



# Real Healthy Kids Report 2024

April 2024



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# About the report

The Real Healthy Kids Report 2024 forms part of the Real Insurance Research Series, delving into the evolving landscape of healthy parenting.

The report explores the intricacies of fostering active and healthy children, encompassing not only physical wellbeing but also mental health. It examines the motivations and concerns surrounding the upbringing of active children, shedding light on the various factors that influence parenting decisions. Furthermore, the report addresses the challenges and hidden sacrifices inherent in raising healthy children, while also highlighting the extensive benefits associated with nurturing an active lifestyle from a young age.

The study also compares trends, challenges, and expenses with the Australian Active Kids 2017 research data to identify how the landscape of parenting active children has evolved.

The report is compiled based on research commissioned by Real Insurance and conducted by MYMAVINS between the 5th and 20th of December 2023. The research was conducted via a quantitative online survey, gathering 3,026 responses from adult Australian parents with children under 18 years living at home. The sample is broadly representative of this population in terms of age, gender, wealth, and region.

## Important things to observe about the charts and figures

- ✓ Figures were determined from self-reported estimates provided by respondents.
- ✓ Footnotes directly underneath the charts may refer to one or more of the below, depending on the data presented. If more than one note is required, this will appear as a bulleted list. Charts without a specific note represent questions that were asked to all respondents.
  - Subset of the total sample size as certain questions would only be asked to specific respondents.
  - Types of questions asked, for instance multiple responses allowed, appear when the question calls for more than one answer from the respondent.
  - Data has been excluded from analysis (e.g. outliers removed in analysis).
  - Some charts and figures may not be equal to 100% due to rounding differences. This is also true for summed up figures.



## Key findings



## Majority of children participate in extracurricular activities with physical activities the most popular

- ✓ Almost 9 in 10 (85%) children participate in at least one extracurricular activity, with the most popular being physical (71%) followed by creative activities like music or arts (42%).
- ✓ If forced to choose, parents show a clear preference for their children engaging in physical pursuits (64%) over creative (21%) or intellectual pursuits (12%).

## Almost all parents are trying to keep their kids active and healthy

- ✓ Almost all parents (98%) are doing at least one thing to help keep their kids active and healthy. Most commonly, parents prioritise providing nutritious meals and snacks (71%), ensuring their children get enough sleep (71%), and encouraging regular physical activity through sports or outdoor play (66%).
- ✓ Almost 3 in 4 (72%) now spend time taking their children to various places and supervising their activities, a notable increase from 55% in 2017.

## Almost all children are regularly involved in sporting activities

- ✓ Over 4 in 5 (85%) children are involved in sporting activities at least once a week.
- ✓ For those involved in sports, organised team sports are the most common (47%), followed by organised individual sports (26%) and informal activities (27%).
- ✓ Swimming (45%), soccer (31%), and dancing (23%) are among the top sports children play, with basketball (21%) and martial arts (15%) also being popular choices.

## While most parents are happy to get involved there has been a noticeable decline in engagement since 2017

- ✓ 3 in 5 (60%) parents are happy to get involved in their kid's sporting activities.
- ✓ On average, parents now spend 4.3 hours each week involved with sporting activities, 3.9 hours weekly on creative and intellectual pursuits, and 2.4 hours weekly on medical and health-related activities, including routine checkups and treatments.

## Supporting kid's wellbeing among other commitments is not without its challenges

- ✓ Almost 9 in 10 (86%) find it challenging to balance the time it requires to support their children's wellbeing and other commitments.
- ✓ Close to 2 in 3 (65%) feel they are investing more time when compared to their parents while almost 3 in 10 (29%) feel it's about the same commitment.
- ✓ 3 in 5 (60%) find it challenging to meet the expectations set by schools, while around 2 in 3 (64%) struggle to keep pace with the efforts of other parents.

## The cost of keeping kids healthy is outstripping inflation and parents are feeling the pinch

- ✓ Overall, the total annual cost of engaging in extracurricular activities has increased by 49% from 2017 to 2023 (\$2,180 to \$3,255). More than 4 in 5 (82%) now feel that extracurricular activities are expensive.
- ✓ Parents estimate that they spend \$8,294 on average each year on healthy eating options for the household. More than three-quarters (77%) of parents feel financial pressures in being able to feed their children healthy food.

## Extracurricular activities are important social opportunities for kids and their parents

- ✓ More than 9 in 10 (92%) agree that sporting and physical activities are important social opportunities for their children, and more than 3 in 4 (76%) see it as important for their own social and community involvement.
- ✓ More than 9 in 10 (92%) also feel that their children's participation in extracurricular activities contributes significantly to a sense of belonging in the community.

## Keeping kids healthy can also come with social pressures

- ✓ Just over 1 in 3 (35%) parents have not observed any pressure or shaming occurring around extracurricular participation.
- ✓ When it comes to food, 2 in 5 (42%) have experienced or witnessed lunchbox shaming at school from other parents, teachers, students, or other school community members.

## Parents report a myriad of both physical and mental health benefits for their kids from an active lifestyle

- ✓ Improved physical fitness (58%) is the top positive influence on physical health and wellbeing closely followed by positive mental health (57%). Better sleep patterns (46%), increased energy levels (46%), as well as improved coordination and balance (45%) are also seen as key outcomes of an active lifestyle.
- ✓ Parents also report several mental and emotional benefits associated with an active lifestyle including enhanced self-esteem and confidence (45%), increased social interaction and skills (44%), and better mood regulation (43%).

## Vaping is not widespread but many parents are still concerned

- ✓ 1 in 4 (25%) parents have caught their children vaping or suspect they may have. The average age at which children first try vaping is reported to be around 13 years old.
- ✓ More than half (54%) of parents of kids who haven't used a vape or are unsure if they have are concerned about the possibility of their child starting to vape, with a significant number being extremely (20%) or very concerned (15%).



