



PARENT SURVEY REPORT

I struggle at lots of different levels with no family support, childcare is an issue, emotional support, financial support. Rural living/working means it is hard to find things to do outside of school and organised sport for the child to do. School holidays are particularly tough and expensive.

(Survey Respondent)

1. Introduction

Limerick CYPSC circulated a Parent Survey between 26th March 2025 to 8th May 2025. This report is a summary of the survey responses.

This report, along with consultations with children, young people and practitioners, will inform the development of the Limerick Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP). The Limerick CYPP is developed through Limerick Children and Young People's Services Committee (CYPSC), an interagency committee that brings together the main statutory and community services working with and for children and young people in Limerick city and county.

The purpose of the survey was to get a general picture of the experiences of being a parent in Limerick. The survey will inform more targeted focus groups that will be facilitated in partnership with Limerick CYPSC partners in Autumn.

The survey was circulated to parents through:

- Limerick CYPSC practitioner networks;
- Early year services, primary and post-primary schools;
- Positive Parenting article in Limerick Leader

Disability

The challenges parents of children with disability face are well documented. Anecdotally at Limerick CYPSC and sub-group level this has emerged as a prominent issue over the last number of years. Throughout the document data comparisons are made between all survey respondents and those parents who have a child with a disability.

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3. Survey Responses

795 parents responded. As outlined in the Figure 1, the respondents are parenting:

- 1,764 children between 0 – 17, averaging 2.2 children per family (3.7% of child population in Limerick)
- 1,973 children between 0-24, averaging 2.48 children per family (3% of child and young person population in Limerick)

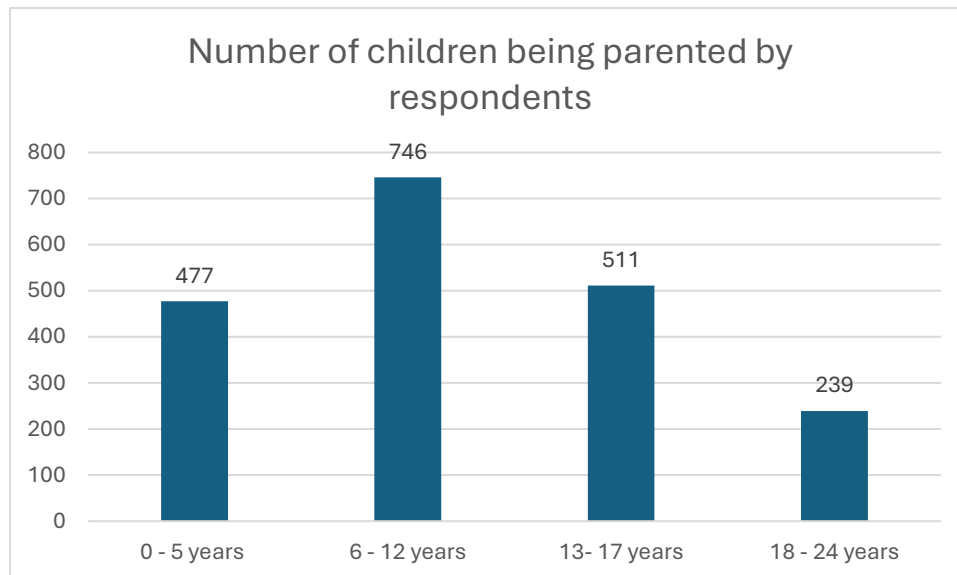


Figure 1 No. of Children being parented by survey respondents

As outlined in Figure 2 below, the majority of respondents were female (87%) with 12% male respondents. Table 1 shows that the majority of survey respondents were parents (96%).

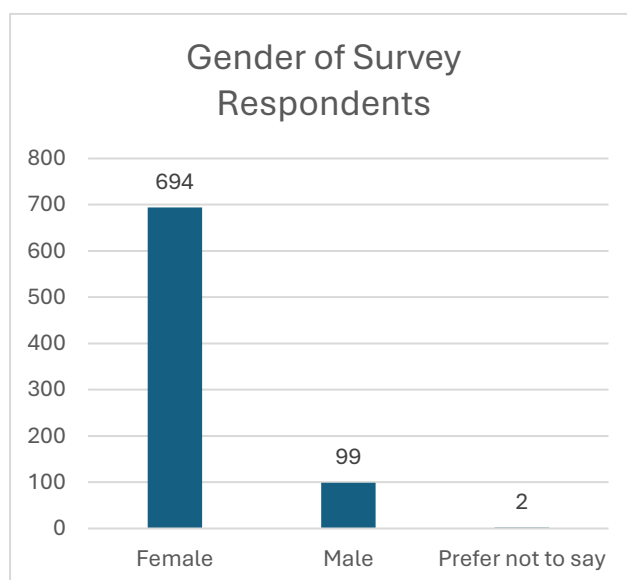


Figure 2 Gender of Survey Respondents

Are you a...	No	%
Parent	765	96%
Foster Parent	20	3%
Guardian	4	(<1%)
Carer	2	(<1%)
Other	4	(<1%)

Table 1 Type of Respondent

Table 2 shows that there was an almost equal number of respondents who identified as living in the City (40%) and County (41%). Those who identified as coming from outside Limerick (6%) are being included in the overall statistical breakdown of the report. The rationale for this is that families living just outside Limerick often attend school and access services in Limerick city and county.

Location of Respondent	No	%
Limerick City	319	40%
Limerick County	324	41%
Limerick Suburbs	107	13%
Outside Limerick	45	6%

Table 2 Location of Survey Respondents

Disability

27% of respondents (215) have one or more children with additional needs or a diagnosed disability.

Parents were asked, if your child has additional needs or a diagnosed disability, what would make it easier to help you meet your child's needs? Parents were able to select multiple answers.

