

MEDIA RELEASE

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New survey reveals friends and family are the first point of contact for parenting advice

- *1 in 3 Australian parents are reluctant to seek advice about their child's behaviour and development for fear of being judged or seen as a failure*
- *Sleep troubles, behavioural challenges and reaching milestones are key concerns for parents*
- *Free, Australian Government service offers parents advice and support from maternal child health nurses*

Australian parents will turn to friends and family about their child's behaviour and development before seeking advice from healthcare professionals, a new survey from **Pregnancy, Birth and Baby** has found – meaning thousands of Australians may be following outdated and inaccurate advice when it comes to parenting.

The new online survey¹ of more than 1,000 Australian parents of children aged up to 5 years reveals healthcare professionals, including GPs, pharmacists and maternal child health nurses, rank third as the source parents turn to most for information on their child's behaviour and development – behind friends and family. This means Australian parents may be missing out on clinically approved advice to help their child as they grow from birth to pre-school age.

“No matter the age of their child, parents will face many challenges, doubts and obstacles during the first five years of child rearing,” said Dianne Zalitis, Clinical Lead of Pregnancy, Birth and Baby.

“Friends and family are an invaluable source of support for parents – but may not always have the most up-to-date and accurate information to answer the many questions and challenges parents face,” she said.

Adding to their concerns, one in three (33%) Australian parents admit they are reluctant to seek advice about their child's behaviour and development because they fear being judged or seen as a failure – while more than half (58%) have compared themselves or their child's progress unfavourably with others.

Pregnancy, Birth and Baby is a national initiative of the Australian Government and offers parents confidential and non-judgemental support, guidance and advice from maternal child health nurses. Available seven days a week, parents can access the service for free – via phone, video call or through www.pregnancybirthandbaby.org.au – from the comfort of their own home.

¹ Pure Profile, March 2016. Online survey of 1,016 parents. Commissioned by Healthdirect Australia, conducted by Pure Profile

“The most important thing for parents to remember is that they are not alone, and there is always credible and qualified information, advice and support on hand to help them navigate through the challenges and joys of parenthood,” Ms Zalitis explained.

Sleep troubles

For most parents, ensuring their child gets enough sleep is a concern that carries on throughout the first two years. While this was the biggest concern for almost two thirds of parents (62%) during their baby’s first year, almost half (45%) reported this was still the biggest concern when their child was in their second year.

“We all know how important our sleep is, and the first two years is a long time to struggle with sleep. It’s not only essential for the baby’s growth and development, but also for the health and wellbeing of parents,” said Ms Zalitis.

Behavioural challenges

For parents of toddlers (38%) and pre-schoolers (41%), experiencing and managing behavioural challenges with their child is a key concern.

According to the survey, 32 per cent of Australian parents will seek advice about tantrums and discipline from friends and family, ahead of seeking this advice from a maternal child health nurse (22%) or GP (10%).

“Behavioural issues in children such as biting, hitting, scratching, arguments or tantrums, are a real worry for parents,” said Ms Zalitis.

“If parents are concerned about their child’s behaviour, they should call Pregnancy, Birth and Baby. Our maternal child health nurses will be able to provide useful guidance, strategies and support to navigate through this challenging time,” she said.

Reaching milestones

Whether their child is reaching their milestones is a concern for parents at all stages of their development, from babies (38%), to toddlers (36%) and pre-schoolers (35%).

When it comes to toilet training, 37 per cent of Australian parents consult their friends and family for advice, compared to just 22 per cent who seek this guidance from a maternal child health nurse, and 9 per cent from a GP.

Other typical developmental milestones for children include:

- **0-12 months:** *smiling, rolling, sitting up, crawling, first words*
- **1-2 years:** *walking, talking, pointing, hugging*
- **3-5 years:** *talking in sentences, jumping, holding a pencil and scribbling, understanding and following instructions*

“Watching their child reach milestones from when they are born, to when they are ready for school at five, is a rewarding time for parents,” said Ms Zalitis.

