

Working Together to Support Parents and Carers Navigating Adolescence

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About the project

Nu Know partnered with Brunel University's Innovation/Research Support and Development Office, who supported with funding and academic support from Dr Nicole Wen for this research and development project (R&D). During this project, we conducted a survey seeking to answer the research question:

What issues are parents and carers most concerned about regarding their adolescent children and do parents and carers have access to support?

This document outlines the methodology used and results found for this project.



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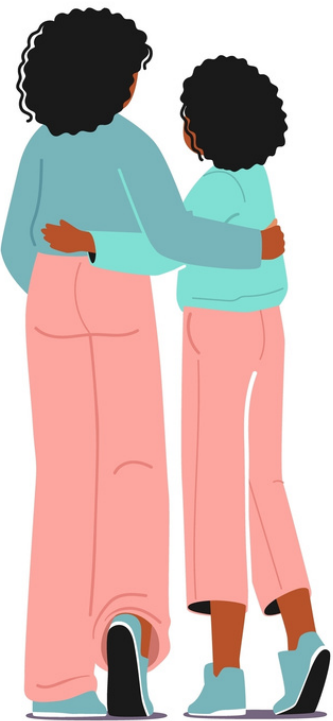
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Contextual Literature

Adolescence is a fascinating period of development, characterized by rapid physical, emotional, and social changes (Eccles et al., 1993). During this time, individuals undergo dramatic transformations, making parental support a crucial factor in shaping their development, well-being, and future life trajectories (Baig et al., 2021). Their network of “significant others” is primarily composed of relationships with parents/carers and friends (Crocetti et al., 2023). While these peer relationships are important, parental support is directly linked to reduced engagement in risky behaviors and increased self-esteem amongst adolescents (Zhu & Zhuang, 2023). In adolescence, parents and caregivers play an essential role in providing the necessary emotional and practical support that adolescents need to navigate these challenges (Silvers, 2022).

Research highlights several dimensions of parental support, including emotional availability, communication, and guidance, which collectively contribute to improved adolescent outcomes, such as academic success, mental health, and social development (Steinberg, 2014; Quatman et al., 2001). The emotional and psychological support provided by parents and carers fosters resilience in adolescents. According to a study by Bai and Repetti in 2015 adolescents who receive high levels of parental support are more likely to exhibit adaptive coping strategies and fewer behavioral problems. Additionally, parental involvement in adolescent life promotes a sense of belonging and security, which is crucial for personal identity formation (Brown & Larson, 2009). This groundwork enables adolescents to explore their independence while knowing they have a supportive network to rely on during challenging times.

Despite the acknowledged importance of parental support, parents and carers often express uncertainty regarding how best to support their adolescent children. This gap in confidence may stem from a lack of relevant information and resources, underscoring the need for targeted support systems for parents and carers. Many community and school-based organisations are implementing “family strengthening intervention programs” which consist of promoting parental involvement in children's development through sustained effort to ensure the parents and carers have the necessary opportunities, networks and support to raise their children successfully (Caspe et. al., 2006). These programs helped strengthen parents' and carers confidence in helping children with school thus raising expectations for children's futures as learners (Caspe et. Al., 2006).



Contextual Literature

Similarly, one-to-one support programmes, such as the Family Check-Up model, have shown positive effects in enhancing parental skills, leading to better youth outcomes, including decreased rates of substance misuse (Smith et al., 2018). The Incredible Years Program is an effective intervention that successfully targets parenting behaviors to yield positive outcomes for young children, reducing conduct disorders while promoting prosocial behavior. By enhancing parenting practices through training, the program leads to significant improvements in child behavior, particularly for those initially identified as high-risk for behavioral issues (Caspe et al., 2006)

Problem solving programs that aim to increase parents' range of skills as well as changing parents' behaviors were effective in improving emotional and behavioral problems in young children (Bell, 2007). Furthermore, research conducted by the Early Intervention Foundation (Pote, 2019) highlights that structured support facilitates not only skill-building for parents but also enhances their confidence in dealing with complex adolescent issues. Parents who participated in these interventions reported feeling more equipped to foster open discussions with their children about sensitive topics, which can mitigate potential risks associated with adolescence (Pote, 2019).

