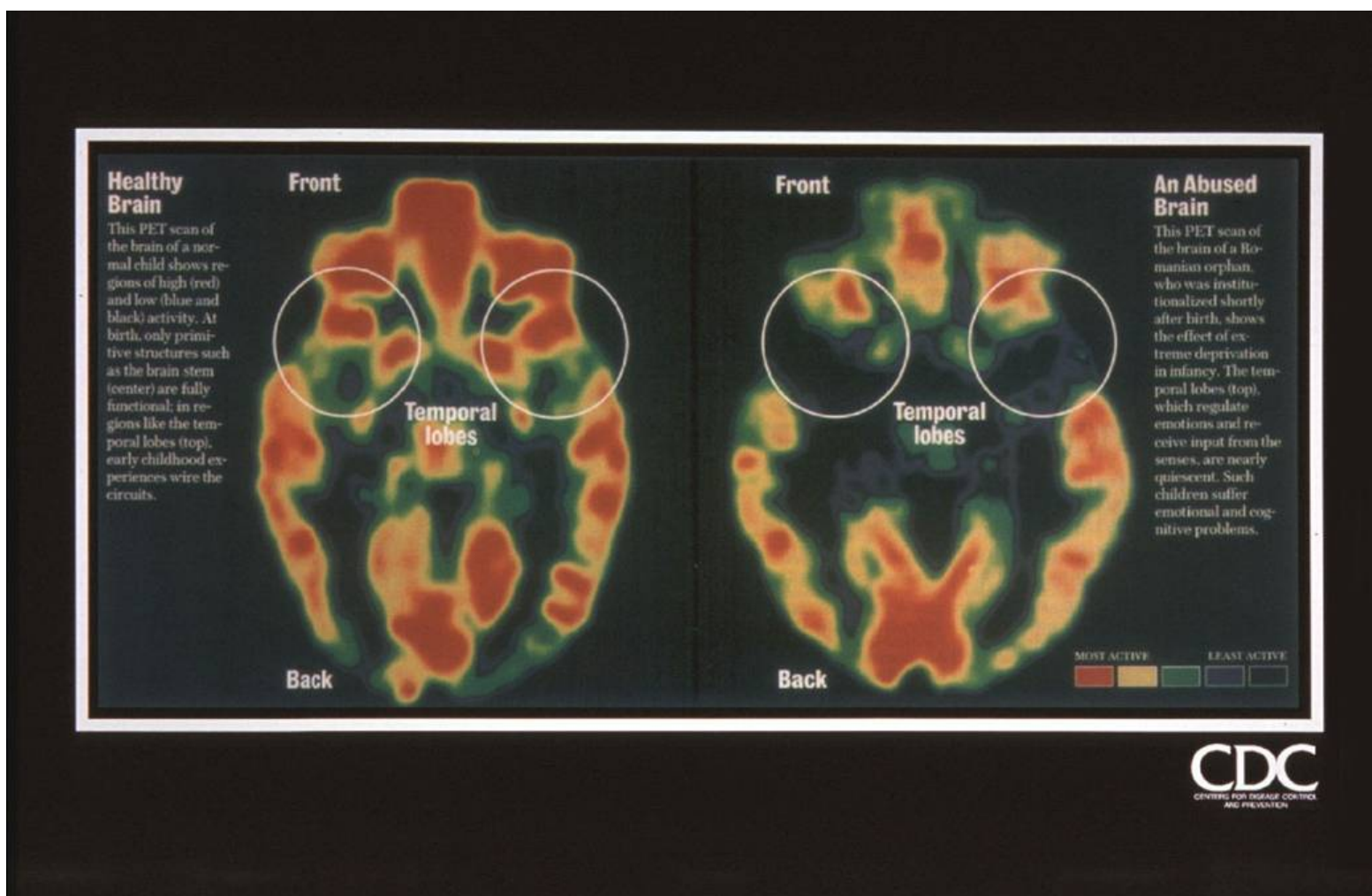
# Implications

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- Identify and engage key influencers of parents.
- Empower key influencers with information and tools they can incorporate into their interactions with families to help them understand early social- emotional development and the impact of early experiences.

