

# Parent Support and Education

SUPPORTING PARENTS SOCIALLY AND EMOTIONALLY WITH FAMILY FOCUSED ACTIVITIES, POLICIES, AND EDUCATION

## Why It's Important

A parent can be any figure in a child's life that provides care, safety, and security for a child. Parental figures can be biological, adopted, foster parents, grandparents, or other primary caregivers. Parental support and education positively impact parents and families. Supporting parents can benefit the parent-child relationship, help families meet their physical, emotional, and financial needs, and improve health outcomes for children and parents. The type of support needed and wanted can vary across families – one family may experience certain activities as supportive, another family may wish for other forms of educational support.

**According to the Zero to Three National Survey, 48 percent of all parents don't feel they are getting the support that is needed when they are stressed with nearly 60 percent of single mothers reporting receiving inadequate support.<sup>1</sup>**

The importance of other personal relationships outside of the immediate family cannot be understated as community connection is beneficial to caregiver health as well.<sup>2</sup> Parents need a network of supportive relationships, strategies for coping with stress, resources, knowledge, and an understanding of child development. Parents and caregivers who have resources and support are more likely to provide safe and healthy homes for their children and families.

*"[Minnesota women, children, and families need] support. I think the community would benefit immensely from finding ways to support mothers in parenting. By providing relief when needed (childcare, mental health support)." – Needs Assessment Discovery Survey Respondent*

Parental education programs have been shown to improve parental self-esteem, positive parenting practices, parental mental health, and ultimately improve the parent-child relationship.<sup>3</sup> Parent support and education programs can take the form of informal social gatherings in the community or more formal home visiting programs designed to increase parenting skills related to communication, attachment, and safety. Other examples of parent support include paid leave, breastfeeding support, and opportunities to participate in early childhood family education (ECFE) programming.

## Focus on Health Equity

The type of support and education needed and wanted by parents can differ greatly depending on personal preference, family structure, education, culture, employment, and other factors.

### Single Parents

Single parents and caregivers can experience additional barriers to parental support and education while also needing more support surrounding housing, financial security, and childcare. In the United States, 1 in 4 parents is unmarried and living alone as opposed to cohabiting with a partner. Single parents are more likely to be living in poverty compared to cohabiting parents (27% vs. 16%).<sup>4</sup> The majority of single

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parents are mothers (81%) and are twice as likely to be African American mothers than mothers of other races or ethnicities.<sup>4</sup>

### Employer Support

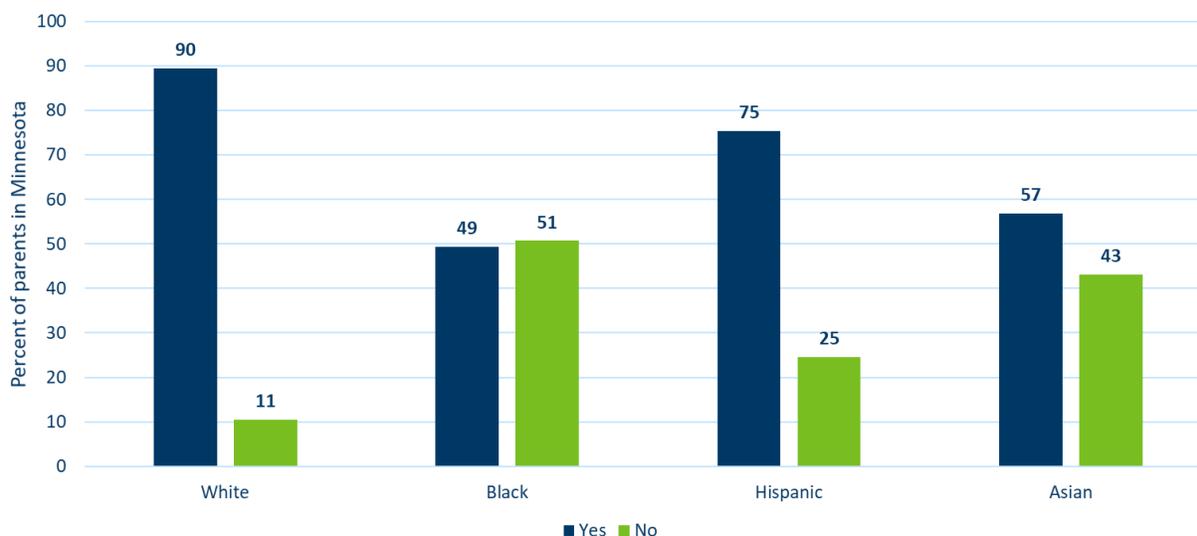
Mothers returning to work following the birth of a baby face additional challenges to feeling supported when confronted with inflexible work schedules that can result in increased stress in the home. Referred to as work-family conflict, the many challenges of balancing childcare, healthy relationships, and mental well-being have been associated with numerous negative health outcomes such as depression, substance use, and overall poor physical health.<sup>5</sup> Partnered parents can experience conflict when navigating the transition back to work following the birth of a baby. Fathers can experience a lack of support from their employer upon returning to work, especially following a longer paternal leave, and may experience cultural stigma surrounding fathers spending an extended period of time away from work following the birth of a baby.<sup>6</sup> Parents of children and youth with special health needs (CYSHN) often face additional stresses and challenges related to accessing support and education.

