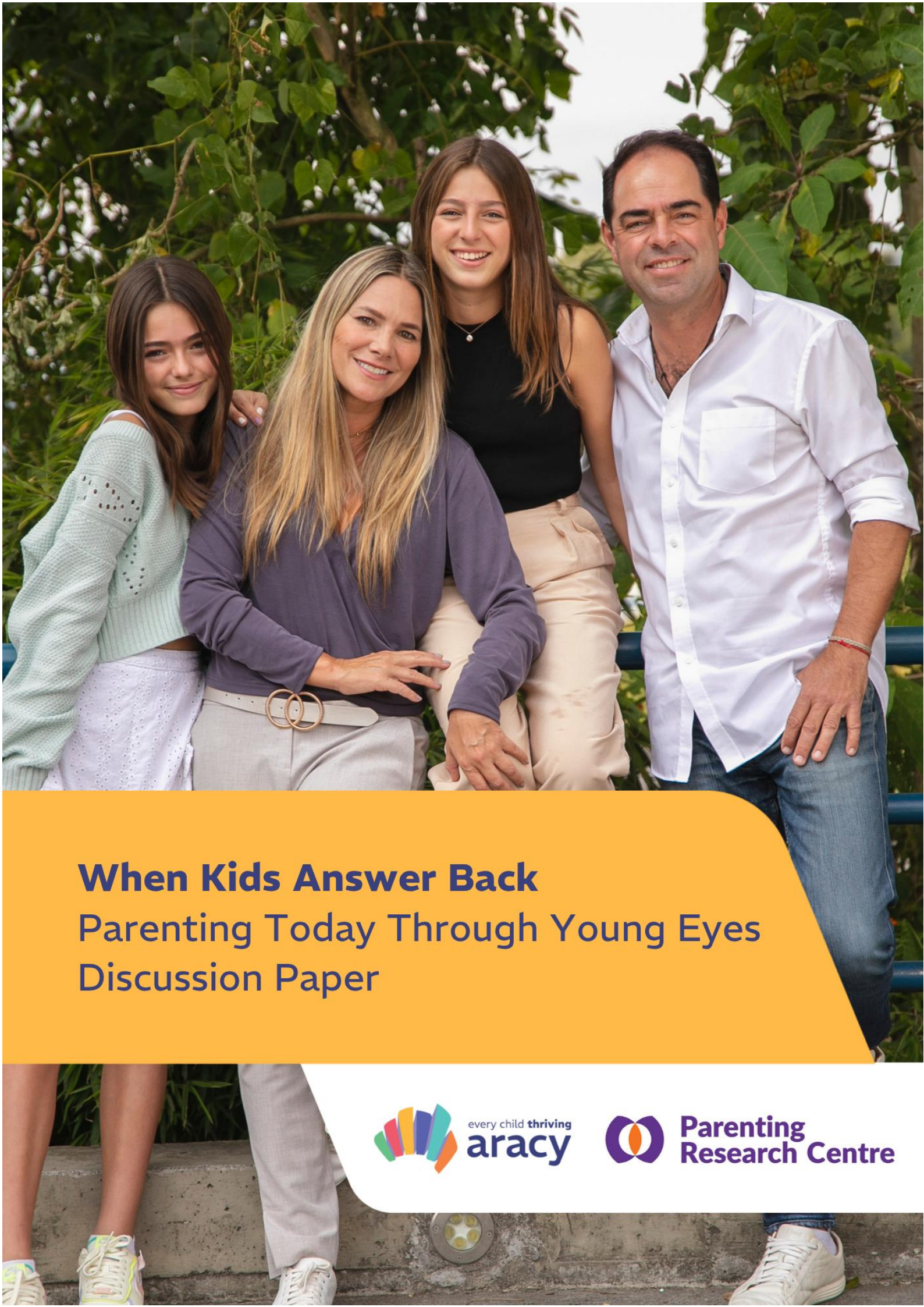




When Kids Answer Back Parenting Today Through Young Eyes Discussion Paper



Acknowledgement of Country

ARACY acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the lands and waters across Australia. We pay our respects to Elders past and present. We thank the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people who shared their voices with us. Their wisdom helps shape this work.

The Parenting Research Centre acknowledges and respects the diverse Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of this Country, the Elders, past and present, and the families and communities who have cared for children on this Country for countless generations.

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Prepared by Dr Natalie Day, Adam Valvasori and Sarah Lake

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Parenting Today is a national research initiative led by the Parenting Research Centre, designed to build a clearer and more contemporary picture of parenting in Australia. The establishment of Parenting Today has been made possible through foundational support from the Minderoo Foundation and the Victorian Government.



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About ARACY and The Nest

ARACY the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth, champions the wellbeing of children and young people aged 0 to 25 years. We work to break down the silos between systems so every young person can thrive.

We measure wellbeing through The Nest, Australia's first evidence-based framework of wellbeing for children and young people. The Nest has six connected domains: being healthy; being valued, loved and safe; learning; participating; having material basics; and a positive sense of identity and culture. This report consolidates the findings through The Nest as a means of demonstrating the complexity and interconnectedness of influences that shape the parent-child dynamic.

This report draws on data analysed with the support of AI-assisted tools. AI helped organise, synthesise and compare across different source materials from ARACY's Young and Wise Roundtables, including session recordings and transcripts, Mentimeter entries and Microsoft Teams chat messages. It was also used to identify recurring themes, with all themes, descriptions and counts reviewed and confirmed by the ARACY project team against the original contributions. ARACY approved all published themes and interpretations. More on our methodology can be found in the 'How We Listened' section below.

About Parenting Research Centre

The Parenting Research Centre is an independent, non-profit organisation that helps children thrive by advising on new and better ways to support families in their parenting.

