



RBC  
Children's Mental  
Health Project



# Healthy Kids Inside and Out:

## The 2011 RBC Children's Mental Health Survey

October 2011

## A message from RBC

Parents are quick to take action if their child breaks a limb or has a physical illness. They know what to do and where to go for information. However, it's a different story altogether when a child has a mental illness. There's no "Dr. Spock" book to help parents who are struggling with children's mental health issues. And it appears that Canadian parents may not recognize the early warning signs of mental illness when they see them.

According to Dr. David Wolfe, RBC Chair of Children's Mental Health at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, "most mental health problems start in childhood or adolescence, and the good news is that many children improve with early intervention and treatment. But it's absolutely crucial for parents, doctors and teachers to have a basic level of mental health IQ so they can recognize the warning signs if a child is struggling at an early age."

That's why RBC® is proud to present [Healthy Kids Inside and Out: The 2011 RBC Children's Mental Health Survey](#).

This study is made available to NGOs and other interested parties, courtesy of RBC. We encourage the broad dissemination of the data and findings of this study and hope the information helps contribute to a healthy conversation about children's mental health.

You are welcome to refer to, reprint or redistribute this information, and we ask that you attribute the source "[Healthy Kids Inside and Out: The 2011 RBC Children's Mental Health Survey](#)."

The RBC Children's Mental Health Project is a multi-year philanthropic commitment to support community-based and hospital programs that reduce stigma, provide early intervention and increase public awareness about children's mental health issues. RBC has donated more than \$6.5 million to over 125 community-based and hospital programs across Canada since 2009. These organizations form a network of trusted sources of information that help parents and health-care professionals nationwide.

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# Methodological overview

These findings are part of an online survey of 2,556 parents, conducted by the Rogers Connect Marketing Research Group and commissioned by the RBC Children’s Mental Health Project and *Today’s Parent magazine* from July 11 to August 11, 2011.

The results reflect the opinions of Canadian parents with children aged 18 and younger. The margin of error for the full data set — which measures sampling variability — is +/- 1.9%, 19 times out of 20. Discrepancies in or between totals are due to rounding.

This report presents the overall survey results as well as any subgroup differences that are both practically and statistically significant.

# Key findings

## Top concerns

- Two-thirds of parents say that attention deficit and behaviour disorders are among the top three mental health issues they face today.
- After identifying the highest priorities for improving children's mental health, parents focus on access to and coordination of services.

## Responding to children's mental health issues

- In response to most problem behaviours, about 20% to 25% of parents would seek professional help immediately, while a similar number would try to manage on their own. Risky behaviour and bedwetting, however, stand out as problems needing more professional intervention, while shyness and inattentiveness are taken somewhat less seriously by parents.
- Clearly, the family doctor is the primary point of contact for worried parents.
- Most parents reject stigmatization themselves but feel that other parents and children stigmatize mental health issues. While this suggests that the fear of stigmatization may be lessening, it could also mean that respondents are providing an idealized self-image.
- Despite the generally more progressive outlook on mental health among parents overall, more than four-fifths of Canadian parents believe other parents and children stigmatize children with mental health conditions.
- Moreover, there remains a group comprising perhaps one-quarter of parents who would be embarrassed, defensive and/or secretive if their child showed signs of a mental health condition.
- While most believe that mental health conditions in children can be successfully treated, more than one-quarter of parents disagree or are not sure. There is even less consensus on whether adult problems can be traced to childhood issues — only 54% agree.

## Experience with mental health conditions

- Mental health issues touch almost everyone. Only one parent in six (16%) does not know anyone with a mental health issue. Meanwhile two-thirds (63%) have seen it in their family, and nearly three-quarters (71%) have seen it outside their family. Children with mental health issues are personally known to a large portion of parents.
- One in 10 families has a child diagnosed with an attention deficit disorder. Anxiety, behaviour disorders and depression are the other most commonly diagnosed conditions. 83% of all parents report no diagnosed mental health conditions of their children, however.

- Many more parents (50%) see signs of mental health conditions in their children that have not been confirmed by diagnosis.
- Just over one-half (57%) of parents say they are at least moderately concerned about the mental health of their children.

### **Information about mental health conditions**

- Parents express the same overall interest in mental health and development as they do in physical health and development. Just under one-third seeks out these types of information, while the rest receive it passively or not at all.
- Family doctors and health organizations are by far the most trusted sources of information on children’s mental health.
- While only 11% feel the internet is among the most trustworthy sources of information on children’s mental health (see previous page), 77% would turn there for information if the need arose. The most trusted sources — doctors (92%) and health organizations (72%) — are also mentioned very frequently.
- Evidently, worried parents faced with an issue would seek information in many places, including those that they acknowledge may be less trustworthy.
- Just over one-half of parents are aware of children’s mental health support in their community.

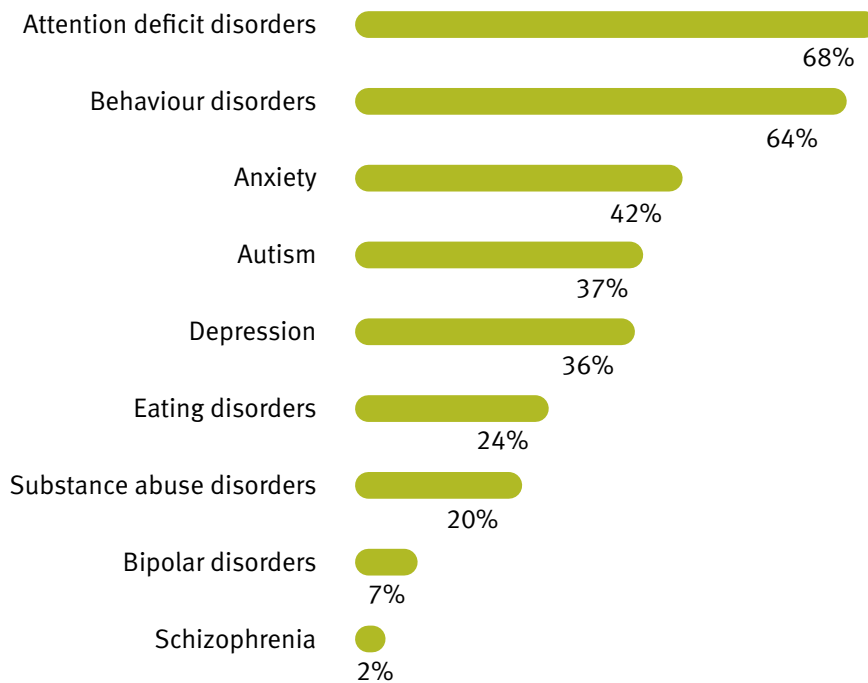
### **The experience of affected families**

- Among parents of children facing a mental health issue, there is widespread agreement that finding information and support is a challenge. A majority manage to get what they need for their children, but a sizable minority feels under-served and unsupported. On average, parents say that just over two years passed between the first suspicions of a mental health condition and the time their child was officially diagnosed. Another year, on average, passed before treatment began.
- Over 20% of children with diagnosed mental health issues wait more than a year for treatment. The average delay is 12 months.
- Reinforcing the progressive views noted earlier, most parents report not feeling shame or embarrassment on hearing of their child’s diagnosis. Instead, they more commonly say they feel relief. Others admit feeling more negative emotions such as fear, guilt, frustration, sadness or anger.
- While doctors are generally credited with treating diagnosed children well, there is more ambivalence about the behaviour of social services and schools.
- More than 90% of parents of children with diagnosed mental health conditions say they are highly involved in their child’s treatment.
- Of parents with a diagnosed child, only three in 10 are very satisfied with their child’s program of treatment.

# Top concerns regarding children's mental health

**Q** In your opinion, what are the top three children's mental health illnesses/issues facing parents today?  
*Base: 2,556 Canadian parents.*

According to parents, attention deficit and behaviour disorders are viewed as the top mental health issues.



Two-thirds of parents say that attention deficit and behaviour disorders are among the top three mental health issues facing parents today. A second tier includes anxiety, autism and depression.

Percent placing each condition in their “top three.”