# Impact of Trauma on Brain



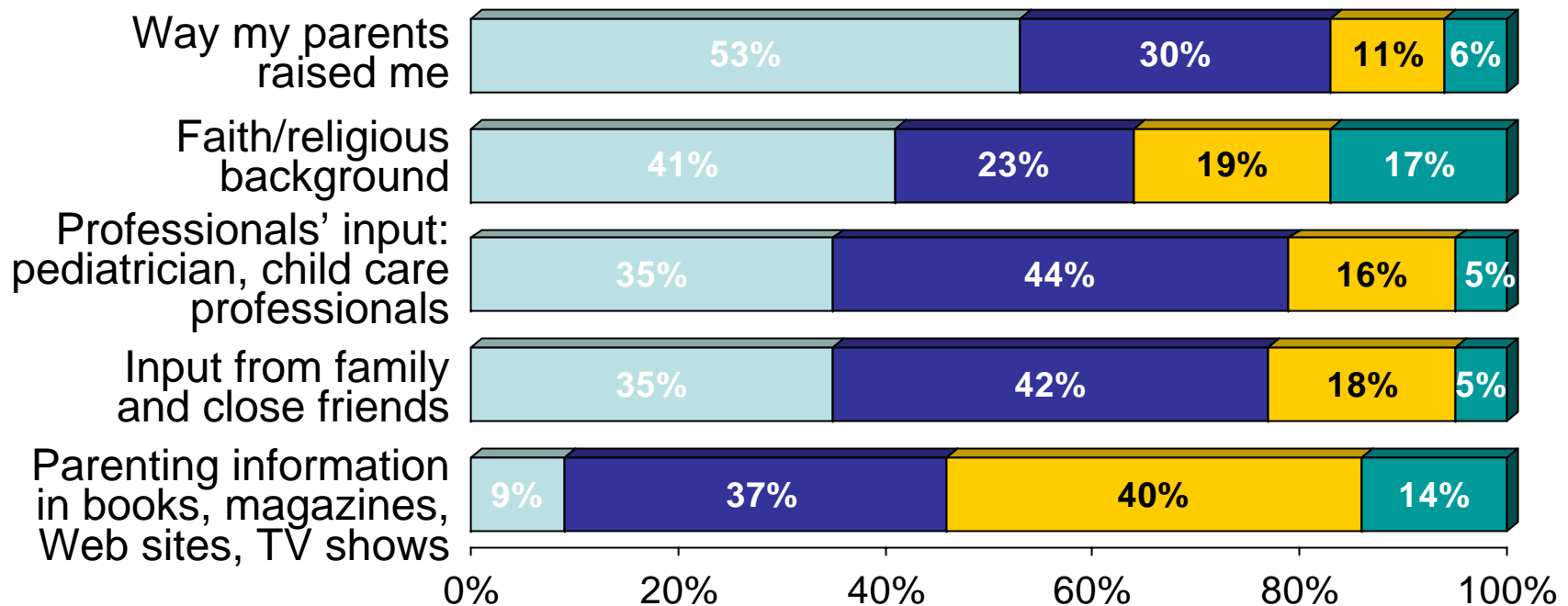
# Family history and faith are major influences on approach to parenting



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# Family History and Faith Are Powerful Influences on Parenting

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



# Major Influences on Parenting Among Key Subgroups

*% saying each has a major influence on their parenting*

	Whites	African Americans	Hispanics	Mothers	Fathers	First-time parents	Repeat parents
Way my parents raised me	52%	<b>61%</b>	49%	50%	<b>59%</b>	53%	53%
Faith/religious background	42%	<b>49%</b>	35%	42%	40%	35%	44%
Professionals' input: pediatrician, child care professionals	33%	37%	<b>40%</b>	<b>39%</b>	26%	38%	33%
Input from family and close friends	33%	34%	36%	36%	35%	<b>43%</b>	31%
Parenting information in books, magazines, Web sites, TV shows	7%	13%	14%	11%	5%	10%	9%

## Implication: Influence of Family and Faith

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- Underscores need to encourage reflection to help parents become aware of how messages and experiences from their childhood influence their childrearing approach and choices.
- Need to dialogue with faith-based groups to understand their beliefs and values and how their scriptural holy books shape their attitudes about parenting and child rearing.
- Find ways to collaborate with clergy to share and incorporate evidence-based child development information in their communications with parents that respects and takes into account their beliefs and values.

