

PLANT YNG NGHYMRU
CHILDREN IN WALES

Annual Child and Family Poverty Surveys 2024 Parents/Carers: Findings Report

Fatiha Ali, Anna Westall | October 2024



In partnership with



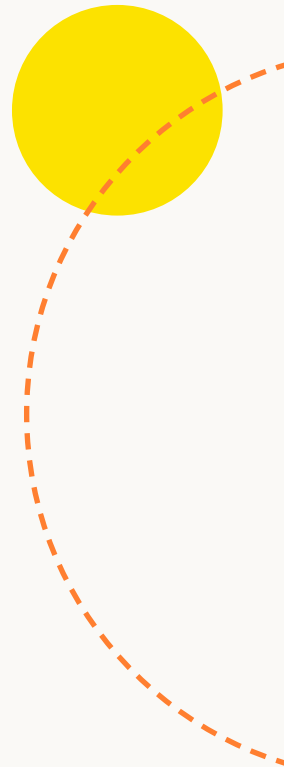
END CHILD POVERTY NETWORK CYMRU
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Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the ECPN steering group members and Parents Connect Wales for their collaboration and support.

Children in Wales would like to sincerely thank all of the parents, carers, children, young people, practitioners and professionals who participated in the survey. Without them our surveys and this report would not be possible. Thank you.

In memory of Karen McFarlane, who authored the reports from 2021-2024.



The quotes used in this report are those kindly provided by the survey respondents.

This report is funded by Welsh Government. The views expressed in this report are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of the funder.

The views in this report are those of respondents to the questions in the survey and do not necessarily represent the views of Children in Wales.

This report is a separate, smaller report that covers the findings from the parents'/ carers' surveys. There are separate reports and these are all available on the [Children in Wales website](#):

Practitioners and Professionals: Findings report

Infographic summaries

Children and Young People's Version of their findings

Children and Young People: Findings report

In addition, the 'Children in Wales Annual Child & Family Poverty Survey 2024' is the main publication of all of the findings. This can be found [here](#):

Contact details: parents.connect@childreninwales.org.uk

About Children in Wales



Our Vision: Building a Wales where all children and young people have all their rights fulfilled.

We are the national umbrella body for organisations and individuals who work with children, young people and their families in Wales. We work closely with Welsh Government and others in Wales to ensure that children's rights are at the forefront of policy and decision making.

To do this we focus on ensuring that children and young people in Wales have a voice, we fight for sustainable and equitable services, advocate for policy changes in Wales and connect and represent the work being undertaken by our membership.

Our membership includes individuals and organisations from the voluntary, statutory and professional sectors. We also work directly with children and young people on a number of different projects and have a dedicated membership for our young audience.

To find out more about our work or to become a member of Children in Wales, contact membership@childreninwales.org.uk

About Parents Connect Wales



Parents Connect Wales (PCW) is a project led by Children in Wales and funded by Welsh Government. It is aimed at empowering the voices of parents/ carers to promote children's rights.

Parents Connect Wales has established:-

- A professionals' forum with 110 members to date
- A parent advisory group with 6 parent representatives
- 22 local representatives, one in each of the local authorities in Wales
- An online platform called the 'Parents Connect Wales' Online Hub

To find out more about the Parents Connect Wales project, then please visit the [online hub](#) or contact parentsconnect@childreninwales.org.uk

NB When we refer to 'parents' we use this as an inclusive term that includes parents (both mothers and fathers), carers, grandparents, foster parents, adoptive parents or anyone with parental responsibility.

About End Child Poverty Network Cymru



The End Child Poverty Network (ECPN) Cymru is a coalition of organisations focused on the eradication of child poverty in Wales, co-ordinated and managed on a day-to-day basis by Children in Wales.

Its Steering Group includes representation from across the voluntary and statutory sectors, and the wider network has over 1200 supporting members from a broad cross-section of agencies.

If you would like to join the wider End Child Poverty Network Cymru, please visit the [website](#) or contact info@childreninwales.org.uk

Children's Rights and Poverty

Poverty contravenes a number of Articles laid out in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

The UNCRC is an international agreement setting out the rights of children and young people up to the age of 18 years. It is based on three principles: **participation, protection and provision.**

In 2011, the **UNCRC** became enshrined in Welsh law through the Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure 2011. This Measure places a duty on Welsh Ministers to have a due regard to the UNCRC when developing or reviewing legislation and policy.

Poverty denies children and young people many of their rights:

- Their rights to develop their full potential (Article 6)
- Their rights to the best possible health and nutritious food (Article 24)
- Their rights to benefit from social security (Article 26)
- Their rights to an adequate standard of living that meets and supports their needs (Article 27)
- Their rights to an education and on the basis of equal opportunity (Article 28)
- Their rights to play and leisure opportunities (Article 31)

The **Social Services and Well-being Act 2014** places a similar due regard duty on named public bodies, including local authorities and health boards, to the UNCRC when discharging their functions regionally and locally.

In March 2021, the **Socio-economic Duty** came into force in Wales. This duty means that specific public bodies must consider how their strategic decisions can improve inequality of outcome for people who experience socio-economic disadvantage.

In January 2024, Welsh Government published their updated [Child Poverty Strategy](#) to help prevent and mitigate child poverty.

Parents/ Carers and Children's Rights

The UNCRC mentions the words 'parents' and 'families' more than 'children' and recognises that children's rights are protected first within families.

The following articles recognise the crucial role of parents and families in protecting and caring for children:-

- Their right to have their best interests considered in all decisions that affect them (Article 3)
- Their right for the role of their parents/ carers to be recognised and respected so that children can access all their rights (Article 5)
- Their right to be brought up by both parents if possible (Article 18)

Poverty can deny parents/ carers' the ability to fulfil their children's rights and ensure that they are being met.

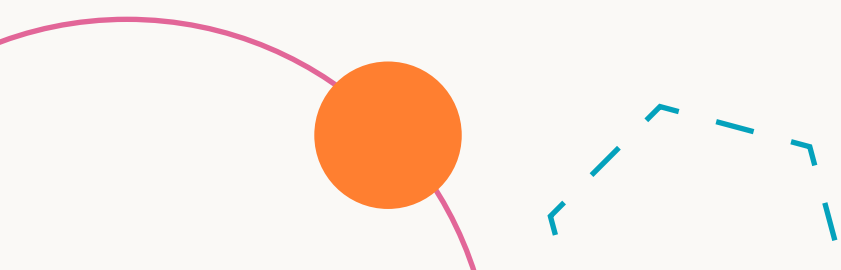
You can find out more about how parents can support children's rights here;-

[UNCRC_Understanding_Childrens_Rights.pdf \(childreninwales.org.uk\)](https://www.childreninwales.org.uk/uncrc-understanding-childrens-rights.pdf)

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Introduction

This is the first year that we have had a separate parents' survey, giving us the opportunity to hear directly from parents and carers. When we refer to 'parents' we use this as an inclusive term that includes parents (both mothers and fathers), carers, grandparents, foster parents, adoptive parents or anyone with parental responsibility.

There was a huge response with 522 parents completing our survey. Parents really took the opportunity to share their personal insights which were varied, detailed and heartfelt.

This reflects the importance of the topic to parents as they had a lot to say about it. Their direct insight, views and lived experience are vital. They illustrate the realities of the impact of poverty and the challenges that are faced by families.

“It's hard, it's a disgrace, its soul destroying, heartbreaking, kids shouldn't be going hungry, kids are suffering unnecessarily, everyone struggling one way or another.”

The responses focused on the impact of poverty and the cost of living, recognising that it can have a profound impact on both parent and children's physical, emotional and mental health. Many parents felt like their children experienced a lack of opportunities, lower aspirations, bullying, low school attendance. They also felt that children were worrying on their behalf, which could result in anxiety.

“No child in the UK should be living in poverty. It's a disgrace.”

The impact is felt by the whole family, parents who are stressed and continually counting every penny, can feel anxious, worthless, useless and lead to a strain of family relationships and time. Going without your basic needs met can affect your happiness and self-worth.

“Every parent wants the best for their children and feel guilty when they can't even cover the basics.”

“I think it affects people's happiness and self worth. They say money doesn't buy happiness but having no money can bring misery.”

One parent sums it up:

“It is just very hard for us and our children.”

There was also a focus on how current systems are failing, with the postcode lottery of Flying Start support and reliance/dependence on benefits. There were so many working and low-income families reporting how they struggled with little or no financial support.

Parents share ideas about societal changes and smaller changes that could make a difference. There needs to be investment in children, more value placed on the family and the cost this involves. Everyone needs to work together to support and stop the devastating effects of poverty.

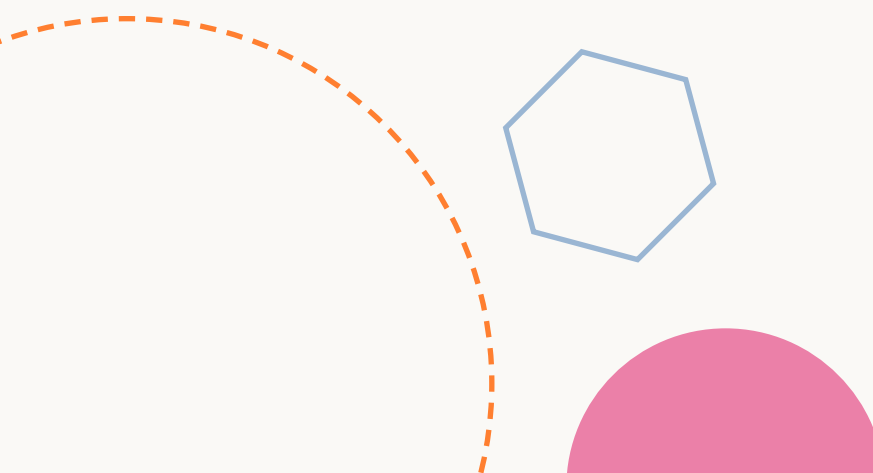
“They are our future and really are worth all our investment as a country.