## Parent ranking of top three issues: demographic splits

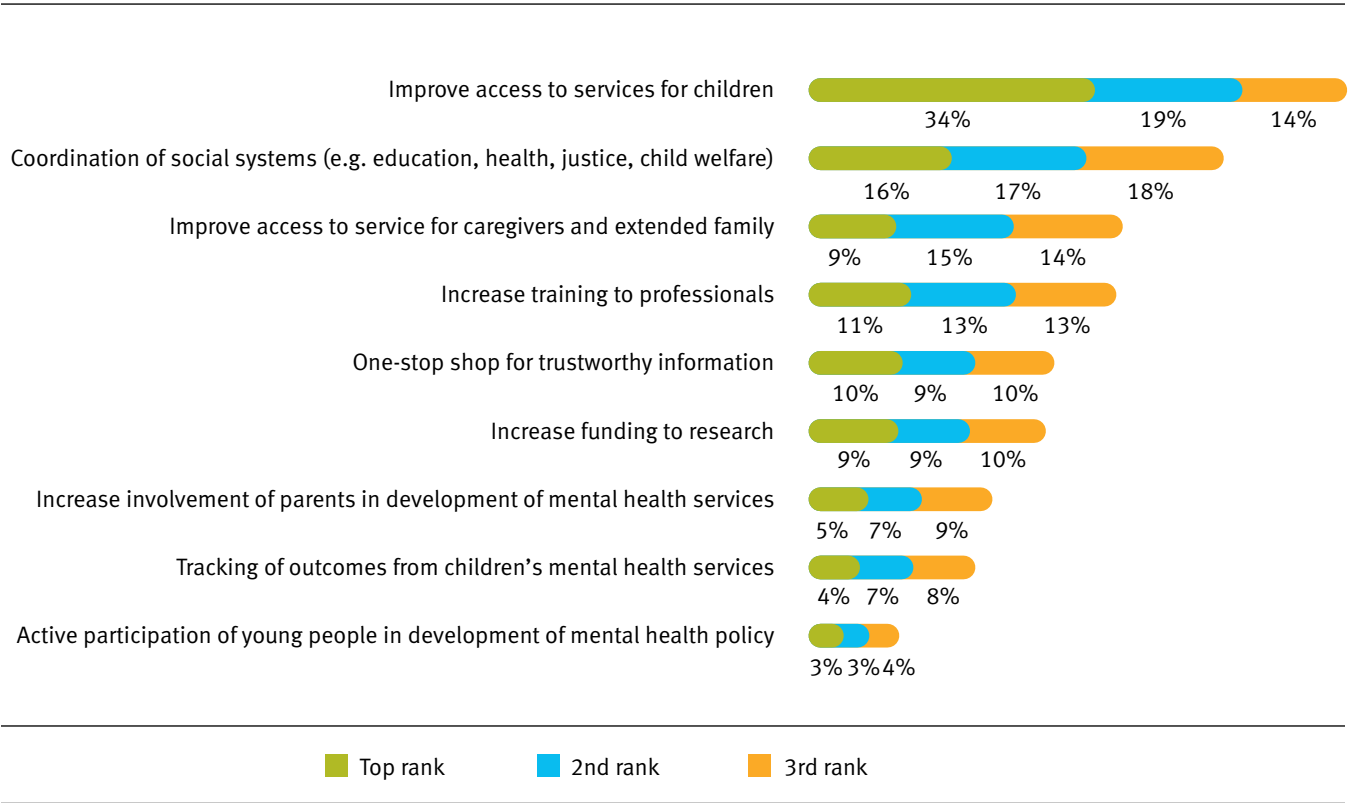
**Q** In your opinion, what are the top three children’s mental health illnesses/ issues facing parents today?  
*Base: 2,556 Canadian parents.*

	Gender			Region					
	Total	Men	Women	Atlantic	Quebec	Ontario	Man/Sask	Alberta	British Columbia
	2,556	1,009	1,547	168	666	1,008	150	250	309
Attention deficit disorders	68%	64%	71%	63%	79%	68%	56%	66%	59%
Behaviour disorders	64%	63%	64%	61%	73%	61%	59%	59%	65%
Anxiety	42%	40%	44%	34%	48%	42%	33%	39%	42%
Autism	37%	30%	43%	45%	25%	41%	37%	37%	41%
Depression	36%	38%	34%	39%	25%	38%	43%	44%	35%
Eating disorders	24%	27%	21%	24%	23%	23%	27%	26%	25%
Substance abuse disorders	20%	24%	17%	27%	13%	21%	32%	23%	22%
Bipolar disorders	7%	9%	5%	5%	9%	5%	8%	5%	7%
Schizophrenia	2%	3%	1%	2%	3%	1%	4%	0%	4%

- While the concerns of both genders are similar overall, mothers are more likely than fathers to express concern about attention disorders and autism, while fathers worry somewhat more about eating disorders and substance abuse.
- Quebecers express the greatest concern about attention disorders, behaviour disorders and anxiety, while expressing less concern about autism, depression and substance abuse. Substance abuse has a higher profile in Manitoba/Saskatchewan than elsewhere.

# Improving access and coordination of services viewed as most important areas for improvement

Of the following areas for improvement in addressing children’s mental health, which three do you feel are the most important to address?  
*Base: 2,556 Canadian parents.*



- When they identify the highest priorities for improving children’s mental health, parents focus on access and coordination of services. Research, information and patient empowerment are much lower priorities.

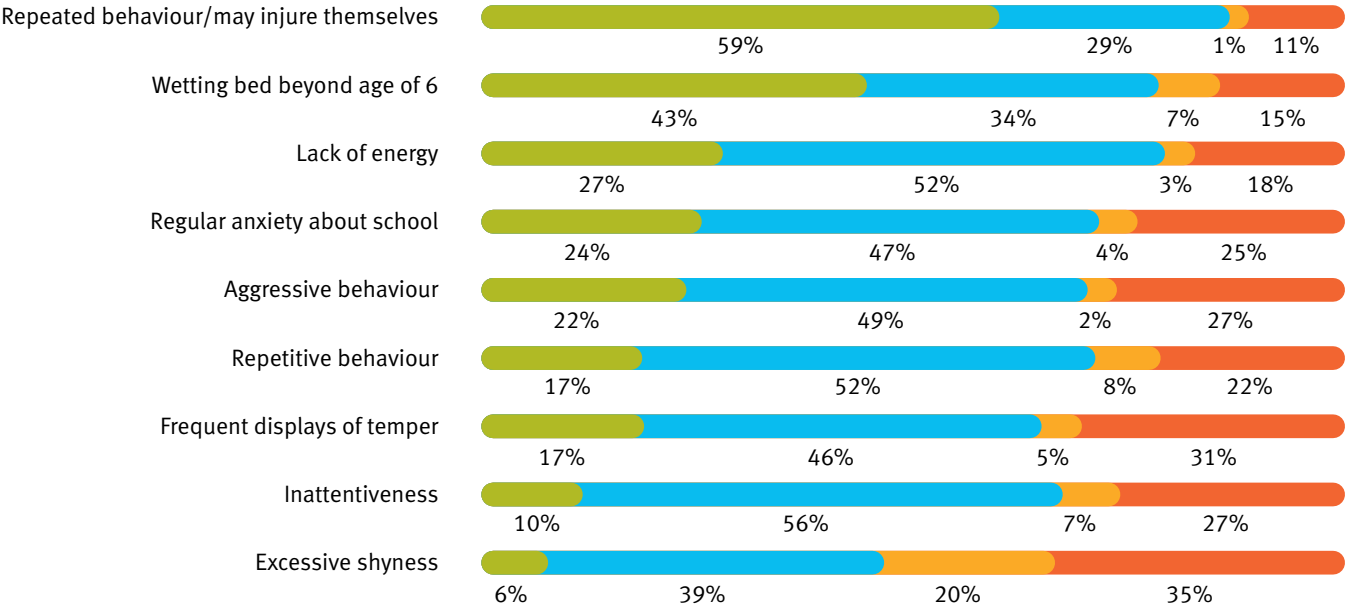


# Responding to children’s mental health

Below are a number of different situations, and we would like to get a sense of how you would handle the situation if it were your child.  
*Base: 2,556 Canadian parents.*