# Grandparents are key and are major source of daily information and support

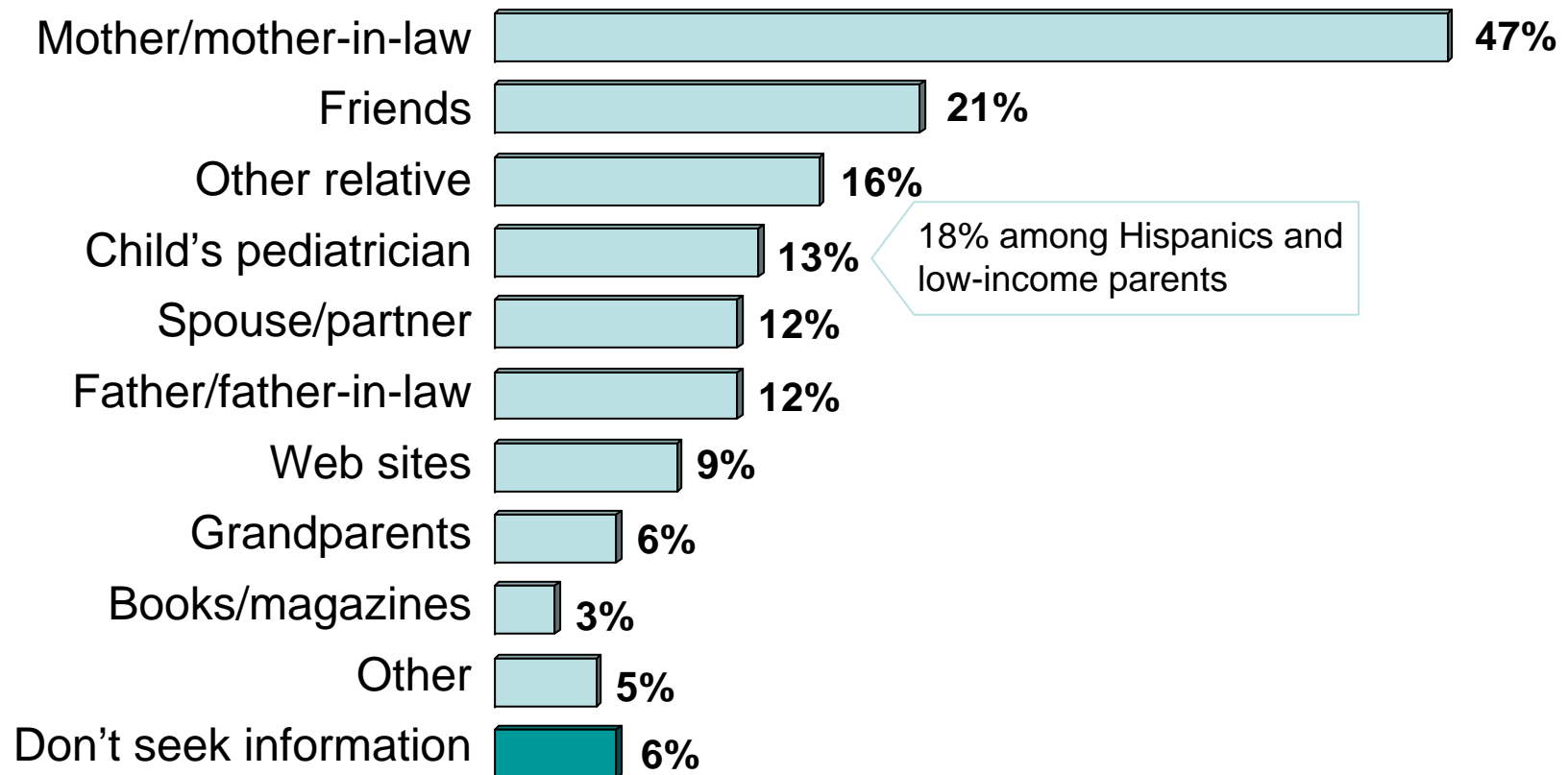