“It’s important to remember that all children are different and will develop skills and reach their milestones at different times. This is normal. If a child hasn’t reached every milestone, they might just need a bit more time,” she continued.

“Speaking to a health professional can help provide parents with reassurance about what is typical for a child at various stages of their development, or when it might be appropriate to act on concerns,” Ms Zalitis said.

Trusted, credible advice

With eight in 10 Australians now turning to the internet for their health information², it is no surprise that this is also a go-to source for time poor parents looking for advice. The survey reveals that when parents search online for information about their child’s behaviour and development, the top three sources they trust most include:

1. Websites that have information from medical professionals
2. Websites that specialise in children’s issues
3. Australian Government websites

“We are encouraged by these results as Pregnancy, Birth and Baby meets all of these criteria, so parents can feel confident when using our service,” said Ms Zalitis.

The free Pregnancy, Birth and Baby service is accessible by contacting **1800 882 436** or visiting www.pregnancybirthbaby.org.au.

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MEDIA CONTACT:

Tania Jayesuria: 02 8281 3875 | 0404 094 744 | tania@ogilvyprhealth.com

ABOUT PREGNANCY, BIRTH AND BABY:

Pregnancy, Birth and Baby is an Australian Government service delivered by Healthdirect Australia. It offers free guidance and reassurance on pregnancy and parenting children up to 5 years.

Being a parent can be challenging or overwhelming at times, but it’s reassuring to know there is expert help and support available when you need it, seven days a week:

- **By phone:** call 1800 882 436 from 7.00am to midnight. Maternal child health nurses can answer any questions you may have, give you advice on what to do next, and refer to local health services.
- **Video call:** Pregnancy, Birth and Baby is one of the world’s first health services to offer a secure, high quality video call option so you can have a face-to-face conversation with a maternal child health nurse, 7am – midnight, 7 days a week: <http://www.pregnancybirthbaby.org.au/video-call>
- **Online:** The Pregnancy, Birth and Baby website provides information for parents on a range of topics. The information is easy to understand, up-to-date, clinically approved and has been subject to Healthdirect Australia’s strict quality assurance processes: www.pregnancybirthbaby.org.au

ABOUT HEALTHDIRECT AUSTRALIA:

Healthdirect Australia was established by the Governments of Australia to provide all Australians with access to trusted health information and advice, when and where they need it. We deliver a number of health services, including Pregnancy, Birth and Baby – a free national service providing guidance and reassurance on pregnancy and parenting children up to 5 years. For more information visit: about.healthdirect.gov.au.

² Market research conducted by Objective Digital in June 2013

SUMMARY OF SURVEY RESULTS

- Online survey of 1,016 Australian parents of children aged 0-5 years
- Carried out by Pure Profile from 24-27 March 2016

Q. Thinking about your child's (aged 0-5 years) behaviour and development, where do you turn for information and advice?

Response	Ranking
Friends with children of similar or older ages	1
Relatives	2
Health professionals (e.g. GP, child health nurse)	3
Mothers' or parents' groups	4
Internet searching	5
Official information from health or government organisations (e.g. brochures, helplines, websites)	6
Parenting books or magazines	7
Social media + blogs	8
Mobile apps	9

Q. Thinking about the advice you have received about your child's behaviour and development, how seriously do you take the advice offered/provided by the following?

Response	Very seriously	Somewhat seriously	Not very seriously	Not seriously at all	No advice received / does not apply
Friends with children of similar or older ages	23.5%	58.8%	13.5%	2.4%	1.9%
Relatives	25.5%	53.3%	15.6%	3.4%	2.2%
Health professionals (e.g. GP, child health nurse)	56.7%	32.0%	6.6%	2.6%	2.2%
Mothers' or parents' groups	15.4%	52.4%	22.3%	3.5%	6.4%
Internet searching	11.0%	47.6%	33.3%	5.5%	2.6%
Official information from health or government organisations (e.g. brochures, helplines, websites)	31.2%	51.1%	12.0%	2.8%	3.0%
Parenting books or magazines	12.1%	52.3%	25.4%	5.2%	5.0%
Social media + blogs	7.2%	29.6%	39.6%	14.0%	9.6%
Mobile apps	6.8%	27.8%	33.3%	16.4%	15.7%

