Center for Health & Safety Culture

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2020 Montana Parent Survey Key Findings Report

Prepared for the

Montana State Department of Public Health and Human Services,

Addictive and Mental Disorders Division

June 25, 2021

Montana STATE UNIVERSITY

Recommended Citation:

Center for Health and Safety Culture. (2021). *2020 Montana Parent Survey Key Findings Report,* Bozeman, MT: Montana State University.

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Introduction

Healthy mental, emotional, and behavioral development is important for young people to lead meaningful, productive, and engaged lives. There are many strategies that can promote and strengthen healthy mental, emotional, and behavioral development. One powerful strategy is to grow social and emotional skills.[1]

Individuals can learn social and emotional skills at any age. Children can learn social and emotional skills from their parents and caregivers. Parents and those in a parenting role can grow social and emotional skills through intentional practice and reflection. ParentingMontana.org, an online resource for parents and those in a parenting role, includes numerous "tools" addressing common parenting issues (e.g., establishing routines, getting homework done, building confidence) that use a five-step process designed to grow the social and emotional skills of parents and children.

The purpose of this survey was to continue the development of a tool to assess the social and emotional skills of parents. Social and emotional skills include understanding and managing oneself, relating to others, and making responsible choices based on self and others. This survey explored the use of questions specifically designed to assess social and emotional skills in the context of parenting. The skills were grouped into five competencies following a framework developed by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL, www.casel.org):

- Parenting Self-Awareness
- Parenting Self-Management
- Parenting Social Awareness
- Parenting Relationship/Social Skills
- Parenting Responsible Decision Making

The survey asked parents a series of questions to assess their parenting social and emotional skills. It also used a standardized instrument to assess their overall emotional intelligence[2] and included questions about child flourishing (for children ages 6 to 17 years),[3] school engagement,[4] and family resilience.[5]

The survey also asked respondents how much they agreed or disagreed with four beliefs about parenting:

- "Older adults have knowledge and wisdom gained through experience that can benefit me as a parent."
- "People with children older than mine can have ideas about parenting that are valuable."
- "I am always learning how to be the parent I want to be."

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[1] National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. (2019). *Fostering Healthy Mental, Emotional, and Behavioral Development in Children and Youth: A National Agenda*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. https://dio.org/10.17226/25201

[2] The Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale (WLEIS). See Law, K. S., Wong, C.-S., & Song, L. J. (2004). The construct and criterion validity of emotional intelligence and its potential utility for management studies. *The Journal of Applied Psychology*, 89(3), 483–496.

[3] See the National Survey of Children's Health (2018) at https://www.childhealthdata.org/learn-about-the-nsch/NSCH.

[4] School engagement was assessed asking respondents how much they agreed with two statements: "My child cares about doing well in school" and "My child does all their required homework."

[5] Bethell, C. D., Gombojav, N., & Whitaker, R. C. (2019). Family Resilience and Connection Promote Flourishing Among US Children, Even Amid Adversity. *Health Affairs (Project Hope)*, 38(5), 729–737.

- "I can learn new ways of parenting regardless of my age."

Survey Methodology

The Center for Health and Safety Culture pilot tested a version of the survey using an internet convenience sample before administering the final version. The final version used a sample of adults living in Montana recruited online by Qualtrics between September 29 and October 30, 2020. The final sample included 326 respondents: 56.4% were female; ages ranged from 18 to 80 years (mean 42.3 years, standard deviation 14.2 years), 3.7% were Spanish, Hispanic or Latino; 92% were white; 4.9% were American Indian or Alaska Native; and most had a high school degree or more education (26.1% high school only; 21.8% some college; 13.2% Associate's degree; 19.3% Bachelor's degree; and 15.6% post-graduate degree).

Most of the respondents had one or more children (82.2%): 27.0% had a child birth to age 5; 32.2% had a child age 6 to 11; 21.2% had a child age 12 to 18; 5.5% had a child age 19 to 20; and 34.4% had a child age 21 or older.