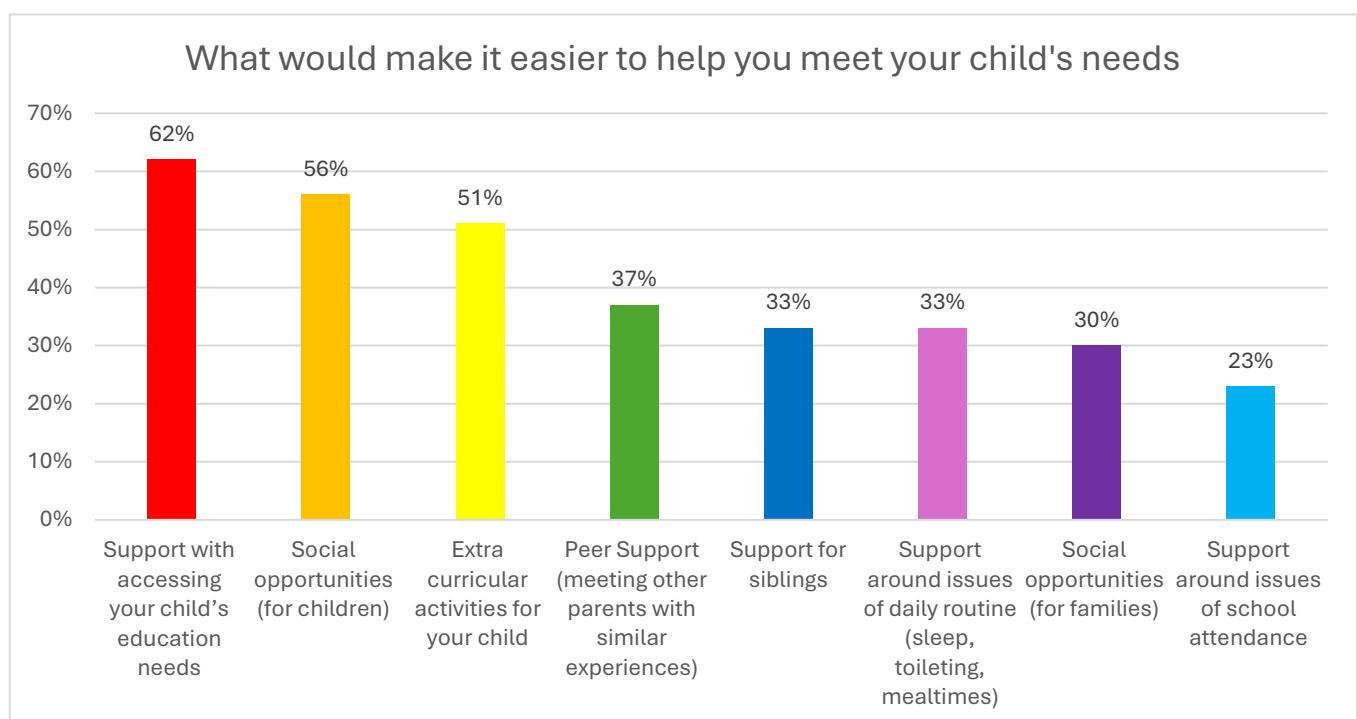


Figure 3 What would make it easier to help you meet your child's needs?

A small number of parents selected "other". These responses can be categorised into three broad areas:

- greater access to therapeutic supports
- enhanced supports around education access
- additional supports when children enter puberty

4. Parenting Advice

The survey asked parents how often they have sought parenting advice in the last year. All survey respondents answered the question. Just over 1 in 3 (34%) responded that they have not sought advice in the past year¹.

Figure 4 shows 27% of parents said they looked for advice once or twice a year, 22% monthly, 13% weekly and 4% daily.

Figure 5 compares parents of children with disabilities with parents who have no children with a disability. Parents of children with a disability are more likely to seek advice than parents who don't have a child with a disability with almost 4 in 5 (78%, n = 167) saying they have sought advice in the last year.

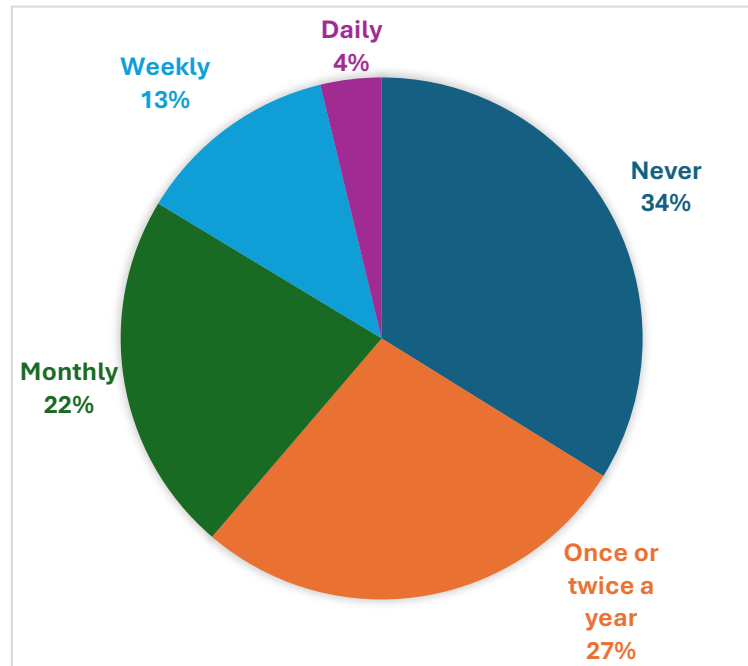


Figure 4 In the last year, how often have you looked for parenting advice?

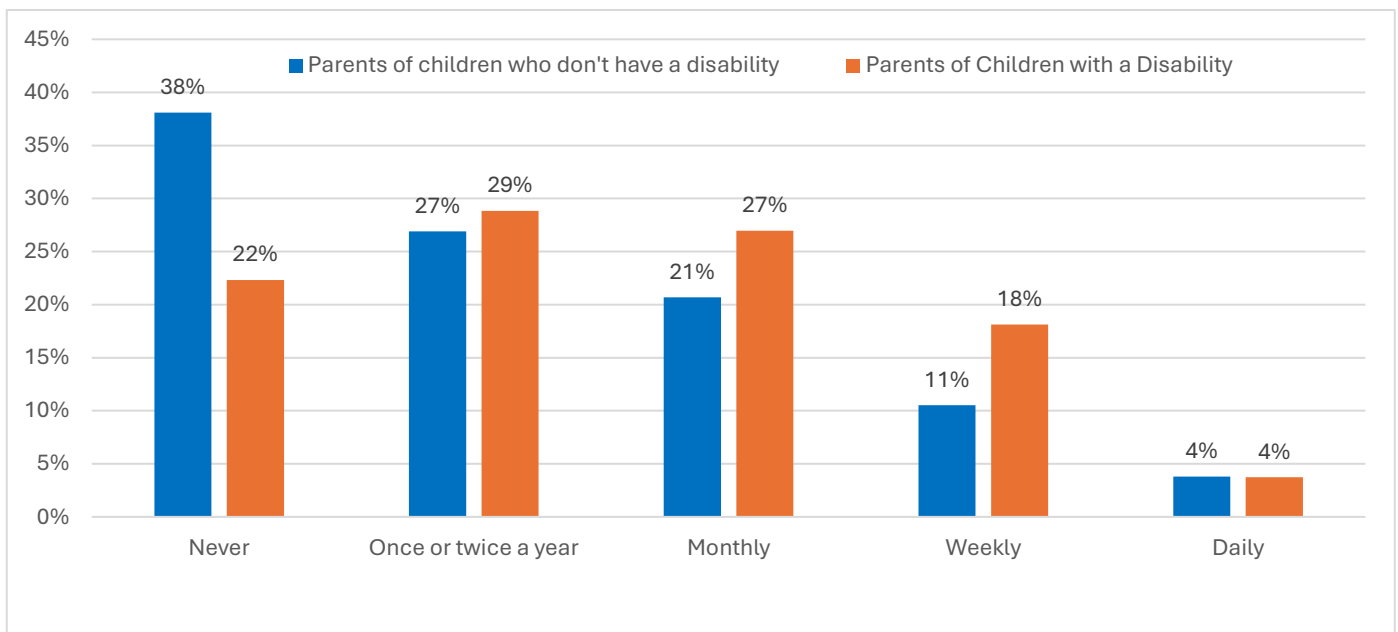


Figure 5 In the last year, how often have you looked for parenting advice? Parents of children who don't have a disability v parents of children with a disability.

