



THE COLORADO PARENT AND INFORMAL CAREGIVER PERSPECTIVE

FOCUS GROUPS REPORT • Summer/Fall 2016



From Great Ideas to Great Results



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents the objectives, methodology, and findings of a qualitative research study commissioned by the Colorado Department of Human Services - Office of Early Childhood and the Early Childhood Communication Collaborative to uncover the perspective of parents and informal caregivers in Colorado as it relates to their child-rearing role.

The methodology utilized for this study was focus groups, both in English and Spanish, conducted in main cities across the state: Denver, Colorado Springs, Longmont and Eagle. Additionally, we included a quantitative element in the study: participants filled out a 21-question survey about their media preferences and habits.

Note: since the total number of participants that attended the sessions was 95, we cannot extrapolate the results of the survey to the total parent and caregiver population across the state.

During the research, we found five major and recurrent themes: Openness, Anxiety, Confusion/Knowledge Gap, Loneliness and Lack of Help, and Desire for Support and Value.

OPENNESS: Colorado parents and caregivers are eager to learn about all aspects of child development and are open to support and training. However, they do not know where to find the support they want.

ANXIETY: Parents want and feel pressured to be better parents than what their parents were. Yet they also affirmed those same parents and grandparents are their main source of trust for both information and caregiving of their children. On the other hand, caregivers are mainly concerned about the safety of the children under their care and are worried about the cultural differences between themselves and the families of the children they take care of.

CONFUSION/ KNOWLEDGE GAPS: There is no consensus about what the term “early childhood development” really means, and key misconceptions exist surrounding what propels brain development. Additionally, the large majority of participants underestimated how early their child’s development starts: they





believe that major knowledge and skill development begins after the age of one, with some indicating major development begins closer to age five. It is important to note, that the gap among Spanish-speaking parents and caregivers was even more significant.

Furthermore, there is universal confusion about information sources and resources available and how to find them. Aside from Google, almost all of the parents and caregivers struggled to name local resources that provide them with trusted information or support.

LONELINESS AND LACK OF HELP: Parents have a general sense of loneliness regarding their parenting role: they feel they are doing things completely on their own. Unanimously, they expressed that the thing they need the most is support. This sense of loneliness was aggravated in the rural areas. Both parents and caregivers expressed a belief that, 'it takes a village' to raise a child, and many of them are seeking that 'village'. Lastly, most young parents and caregivers noted they are afraid of asking for help, as they think it could have negative connotations.



DESIRE FOR SUPPORT AND VALUE: Participants feel a great deal of external judgment and criticism over their parenting/caregiving skills. They feel that they can never do enough. Consequently, they want other community members to value them in their role as parents and caregivers. This sensation of being under-valued was most evident among fathers.





FRAMEWORK

After several months of interviews and meetings with funders, co-chairs, steering committee members, advisory partners and other key stakeholders of the early childhood community, it was clear there was a need for further information about the perspective of Colorado parents and informal caregivers on the importance of early childhood development, as well as their motivations and/or barriers to access parenting/caregiving information and services.

Zero to Three and the Bezos Family Foundation engaged in a research study ("National Parent Survey") dedicated to gain a clear understanding about the challenges parents face, the kind of help they seek and their level of satisfaction with the support and information available to them. This study unveiled important findings at national level. Hence, we decided to also test some elements of that study at a state level and go even further by including another target audience: Colorado informal caregivers (FFN: Friends, Family and Neighbors).

Moreover, we were looking not only to gain invaluable knowledge about parents' and informal caregivers' attitudes and sources of information and services, but also to gather a deeper understanding of their anxiety points in order to to identify strategies to better support them in their roles.

In the following pages please find the specific objectives, methodology, and findings of this research project commissioned by the Colorado Department of Human Services - Office of Early Childhood and the Early Childhood Communication Collaborative.





OBJECTIVES

After different meetings with the client and its advisory team, we established the research objectives listed below, which later guided the development of the methodology for the study.

- Evaluate the level of understanding parents and informal caregivers in Colorado have of the importance of early childhood development.
- Explore current needs/concerns of parents and caregivers regarding their roles and situations.
- Identify places/platforms/locations where parents and informal caregivers go when needing help with their children or when looking for community resources.
- Evaluate the barriers parents and informal caregivers encounter when accessing information and services to propel the early childhood development of the children under their care.
- Determine how best to support parents and informal caregivers within the state.
- Test locally some of the findings of the National Parent Survey report conducted by Zero to Three and the Bezos Family Foundation and expand it to include informal caregivers (FFN: Friends, Family and Neighbors).
- Evaluate media habits of parents and informal caregivers.
- Identify the kind of imagery that is relevant to parents and informal caregivers.





TARGET

There were a total of 95 participants comprised of English and Spanish-speaking parents and informal caregivers of children under age eight, and at least 50% of them had children below age three. At least 70% of the participants were not engaged in early childhood supports and services. Additionally, all participants were from low to moderate-income households (less than \$45,000 per year).

Please note that Eagle was the exception, as income and living expenses are higher than the average of the state. Average annual income of Eagle participants was \$50,000 (which it is still low to moderate-income for that area).



METHODOLOGY

The study centered around four (4) pillars:

AWARENESS | NEEDS | MOTIVATORS | ACCESS

Thus, the discussion guide was specifically developed to address these areas of questioning and follow this order.



For this study, we conducted eight (8) focus groups of parents and informal caregivers in four Colorado communities (four sessions in English and four sessions in Spanish in Denver, Eagle, Longmont and Colorado Springs).

At the beginning of each session, while participants were arriving and getting their refreshments, a 21-question survey about media habits was distributed and attendees returned it at the end of the focus group.

METHODOLOGY AT A GLANCE

Research Mode:

Qualitative – 8 Focus groups
(4 in English and 4 in Spanish)
90-minute each

Respondents:

- 95 Parent and informal caregivers of children from 0 to 8 years old
- At least half had children under 3
- Spanish and English-speakers
- Household income of \$45,000 or less

Geographic Scope:

- Denver Metro
- Colorado Springs
- Longmont
- Eagle

Quantitative Addition:

21-question survey administered at the beginning of the session

Time of the Sessions:

Weekday evenings | August 2016.



FINDINGS

These sessions brought to light many eye-opening insights into the perspective and situation of parents and informal caregivers, not only regarding their views on early childhood development but also their general attitudes towards parenting in Colorado. The major themes uncovered in these focus groups can be categorized as follows: Openness, Anxiety, Confusion/Knowledge Gaps, Loneliness and Lack of Help, and Desire for Support and Value.

Most Salient Struggles and Anxieties

The most common struggle among all participants was the feeling that they are not doing enough and consequently are not allowing their children (or the children under their care) to reach their true potential. They are truly afraid of 'failing' at this role in their lives.

"This is the only thing in my life I cannot fail at."

"You're always afraid that you are not doing enough, that you are not teaching them exactly what they need to know, to be at the same level as other people as far as intelligence. My daughter went into preschool this summer and I was terrified that I didn't teach her enough, that she didn't know her ABC's, or that behavior-wise she wouldn't be listening or paying attention."

"I'm scared of failure. I don't want to mimic the way that my mother raised me."

This specific theme also brought out the largest disparity among parents and informal caregivers throughout the entire research. Parents want and feel pressured to be better parents than what their parents were. "I do not want to be like my mom. I want to break the cycle with my child". On the other hand, informal caregivers are mainly concerned about the safety of the children under their care and are worried about the cultural differences between themselves and the families of the children they take care of.

"When you take care of other people's children, the thing that worries you the most is their safety."

"I cared for a child that was three months old and in chemotherapy and I had to be extremely careful with him. It's a huge responsibility when it isn't your own kids."

"When you are taking care of a child that is not yours you can get sued over any bump or bruise."