Parental support during adolescence is paramount, influencing a wide array of developmental outcomes for young people. Despite parents and carers often expressing a lack of confidence in their ability to provide support, evidence suggests that targeted training and resources can significantly enhance their skills and confidence. Future policies should focus on implementing widespread training programmes for parents and carers, facilitating greater awareness and understanding of adolescent development, and promoting healthy parent-adolescent relationships. Such initiatives are essential for fostering an environment where adolescents can thrive and develop into well-adjusted adults.



Research Participants

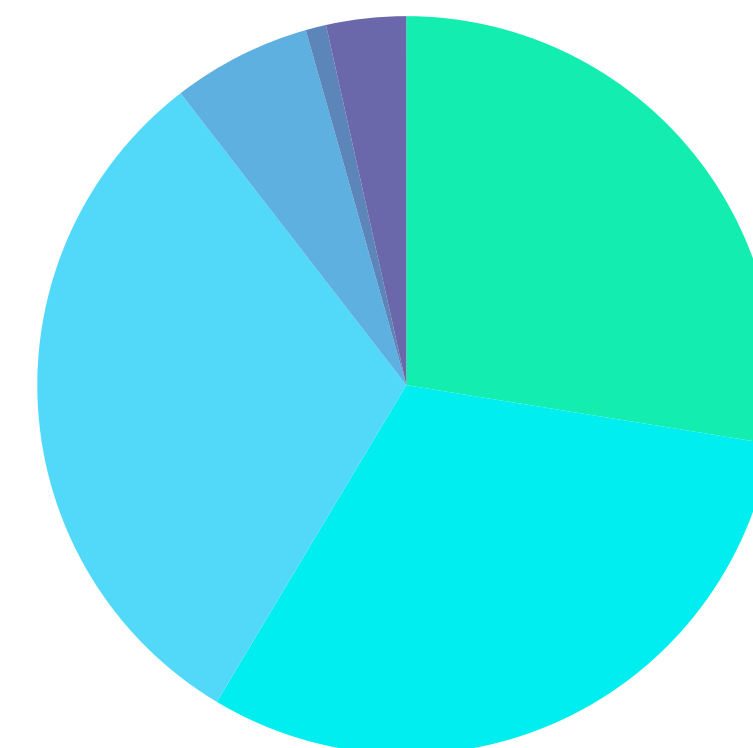
Profile of survey respondents:

- **116 parents or caregivers** of a current 8–19-year-old residing in England.*
- The **mean age of participants was 40.6 years** (range: 26 – 61 years).
- **50% self-identified as women, and 50% self-identified as men.**
- Participants were recruited using the online recruitment tool Prolific.com.
- Participants received £7 compensation for participating in this survey.

*We excluded individuals currently working in youth or child-related services (e.g., education, healthcare) to enable researchers to gather feedback that is more likely to align with the general population.

Figure 1: Participants ethnic background

- 27.6% Black British, African and/or Carib...
- 31.1% White English, Welsh, Scottish, Irish...
- 31% Asian British, Indian, Pakistani, Japa...
- 6.1% Mixed/Multiple Ethnic Background
- .9% Other (i.e. Egyptian)
- 3.5% Prefer Not to Say



Research Materials & Procedure

- Our survey consisted of 12 questions about parenting, issues impacting young people and participants views on current access to information and support for parents and carers of adolescents.
- The survey took approximately 20 – 25 minutes to complete and was hosted on Qualtics.com.
- The study protocol was reviewed and approved by the Brunel University ethics committee.

Research Data Analysis

Our data analysis encompassed both quantitative and qualitative methods:

- Quantitative survey responses were analysed using descriptive statistics (means and frequencies).
- Thematic analysis was used to explore the qualitative data (e.g., open-ended survey responses) to identify patterns and insights about participants' experiences and perspectives.



Beliefs About
Issues
Impacting
Young People
and Parents



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What are the most pressing issues impacting young people today?