¹ The question did not make it clear if the advice was formal or informal. The question could have been interpreted in a way that suggests informal conversations with friends, family or work colleagues etc is or is not understood as advice.

Figure 6 and Table 3 highlights parents' order of preference for advice. Of those parents who did respond that they had sought parenting advice in the last year (n 526), 7 in 10 (70%) identified *Family or Friends* as their first preference or second preference. 45% identified *Other Parents* as their first or second preference. *Online search* was third at 35.5%. 3 of the next 4 on the list were all universal services – *GP* (4th, 25%) , *School or Early Years Service* (5th, 25%) and *Public Health Nurse* (7th, 8.2%).

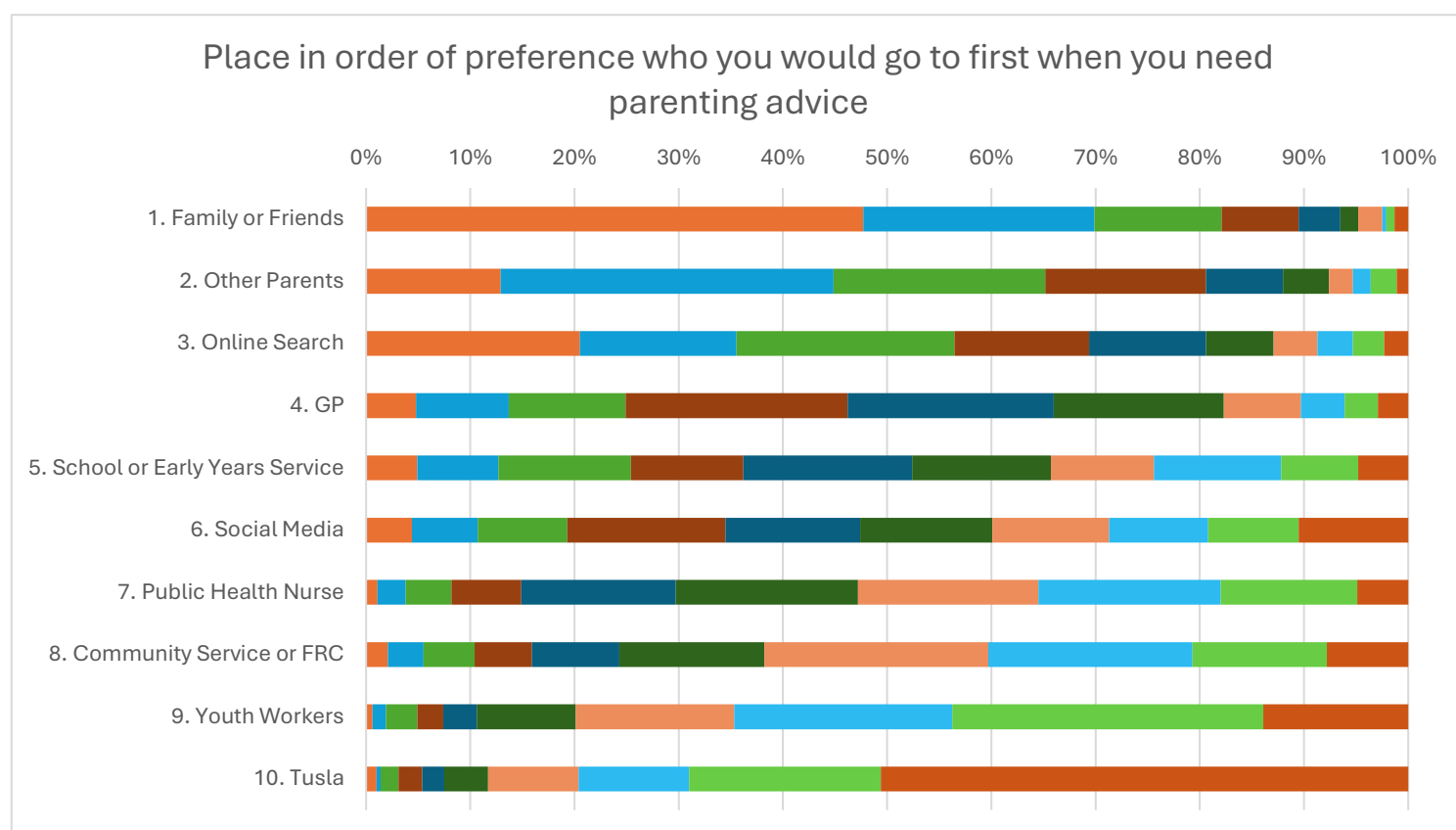


Figure 6: Order of preference for parenting advice

		Order of preference									
		1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th	8th	9th	10th
Who do you go to for parenting advice	1. Family or Friends	47.7%	22.2%	12.2%	7.4%	4.0%	1.7%	2.3%	0.4%	0.8%	1.3%
	2. Other Parents	12.9%	31.9%	20.3%	15.4%	7.4%	4.4%	2.3%	1.7%	2.5%	1.1%
	3. Online Search	20.5%	15.0%	20.9%	12.9%	11.2%	6.5%	4.2%	3.4%	3.0%	2.3%
	4. GP	4.8%	8.9%	11.2%	21.3%	19.8%	16.3%	7.4%	4.2%	3.2%	2.9%
	5. School or Early Years	4.9%	7.8%	12.7%	10.8%	16.2%	13.3%	9.9%	12.2%	7.4%	4.8%
	6. Social Media	4.4%	6.3%	8.6%	15.2%	12.9%	12.7%	11.2%	9.5%	8.7%	10.5%
	7. Public Health Nurse	1.1%	2.7%	4.4%	6.7%	14.8%	17.5%	17.3%	17.5%	13.1%	4.9%
	8. Community Service or FRC	2.1%	3.4%	4.9%	5.5%	8.4%	13.9%	21.5%	19.6%	12.9%	7.8%
	9. Youth Workers	0.6%	1.3%	3.0%	2.5%	3.2%	9.5%	15.2%	20.9%	29.8%	13.9%
	10. Tusla	1.0%	0.4%	1.7%	2.3%	2.1%	4.2%	8.7%	10.6%	18.4%	50.6%

Table 3 Order of preference for parenting advice

The survey sought to understand where parents go for advice to when accessing traditional (e.g. radio, TV, newspapers) or social media for advice. Parents could select as many options as were relevant to them. Half of parents (50%) identified social media as a source of parenting advice, followed by podcasts (33%), parenting segments on the radio (27%) and online boards or fora (24%).