Additionally, we found there is a gap between the approach informal caregivers use in raising their own children versus the children under their care. “I raise my children in a totally different way because each family is different and I want to avoid problems with the parents.”

Interestingly, most young parents and informal caregivers noted that they are afraid of asking for help. “In this community it is almost like it is a bad thing, because they look at you like you are doing something wrong when you ask for help.”

On numerous occasions the fathers across the different sessions mentioned their fears about not knowing how to raise girls, while mothers said they are worried they do not know how to raise boys.

It is important to mention that working mothers feel that, by bringing in an extra income, they lose many opportunities and access to important services. This makes them feel unfairly ‘punished’ in some way. Moreover, mothers feel somewhat guilty by working and not being with their children at all times.

“When mom works you make enough money that you don’t qualify for programs. You want to work, you don’t want to be at home, but then you can’t make enough to afford daycare so you end up being worse off”.

“I want to have more time with my daughter instead of having to work all the time, but we have bills that are waiting.”

“I worked with my first child and she was in daycare. I didn’t do a lot of reading with her. With my second child I was able to read with her and you can tell the difference.”

Not surprisingly, among lower-income parents the struggle for financial resources is at the top of their anxiety points. They are concerned over being able to provide for their children and offering them more opportunities than the ones they had growing up. “Financially being able to provide what you want for your kids. I’d love to send them to preschool five days a week but financially I can only afford three days.” “Being able to provide education and that my kids are never in need of anything.”





Related to the same topic, in Eagle we found specific anxiety points regarding accessibility to government support. Since the average income level is higher in this county, many are ineligible for government assistance or other programs that could support them with their child-rearing responsibilities (i.e.: Daycare). This issue is exacerbated by the elevated cost of living in the area, which is so high that it negates the extra income. In this way, because they have to pay for childcare services and cover their high living expenses at the same time, they end up being worse off than those that receive government assistance.

The language barrier is a limitation to monolingual Spanish-speaking parents and informal caregivers, as they feel frustrated that they are not able to help their children with schoolwork. "My daughter sometimes needs me to help her with her homework and I don't speak English. I want to learn English just so I can help her." Note: Four parents and caregivers in the room corroborated this statement.

Single mothers affirmed having a challenging life and struggling with the social pressure. "I'm worried that when he's older he's going to ask me about his dad and I won't know what to tell him."

Lastly, all parents expressed a deep need for having some respite or as they called it 'Me Time'. "You need me time. Time to get away and recharge your batteries." "I can't remember the last time I did something 100% for me".

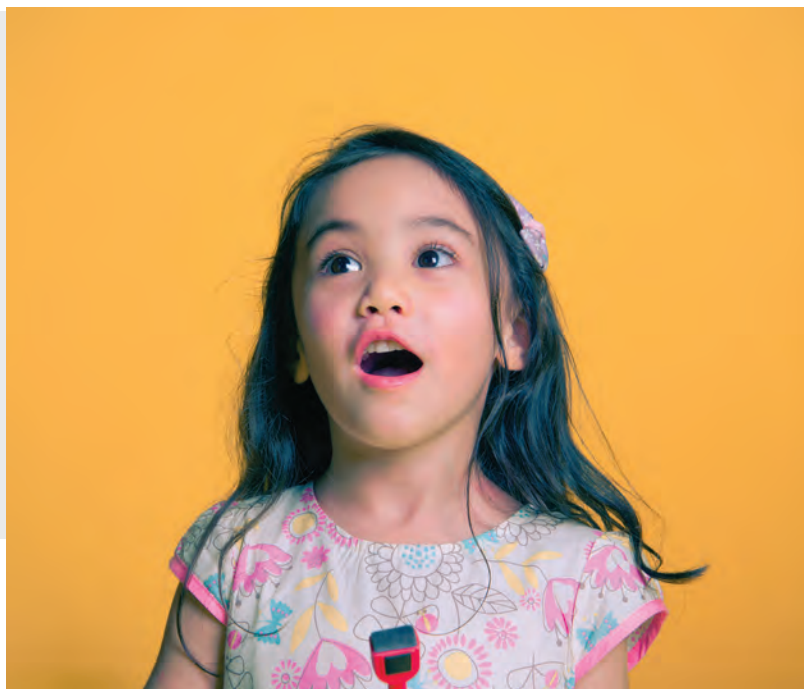
People/Organizations They Entrust with Their Child's Care

It is important to mention that daycare is considered a last resort, as parents feel daycares are outrageously expensive and out of reach for many of them.

"They (my children) bounce around with family members and they have a sitter. (...) I work full time and I can't pull it all on one person. Daycare takes my second job income and I can't afford to have them in it forever."

"The cost of daycare is not even. My boyfriend and I, one of us has to work mornings, one has to work nights. So someone is always home with our daughter."

"If you have two kids, it almost makes more sense to stay home than go to work because the cost for preschool is so prohibitive."





Also there are serious concerns and trust issues regarding how their children will be treated while at daycare (especially if the child does not talk yet and cannot inform parents about what happened during the day.)

"I don't trust daycares. Trust is a really big thing. There's so much going on in the world especially when you are dealing with such a delicate person. "

"I felt very comfortable with preschool, but I put her there only when she was old enough and could talk. (...) I know what's happening and what she's learning because she's able to tell me."

Another salient challenge is the actual access to daycare and preschools. Parent feel hopeless and that it is not worth even checking out daycares, sending applications nor touring facilities, because there is simply not enough capacity within the system to fit their child in. "My ten year old never went to preschool, he was waitlisted the whole time. He was diagnosed with ADD a year ago in elementary school (...). I lost a lot of time because he wasn't in preschool, he could have been diagnosed earlier."

Additionally, parents believe that children learn faster and better at home versus daycare, as the home environment offers a one-on-one learning opportunity. "There are too many children in the daycare, teachers cannot pay attention to every child. If there is a child with special needs in the classroom, they will never even look out for your child. It is almost bad that your kid is normal now."





Regardless if it is in a daycare setting or in a more informal environment (i.e.: a neighbor's house), parents are afraid and overly cautious about the kind of people that are around their children.

"I do not trust anybody to take care of my kids because of the things that happened to me."

"It has to be someone you know or trust."

"You have to be careful who watches your child, I was fortunate I had my mom."

The availability good caregiving options that parents can trust is critical. Moreover, the absence of good options puts a strain on the entire family. For instance, for lack of trusted caregiving alternatives, many participants stated that they rely on direct family members, such as grandparents. That said, grandparents expressed being concerned of their capacity to be the exclusive day caregiver of their grandchildren. Basically, they affirmed not having the stamina needed to keep up with 'today's hectic children'. "I need to rest, you get tired. I don't have the same energy that her mom has or that I had when I was young. I need to rest and sleep more."

This generalized lack of trust in others but an immediate family member or a very close person is consistent with the way many participants started caring for other's children. Exclusively, almost all started as an informal caregiver when a family member or a close friend asked them to take care of their children. Their network then grew within the broader community by word of mouth. "In my case I had one son who needed a babysitter and they didn't have the income to take them to quality daycare. Since I'm retired I volunteered to help. (...) Then neighbors saw what I was doing and started bringing their own kids."

Interestingly, as mentioned before, parents want to be better parents than their parents. However, they also affirmed that they turn to their own parents and grandparents for advice and information and stated they are their main source of trust (this point also supported by the results of the national survey).





Concerns Regarding Their Parenting Style/Skills

Across the board, when asked if they have any concerns regarding their parenting skills, the immediate answer among all participants was, "I think everybody does."