Parents and carers were asked to share what they believed were the most pressing issues impacting adolescents today. An inductive thematic analysis of participants responses identified several areas that parents/carers were concerned are impacting adolescents, which were arranged into 7 overarching themes: **technology, wider society, education and careers, self-perception and social pressures, health and wellbeing , relationships and peers, lifestyle** (Table 1).

The issues most suggested by parents and carers in this study were related to technology – largely issues stemming from social media such as misinformation, negative influences and screentime overuse. These responses help to identify common concerns amongst parents/carers of adolescents.

Table 1
Parent/carers responses to “What are the most pressing issues impacting young people in England today?”



Theme	Issues Listed By Parents and Carers (Codes)	Description (Code Meaning)	Number of Times Issue Appeared in Responses
Theme 1 TECHNOLOGY	Social media and Online Culture	The impact of social media platforms on communication, self, and daily life.	41
	Online Influence and Influencers	The influence of digital personalities and viral content on values, behavior, and decision-making.	8
	Harmful Content and Misinformation	Exposure to misleading, exaggerated, or dangerous online material.	6
	Unrealistic Expectations and Pressures Shown Online	Unattainable beauty, success, and lifestyle expectations sometimes set by social media	9
	Impacts Of Technology on Behavior and Mental Health	The impact of digital devices on thinking and mental wellbeing (e.g. anxiety, mood disorders, and atte	6
	Excessive Screen Time and Digital Addiction	The struggle with prolonged mobile or computer use.	11
	General Access to Mobile Phone	The consequences of constant connectivity, including distraction and reduced real-world interaction.	8
			Total = 89
Theme 2 WIDER SOCIETY	Climate and Environmental Concerns	Fear of the future due to climate change and environmental degradation.	5
	Violence and Crime	Concerns about personal safety, gang culture, or rising crime rates.	10
	Economic Instability and Financial	Worries about housing affordability, inflation, and job markets.	17
	Discrimination and inequality	The impact of racial, gender, or socio-economic biases on opportunities and treatment.	3
	War, Global Conflict and Negative News Impact	The psychological toll of constant exposure to crises and distressing world events.	2
	Poverty and Financial Hardship	The challenges of low-income backgrounds affecting opportunities and well-being.	2
	Lack of Accessible Youth Programs and Services	Limited spaces or resources for young people to engage, learn, and grow.	3
			Total = 42
Theme 3 EDUCATION AND CAREERS	Job and Career Uncertainty	Anxiety about securing stable employment and future prospects.	15
	University Costs and Financial Barriers	The burden of tuition fees and student debt concerns.	2
	Academic Pressure	Stress from grades, exams, and achieving high academic standards.	14
	Dissatisfaction with Education Quality	Frustration over schooling, lack of engagement, or unhelpful content.	113
	Struggles with Focus and Concentration	Difficulty maintaining attention due to distractions or learning challenges.	3
			Total = 37

Table 1 (Continued)

Parents/carers responses to “What are the most pressing issues impacting young people in England today?”



Theme	Issues Listed By Participants (Codes)	Description (Code Meaning)	Number of Times Issue Appeared in Responses
Theme 4 SELF-PERCEPTION AND SOCIAL PRESSURES	Self-Esteem and Confidence Struggles	Internal battles with self-worth, comparison, and self-doubt.	5
	Body Image and AppearanceConcerns	The pressure to conform to beauty standards.	6
	Pressure to Fit In	The expectation to behave, dress, or think a certain way to gain acceptance.	21
			Total = 32
Theme 5 HEALTH AND WELL-BEING	Mental Health Struggles	Rising rates of anxiety, depression, and emotional distress among young people.	27
	Decline in Physical Activity and Healthy	Sedentary habits, poor diet, and lack of exercise affecting overall well-being.	4
			Total = 31
Theme 6 RELATIONSHIPS AND PEERS	Bullying and Cyberbullying	Harassment, exclusion, and harmful interactions both online and in person.	4
	Decline in Face-to-Face Social Skills	Struggles with building real-life connections due to digital reliance.	4
	Societal and Peer Expectations	The stress of meeting cultural, social, or peer group norms.	4
	Friendship Integration	Challenges in developing genuine, supportive social circles.	5
			Total = 17
Theme 7 LIFESTYLE	Materialism / Consumerism	Pressure to have the latest trends, social status tied to possessions.	2
	Instant Gratification	Difficulty with patience, reliance on quick rewards.	2
	Drug and Alcohol	Substance use as a coping mechanism or social norm.	4
			Total = 8

N.B. Perfectionism, Communication Skills, Pressure to Cater to Aging Population, Artificial Intelligence, Gender Issues, Romantic Relationships and Disabilities were also listed as pressing issues, by one parent or carer each.