Several items were used to assess each of the five parenting social and emotional competencies. These items showed strong internal reliability (as assessed by Cronbach's alpha which ranged from .83 to .87). The overall parenting social and emotional skills scale correlated with the standardized emotional intelligence scale ($r = .53$, $p < .001$) and with the family resilience scale ($r = .62$, $p < .001$).

Because the respondents were recruited online and not randomly selected, these results cannot be generalized to all parents or adults in Montana. Nonetheless, the results do provide important insights about the beliefs of parents and the relationship between their parenting social and emotional skills and important indicators such as family resilience, child flourishing, and child engagement in school.

Parenting Social and Emotional Competencies

Table 1 shows the distribution of five social and emotional competencies of respondents who indicated they had children (n= 267).
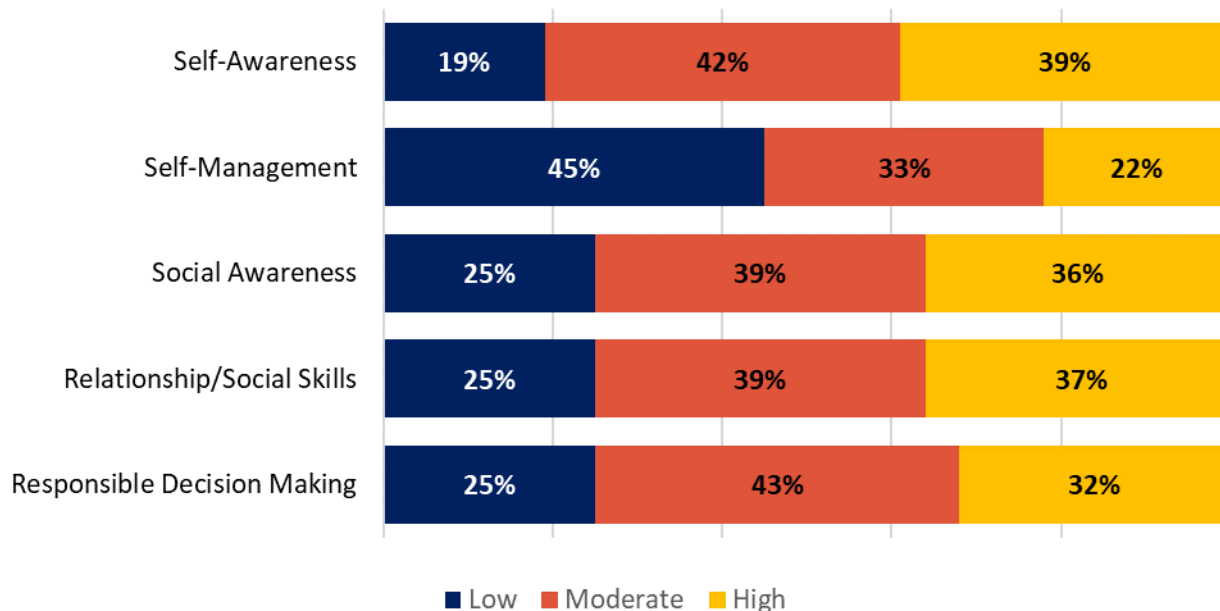

Competency	Low	Moderate	High
Self-Awareness	19%	42%	39%
Self-Management	45%	33%	22%
Social Awareness	25%	39%	36%
Relationship/Social Skills	25%	39%	37%
Responsible Decision Making	25%	43%	32%

■ Low ■ Moderate ■ High

Figure 1. Parenting Social and Emotional Competencies

Observations

- Many respondents revealed strength in self-awareness, social awareness, and relationship/social skills.

- However, many indicated lower levels of competency in self-management.

- Overall, many respondents have room to improve their parenting social and emotional skills.

- Parenting social and emotional competencies were correlated with family resilience (r= .62, p< .001). As parenting social and emotional competencies increased, family resilience increased.