We help governments and community organisations in the fields of health, education and welfare put the best evidence on parenting support into action. We help them find practical solutions by:

- Making evidence more accessible and useful to them through synthesising, translating and exchanging knowledge
- Offering ways to design and implement parenting supports that are innovative, effective, sustainable and evidence-based
- Conducting rigorous applied research that helps them evaluate and improve the quality of their policies, programs and services.

Our 20 years of experience, practical expertise, scientific rigour and collaborative approach mean we are uniquely positioned to support those working with parents who want to drive change and improve outcomes for children.

Our work acknowledges the cultural, socio-economic and geographic diversity of people in Australia. We take great efforts to ensure our work is inclusive and accessible to the broad diversity of peoples to whom it is relevant, including children and young people, people with disabilities and people from diverse cultural backgrounds.

Executive Summary

Parenting and childhood wellbeing are deeply interconnected. Yet research has typically captured the experiences of parents and children separately, providing a partial understanding of family life. This report brings together two complementary sources of evidence: findings from the 2025 Parenting Today national survey of more than 10,000 parents and carers across Australia, and insights from 53 young people who participated in ARACY's Young and Wise Roundtables in 2026. By considering these perspectives side by side, the report offers a unique view of how parents and young people understand, influence, and respond to one another's wellbeing.

The findings reveal a striking pattern of reciprocal concern. Parents' greatest reported concern is their children's worries, fears and anxieties, while young people are deeply concerned about the mental health, stress and wellbeing of the adults who care for them. Across both datasets, mental health emerged as a shared priority, demonstrating that wellbeing is experienced not as an individual issue but as something that is negotiated and felt across family relationships.

Young people showed a strong awareness of the pressures facing parents and carers. They identified financial strain, cost-of-living pressures, burnout, work demands, and mental health challenges as key threats to parent wellbeing. Many worried about adding to their parents' burden and described actively managing their own struggles to avoid creating additional stress. This finding suggests that children and young people are not passive recipients of care, but active participants in family wellbeing, often carrying concerns that might be invisible to parents.

The Parenting Today data highlights the challenges many parents face in their own wellbeing. More than half reported feeling lonely at least occasionally, almost half worried they were not as good a parent as they should be, and experiences of loneliness, guilt, and low self-compassion were strongly associated with psychological distress. Importantly, parent mental health was more closely linked to these psychosocial factors than many demographic characteristics. Young people's responses reflected an awareness of these pressures and reinforced the importance of supporting parents' wellbeing alongside children's wellbeing.

The report also identifies developmental differences in how young people understand family life. Younger participants were more likely to worry that their own needs placed pressure on their parents, often expressing guilt about being a source of stress. Older young people, by contrast, were more likely to focus on broader economic and social pressures affecting their families and expressed a desire for greater autonomy, agency, and involvement in decisions that affect them. As young people mature, their focus shifts from dependence towards participation, highlighting opportunities for more collaborative parent-child relationships.

Perhaps the strongest message from young people was one of reassurance. Across diverse communities and experiences, participants repeatedly communicated that parents are doing more than they may realise. Young people encouraged parents to be

less self-critical, prioritise their own wellbeing, listen with curiosity, create safe and supportive relationships, and trust young people with increasing responsibility and agency. They emphasised that they do not expect parents to have all the answers, but value connection, understanding and genuine dialogue.

Taken together, these findings demonstrate the value of listening to parents and young people together. They reveal a family dynamic characterised by mutual care, concern and responsibility, but also by assumptions, silence, and unspoken worries. The evidence suggests that strengthening family wellbeing may depend not only on supporting parents and children individually, but also on creating opportunities for meaningful conversations that help each better understand what the other is carrying. Through this lens, family wellbeing becomes a shared endeavour, shaped by relationships, community conditions and broader social systems, and guided by the voices of both parents and young people.

Aims of this work

Parenting is the key pathway that links a child's healthy development with the broader social environment in which they are raised (Armstrong et al., 2005). Yet in Australia we have limited robust information about the everyday lives of parents and carers; how they feel about parenting, the challenges they face, and the types of supports they access and use to help them carry out this critical role well. The Parenting Today national survey provides us with that information, so that we can better understand the contextual influences that shape parents' experiences.

Within societal eco-systems, a child's family is the first system a child knows. Bronfenbrenner (1979) placed family at the innermost ring of a child's world, where they indirectly experience the influences of community, policy, and education. This report details two complementary pieces of research that shed light on the bi-directionality of the parent-child dynamic that exists within a child's ecosystem: first, data that shares the youth voice from the Young and Wise Roundtable series led by ARACY and second, survey data of parent perspectives derived from the Parenting Today national survey, 2025. By drawing out the interactions that emerge between parent data and that derived from the youth voice, we are able to interrogate the adult lens through which we often view and rationalise the youth experience. This work therefore offers a unique perspective to understanding the experiences of parents in parallel to what's going on for young people in Australia.

What this report can do

While family perspectives have featured in Australian data collection for over two decades (for example *Growing Up in Australia*, Australian Institute of Family Studies) research has typically captured the views of parents and children separately, offering only a partial picture of family wellbeing. This report adopts a different approach by bringing together parent and young people's perspectives on one another, to illuminate the relationship between those perspectives. Parents were asked about their concerns for their children, while young people were asked about their concerns for their parents, albeit separate cohorts. Considering these perspectives side by side sheds light on the reciprocal nature of care and concern within families, and reveals how wellbeing is experienced as a shared rather than an individual issue. The report demonstrates the importance of examining both parent-centred and child-centred views to better understand the parent-child dynamic, its influences, and the shared wellbeing challenges facing families and society.