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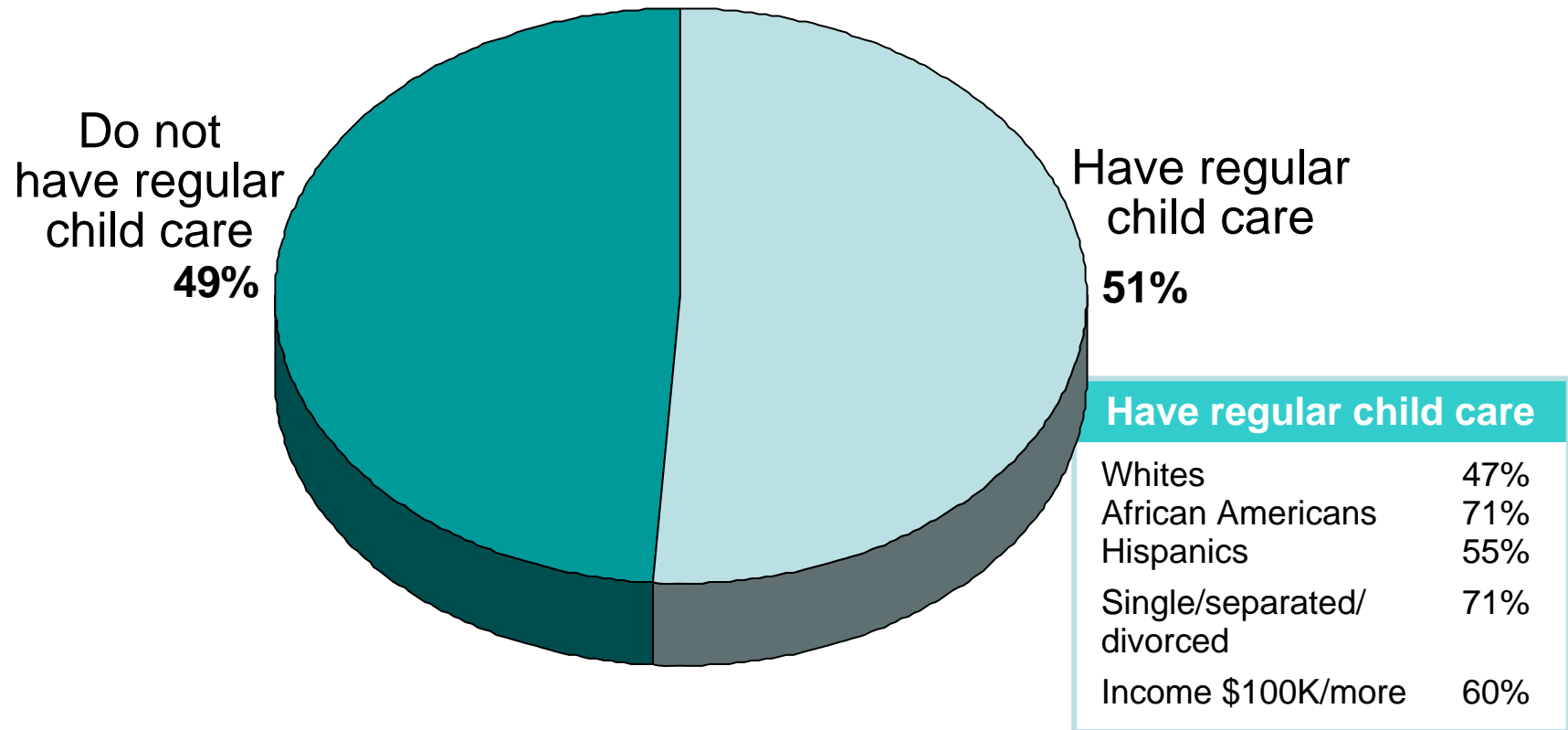
# Family Is Important Day-to-Day Source of Information