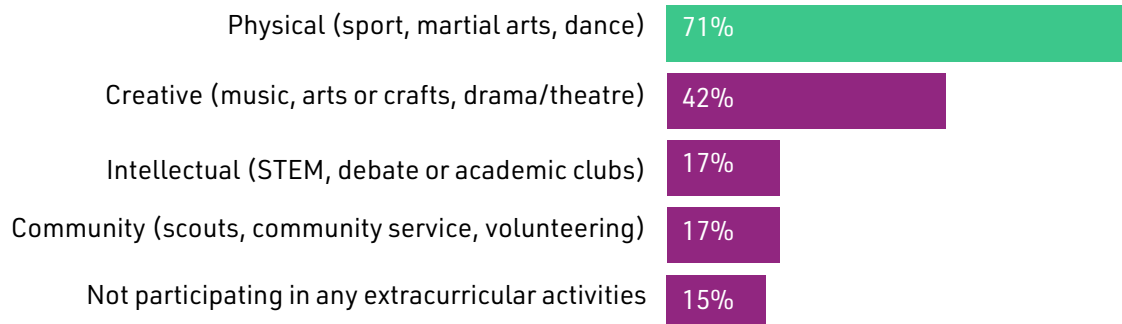
Healthy activities





# State of play

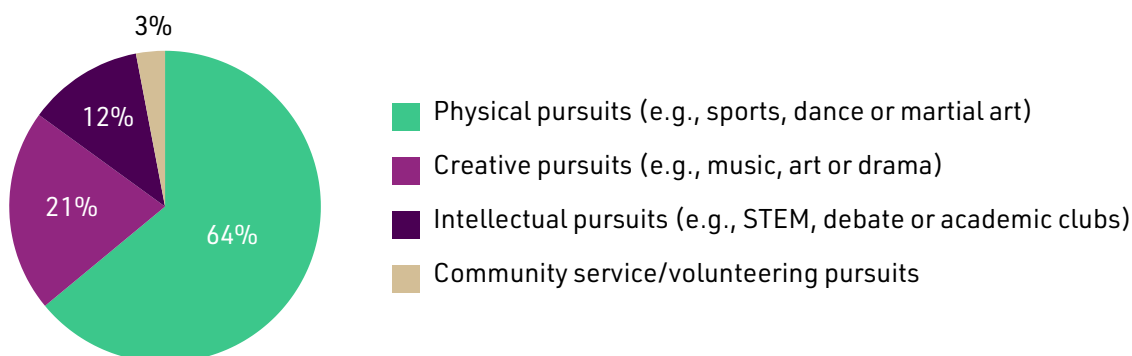
**Are your children participating in any of the following extracurricular activities i.e. outside of normal school hours?**



\*Multiple responses allowed.

Almost 9 in 10 (85%) children participate in at least one extracurricular activity, with the most popular being physical (71%) followed by creative activities like music or arts (42%). Only close to 1 in 5 (17%) participate in intellectual activities like STEM clubs and similarly close to 1 in 5 participate in community activities like scouts.

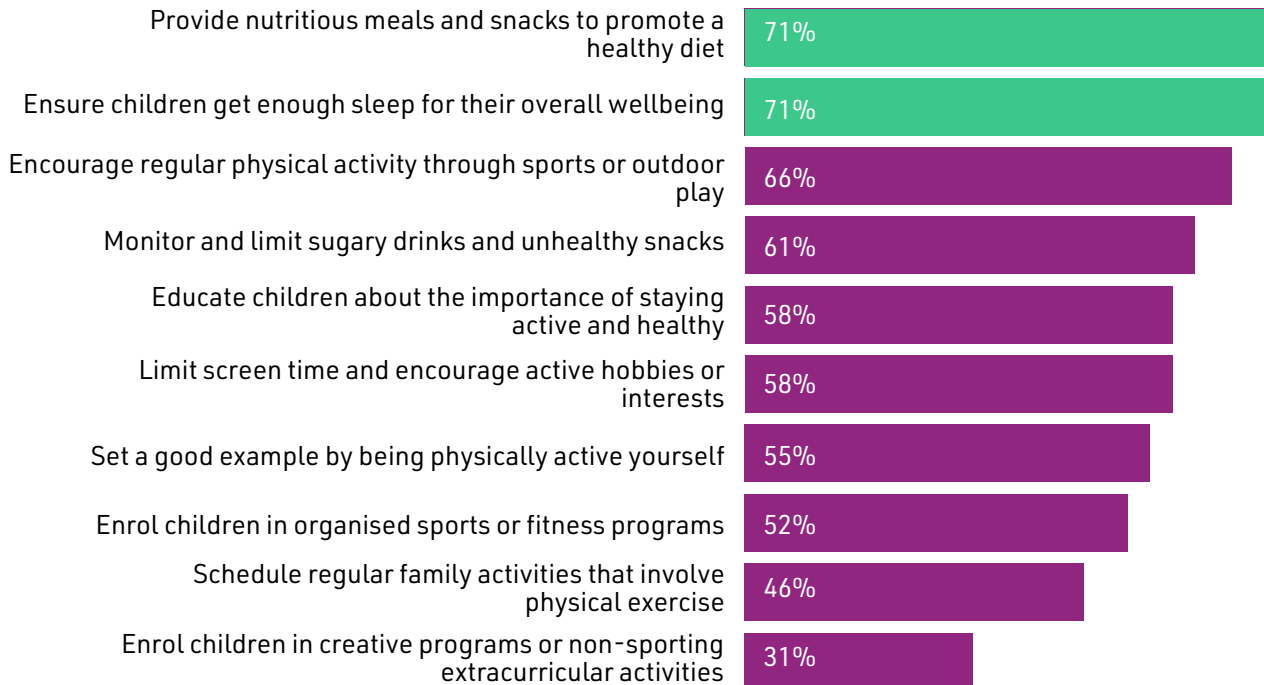
**If you had to choose, would you prefer your children to be doing...**



Parents show a clear preference (if forced to choose) for their children engaging in physical pursuits (64%) over creative (21%) or intellectual pursuits (12%).

# Keeping the kids healthy

## What do you do to help keep your children active and healthy?

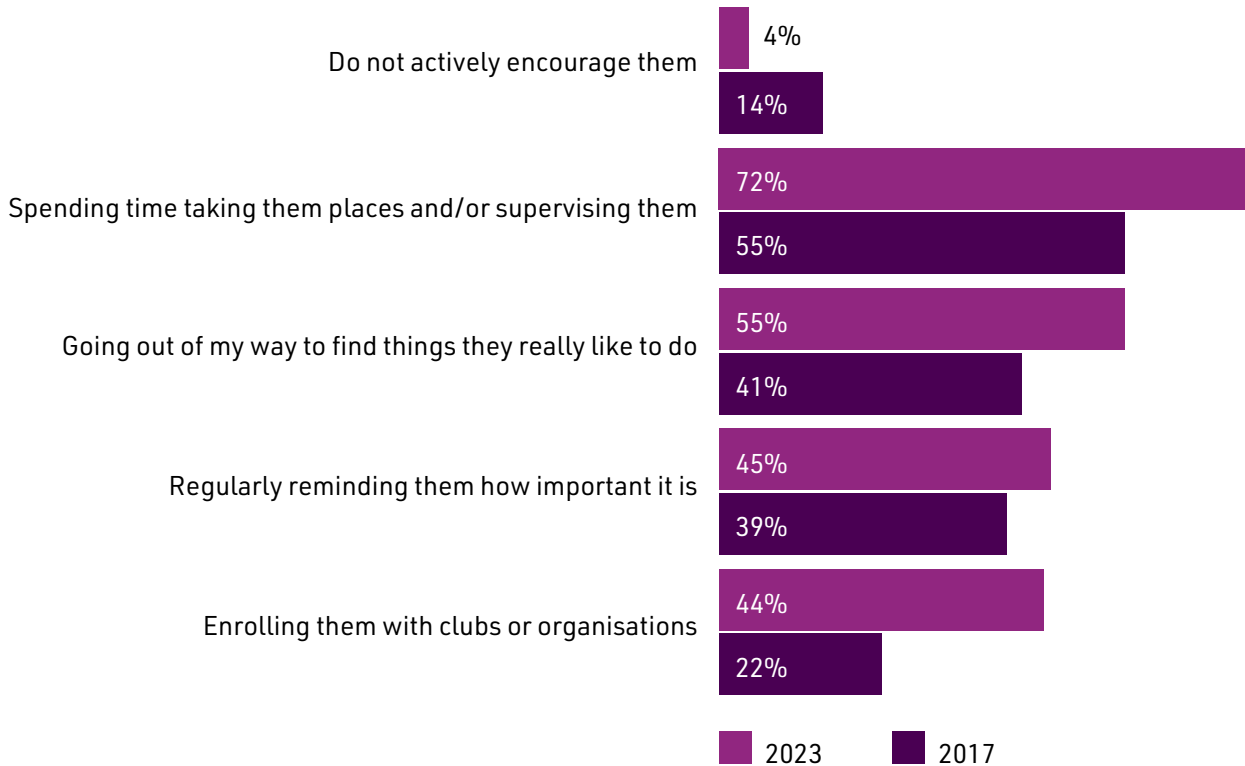


\*Multiple responses allowed. Top 10 responses only.