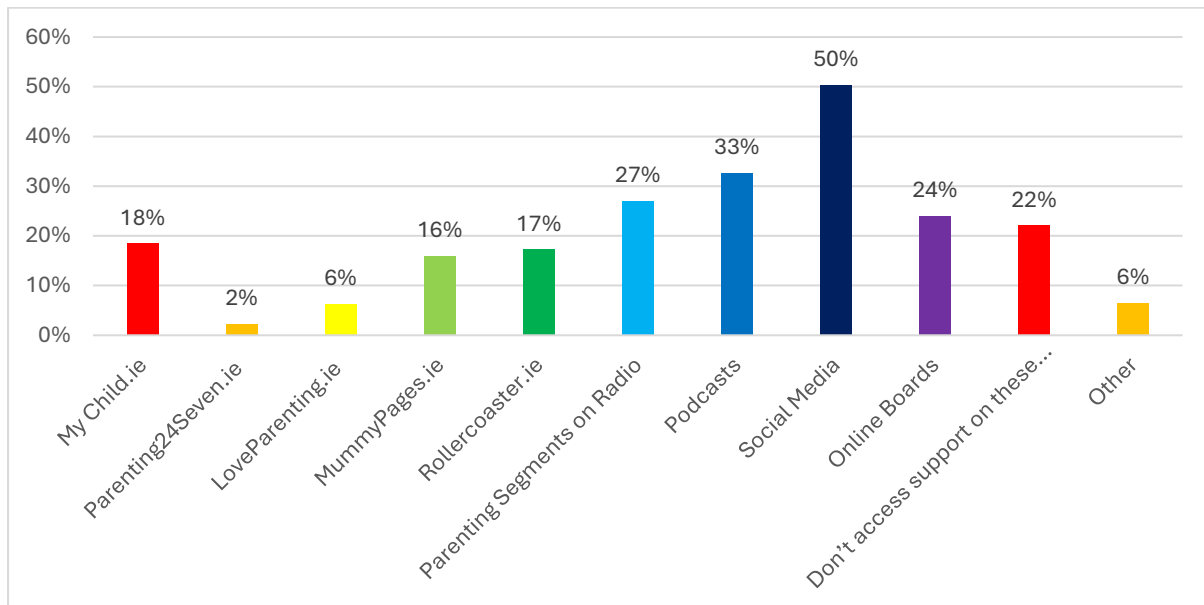


Figure 7: Do you access or listen to any of the following for parenting advice?

Figure 8 compares parents who have at least one child with a disability with respondents who reported having no children with a disability. Those who parent a child with a disability are less likely to access all types of traditional and social media.

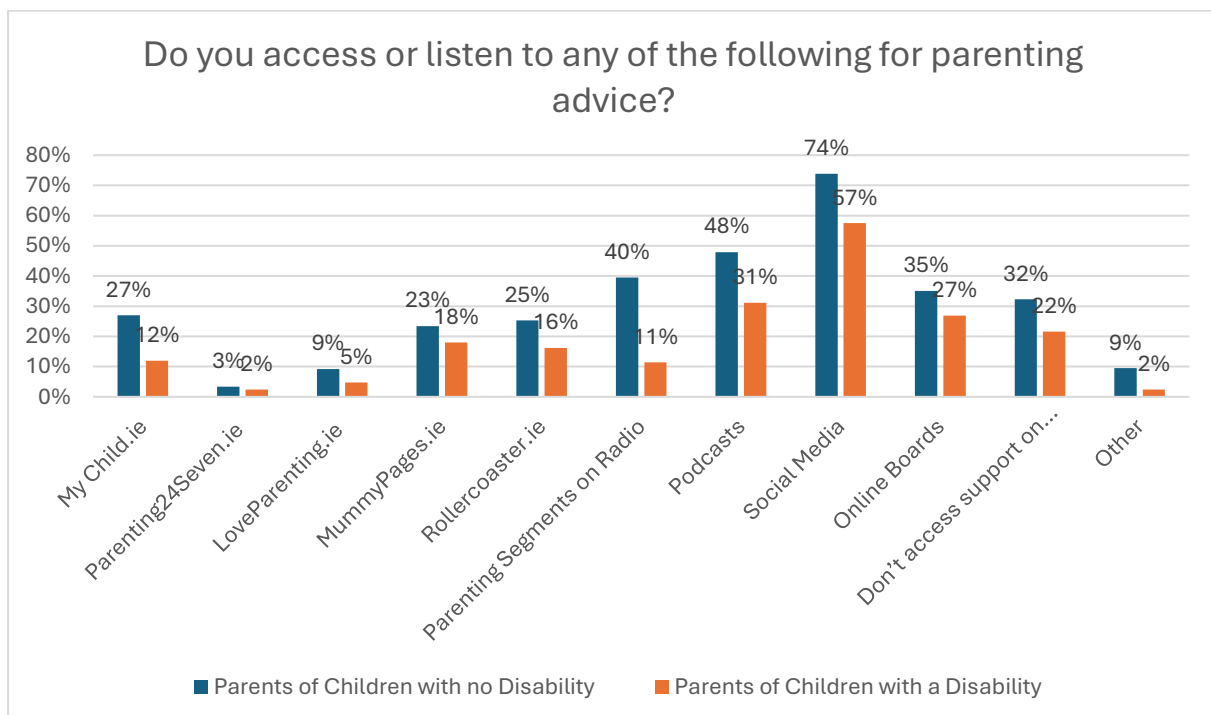


Figure 8 Do you access or listen to any of the following for parenting advice? Parents of children who don't have a disability v parents of children with a disability.

Parents were subsequently asked what social media platforms websites, podcasts or parenting segments on the radio they find helpful. The response from parents was comprehensive with a wide range of online groups, social media platforms, online boards, podcasts and radio shows recommended. The responses can be grouped into three broad areas:

- Social media: Facebook groups, Instagram or other boards/fora (e.g. reddit) for topic specific support, primarily amongst peers (e.g. DCA Warriors, Autism, ADHD, Dyslexia, Dyspraxia, OT support School Attendance, Eating and Food preparation, Sleep, events and activities for families);
- Radio/Podcasts: All radio segments on Radio 1, Newstalk, Today FM (David Coleman, Colman Noctor, Mary O’Kane, Joanna Fortune, Richard Hogan), were referenced – all are also accessible in podcast form;
- Websites: resources and supports provided by advocacy and support organisations such as AslAm, Middletown, Down syndrome Ireland, Jigsaw, Webwise.