- Parents with high social and emotional competencies reported high levels of family resilience six times more often than parents reporting low social and emotional competencies.

- Parenting social and emotional competencies were somewhat correlated with child flourishing (r= .34, p< .001) and school engagement (r= .33, p< .001). As parenting social and emotional competencies increased, indicators of flourishing and school engagement among their children increased (as reported by the parent).

Parenting Social and Emotional Competency: Self-Awareness

Self-awareness skills include the abilities to accurately recognize one's own emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence behavior; the ability to accurately assess one's strengths and limitations with a well-grounded sense of confidence and optimism; and having a growth mindset.
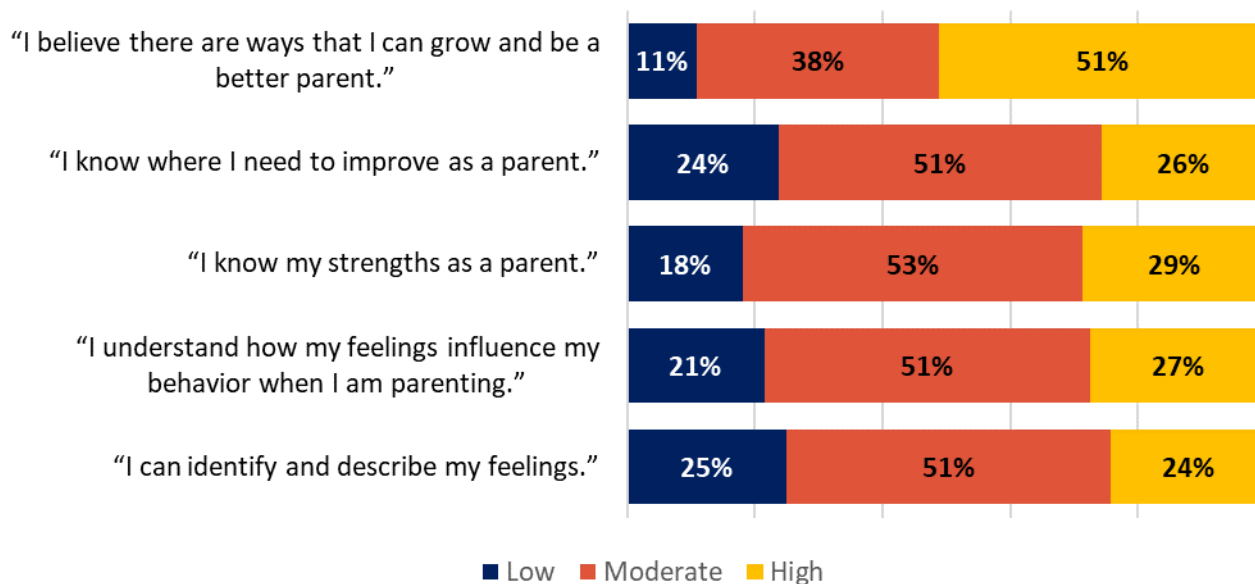

Statement	Low	Moderate	High
"I believe there are ways that I can grow and be a better parent."	11%	38%	51%
"I know where I need to improve as a parent."	24%	51%	26%
"I know my strengths as a parent."	18%	53%	29%
"I understand how my feelings influence my behavior when I am parenting."	21%	51%	27%
"I can identify and describe my feelings."	25%	51%	24%

■ Low ■ Moderate ■ High

Figure 2. Parenting Self-Awareness Skills

Observations

- Many respondents revealed a growth mindset recognizing that they can improve their parenting skills.

- However, fewer indicated they knew where they needed to improve.

- Overall, many respondents have room to improve their parenting self-awareness skills.

- Parenting self-awareness skills were correlated with family resilience (r= .52, p< .001). As parenting self-awareness skills increased, family resilience increased.