Hope the government learn, grow and focus on the future generations to come.”

There were a range of other ideas and suggestions on what could support families these included: promotion of what support is available, encouragement and reliable support to help families break cycle without judgement, more support to get people in employment, cooking and budgeting lessons in schools, holiday childcare, holiday food vouchers and a need to just keep costs low and ease financial pressures.

The results of the parents’ survey alongside the professional and children and young people's views will allow us to identify key priorities that need to be addressed. We need to support families and work together to break these cycles of poverty by learning from and working with those directly affected.

Whatever our role, it is within all of our powers, right now, to mitigate the impact poverty has on babies, children and young people and parents. We all have the gift of increasing our own understanding, awareness and empathy, looking at our practices and internal policies and ensuring that those living in poverty, under very difficult and often debilitating circumstances, receive our respect and are treated with dignity and kindness.



About the survey

The survey sought to gain an insight into the experiences and observations of parents of children and young people in Wales. The survey ran for a period of 5 weeks from 30 April – 7 June 2024 and was completed online anonymously by respondents.

Respondents were asked to consider poverty related questions across several areas and included a combination of multiple-choice and open questions, enabling them to share their views and experiences.

The response rates to the online survey differed from question to question and where relevant, percentages have been included and presented for comparison, rather than numbers.



Who responded

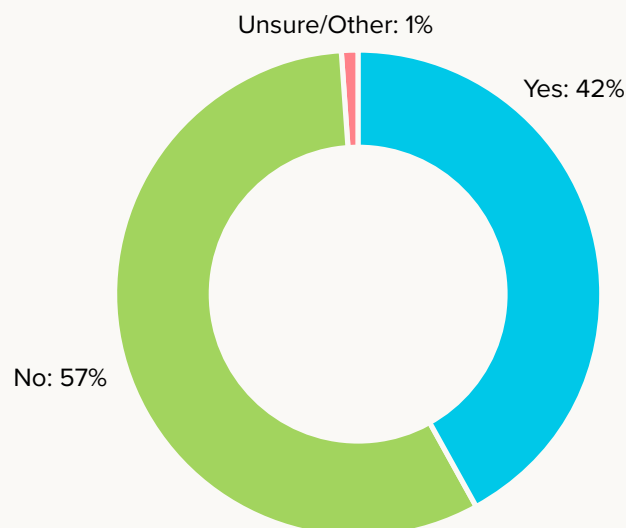
Parents and carers responded from **21 local authority** areas across Wales. A total of **522 responses** were received. All respondents had at least one or more children, up to a maximum of seven children living with them. The responses came from the parents' of **1084 children** in total.

Respondents were asked to identify the age ranges of the children that lived with them. It should be noted that some respondents had children from more than one age group living with them. There were roughly equal numbers of responses came from parents of children aged **0-5 years, 6-10 years** and **11-15 years**. This means a range of different aged children and experiences were included.

Age Ranges of Respondents' Children

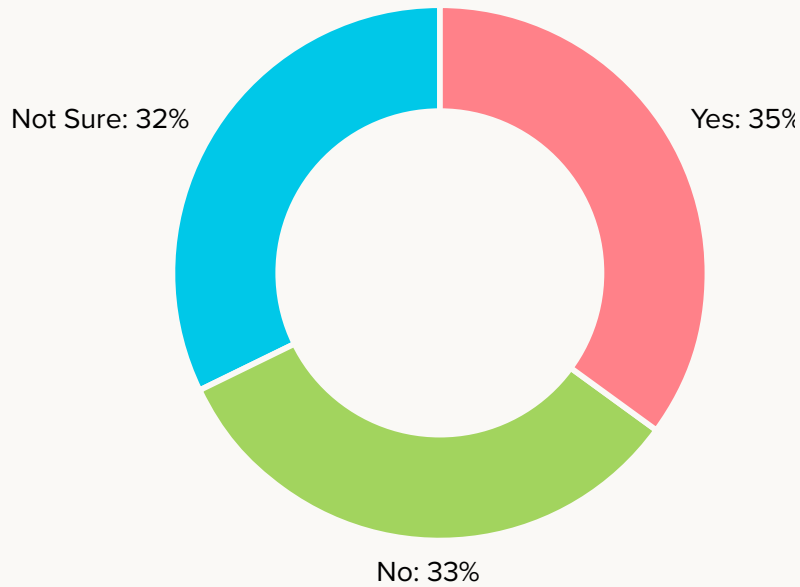


Do you receive Universal Credit or Tax Credit?



42% of the respondents said that they received Universal Credit or Tax Credit. This indicates household where parents are not in employment, or that they are a lower-income household.

Do you live in a Flying Start area?



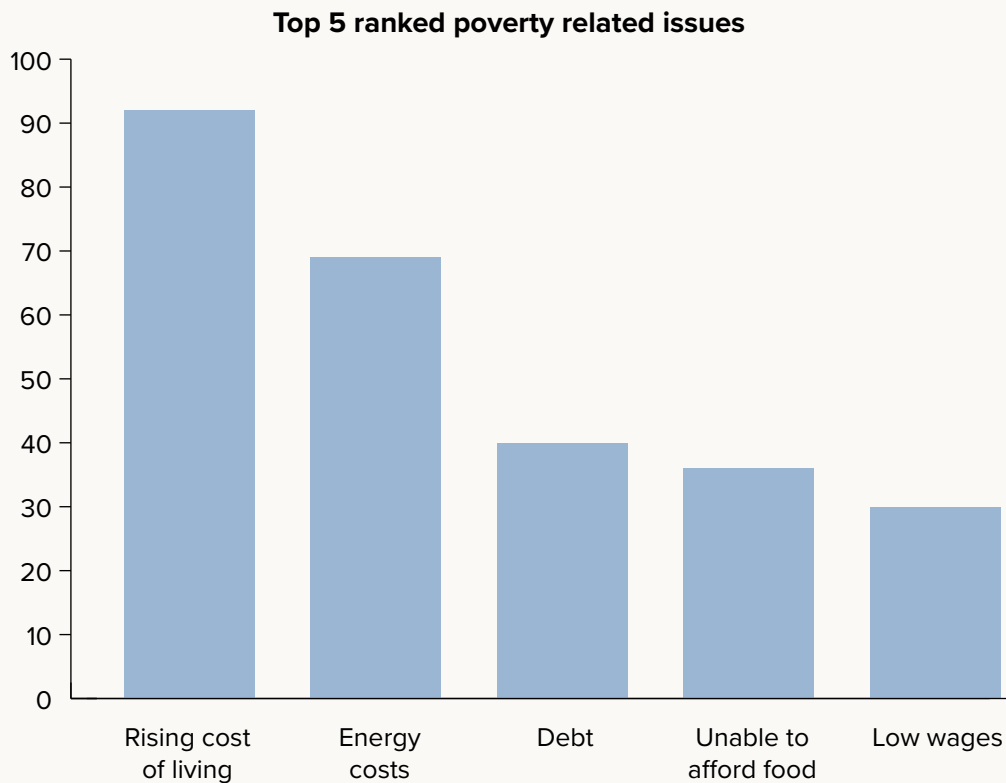
35% of parents said that they did live in a Flying Start area which means that they are entitled to support from the Flying Start scheme. Interestingly though, 32% of parents were not sure if they lived in a Flying Start area or not.



Top 5 poverty issues

“If children aren’t fed/clothed and don’t have decent sleep they can’t learn.... they are our future and really are worth all our investment as a country.”

Parents were asked what the top issues are facing families on low income. The following issues were rated as the top 5 and have been presented in order of ranking.



The majority of families, including working families, are struggling with increased costs in multiple areas. Many are barely surviving, and it is affecting their mental health and wellbeing.

“My husband works full time, I work part time and we still struggle.”

“I manage every single penny. It’s exhausting, it’s hard to remain positive and I feel guilty that my children missing out on opportunities because I can’t afford them.”

Families are having to make tough choices as they are often unable to meet their basic needs due to the rising cost of living. Parents are having to limit food options, not eat themselves, choose between heating and clothing or sacrifice other essentials.

“It’s a choice of roof over our head, food for electricity and gas.”

“Struggling to feed my child 3 meals plus snacks a day. I have to skip meals to feed my child.”

The rising cost of living is leading some families into debt and putting a huge strain on household finances.

“Rising costs make it difficult to budget properly; money going out often more than coming in so debt building up, or having to go without essentials.”

A lack of family time because of increased working hours closely followed in sixth place with 27% of respondents identifying this as a priority. Family time and leisure activities are limited to what is local and free and only if a parent can have time off work to take their children. Parents are working more and more hours, and family and bonding time is being adversely affected.

“Less disposable income to do nice things with the kids. less to look forward to.”

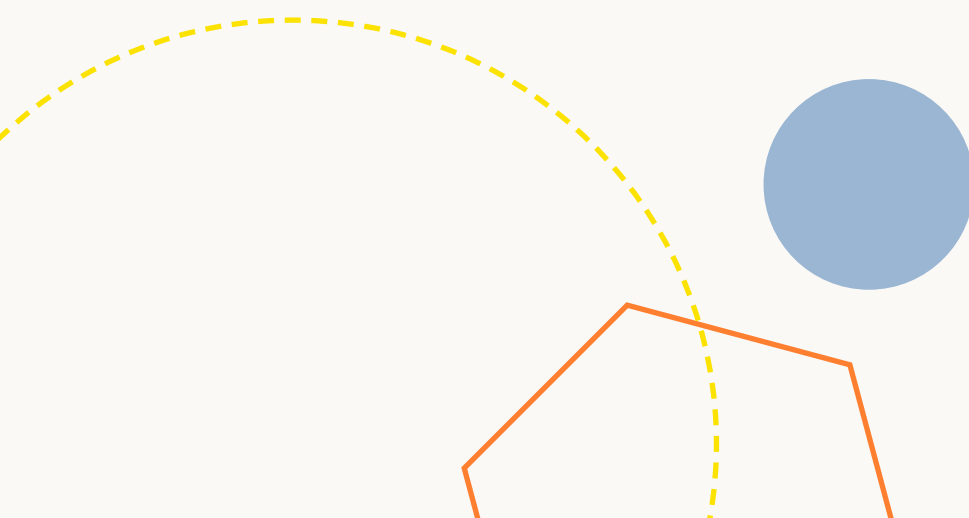
“We as a family work 100+ hours a week, quality time is limited.”