Almost all parents (98%) are doing at least one thing to help keep their kids active and healthy. Most commonly, parents prioritise providing nutritious meals and snacks (71%), ensuring their children get enough sleep (71%), and encouraging regular physical activity through sports or outdoor play (66%).

# Keeping the kids healthy

## What are the ways you are encouraging your children to get outdoors more? (2017 vs 2023)



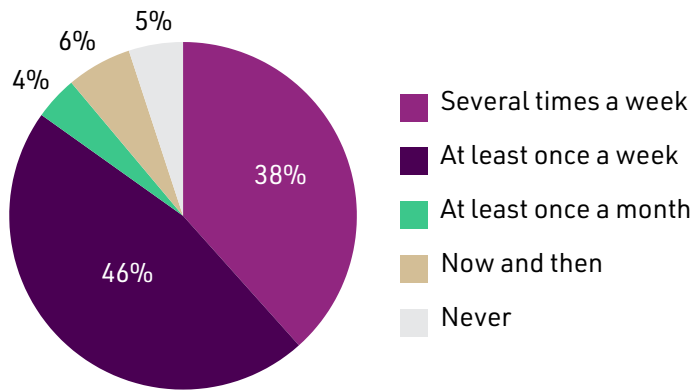
\*Multiple responses allowed.

Almost 3 in 4 (72%) now spend time taking their children to various places and supervising their activities, a notable increase from 55% in 2017. Additionally, over half (55%) go out of their way to find activities that their children particularly enjoy (up from 41% in 2017).

1 in 2 (50%) parents with children participating in extracurricular activities (n= 2570) make the decisions or strongly encourage certain activities. Around 1 in 4 involve their children in the decision-making process (25%) or encourage them to make their own choices (23%).

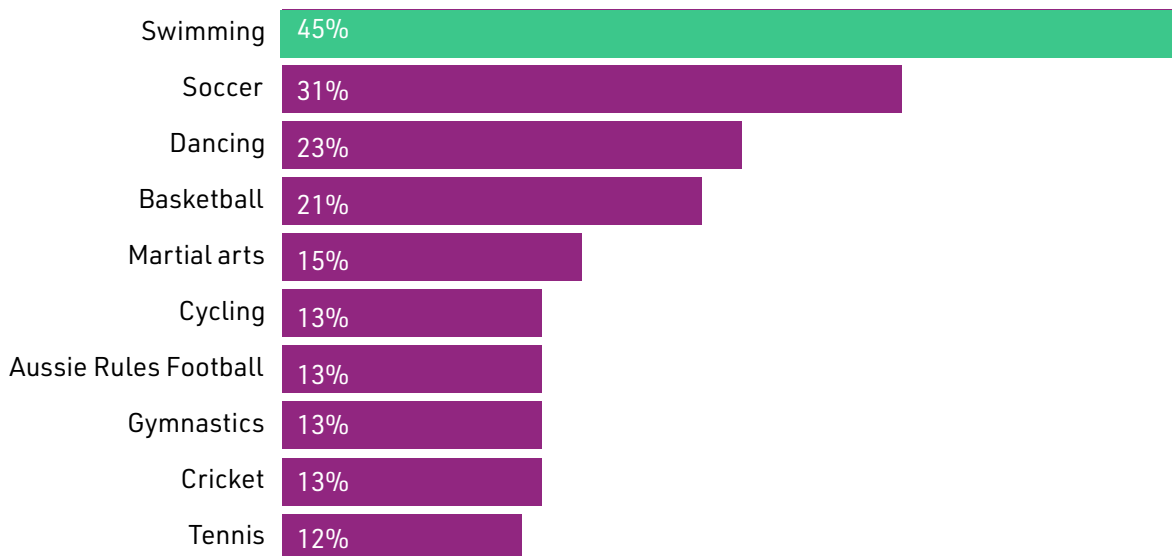
# Sports involvement

## How often are your children involved in any sporting activities?



Over 4 in 5 (85%) children are involved in sporting activities at least once a week. Only around 5% never play any sports. For those involved in sports, organised team sports are the most common (47%), followed by organised individual sports (26%) and informal activities (27%).

## What sports are your children playing?



\*Parents with children involved in any sporting activities (n= 2,877). Multiple responses allowed.

Swimming (45%), soccer (31%), and dancing (23%) are among the top sports children play, with basketball (21%) and martial arts (15%) also being popular choices.

For those playing sports, the Matildas women's soccer team (24%) and the Socceroos men's soccer team (19%) draw the most inspiration among our national sporting teams. However, 2 in 5 (42%) say their children don't draw inspiration from any national teams.



# Parental commitments



# Involvement

3 in 5 (60%) parents are happy to get involved in their kids' sporting activities. A further 1 in 3 (34%) are somewhat happy to get involved but admit that it can get overwhelming and/or tiring.

## Which of the following forms of involvement in your children's sporting activities have you or your partner completed over the years? (2017 vs 2023)



\*Parents with children involved in sporting activities (n= 2,877). Multiple responses allowed.

However, in reality there has been a noticeable decline in the level of volunteer engagement within clubs and organisations. Fewer parents are dedicating time to organise or supervise activities, with participation dropping from 60% in 2017 to 45%.

Support through fundraising has also seen a decrease, now at 37% compared to 54% in 2017. The trend continues with formal roles in training, coaching, or refereeing, which have diminished to 30% from 39%.

On average, parents spend 4.3 hours each week involved with sporting activities (223 hours annually)<sup>+</sup>, 3.9 hours weekly on creative and intellectual pursuits (205 hours annually)<sup>++</sup>, and 2.4 hours weekly on medical and health-related activities, including routine checkups and treatments (125 hours annually)<sup>+++</sup>

<sup>+</sup> Parents with children involved in sporting activities with outliers removed (n= 2,757)

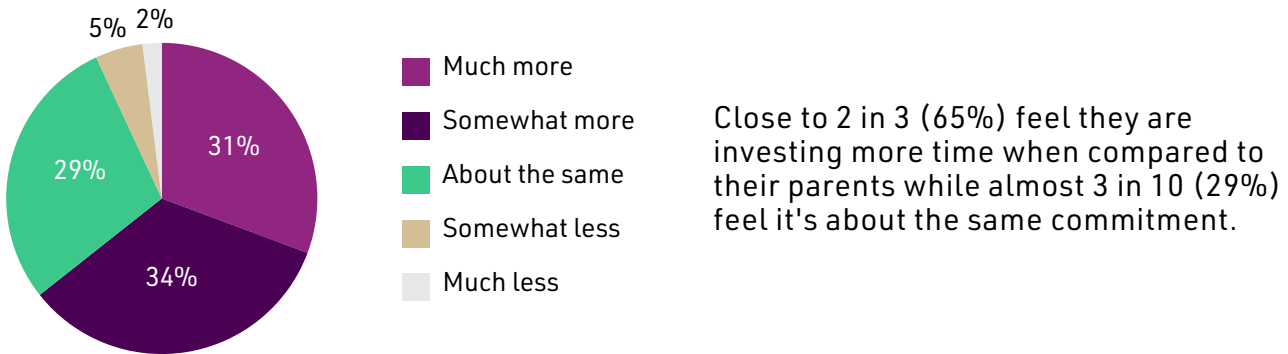
<sup>++</sup> Parents with children involved in intellectual activities with outliers removed (n= 2,475)

