

# MEDIA RELEASE



21 May 2026

## Parents are struggling, but not for the reasons you think

Social connection, validation and support key to tackling parent distress

New findings released from the [Parenting Today national survey](#) challenge assumptions about what shapes parent mental health and the stereotype of who you might expect to be 'struggling'.

Drawing on responses from more than 10,000 parents and carers across Australia, the survey shows parent wellbeing is shaped less by factors such as gender or income, and more by experiences such as loneliness, emotional strain, low self-compassion, and feeling unsupported.

The findings highlight the importance of social connection, validation and support for parents and show pressures, such as loneliness, don't just sit in the background – they have a direct and meaningful impact on how parents relate to and interact with their children, which is linked to children's development and overall wellbeing. The survey found:

- Parents reporting higher levels of distress and greater self-doubt were more likely to say they wanted to be less impatient and more consistent with their children, but were finding it hard to do so.
- Parent distress and self-doubt were associated with harsher parenting behaviours such as smacking, arguing or yelling at one's child.
- In contrast, higher levels of self-compassion and lower levels of loneliness were associated with more positive parenting practices.

Lead researcher Dr Catherine Wade said that when parents are feeling overwhelmed or second-guessing themselves, everyday parenting moments can become harder.

"Parents with higher distress want to respond differently in their parenting, but they are stretched. Helping parents who might be struggling with loneliness, self-doubt and poor mental health feel less alone and be kinder to themselves will ultimately support children's emotional security, behaviour and development," she said.

"It's not about who parents are, where they live or how much money they have – it's about whether they feel supported and connected in their day-to-day lives.

"Forging connections, for example through peer support groups, does seem to help us reduce that sense of loneliness and build hope and optimism."

*Continues next page*

Parenting Research Centre CEO Rob Ryan said that at a time when governments are investing heavily in child mental health, early intervention, productivity, and prevention, the mental health and wellbeing of parents remains largely invisible in mainstream policy frameworks.

“These findings highlight the importance of reducing isolation and making support easier to access, because parents’ feelings of connection and support change how they parent,” he said.

“This data shifts the focus from traditionally looking at ‘who parents are’ to ‘what they are experiencing’, and parents across Australia have told us that loneliness, self-doubt and low self-compassion are common parts of the parenting experience.

“It’s clear that we need to strengthen connection, confidence and emotional supports that benefit all parents, and to look at how we lighten emotional loads by improving access to practical and relevant help across communities – not just for specific demographic groups.”

## **Key Parenting Today wellbeing findings**

More than half of the 10,000 surveyed parents and carers feel lonely at least occasionally (57%) and nearly half experience moderate psychological distress (45%) – the kinds of worries, low mood, or fatigue that, while not indicative of serious mental ill-health, still weigh heavily in day-to-day life.

- A further 12% report high distress, marked by serious emotional strain such as anxiety or depression.
- Around one in four parents (27%) also live with a disability or chronic health condition that affects daily functioning.
- Tiredness (49%) and self-doubt (47%) also remain common among parents.
- There has been a steady decline in parent mental health over the past decade, reflected in the growing weight of societal and contextual pressures, from rising cost-of-living pressures to reduced informal support networks, increasing the load on caregivers.

## **About the Parenting Today survey**

Parenting Today is a landmark research initiative led by the Parenting Research Centre, established with foundational support from Minderoo Foundation and the Victorian Government to build a long-term picture of how families are faring across Australia. The largest survey of its kind in Australia, it captures the experiences, wellbeing and support needs of more than 10,000 parents and caregivers from across Australia and provides a contemporary snapshot of what it’s like to be a parent in Australia today. [Visit the Parenting Today webpage.](#)

## **About the Parenting Research Centre**

The Parenting Research Centre is an independent, not-for-profit organisation that works to improve outcomes for children by strengthening parenting and family support. Our work is grounded in translating research into practical, evidence-informed programs, resources, and approaches that support parents in their everyday lives. [Visit the Parenting Research Centre website.](#)

## **ENDS**

Contact: Stephanie Childs, Media manager, Parenting Research Centre.  
[media@parentingrc.org.au](mailto:media@parentingrc.org.au); 0407 925 523