## Majority (59%) of parents would seek immediate help if child was injuring themselves

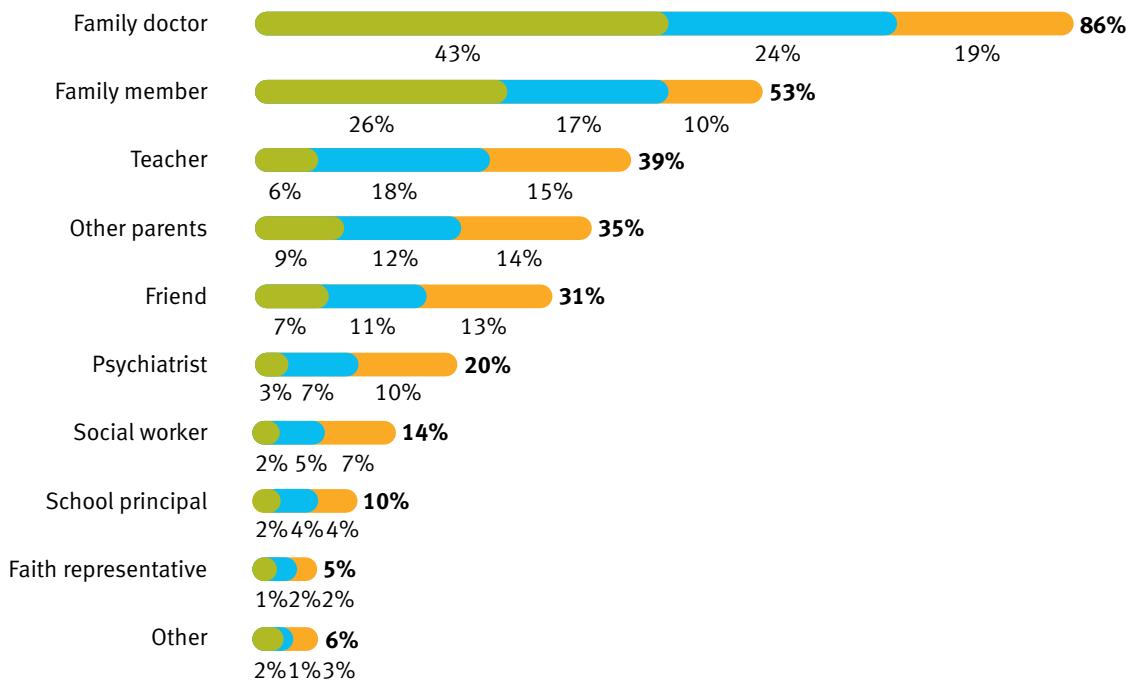
- Risky behaviour and bedwetting stand out as problems that need more professional intervention. Shyness and inattentiveness are taken somewhat less seriously by parents.
- Parents with a diagnosed child are generally quicker to consult a professional, as are parents with only one child.
- Quebecers are more likely than others to consult a professional about lack of energy (32%), a temper (23%), inattentiveness (14%) and shyness (12%).



■ Seek professional help   
 ■ Monitor   
 ■ Stage/grow out of it   
 ■ Manage on my own

# Close to nine in 10 (86%) would discuss child's condition with family doctor

**Q** Who would you discuss your child's situation with?  
*Base: 2,556 Canadian parents.*



■ First choice   ■ Second choice   ■ Third choice

- Clearly the family doctor is the primary point of contact for worried parents.
- Other professionals are usually the second- or third-tier choice for advice, often after friends, family or other parents.

## Mothers more likely to consult friends and teachers; fathers turn to psychiatrists and principals



Who would you discuss your child's situation with?

Base: 2,556 Canadian parents.

	Gender		Age			
	Total	Men	Women	18 to 34	35 to 54	55+
	2,556	1,009	1,547	520	1,918	115
Family doctor	85%	83%	88%	86%	85%	84%
Family member	53%	51%	54%	66%	51%	38%
Teacher	39%	35%	42%	32%	40%	42%
Other parents	34%	34%	35%	41%	34%	21%
Friend	31%	26%	35%	36%	30%	21%
Psychiatrist	19%	26%	14%	16%	19%	29%
Social worker	14%	15%	12%	8%	15%	22%
School principal	9%	12%	7%	5%	10%	19%
Other	6%	5%	7%	3%	6%	8%
Faith representative	5%	7%	2%	5%	5%	5%
No one	1%	2%	1%	2%	1%	2%

- Mothers are more likely than fathers to consult friends and teachers.
- Fathers are more likely to turn to a psychiatrist, school principal or a faith representative.
- Older parents are much more likely to turn to professionals for help.
- Younger parents gravitate more to other parents and to family.

## Most parents reject stigmatization themselves but are afraid that others stigmatize mental illness

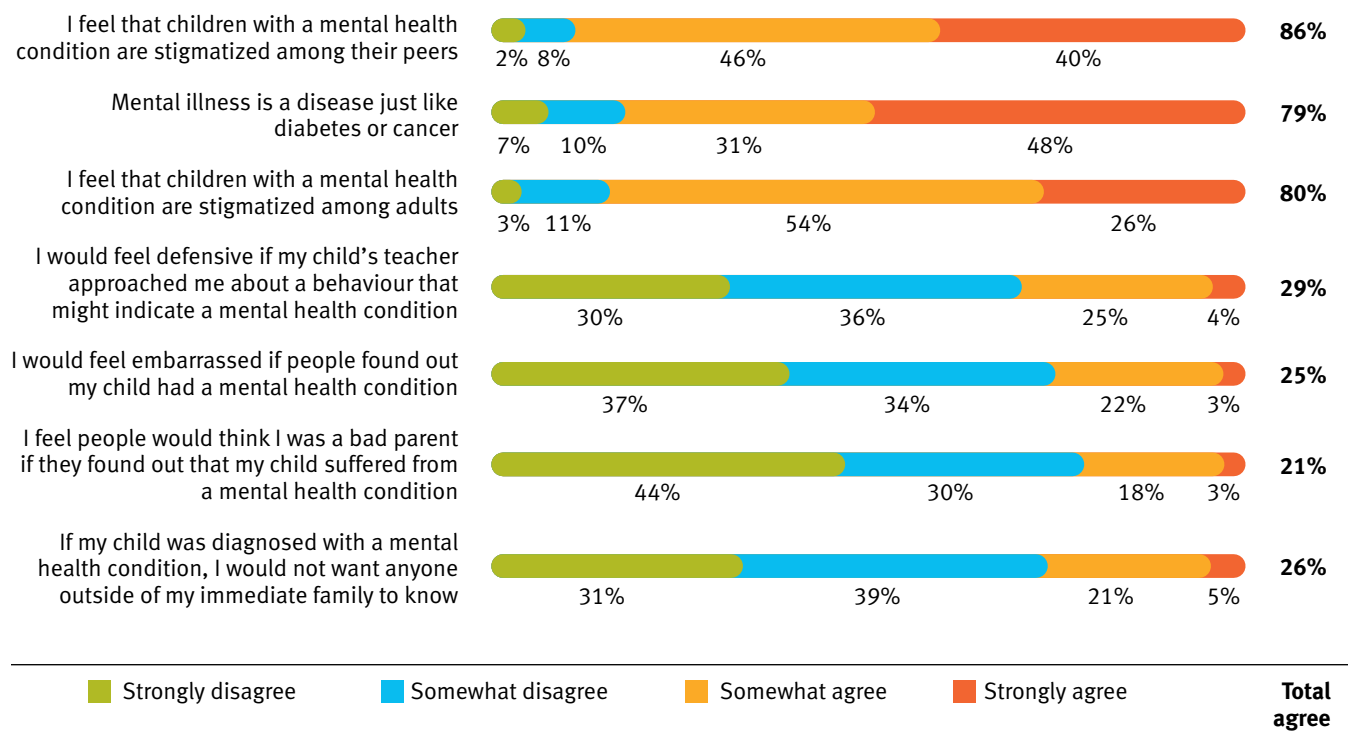
- As the graph on the following page shows, more than four-fifths of Canadian parents believe other parents and children stigmatize children with mental health conditions.
- However, an equal proportion of parents say that mental illness is a disease like any other. Two-thirds would not feel defensive about their child if a teacher raised the possibility of a mental health issue. Thus, most parents reject stigmatization themselves but feel that other parents stigmatize mental illness. This may suggest that the fear of stigmatization may be exaggerated.
- Despite the widespread expectation of stigmatization, most parents reject the suggestion that they would be embarrassed if their child were diagnosed, or that they would keep the information private within their family. Thus, most parents indicate they would not be prevented by shame or embarrassment from engaging support services if their child were diagnosed with a mental health issue.
- Notwithstanding the generally progressive outlook on mental health among parents overall, there remains a group comprising about one-quarter of parents who would be embarrassed, defensive and/or secretive if their child showed signs of a mental health condition.
- Moreover, parents with diagnosed children are more likely to strongly agree that diagnosed children are stigmatized by other children (49% versus 38%) and by other adults (37% versus 24%). They are also more likely to say that mental illness is a disease like any other (60% versus 46%).

