

Millennial Connections: Findings from ZERO TO THREE's 2018 Parent Survey

Executive Summary



Authors:

Kathy Kinsner and Rebecca Parlakian, ZERO TO THREE;

Gabriel R. Sanchez, Sylvia Manzano, and Matt Barreto, Latino Decisions



ZERO TO THREE
Early connections last a lifetime

Executive Summary

In the spring of 2018, **ZERO TO THREE** and its partners at the Bezos Family Foundation, the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, the Einhorn Family Charitable Trust, and the Overdeck Family Foundation **commissioned a national survey of parents and primary caregivers of children age five or younger to gather insights on:**

- **The most trusted information sources parents turn to when they have questions about parenting,**
- **the topics that motivate parents to seek information,**
- **and the approaches organizations can take to increase the trust parents have in information provided.**

Study Design

The study was designed with a sample size (1,002 parent respondents) large enough to compare results of key items across sub-groups of families. In addition, the study included an oversample of low-income families (under \$40,000 in household income) to provide insight on the experiences of families with limited resources and guidance on the types of information that resonate most.

Use of In-Person Resources

While important nuances between various demographic groups did emerge, there was near-universal accord on several key questions driving this study:

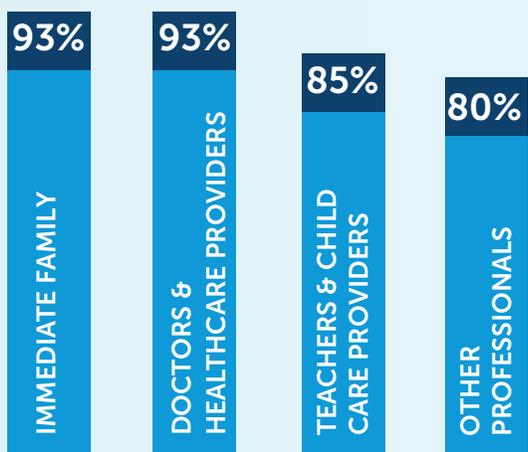
- Regardless of demographic profile, **personal networks are a key information source for parents with young children.** In particular, **parents show great trust in parenting information they receive from immediate family** (93% trust “some” or “a lot”), extended family (90%), and friends (85%).

- **Parents also place a high degree of trust in doctors and health care providers.** This was true for participants across all income categories, levels of educational attainment, and racial/ethnic backgrounds. Ninety-three percent of parents trust their child’s doctor and health care providers “some” or “a lot” for information on parenting.
- For families that access child care regularly, **teachers and child care providers also serve as trusted parenting information sources**, with 85% of respondents saying they trust them as an information source “some” or “a lot.” Note that although only 59% of respondents frequently or sometimes turn to teachers or caregivers for information, this number closely approximates the percentage of children in this age group in regular child care arrangements (61.3%)¹.
- **Professionals in programs that support parents are also highly trusted.** Eighty percent of parents report trusting

¹ United States Census Bureau. *Who’s Minding the Kids? Child Care Arrangements: Spring 2011.* Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/prod/2013pubs/p70-135.pdf>

home visiting professionals or parent group leaders as an information source “some” or “a lot.” Trust in the information provided by government programs like The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) as an information source remained high as well (78%).

WHICH PARENTING SOURCES DO PARENTS TRUST?



Use of Online Resources

Online access is nearly universal (96%) across the sample, and 94% of survey participants own smartphones.

- Parents in this survey make a **distinction between medical and expert websites and other online parenting resources like social media and parenting blogs.** Sites like WebMD, the Center for Disease Control (CDC), ZERO TO THREE, and the Mayo Clinic are sought out and trusted at significantly higher rates as compared to other online information options. However, socio-economic differences emerged around usage, as discussed below (see page 4).

- Parents also **trust information that includes the stories and experiences of other parents** who are raising young children. Sixty-five percent of survey respondents said that including experiences and stories from parents would make them more trusting of the information provided.
- A small, but sizeable, share of parents are **currently using online resources to connect with other parents and get updates on parenting topics.** Asked specifically about their engagement with parenting sources online over the course of the last year, 41% of parents said they had gone online to connect with others with similar parenting concerns. Thirty-seven percent signed up for email alerts and updates on parenting topics, and 18% signed up for text alerts with parenting information.
- Parents have a near-even preference for using online, offline, or both types of resources when seeking parenting information. In fact, 35% of the parents surveyed are most comfortable using both approaches to find out more about how to encourage their child’s critical thinking or problem-solving skills.

Where Do Differences Exist Among Parents?

- Parents, overall, value science and research as it relates to parenting information, with 64% of respondents noting that **including scientific research would make them more trusting of parenting information.** However, variations existed based on education level. Parents with college degrees were more likely to trust science-based information (72%). Parents with less than a

high school degree were only marginally more likely to trust science-based information (52%), less than any other group in the study. Further, science-based parenting websites were never used by 22% of lower-income parents and 27% of less-educated parents in this study.