- Parenting self-awareness skills were somewhat correlated with child flourishing (r= .27, p< .001) and school engagement (r= .30, p< .001). As parenting self-awareness skills increased, indicators of flourishing and school engagement among their children increased (as reported by the parent).

Parenting Social and Emotional Competency: Self-Management

Self-management skills include the abilities to successfully regulate one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors in different situations — effectively managing stress, controlling impulses, and motivating oneself – and the ability to set and work toward personal goals.
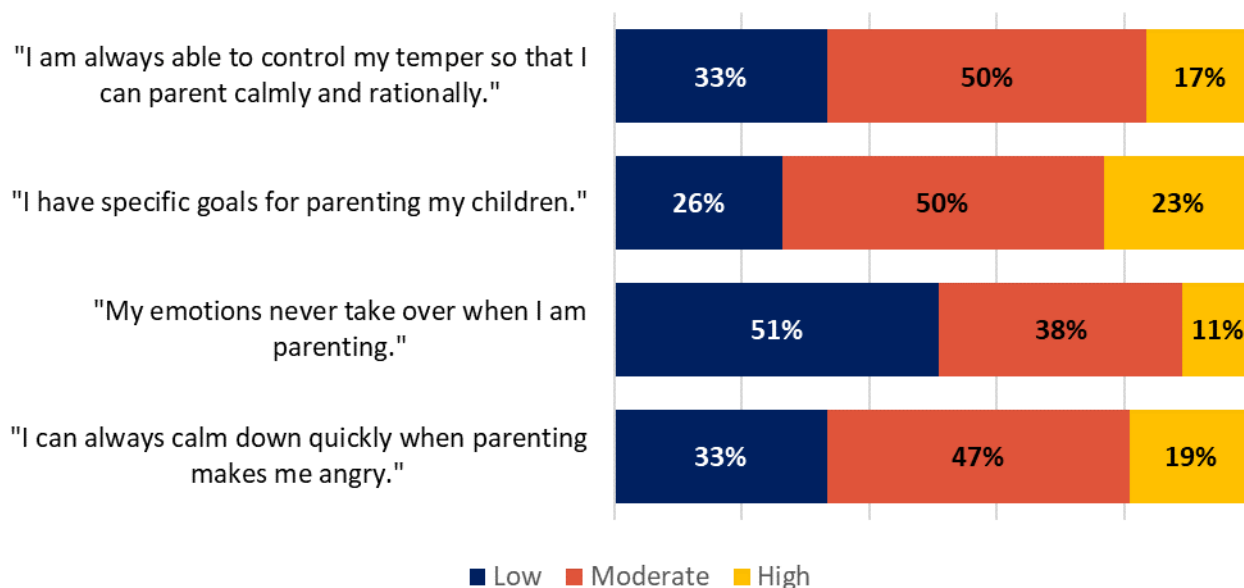

Figure showing horizontal stacked bar chart:

- "I am always able to control my temper so that I can parent calmly and rationally." — Low 33%, Moderate 50%, High 17%
- "I have specific goals for parenting my children." — Low 26%, Moderate 50%, High 23%
- "My emotions never take over when I am parenting." — Low 51%, Moderate 38%, High 11%
- "I can always calm down quickly when parenting makes me angry." — Low 33%, Moderate 47%, High 19%

Legend: ■ Low ■ Moderate ■ High

Figure 3. Parenting Self-Management Skills

Observations

- Many respondents indicated they had specific goals for their parenting.

- However, half of the respondents indicated opportunities to improve on managing their emotions when parenting.

- On average, parenting self-management skills were the lowest of the five competencies.

- Parenting self-management skills were correlated with family resilience (r= .51, p< .001). As parenting self-management skills increased, family resilience increased.

- Parenting self-management skills were somewhat correlated with child flourishing (r= .29, p< .001) and school engagement (r= .24, p< .001). As parenting self-management skills increased, indicators of flourishing and school engagement among their children increased (as reported by the parent).