“With our busy schedules, there's little time for family bonding.”

Families are trying their best, but parents often feel like they are failing.

“We barely afford to get by. We can't afford to do anything nice as a family. If there is ever an unexpected expense, we have to bounce a bill to pay for it. This then results in us not affording anything. The children missing out and me constantly in a state of guilt, anxiety and worry.”

“Everything has doubled. There's no room for anything other than survival. This will affect wellbeing and thus the spiral starts.”





Findings

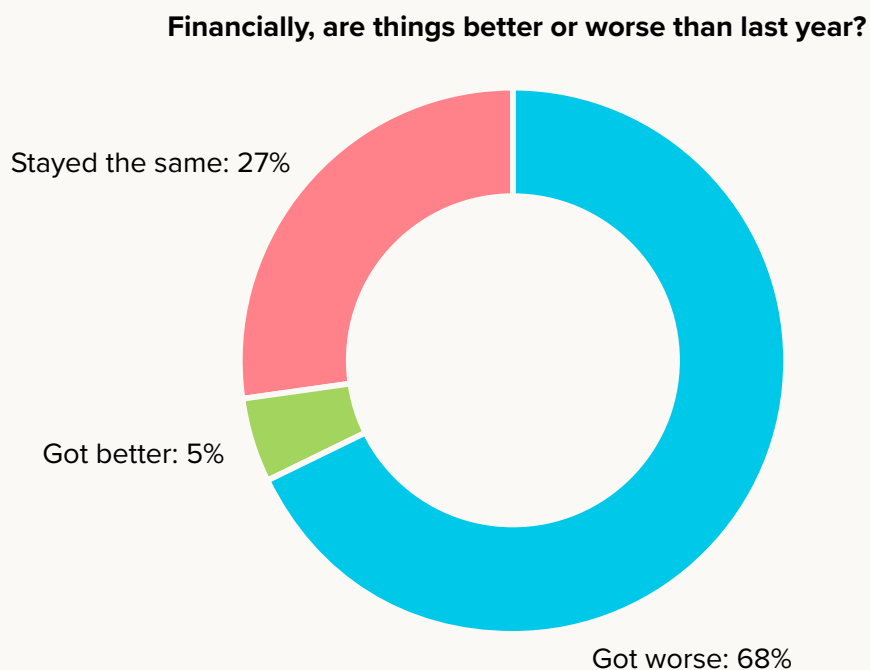
Findings

All **522 responses** were analysed by Parents Connect Wales and there were several key themes that emerged during the process. These key themes will now be outlined, discussed and illustrated using direct quotes from the parents themselves.

Day to day living

“When we get any money it all goes on bills, fuel and shopping. We can't afford to get new clothes, haircuts, footwear or days out. We can't even afford to go to the cinema.”

Parents were asked about their current financial situation and if it had improved or worsened compared to last year. **68%** of respondents said that their financial situation had worsened.



When asked to elaborate on their response, some key themes emerged about the financial challenges that parents are facing.

Meeting basic needs

25% said that they are struggling to afford necessities due to extortionate living costs. Many parents are unable to afford essentials like food, clothes, transport and utility bills. They are having to rely on food banks and also charity shops for clothes.

Parents are unable to heat their homes properly or keep up with housing costs. They cited high rental costs, increased mortgage rates and a lack of affordable or suitable housing as key reasons for this.

“Everything has doubled. There’s no room for anything other than survival.”

“Very little income left after paying bills and buying food. People must work more and sacrifice their quality family time just to make ends meet.”

28% of respondents said that they are experiencing financial stress. Parents reported difficulties with money and said they were being forced to dip into savings or work longer hours because of the strain on their household finances. They are also having to rely on extended family for support and get into debt to be able to afford living costs.



Rising costs and food insecurity

17% of parents said that the cost of food has made their financial situation worse this year. Parents report a dramatic rise in the price of food and said that they are struggling to manage the rising costs. In some cases, they cannot afford the food that they need.

“Rising food costs have really affected us, there is less food in the trolley.”

“The price of food in this country is disgusting.”

Skipping meals or opting for unhealthy, cheaper food options has become a common reality. In some cases, parents facing food insecurity have had to visit food banks. Often, they feel ashamed to do this but feel desperate and feel they have no choice.

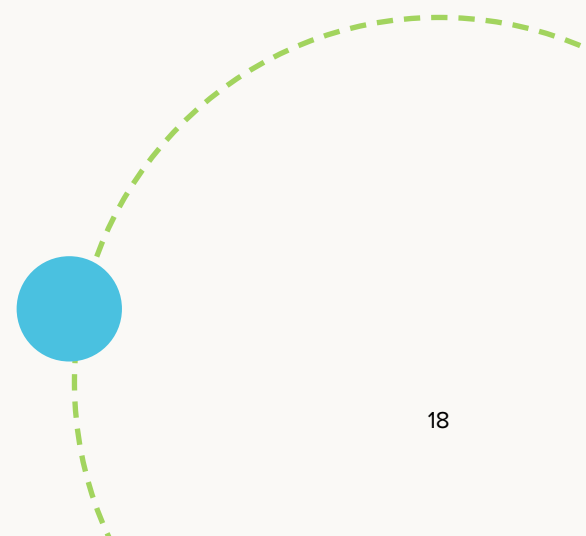
“I barely eat because I save all the food I buy for my child..... I cannot afford to live.”

“It's absolutely heartbreaking that there's children going hungry. I have gone hungry to feed my kids.”

The lack of adequate food and nutrition has adverse impacts on the whole family and there is also a decline in the quality of food that they are accessing. Parents are aware of the consequences of not being able to provide healthy, nutritious food and meals.

“If you can't eat, everything suffers, mental and physical health. The ability for children to achieve in school and the ability for parents to focus on their children.”

“Eating healthy is difficult, so we don't have... energy to give our children attention...our children are crankier without as much fresh fruit and veg.”



Inflation and the cost of living

“I manage every single penny. It’s exhausting, it’s hard to remain positive and I feel guilty that my children missing out on opportunities because I can’t afford them.”

Families are doing their best to manage, but **24%** of respondents said that rising inflation and stagnant incomes and benefits (such as Universal Credit) have made this difficult.

Even with slight wage increases, parents report being unable to improve their standard of living. The soaring cost of living is outpacing any pay rise or benefit increase that they might receive. In some cases, even with both parents working, the gap between income and rising costs means they are worse off than before.

“My wages stayed the same whereas cost of living is still going up so overall we are able to purchase less.”

“Even though we had a slight pay rise, it’s not seen as the cost of living keeps going up.”

Families often find themselves unable to afford anything beyond the basics and constantly living in fear of unexpected expenses. If inflation continues to rise, many families will remain trapped in a cycle of financial hardship with devastating effects for their children.



The Impact of Poverty

There were several key areas where parents reported poverty as having a clear and direct impact on their children and their family.

Family Life

“It's impossible to enjoy life when you're constantly stressed about making it to next month's pay.”

Throughout the survey, parents shared how financial pressures and worries are having a direct impact on family life, due to having less disposable income and less time.

Families reported having less disposable income to enjoy hobbies, activities, days out and holidays. Family time and leisure activities are limited to what is local and free, and only when a parent can have time off work.

“Less time and money available to do hobbies and things we enjoy.”

“Less disposable income to do nice things with the kids. Less to look forward to.”

Alongside this, parents are working more and more hours to get by, and opportunities for family bonding are being negatively affected.

“With our busy schedules, there's little time for family bonding.”

“We, as a family, work 100+ hours a week, quality time is limited.”

This is causing stress, worry and sometimes guilt for parents, as they feel like their children are missing out on basic activities or life experiences. In turn, they are concerned this is affecting their children's health and aspirations.

Overall, parents felt poverty diminished their children's social and educational opportunities, as well as their potential to achieve in life. Families are feeling like they are fighting a losing battle, and it is putting a strain on family relationships.

“It can cause a strain on relationships and family breakdowns.”

Families are trying their best, but they feel like the systems are failing them, and it is impacting their wellbeing.

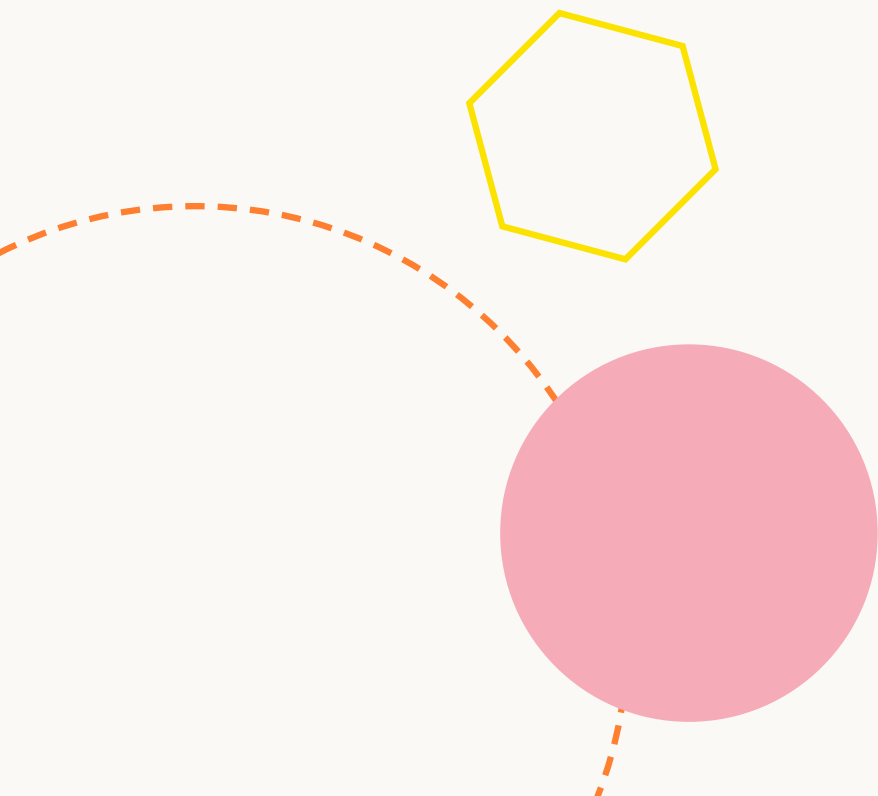
“We barely afford to get by. We can't afford to do nothing nice as a family. If there is ever an unexpected expense, we have to bounce a bill to pay for it.”