# Parents reject stigma of mental illness, but fear others do not

**Q** To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?  
*Base: 2,556 Canadian parents.*

## Majority (59%) of parents would seek immediate help if child was injuring themselves

- Risky behaviour and bedwetting stand out as problems that need more professional intervention. Shyness and inattentiveness are taken somewhat less seriously by parents.
- Parents with a diagnosed child are generally quicker to consult a professional, as are parents with only one child.
- Quebecers are more likely than others to consult a professional about lack of energy (32%), a temper (23%), inattentiveness (14%) and shyness (12%).

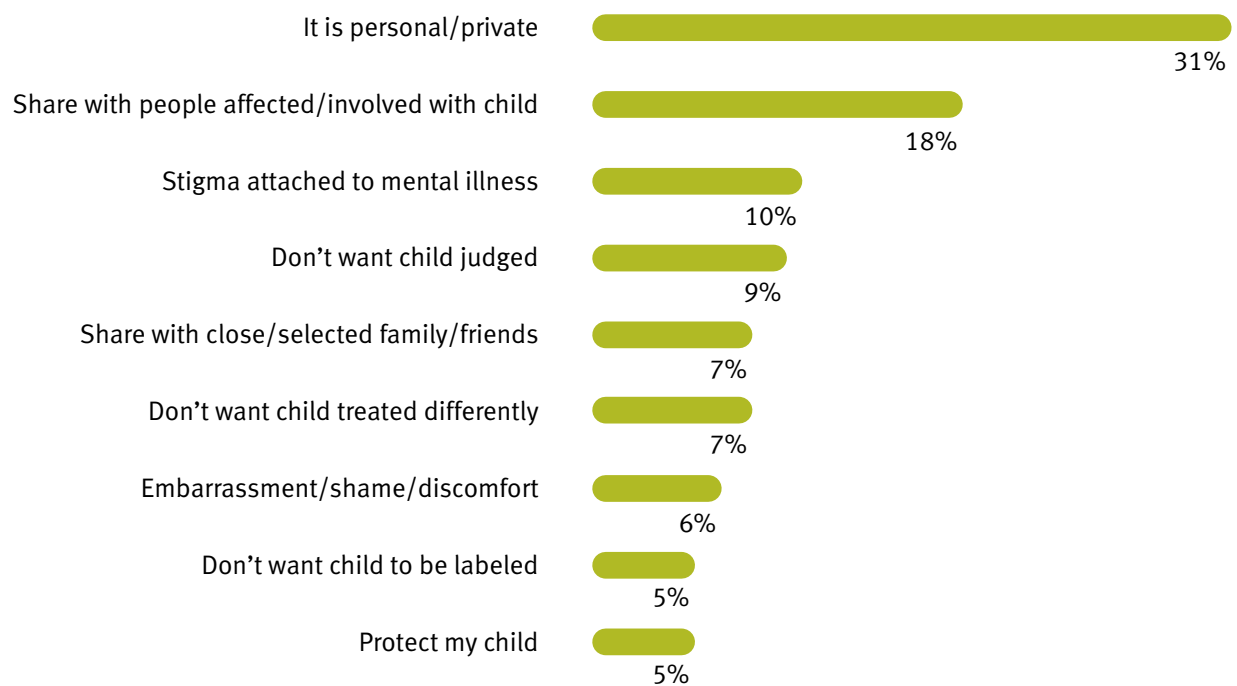


## Parents who would not tell others about their child's diagnosis do so out of privacy



Why wouldn't you tell anyone about your child's diagnosis?

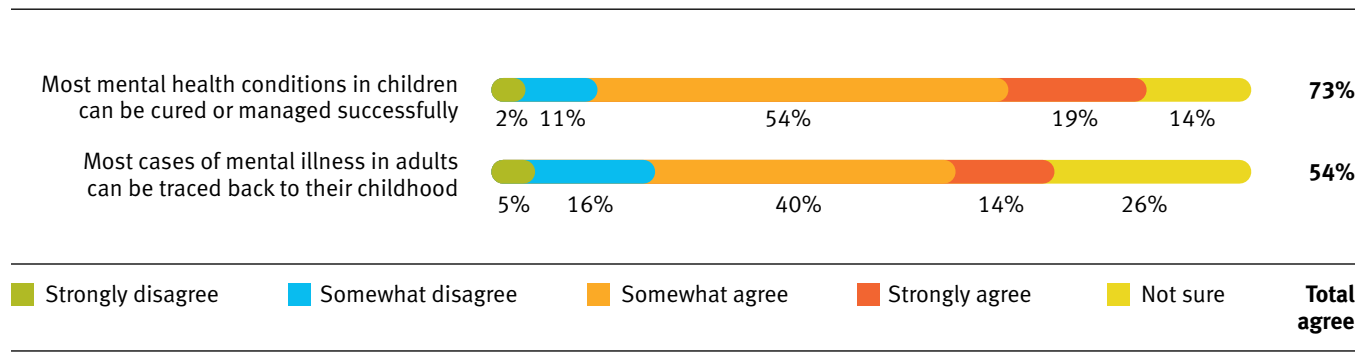
*Base: 575 Canadian parents who would only tell immediate family if their child had a mental health condition.*



- The decision not to tell many people about a child's mental health issue is based on simple privacy and on a fear of stigmatization.
- Though most parents in the study express progressive views on mental health, they do not trust other people to think the same way. They want to protect their child from the judgments and prejudices of others.

## Close to three-quarters (73%) of parents agree that most mental health conditions in children can be managed or cured

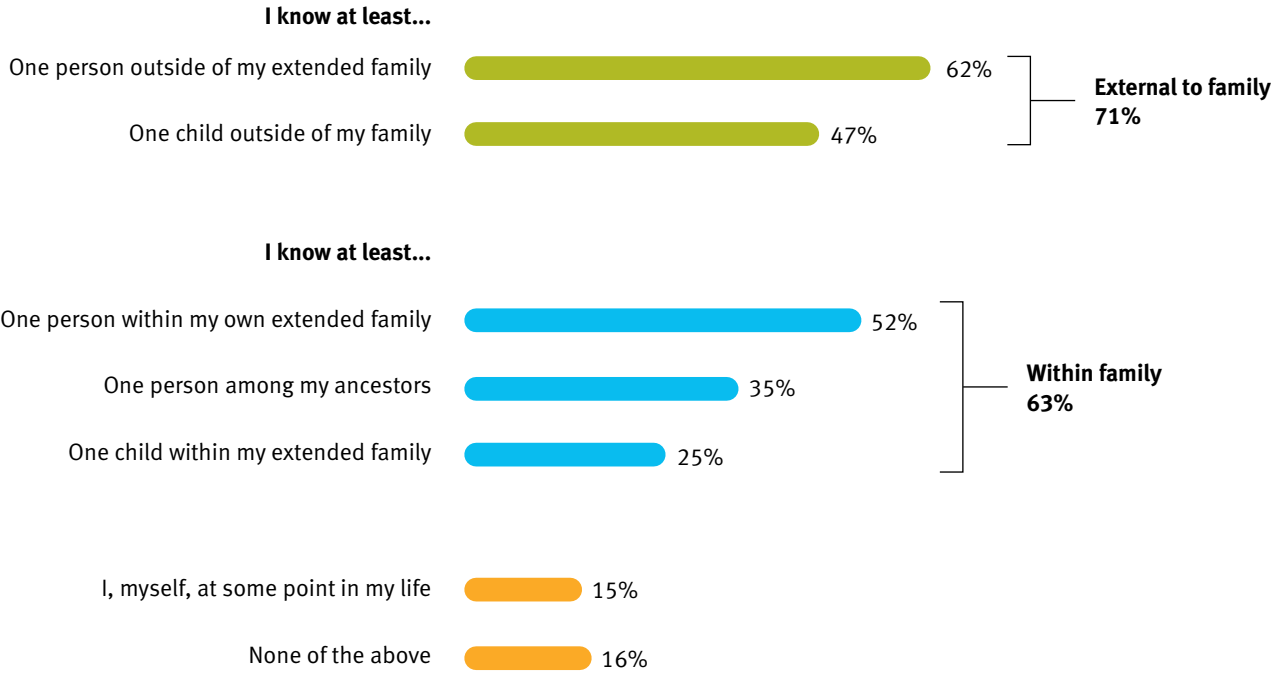
**Q** To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?  
*Base: 2,556 Canadian parents.*



- While most believe that mental health conditions in children can be successfully treated, more than one-quarter of parents disagree or are not sure.
- There is even less consensus on whether adult problems can be traced to childhood issues — only 54% agree.