How We Listened

For this body of work, ARACY and Parenting Research Centre were interested in the alignment between parent and young people's concerns, to better understand if parents are worried about the 'right' things, if their efforts are well situated with the experiences of young people.

Parenting Today 2025

The 2025 Parenting Today national survey is a 122-item survey that asked more than 10,000 parents a range of questions to deepen understanding of the experiences of parents across Australia across six substantive domains, including parenting experience (including parenting self-efficacy); parenting in the digital age; parenting practices; parent wellbeing; parent support and help seeking; and environmental and social impacts on parenting in Australia.

For the purposes of this survey, a 'parent' was broadly defined as any individual fulfilling a primary caregiving role, including biological parents, stepparents, foster carers, grandparents, adoptive parents, or other guardians. The term 'parent' used throughout this report therefore comprises all survey respondents in a primary caregiving role who were caring for a child for at least four nights per week.

The Parenting Research Centre started collecting data on Victorian parents in 2016, with subsequent Victorian surveys repeated in 2019 and 2022. The survey is a periodical 'check-in' to help to better understand the parenting experience and trends over time. Policy-relevant insights that emerged from the Victorian survey created the momentum to expand the study to national scope via the Parenting Today national survey, 2025. Capturing a snapshot of parents' and carers' experiences across all jurisdictions in Australia provides a strong, evidence-based foundation for policy and practice that more effectively supports the role of parents.

The 2025 survey was jointly funded by the Victorian Government and the Minderoo Foundation, whose funding (with contribution from the Parenting Research Centre) made it possible to expand the survey to all states and territories across Australia.

Survey items included for analysis

To identify parents' primary concerns, respondents were asked to report how much of a problem everyday issues were. Some of these were age-dependent, detailed in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Parenting Today questions asking respondents to rate the extent of concern.

Question	Response options (for all)
Thinking about [child name], how much of a problem are the following common issues for you:	A large problem A moderate problem A small problem No problem at all Not sure
Child's sleep	
Child's worries, fears, or anxieties (if 2+ years)	
Child not attending school (if 6+ years)	
Child being violent or aggressive towards anyone in your family (if 6+ years)	
Child being bullied (if 4+ years)	
Child bullying others (if 4+ years)	
Child's use of social media (e.g. Tik Tok, Instagram, YouTube) (if 6+ years)	

To measure parent mental health the Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K6) was used (Kessler et al., 2010). The scale asks respondents how often they had experienced symptoms of sadness, nervousness, restlessness, hopelessness, effortfulness, and worthlessness using a five-point response scale ranging from 'none of the time' to 'all of the time'. Scores were calculated by assigning each response value from 1 to 5, where 'none of the time' was scored as 1 and 'all of the time' was scored at 5. Responses across the six items were summed to generate a total K6 score for each respondent, possible scores ranging from 6 to 30, with higher scores reflecting greater psychological distress.

Parenting Today survey data was analysed by the Parenting Research Centre research team utilising IBM SPSS Statistics, Version 29.0. (IBM Corp, 2022). Details of the

research methodology, including post-stratification weighting, can be found at <https://parentingtoday.net.au/> .

ARACY Young and Wise Roundtables and Survey

Young and Wise exists because young people are rarely asked directly about the systems shaping their lives. Growing from ARACY's landmark report of the same name, which captured more than 10,000 young voices over five years, the roundtables carry that work forward. Series 1 of the roundtables ran five consultations across 2025, co-designed with the Australian Government Department of Health, Disability and Ageing.

Across Series 2 in early 2026, ARACY held roundtables with five groups of young people, data from which contribute to this report. Fifty-three young people contributed across the five cohorts, representing every state and territory except Tasmania.

The Young and Wise Roundtables were conducted online via Microsoft Teams between March and June 2026 and combined facilitated discussion with Mentimeter polls, ranking exercises, open written responses and live chat. The participants were selected via an open Expression of Interest process advertised by ARACY in Summer 2025/26.

Following each roundtable, participants could also submit video reflections through Folktale, which were analysed alongside the roundtable material.

For each cohort we sought to convene two roundtables, one with participants aged 13 to 17 years and one with those aged 18 to 25 years. Where participant numbers were insufficient to convene both groups, as with the neurodivergent and First Nations cohorts, younger participants were offered an individual interview or the option to complete the roundtable Mentimeter questions independently.

Participants were recruited through expressions of interest circulated across ARACY networks, Young and Wise channels, partner organisations and social media, with selection intended to reflect diversity of age, geography, identity and lived experience. Participation was voluntary and based on informed consent. Participants aged 18 and over gave their own consent. All participants under 18 required the consent of a parent or guardian to take part. Where a first name, preferred name or nickname appears in this report, it is used with the participant's consent; participants who asked to remain anonymous are not named. Participants were offered an incentive of \$50 for their participation in the roundtable, and a further \$20 for providing post-session feedback, disclosed at the expression-of-interest stage. Participants could skip any question, turn off their camera, take breaks, or withdraw their participation at any time without consequence. The cohort composition can be found in Table 2.

Table 2. Table to illustrate sub-cohorts of the Young and Wise Roundtables.

Roundtable sub-cohort	Under 18 (Menti n)	Over 18 (Menti n)	Additional or adapted participation
Rural, Regional and Remote (RRR)	8	6	-
LGBTIQA+	6	12	-
Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD)	7	8	-
Neurodivergent	-	8	One (under 18) participant contributed through an individual interview; a further (under 18) participant completed the ranking through an independent survey response.
First Nations	-	Double session: 5	Held as a two-part conversation (Part 1, n=5; Part 2, n=3). Participants unable to attend Part 2, or who had to leave early, completed the Mentimeter questions in their own time

Note: Mentimeter (Menti) is an interactive audience engagement platform used during the roundtables to collect real-time responses from participants. Activities included ranking exercises, scaled ratings, voting and open-text responses, allowing young people to share their views anonymously and contribute to group discussions.