“Everything has doubled. There's no room for anything other than survival. This will affect wellbeing and thus the spiral starts.”

The impact is felt by the whole family as parents who are stressed and continually counting every penny can feel anxious which leads to strains on family relationships and time.

“I manage every single penny. It's exhausting, it's hard to remain positive and I feel guilty that my children are missing out on opportunities because I can't afford them.”

Parents did provide ideas and suggestions to support more family time. They recognised the importance of local and community-based services and the need to invest in these so families can enjoy free or low-cost days out. They wanted to see more places for families to meet and free trips and activities on offer for them to access.



Life as a Parent

“Parents are suffering in silence as you don't want people to know your struggling, you don't want your children to know your struggling. All this emotion is hidden away, and parents are losing sleep, not eating proper meals to make sure their children are getting what they need.”

Parental Identity and poverty

“I feel ashamed that I can't provide for my child as I would like to, I feel that I have failed my children.”

Child poverty deeply impacts parents' sense of identity, often leaving them with overwhelming shame, guilt and a sense of failure. Many parents felt inadequate, questioning their abilities as caregivers. Parents felt like they were failing their children, especially when they are unable to provide for their children's basic needs.

Children can be teased and treated badly if they don't have the items that their peers have. Parents put pressure on themselves to afford these items either through getting into debt or going without things themselves.

“It is very hard, being a parent....when you can't afford things, it makes you feel like a bad parent.”

Poverty stigma intensifies these feelings, leading parents to hide their struggles and avoid seeking help due to fear of judgment. Parents report feeling looked down upon for their financial situation and dismissed as "bad parents," rather than receiving the support they so desperately need. Low self-esteem becomes common as parents feel judged on their parenting abilities.

“I don't want to ask for help...it is a matter of pride.... people look down on us because we are not able to provide. It makes me feel like less of a mum.”

“Stop making us feel like bad parents because we can't supply everything that's expected.”

This lack of empathy and support traps them in a cycle of silence and emotional isolation, making it even harder to improve their circumstances. The stigma affects their sense of identity and also contributes to the ongoing struggle with poverty.

The hidden poverty of parents

Parents were asked about meeting the costs of children's educational needs. They revealed that they prioritise their children's needs, but this comes at a significant personal cost. **22%** of respondents said that they are making sacrifices to ensure that their children have necessities such as food, clothing, and educational resources.

Parents frequently put their children's needs above their own. They don't want their children to be bullied by their peers because of their financial circumstances.

They are skipping meals and going without necessities. In many cases, they turn to family members for support, asking for financial help. This can mean getting into debt to cover expenses, all to shield their children from their financial struggles.

“I frequently go without new clothes and shoes that are needed to ensure my children are dressed to “fit in” with their peers.”

“I find the money somehow even if it means having a basic meal instead of a full proper meal.”

The poverty of parents is often invisible. Their sacrifice is often hidden from view as children can present as not experiencing poverty. While the focus is on ensuring children don't suffer, these sacrifices can lead to long-term stress and anxiety for parents, further trapping them in a cycle of poverty and isolation.



Working Families

“Poverty isn't just hitting low-income families, working families who receive little financial support in terms of benefits are also struggling.”

In-Work Poverty

Throughout the survey, it was clear that many working families are struggling with the increased costs of living. Many are barely surviving, as in-work poverty becomes a reality for many families, even those with above minimum levels of income.

“Very little income left after paying bills and buying food. People have to work more and sacrifice their quality family time just to make ends meet.”

Despite working long hours, households struggle to make ends meet due to high childcare costs and low wages. They suffer from the double burden of being time poor due to work commitments and still experiencing financial struggles.

Benefits threshold and inadequate support

Some parents are impacted by benefits threshold, where they are just above the eligibility criteria to qualify for additional benefit support but still have a low income. Working parents feel it is unfair that they cannot access any financial support, despite struggling with rising living costs.

“I work full time, there's no help for working families... even though we are struggling too financially. There's no help at all but we pay full for everything.”

“It doesn't just affect families on lower incomes - higher income families that have higher outgoings.... and costs that were once affordable have now become harder to afford.... but are exempt from every benefit... including child benefit.”

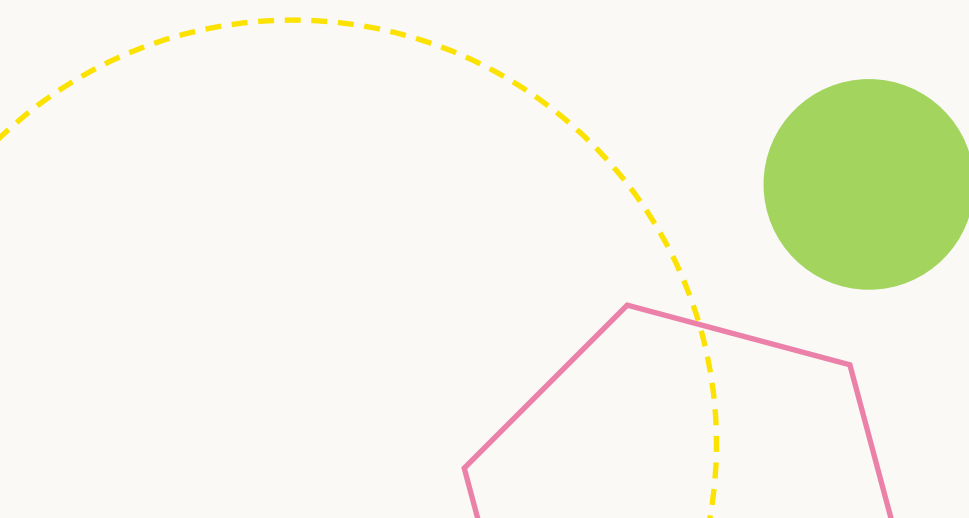
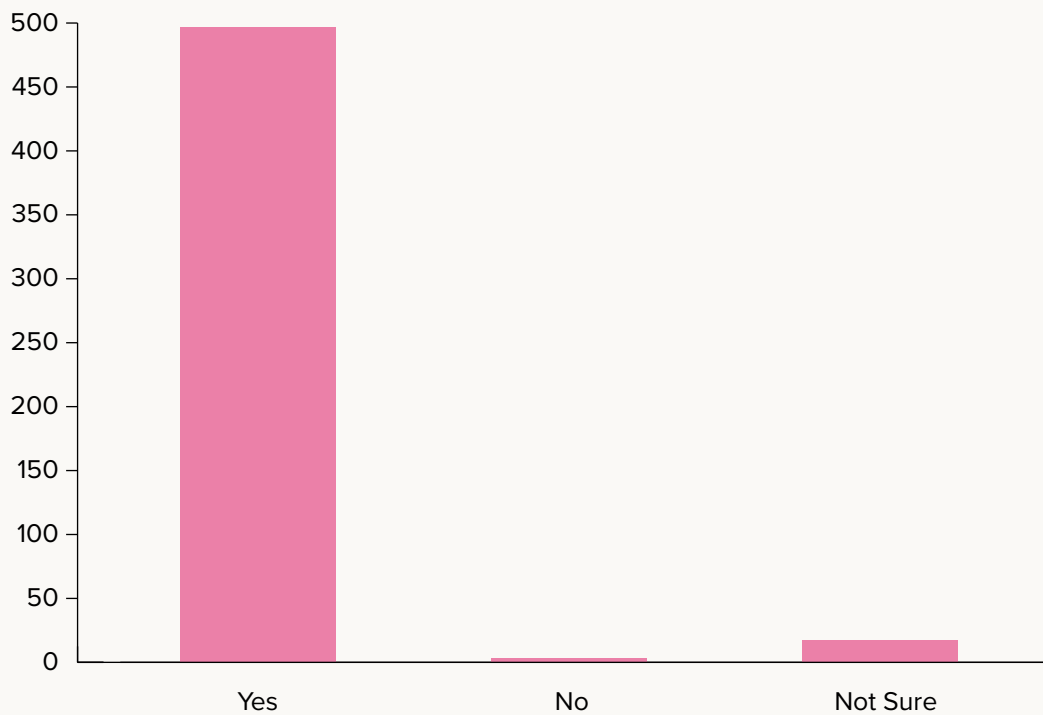
Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing

“It's hard, it's a disgrace, its soul destroying, heartbreaking, kids shouldn't be going hungry, kids are suffering unnecessarily, everyone struggling one way or another.”