# Experiences with mental health conditions

Which of the following apply?  
*Base: 2,556 Canadian parents.*



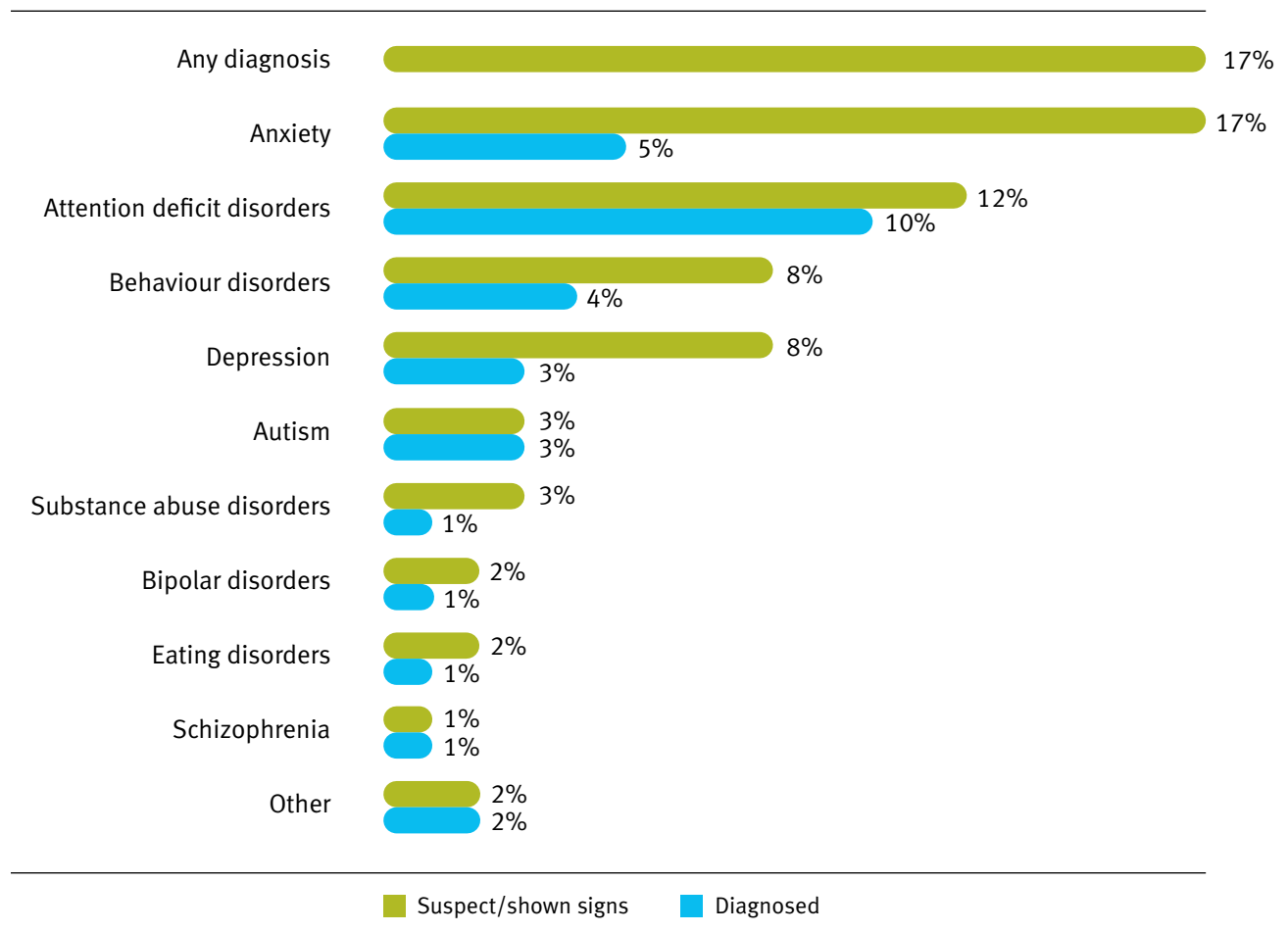
- Only one parent in six (16%) does not know anyone with a mental health issue.
- Two-thirds (63%) have seen it in their family, and nearly three-quarters (71%) have seen it outside their family.
- Children with mental health issues are personally known to a large portion of parents.

**Parents of diagnosed children (24%) are twice as likely as other parents (13%) to have experienced mental health problems themselves.**



## One in six (17%) parents report having a diagnosed child — attention deficit disorders are the most common condition

**Q** Have any one of your children exhibited signs of or been diagnosed with any of the following conditions?  
*Base: 2,556 Canadian parents.*



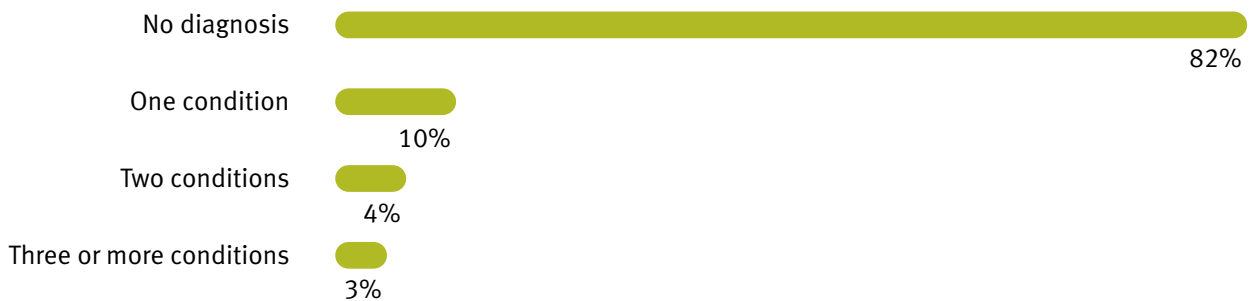
- 17% of parents report having a child who has been diagnosed with a mental health condition.
- Many more parents see in their children signs of mental health conditions that have not been confirmed by diagnosis.
- These are most common: anxiety, attention deficit disorders, behaviour disorders and depression.

## Among single-child families, 7% report multiple diagnoses



Number of conditions your children have been diagnosed with.

*Base: 1,187 Canadian parents with only one child.*

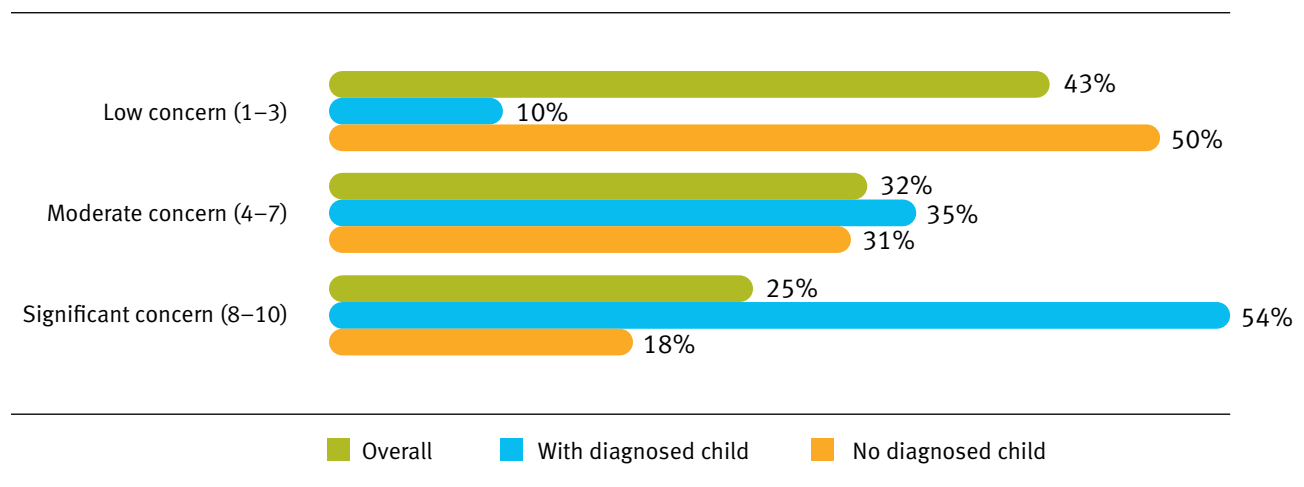


- While 83% of all families (and 82% of single-child families) report that they have no children with diagnosed mental health issues, it is not uncommon to see diagnosed children with multiple diagnoses.
- As shown, 4% of diagnosed children in single-child families have two diagnoses and 3% have three diagnoses.