*“If only women could receive paid maternity leave, extended maternity leaves and consistent support from employers and others when returning to work or school. So much falls on women's shoulders which of course affects their children and families. Childcare assistance and breastfeeding support from family, friends, ALL health care providers and employers early in life are key.” – Needs Assessment Discovery Survey Respondent*

### Race/Ethnicity

Data from National Survey of Children’s Health shows that 90 percent of parents that identify as white report having someone they can connect with for emotional support related to parenting compared to only 49 percent of African American parents (Figure 1).

**Figure 1. Minnesota Parents reporting having someone that provides emotional support with parenting or raising children, 2016-2017**

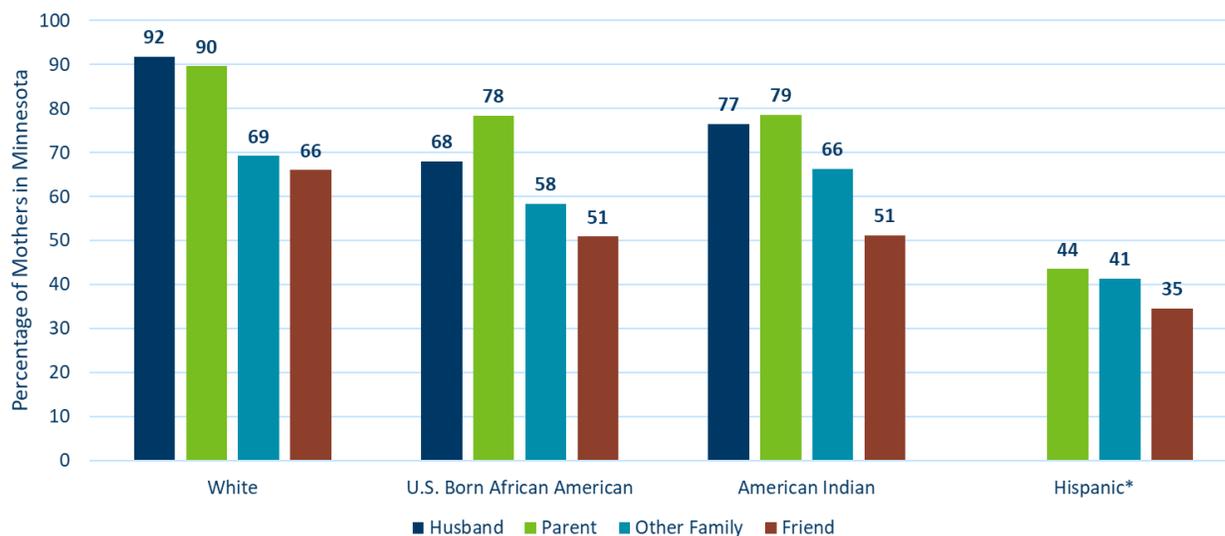


Source: National Survey of Children’s Health

The source of parental support after pregnancy differs between racial and ethnic groups as well with white parents more likely to report receiving support from a spouse or other family member when compared to all other groups (Figure 2). Hispanic parents are the least likely to report receiving support

from family or friends (note the overall response rate for Hispanic mothers answering the question about support from their husband in the PRAMS was too low to report according to the CDC threshold (<30) and is suppressed in the chart below).

**Figure 2. Sources of Support after Pregnancy for Minnesota Mothers by Race/Ethnicity, 2016-2017**



Source: Minnesota Pregnancy Risk Assessment Monitoring System (PRAMS)

The source of support can have an impact on a mother’s psychological well-being with family members and partners providing the highest levels of support, serving as a vital connection to speak with mental health and parenting advice.<sup>4,7</sup> Being married or cohabiting while parenting has been associated with increased financial security and decreased stress among parents. Among Minnesota mothers, women of color are less likely than white women to report having support from a spouse or family member which could lead to increased financial strain and stress. One in five parents without the support of a spouse or partner report not having enough money to pay for their basic needs.<sup>4</sup>

### Additional Considerations

Supporting caregivers can have numerous positive downstream effects on the health of children by reducing family separation.<sup>8</sup> Parents need a network of supportive relationships, strategies for coping with stress, resources, knowledge, and an understanding of child development. Unfortunately, a lack of these critical supports can cause otherwise well-intentioned parents to engage in abuse or neglect. Parents and caregivers who have resources and support are more likely to provide safe and healthy homes for their children and families and reduce the need for out of home placement following confirmed instances of abuse or neglect.<sup>8</sup>

The parent-child relationship and the environment of the family- which includes all primary caregivers- are foundational to a child’s well-being and healthy development. The impact of parents is critical during the first years of life when a child’s experiences are almost entirely created and shaped by caregivers and their family environment. Parents’ knowledge of child development has been shown to lead to more quality parent-child interactions and engagement in practices that promote their child’s healthy development.

## Important Note on Equity and Intersectionality

The Minnesota Department of Health's Title V Needs Assessment team acknowledges that structural (social, economic, political and environmental) inequities can result in poor health outcomes across generations. They have a greater influence on health outcomes than individual choices or a person's ability to access health care, and not all communities are impacted in the same way.

**All people living in Minnesota benefit when we reduce health disparities.**

We also acknowledge that the topic addressed in this data story does not exist in isolation— which is important to remember as we do needs assessments and as we start thinking about how we approach solutions. In addition to the needs themselves being intersectional, there are also intersecting processes and systems through which power and inequity are produced, reproduced, and actively resisted.

## Citations

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