<sup>+++</sup> Outliers removed (n=2,907)

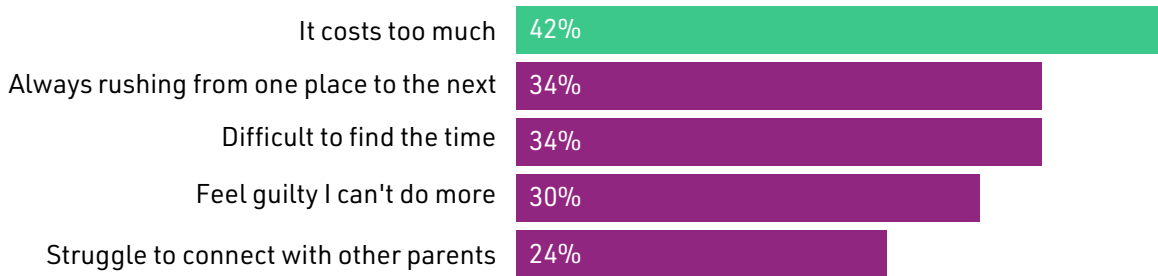
# Challenges

Almost 9 in 10 (86%) find it challenging to balance the time it requires to support their children's wellbeing and other commitments.

## How does the time you are investing in your children's wellbeing compare to your parents?



## Have you experienced any of the following when trying to support your children's sporting activities?



\*Parents with children involved in sporting activities (n= 2,877). Multiple responses allowed. Top 5 responses only

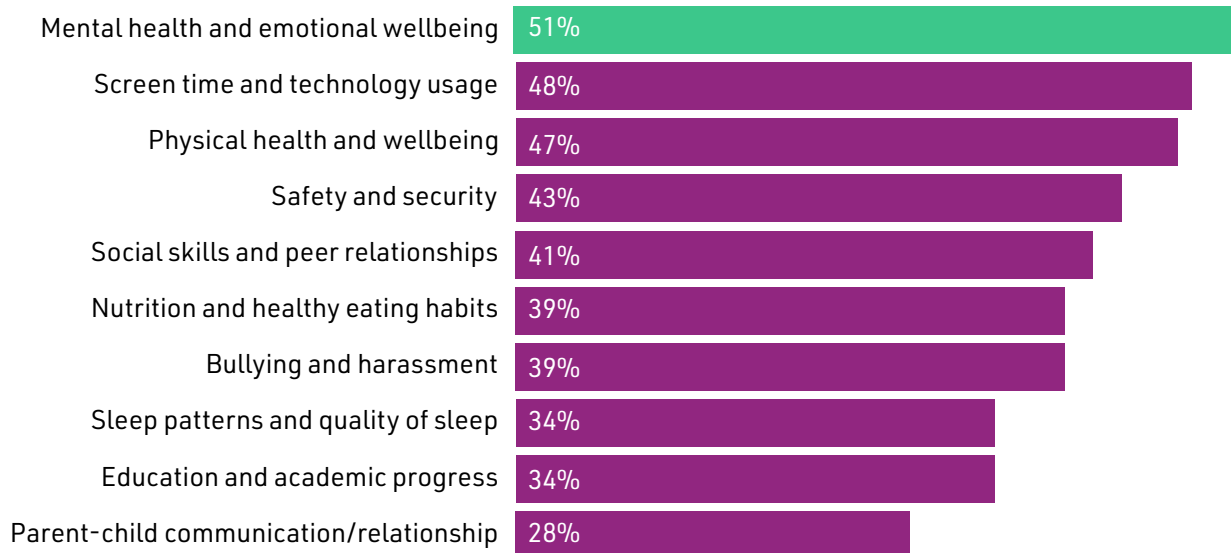
The balance of commitments comes with other challenges, around 2 in 5 (42%) individuals believe that the high cost is significant, while 1 in 3 (34%) are constantly rushing from one place to another and find it difficult to allocate time. Nearly 1 in 3 (30%) also experience guilt for not being able to do more, and about 1 in 4 (24%) struggle to connect with other parents, indicating a range of challenges faced by people in managing their busy lifestyles.

3 in 5 (60%) find it challenging to meet the expectations set by schools, while around 2 in 3 (64%) struggle to keep pace with the efforts of other parents.

3 in 4 (75%) believe that it is not safe for children to play ball games in the streets compared to their own childhoods.

# Motivations

## What are you currently most concerned about regarding your children's wellbeing?



\*Multiple responses allowed.

More than 1 in 2 (51%) consider mental health and emotional wellbeing a top concern. Closely following mental health concerns, the impact of screen time and technology usage is also a major worry for parents, with nearly half (48%) acknowledging it as a concern.

Physical health and wellbeing are also high on the list of parental concerns, with 47% of parents being apprehensive about this aspect of their children's lives. Safety and security are not far behind, with 43% of parents anxious about the risks their children may face in their daily environments.

Social skills and peer relationships are a concern for 41% of parents, indicating the importance of social development in childhood. Nutrition and healthy eating habits are also a priority for many, with 39% of parents focused on ensuring their children have a healthy diet.

Almost 7 in 10 (68%) believe that involvement with sports has had a beneficial impact on their children's academic performance. Men are more likely than women to feel this way (73% vs 64%). Only a small percentage (10%) feel that sports have been detrimental, while 22% are unsure of the impact.