A natural consequence of this is a generalized feeling of guilt. Many parents felt extremely guilty over not correctly handling their child's problems or challenges. They were particularly distressed regarding not catching things 'early' enough or about not doing the right thing to address issues. "My oldest son has ADHD and it was caught by his preschool teacher not by me. How can I help him be successful? I am not sure if I am handling it correctly." "It's a struggle to know if you're making the right choices. If to spank or not to spank, let them cry or not. There are so many opinions about things out there, you don't know what to do."

Curiously, the main concern of informal caregivers regarding their child-rearing skills is the lack of ability to use their own style, as they feel they must follow the parents' way of parenting, even if they disagree with it. "Mothers just have their own rules and as a babysitter you have to respect that. You have to adapt yourself to their routine, not the other way around. It doesn't matter what you think or if your techniques are better than hers."

Common ground was found among participants as both parents and informal caregivers expressed concerns regarding their ability to manage tantrums, their lack of self-control in certain situations, and how to best discipline the children under their care.

Regardless of their concerns over their skills and abilities as parents, or their doubts about doing things correctly, parents believe they are the most important thing in their child's life and the one thing they truly need. "You. All they need is you. The same, consistent you all the time, the loving you. They need and want you."





Openness to Learn/Ask for Help

Both parents and informal caregivers agree that what happens early in life (both positive and negative) can affect a person for the rest of his/her life. This creates anxiety among the groups and they are worried about doing things 'right' during those critical years. Consequently, they are willing to learn new skills and mitigate any negative experiences.

Parents and informal caregivers expressed that they are eager to learn about all aspects of child development and are open to receive support and training.

Here the challenge is that they feel stuck, as they do not know what it is they need to learn, or what information it is that they are missing: "I do not know what I do not know." Yet there were discernable recurrent topics when we inquired if there was anything in particular they would like to learn about. These included: support groups with other parents, how to discipline children, and activities they can do with their children.

"I would like more classes and places where moms can get together and talk about what we go through."

"A support group or reference. You get to a point where you are tired and bored of doing the same things with your child. You just run out of ideas. I have to keep on teaching my children, but I don't know how."

"More creative resources. Winter is so long here and sometimes kids are out of school with snow days. What are you supposed to do with the kids at home? I wish there were creative resources available so that they can be playing and learning at home."

"I want to learn how to manage their tantrums without not getting out of control. How to be more patient."





Overall they are open to receive classes or training as long as they are high quality, respond to their current needs, offer flexible hours, provide daycare, as well as are affordable.

"We are working on potty training right now, so I would definitely go to a class if it was about that topic."

"Trainings and classes have to be accessible. Almost all the classes or education here are super expensive. Back in our countries there are free things and more access. Here you have to be college level to be able to access things. If you have money, then sure, you can acquire new skills."

Parents and caregivers are open to receiving information, but they struggle with asking others for help, particularly asking organizations or the government for aid.

"My daughter told me that the child of one of our family friends (a 13 year old boy) was touching her. My daughter is 6 years old. So I talked to her teacher to get some help about how to manage the situation, and then I ended up at Denver Human Services being questioned about my parenting skills."

"I actually moved my children from one childcare to a different one because I went to them for help and they actually sent CPS (Child Protective Services) to take my children from me. They looked at my background and assumed that I was abusive. I was asking for help with the behavioral issues I was dealing with at home because she could not accept that her dad left us. The worst is that every single CPS worker I've come in contact with has never had children of their own."

"It's mixed feelings; you need this support but you are afraid to use what's there."

This cautious attitude towards asking for help was particularly salient among Spanish-speakers, and it seems that there is a cultural component that bars them from seeking support.

"For me that's how I grew up, don't depend on anybody. But I have learned to be humble enough now to ask."

"That's one of the biggest challenges we encounter here. There are many people that need help but don't ask for it. Many times they go and hide their problems for years. There could be a ton of information out there, but we ignore it. Until things get out of control, we stay shut. It's a cultural thing, we don't trust anyone and it takes us a long time to open up our eyes and take steps to fix things."

"We are a bit cautious when it comes to asking for help. I think at times it is because we don't know how to explain what is happening to us."





In the end, the number one factor that empowers parents and informal caregivers to ask for help, as well as determines their level of openness to receive resources and information is the love for their child.

"What motivates me to ask for help and look for services is my kids wellbeing."

"I'm not super comfortable asking for support, but when there is a kid in the picture, you will do whatever you have to do to make things happen. Sometimes it's uncomfortable to ask for help, but I'll be damned if I'll let something happen to my child."

Amount and Quality of Parenting Information/Services Available

There is significant lack of awareness among parents about what information and services are available. The large majority believed that there are many services in the community, but they do not know what those are or where to look for them.

"Maybe there is information out there, but we don't know about it."

"Perhaps there are resources that I don't know about because maybe I haven't looked hard enough for them."

"There are a lot of information and resources around, but parents don't learn or know about them. Unless you really need to learn about something because you have a specific need, then you actively look for those resources and go find them. Services have to be more flexible."

Spanish-speaking parents and informal caregivers expressed the added frustration of not being able to find enough services or information in Spanish. "There just aren't enough programs for people in Spanish. It's the same with resources, service and information, there are not enough of those in Spanish. And the ones that are out there people don't know about or the information is really badly translated so you don't understand what they are talking about." I used to go to the activities for parents over at the library. But there was nothing available in Spanish. (...) I didn't understand anything they were saying, so I watched the other mothers and copied what they were doing."





Moreover, some parents considered that many of the programs and services do not adapt to their needs and could be particularly hard to access. “Most of the daycares close at four in the afternoon. I’m working at that time, so I need a place that is open until eight.” “It is frustrating now because there are so many zip codes and that is how they determine who will help you. It’s all subdivided by zip codes for services so you don’t have any control over it.”

Some participants commented on the geographic disparities within the state, saying that some areas are more supportive to parents and have more resources available to them than others. “I’ve lived in Boulder County, Pueblo and El Paso. Boulder helped me the most, Pueblo second and here the least. Pueblo, the community is not the best but they were very helpful. They had way better housing services and helped my children with emotional services.”

The situation was reportedly worse when talking to parents and informal caregivers in Colorado Springs. They all agreed they felt that they received minimum to no support from the community. They also affirmed that the amount and quality of services have declined over the last 5 years. “It bothers me. I’ve lived here twice. Four years ago they had so many resources. They had a big book they put in front of me with all the organizations and places I could go to. When I came back it was a very small version of that book and they had no descriptions about what services they offered. Just a name and a phone number.”

Overall, parents and informal caregivers felt that there are barriers to accessing resources and services. Particularly related to capacity in the programs they want to enroll. In almost every session, parents mentioned that when they learned about one services/program (i.e.: daycare, swim classes, etc.) and then called to inquire about it there was never space for their child. Thus, they get really frustrated and demotivated to call again. “Why am I going to call if there are never any spots available?”

Additionally, participants considered the maximum income requirement for non-profits and government agencies should be extended. They explained that in many instances they become ineligible when both parents work and their household income rises just above the maximum threshold for the majority of subsidize programs.

“He could have been in preschool at age three through HeadStart. No one told us. The pediatrician never gave us any resources. No one told us what the organization in the community that could help us were. It was all trial and error, first medicine, then psychological, then educational. We don’t have the money to pay for it. We’re on the lower end of the middle class spectrum, so we do not qualify for many things. Families like us feel screwed with the resources available to us.”

“Families with two incomes don’t qualify for these programs. It works if you’re a single mom, but if you do not qualify they’re really expensive out of pocket and you can’t afford them. I feel kind of jealous.”





The access problem is not exclusive to parents, informal caregivers have also been affected. For instance, it was interesting to learn from a caregiver in Denver that in one opportunity wanted to register for a workshop. However, she was rejected, as she was an 'informal' caregivers and was not 'licensed'.

We did come upon some encouraging news: parents and informal caregivers agreed that, although few and far between, when they did hear about a workshop, class or other type of session and managed to attend, the quality of these were very good. All participants reported having learned plenty and being treated with care, respect and consideration.