Parenting Social and Emotional Competency: Social Awareness

Social awareness skills include the abilities to take the perspective of and empathize with others (including those from diverse backgrounds and cultures), the ability to understand social and ethical norms for behavior, and to recognize family, school, and community resources and supports.
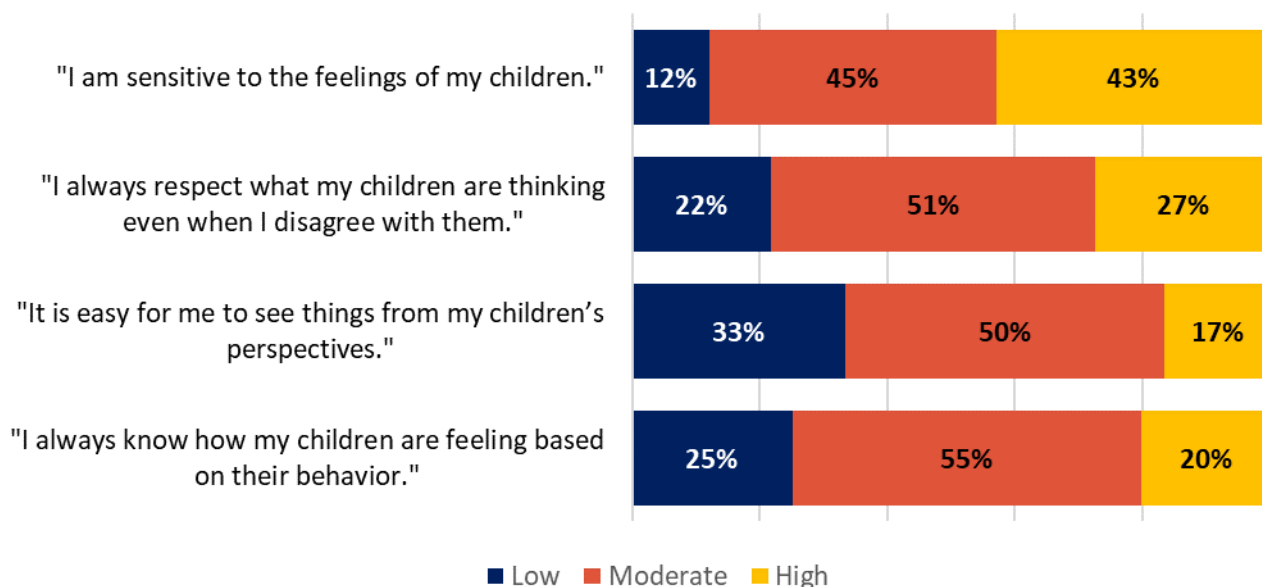

Figure showing responses with Low (dark blue), Moderate (red), High (yellow):

- "I am sensitive to the feelings of my children." — Low 12%, Moderate 45%, High 43%
- "I always respect what my children are thinking even when I disagree with them." — Low 22%, Moderate 51%, High 27%
- "It is easy for me to see things from my children's perspectives." — Low 33%, Moderate 50%, High 17%
- "I always know how my children are feeling based on their behavior." — Low 25%, Moderate 55%, High 20%

Legend: ■ Low ■ Moderate ■ High

Figure 4. Parenting Social Awareness Skills

Observations

- Many respondents indicated they were sensitive to the feelings of their children.

- However, many respondents indicated it was not always easy to see things from their child's perspectives.

- Overall, many respondents have room to improve their parenting social awareness skills.

- Parenting social awareness skills were correlated with family resilience (r= .54, p< .001). As parenting social awareness skills increased, family resilience increased.

- Parenting social awareness skills were somewhat correlated with child flourishing (r= .32, p< .001) and school engagement (r= .31, p< .001). As parenting social awareness skills increased, indicators of flourishing and school engagement among their children increased (as reported by the parent).