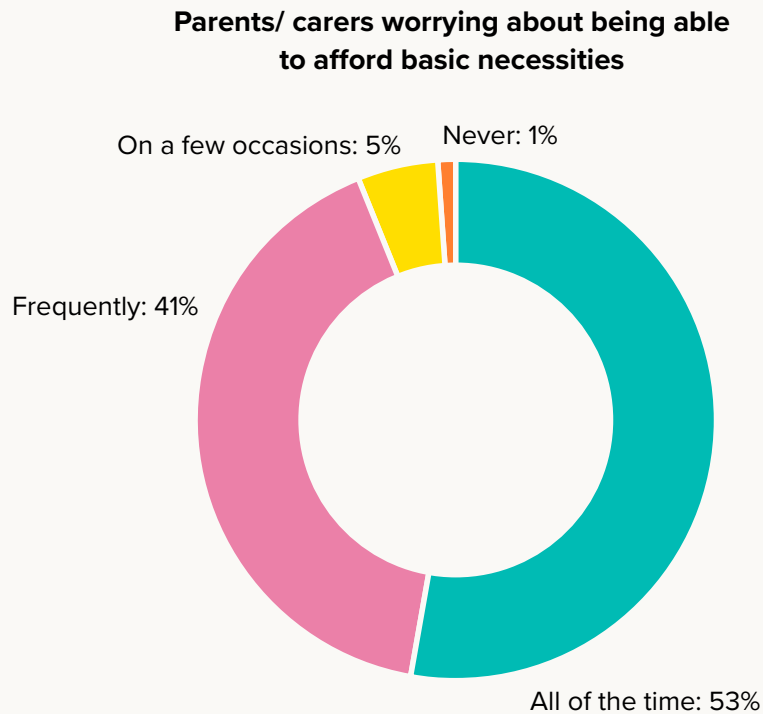
The impact of financial hardship is negatively affecting families and their mental health and emotional wellbeing

Parents were asked if they felt that the mental health of parents/carers was negatively impacted by current financial situations. An overwhelming **96%** said 'Yes', they felt that it was.

Do you feel parents'/ carers' financial situation negatively impacts their mental health?



Respondents were asked how often they thought parents/carers worried about being able to afford necessities. **53%** said that they thought it was 'All of the time' with another **41%** saying that they thought it was 'Frequently'.



Parents mentioned the constant pressure to meet their children’s basic needs amidst financial hardship. This can lead to chronic stress and anxiety. Parents often feel overwhelmed and experience persistent worry and fear of failure.

“It’s a really big struggle and causes stress, anxiety and sleepless nights.”

Some parents reported struggling to provide everything their children need in their homes and to keep them happy, healthy and safe.

“My partner and I worry over every last penny... we will always make sure our children have food...and a safe, warm home but some months it’s a struggle.”

These overwhelming responsibilities can create a sense of isolation, making it difficult for parents to protect their mental health. The day-to-day survival mode that parents must live in leaves little room for emotional self-care, intensifying the pressure that they face.

“...It affects people’s happiness and self worth. They say money doesn't buy happiness but no money can bring misery.”

“I’m no better off this year than I was last year, everything is still a struggle to keep our families head above water.”

Parents reported having to avoid social situations and events because of the cost implications. Consequently, many didn’t have a social life as they couldn’t afford it, leading to further isolation.

“I feel embarrassed when asked to go to some groups with friends.... I’m unable to attend due to the cost but feel like I can’t say this is the reason.”

Parents experiencing constant stress about finances reported experiencing sleep disruption, whilst also hiding their struggles from their children, bottling up feelings of anger and frustration.

Some parents found it heartbreaking to witness their children going hungry. They want those in power to do more.

“No child in the UK should be living in poverty. It’s a disgrace.”

“It's soul destroying.”

They felt that everyone is struggling in some way. The emotional toll on parents and families is immense, as they battle feelings of hopelessness because help seems distant and scarce.



Childcare

“Childcare costs a week would be my whole wage.”

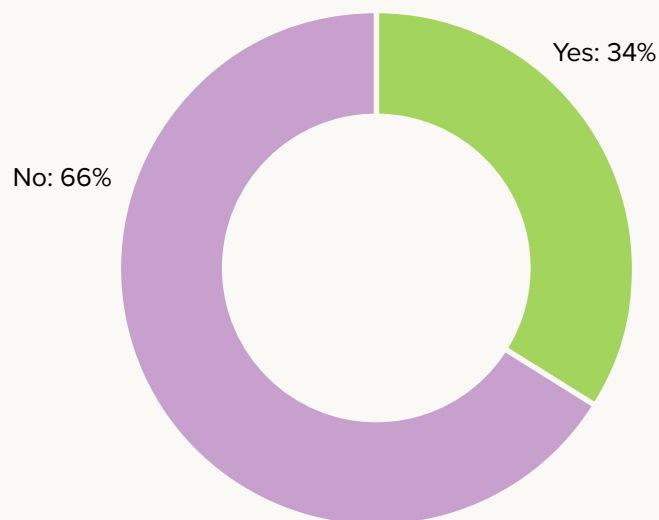
“Childcare is more than a typical part time months wages. There is no support or help for people who work weekends. I...have no one to help with childcare hence I've had to leave work.”

One section of the survey asked parents about their childcare choices, the reasons behind these choices and the impact cost and accessibility on their financial situation.

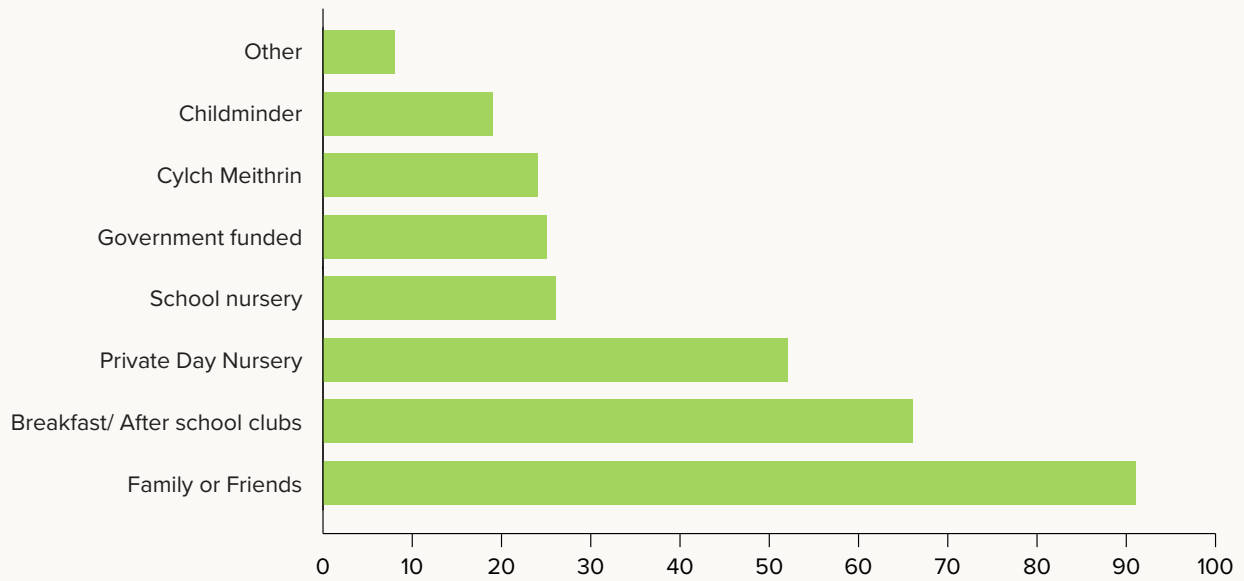
Childcare in this instance is when a child is looked after by someone other than their parent, this can be paid childcare or informal childcare with family and friends.

34% of respondents were currently using childcare.

Do you use childcare?



Which childcare options are you using?



The majority of respondents access informal childcare such as 'Family or Friends' as their main source of childcare. Day Nurseries, breakfast and after-school clubs were also being regularly used.

Parents were asked more about why they used informal childcare on a regular basis. **34%** said the reason for this was due to 'paid-for' childcare being unaffordable.

“It would not be worth my while working if I had to put my children into childcare.”

“Childcare is so expensive, I am unable to afford this even with me & my husband working.”

30% of parents are using a mixture of 'informal' and 'paid-for childcare'. This was due to choice and wanting to involve family members. It was also due to affordability or availability of childcare.

“Family enjoy looking after the children and so we are lucky we have them.”

“To keep childcare costs to a minimum I use the childcare offer entitlement and then rely on family for childcare outside of the entitlement.”

“Cannot afford full time childcare in nursery so having to do a mix of formal and informal childcare.”

Parents shared how their choice of childcare was determined by settings not catering for their child’s specific needs due to ALN or disability.

“There are no childcare places for an 11 years old with additional needs.”

“Unable to afford childcare costs and have informal childcare for respite or to enable us to meet our disabled child’s needs , however unfortunately funded respite has not been offered.”

“My child’s costs are rising due to her additional needs and.... (I am) unable to work as I am a full-time carer.”

This was also impacted by their working hours, their location and limited accessibility, meaning they were left with no choice but to use informal childcare or not work.

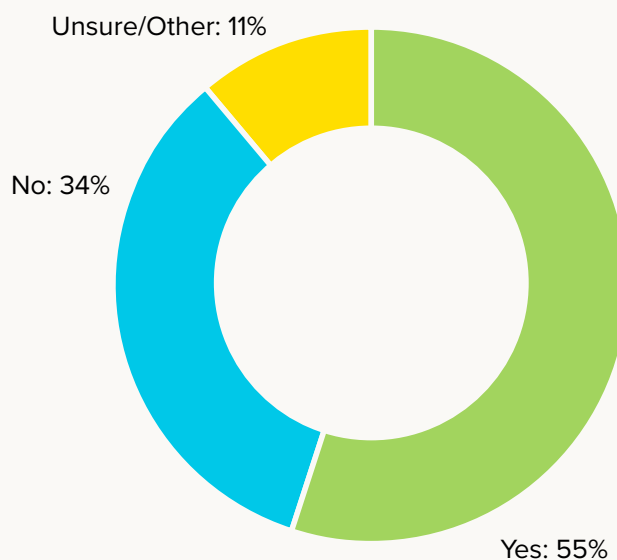
“I live in a rural area and there are no childminders or nurseries that offer school wrap around with any availability.”

“Many child-care settings couldn’t meet the needs of my son so it wasn’t optional.”

Many families also reflected on the fact that they didn't have family or friend support and were unable to even consider informal childcare.

“I don’t have a “village” it’s me on my own.”

Does childcare stop you working or working more hours?



Concerningly, **55%** of parents cited that childcare was stopping them working or working more hours.

For those families who pay for childcare, **60%** of them said it is causing a huge strain of finances; their ability to afford basic necessities and was putting them into debt.