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



\* Volunteered responses to open-ended question

# Half of Parents Have Regular Child Care Other Than Themselves or Spouse/Partner



*Do you have someone else, besides you and your spouse or partner, who takes care of your child on a regular basis? And who is that?\**

	Whites	African Americans	Hispanics
<b>Have Regular Caregiver</b>	<b>47%</b>	<b>71%</b>	<b>55%</b>
Grandparent	22%	27%	27%
Other family	7%	20%	13%
Friend/neighbor	3%	2%	1%
Child care center	14%	24%	11%
Child care in child's home	4%	4%	4%
Child care-provider's home	2%	2%	2%
Other	1%	1%	—
<b>No Regular Caregiver</b>	<b>53%</b>	<b>29%</b>	<b>45%</b>

\* Volunteered responses to open-ended question

## Implication: Importance of Grandparents

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- “How I was raised” guides how parents care for their children – and strengthens intergenerational connections when a child is born.
- Grandparents are crucial for providing regular child care – especially when finances are difficult – and last-minute child care assistance when parents need it.
- Two-generation child care occurs when grandparents enable parents to be better caregivers.

Cherlin, A., & Furstenberg, F. (1986). *The new American grandparent: A place in the family, a life apart*. Basic.

## Implication: Importance of Grandparents

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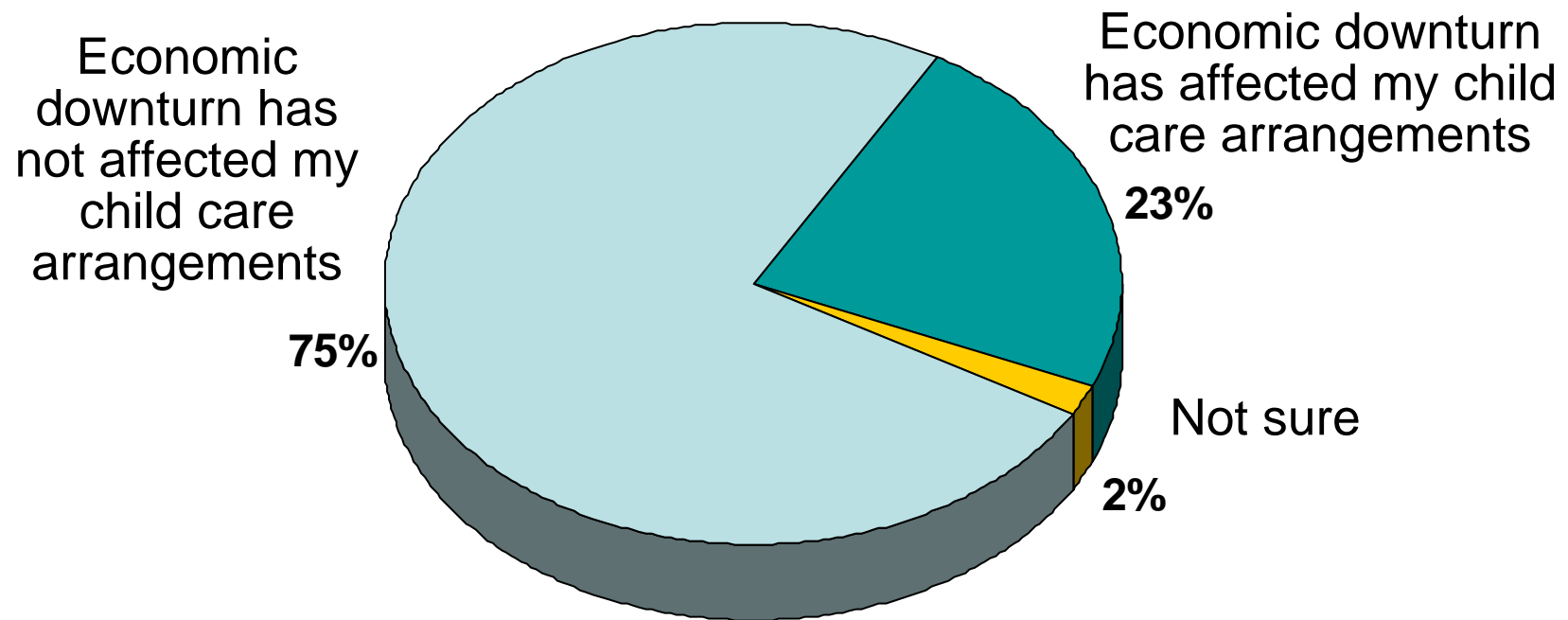
- Grandparents are key target audience for early childhood professionals.
- Need to understand and respect grandparents' unique role and provide services that join them where they are at.
- Grandparent-to-grandparent support and concrete assistance are critical for many grandparents caring for young children.