Parenting Social and Emotional Competency: Relationship/Social Skills

Parenting relationship/social skills include the abilities to establish and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships with one's children and the abilities to communicate clearly, listen well, cooperate with others, resist inappropriate social pressure, negotiate conflict constructively, and seek and offer help when needed.
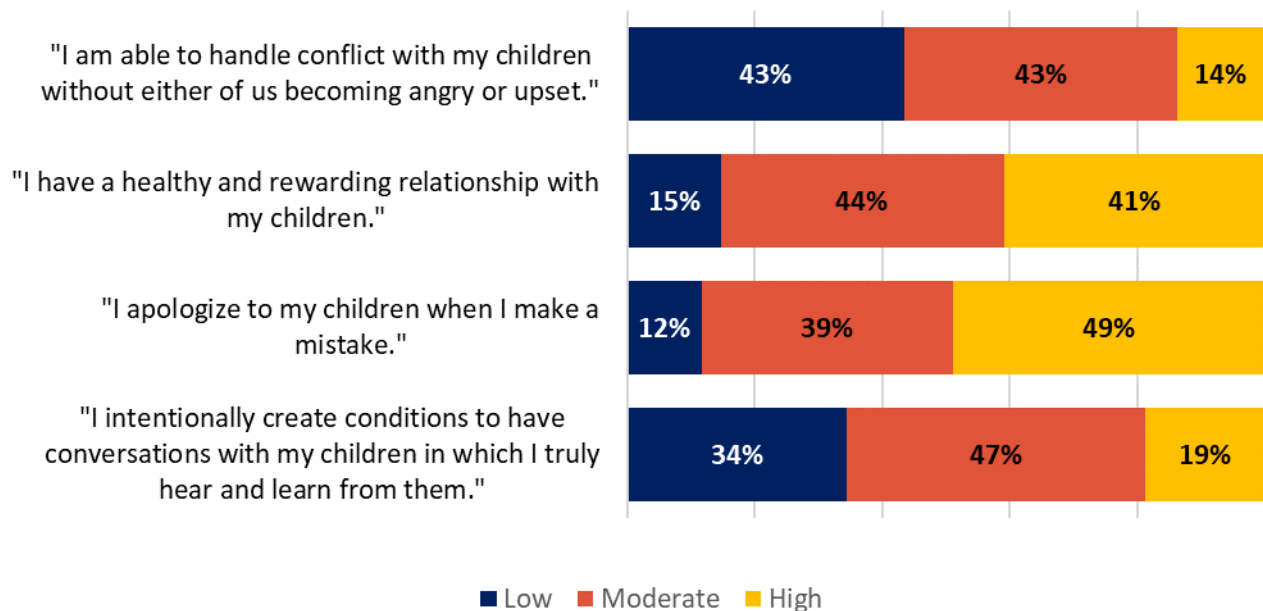

"I am able to handle conflict with my children without either of us becoming angry or upset." — Low 43%, Moderate 43%, High 14%

"I have a healthy and rewarding relationship with my children." — Low 15%, Moderate 44%, High 41%

"I apologize to my children when I make a mistake." — Low 12%, Moderate 39%, High 49%

"I intentionally create conditions to have conversations with my children in which I truly hear and learn from them." — Low 34%, Moderate 47%, High 19%

■ Low ■ Moderate ■ High

Figure 5. Parenting Relationship/Social Skills

Observations

- Many respondents indicated they apologize to their children when they make a mistake.

- However, many respondents indicated they were not always able to handle conflict with their children without either themselves or their children becoming angry or upset.

- Overall, many respondents have room to improve their parenting relationship/social skills.

- Parenting relationship/social skills were correlated with family resilience (r= .59, p< .001). As parenting relationship/social skills increased, family resilience increased.

- Parenting relationship/social skills were somewhat correlated with child flourishing (r= .35, p< .001) and school engagement (r= .30, p< .001). As parenting relationship/social skills increased, indicators of flourishing and school engagement among their children increased (as reported by the parent).