In fact, the good quality and caring treatment they received, were vital factors in their decision to open up to learning opportunities and to be willing to receive extra information and services. They are eager for more, but need to know where they can go and what services are available to them.

In this manner, it is important to mention that across the board, all parents expressed a need for a smart directory (Siri-style) that can provide up-to-date information about where to go for the specific resources and services they need. "We need a smart directory that I can tell it what I need, and it responds with the places that can offer the solution and knowing they still accept my child. It needs to be smart, like Siri on your /phone."

Confusion/Knowledge Gaps

Among parents and informal caregivers there is no consensus about what the term 'early childhood development' even means. Additionally, participants underestimated the most important ages for early childhood development. It is important to note that the knowledge gap is a lot more pronounced among Spanish-speakers than English-speakers.

Parents and informal caregivers are confused about the elements that propel brain development. While most participants correctly believe that brain development begins during pregnancy, they underestimate the importance of relationships and interactions once a child is born. The large majority thinks that genetics and nutrition are the only factors that determine brain development. "It depends on genetics. That's why learning disabilities are inherited. Parents with highly developed brains will usually have children with highly developed brains."



This lack of understanding was also showcased when asked if had have heard something about the importance of the first 1,000 days or three years of life, only two people from the 95 attendees had heard about it in an explicit manner.

However, it is important to note that many participants affirmed they do not want to believe that this timeframe in child development is true, as it creates too much pressure.



"I do not want to believe that it is true, because I want to think I can make a change in my niece's life. She is only 7 years old, so I can't accept she is already lost."

"I don't ever recall anyone specifically saying the first three years, but I feel I kind of heard the same information. Are you reading with them, are you playing? But I never actually heard the term the first three years. Maybe I should bring this up at her next doctor's appointment and make sure I did everything. I am a little nervous, like what did I miss? I only have six months left."

Loneliness and Lack of Help

Particularly among parents there is a sense of loneliness regarding their parenting role: they feel they are on their own. Unanimously, they expressed that the thing they need the most is support. "I need someone to lean on, you can't lean on air." This sense of loneliness was aggravated in the rural areas. "I felt really alone. I didn't have anyone around that could help me or guide me." "Basically you are on your own."

Both parents and caregivers expressed a belief that, "it takes a village" to raise a child, and many of them are seeking that "village" of individuals to help support their parenting efforts but are not having much success finding it.

Among Spanish-speakers the sense of loneliness is greater as they explained that they do not have any family around. Compared to their English-speaking counterparts, Spanish-speaking participants expressed a greater desire for finding that 'village' that can help them raise their children.

Unsurprisingly, parents (both Spanish and English-speakers) living in Eagle County feel terribly lonely and claimed to have no family support system. Moreover, they expressed this feeling accentuates during the winter. "Everyone is at their places by their own, people do not go to hang out. Winter is also when many of us work more."





Desire for Being Valued and Emotional Support

Parents and informal caregivers feel a lot of pressure from those around them. They feel they are subjected to a great deal of external judgment and criticism over their parenting skills.

"People only see what you are doing wrong, they never notice what you are doing right."

"Specially with my autistic son, we get judged all the time. We always get the stink eye. It's like people are thinking, 'Why can't you control your son?' 'Why is he acting that way?'"

"I live in a house with my grandma and sister, they don't agree with how I discipline my daughter. They criticize when I discipline my child."

"If my little boy cries because I don't buy him something for whatever reason, people ask why don't you get it for him? Get it for him! It's my call what he gets and when."

Parents are not alone in this sense, informal caregivers also claim they are being judged and are undervalued for the work they do. They expressed feeling like their bosses (parents) hold them to an extremely high standard and there is a lower threshold for mistakes on their part when it comes to the children in their care.

"I'm held to a much higher standard than the parents hold themselves. It's silly. If you lose a sock it's a critical mistake. If they lose it nothing happens"

"One of the girls I care for, her mother lets her stay up very late. There was one time that she only slept five hours before they dropped her off and we had to go to church. Obviously she was miserable and crying. Everyone was turning to look at me, like I had done something wrong or hurt the girl."

Curiously in Colorado Springs we had many participants that had moved and lived in other places/states/countries and they all agreed that people in the State of Colorado are far more judgmental. "Yes I feel judged. Specially in this state they judge you as a parent all the time."

Participants commented that the rise in use of social media has exacerbated the criticizing. They showed concern that even their own children get judgmental and compare their family with the ones they see on social media platforms like Facebook.



"Social media is making this situation worse...I think there's pressure and social media adds to it. There are all these people presenting to the world these perfect, happy moments, when that's not your reality! I feel like that's a new pressure that didn't exist. As a working mom it's hard."

"I almost want to stop going on Facebook. You see what all the parents are doing, they went to Disney, and horseback riding lessons. It's like keeping up with the Joneses."



However, some parents and informal caregivers recognized that being judgmental is almost a general human condition and habit. "It's what people do. It's human nature to judge and form opinions. When you see the perfect family on Facebook you're like "wow". Or when you see a mom spanking a child you form a judgment."

This situation creates a feeling of being undervalued among both parents and informal caregivers. They expressed it simply does not matter if they work hard and do the best they can, whatever they do is never enough. "No one values you. Being a parent is a full time job without vacations or sick days. The only overpay you get is the love of your kids."

They want to know that other community members value and care for their role as parents and informal caregivers.

"I want someone to lean on. That knows what you're going through, where you can go and get advice."

"You know how they say it takes a village but it's really hard."

"I would want to always find family that would be appreciative of my role. But they never do."

The participants that reported they felt the most undervalued were the fathers in the groups.

"It's a different dynamic now and fathers don't get the credit."

"We are paying for what our fathers did. They were not close to us and now people do not value fathers like me that really care and dedicates himself to his kids."

Sources of Trusted Information

Parents and informal caregivers alike overwhelmingly responded that their main trusted source of information are close family members: especially parents and grandparents. They also reach out to other parents they know and respect. "I ask my parents (my adopted parents), I lived with them and I liked the way they raised me and that's the way I want to do it with my child."

In addition, after family members and friends, the next choice for trusted information are professionals that work closely with children. They reach out to doctors (pediatricians), midwives and teachers that they come in contact with. "If I have a question I ask her pediatrician during her check-up or her teacher at school."

The Internet was another commonly mentioned trusted source of information. Throughout the study Google kept coming up as a main way to obtain information. However, participants also affirmed that although they use the search engine frequently, they are sometimes weary of what they find.





"I trust what I find on the Internet for the most part, depending on the source."

"I trust it, but you have to be careful what you find. It depends on the source and the reputation of the site."

"I follow people online, I read books, I ask their teachers and other parents. You follow moms that are successful at the things that you aren't."

However, there seems to be generalized confusion when it comes to finding quality information about child development or how to access services. Aside from Google, almost all of the parents and caregivers struggled to define a single place/program/service that they had heard of where they could obtain immediate answers to their questions or concerns. There was no consensus on a sole resource they could all name.

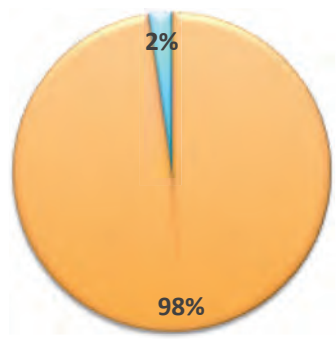




Media Habits Survey Results

Participants were asked to fill out a media usage survey at the beginning of each session. The survey inquired about the types of media they consumed, habits and preferences. The responses provided valuable insights into how parents and caregivers obtain their information and through what methods.