While each roundtable examined a broad set of wellbeing themes (access to services; schools as settings; the material basics of housing, food, transport and cost; identity, culture and belonging) data relevant to this report were derived from questions that asked young people about the adults who care for them: what they want their parents and caregivers to focus on, and how they see the pressures those adults carry.

These questions were designed with the Parenting Research Centre so that young people's perspectives could be read alongside the Parenting Today national survey data. The same three questions were posed to each group which asked for young people's perspectives on parent concerns, parent wellbeing, and advice for parents, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Table to show roundtable questions and method of data collection for the Young and Wise Roundtables.

Question	Data collection method
What should parents and caregivers focus on most to support you? (Alphabetical Order) 1. Chances to have a say and be listened to on things that affect your life 2. Discrimination, harassment and bullying (online and offline) 3. Education (quality, support, workload, pathways) 4. Friendships and belonging 5. Family relationships (including conflicts or stress) 6. Mental and Physical Health 7. Money stress (affording to do fun stuff others do) 8. Rapidly changing technology (including AI and social media)	Participants ranked 8 options (provided) followed by facilitated discussion
Thinking about <i>your</i> parents/care givers. What are you most concerned about <i>their</i> wellbeing in 2026?	Open, multiple answers collated by a word cloud, followed by facilitated discussion
What's one piece of advice you would give all parents and caregivers based on your experience?	Open, multiple answers, followed by a facilitated discussion

Note: All survey responses hosted by Mentimeter.

What's the story?

This section presents the data from Parenting Today and the Young & Wise Roundtables, presented in thematic questions to reflect the questions posed across both methods of data collection and the data that emerged. Through iterative discussion, qualitative data from the Young and Wise Roundtables were corroborated with quantitative survey data.

Are parents and young people aligned with their worries and concerns?

Across the listed concerns that parents could rate as large, moderate or small problem, the concern that was rated most problematic for parents was the child's own worries, fears, or anxieties, with 67% of parents rating it a moderate or large problem. The second biggest concern was the child's use of social media, with 56% of parents rating it a moderate or a large problem. There was a strong alignment with young people concerning mental health broadly across the family system, but not with

technology use. There was strong consensus that young people want parents to worry less about 'Keeping up with technology'.

In contrast, health emerged as a shared priority for both parents and young people. Across all five sub-cohorts who participated in the roundtable, every group ranked mental and physical health first or near first (See Figure A1, Appendix A). The nature of the roundtable allowed for nuance to shine through, in particular for LGBTIQ+ participants who associated mental health with bullying, parent education and the parent-child relationship.

"I ranked education quite highly, but I think that for me, that more surrounds parents and caregivers being able to educate themselves about what they need to do in order to support their queer child and not leaving it on the shoulders of that child to be able to teach them about everything that they need to do in order to make sure that their child feels safe and happy."

— Beau, LGBTIQ+ under 18

"I feel like at the moment, so many adults like focus so much on queer young people being bullied that it can either go like one of two ways. It's like, 'oh, don't come out' or 'don't be too open about your identity' because you're like setting yourself up to fail... it would be more helpful if parents and carers focused on like mental and physical health ... if those things are ...supported by your family, then the impact of bullying is less."

— Jacqueline, LGBTIQ+ over 18

"Being a queer CALD person, it's extremely hard to talk about belonging or identity with my family ... it's a very awkward, taboo conversation."

— Deidentified, CALD under 18

Across all sub-cohorts and ages providing 174 responses, young people were concerned about their parents' mental and physical health, and worry that they are a source of stress for their parents. In contribution to their parents' health and wellbeing, young people mentioned "financial strain", "cost of living" and "burnout".

Broader investigation of the Parenting Today survey data illustrates how parents are faring, and what the factors associated with parent mental health are (Day et al., 2026) Findings demonstrate that parent loneliness, feelings of guilt, and low self-compassion are more strongly associated with parent mental health than demographic and structural factors such as income, gender, education level, and where people live.

Survey data show that 57% of parents felt lonely at least occasionally, and that parents experiencing social isolation or limited support networks had 3.6 times higher odds of high psychological distress. Nearly half of parents surveyed (47%) worry they aren't as good a parent as they should be, this self-doubt made parents 2.4 times more likely to report psychological distress than those who didn't feel guilt. Parents who have higher self-compassion, that is, they can forgive themselves for making mistakes, were 46% less likely to report poor mental health.

These psychosocial factors (that are themselves complex) are identified by young people as a source of concern, with the addition of financial strain that adds pressure on family life (See Figure B1 and Table B1 Appendix B).

While parent guilt was strong, young people under 18 hold their own guilt about their parents' wellbeing. Worries about their grades and sport were mentioned, with one participant stating, "what I do impacts them", illustrating the bi-directionality of wellbeing as a consequence of the parent-child dynamic. This itself is a wellbeing risk for young people and demonstrates how young children may internalise their need for care as a burden.

Younger children in this sample were more likely to focus on the impact of their care needs on parents. Older participants (over 18 years), however, centred more on how external factors such as financial stress and cost-of-living pressures, impact their parents and add strain on the parent-child relationship.

They additionally mentioned the context of global-instability. This suggests that older young people have a greater capacity to understand, influence, and participate in decisions relating to their care, and recognise how wider societal issues influence the family ecosystem. This agentic decision making was also reflected in their responses when asked what parents should focus on and encouraged parents to honour the importance of allowing young people freedom in "having a say", compared to responses from younger participants that centred on safety and protection.