Parenting Social and Emotional Competency: Responsible Decision-Making

Parenting responsible decision-making skills include the abilities to make constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions based on ethical standards, safety concerns, and social norms and the ability to realistically evaluate the consequences of various actions and consider the well-being of oneself and one's children.
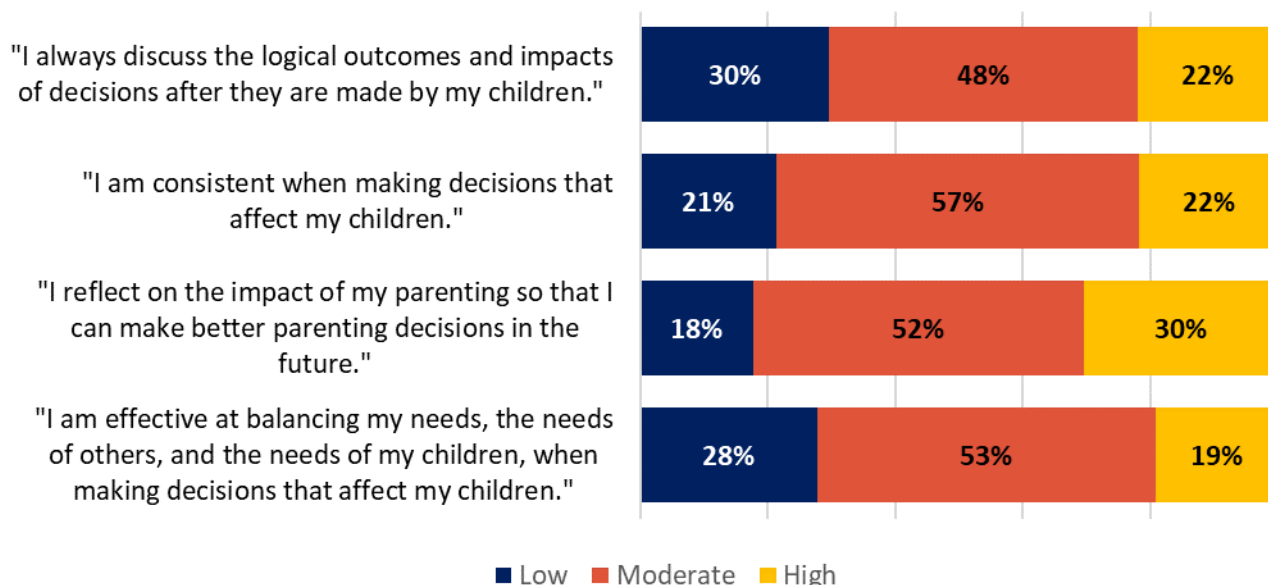

Statement	Low	Moderate	High
"I always discuss the logical outcomes and impacts of decisions after they are made by my children."	30%	48%	22%
"I am consistent when making decisions that affect my children."	21%	57%	22%
"I reflect on the impact of my parenting so that I can make better parenting decisions in the future."	18%	52%	30%
"I am effective at balancing my needs, the needs of others, and the needs of my children, when making decisions that affect my children."	28%	53%	19%

■ Low ■ Moderate ■ High

Figure 6. Parenting Responsible Decision-Making Skills

Observations

- Many respondents indicated they reflect on the impact of the parenting in order to improve.

- However, many respondents indicated they do not always discuss the outcomes and impacts of their child's decisions.

- Overall, many respondents have room to improve their parenting decision-making skills.

- Parenting decision-making skills were correlated with family resilience (r= .53, p< .001). As parenting decision-making skills increased, family resilience increased.

- Parenting decision-making skills were somewhat correlated with child flourishing (r= .31, p< .001) and school engagement (r= .32, p< .001). As parenting decision-making skills increased, indicators of flourishing and school engagement among their children increased (as reported by the parent).

Parenting Beliefs

Respondents were asked how much they agreed with four statements about parenting. The results shown in Table 1 include respondents who indicated they had a child (of any age including over the age of 18).