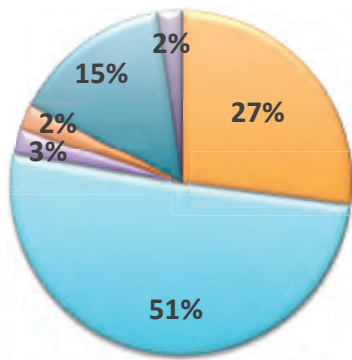
All participants have mobile phones. Only 2% did not own a mobile phone, with the majority of those (93%) having a smartphone. This is an advantage when trying to communicate with this audience because it allows for various formats of messaging and in a more complex manner. Additionally, mobile phones are very personal with the majority of participants saying they do not share their phones with other people. However, they do allow their children to use their phones.



DO YOU HAVE A CELL PHONE?

- Yes
- No

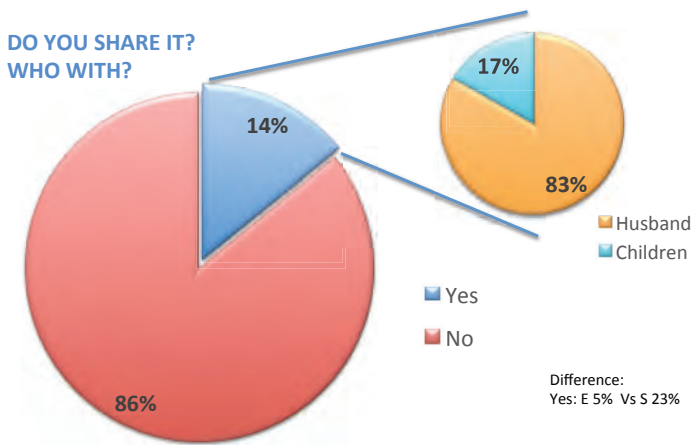
Note: There was not difference between English and Spanish speakers.



TYPE OF CELL PHONE

- Apple
- Android
- Flip Phone
- Not a Smartphone
- Other
- No answer

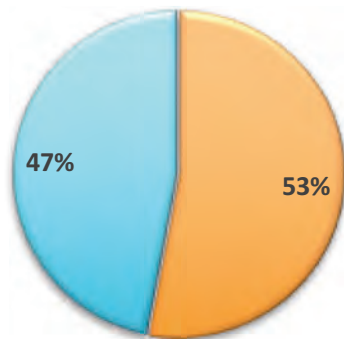
Note: There was not difference between English and Spanish speakers.



DO YOU SHARE IT? WHO WITH?

- Yes
- No

Difference: Yes: E 5% Vs S 23%



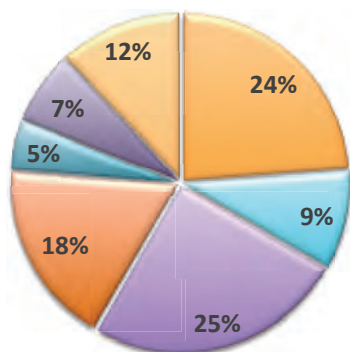
DOES YOUR CHILD USE YOUR CELL PHONE?

- Yes
- No

Note: There was not difference between English and Spanish speakers.



Regarding mobile phone providers these were varied across the board, but there was a slant towards least expensive, or no long-term contract providers. Unlimited features are common among participants, ranging from unlimited calls, texting or data plans, with few (9.5%) participants saying they have no unlimited features. This amplifies the amount of information that can be sent out as people will not be concerned about opening it over their phones. Participants use their phones for a variety of activities including streaming music, watching videos, gaming apps and texting.

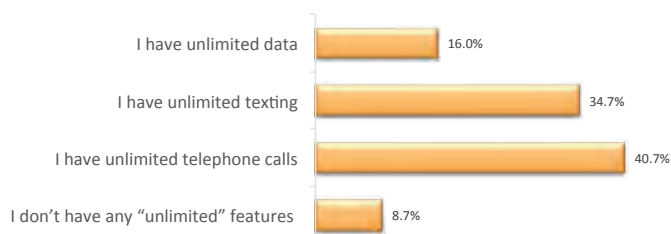


MOBILE CARRIER

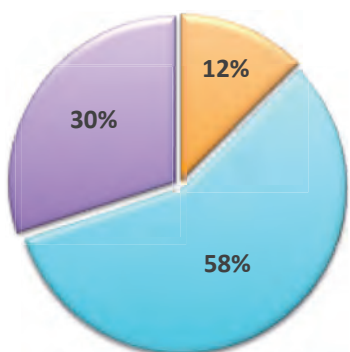
- ATT
- Verizon
- T-Mobile
- Cricket
- Metro PCS
- Boost
- Sprint

Note: There was not difference between English and Spanish speakers.

DOES YOUR PLAN HAVE ANY "UNLIMITED" FEATURES?



Note: There was not difference between English and Spanish speakers.

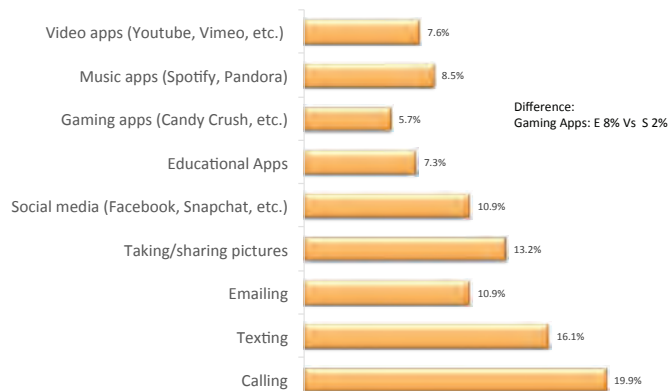


TYPE OF PLAN

- Pre-paid
- Month-to-month
- Contract

Difference:
Month-to-month: E 42% Vs S 70%
Contract: E 47% Vs S 16%

DO YOU USE IT PRIMARILY FOR?



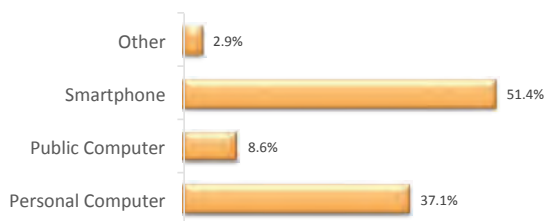
Difference:
Gaming Apps: E 8% Vs S 2%





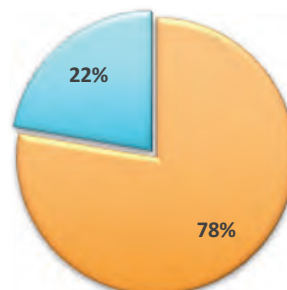
Over 51% of respondents use smartphones as the main way to navigate the Internet. However, 22% do not have Internet at home, a result that varied by geographic locations.

HOW DO YOU NAVIGATE THE INTERNET?



Note: There was no difference between English and Spanish speakers.

DO YOU HAVE INTERNET AT HOME?



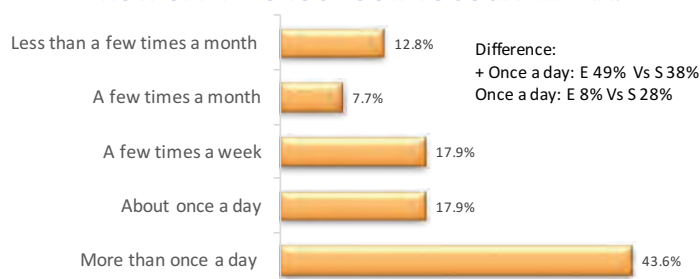
Yes No

Difference:
NO: E 12% Vs S 33%



Social media use is high among parents and caregivers, 44% percent use social media more than once a day; this number was particularly high among Spanish-speakers. This provides a great opportunity to engage parents and caregivers in two-way conversations through social media.