Q. In your child's first year, which of the following are / were you concerned about?

Response	Percent
Weight gain and growth	43.4%
Sleeping and settling	61.8%
Reaching milestones (e.g. smiling, rolling, sitting, crawling, first words)	38.3%
Breastfeeding	39.1%
Weaning / starting bottle feeding	18.3%
Starting solids	31.1%
Getting baby into a routine	37.4%
Starting childcare	17.4%
Urinary or bowel habits (e.g. constipation)	20.3%
Other	2.3%
None of the above	11.2%

Q. Thinking about when your child is / was aged 1-2, which of the following are / were you concerned about?

Response	Percent
Weight gain and growth	26.9%
Sleeping and settling	44.5%
Reaching milestones (e.g. walking, talking, pointing, hugging)	35.9%
Diet and nutrition	42.2%
Daily routines	34.6%
Social interaction with others	34.0%
Behavioural challenges (e.g. temper tantrums, biting, hitting)	37.6%
Starting or coping with childcare	19.2%
Urinary or bowel habits (e.g. constipation)	15.4%
Other	1.5%
None of the above	13.7%

Q. Thinking about when your child is / was aged 3-5, which of the following are / were you concerned about?

Response	Percent
Weight gain and growth	19.9%
Sleeping and settling	26.0%
Reaching milestones (e.g. talking in sentences, jumping, holding pencil and scribbling, understanding and following instructions)	35.2%
Diet and nutrition	36.3%
Daily routines	27.6%
Social interaction with others	37.0%
Behavioural challenges (e.g. hitting and scratching, arguing, tantrums)	40.5%
Starting or coping with childcare / preschool	31.3%
Urinary or bowel habits (e.g. constipation)	13.5%
Other	2.9%
None of the above	19.4%

Q. Have you ever been reluctant to seek advice about your child's behaviour and development because you feared you'd be seen as failing and/or judged about your parenting?

Response	Percent
Yes	13.7%
Sometimes	19.3%
No	67.0%

Q. Has there been any other situation where you might have been reluctant to seek advice from a health professional?

Response	Percent
Yes	7.0%
No	93.0%

Q. When it comes to how you think you are doing as a parent, do you find yourself comparing yourself or your child's progress unfavourably with others?

Response	Percent
Yes	15.2%
Sometimes	42.3%
No	42.5%

Q. If you were seeking advice about your child on the following, from where would you seek it?

Response	GP	Maternal / child care nurse	Specialist	Pharmacist	Friends & family	Social media / blogs	Mobile apps	Internet search	Mothers' groups	Parenting books or magazines
Weight and growth	38.9%	33.5%	6.2%	3.2%	8.8%	1.7%	0.4%	4.8%	1.7%	0.9%
Milestones – smiling, sitting, walking	18.0%	34.8%	5.4%	4.3%	19.7%	2.1%	1.2%	9.0%	3.1%	2.4%
Breastfeeding	16.6%	42.6%	9.9%	3.2%	14.7%	2.2%	1.0%	4.7%	3.5%	1.5%
Formula feeding	20.1%	35.8%	5.8%	8.4%	15.1%	1.7%	1.5%	7.2%	3.0%	1.6%
Sleeping issues	21.0%	31.3%	9.3%	3.8%	15.7%	3.2%	0.7%	8.5%	4.1%	2.4%
Health issues (e.g. rashes, colds)	59.3%	12.0%	5.4%	6.6%	6.8%	2.0%	1.3%	4.5%	1.7%	0.5%
Toilet training	9.4%	21.8%	4.8%	2.6%	36.9%	2.4%	1.5%	10.6%	6.6%	3.4%
Tantrums + discipline	10.4%	21.9%	8.1%	4.0%	32.3%	3.8%	0.7%	9.2%	5.2%	4.4%
Constipation	49.4%	15.3%	4.7%	8.1%	10.5%	2.1%	1.0%	5.6%	1.8%	1.6%
Wrapping or swaddling	10.6%	39.7%	4.8%	3.6%	24.1%	2.4%	1.6%	7.6%	3.6%	2.0%
Keeping baby warm and cool enough	13.4%	33.0%	4.6%	4.6%	25.6%	2.1%	1.2%	8.9%	4.3%	2.4%
Dummies	10.8%	25.5%	5.1%	7.7%	28.6%	3.1%	1.7%	10.1%	5.0%	2.4%
Child's nutrition	32.1%	28.0%	9.9%	3.5%	11.1%	2.0%	1.2%	7.4%	2.0%	2.9%
Separation anxiety	17.0%	25.1%	9.4%	3.4%	23.7%	3.0%	1.7%	9.4%	4.2%	3.1%