What are the biggest challenges faced by parents today?



Participants were asked to share what they believed were the biggest challenges currently faced by parents and carers of adolescents in the UK (Table 2). An inductive thematic analysis of participants responses identified several areas that parents/carers felt were challenging, which were arranged into 6 overarching themes: **technology, family/parent-child relationships, wider society, relationships and peers, health and wellbeing education and careers.**

The challenges most suggested by parents and carers in this study were again related to technology, with 70 survey responses related to the challenges of navigating new technology, social media and online safety as parents and carers.

Table 2
Participants responses to “What do you think are the biggest challenges faced by parents and carers of teenagers today?”



Themes of challenges facing parents/carers	Challenges Listed By Participants (Codes) [Quotes from Participants]	Number of Times Challenge Appeared in Responses
Theme 1 TECHNOLOGY	Parents and Carers Keeping Up to Date with Social Media	3
	The Role of The Digital World and Its Influence on Children’s Life	27
	Ensuring Internet Safety	22
	Managing Excessive Screen Time and Digital Addiction	18
		70
Theme 2 FAMILY/PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIPS	Balancing Giving Adolescents Independence and Parental Guidance [Quote: Teenagers crave independence but still need guidance. Parents often struggle with finding the right balance between giving freedom and setting rules.]	9
	Having Respect From Child	3
	Being Able to Relate/Understand to Young Peoples Challenges in a Changing World	8
	Disciplining and Enforcing Rules	5
	Work-life Balance [Quote: Trying to juggle multiple jobs and caring for children. Not having enough time to focus on being a parent.]	6
	Communicating with Child	8
	Knowing How to Best Guide/Raise Child	2
	Dealing With Family Dynamics [Dealing with divorce, blended families, and how parental stress can impact teenagers' emotional well-being, making it harder for parents to provide stability.]	3
	External Influences (such as social media and friends) Overshadowing Parental Guidance and Teachings. [Quote: The access to information that teenagers have now is unprecedented and they can feel that parents/carers don't have the necessary skills or life experience to help or advise them.]	19
		14
		63

Table 2 (Continued)

Participants responses to “What do you think are the biggest challenges faced by parents and carers of teenagers today?”



Themes of challenges facing parents/carers	Challenges Listed By Participants (Codes) [Quotes from Participants]	Number of Times Challenge Appeared in Responses
Theme 3 WIDER SOCIETY	Keeping Teens Safe From Violence and Crime	16
	Parents and carers Financial Challenges	12
	Managing Childs Expectations About Life / Managing entitlement	4
	Lack of Accessible Healthcare and Public Services	3
		35
Theme 4 RELATIONSHIPS AND PEERS	Navigating Bullying and Cyberbullying	6
	Reducing Influence of Peer Pressure	11
	Helping Child to Establish Healthy Peer Relationships	2
		19
Theme 5 HEALTH AND WELL-BEING	Navigating Child’s Well-being and Mental Health Struggles	14
	Understanding Typical Adolescent Development	2
	Protecting Child from Substance Use	2
		18
Theme 6 EDUCATION AND CAREERS	Concerns About Future Job and Career Uncertainty for Child	7
	Managing Academic Pressures	5
	Instilling the Importance of Education	2
		14

N.B. The parents or carers own mental health, struggles to help their children financially, radicalisation, Environmental concerns, getting child involved in constructive activities and discrimination were also listed as pressing issues, by one parent each.

Quote:
Views on
issues
impacting
young
people

“Anxiety, depression, and stress are on the rise among teenagers due to academic pressure, social comparisons, and uncertainty about the future. Parents often struggle to identify and address these issues.”

