**Americans on Parenting**

**Question:** How important is it to you in your life that you... have children? Is it very important, fairly important, just somewhat important, or not important?

- **Very/fairly important:** 79%
- **Somewhat important:** 14%
- **Not important:** 6%
- **Don't know:** 1%

**Source:** Survey by the Washington Post, July 11-15, 1997.

**Question:** Do you agree or disagree... watching children grow up is life's greatest joy?

- **Strongly agree/Agree:** 81%
- **Neither agree nor disagree:** 14%
- **Disagree/Strongly disagree:** 4%

**Source:** Survey by the National Opinion Research Center-General Social Survey, January 27-May 31, 1994.

**Question:** Do you agree or disagree... having children interferes too much with the freedom of parents?

- **Strongly agree/Agree:** 9%
- **Neither agree nor disagree:** 16%
- **Disagree/Strongly disagree:** 75%

**Source:** Survey by the National Opinion Research Center-General Social Survey, January 27-May 31, 1994.

**Question:** Do you agree or disagree... people who have never had children lead empty lives?

- **Strongly agree/Agree:** 18%
- **Neither agree nor disagree:** 27%
- **Disagree/Strongly disagree:** 52%

**Source:** Survey by the National Opinion Research Center-General Social Survey, January 27-May 31, 1994.

**Less is More**

**QUESTION:** What do you think is the ideal number of children for a family to have?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1957</th>
<th></th>
<th>1997</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>One</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>Two</td>
<td>48%</td>
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<td>34%</td>
<td>Three</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>Four</td>
<td>7%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Five or more</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>Five or more</td>
<td>1%</td>
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**Source:** Surveys by the Gallup Organization, February 5-12, 1957; and the Gallup Organization for CNN/USA Today, February 24-26, 1997.

18 Public Perspective, October/November 1999
**Bringing Up Baby**

**Question:** ...If you were describing how you prepared for the experience of parenthood—in terms of reading things, talking to others, and getting information or advice—would you say you went overboard and did too much, did a great deal, quite a bit, a moderate amount, just a little, or basically just waited to see what it would be like?

![Pie chart showing responses to preparedness question]

**Note:** Asked of parents of children aged 3 or younger.  
**Source:** Survey by Peter D. Hart Research Associates for the Heinz Family Foundation, March 21-April 1, 1997.

**Question:** And then, when you actually had your first child, how prepared for parenthood did you feel—totally prepared, quite well-prepared, pretty well-prepared, only slightly prepared, or not really prepared at all for what the reality was like?

![Pie chart showing responses to preparedness question]

**Note:** Asked of parents of children aged 3 or younger.  
**Source:** Survey by Peter D. Hart Research Associates for the Heinz Family Foundation, March 21-April 1, 1997.

**Question:** I’m going to mention a number of feelings that some people say they experienced when they first began caring for a child. Please tell me how closely each of these matches your own feelings when you first became a parent. For instance, some first-time parents have said that they felt... does this match your experience almost exactly, pretty closely, only a little, or not at all?

**Percent saying exactly or pretty closely**

- "In love" with their baby: 96%
- Happier than ever before: 91%
- Surprised at baby's changes and development: 70%
- Couldn't bear to be apart from their baby: 68%
- Stressed and worn out: 56%
- Afraid of doing something wrong: 52%
- Afraid of not being a good parent: 47%
- Unsure about what to do a lot of the time: 44%

**Note:** Asked of parents of children aged 3 or younger.  
**Source:** Survey by Peter D. Hart Research Associates for the Heinz Family Foundation, March 21-April 1, 1997.

**Question:** Please tell me how much you worry about each of the following when you think about your [child]'s future. How much do you worry that...? Do you worry a lot, some, only a little, or not at all?

**Percent saying a lot or some**

- He/she will be kidnapped or will be the victim of a violent crime: 54%
- He/she will have a serious accident or illness: 51%
- He/she won't grow up to share your moral or religious values: 29%
- You won't be able to afford to send him/her to college: 52%
- You won't have enough money to buy him/her the things he/she needs: 36%
- He/she will have trouble making friends at school: 14%

**Note:** Asked of parents aged 18-44 with children under 3.  
**The Heart Stands Still**

**Question:** Which of the following do you tend to worry about more when it comes to your children? Do you worry more about their economic security, their success in school, or the threat of drugs and crime?