25% of parents have either had to reduce working hours; give up working or find that they can't afford to get job due to the costs which is restricting parental choice.

Ideas/ suggestions to improve childcare

Parents were asked to share ideas or suggestions on how low-income families could be supported. Many parents cited help with childcare costs as crucial.

“Provide more help whether it's allowing parents to work from home more so childcare costs can be cut completely or providing financial help to those who truly need it.”

“Help nursery settings, give them funding which passes through to the working family's.”

Parents also gave further ideas and suggestions including:

- After school clubs and extra-curricular activities for children
- Holiday childcare (including for older children)
- More funding for childcare from an earlier age (9mths)
- Universal childcare entitlements
- Universal Flying Start provision
- More flexible working options including options to work from home
- Childcare grants
- More community level support and local childcare options
- More specialist childcare for children with ALNs physical and disabilities

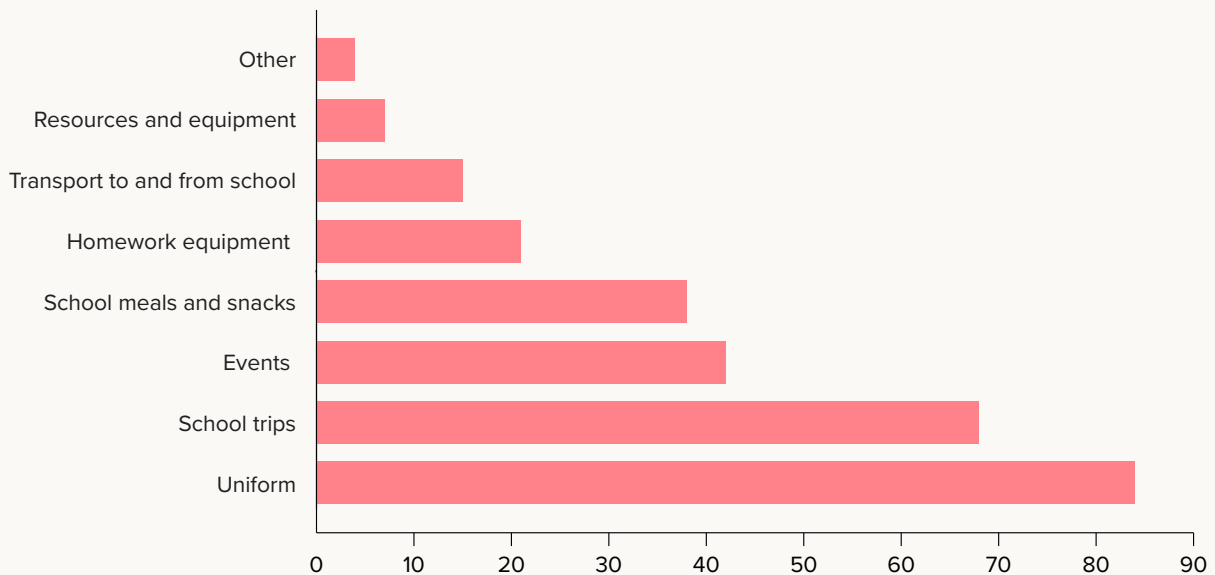
Education

“Schools expect parents to pay for things all the time.... they ask for money for trips, events or activities... You have to pay for your child not to miss out.”

“So far, I’ve been able to manage the costs... sometimes this means that I’ll skip meals to ensure I’ve got.. all the necessities.”

Parents were asked how they managed the additional costs of education. This was a very relevant question given that **91%** of survey respondents had children that attended school. The responses revealed that school-related expenses are negatively impacting families.

Most difficult school costs to manage



Uniform costs

Parents identified uniforms as the most difficult school cost to manage. They said that the high cost of school uniforms, including shoes and bags, places a significant financial burden on families. As children grow, more than one set of uniforms is often required each year, increasing the expense. PE kits and uniforms with logos add to these costs, particularly for those with multiple children.

“I couldn’t afford school uniform and was refused the grant...I bought what I could and then... I got a few bits given to my children from the lost property bin, which is obviously embarrassing... (for) me and my children.”

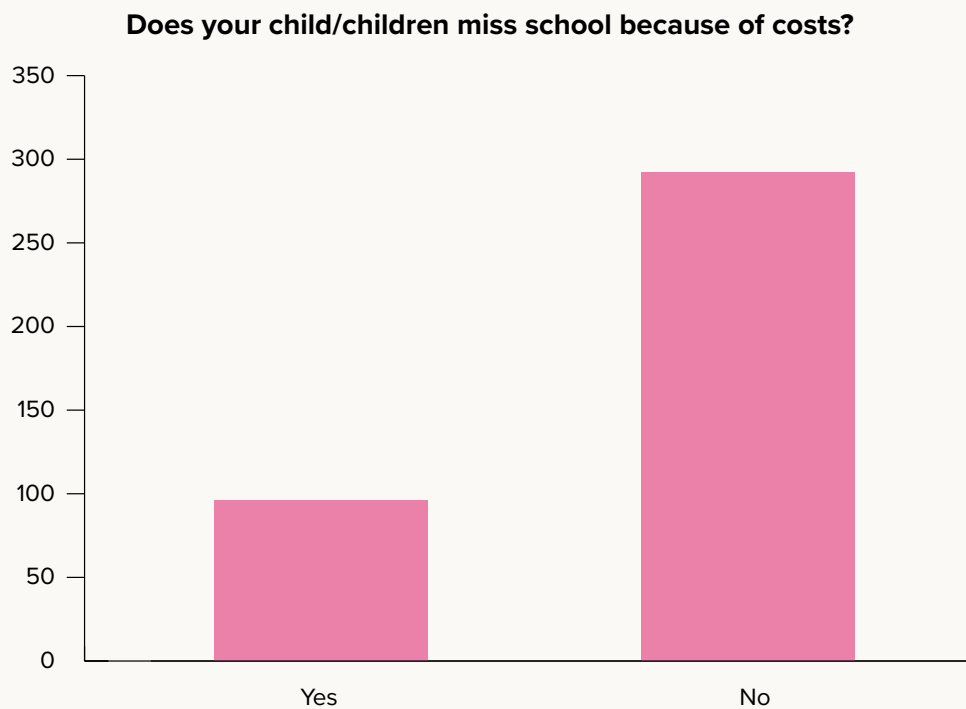
Other school costs

Parents highlighted that school trips, residential, fancy dress days, and event-related expenses are often unaffordable. Fundraising activities add pressure, as families feel obligated to contribute.

Some children were digitally excluded as they didn't have laptops to complete homework properly. Parents also have significant food costs for school meals, packed lunches, breakfast clubs, snacks, and ingredients for cooking classes.

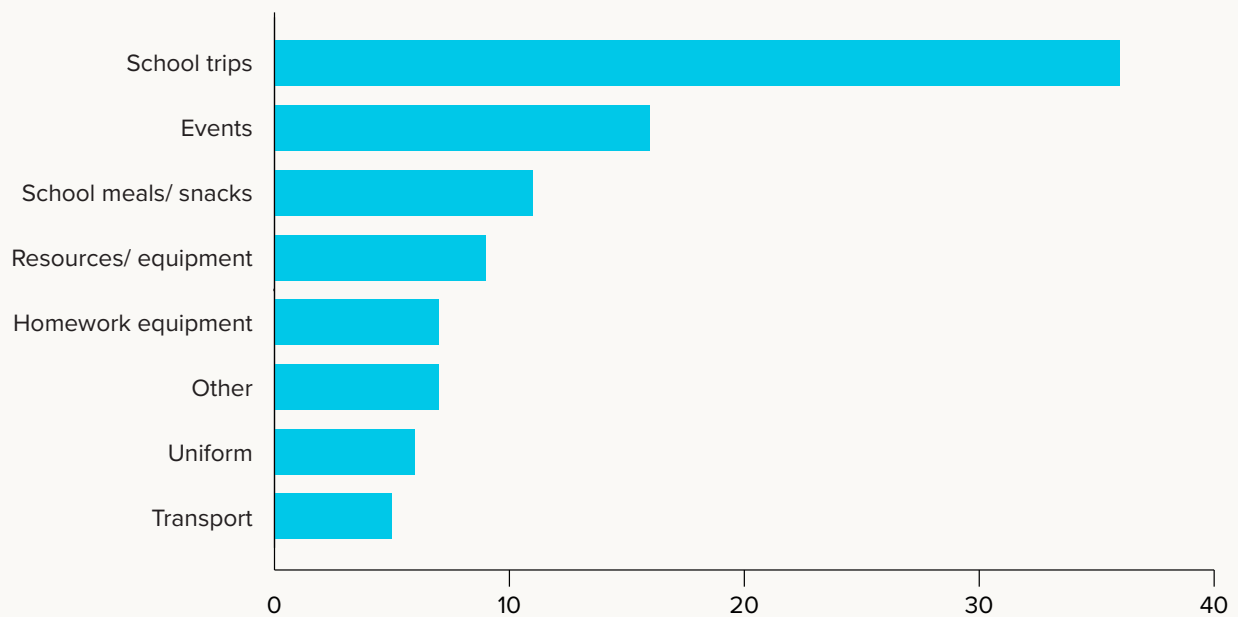
Many parents face high fuel and bus fare costs, with some children being refused bus passes. Inadequate bus services also force parents to have to drive their children to school.

“The older children walk one and a half miles to school because we couldn't get a bus pass.”



When asked if their children missed school because of costs, **25%** of parents responded saying **‘Yes’**.