Parents were then asked, if they do go online or listen to radio or podcasts for parenting advice, what type of advice have they found helpful. “Experience other parents” ranked highly (61%) alongside “advice about child’s behaviour” (61%).

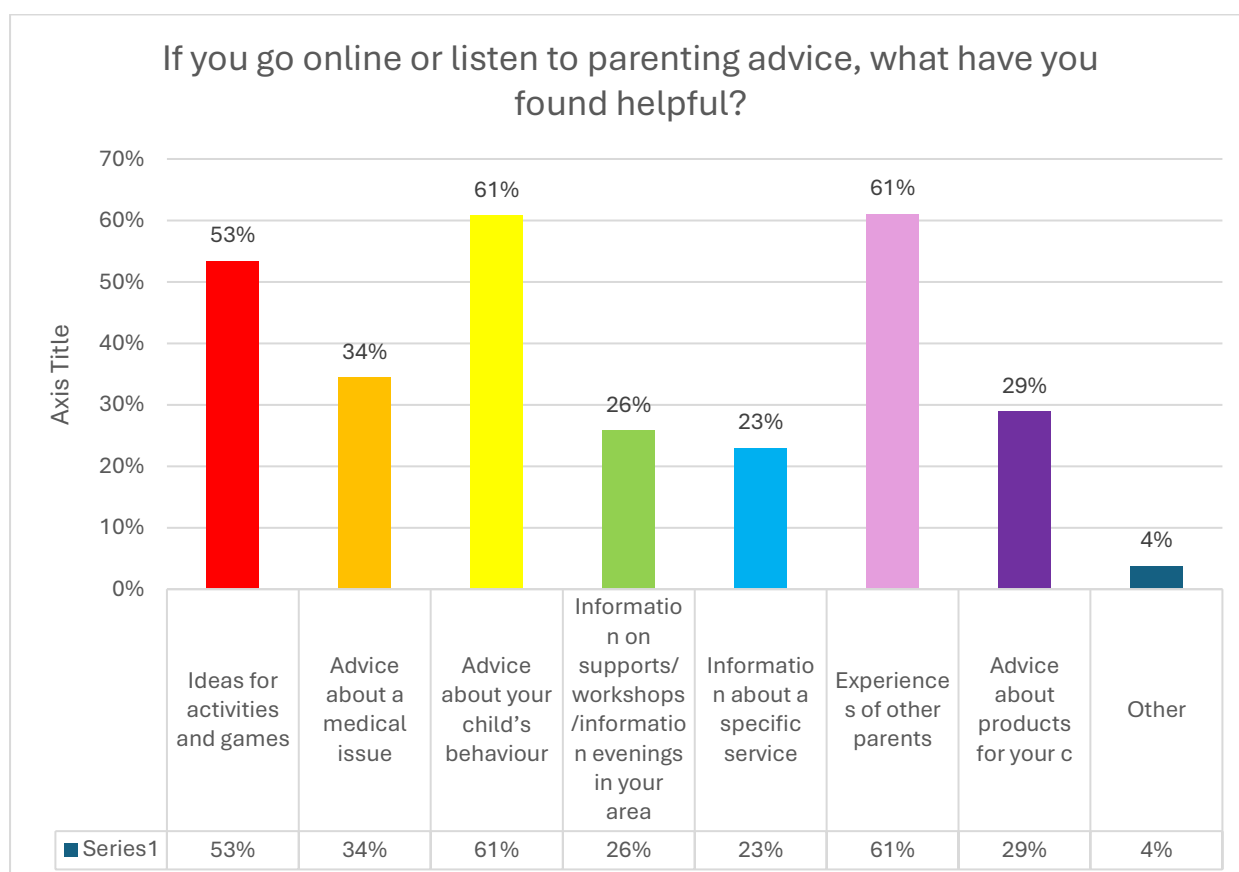


Figure 9 If you go online or listen to parenting advice, what have you found helpful?

A quote from one parent who responded to the survey highlights how social media can be used by some parents to access parenting advice:

TikTok is a great one just type whatever you query is for into the search bar and loads of other parents have videos with answers or their experiences on getting [the type of support you're looking for]

5. Parenting Supports

Parents were asked what supports they have accessed in the past (Figure 10). 311 (39%) respondents said they had never access parenting supports. Of the remainder, the majority of responses were supports around the early years period: Parent and Baby/Toddler groups (36), Baby Massage workshops (24%), Breastfeeding support groups (21%).