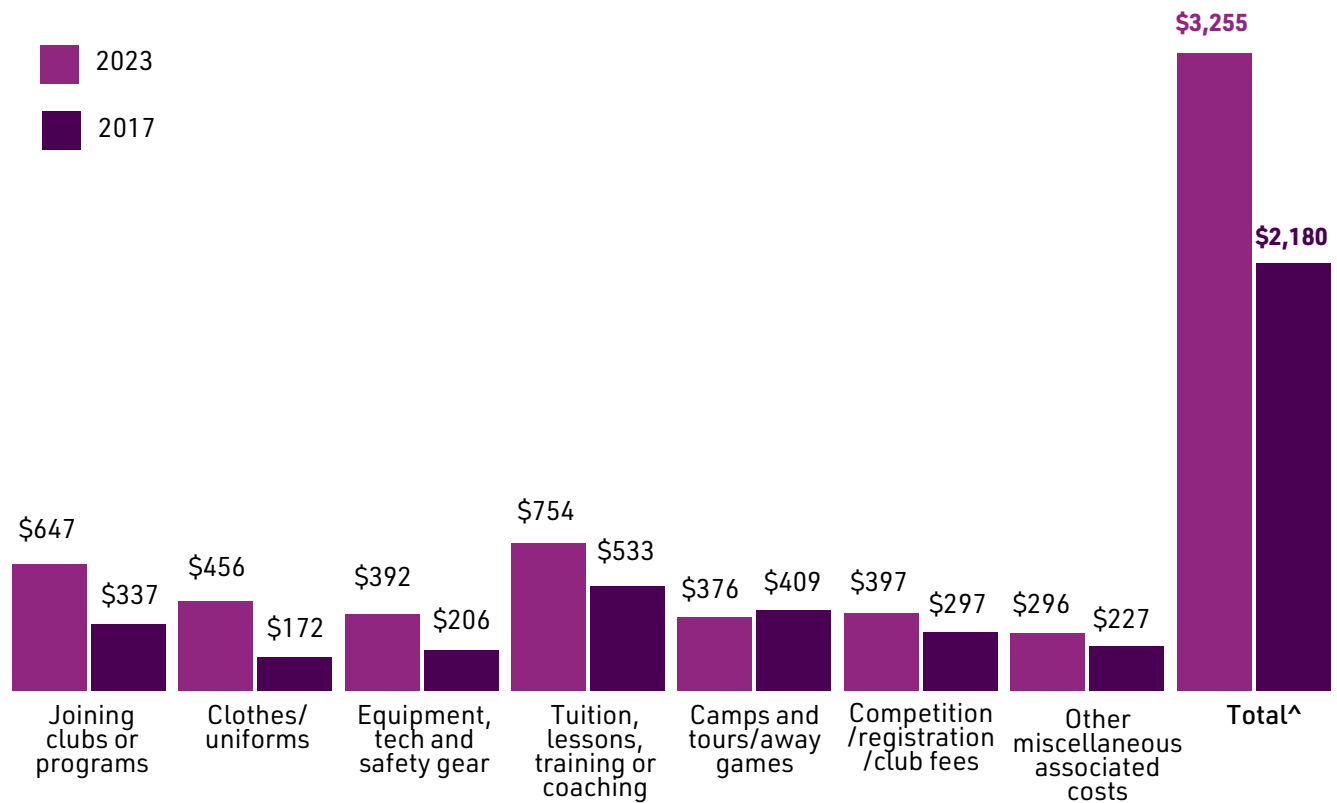


## Cost of healthy kids



# Extracurricular expenses

How much money would you estimate spending each year on the following extracurricular sporting, creative and intellectual activity related costs for the children in your household?  
(2017 vs 2023)



\*Parents with children participating in any extracurricular / sporting activities with outliers removed (n= range 2,839-2,856)

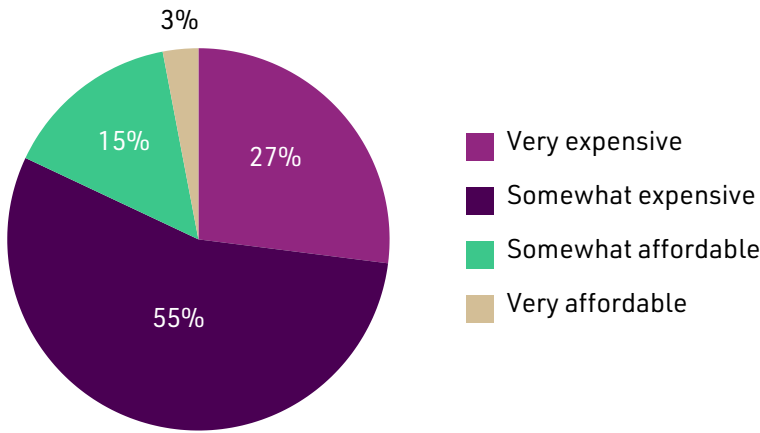
<sup>^</sup>Total may not sum up due to rounding and outlier analysis (n= 2,698)

Overall, the total annual cost of engaging in extracurricular activities has increased by 49% (from \$2,180 to \$3,255) from 2017 to 2023. This increase has outpaced inflation, which was around 21% in the same period.

Membership in clubs or programs has surged by 92% (from \$337 to \$647), while the cost for clothes and uniforms has soared by 165% (from \$172 to \$456). The investment in equipment, technology, and safety gear has also climbed by 90% (from \$206 to \$392).

Tuition, lessons, training, or coaching have experienced a 42% increase (from \$533 to \$754), competition, registration, and club fees have risen by 34% (from \$297 to \$397), and other miscellaneous associated costs have gone up by 31% (from \$227 to \$296).

## How would you rate the overall affordability of your children's extracurricular activity expenses?



More than 4 in 5 (82%) feel that extracurricular activities are expensive.

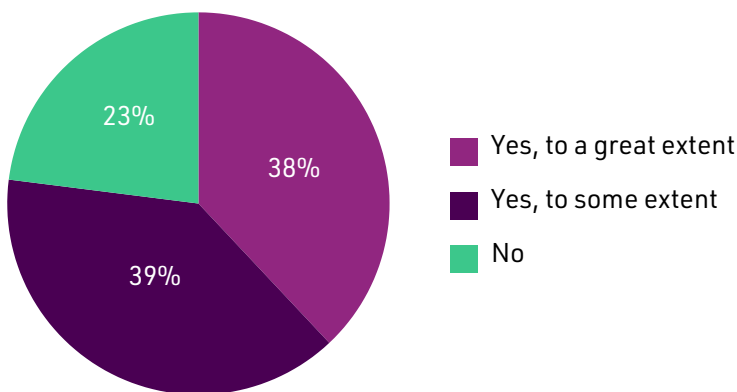
\*Parents with children participating in extracurricular activities (n= 2,570).

## Healthy food expenses

Parents estimate that they spend \$8,294 on average each year on healthy eating options for the household. Those with one dependent child still spend on average \$8,073 compared to those with three or more dependents who spend \$9,237.

\*Outliers removed (n= 2,839).

## Do you feel any financial pressures to be able to feed your children healthy food?



More than three-quarters (77%) of parents feel financial pressures in being able to feed their children healthy food.

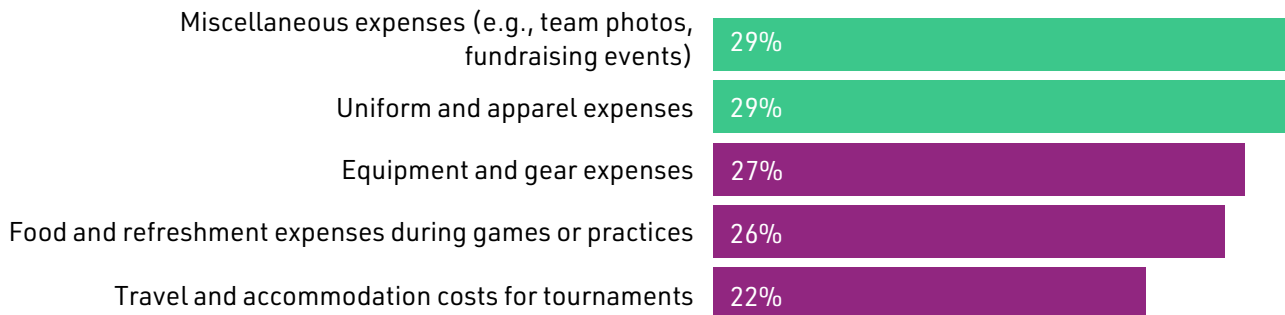
On average, parents estimate that they spend around \$829 annually on health appointments such as dentists, GPs, specialists, and other health services.