This analysis is limited to single-child families to ensure that the multiple diagnoses all apply to the same child.

## Close to six in 10 (57%) parents at least moderately concerned about mental health of their children

**Q** To what degree is mental illness among any of your children a source of concern for you? (1 = Not at all concerning, 10 = Very concerning)  
*Base: 2,556 Canadian parents.*



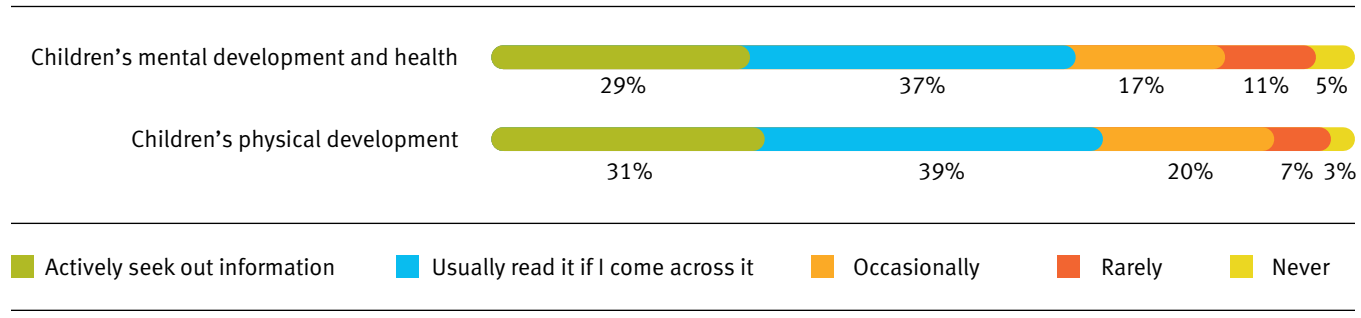
### Why parents are not concerned

- Children have not shown any signs: 83%
  - Likely just normal child behaviour: 15%
  - Just a stage that they will grow out of: 8%
- 
- Close to six in 10 parents say they are at least moderately concerned about mental illness in their children.
  - Concern among the parents of children who have been diagnosed with a mental health condition is much higher than among other parents.

# Information about children's mental health conditions

**Q** To what degree do you pursue information about...?  
*Base: 2,556 Canadian parents.*

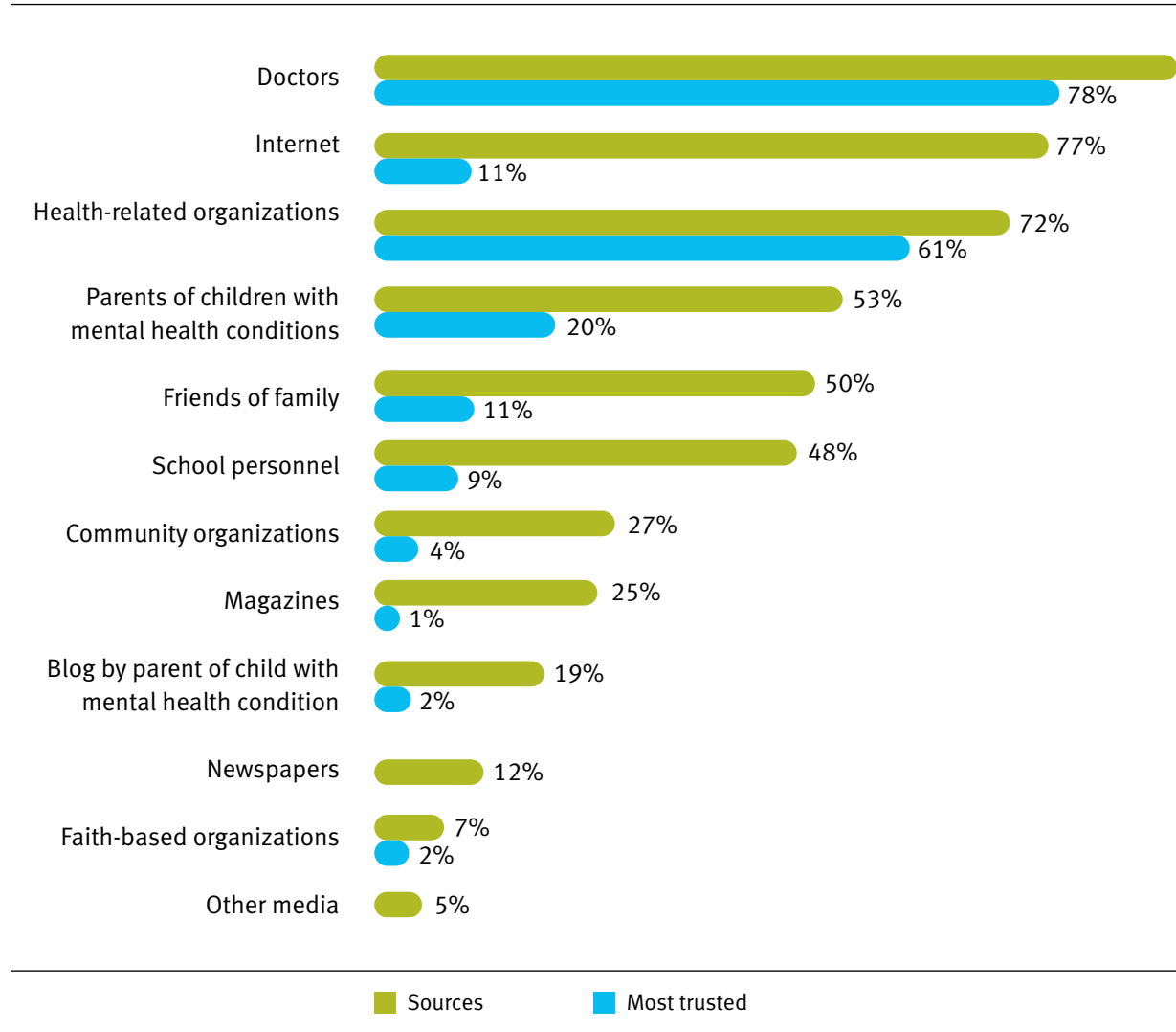
## Just under one-third of parents actively seek information on children's mental development and health



- Parents express relatively the same overall interest in mental health and development as they do in physical health and development. Just under one-third seeks out these types of information, while the rest receive it passively or not at all.
- Parents with diagnosed children are more likely than others to actively seek out information on mental development and health (58% versus 23%) and physical development (41% versus 29%).

## Doctors and internet top sources of information, but just one in 10 (11%) say internet one of most trusted sources

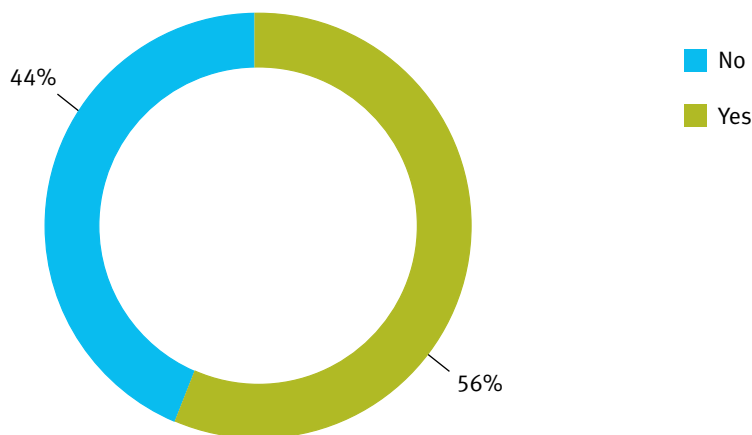
**Q** If the need arose, what resources do you think you might turn to in search of information on children’s mental health or mental illness? Which two sources do you trust the most?  
*Base: 2,556 Canadian parents.*



■ Parents with diagnosed children would use the same sources as other parents.