Schools costs that cause children to miss school

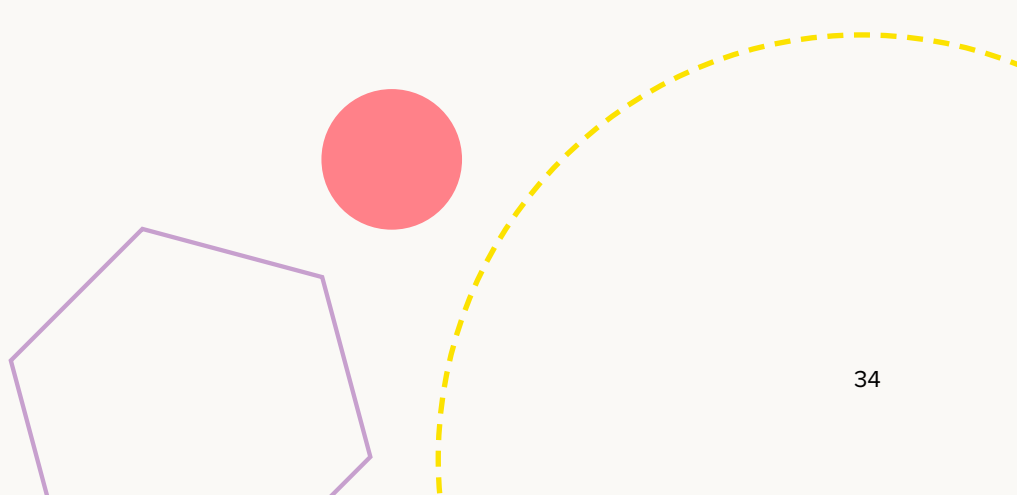


Sometimes parents felt that they had no choice but to give their children days off to avoid them feeling left out. They felt this negatively impacts their education and development. School costs are therefore limiting children's participation and leading to them being excluded from activities.

“I really want my child to go to school trips, to travel to learn as its good for his physical and mental health but the cost so high that I can't afford it’

“Sometimes we just can't afford another outfit just for one day. So ashamed to say we've given days off.”

Parents also expressed feelings of stress, as they struggle to meet the costs of education. The constant need to budget and make difficult financial decisions leads to ongoing worry and anxiety, which children often share.



Ideas to support parents with school costs

When asked for ideas to support low-income families, parents suggested more support with transport, school meals and uniform, particularly for secondary school students.

The eligibility criteria for uniform grants is restrictive and the value limited, leaving many low-income families without sufficient support. Raising the threshold or offering non-means-tested financial help could help address this. Schools could also facilitate uniform banks and swap shops and change their policy to allow cheaper, non-logoed options.

Additionally, transport costs and eligibility could be reviewed and universal free school meals could be extended to secondary school students. During holidays, cash vouchers could replace free school meals. Schools should have budgeting classes and low-cost cooking skills classes.

Many parents expressed the need for more flexible payment plans and advance notice of costs which would help families with financial planning.

The rising costs of education are creating financial challenges for parents, particularly those already facing poverty. It is important to mitigate these to ensure that these costs do not negatively impact children's well-being and attendance levels.

You can access **free resources**, produced by Children in Wales, that offer practical steps to help remove barriers and the 'cost' of learning in school settings **here**:-

[Children in Wales | Price of Pupil Poverty Resources](#)

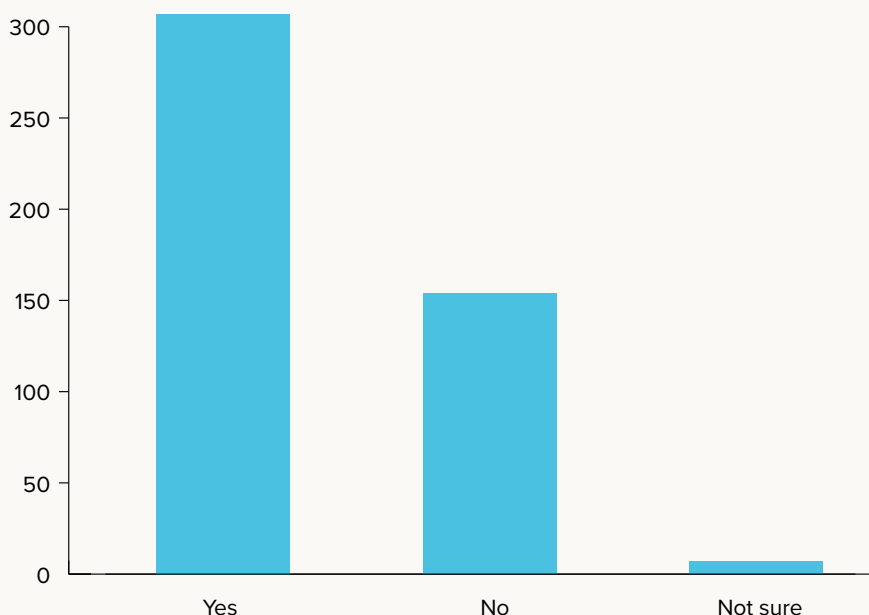


Free school meals

“Great difference as I don't have to spend money on lunch food items, lunch bags and boxes... It all adds up with 3 children. I don't have to spend time on shopping... and making things each evening. I am able to spend quality time.... connecting with the family.”

In September 2022, the Welsh Government began rolling out a free school meals programme to all primary school children. This was a 3-year phased roll out through the Co-operation agreement with Plaid Cymru. Parents were asked for feedback on the scheme.

Do any of your children benefit from the Free School Meals programme in primary schools?



Around **66%** of parents said that their children were benefitting from the free school meal programme. They also reported the positive benefits that they were gaining from this initiative. **55%** of parents said that there had been a **positive financial impact** for them and that they were saving money and that it had eased their financial burden. Parents have used the money that they have saved on school meals to spend on their children.

“I used the money we would normally pay for school meals on days out with children giving them new experiences.”

21% of parents were also content that their children were receiving a hot, nutritional meal every day and welcomed the opportunity for children to try a variety of foods. Some parents felt that free school meals compensated for their inability to provide adequate food at home and guaranteed a daily hot meal for their child.

“It relieves the pressure of them having a large hot meal at home. Our weekly food bill has decreased. I’m very grateful that this initiative was for all children.”

“A huge difference because we know our child will be fed well at school even if food is minimal at home.”

As well as relieving financial pressure, free school meals also reduced mental health pressure and stress. **18%** of parents said that it made their lives easier as they did not have to worry about finding money for lunches. They also saved time because they did not have to shop for food or pack lunches every day.

By providing free school meals for all children, it also removed the fear of being judged or stigmatised for taking a packed lunch or being identified as being eligible for free school meals.

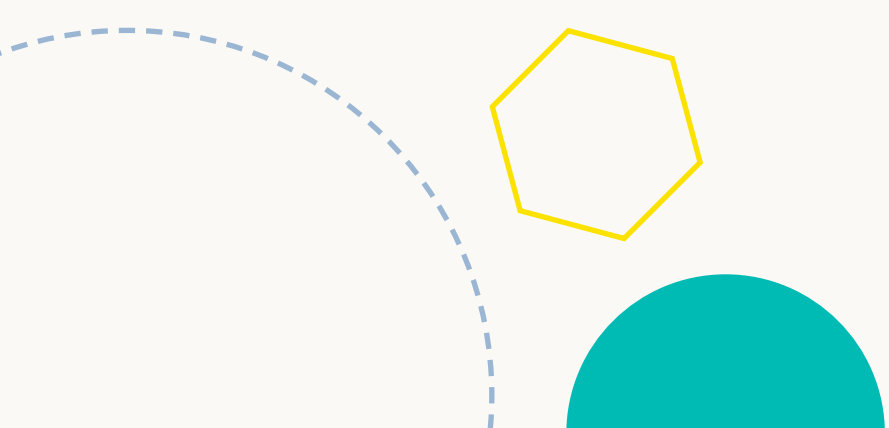
“It has made a huge difference financially for us as well as reduced stress levels as it’s one less thing to think about.”

“... Greater flexibility with time because of not preparing lunches in the morning.”

Despite the overwhelmingly positive feedback, there were some parents who felt that the quality and portion sizes of free school meals needed to be improved. Parents reported that children were coming home hungry due to the small portion sizes. Some children did not like the school meals, meaning that parents were unable to fully benefit from them.

“The food choice and portion size are poor so it’s not as beneficial as it could be.”

“My children either do not like the menu or are still hungry as the portions are small.”



Additionally, **17%** of parents said that they didn't receive any benefit from the initiative. Some children had additional learning needs or were neurodivergent, meaning the food provided did not meet their specific needs. Others had specific dietary needs that were not met. A lot of parents had children who were also previously eligible for free school meals or had children in secondary school or nursery where universal free school meals are not available.

“Both my kids have learning disabilities... they are very fussy when it comes to food. I have to make them packed lunch.... as they don't eat the food in school.”

“My daughter is being tested for autism and struggles with certain foods.”

There were also suggestions made by parents about how the scheme could be improved and be more beneficial for children and their families. The key suggestions made were

- Universal free school meals should also be extended to secondary schools
- The menu should be more varied and cover a greater range of dietary needs e.g. a gluten-free menu.
- Food or cash vouchers should be provided for those not benefiting from the initiative in the school environment, especially during school holidays.
- The provision should be means-tested rather than universal and limited to those on a low income and in the most financial need.





Barriers to overcoming poverty

Barriers to overcoming poverty

“They’re set up to fail. The government doesn’t want to help end the never-ending cycle.”

Throughout the survey, a range of barriers were identified by families or collectively recognised. These barriers are hindering the ability of families to overcome poverty. The key barriers are outlined below.

Childcare

As highlighted in the ‘childcare’ section ([insert link](#)), the lack of accessibility, availability and choice of childcare are directly limiting parents’ ability to work or take on more hours to improve their financial situation. This is trapping them in a cycle of limited opportunities.

Inadequate maternity pay also makes it difficult for working mothers to afford living costs. This, coupled with the high cost of childcare, is leaving parents with little disposable income. They are also being forced to consider other working options.

“Maternity pay is a joke...I rushed back to work because you can’t afford to live on one wage.”

“It makes the balance of ‘child care costs vs working’ tip debate tip towards just looking after your children more as child care is a big chunk of the months budget.”



Inflation/rising cost of living

Another huge barrier impacting many families is the rising cost of living and the lack of pay rises or increase in benefits to compensate this.

“Everything except wages are increasing.”

“Cost of things rises quicker than wages so have to make the same amount of money go further.”