Comment From a Parent/Carer

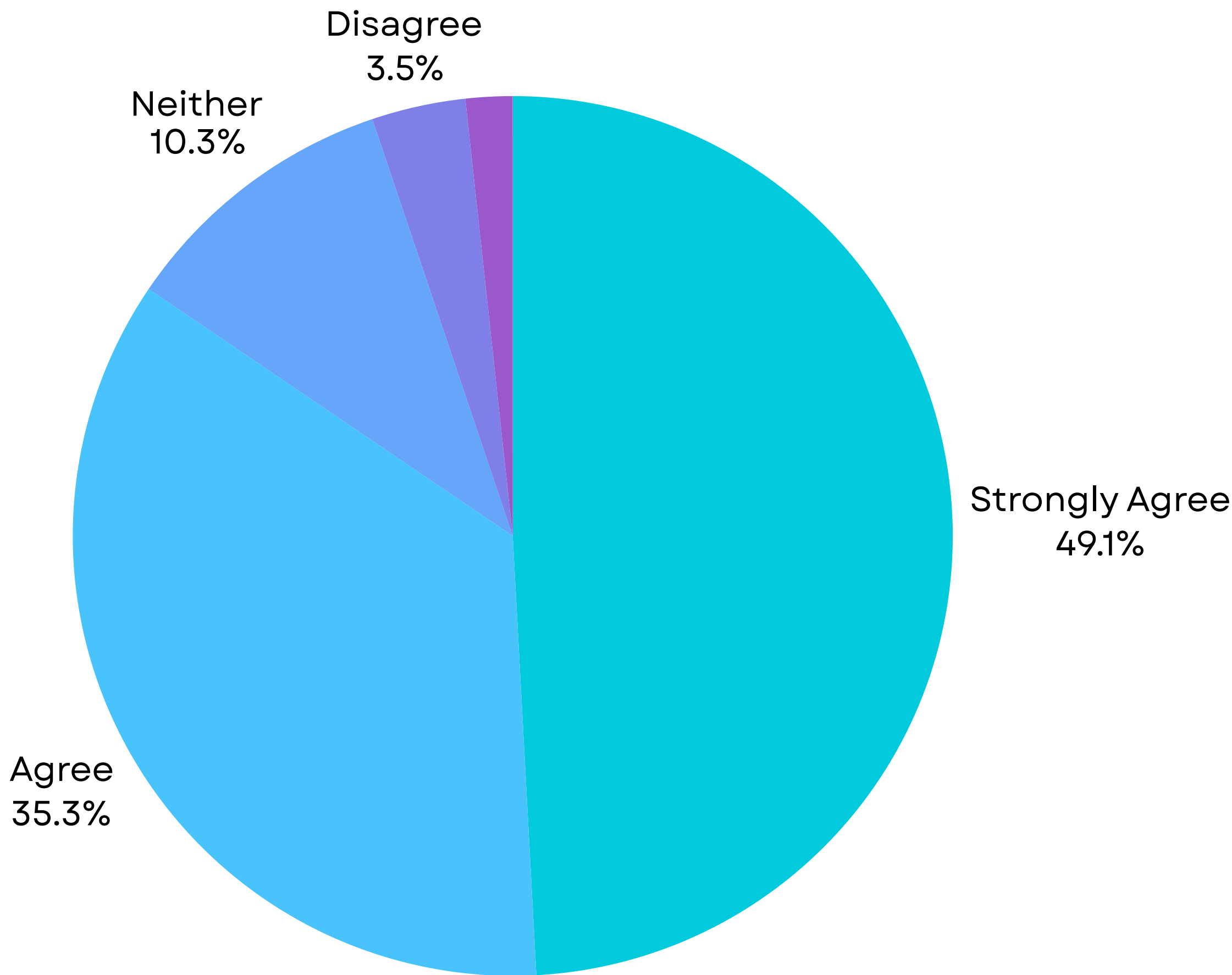


Access to
support and
information

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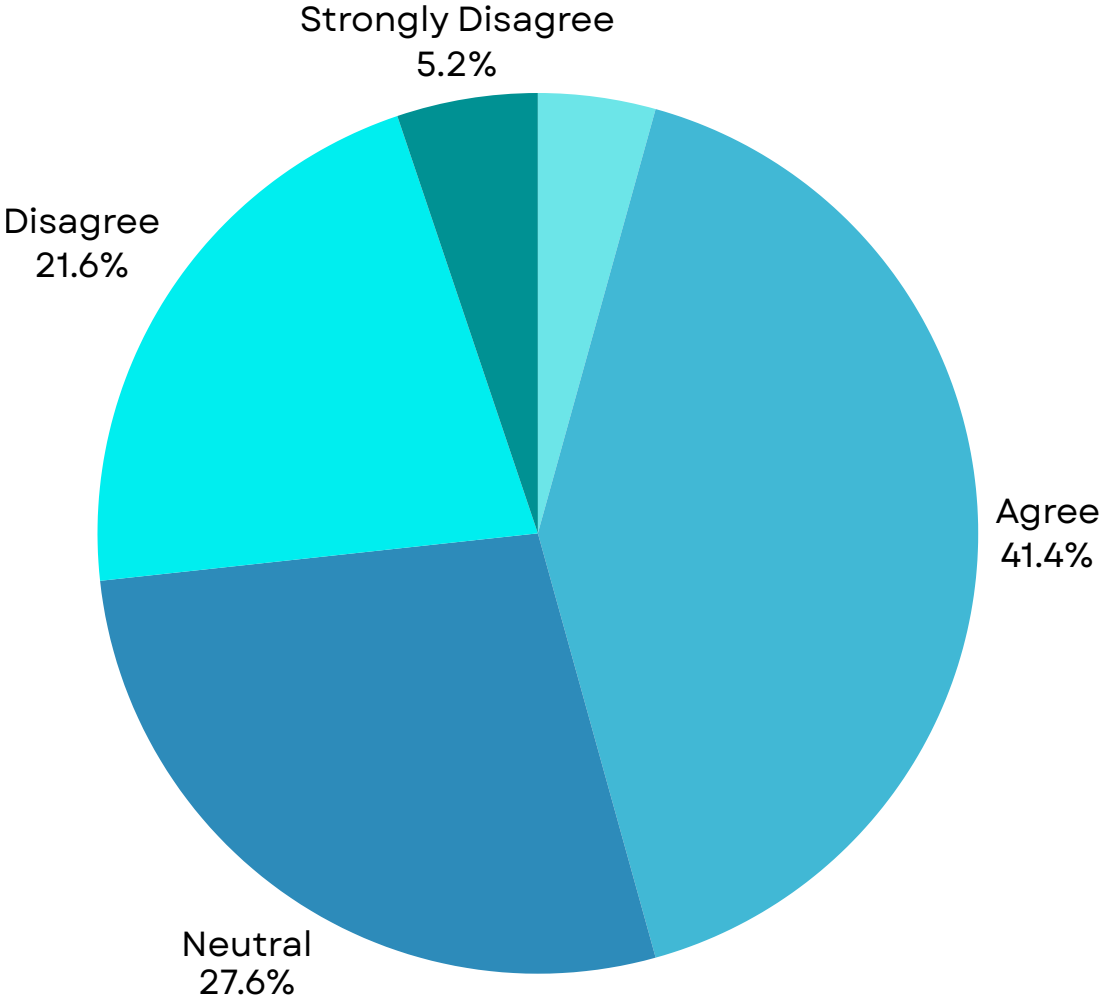
Do parents find parenting adolescents difficult?

Figure 2
Survey responses to the statement, "Parenting during a child's teenage years is difficult" (N = 116)



Do parents feel equipped and supported?

Figure 3
Survey responses to the statement, “I feel fully equipped with the knowledge I need to support my child during their teenage years.”



Overall, there was a spread in parents’ and carers responses to ‘I feel fully equipped with the knowledge I need to support my child during their teenage years’, with most participants agreeing, however numerically speaking, on average (2.9 rating) parents and carers neither agreed nor disagreed with this statement (Figure 3). Typically (2.7 rating), most parents and carers also neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement, ‘there is enough free support and information available to parents and carers’ (Figure 4).