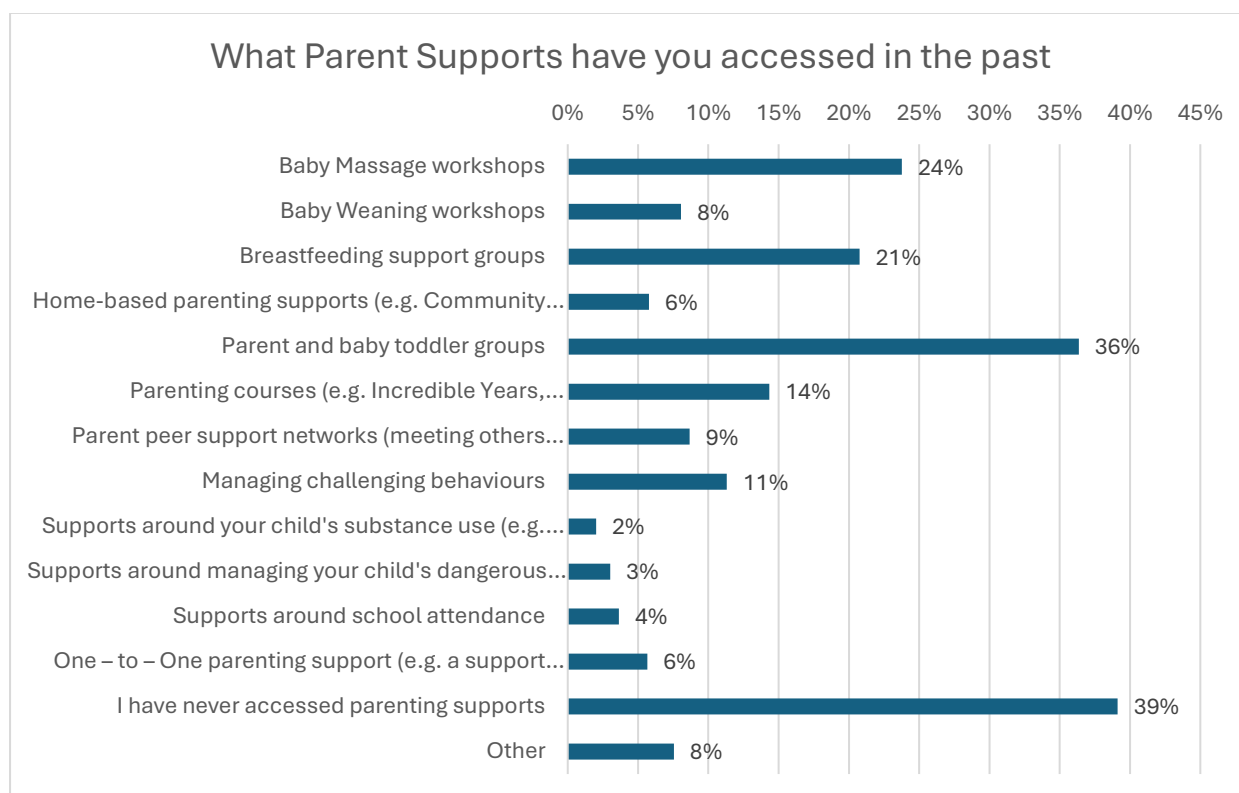


Figure 10 Parenting Supports accessed by survey respondents

Of those parents who have never accessed parenting supports, 32% stated that they did not know what parenting supports are available. 26% cited work commitments and 18% reported that they did not know how to access parent supports.

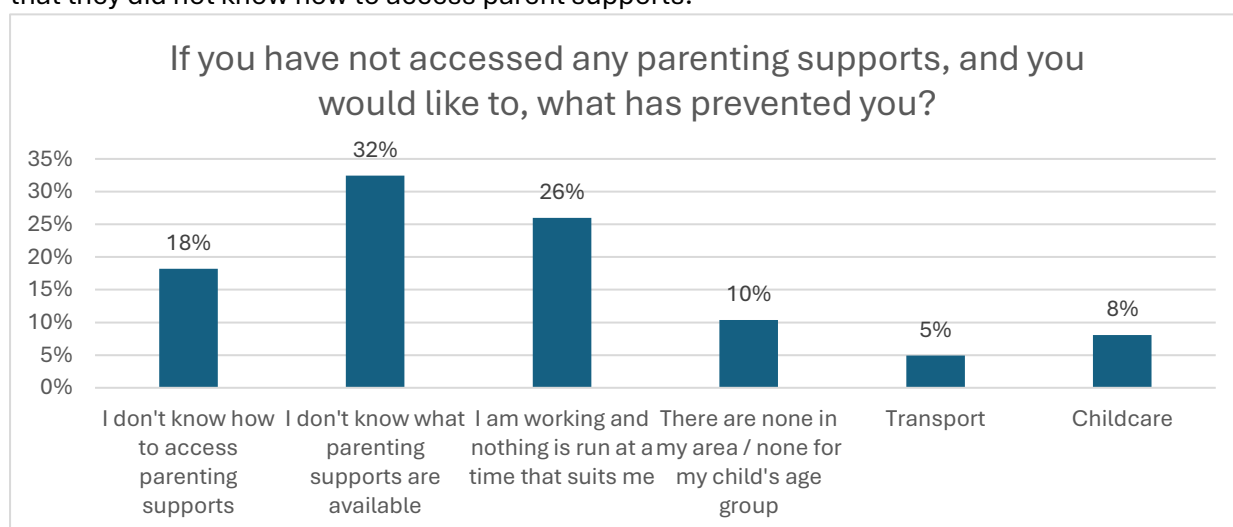


Figure 11 What has prevented parents from accessing supports

When given an option to expand on why that have not taken up parenting supports, they were a diverse range of views. The below are a sample of the responses:

“lack of knowledge and fear”

“fear of social workers”

“I don’t know what parenting supports are available; I gave birth a month before covid and everything stopped and then there was no info, nurse came once. I know I can reach out but honestly sometimes it’s the services that should be checking on us especially during the pandemic”

“My first born was born during covid so none of the resources were available. I intend to join some groups with my new baby though”

“[I am] In public system - for any support waiting list is too long”

Parents were asked what aspects of parenting they would most like support with (Figure 12). Four areas in particular stood out with 40% of parents looking for support in relation to “anxiety in my child”, “screen time” (38%), “mental health of child” (37%) and “positive parent-child relationships” (37%). Other prominent responses from parents included “supporting my child in school” (30%), “bullying” (21%) and “eating/mealtimes” (20%). Nearly 1 in 4 parents (23%) said they would like support with their own mental health.

When parents of children with disabilities were compared with parents of children with no disabilities, the numbers are higher. 54% of parents would like support with anxiety in their child (34% of parents of children with no disability) and 52% with their mental health (32% of parents of children with no disability). “Promoting positive behaviour” (42% v 31%) and “supporting my child in school” (41% v 26%) were also significantly higher. “Screentime” and “positive parent-child relationships” were the only elements of support that parents of children with no disability scored significantly higher.

29% of parents of children with disability said they would like support with their own mental health.