# The economic downturn has caused hardships for millions of parents of infants and toddlers



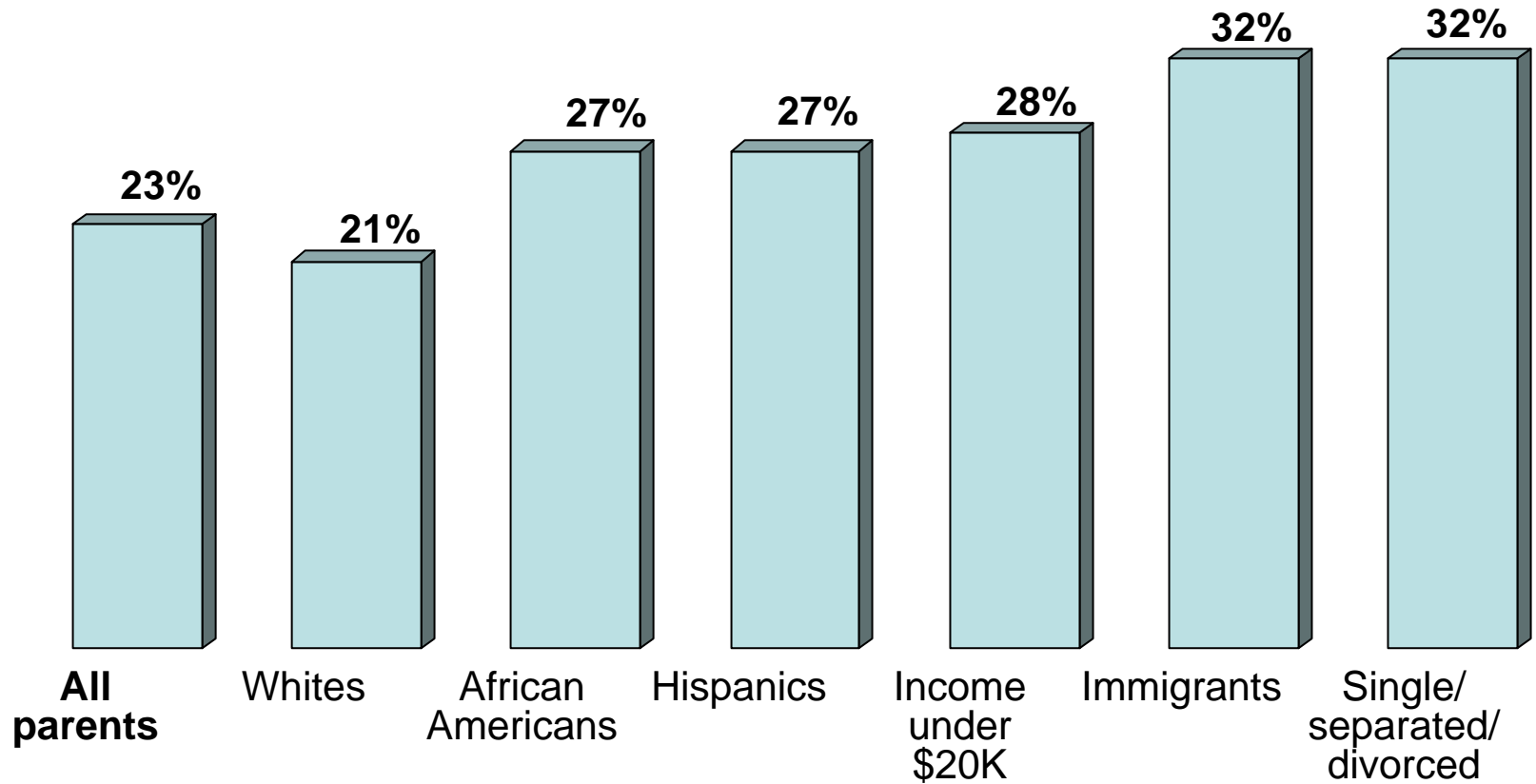
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# Economic Downturn Affects Child Care for One in Four Parents