Table 1. Level of Agreement With Four Statements About Parenting

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree
"Older adults have knowledge and wisdom gained through experience that can benefit me as a parent."	8%	7%	84%
"People with children older than mine can have ideas about parenting that are valuable."	7%	12%	81%
"I am always learning how to be the parent I want to be."	5%	9%	85%
"I can learn new ways of parenting regardless of my age."	6%	3%	91%

Observations

- Most respondents agreed that older adults and parents with older children may have valuable knowledge about parenting. Older adults may have developed stronger social and emotional competencies and may be able to help younger parents develop similar skills.

- Most respondents also indicated a growth mindset about parenting as they indicated an openness to learning about parenting. This openness indicates a potential willingness to develop their own social and emotional skills.

Conclusion

A survey was developed and implemented to assess the social and emotional competencies of parents. Each of the five measures used to assess the five parenting social and emotional competencies showed strong internal reliability (as assessed by Cronbach's alpha which ranged from .83 to .87). The overall parenting social and emotional skills scale correlated with a standardized emotional intelligence scale (r= .53, p< .001). Some important results include:

- Many respondents revealed strength in self-awareness, social awareness, and relationship/social skills. However, many indicated lower levels of competency in self-management.

- Parenting social and emotional competencies were correlated with family resilience (r= .62, p< .001). As parenting social and emotional competencies increased, family resilience increased. Parents with high social and emotional competencies reported high levels of family resilience six times more often than parents reporting low social and emotional competencies.

- Most respondents agreed that older adults and parents with older children may have valuable knowledge about parenting and may be able to help younger parents develop their social and emotional competencies.

- Most respondents also indicated a growth mindset about parenting which may include a willingness to develop their own social and emotional skills.

Efforts to grow the social and emotional competencies of parents may increase family resilience and support the healthy development of children. ParentingMontana.org includes tools and resources to grow the social and emotional competencies of parents. While these tools and resources address all five competencies, it may be beneficial to bolster efforts to improve self-management as this was the weakest competency among this sample of parents.

Because the respondents were recruited online and not randomly selected, these results cannot be generalized to all parents or adults in Montana. Nonetheless, the results do provide important insights about the beliefs of parents and the relationship between their parenting social and emotional skills and important indicators such as family resilience, child flourishing, and child engagement in school.

Conversation Guide

Engaging in constructive dialogue about these results has the potential to improve outcomes in your community by revealing new understanding and opportunities.

Getting Ready for Constructive Dialogue[6]

Otto Scharmer, in his research on organizational and community change, has recognized the importance of preparing ourselves to learn from new information. He calls this "Quieting the Voices." He has noted three voices that can inhibit us from learning and engaging in constructive dialogue: the voice of judgement, the voice of cynicism, and the voice of fear. We encourage you to intentionally

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[6] Scharmer, C. O. (2009). *Theory U: Leading from the Future as It Emerges* (1st edition). San Francisco, Calif: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.

reflect on how you respond to the results shared in this report and how these voices may be getting in the way of you seeing and learning new information.

We encourage you to acknowledge these voices and try to "quiet" them as you engage in dialogue about these results.

Questions to Foster Constructive Dialogue[7]

Questions to Reveal Deeper Insights
- What surprised you?
- What challenged you?
- What encouraged you?
- What has had real meaning for you from what you have seen in the data?
- What has been your major learning, insight, or discovery so far from these data?

Questions to Focus Collective Attention
- How do these results challenge our current approaches?
- What opportunities can you see that the data are revealing?

Questions to Create Forward Movement
- What is possible here?
- What will it take to create change?
- What needs our immediate attention going forward?
- What do we still need to learn about this issue?

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[7] Adapted from Brown, J., Isaacs, D., Community, W. C., Senge, P., & Wheatley, M. J. (2005). *The World Café: Shaping Our Futures Through Conversations That Matter* (1 edition). San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.