Sports injuries may have an influence as those with children who participate more regularly in sports tend to spend more on average than children who play less sports. Those who regularly play sports spend \$947 on average compared to \$524 for children who never play sports.

\*Outliers removed (n= 2,941).

# Budgeting

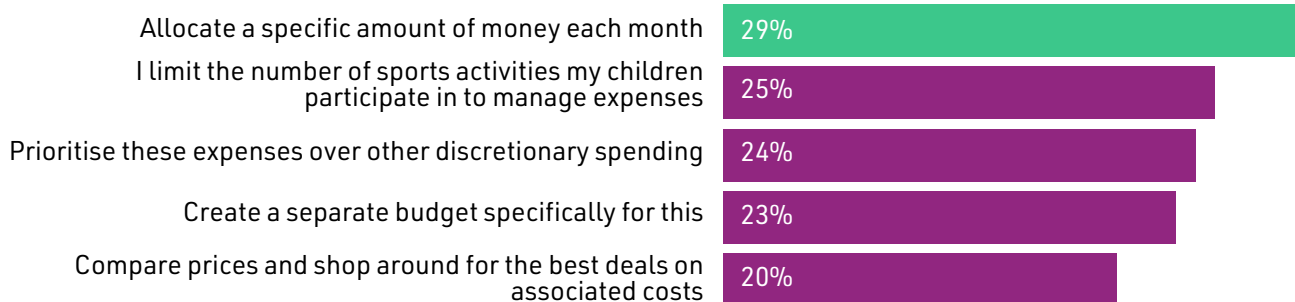
## What if any unexpected or hidden costs related to your children's sports involvement have you encountered?



\*Parents with children involved in any sporting activities (n=2,877). Top 5 responses only.

The majority (70%) have experienced unexpected or hidden costs in their children's sporting activities. The most common include miscellaneous expenses like team photos or fundraising (29%), uniform or apparel expenses (29%), equipment and gear expenses (27%) and food or refreshment expenses during games or practice (26%).

## How does your household typically budget for your children's extracurricular activity related expenses?



\*Parents with children participating in extracurricular activities (n= 2,570). Multiple responses allowed.

Almost 9 in 10 (88%) use at least one kind of budgeting technique, the most common include allocating a specific monthly amount (29%) for their children's extracurricular activities, limiting the number of activities to manage costs (25%) and prioritising these expenses over other discretionary spending (24%).



# Social interactions

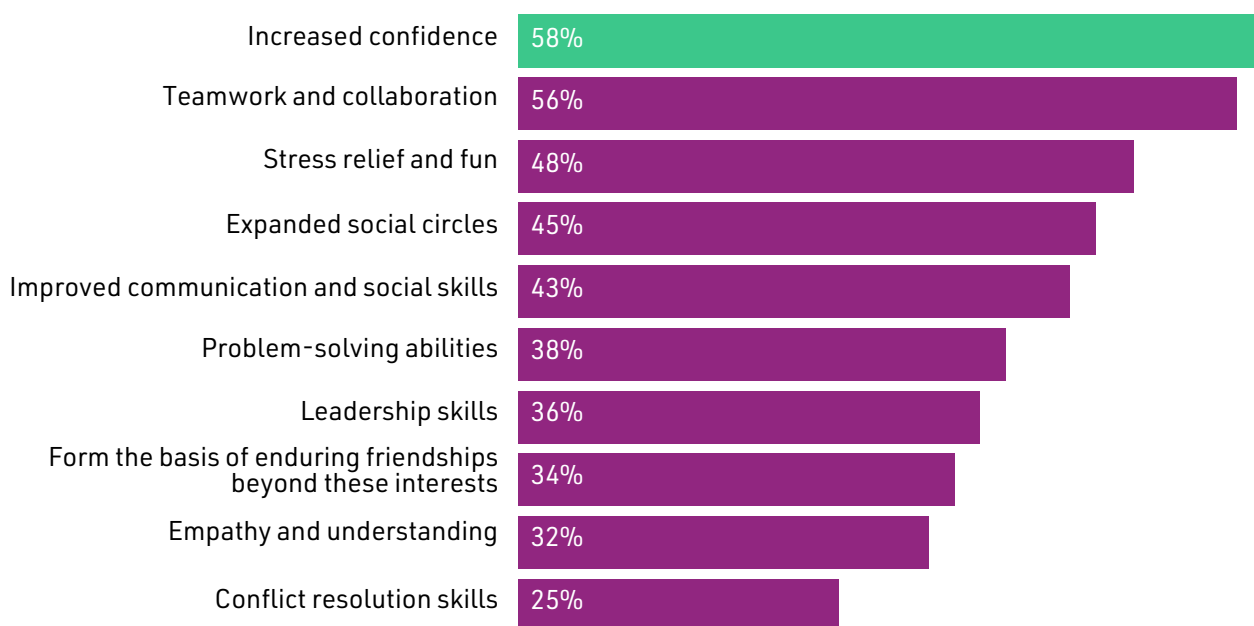


# Social opportunities

More than 9 in 10 (92%) agree that sporting and physical activities are important social opportunities for their children, and more than 3 in 4 (76%) see it as important for their own social and community involvement.

More than 9 in 10 (92%) also feel that their children's participation in extracurricular activities contributes significantly to a sense of belonging in the community (Parents with children participating in extracurricular activities, n=2570)

## Has your children's involvement in extracurricular sports, creative and intellectual pursuits helped them develop any of the following?

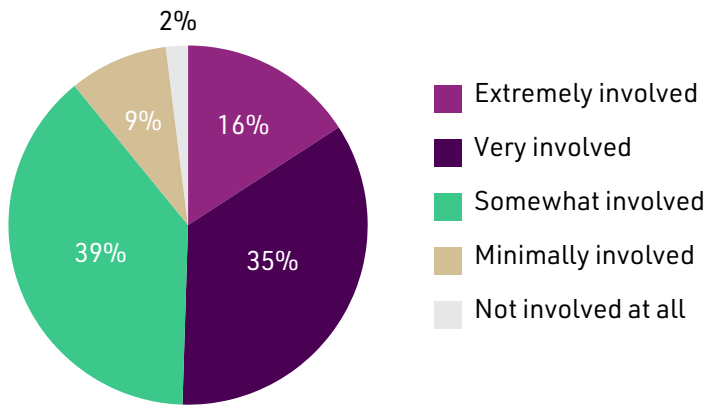


\*Parents with children participating in extracurricular activities (n= 2,570). Multiple responses allowed. Top 10 responses only.

A majority of parents also see that their children's involvement in sports, creative, and intellectual pursuits has led to increased confidence (58%), with teamwork and collaboration following closely behind (56%). These activities also provide stress relief and fun (48%), expand social circles (45%), and enhance communication and social skills (43%).