HOW OFTEN DO YOU LOG INTO SOCIAL MEDIA?



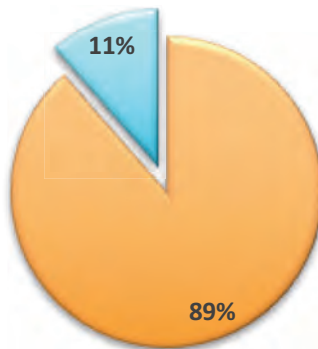
Difference:
+ Once a day: E 49% Vs S 38%
Once a day: E 8% Vs S 28%



Television is still highly consumed across the board and over 90% of respondents watch TV over two hours a day particularly during primetime evening hours. TV is watched both on sets or streamed through phones. Spanish-speakers rated Univision and Telemundo highly, and watch TV using their TVs at homes.

On the other hand, mainstream audiences had more diverse answers. This is understandable given the greater variety of channels they have to choose from, channels with the highest ratings were networks NBC and FOX.

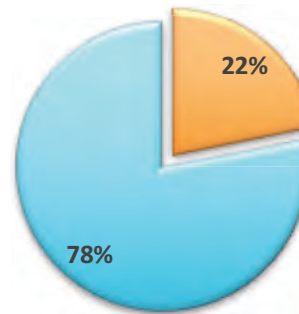
DO YOU WATCH TV?



■ Yes ■ No

Note: There was no difference between English and Spanish speakers.

HOW DO YOU WATCH TV?

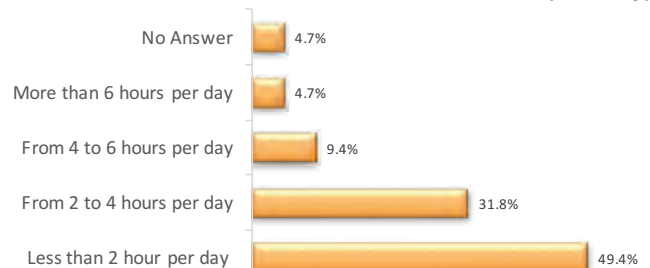


■ Stream on Phone or Computer
■ On TV

Difference:
TV Stream: E 36% Vs S 5%

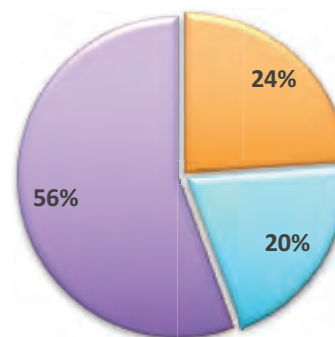


HOW MUCH DO YOU WATCH TV? (hrs/day)



Note: There was no difference between English and Spanish speakers.

WHEN DO YOU WATCH TV?

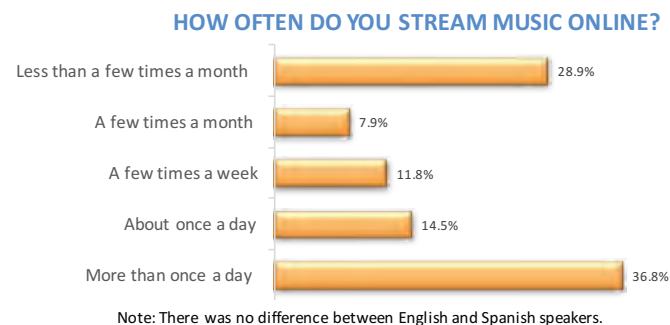
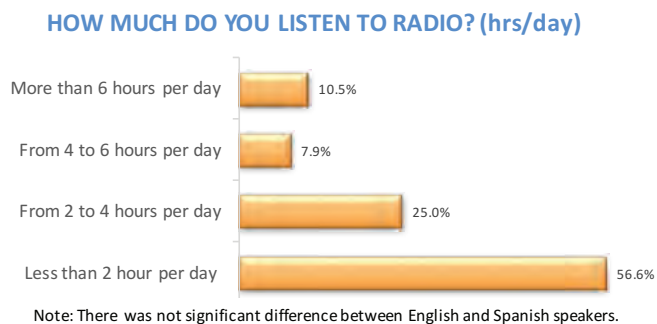
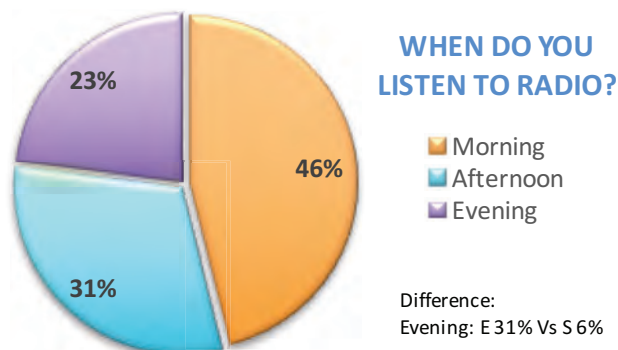
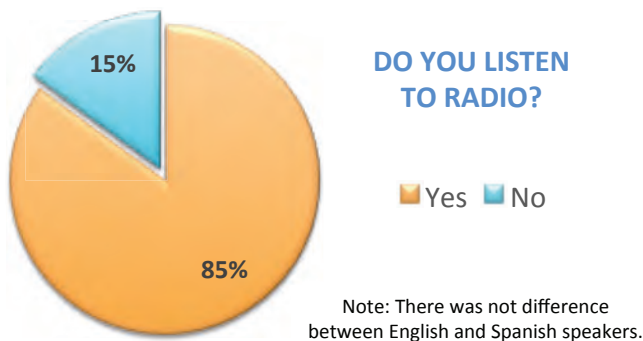


■ Morning
■ Afternoon
■ Evening

Note: There was no difference between English and Spanish speakers.

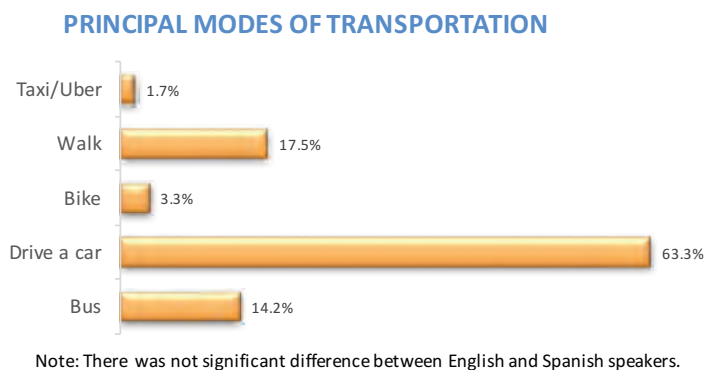


Radio is also heavily consumed. Music is streamed through phones or consumed in cars mainly on the way to work. If this type of media is chosen it is important to note that heavy use occurs during morning-drive hours.



Additionally, we inquired about transportation methods, given that this is a parameter to determine the effectiveness of out-of-home campaigns. Generally speaking, people drive their own cars which indicates possible success for out-of-home media placements via billboards or bus advertising. Bus advertising can function as mobile billboards that provide broader coverage across a geographic region.

It important to mention that indoor bus or train advertising is not recommended, as only 14% of respondents utilize public modes of transportation such as busses. This is especially true in Colorado Springs, where participants claimed to have an inadequate public transportation system and consequently it is not a choice.





Imagery Exercise

Each focus group ended with an imagery exercise through which we gauged parents' and caregivers' responses to various photos. The goal was to establish which type of imagery resonated the most with participants in order to inform future campaigns, collateral material or outreach information the community may want to utilize in the future.