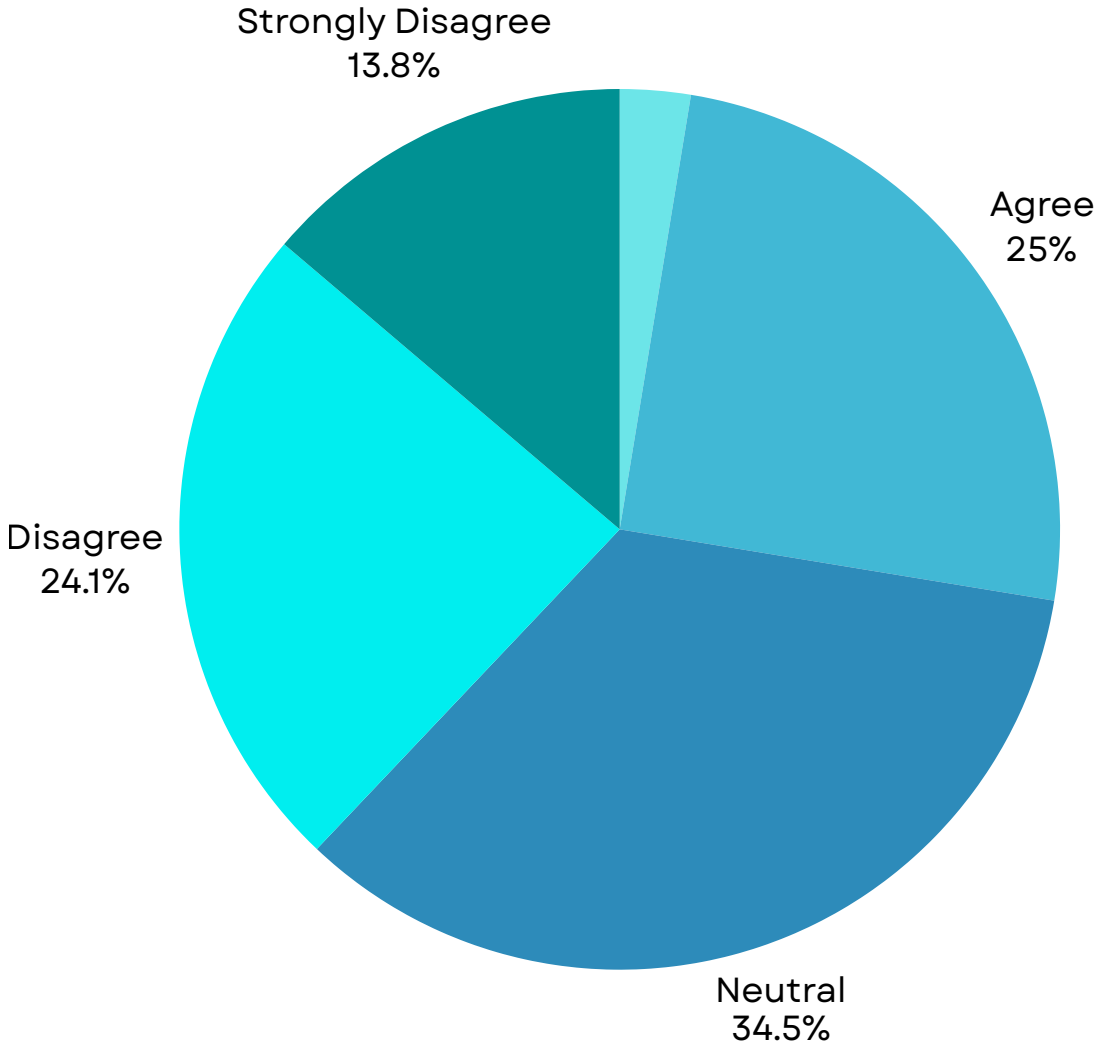


Figure 4
Survey responses to the statement, "There is enough free support and information available to parents and carers”.

Which topics do parents want more guidance on?

Figure 5

Parents/carers responses to “What topics do you wish you had more guidance on when it comes to raising a teenager?”