Q. If you are searching for information about your child's growth and development online, how do you decide which information you can trust?

Response	Ranking
I go to websites that have information from medical professionals	1
I go to websites that I know specialise in children's issues	2
I go to Australian Government websites	3
I go to websites that have information for Australians	4
I look for forums where parents exchange tips and information	5
I go to websites I recognise or that have been recommended to me	6
I go with the top results from an internet search (e.g. Google)	7
I go to blogs that specialise in parenting	8
I ask for help on Facebook or search Facebook	9

Don't know	10
Others	11

Q. Thinking about your child's first year, which health care professionals did your child or children see?

Response	More than once a month	Every 1-2 months	Every 3-4 months	Every 5-6 months	Less than every six months	Never seen
HCP	9.0%	16.3%	14.8%	8.5%	9.4%	42.0%
GP	9.7%	28.7%	28.9%	13.0%	15.1%	4.6%
Nurse in a GP practice	5.2%	17.6%	20.3%	12.4%	17.7%	26.9%
Maternal / child health care nurse	9.5%	22.7%	23.9%	11.8%	15.1%	17.0%
Paediatrician	3.7%	10.0%	14.4%	11.6%	21.7%	38.5%
Mothercraft nurse / specialist parenting centre / parent helpline	4.6%	8.1%	13.3%	8.4%	14.3%	51.3%
Pharmacist	5.5%	13.5%	18.9%	12.7%	18.2%	31.1%
Occupational therapist	3.1%	6.2%	6.8%	5.5%	7.4%	71.0%
Osteopath	3.0%	5.0%	7.0%	5.5%	5.4%	74.0%
Physiotherapist	3.0%	5.1%	5.9%	5.5%	7.5%	73.0%
Chiropractor	3.0%	5.7%	6.6%	4.1%	5.9%	74.8%
Speech pathologist	3.1%	6.0%	5.3%	5.0%	7.2%	73.3%
Audiologist	2.0%	5.7%	5.8%	5.9%	11.3%	69.4%
Specialist, e.g. ear nose and throat, endocrinologist	2.7%	6.0%	6.6%	6.7%	10.4%	67.6%
Social worker, psychologist, psychiatrist	2.3%	5.8%	6.1%	4.4%	6.3%	75.2%
Other	2.6%	5.1%	6.5%	4.5%	5.2%	76.1%