# Some Parents Affected at Higher Rates

■ Economic downturn has affected my child care arrangements





How has the current economic downturn affected your child care arrangements?

Can't afford day care, babysitter	21%
Spouse lost job, stays with child/children	11%
Cut back child care hours	10%
Made other arrangements, pay others	7%
Costs went up, prices increased	5%
Changed shifts, rearranged schedules, someone stays home with children	5%

\* Volunteered responses to open-ended question

## Implication: Economic Downturn Impact on Child Care

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- Quality infant and toddler care is expensive, and parents have difficulty finding quality care they can afford.
- When family finances are tight, parents are forced to find alternative care – sometimes sacrificing *quality* and *stability* for *affordability*. This can be hard on young children.
- These problems weigh especially heavily on those least able to afford high quality infant/toddler care.

Phillips, D., & Adams, G. (2001). Child care and our youngest children. *The Future of Children*, 11, 35-51.

Cabrera, N. and colleagues (2006). *From welfare to child care: What happens to young children when mothers exchange welfare for work*. Erlbaum.

## Implication: Economic Downturn Impact on Child Care

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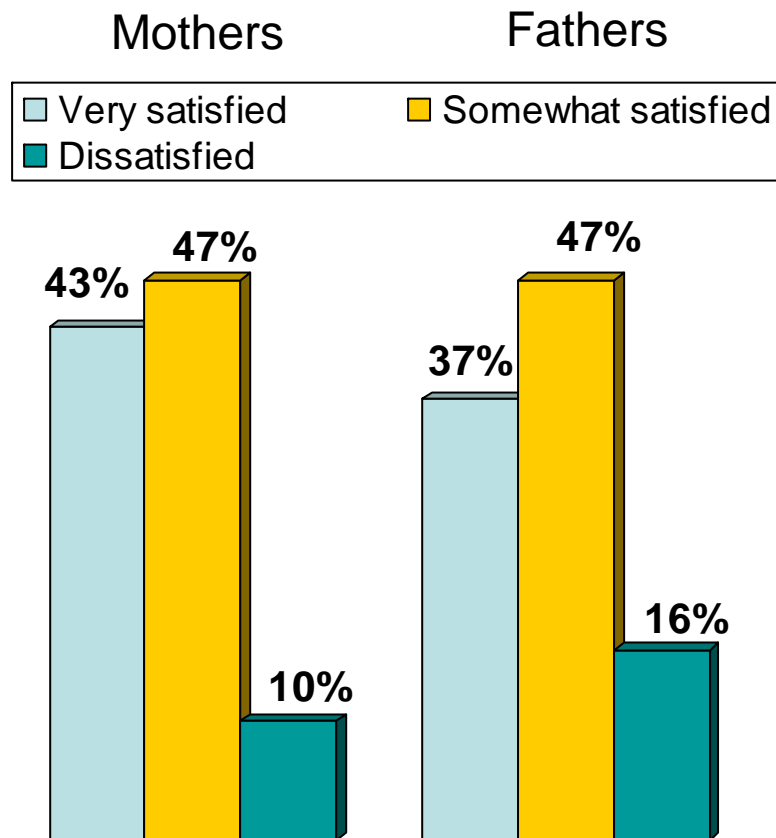
- Concern about impact of disruption to child's daily routine and impact of parental stress on child.
- Need to increase efforts to connect with Family, Friend and Neighbor (FFN) care providers who are caring for young children in ever-increasing numbers.