- Their success in school: 51%
- The threat of drugs and crime: 36%
- Their economic security: 10%
- 3% Don't know

**Note:** Asked of parents of children in public school K-12.
**Source:** Survey by Public Agenda, December 10-20, 1998.

**Question:** When you or another parent can’t be with your child during after-school hours, how much do you worry that your child might be hurt or get in trouble? Do you worry a lot, a little, or not at all?

- Worry a lot: 19%
- Worry a little: 45%
- Not at all: 35%
- 1% Don't know

**Note:** Asked of parents of children aged 6-17.

**Question:** Please tell me if you worry a lot, a little, or not at all about your children’s safety in each of the following places...?

- On the street
  - A lot: 57%
  - A little: 32%
  - Not at all: 11%

- At school
  - A lot: 23%
  - A little: 44%
  - Not at all: 33%

- At shopping malls
  - A lot: 56%
  - A little: 31%
  - Not at all: 12%

- At friends’ homes
  - A lot: 20%
  - A little: 48%
  - Not at all: 32%

**Note:** Asked of parents of children aged 6-17.

**Question:** Before you had a child, did you expect that raising a child would be very difficult, somewhat difficult, somewhat easy, or very easy?

- Somewhat/very easy: 78%
- Very/somewhat difficult: 20%
- Don't know: 3%

**Question:** Now that you are a parent, how has it been raising a child: very difficult, somewhat difficult, somewhat easy, or very easy?

- Somewhat/very easy: 66%
- Very/somewhat difficult: 34%
- Don't know: 1%

**Note:** Asked of parents of children under age 18 who reside in their house.
**Source:** Survey by ABC News/Washington Post, July 17-21, 1996.

20  Public Perspective, October/November 1999
Raising 'Em Right

**Question:** If you had to choose, which thing on this list would you pick as the most important for a child to learn to prepare him or her for life?...

*First choice and second choice combined*

**To think for himself or herself**
- 1986: 70%
- 1998: 67%

**To work hard**
- 1986: 44%
- 1998: 54%

**To help others when they need help**
- 1986: 44%
- 1998: 44%

**To obey**
- 1986: 39%
- 1998: 32%

**To be well-liked or popular**
- 1986: 5%
- 1998: 3%

*Source:* Surveys by the National Opinion Research Center-General Social Survey, latest that of February-April 1998.

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Teach Your Children Well

**Question:** ...[Which statement do] you agree with more... Children need to learn the value of healthy competition, or children need to learn to cooperate with others...?  

**Question:** ...[Which statement do] you agree with more... It’s important to teach children to think independently, or it’s important to teach children respect for authority...?

**Measuring Up To the Past**

**Question:** Compared with your own mother/father, how do you think you rate as a parent? Are you a much better parent, somewhat better, about the same, somewhat worse, or a much worse parent?

- Somewhat/Much worse: 2%
- About the same: 49%
- Much/Somewhat better: 45%
- DK/refused: 3%

**Note:** Asked of parents of children aged 17 or younger.  
**Source:** Survey by Princeton Survey Research Associates for *Newsweek*, May 4-11, 1995.

**Question:** Compared with your own mother/father do you think you spend a lot more time with your child, somewhat more time, about the same amount, somewhat less time, or a lot less time with your child?

- Somewhat/A lot less time: 12%
- About the same: 60%
- A lot/Somewhat more time: 27%
- DK/refused: 1%

**Note:** Asked of parents of children aged 17 or younger.  
**Source:** Survey by Princeton Survey Research Associates for *Newsweek*, May 4-11, 1995.

**Question:** Compared with your own mother/father, do you think you understand your child much better, somewhat better, about the same, somewhat less, or understand your child much less?

- Understand much/Somewhat better: 62%
- Understand somewhat/Much less: 34%
- About the same: 4%

**Note:** Asked of parents of children aged 17 or younger.  
**Source:** Survey by Princeton Survey Research Associates for *Newsweek*, May 4-11, 1995.

**Question:** Compared with your own mother/father, do you think being a parent is much more important to you, somewhat more important to you, about as important to you, somewhat less important to you, or think being a parent is much less important to you?

- Somewhat/Much less important: 1%
- About the same: 51%
- Much/Somewhat more important: 46%
- DK/refused: 2%

**Note:** Asked of parents of children aged 17 or younger.  
**Source:** Survey by Princeton Survey Research Associates for *Newsweek*, May 4-11, 1995.