## Only slightly over half (56%) of parents indicate knowledge of community programs/services

**Q** Are you aware of programs or services in your community to help you if you need assistance with a children's mental health issue?  
*Base: 2,556 Canadian parents.*



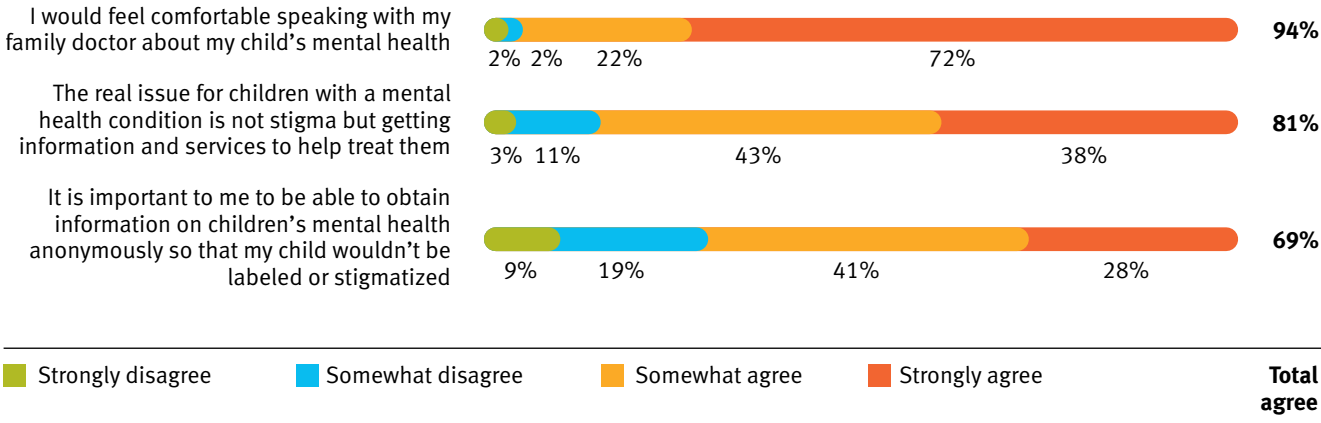
- Just over one-half of parents are aware of children's mental health support in their community.
- Among parents who are very concerned about the mental health of their children, awareness is only slightly higher (61%) than the average.
- Awareness does not vary by community size.

# Experiences of affected families

**Q** To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?  
*Base: 2,556 Canadian parents.*

## Comfort expressed about discussing child’s mental health with doctor, but still concerned about stigma

- Although most parents do not expect to be stigmatized because of a child’s mental health issues, they nonetheless would want to obtain information anonymously.
- They would feel comfortable speaking to their doctor, however. Many believe that access to information and services is a real issue for children with mental health issues.



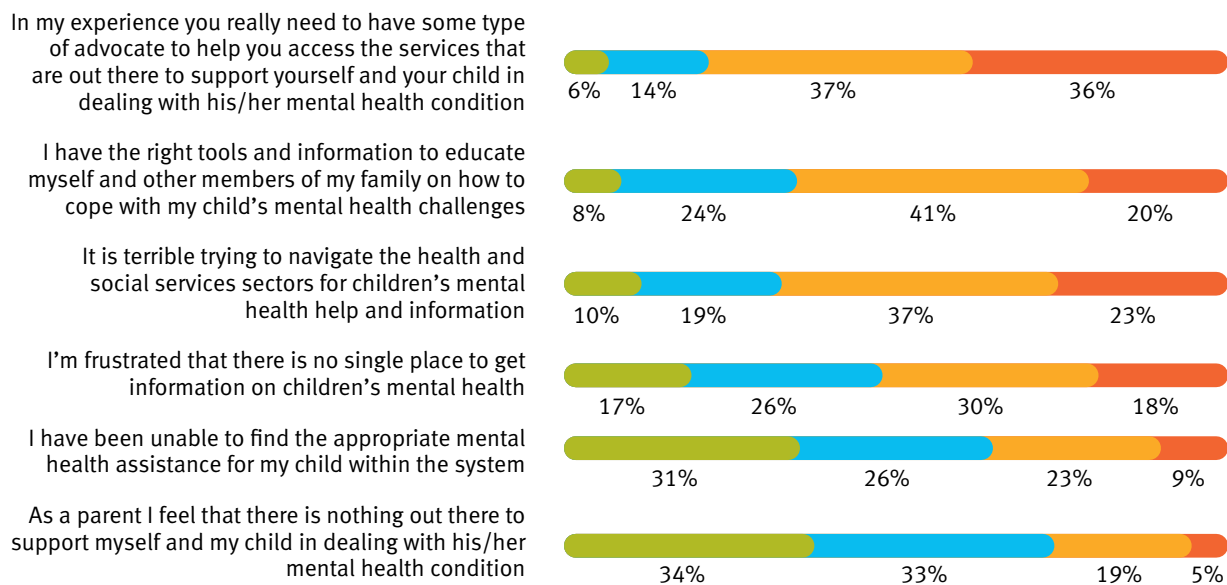
## Finding help for children's mental health difficulties

- Among parents of children facing a mental health issue, there is widespread agreement that finding information and support is a challenge.
- As the following table shows, the majority agree that it is “terrible” trying to navigate the system, and one-half is frustrated by the lack of a single, reliable source of information. More than two-thirds say that parents need an advocate to help them access existing support services.
- Of particular concern is the fact that one-third of parents say that they have not been able to find appropriate help for their child, and one-quarter feels there is nothing available in the community to help them and their child. Less than two-thirds of parents feel their family has the tools and information they need to manage the child's mental health condition.
- In sum, the system is challenging to almost all parents, but a majority manages to get what they need for their children. A sizable minority, however, feels under-served and unsupported.



# Three-quarters (73%) of parents with a diagnosed child feel they need some type of advocate to help navigate system

**Q** To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?  
*Base: 422 Canadian parents of children with diagnosed mental health conditions.*



■ Strongly disagree    
 ■ Somewhat disagree    
 ■ Somewhat agree    
 ■ Strongly agree

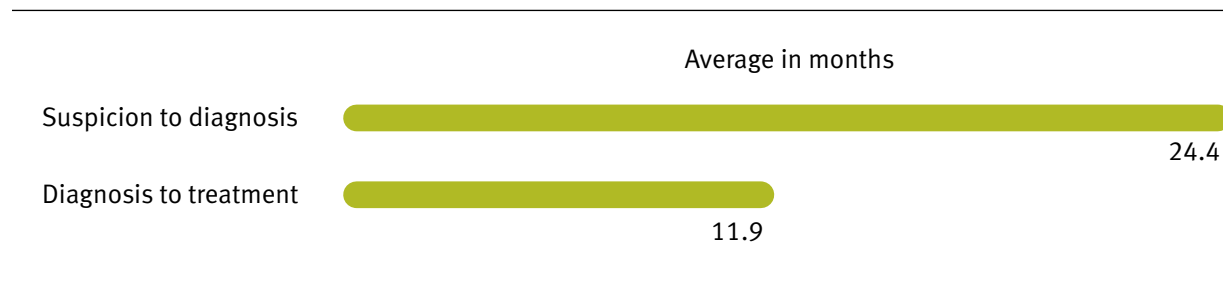
## On average, the time between first suspicion and beginning of treatment is up to three years



How long was it between when you first suspected your child may have an issue and the official diagnosis?

How long was it between when your child was officially diagnosed and when their professional help began?