Q. Thinking about when your child was aged 1-2, which health care professionals did your child or children see?

Response	More than once a month	Every 1-2 months	Every 3-4 months	Every 5-6 months	Less than every six months	Never seen
HCP	6.6%	12.6%	10.9%	9.4%	11.9%	48.6%
GP	8.2%	21.1%	28.1%	19.0%	18.4%	5.1%
Nurse in a GP practice	6.0%	11.9%	17.4%	14.2%	18.2%	32.3%
Maternal / child health care nurse	5.1%	13.4%	18.0%	17.3%	16.8%	29.3%
Paediatrician	3.0%	8.4%	12.3%	10.3%	15.6%	50.4%
Mothercraft nurse / specialist parenting centre / parent helpline	3.3%	8.1%	9.5%	8.3%	9.7%	61.1%
Pharmacist	4.8%	10.1%	14.8%	14.5%	15.0%	40.7%
Occupational therapist	2.5%	5.4%	6.5%	5.4%	5.7%	74.5%
Osteopath	2.1%	4.9%	7.2%	5.8%	8.2%	71.7%
Physiotherapist	2.3%	5.7%	6.2%	4.3%	5.5%	76.0%
Chiropractor	2.7%	4.3%	6.2%	5.7%	6.4%	74.8%
Speech pathologist	3.1%	5.3%	5.8%	4.9%	6.5%	74.4%
Audiologist	3.9%	4.8%	5.8%	5.1%	6.2%	74.2%
Specialist, e.g. ear nose and throat, endocrinologist	3.4%	5.2%	7.0%	6.6%	8.0%	69.7%
Social worker, psychologist, psychiatrist	2.6%	5.1%	6.2%	5.1%	5.0%	76.0%
Other	2.0%	5.4%	7.1%	3.7%	4.4%	77.3%

Q. Thinking about when your child was aged 3-5, which health care professionals did your child or children see?

Response	More than once a month	Every 1-2 months	Every 3-4 months	Every 5-6 months	Less than every six months	Never seen
HCP	3.8%	6.7%	7.3%	9.8%	15.2%	57.2%
GP	4.5%	11.5%	20.8%	25.2%	30.2%	7.8%
Nurse in a GP practice	3.5%	6.0%	10.5%	13.0%	25.0%	42.0%
Maternal / child health care nurse	3.5%	7.0%	5.3%	8.8%	25.0%	50.3%
Paediatrician	2.7%	5.2%	6.0%	10.3%	15.8%	60.0%
Mothercraft nurse / specialist parenting centre / parent helpline	2.8%	3.8%	5.7%	6.5%	11.7%	69.5%
Pharmacist	3.2%	5.3%	12.3%	13.3%	18.3%	47.5%
Occupational therapist	2.0%	2.8%	5.0%	5.8%	11.5%	72.8%
Osteopath	2.8%	3.5%	4.0%	3.3%	8.3%	78.0%
Physiotherapist	2.3%	3.3%	2.7%	3.8%	6.7%	81.2%
Chiropractor	2.2%	2.7%	3.7%	3.5%	8.3%	79.7%
Speech pathologist	2.2%	2.8%	5.0%	2.8%	7.2%	80.0%
Audiologist	6.3%	3.8%	4.2%	4.5%	9.8%	71.3%
Specialist, e.g. ear nose and throat, endocrinologist	2.2%	2.5%	5.3%	7.8%	10.3%	71.8%
Social worker, psychologist, psychiatrist	2.8%	2.3%	4.2%	4.8%	8.2%	77.7%
Other	2.0%	2.7%	2.8%	3.3%	8.7%	80.5%

Q. When it comes to feeding your child, what are your biggest concerns?

Response	Percent
Managing their food allergies	15.8%
Preparing food and understanding food labels	20.4%
Identifying healthy drinks for children	22.2%
Introducing them to a variety of foods	46.7%
Dealing with a fussy eater	40.7%
Ensuring they get the right amount of the five food groups for a healthy, balanced diet	41.7%
Understanding daily recommended dietary requirements for children up to 5 years of age	23.6%
Identifying and limiting junk food	29.3%
Finding time to prepare healthy meals	31.4%
Getting them to eat enough	34.1%
Making sure they don't put on too much weight	11.5%
Making meals that they will eat	36.9%
Making meals the whole family will eat	27.9%
None of the above	9.6%

Q. Thinking about the time since you became a Father, have you experienced any of the following challenges?

Response	Percent
Getting your children to sleep	46.9%
Comforting your children if they have any separation anxiety	33.2%
Getting your children to eat	46.6%
Managing tantrums	42.2%
Which games to play with your children	27.4%
How to discipline your children	35.3%
Being at home alone with the children	20.8%
Other (please specify)	1.6%
None of the above	16.2%