As children grow older, their perceptions shift from centring their own care needs to considering external pressures on parents, yet parents remain child centred regardless of the age of their child (although the survey solely focused on parents of children aged 18 and younger). This was evident in data from the LGBTIQ+ sub-cohort, where younger participants centred the parent-child dynamic and acknowledged parent concerns over their own wellbeing – worried their parents were "stressed about me", whereas older participants spoke of their role to support their parents.

"A lot of us have been therapizing our parents already [...] potentially not even telling them about stuff because we're worried about them."

- Jess S., LGBTIQ+ Over 18 Roundtable

"I worry a little bit about my parents' mental well-being and their relationship with work and how they're making ends meet [...] it also makes me worried about like if they get sick and they need me to take care of them."

- Abbey, LGBTIQ+ Over 18 Roundtable

Survey findings that demonstrate parents' concerns about whether they are doing a good enough job reflects a focus on child wellbeing and concern about the quality of their parenting. This may demonstrate a child-centred concern as a stable feature of parenting across developmental stages. This child-centredness is reciprocated with under 18s, but evolves with age. In this way, younger children in the sample could be described as 'censored dependents' – too concerned that their own needs contribute poorly to their parents' wellbeing. Older young people in this sample called for parents to afford them more ownership and agency to contribute in supporting their families, as 'participating dependents'.

There was some alignment between young people in rural, regional, and remote locations who identified isolation and a “lack of connection” as a point of concern for their parents. Parenting Today data showed loneliness to be a universal issue, not only felt by parents in regional and remote areas, yet social connection was not identified by other sub-cohorts of young people. This shows how loneliness is viewed by young people as an isolation issue and not a social connection issue. Loneliness is felt very differently by parents (Nowland et al., 2021) – a consequence of a perceived lack of shared experiences or shared understanding in circumstance (Dahlberg, 2007).

In rural areas, children’s mental health concerns for parents were material and concrete, focused on financial (in)stability, access to food, and work (in)stability.

"Rural families have really struggled with mental health support, especially around things like domestic violence, because often it goes very quiet and it's treated as the normal [...] People get very stressed, myself included."

- Aspen, RRR Under 18 Roundtable

"Coming from my family, who are all got a bunch of mental health issues [...] it's not just a thing that they're going to get over, that you should definitely take what they're going through serious."

- Deidentified, RRR Under 18 Roundtable

What can parents do?

During the roundtables, young people were asked what advice they would give parents. Their comments focused on a reassuring message for parents – “you are doing enough” (See Table C1, Appendix C). Overall, their thoughts and advice were focused on trusting the youth voice, parents taking care of their own wellbeing, and how it’s ok for parents not to have all the answers, drawing support for strengthening the parent-child dynamic, and improving psychosocial factors (parent guilt and low self-compassion) toward more positive mental health and wellbeing.

For young people under 18 years, they mentioned their parents are doing a good job and encouraged them to take a break (8 mentions from 32 in total). Parenting Today data demonstrates how often ‘parents do things for themselves to help them relax and re-energise’. Nearly half of parents surveyed (47%, $n=4744$) either strongly agreed or agreed with the statement, while 30% ($n=3008$) had mixed feelings, and a further 23% ($n=2297$) disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement, showing a clear need for parents to care for their own wellbeing and find opportunities to relax.

"Work on your own mental health. You can't pour from an empty cup. It's not cowardly, it's brave to take care of yourself and you can model recovery to your children"

— LGBTIQA+ over-18 participant, Mentimeter response

As children grow older, as we saw previously, their advice for parents is grounded in trusting the youth voice, where ‘autonomy and listening’ was mentioned 9 times (from 52 responses), echoing the LGBTIQA+ sub-cohort who asked parents to “listen and be curious” with additional supports.

"Approach your child with curiosity. If you don't understand something, seek to understand, rather than making a snap judgement."

— **LGBTIQA+ over-18 participant, Mentimeter response**

"Something I'd like to expand on is about having more accessible and widespread resources for parents of queer people, especially trans teens. I would have had a much easier time as a teenager if my parents were more educated about gender diverse topics, and specifically about transitioning."

— **E, LGBTIQA+ over 18 (Folktale feedback)**

Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) young people had a particularly strong guilt-lifting tone and mentioned reassurance and self care most frequently.

"We should always look out for our parents and carers the same way they look out for us. Our parents moved to this country to have a better future."

— **Ely, CALD under 18 participant (Folktale feedback)**

"...coming from, like, I guess, refugee backgrounds, refugee parents...I think a lot of them, they carry this guilt of, you know...trying to support your family here and then trying to support your family back home as well. So I think... allowing them to understand that they don't have to feel guilty and that they are already doing the best that they can.."

— **Immaculate, CALD over 18 participant**

First Nations young people also focused on reassuring their parents, but added 'safety/connection', highlighting again the importance of the parent-child dynamic with participants saying "Be your child's safe place before you try to be their teacher, disciplinarian, therapist, or fixer."; "We will be okay, let us be kids."; and "You are doing enough."

Consolidation: when parent and youth perspectives meet

Together, data from the Parenting Today national survey and the Young and Wise Roundtables provide new and unique insights into what's going on for both groups that contribute toward mental health and wellbeing. Simply, parents' main concern is their children's worries, anxieties and fears, and in return children are worried about their parents' own mental health and wellbeing, unearthing a potentially unsaid need within the parent-child dynamic.

Younger children in this sample were concerned that their caring needs are a burden for their parents, while older young people asked their parents for more agency and autonomy in contributing to the family system. While young people's opinions about factors that contribute to parent wellbeing shift between psychosocial factors and structural economic conditions, parent concerns (that have implications over their mental health) are grounded in how effective the care is that they provide for their children.