# Social involvement

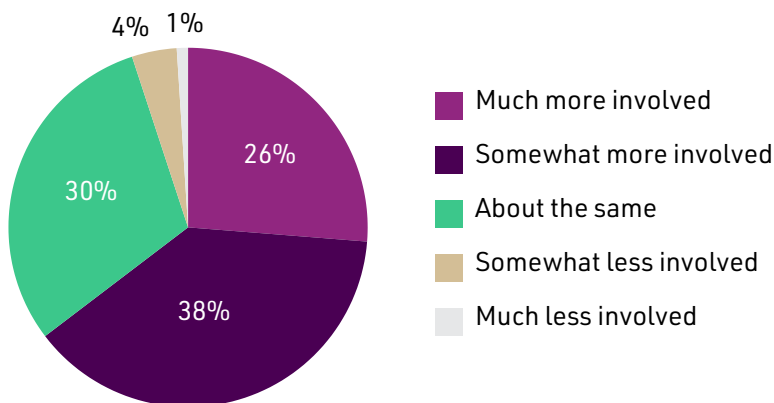
## How involved do you get when it comes to promoting social interactions with your children and other kids?



1 in 2 (50%) parents feel they are very or extremely involved in promoting social interactions with their children and other kids.

Around 7 in 10 (71%) actively encourage their children to foster relationships with kids from different backgrounds.

## Are you more or less involved in promoting social interactions for your children than your parents were when you were growing up?

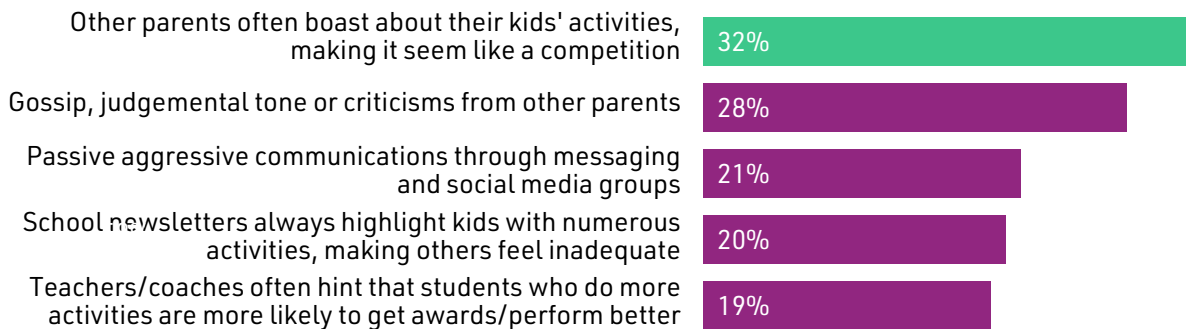


Almost 2 in 3 (64%) believe that they are more involved in their children's social interactions than their parents while almost 1 in 3 (30%) feel that it's about the same

\*Parents involved in promoting social interactions with their children (n= 2,976)

# Social pressures

**Have you observed any of the following pressure or even shaming occurring among other parents, teachers, schools or care providers?**

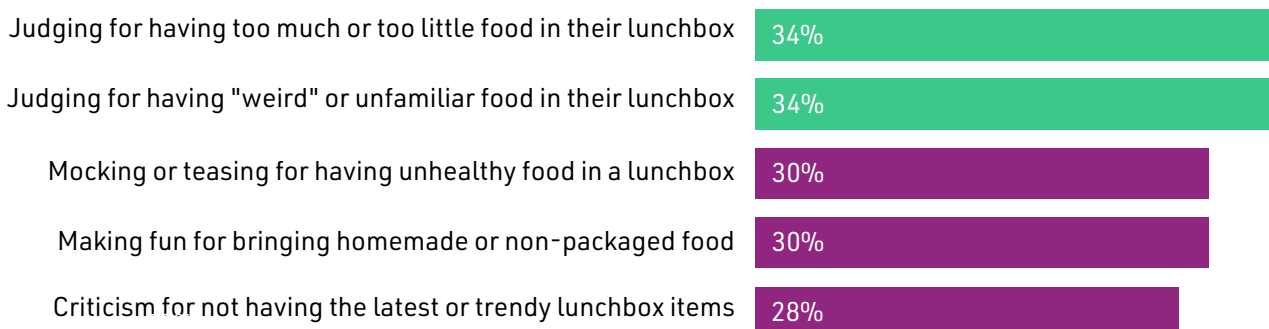


\*Multiple responses allowed. Top 5 responses only.

Just over 1 in 3 (35%) parents have not observed any pressure or shaming occurring. The most common forms include boasting about children's activities as a form of competition (32%), gossip and judgment from other parents (28%) and passive-aggressive communications (21%).

When it comes to food, 2 in 5 (42%) have experienced or witnessed lunchbox shaming at school from other parents, teachers, students, or other school community members.

**Which of the following lunchbox shaming incidents have you experienced or witnessed at school?**



\*Parents who have experienced or witnessed lunchbox shaming (n= 1,266). Multiple responses allowed. Top 5 responses only

Most common lunchbox shaming incidents include judging the amount of food (34%), judging for having 'weird' food (34%), and mocking unhealthy food in lunchboxes (30%).