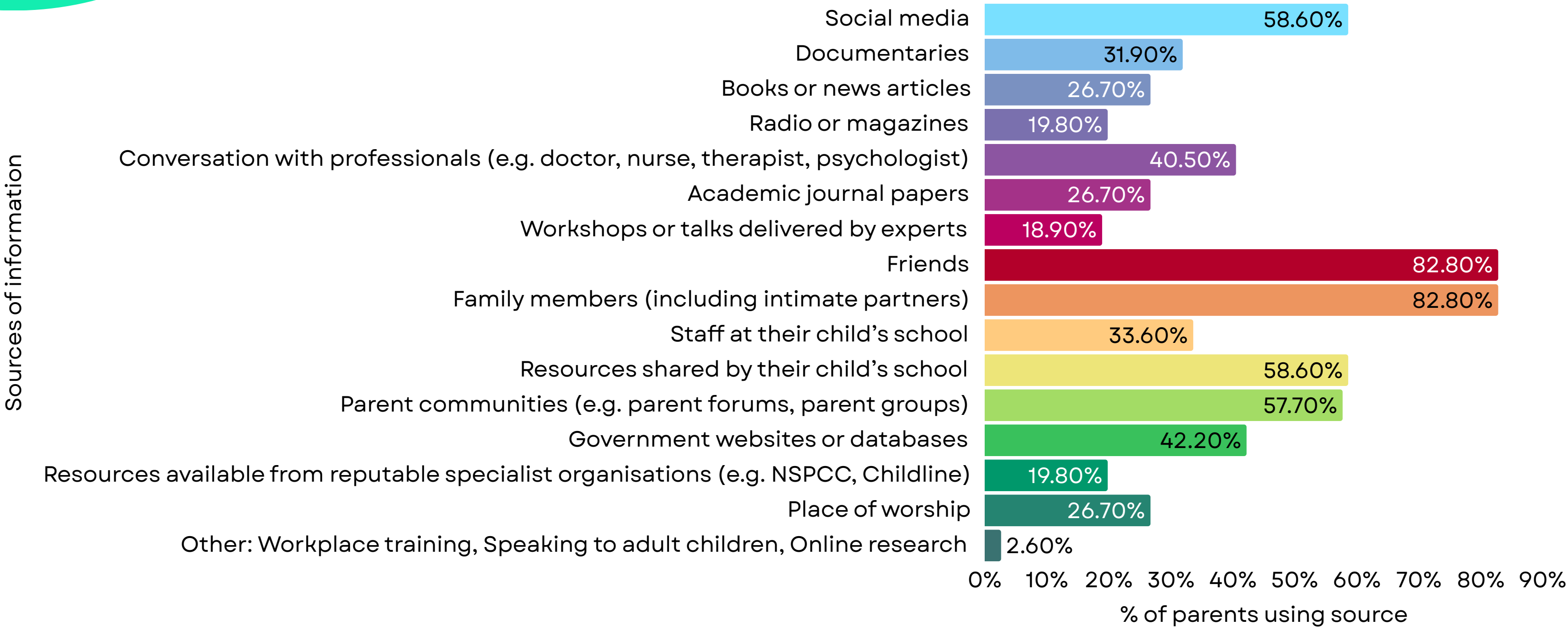
N.B. Setting boundaries, communicating with practitioners, the world today, self-care, respect, materialism, keeping children safe, gentle parenting, skill building, instilling reality, nutrition, discipline, crime, racism and special education needs and disabilities were also listed as pressing issues, by one parent or carer.

How do parents learn about issues impacting adolescents?

When parents and carers were asked which sources they currently use to learn about issues impacting young people, the vast majority (82.8%; N = 96) indicated that they currently learn from their friends, other family members and partners.



Figure 6
The number of parents/carers currently using each source to learn about issues impacting adolescents. (N = 116)



Quote:
Views on
access to
support

“I'd like to say that the level of knowledge, support and care across providers is lacking. And the key to obtaining support is the level of trust.

Unfortunately, it feels like the NHS/our GPs and schools do not have the tools or resources to offer support. They care, but their hands are tied. The Council is not to be trusted and is doing a tick box exercise to be seen to be supportive, but cannot care less.”

Comment From a Parent/Carer

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