Core messages across the collective data show that:

- Children recognise the importance of psychosocial factors
 - Loneliness was acknowledged by both young people's concerns for their parents and is significantly associated with parent self-reports of psychological distress.
 - Despite parents own feelings, young people reassured parents they are doing a good job and don't need to feel guilty.
 - Parents need to trust themselves and have self-compassion when they've made a mistake, and young people are asking for the same trust through requests for autonomy and agency.
- Parents and young people situate technology differently
 - Technology was parents' second-biggest concern. Young people ranked it last or near-last in almost every group, with the parent-child relationship of greater importance. This is the clearest divergence in the data, and the one most worth testing inside real families.

The Nest is a useful tool through which to frame the complexity of the parent-child dynamic within the wider ecosystem. Embodying all elements of the wellbeing wheel (see Figure D1, Appendix D) we can better understand the inter-relatedness of economic, social, and interpersonal factors that is ultimately experienced by children, mediated through their relationship with their parents. While parents are centring their attention on their children's wellbeing, children seem to be internalising their parents' experiences/pressures and are aware of the role they play, and in-so-doing, are providing feedback to their parents.

Identifying the similarities and differences across the two datasets, the most impactful take away may be that neither parents nor young people are sharing their concerns with one-another. While this is not explicit in the parenting data, young people shared that they withhold their own struggles to avoid contributing to their parents' load, while parents worry they aren't doing a good enough job. While the underflowing care between these two unrelated cohorts is clear, there may also be a silence in understanding what the other is carrying, and why. This presents an opportunity to move past assumptions and create opportunities for intentional dialogue, where parents and young people can better understand each other's realities, challenge assumptions, and help reduce the burden of carrying concerns for one another.

Where to next?

This report shines a light on the potential of listening to both parent and children's voices together. Insights from such work can be used to build on strong areas of alignment between parents and young people when designing future programs, communications, or policy responses. While these areas of agreement are important, areas of divergence are imperative to better understand expectations around societal issues that impact both the parenting role and children's experiences. Creating opportunities for direct dialogue between parents and young people can support interventions that can be informed by lived experiences, recognising both the key role of parents and young people's views. In this work, there was strong alliance on prioritising mental health in wellbeing in one-another, providing an opportunity for purposeful dialogue that might shape family-centred supports. One area of divergence, technology, warrants further exploration. At a time where parenting in a digital world consumes considerable energy, understanding where difference stem from is critical in ensuring parents are on the right track to provide relevant and timely supports for their children, and in response, that their children understand the reasons behind their parents' concerns towards a shared understanding.

In addition to the data gathered across these two studies, young people spoke of concerns that were not offered to parents to report on: namely the cost-of-living pressures, abuse prevention, and identity and belonging (especially for the LGBTIQ+ and culturally and linguistically diverse communities). These are possible future lines of inquiry for which parents can better support their children.

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Appendix A – What should parents and caregivers focus on most

Participants were asked, "What should parents and caregivers focus on most to support you?" They ranked eight priorities: bullying and discrimination; education; family relationships; friendships and belonging; giving young people a real say; keeping up with technology; mental and physical health; and money stress. Rankings were followed by facilitated discussion.

Figure A1. Ranking of parental support priorities by cohort and age group: Young and Wise Series 2 (2026)

What should parents and caregivers focus on most to support young people?

20 Groups Ranking 8 options from PRC

	RRR				LGBTIQA+				CALD				Neurodivergent				First Nations				No group named	
	Roundtable		Survey		Roundtable		Survey		Roundtable		Survey		Roundtable		Survey		Roundtable		Survey		Survey	
	n=8	n=6	n=21	n=13	n=6	n=12	n=27	n=21	n=7	n=8	n=25	n=26	not run	n=8	n=25	n=26	not run	n=4	n=3	n=7	n=65	n=15
	U18	18+	U18	18+	U18	18+	U18	18+	U18	18+	U18	18+	U18	18+	U18	18+	U18	18+	U18	18+	U18	18+
Mental and physical health	1	3	1	1	5	2	1	1	2	1	1	3	-	1	1	1	-	1	1	1	1	1
Giving young people a real say in decisions that affect them	2	1	2	2	2	1	3	2	4	4	2	2	-	2	2	2	-	5	2	2	4	3
Family relationships and conflict	4	2	5	5	4	3	5	5	3	2	4	1	-	5	5	4	-	4	4	5	5	2
Education — quality, support and what comes next	5	6	3	3	3	4	6	4	1	3	3	4	-	6	4	5	-	2	6	4	2	4
Dealing with bullying, harassment and discrimination	3	5	4	4	1	6	2	3	6	7	6	5	-	3	3	3	-	7	5	3	6	6
Friendships and feeling like you belong	7	4	6	6	6	5	4	6	5	5	5	7	-	4	6	6	-	3	3	6	3	5
Money stress	6	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	6	7	6	-	7	7	7	-	6	7	7	8	8
Keeping up with technology (AI, social media)	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	-	8	8	8	-	8	8	8	7	7

Notes: Rankings range from 1 (highest priority) to 8 (lowest priority). Darker green indicates higher-ranked priorities and darker blue indicates lower-ranked priorities. Across cohorts, mental and physical health was consistently prioritised, while keeping up with technology was consistently ranked lowest. The survey column presents responses from the broader Young and Wise 2026 Survey, completed by a separate sample of young people aged 8 to 25 years. The survey findings are currently unpublished and are included here to provide additional context alongside the roundtable findings.

Appendix B – What worries young people about their parents' and caregivers' wellbeing in 2026

In Young and Wise Series 2 (2026), participants were asked, "What worries you most about your parents' or caregivers' wellbeing in 2026?" Responses were collected through an open-ended activity and visualised in a word cloud. The results capture the pressures and challenges young people perceived as affecting their parents' wellbeing, with responses explored further through facilitated discussion. Findings are drawn from 192 responses, generating 247 thematic mentions. Responses could be coded to multiple themes, meaning percentages exceed 100 per cent and should be treated as indicative rather than representative.