There were fifteen images used for this exercise depicting adults and children in various situations. Some images showed emotions, like a tired parent at the end of the day, or a father with a face of concern as he carries a child. Other images focused on family time or one-on-one connections between an adult and a child.

Participants were asked to first sort the group of pictures into three categories: toss, keep or maybe. The maybe and keep piles were then shuffled and compared once again. Finally, pair comparisons were made to arrive at the top three.

Although groups differed during the exercises regarding which to toss or which images were a maybe, the final results were surprisingly consistent across the board. Parents and caregivers responded to images portraying one-on-one connections between a parent and child (instead of the entire family or even mom and dad with the children). They overwhelmingly voted for images portraying the connection, particularly if these were engaged in a constructive activity, explaining that these are the moments they value the most.

While they said that images showing stressful situations, such as a frustrated mom, a multitasking parent, were the reality and that they identified with that, it wasn't how they wanted to think about their parenting or caregiving. Additionally, when shown pictures of happy families, they appreciated the shots but readily accepted that these were 'too perfect' and 'not real life.'





WHAT IMAGES APPEAL TO PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS OF CHILDREN 0 TO 8

Quality Moments

Both parents and informal caregivers respond most positively to images depicting one-on-one connections between a parent and their child. While they appreciate images that show tender moments of connection, they prefer those that depict quality moments. These images showed parents with a child engaging in a teaching moment, whether reading or cooking together. They value the time they have with their children and want to take advantage of those moments to transmit knowledge or share quality time with their child.

Real Life Frustrations

Parents and informal caregivers alike expressed sometimes feeling frustrated with their children or situations. They feel lonely and desperate and 'don't know what to do' at moments. However, they said they did not want to show those feelings of frustration in front of the children. Moms in particular felt these frustrations were exclusive to them and when they saw a frustrated father the initial response was that he was wondering where mom was.

Happy (Fake) Family

These aspirational scenarios produced feelings of 'how it should be' for many parents. They felt that this scenario was a luxury, something nice to have but not necessarily the reality they live in. They called them: 'the perfect Facebook family photo'. Spanish-speaking parents particularly expressed a feeling of longing for scenarios that showed the extended family, but many of them commented their families are in their countries of origin so those photos do not represent them.

Tired Parent

Parents and informal caregivers related to the tired parent saying it was a consequence of caring for a child all day. They identified with the exhaustion and there was a sense of this being a sign of having done things right. Although these images resonated with them, this is not necessarily how they want to be perceived.

A. (Maybe)



- "Makes me think I'm not alone, someone else feels like that."
- "I can relate to this, I've felt like this many times."
- "You can feel like this but not in front of your kids."

B. (Toss)



- "It's like she gave up."
- "This reminds me of me."
- "My kids are constantly fighting and I feel like her. I don't know what to do."

C. (Maybe)



- "Not paying attention to the kids."
- "Her back is to the kids."
- "It's a real life moment, that's when you need more help."

D. (Toss)



- "That's a mess. I don't even like looking at the picture."
- "She doesn't have control."
- "I have one of my kids that makes me feel this way. Too much going on at once."
- "I like that it's real life but it's upsetting."

E. (Maybe)



- "This is real life."
- "They are frustrated but that's how I feel."
- "The mom is the one dealing with the child, like always."

F. (Maybe)



- "At the end of the day that's how you feel."
- "This is me."
- "This is what happens after all the quality time."
- "I feel connected to this."
- "It's more work to take care of kids than to work outside the home."

G. (Toss)



- "She does not care about the children."
- "It looks like the kids are bothering her."
- "I can identify, she's frustrated."

H. (Toss)



- "He's does not care about the baby."
- "He's desperate. I don't like this."

I. (Maybe)



- "I'm always multi-tasking."
- "I know what this picture feels like."
- "That's dangerous the child is near the stove."
- "You have to be everywhere at once, someone always wants your attention."
- "You have to be like a spider that can do many things at once."

J. (Maybe)



- "I like that the whole family is there, even the grandparents. That's how I grew up."
- "My kids need their whole family, but my family is back in Mexico."
- "I like the concept but it's a little fake."
- "This is an ideal, something to strive for."
- "These people are happy, that's not me."

K. (Maybe)



- "This is dynamic, they are out doing something together."
- "This is aspiration, it's how it should be."
- "It is beautiful, but definitely fake. Too happy and perfect to be real."

L. (Keep and Winner)



- "It's a sweet moment."
- "That's what moms are for."
- "Even if you're tired you're there for your kid."

M. (Keep)



- "It's sweet she's enjoying her time with her baby."
- "It's a calm moment, just mom and baby."
- "She looks worried, like she knows what's coming."
- "It looks sweet to me."

N. (Keep and Winner)



- "This is the beautiful life, the whole family together can be just sometimes, but this is every day, you and your kid."
- "I like that he's doing something constructive, teaching him something."
- "They're doing something good, reading is good for him."

O. (Keep and Winner)



- "It's a real life relationship with her daughter."
- "She's dedicating time to the kids."
- "She's concentrated on her child."
- "She's teaching her how to be healthy."



APPENDIX

MODERATOR GUIDE

1. Moderator Introduction

2. Purpose of Discussion – Focus Group Process

- What we are doing is a focus group. Every comment is important. Therefore, we are recording this session so that we don't miss anything. It is important to mention that all your comments and personal information will be kept strictly **confidential**.
- I have members of my team and they are helping me take notes.
- Please turn off or mute mobile phones.
- We are interested in all your comments—both positive and negative. There are no right or wrong answers.
- Please speak up. It is important that we hear what everyone thinks.
- There may be differing views among some of you during our discussion. That's okay. I just ask that everyone be respectful of one another and their possibly differing viewpoints.
- This is a group discussion so you do not need to wait for me to call on you. Please try to speak one at a time and speak up so the recorder can pick everything up.
- We have a lot to cover and if I change the subject or move ahead before you feel we have finished, stop me if you wish to add anything. We will be moving quickly through some of the topics.
- I am very interested in what you have to say about the topics we will discuss. I hope you will also find our discussion interesting and enjoyable.

3. Participant Introductions

- Please tell us your name and something about yourself – such as what you do, how old the child you care for is, how many children you have or care for, how long you have lived in the area, and maybe something about your family, or any personal interests or hobbies you might have. I will start.

NOTE TO MODERATOR: remember to explain that “your children” means your child or the children you take care of.



ABOUT THEIR PARENTING/CAREGIVING SITUATION

- If you need to define the word “parenting”, how would you do it?
- Do you dedicate yourself full-time to the care of your children or do you work outside of the home, study or are away in a way that affect full-time care? Do you have any support or help?
- Who, besides yourself, cares for your children? How do you decide who will care for your children?
- Do you take care of any children on a regular basis? Who? Since when? How did you become a caregiver?
- What is your favorite activity with your child/children you take care of? Why?

AWARENESS

- Do you think there is a most critical age for children development? Is there any particular age that you considered to be the “tipping point”?
- Do you think it is true that what happens in the earliest years can affect a child for life? Do you think that really early experiences can affect children’s long-term development?
 - If yes, ask... At what age does the quality of a parent/caregiver care have a long-term impact on a child’s development?

NOTE FOR MODERATOR: If they mention early childhood, please go further regarding specific ages.