**Question:** I'm going to name some different kinds of things, and for each one, would you tell me how often you do it as a family unit—that is, parents and some or all of the children?... frequently, fairly often, not too often, seldom, or never?

**Percent responding frequently**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Have the main meal together on weekdays</th>
<th>Watch TV together</th>
<th>Go shopping together</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>1997</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>58%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>72%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>24%</td>
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**Sit and talk together**

<table>
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<tbody>
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<td>53%</td>
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**Take a vacation together**

<table>
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<th>1976</th>
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<tr>
<td>38%</td>
<td>53%</td>
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**Attend religious services together**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1997</th>
<th>1976</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>29%</td>
<td>38%</td>
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**Note:** Asked of parents of children aged 7-12.  
**Source:** Surveys by Roper Starch Worldwide, latest that of May 10-17, 1997.
Bumps in the Road

**Question:** Compared with your own mother/father do you think you punish your child much more severely, somewhat more severely, about the same, somewhat less severely, or punish your child much less severely?

- Punish somewhat/much less severely: 48%
- About the same: 38%
- Punish much/somewhat more severely: 9%

**Note:** Asked of parents of children aged 17 or younger.

**Source:** Survey by Princeton Survey Research Associates for *Newsweek*, May 4-11, 1995.

**Question:** Compared to your parents or guardians, are you more strict, about the same, or less strict?

- More strict: 39%
- Less strict: 35%
- About the same: 25%
- Don't know: 1%

**Note:** Asked of parents of children aged 18 or younger living in their household.

**Source:** Survey by the Gallup Organization, August 15-September 14, 1995.

What Works?

**Question:** I would like to ask some questions about how effective some kinds of discipline are. *For children under the age of six,* how effective a form of discipline would you say... is? Would you say it is very effective, somewhat effective, only a little effective, or not effective at all?

**Very/somewhat effective**

- Taking away their privileges: 88%
- Putting them in a room by themselves for a while or... timeout: 43%
- Reasoning with them: 87%
- Spanking/slapping them*: 7%
- Yelling at them: 22%
- Refusing to talk to them to show your disapproval: 21%

**Note:** *"Spanking" pertains to children under the age of 6.

**Source:** Survey by the Gallup Organization, August 15-September 14, 1995.

**Question:** I would like to ask you the same set of questions *for a child 14 or 15 years old.* How effective a form of discipline would you say... is? Would you say it is very effective, somewhat effective, only a little effective, or not effective at all?

**Very/somewhat effective**

- "Slapping" pertains to children aged 14 or 15 years.

**Note:** Asked of parents of children aged 18 or younger living in their household.

**Source:** Survey by the Gallup Organization, August 15-September 14, 1995.
Helping Hands

**Question:** Which is closer to your view: most parents face times when they really need help raising their kids, or most parents can handle the job of raising their kids without help?

- **Most can handle kids without help:** 63%
- **Most need help:** 32%
- **Neither/Don't know (vol.):** 2%

**Source:** Survey by Public Agenda for Ronald McDonald House Charities/The Advertising Council, December 3-18, 1996.

**Question:** We'd like to know who is involved in your child's life outside your immediate family. Are any of the child's grandparents involved? If yes, would that be very involved or somewhat involved?

- **Very involved:** 49%
- **Somewhat involved:** 22%
- **Not involved:** 29%

**Source:** Asked of parents with children aged 6-17.


**Question:** We'd like to know who is involved in your child's life outside your immediate family. Are any other relatives involved? If yes, would that be very involved or somewhat involved?

- **Very involved:** 38%
- **Somewhat involved:** 34%
- **Not involved:** 28%

**Note:** Asked of parents with children aged 6-17.


**Question:** We'd like to know who is involved in your child's life outside your immediate family. Are any close friends or neighbors involved? If yes, would that be very involved or somewhat involved?

- **Very involved:** 36%
- **Somewhat involved:** 25%
- **Not involved:** 39%

**Note:** Asked of parents with children aged 6-17.


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All Good Things Must End

**Question:** As you know, many older people share a home with their grown children. Do you think this is generally a good idea or a bad idea?

**Source:** Survey by the National Opinion Research Center-General Social Survey, latest that of February 1-June 19, 1998.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>By age</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Bad</th>
<th>Depends/DK</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>52%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-39</td>
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<tr>
<td>70+</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>26%</td>
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