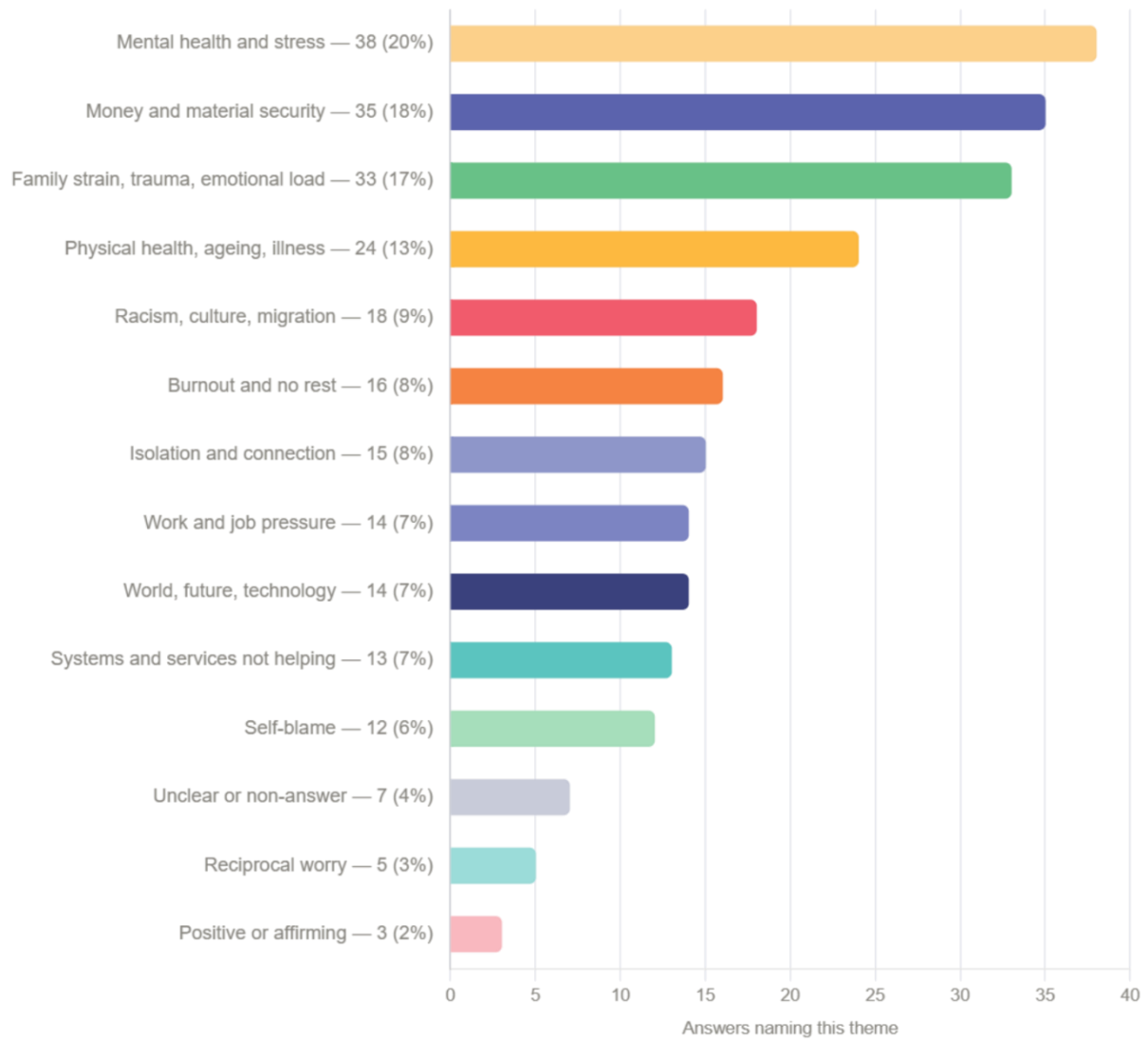
Open-ended responses were initially analysed using AI-assisted thematic analysis to identify recurring themes. The ARACY project team then reviewed and spot-checked the underlying transcripts, chat responses, and Mentimeter data to confirm the themes accurately reflected participants' contributions. The team refined theme descriptions and checked frequency counts to produce the final graph and table. ARACY reviewed and approved all published themes and interpretations.

Table B1. Thematic coding and illustrative participant responses

Theme	Verbatim example
Mental health and stress 38 mentions (20%)	"...I worry a little bit about my parents' mental well-being and their relationship with work and how they're making ends meet." — Abbey, LGBTQIA+ Roundtable, 18+
Money and material security 35 mentions (18%)	"I've had to therapise my family a lot more recently because of the cost of living and everything and now how much stress that's putting on them." — Darcie, LGBTQIA+ Roundtable, 18+
Family strain, trauma and emotional load 33 mentions (17%)	"...I feel like a lot of us have been therapizing our parents already." — Jess, LGBTQIA+ Roundtable, 18+
Physical health, ageing and illness 24 mentions (13%)	"Health - had_cancer" — Mentimeter word cloud, LGBTQIA+ Roundtable, 18+ — anonymous
Racism, culture and migration 18 mentions (9%)	"...especially like immigrant families, my family's from Central America, views on queer LGBT people are a lot more conservative and often not well taken." — Aspen, LGBTQIA+ Roundtable, Under 18
Burnout and no rest 16 mentions (8%)	"Lots of effort no rest"