- What is early childhood development for you and what that includes?
- In your opinion, what are the most important elements that positively or negatively affect a child’s development?
- What do you know about early brain development?
- When do you think a child’s brain begins to develop?
- Have you ever heard about the importance of the first 1,000 days of life, or the first three years of life? Does that create any extra pressure



NEEDS

- How do you feel about being a parent or caregiver in Colorado?
- As a parent/caregiver of a young child what are your biggest challenges/concerns?
- What is the thing that concerns you the most regarding your parenting or caregiving skills/situation?
- Do you think you can overcome that challenge? What do you need in order to overcome it?
- What do you think your children need the most?
- Regarding your parenting or caregiving role, do you have any particular need? Anything to better support your role?
- Do you have any concerns regarding your parenting (skills, abilities, etc.)?
- Thinking of your parenting and caregiving role is there anything you wish you could do a better job at?
- Do you feel there is too much pressure regarding “parenting” or “caregiving” nowadays?
- Do you feel any guilt and/or shame regarding your parenting or caregiving situation/skills?
- Thinking about your parenting/caregiving role, do you feel judged regarding the way you are raising (taking care) of your child? If yes... ask by whom?
- Do you feel valued and supported by the community in your parenting/ caregiving role? Yes? No? Why?
- If you moved to Colorado from somewhere else, do you feel more or less supported in your parenting/caregiving role here? Why?
- Regarding parenting or caregiving, is there anything you would like to learn more about? What kind of information or service do you think you need?

NOTE FOR MODERATOR: Try to find elements like: children emotional development, brain development, how to engage in a more meaningful manner. Also try to find specific services/programs.





ACCESS

- Do you think there is enough support and information available to you that helps you with your child's early childhood development? (specially when you feel overwhelmed or stressed)
- Do you feel welcomed and motivated to apply for services and programs? Do you use them?
- How did you hear about these services?
- What do or don't you like about the services you use and how do they help you?
- Are there any barriers you encounter when accessing information and services that promote the early childhood development of the children under your care?
- What kind of information would you like to receive? Is there any place you go for parenting help?
- If more help or support was available, what would it need to look like for you to utilize it?

MOTIVATORS

- How do you feel about asking for help and support regarding your parenting or caregiving?
- Do you believe parenting skills can be learned?
- Are you open to learning new parenting strategies if available?
- When thinking about parent/caregiver engagement, what empowers and drives you to action? What are the triggers that make you take charge?
- What stops you from taking action?
- Is there something I can say to take you out of your day-to-day busy life so you decide to invest time in learning about something new or going to any specific place to get extra services/obtain extra support?





SOURCES OF TRUST AND MEDIA

- Who in your life influences your parenting and caregiving the most?
- Regarding parenting or caregiving, what or who is a trusted source of information for you?
- When it comes to parenting or caregiving, what in your opinion makes a source trustworthy?
- Do you trust/believe what you find online? Blogs? Websites? Social media?
- Thinking about your role as a parent or caregiver do you trust/believe what you hear or read on TV? Radio? Billboards? Newspapers? Posters? Brochures? Parents or Family? Medical professionals?
- Who do you turn to when you have a question about the children in your care or when you are stressed out about your caregiving role? When you need to talk to someone who do you call?
- Who do you reach out to for parenting or caregiving questions or information?
- If a friend asks you about where they can find information/services for their child, what would you say/recommend? Is there any place that I can go to see what is available?
- What are the various ways you obtain information about parenting and caregiving? Where do you get information? Online? TV? Newspapers? Friends? Social media? Radio? Billboards? Church? Schools? Parents or Family? Medical professionals?
- What is the best tip or information you have received and where did it come from?
- Where (places/locations) do you go when needing help with your children or when looking for community resources?
 - Test the following: Special website or blog site from child development experts? Emails from child development experts? Smartphone/tablet app from child development experts? Text messages from child development experts?
- What would be the best way to reach you? Place and channels?
- **Please rank the following media in terms of usage (note: number one is the one you use/watch/listen/follow the most). TV, Radio, Social Media (which one), Billboards, Pandora, Spotify, Bus Shelters, etc.**
- **Please rank them now in terms of effectiveness motivating you to do something.**
- **Does this order change if I add another sources like ... friends, church, doctor, nurse, libraries, teacher, counselor, etc.?**

Note: Only if you have enough time.



IMAGERY EXERCISE (15 MINUTES)

- “Here I have a set of cards. Each card has a different photo. Please organize the deck of cards: the card that you feel you are most connected to you and/or resonates with you will be on top and the card that you connect the least with on the bottom of the deck.”
- What are your top two cards? Why did you pick those?
- What are your bottom two cards? Why?

NOTE FOR MODERATOR: try to find patterns.

CLOSE / THANK YOU (5 MINUTES)

- That concludes the questions I have. Does anyone have any final comments to make about our discussion tonight?
- I want to thank you for spending time with us this evening. Your comments will help shape the way information about this topic is presented. We hope you enjoyed our discussion and have a great evening. Please come sign our participant sheet in order to receive the \$50 incentive.

NOTE FOR MODERATOR: Pass signature sheet to distribute incentives. Participants need to sign the sheet to receive compensation.





SURVEY

WELCOME! WE ARE SO GLAD YOU COULD JOIN US TODAY. WHILE WE WAIT FOR THE OTHERS TO ARRIVE, WE'D LIKE TO GET SOME INFORMATION.

- 1 Do you have a cell phone?
☐ Yes ☐ No
- 2 What type of cell phone do you have?
☐ Apple ☐ Android
☐ Flip phone ☐ Not a smartphone
☐ Other
- 3 Do you share your cell phone with anyone else?
☐ Yes ☐ No
Who: _____
- 4 Does your child ever use your cellphone?
☐ Yes ☐ No
- 5 Who is your mobile carrier and why did you choose this carrier?
☐ ATT ☐ Verizon
☐ T-Mobile ☐ Cricket
☐ Metro PCS ☐ Boost
Other: _____
Why? _____
- 6 Is your plan...
☐ A Pre-paid plan ☐ Month-to-month
☐ Contract
- 7 Does your plan have any "unlimited" features?
☐ I don't have any "unlimited" features
☐ I have unlimited telephone calls
☐ I have unlimited texting
☐ I have unlimited data
- 8 Do you use it primarily for... (check all that apply)
☐ Calling
☐ Texting
☐ Emailing
☐ Taking/sharing pictures
☐ Social media (Facebook, Snapchat, etc.)
☐ Educational Apps
☐ Gaming apps (Candy Crush, etc.)
☐ Music apps (Spotify, Pandora)
☐ Video apps (Youtube, Vimeo, etc.)
- 9 How often do you log into social media networks (Facebook, Snapchat, etc.)?
☐ More than once a day
☐ About once a day
☐ A few times a week
☐ A few times a month
☐ Less than a few times a month
- 10 How do you navigate the Internet?
☐ Personal computer
☐ Public computer
☐ Smartphone
Other: _____
- 11 Do you have Internet at home?
☐ Yes ☐ No
- 12 How often do you stream music online (Pandora, Spotify, YouTube, etc.)?
☐ More than once a day
☐ About once a day
☐ A few times a week
☐ A few times a month
☐ Less than a few times a month
- 13 Do you watch TV?
☐ Yes ☐ No
- 14 How do you watch TV?
☐ Stream (by computer or phone)
☐ On TV
- 15 How much do you watch TV? (hours per day)
☐ Less than 2 hour per day
☐ From 2 to 4 hours per day
☐ From 4 to 6 hours per day
☐ More than 6 hours per day
- 16 When do you watch TV? (Check all that apply)
☐ Morning ☐ Afternoon ☐ Evening
- 17 Please write your top three favorite channels
1 _____
2 _____
3 _____
- 18 Do you listen to radio?
☐ Yes ☐ No
- 19 How much do you listen to radio?
☐ Less than 2 hour per day
☐ From 2 to 4 hours per day
☐ From 4 to 6 hours per day
☐ More than 6 hours per day
- 20 When do you listen to radio?(Check all that apply)
☐ Morning ☐ Afternoon ☐ Evening
- 21 Please write your top three favorite stations
1 _____
2 _____
3 _____
- 22 What are your principal modes of transportation?
(pick top two)?
☐ Bus ☐ Drive a car
☐ Bike ☐ Walk
☐ Taxi/Uber



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