- Surveved parents were **more likely to trust information that reinforced their pre-existing attitudes**, as 62% said they would be more trusting of parenting information that supported their existing beliefs and values. More than any other group, college graduates (69%) were more likely to trust information that confirmed their existing views.
- **Parenting apps are used by parents, but the prevalence of usage varies based on ethnicity.** Latino and African American parents report relying on parenting mobile apps at higher rates. Sixty-five percent of Latinos and 62% of African Americans in this survey reported using mobile apps for parenting information, as compared to 39% of Whites.
- **Latino (53%) and African American (54%) parents rely on their churches for parenting information** significantly more than their White counterparts (34%).
- **Latinos were significantly more active in their use of online resources to connect**

with other parents and get updates on parenting topics. In the past year, 49% of Latino parents (as compared with 37% of parents in total) had signed up for email alerts, and 33% signed up for text alerts (as compared with 18% of the total parents surveyed). This difference may be associated with the fact that Latinos in the United States, and in this survey, are younger and perhaps more likely to regularly use smartphones.

Which Information Sources are Least Trusted by Parents?

- **Only 13% of surveyed parents were more trusting of celebrity-endorsed information**, while 31% were less likely to trust information that came from celebrities. These findings suggest that there are important and unintended consequences associated with this commonly used approach to reach parents.
- **Well-known brands are not seen by parents as particularly trustworthy sources of information either.** 47% of surveyed parents said endorsements from children's media companies or car seat manufacturers would have no impact at all on their trust in the parenting information provided. About one-third of respondents would be more trusting of brand-endorsed information, while

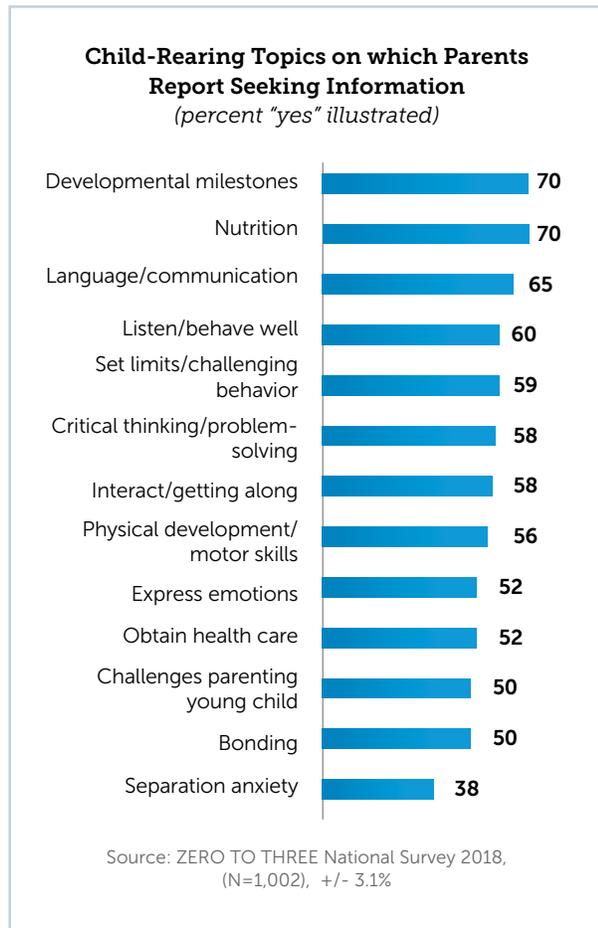
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16% lost trust in the information if it had a brand endorsement. African American parents differed on this point: 47% were more likely to trust information endorsed by familiar brands, while only 10% were less likely to trust.

On what Topics Do Parents Seek Information?

- This survey **asked parent respondents whether they had ever sought out information on a variety of issues relevant to parenting their children**, with the table below summarizing the share of parents who reported seeking information on each topic. Note that these items were split-sampled so each respondent was randomly prompted with half of these items.



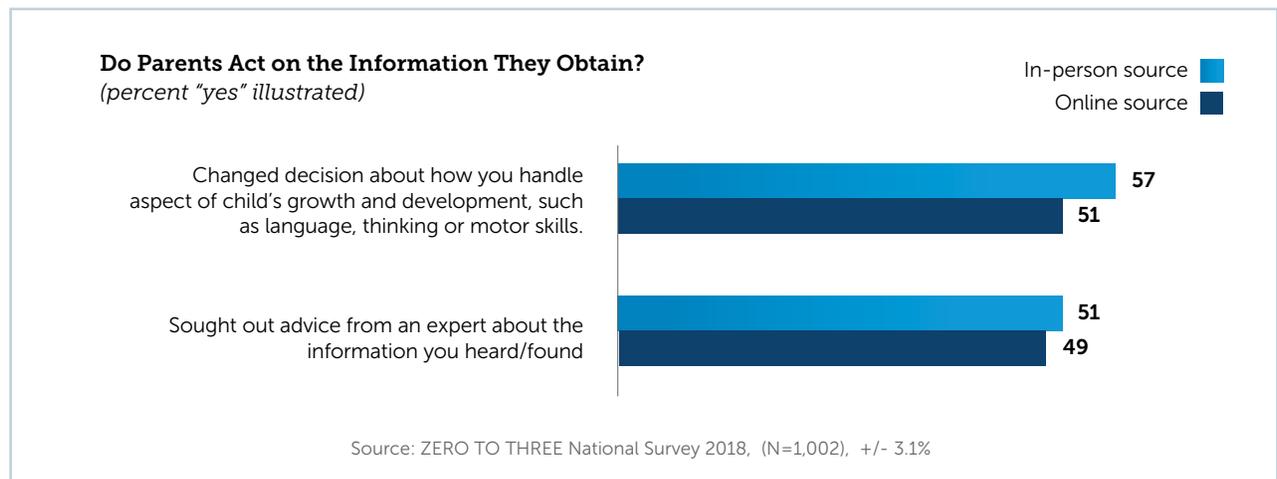
Latino parents did significantly more searches for parent-child bonding, obtaining health care, physical development, social interactions and getting along, and critical thinking and problem solving.