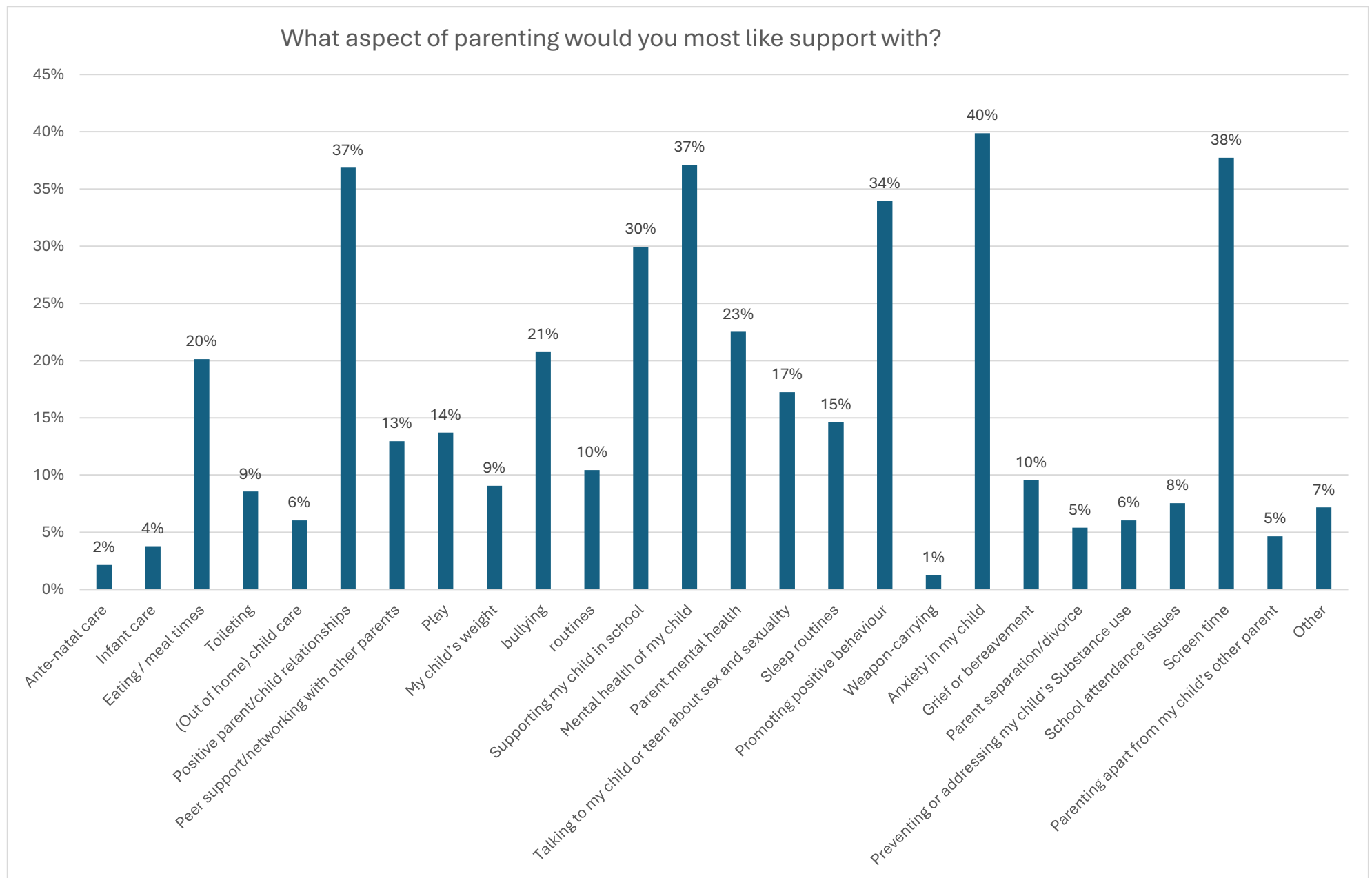
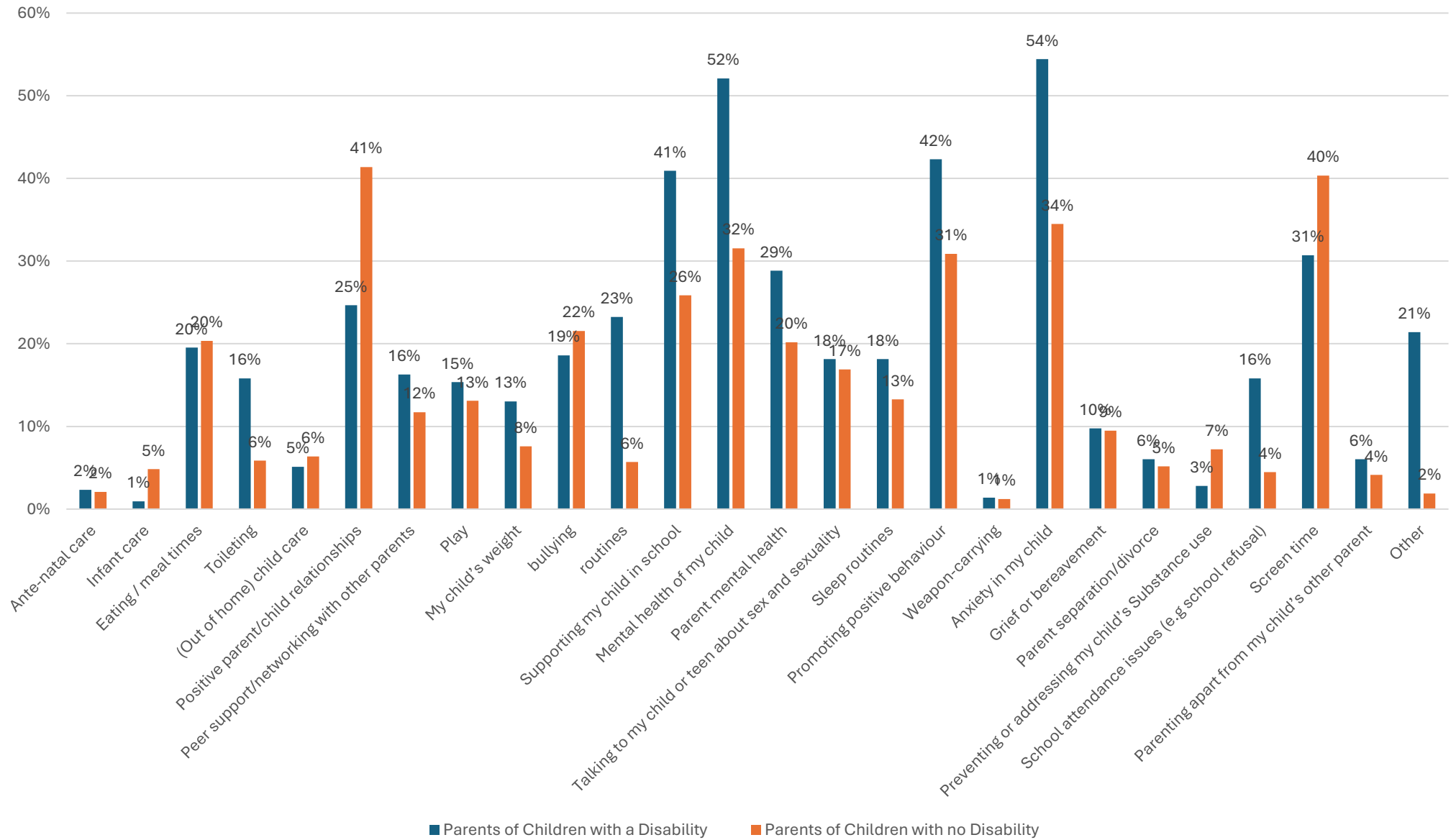


Figure 12 Aspects of parenting survey respondents most want support with. N = 795.

What aspect of parenting would you most like support with?



Parents were asked why they selected those aspects of parenting support. 339 parents responded with over 6,500 words of text. There was a wide and diverse range of reasons parents gave. The following emerged consistently amongst respondents, with many of themes overlapping with each other in terms of cause and effect.

Screentime

Screentime was the most prominent concern in the comments from parents. There was a significant overlap between screentime and the impact covid had on young people and its relationship with bullying, sleeping habits, routine and mental health.

Managing Screen time is a huge issue in our house with teens. Trying to develop good positive relationships with teens that they feel respected and trusted. Also managing anxiety that developed since Covid.

Mental Health

Many parents wrote about the difficulty in navigating the anxiety that their child is presenting with and how to manage it appropriately, as well as the impact it can have on the wider household.