# Parenting experience is different for fathers and mothers



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## Satisfaction with Balance of Family, Work, Other Responsibilities



## Two/Three Most Difficult Behaviors to Deal With in Child Rearing

Behavior	Mothers	Fathers
Temper tantrums	40%	21%
Controlling emotions	15%	16%
Biting, fighting, hitting	16%	9%
Not listening	13%	13%
Sleep, bedtime issues	8%	17%
Potty training	10%	9%
Attitude, talking back	9%	9%
Eating, food issues	6%	11%

Fathers are three times more likely than mothers to turn to their spouse for parenting information.

**Fathers are less likely than mothers to recognize the importance of certain activities that facilitate learning.**

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

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

## Implication: Difference Between Moms and Dads



- Good news: Fathers have more knowledge and interest in young children than has traditionally been true. More fathers are caring for their young children.
- Fathers still defer to their spouses or partners – and this may reflect the reality of their understanding and experience.
- Couples who are mutually supportive as co-parents provide a richer nurturing environment for young children.

Cowan, P., and colleagues (2009). Promoting fathers' engagement with children: Preventive interventions for low-income families. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 71, 663-679.

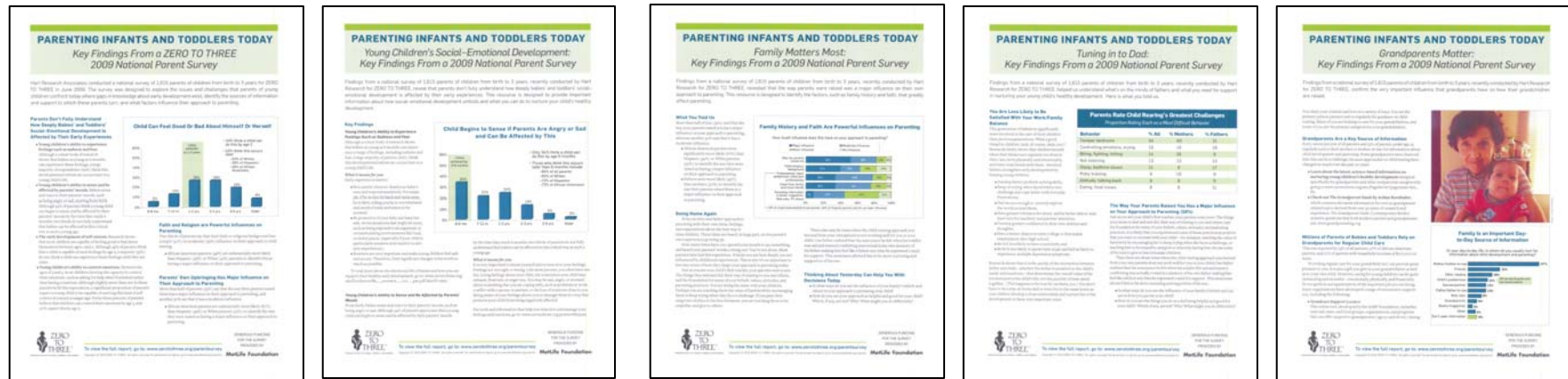
## Implication: Difference Between Moms and Dads



- According to Census data, 140,000 stay-at-home dads last year; one-third jump since 2002
- Estimate for 2009 as high as 2 million stay-at-home dads, either by necessity or by choice. (80% of the jobs shed during this current economic downturn held by men)
- Concern about impact on children being cared for by dads under stress
- Need to find ways to reach out to and connect with fathers in ways that respect their unique role
- Work with parents together, married or not, to develop strong co-parenting relationships



# Spread The Word: Survey Toolkit



To view the full survey report and additional resources, go to: [www.zerotothree.org/parentsurvey](http://www.zerotothree.org/parentsurvey)

# Tell Us What You Think

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We welcome your comments.  
Please submit them to:  
[zttparentsurvey@zerotothree.org](mailto:zttparentsurvey@zerotothree.org)



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