	— <i>Mentimeter word cloud, CALD Roundtable, Under 18 — anonymous</i>
Isolation and connection 15 mentions (8%)	"Nope definitely spending heaps of time reassuring them" — <i>Lars, LGBTIQA+ Roundtable, 18+</i>
Work and job pressure 14 mentions (7%)	"overworking" — <i>Mentimeter word cloud, RRR Roundtable, Under 18 — anonymous</i>
World, future and technology 14 mentions (7%)	"overwhelming news" — <i>Mentimeter word cloud, Neurodivergent Roundtable, 18+ — anonymous</i>
Systems and services not helping 13 mentions (7%)	"...not having enough respite support and dealing with autism as well as mental health, chronic health and the NDIS." — <i>Deidentified, Neurodivergent Roundtable, 18+</i>
Self-blame 12 mentions (6%)	"I worry a lot about my parents finances as a chronically ill young person who has required financial support to afford medications... I can see the stress that my expenses bring to them." — <i>Ren, LGBTIQA+ Roundtable, 18+</i>
Reciprocal worry 5 mentions (3%)	"overly worried about me" — <i>Mentimeter word cloud, CALD Roundtable, Under 18 — anonymous</i>
Unclear or non-answer 7 mentions (4%)	"Worried that I wont have" — cut off at 25 characters — <i>Mentimeter word cloud, LGBTIQA+ Roundtable, Under 18 — anonymous</i>
Positive or affirming 3 mentions (2%)	"it all changed for me when i realised my parents are just overgrown kids too and they also need someone to look after them" — <i>Jess, LGBTIQA+ Roundtable, 18+</i>

Figure B1. Themes identified in responses to "What worries you most about your parents' or caregivers' wellbeing in 2026?"



Appendix C – What young people say parents and caregivers need to do

In Young and Wise Series 2 (2026), participants were asked, "What is one piece of advice you would give all parents and caregivers?" Responses were collected through an open-ended activity and discussed in the roundtables.

The analysis is based on 99 responses and 139 thematic mentions. Responses could be coded to multiple themes, meaning percentages exceed 100 per cent, and Mentimeter results should be interpreted as indicative rather than representative.

Table C1. Themes identified in young people's advice to parents and caregivers

What parents need to do	Verbatim example
You are doing enough 23 mentions (23%)	"...allowing them to understand that they don't have to feel guilty and that they are already doing the best that they can." — <i>Immaculate, CALD Roundtable, 18+</i>
Look after your own wellbeing 17 mentions (17%)	"You don't have to be the superhero all the time." — <i>Mentimeter, CALD Roundtable, 18+ — anonymous</i>
Listen, don't fix 14 mentions (14%)	"That what I'm going through will not be resolved in a single instance and I just need support not a solution" — <i>Mentimeter, RRR Roundtable, Under 18 — anonymous</i>
Accept us as we are 12 mentions (12%)	"...regardless of how your child identifies or what their brain type is, you just, they are your child and you should love them unconditionally at the end of the day." — <i>GZ, LGBTIQA+ Roundtable, 18+</i>
Government support needed 12 mentions (12%)	"I work in advocacy and the resources ARE THERE but they're not pushed/well-organised/spread around for parents to see!" — <i>Lars, LGBTIQA+ Roundtable, 18+</i>
Treat us as people 10 mentions (10%)	"Teaching parents how to let young people be young people i.e. have fun times with friends, explore their identity, push boundaries - not just be focusing on being well-behaved and smart" — <i>Jacqueline, LGBTIQA+ Roundtable, 18+</i>
Educate yourself 10 mentions (10%)	"I think I would have loved to have known earlier because the supports could have come earlier and it would have been like so much less of a headache..." — <i>Jess, Neurodivergent Roundtable, 18+</i>
Talk with us, ask us	"Please ask about how we really feel. Theres alot going on"

10 mentions (10%)	— <i>Mentimeter, LGBTIQA+ Roundtable, 18+ — anonymous</i>
Be a safe place 9 mentions (9%)	"Work on destigmatising disability internally and externally, create a safe space for your child to talk openly about abuse or things they struggle with, and teach them to self advocate." — <i>Mentimeter, Neurodivergent Roundtable, 18+ — anonymous</i>
Trust us, give autonomy 8 mentions (8%)	"Trust your child's judgement. Particularly for neurodivergent children we know a lot of the supports we need, but if you impose your own ideas or deny us those supports it can cause a lot of harm" — <i>Mentimeter, Neurodivergent Roundtable, 18+ — anonymous</i>
Our world is different 6 mentions (6%)	"The world is not the same as it was 30 or 40 years ago when you were young. The world is changing, and with it, the support and needs of children are changing." — <i>Mentimeter, CALD Roundtable, Under 18 — anonymous</i>
Be present, spend time 4 mentions (4%)	"I just want to be with you more regardless of what we lose as a result" — <i>Mentimeter, CALD Roundtable, Under 18 — anonymous</i>
Advocate and push back 2 mentions (2%)	"Be unafraid to push back against other adults to accommodate for your kid" — <i>Mentimeter, Neurodivergent Roundtable, 18+ — anonymous</i>
Unclear or non-substantive 2 mentions (2%)	"You cant change what will happen but you have to garante it to happen" — <i>Mentimeter, CALD Roundtable, Under 18 — anonymous</i>

The two shaded rows are advice about the parent's own wellbeing, not the young person's. Together they account for 40 of the 139 mentions. No answer asked parents for money or material things.

Appendix D

Figure D1. The Nest Wellbeing Wheel

THE NEST

Wellbeing Wheel

The Wellbeing Wheel, based on The Nest and aligning with the Early Years Learning Framework, shows key elements that support children's happiness, health, and overall wellbeing. It helps you explore the different areas of a child's life and environment, so you can nurture their growth, learning, and development in a holistic way.