"I have a child with anxiety, and I feel the house and family life can be stressful

Some parents also spoke about their own mental health and the impact it can have on them and their children

I found it very hard to become a mum, so mental support for parents is essential, especially if mothers are also experiencing perimenopause D

Disability

Parents of children with a disability were the most likely to write about the challenges they and their children face, most notably the difficulty in accessing timely support. The impact this can have on the wider family dynamic also comes up prominently.

I have a son with ASD and I have been on the waiting list with [Disability Service] for years now. He struggles with emotional regulation, particularly if he doesn't want to do something or if he loses a game. My 2 daughters struggle sometimes as he tends to dominate family time or play. Can lash out and hit when upset.

Systemic Issues

A large number of parents referred to wider systemic issues, primarily challenges in relation to long waiting lists and the practical challenges of parenting alone.

Waiting lists are huge. Very little can be accessed without paying privately

Practical Supports

A significant number of parents noted that they are generally managing fine as parents, but find there is not as much low level support available for practical day to day issues such as routine, sleep or work/life balance.

I feel there are supports out there for other / more serious issues, but not any readily available that I know of for daily / normal parent struggles. It's a lot of figuring out or relying on social media for advice

Find work/life balance very challenging at times. Mother 4 days a week at work. Husband 5 days a week at work. House can be stressful trying to do homework, activities etc. Can be lots of arguments.

6. Parents Views

The majority of the survey invited parents to give views through fixed choice-based questions. At the end of the survey parents were invited to respond to two open field questions:

1. What do you think would best support you in your parenting role
2. If you had the power to make one thing available in your area of Limerick that does not currently exist, what would it be?

There was a wide and diverse range of views from parents. It would be difficult to represent all views fully, but some themes did emerge throughout the responses.

Under this the first question, the following themes consistently emerged:

- More guidance and support around **Screentime**
- Access to **Disability and GP services**
- **Cost of living** and dependency on **private services**
- Improved **connectivity between parents and schools**
- **Access to and cost of Early Years services** and difficulty with aspects of the National Childcare Scheme
- Support around **boundaries**
- **Information** on available supports for children and parents
- More supports on **parenting teenagers**

Under the second question, parents were asked if they power to make one thing available in their area of Limerick, what would it be. There was a wide diversity of opinion and innovative suggestions in the responses. Five broad and overlapping themes emerged: disability, social opportunities for children and young people, community facilities, peer support for parents and the importance of integrated public services.

An undercurrent across a lot of the comments was financial concerns, underpinned by the cost of living crisis over the last number of years – references made about the expense of accessing private therapeutic supports, cost of extra-curricular activities, childcare, summer childcare etc.

The cost of living currently means that I am in full time employment. My children are in creche and afterschool full time and mostly during mid-term break and summer holidays. I would love the option to work locally part time so that I can be more involved in my children's day to day, and they have options to do mid-week afterschool activities, playdates etc. However, the everyday expenses mean I do not have this option financially. Our house is modest, and our mortgage is not huge but we still could not survive on one salary to cover the basics.

Disability

For parents of children with disabilities, they prioritised timely access to services – be it speech and language, occupation therapy, psychology or other more specific supports depending on the need of the child. Underlining this was a clear frustration with existing service provision with long waiting lists. Many parents were frustrated with having to access private supports at significant expense.

Whatever that child may need, if I had all the power, they would get it with a click of my fingers. No application forms and 10+month wait for a AAC device. No year long wait for assessments. No 2 months wait between each therapy appointment. No waiting and begging and crying and emailing for appointments from their parents.

Better access to services like OT, Speech Therapists, Physiotherapists, Psychologists and any other services that take a lifetime to receive.

"A dietitian for my child who can't get one through primary care because he's linked in with disability services, even though there are no dietetic services for him as they do not have a dietitian.

Enough therapists to deliver essential therapies like Speech & Language, Occupational Therapy, Physio, etc.. to children at the developmental time they need it.

Alongside this there was a clear and evident desire for more social opportunities for children and young people with additional needs.

Soft play/play group for neurodiverse kids who cannot join other clubs but wish they had something for themselves at the weekend like other kids

Play groups for children who learn/play differently, with certain diagnoses, and find it difficult to retain friendships due to this

Summer camp for SEN teens

The value of having a social opportunities for neurodiverse children also offers parents an opportunity for respite, knowing their children are in a safe space:

Youth groups, peer support, respite services, inclusive social activities, meaningful autism awareness activities that don't exist

Child and Youth Groups

The desire for a broad range of activities and opportunities for children and young people across all age ranges was evident from a significant number of parents. A consistent message from parents of teens were for more teen-friendly spaces and youth groups.

There was also an implicit connection to the cost of living crisis with many respondents noting the expense of participating in certain sporting groups or activities. There was a strong connection between this theme and the following theme, community centre and facilities, and parents views that child and youth groups would support young people around issues relating to screentime, mental health and improved social opportunities for children with disabilities.

Community Centres and Facilities

The desire for more community centres that offered a wide range of supports and opportunities for parents and their children was a prominent wish for parents

More community centres, full of support and youth workers

Community Centre for all ages to have access to and a youth group available for those years after primary school and before third level when they feel like adults but are not yet doing adult things. A safe environment for them to socialise together without parents

Peer Support

Peer support emerged as an underlying theme for parents of children of all age ranges and abilities. A number of parents referred to the desire for peer support amongst parents of teens:

When kids are young you have public health nurse checkups, where you can just check-in, make sure everything is OK, and ask anything you are unsure of/worried about. As the kids get older, I find I worry more about whether they are where they should be at, or if something is normal or not, and how I should handle situations where it feels they are struggling. But you don't get the same support as when they are small.

Integrated Services

Parents also referred to a more integrated system across all children's services. This was succinctly put in one response:

Every area should have a public health care building to act as an umbrella for all services relating to children so that all professionals dealing with any child would be in constant communication with every service that child is accessing and with their education setting. It's very disjointed at the moment and extremely confusing for parents who don't know what services they need.

A number of parents of children with disabilities made reference to improved integrated services between Disability Services, CAHMS and Primary Care.

7. Conclusion

Parenting is the most important job in the world, but it is also the hardest. Parents who responded to this survey gave their views honestly and earnestly. What stands out from the survey is that the parents across Limerick are trying to give the best opportunities possible to their children, support them where they need support, and advocate for them where that support is not forthcoming.

The survey also tells us that parents are struggling – juggling between work, childcare, extra-curricular demands, accessing services, navigating the high cost of living.

795 parents gave us their views in this survey. The report endeavours to represent as many of those views as is possible. This report, along with consultations with children and young people and practitioners, will inform the development of a strategic county-wide document, the Limerick CYPSC Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP).

Thank you to every parent who responded to the survey.