- In short, **we find that parents and caregivers of young children are actively seeking and consuming information on a wide array of topics** to help them raise their children.
- Over half of all parents have searched for many of the topics on this list, though information about **developmental milestones and nutrition were of particular interest to parents**. For the most part, parents are looking for information at similar rates, and there were no large differences by income, education, or marital status.
- Latinos were found to search for information regarding various aspects of parenting and early childhood development to a greater extent than non-Latinos**. More specifically, in ten out of thirteen categories surveyed, Latino parents reported searching for information at higher rates than all other demographic groups. **Latino parents did significantly more searches for parent-child bonding, obtaining health care, physical development, interactions and getting along, and critical thinking and problem solving.**

- Finally, the last four topics in the table above (obtaining health care; challenges in parenting; bonding; and separation anxiety) were also the topics where parents indicated a preference for online resources versus in-person information. One possible interpretation of this data point is that parents may prefer the anonymity of online searches for information on more sensitive or personal topics.

How Do Parents Use the Child-Rearing Information They Obtain?

Parenting information obtained from both online and in-person sources influences parents' decisions and actions, and both can be catalysts to action. The table below illustrates that in-person sources are only slightly more influential than online.



Recommendations from the Survey

- 1. Message to the immediate and extended family.** Organizations that wish to provide information resources to parents of young children should consider strategically messaging to the extended family to whom new parents turn, particularly grandparents. This survey showed that immediate and extended family are critical and trusted information sources for families.
- 2. Partner with health care providers.** Engaging health care providers as primary messengers for parenting and child development information is a key pathway for reaching parents of young children. Parents' deep trust in health care providers, as well as their regular interface with health care settings in the early years, makes pediatrics an ideal setting for ongoing parent education. Providing anticipatory guidance at routine well-child visits is particularly important in reaching the close to one-quarter of parents in our survey who report they don't seek parenting information online. Pediatric health care models that include parent education and parent coaching as key components, such as HealthySteps and others, may prove to be effective partners in this effort.
- 3. Identify trusted, community-based partners that can share parenting guidance, including both early childhood professionals and other community messengers.** Partnering with early childhood professionals in fields as diverse as education, nutrition (e.g., WIC staff), and home visiting builds on parents' existing trust in these relationships. Because professionals in these fields interface with parents regularly and over time, they can serve as effective messengers of parenting guidance. Other organizations, such as families' faith-based communities, may provide ways to connect with specific groups such as African American and Latino parents.

- 4. Include parents' voices when developing messages about child-rearing.** Parents appreciate that child-rearing is a balance of both "art and science." To that end, online resources should be clearly based on science and research, as parents find these more trustworthy. Equally important is including the voices and experiences of real parents when developing resources, as this also contributes to parents' increased trust.
- 5. Continue to leverage the online technology that is nearly ubiquitous.** Online technologies designed for parents' use are increasingly diverse and include websites, apps, texting services, email alerts/e-newsletters, and/or online communities. Though a smaller percentage of parents use online resources than consult family members, pediatricians, and early child care providers, online resources are still frequently used, and parents act on information in similar numbers despite its source (online or in-person). Interestingly, in this survey, parents reported more online searching for sensitive or personal issues related to child-rearing (such as bonding or managing challenges). It is possible that online searching allowed for more anonymity on these topics and thus was the preferred approach. Regardless, the lower cost of online resources makes them an important part of any strategy to reach parents. An important consideration is that an online-only strategy will miss important subgroups; for example, about a quarter of low-income families and a quarter of families with less education don't access science-based online resources like WebMD, ZERO TO THREE, the CDC, and the Mayo Clinic at all.
- 6. Provide parents with multiple pathways of in-person support and guidance.** Almost all families have access to online resources but report trusting offline, in-person resources more. One approach may be to leverage lower-cost online resources to build parents' knowledge base and then provide multiple in-person pathways at the community level that allow parents to connect with trusted messengers (health care, child care, families, etc.) who can reinforce and influence positive parenting behavior.



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