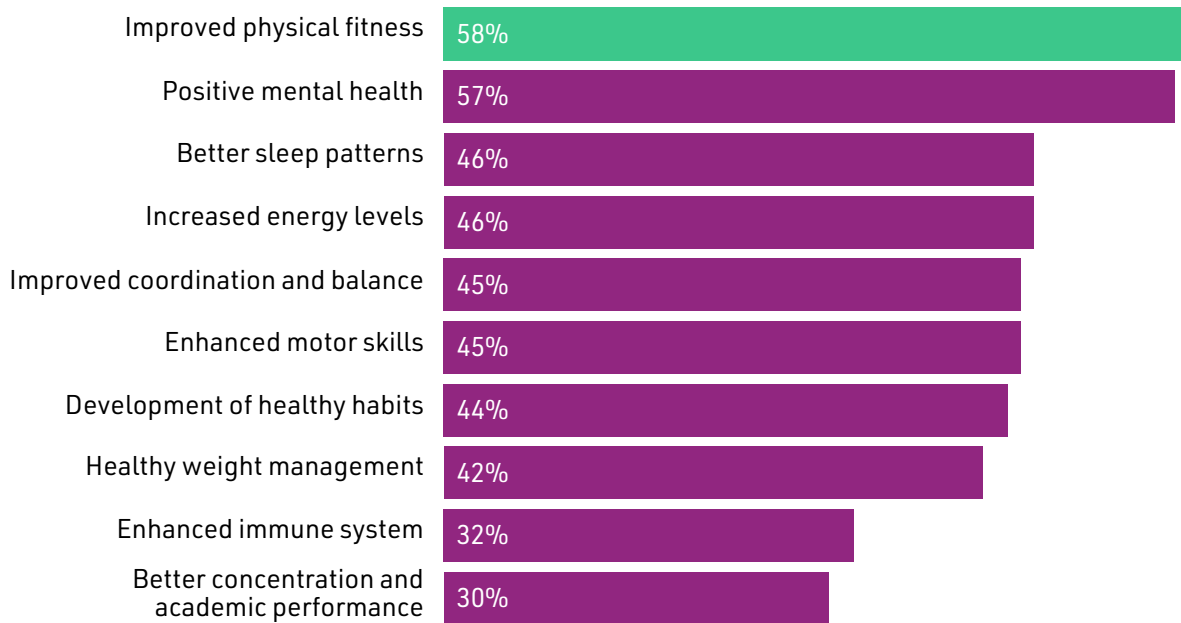


## Benefits and concerns



# Physical and mental benefits

## Does an active lifestyle influence your children's physical health and wellbeing?

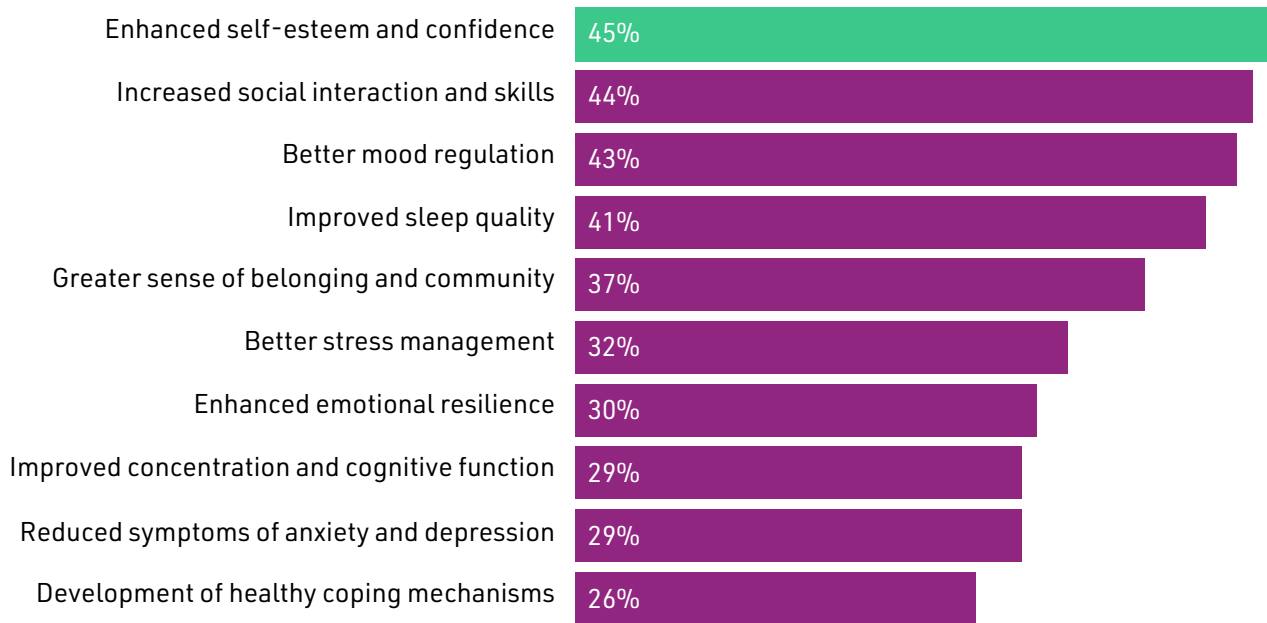


\*Multiple responses allowed.

Improved physical fitness is the top positive influence on physical health and wellbeing cited by close to 3 in 5 (58%) closely followed by positive mental health (57%). Better sleep patterns (46%), increased energy levels (46%), improved coordination and balance (45%), enhanced motor skills (45%), and the development of healthy habits (44%) are also seen as key outcomes of an active lifestyle.

# Physical and mental benefits

**Have you noticed any improvements in your children's mental health and emotional wellbeing due to engaging in an active lifestyle?**



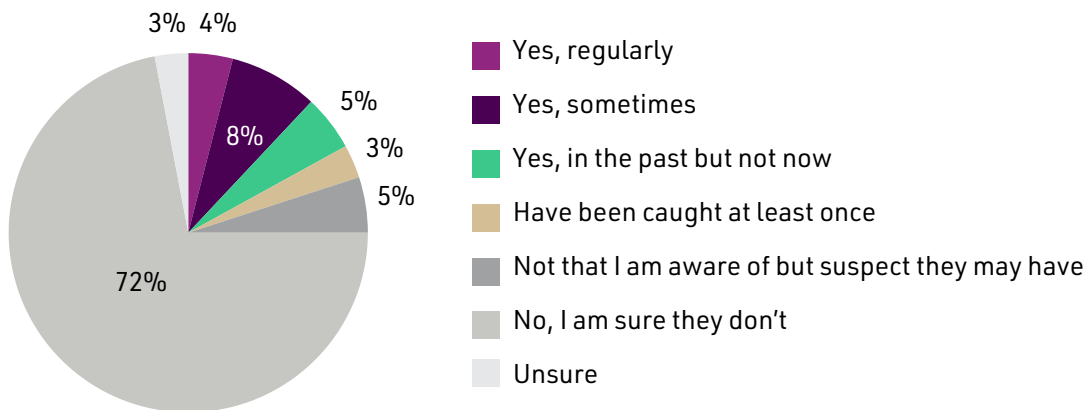
\*Multiple responses allowed.

Parents also report several mental and emotional benefits associated with an active lifestyle including enhanced self-esteem and confidence (45%), increased social interaction and skills (44%), and better mood regulation (43%) are among the top improvements observed. Improved sleep quality (41%) and a greater sense of belonging and community (37%) are further notable advantages.

While the value of sports in teaching teamwork and cooperation is almost unanimously agreed upon (96%) and the importance of sporting participation to teach kids about competition is recognised by 4 in 5 (81%), more than 3 in 5 (63%) agree that too much focus on competitive sports is making children stressed.

# Vaping concerns

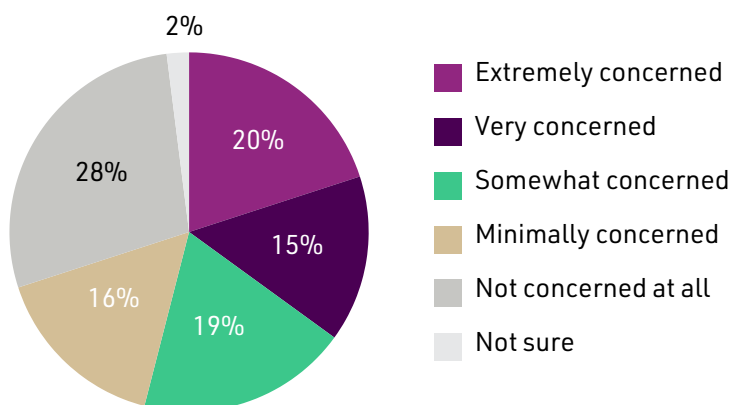
## Do any of your children between 6-18 years old 'vape'?



1 in 4 (25%) parents have caught their children vaping or suspect they may have. The average age at which children first try vaping is reported to be around 13 years old.

Over 1 in 10 (13%) say their children currently vape, with some having tried it in the past (5%) or been caught at least once (3%). A small percentage of parents suspect their children may have tried vaping (5%), while a majority are sure their children do not vape (72%).

## How concerned are you about the possibility of your child starting to vape?



More than half (54%) of parents of kids who haven't used a vape or are unsure if they have are concerned about the possibility of their child starting to vape, with a significant number being extremely (20%) or very concerned (15%).

\*Parents with children between 6-18 years old who don't use 'vape' OR unsure if they use 'vape' (n = 2,638).

# More research from Real Insurance coming soon...

## About Real Insurance

At Real Insurance we pride ourselves on providing trusted service and real value to our customers. Our passion for what we do has been recognised by 15 consecutive years of industry awards. We specialise in life, income, funeral, health, home, car, pet, travel and landlords insurance products. In the market since 2005, we have protected the quality of life of thousands of Australians, through the delivery of innovative products that protect the financial future of people across Australia.