Even when families are receiving a small pay rise, this is going straight to rising costs so the benefits are unseen.

“Although minimum wage went up so did everything else, cost of living has gone through the roof.”

Systems not working

Some families felt that the systems in place to help overcome poverty or to support them were either unfair or not working.

An example of this is the Flying Start postcode lottery where some families can access childcare from 2 years old and others who can't.

Low income families who are working are struggling but are unable to access certain benefits and are therefore struggling with little financial support.

“Poverty isn't just hitting low income families, working families who receive little financial support in terms of benefits are also struggling.”

“On paper we are not in poverty. We are not entitled to benefits. In reality, we are struggling but miss out on any of the cost of living help that is available.”

Stigma

“Yes, trying to seek help is embarrassing but also difficult in rural Wales. When asking for help, you are made to feel like a waste of space receiving any form of benefits. People automatically assume you have 7 kids and are too lazy to work when in reality you'd work or work more if childcare didn't drain your wages.”

Previous surveys (with practitioners) have highlighted that some families living on low incomes are made to feel embarrassed about their financial circumstances or treated differently by services. In this survey parents were asked to share examples of this.

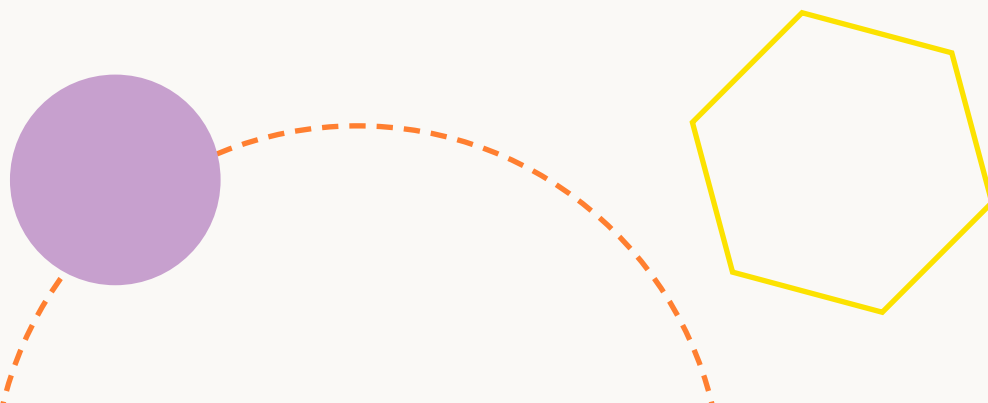
There was a strong response to this question, with parents sharing the stigma surrounding claiming benefits, visiting food banks and in day-to-day situations.

“When accessing food banks, I felt like I wanted the world to swallow me whole.”

“I’m desperate for food and there is a food bank near me but I do not know how to get help and I am embarrassed to ask.... it is soul destroying.”

“Feel looked down upon for being on benefits, treated like someone who is lazy and not someone who wants to work but can’t due to circumstances.”

32% of respondents reported feeling ashamed and embarrassed about their experiences of poverty. They also had feelings of failure and guilt that negatively impacted their sense of parental identity.





Suggestions for Support/ Ways Forward

Suggestions for Support/ Ways Forward

“It’s a terrible situation to be in. We need to try and educate and support families to break the cycle without judgement.”

Throughout this survey, parents were asked for ideas and solutions to support low-income families and improve their circumstances. They suggested a range of ideas for this.



Financial Support

Parents were asked to share suggestions or ideas on how families living on low incomes could be better supported **financially**. They suggested changes that could make a difference. These include:-

- Accessible support, which is free or low cost and non-judgmental.
- Better signposting to relevant support services with self-referral options and anonymity and confidentiality
- Budget management classes, financial advice and life skills workshops to help families maximize their income and meet basic needs
- Access to crisis funds for emergencies.
- Help with debt management
- Promotion of information on available support and benefit entitlements

Employment

“More opportunities = better self esteem = better mental health.”

Parents also want more support with getting into employment and accessing training and volunteering opportunities. This is a key driver for supporting parents out of poverty and building self-esteem and confidence.

Reducing the cost of living

Parents want more action taken to reduce living costs. Essential costs such as fuel, energy, food and housing currently place a huge financial burden on families.

Many suggested that governments could help by reducing inflation and income tax rates. This would help families to meet their basic needs and give them more space to focus on the care and wellbeing of their children.

Targeted assistance for lower-income households facing financial crises is also needed. Parents suggested increasing access to essentials through clothes banks, baby banks, food banks, cost-of-living payments, and crisis funds to support those most in need.

Increasing Household Incomes

With the rising costs of living, families need more money to manage costs. Increasing the living and minimum wages in line with inflation and providing an immediate uplift in benefits were suggested to achieve this.

A fair and equitable benefits system should be in place to support all families, and a Universal Basic Income should be introduced to alleviate financial insecurity. The two-child benefits cap should be removed as it disproportionately impacts larger families, pushing them into poverty. Additionally, ensuring fair Disability Living Allowance (DLA) rates for families of children with disabilities is vital due to the higher costs associated with care and support.

In-work poverty

Parents said there should be more help for working families to reduce in-work poverty. By increasing the tax threshold and the Universal Credit threshold entitlement for free school meals and uniform grants, working families can retain more of their income. Single working parents also need more help with childcare costs

Enhancing statutory maternity and paternity pay is also crucial as some parents felt it was inadequate to cover costs. This, in conjunction with the options suggested in [‘Ideas/suggestions to improve childcare’](#) would allow more working parents to increase their household incomes.

“Maternity pay should be better. Statutory maternity pay means I am losing £1,000 a month from what I used to receive.... it SHOULD reflect what you used to get paid!”



Emotional Support

Parents were asked to share suggestions or ideas on how families living on low incomes could be better supported **emotionally**.

Safe spaces

Parents wanted to feel listened to and said that it was important to have a safe space to share their concerns and their experiences. Suggestions for this were:-

- Fully funded family centres and hubs
- Parenting support groups and drop-ins with varied hours to accommodate working parents
- Childcare provision for all groups
- Mental health support helplines
- Access to counsellors and peer support groups

“Access to a parent group where we can get together, and just talk to people in the same boat. A no-judgment, safe space.”

Better Support Services

There was a call for increased funding for support services for children’s mental health and for families with additional learning needs (ALN) or complex additional learning difficulties (CALDS). Schools could be a base for these services, and this could be facilitated by family liaison officers who could also help with broader family needs.

- Family liaison officers in schools to help access support
- Digital apps and free courses
- Outreach family support officers

Empathy and Understanding

Parents wanted to be valued and understood without being blamed or judged because of their challenging situations.

“I don’t want better emotional support I just want an understanding that times are hard.”

Professionals should be offered training on poverty to tackle stigmas and increase awareness to ensure that the right approach and support is being delivered. This would improve attitudes towards those in poverty and ensure they are more empathetic and emotionally sensitive.

Community Focused solutions

Parents also want better local, community-based provision where they can access low-cost or free services such as childcare or free gym access. They also wanted free or affordable activities for families in clean, safe spaces to help them spend quality time together, consequently reducing emotional stress and building resilience.

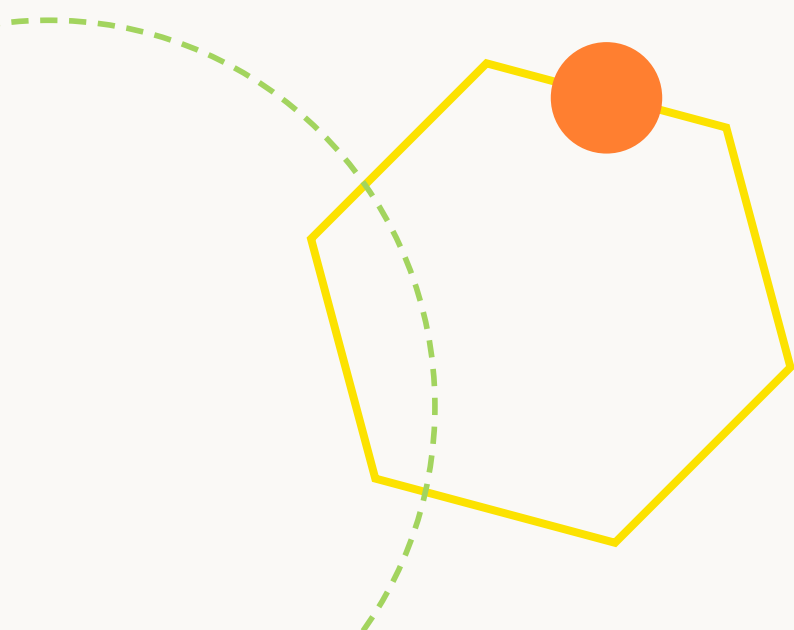
“To give children the best start in life – let’s all work together.”

They also suggested:-

- Free trips and activities
- Effectively funded family centers
- Local, accessible playgroups and youth centers

“Stop pressure on parents to do everything. Make council run gyms etc more accessible to families by cutting the cost. Help families enjoy time together.”

There was also a theme of sustainability and self-reliance, especially in relation to food. Parents suggested creating non-profit food co-operatives in the community where they can purchase food items in bulk and sell them at a cheaper cost. They also suggested better access to local allotments for families to grow their own food.



Conclusion

This report highlights so many real-life examples and lived experiences of poverty that families are facing on a daily basis. These insights must motivate everyone to look for ways forward to mitigate the impacts of child poverty.

Parents highlighted that there needs to be more investment in children and families but actions to address poverty also require more than financial solutions. To tackle the poverty cycle, there needs to be stronger government support and also community-based solutions.

Addressing child poverty requires societal change, empathy, reduced stigma and genuine support to help parents regain confidence and overcome shame. There must be a holistic approach that recognises the emotional and psychological impacts of poverty on children, parents and families.

Children in Wales would like to thank all of the parents who took the time to complete the survey. We really appreciate the time you have taken to complete it and for sharing your detailed thoughts and experiences, often under difficult circumstances. Thank you again.