*Base: 1,187 Canadian parents with only one child.*



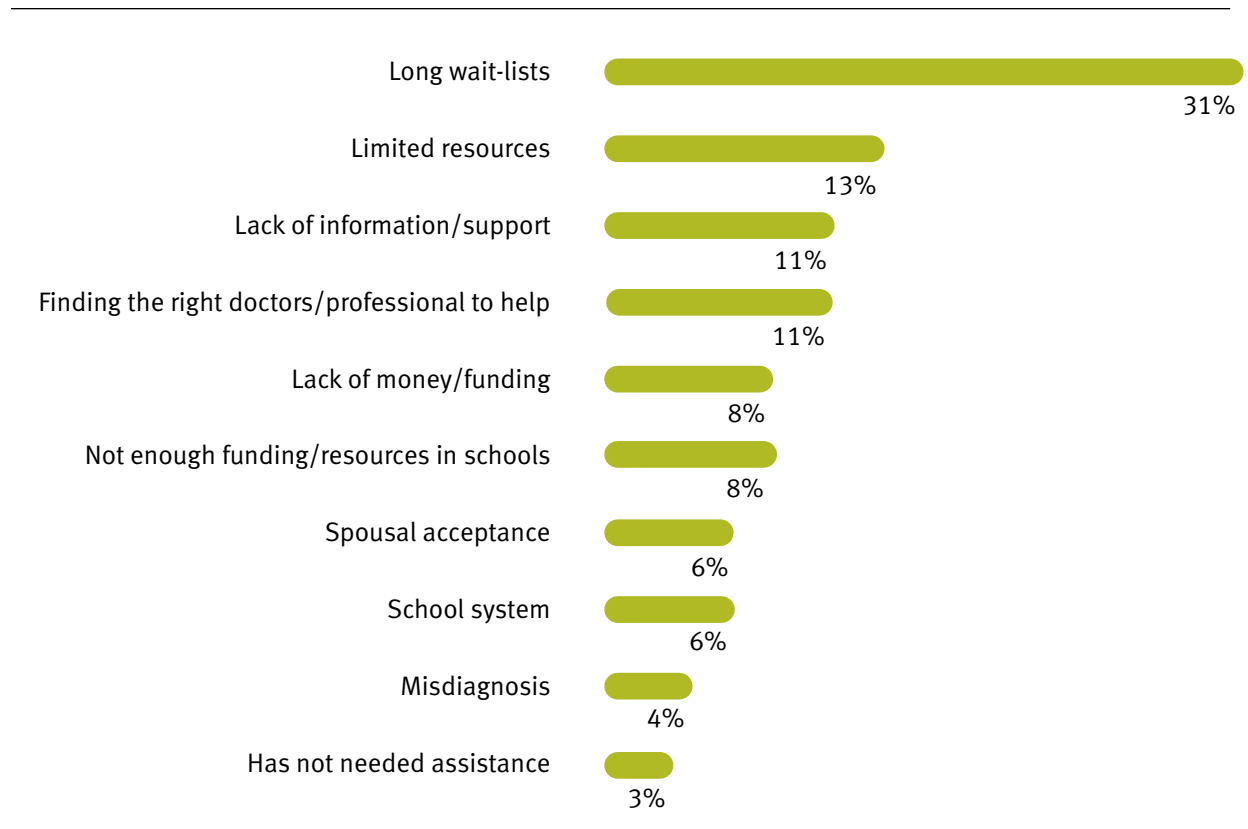
- On average, parents say that just over two years passed between the first suspicions of a mental health condition and the time their child was officially diagnosed.
- For over one-fifth of parents, the delay was more than three years.
- Over 20% of children with diagnosed mental health issues wait more than a year for treatment, with an average wait of 11.9 months.

## For those who had to wait longer than one year, wait-lists were cited as top barrier to faster help



What were the barriers to receiving faster help for your child?

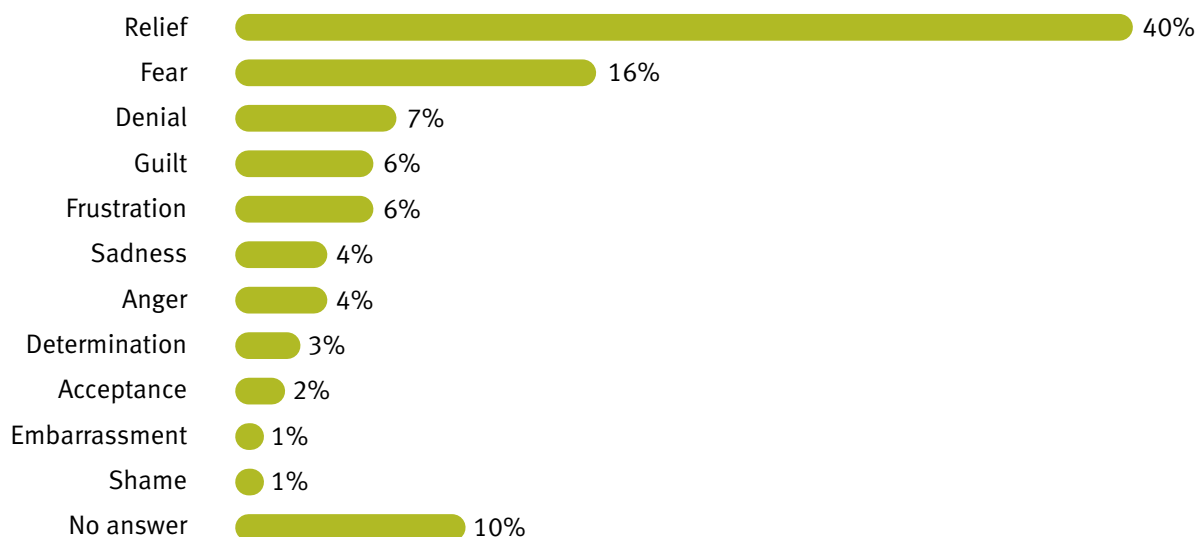
*Base: 84 Canadian parents of children with diagnosed mental health conditions who waited more than a year for treatment*



- Among those whose children waited more than a year for treatment, waiting lists were the most common reason for delays in treatment.
- A lack of funding, information and appropriate treatment options were also factors.

## Relief most cited reaction to their child's diagnosis

When you first learned of your child's diagnosis, what was your first reaction?  
 Base: 422 Canadian parents of children with diagnosed mental health conditions.

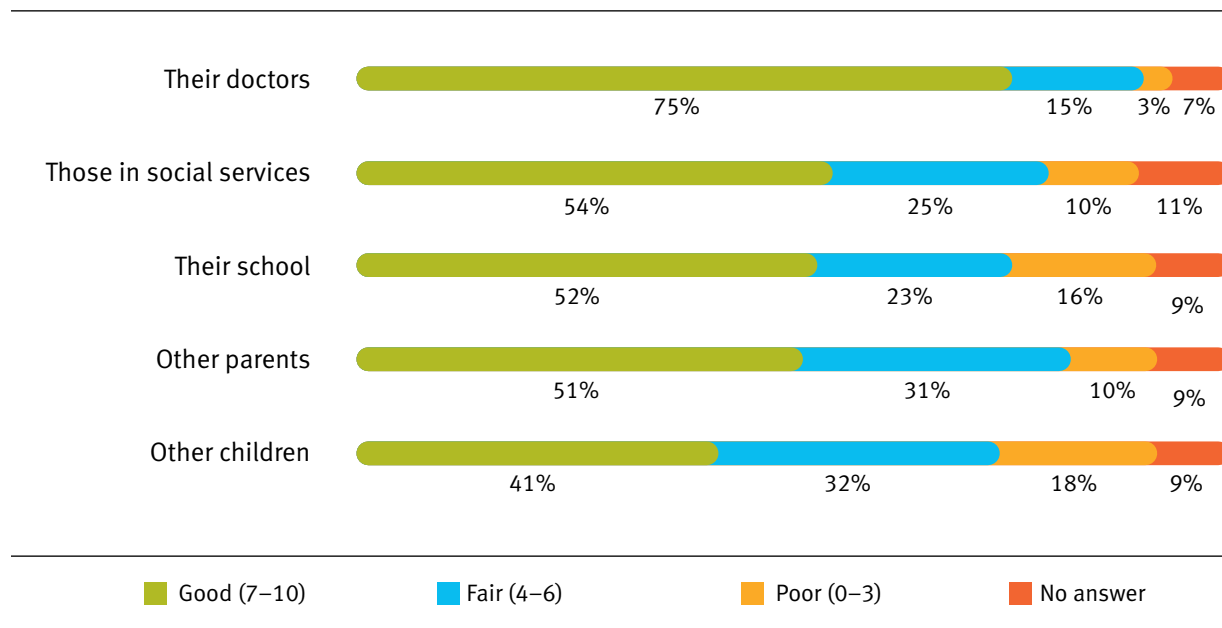


	Men	Women
Relief	36%	43%
Fear	15%	16%
Denial	5%	7%
Guilt	4%	7%
Frustration	11%	3%
Sadness	2%	6%
Anger	6%	1%
Determination	3%	3%
Acceptance	3%	2%
Embarrassment	1%	0%
Shame	0%	1%

- Reinforcing the progressive views noted earlier, most parents did not feel shame or embarrassment on hearing of their child's diagnosis. Instead, they more commonly felt relief. Others admit feeling more negative emotions such as fear, guilt, frustration, sadness or anger.
- Women are more likely than men to react with relief, guilt or sadness, while men are somewhat more likely than women to feel frustration or anger.

## Diagnosed child’s treatment by social services and schools mixed; treatment by doctors tops list

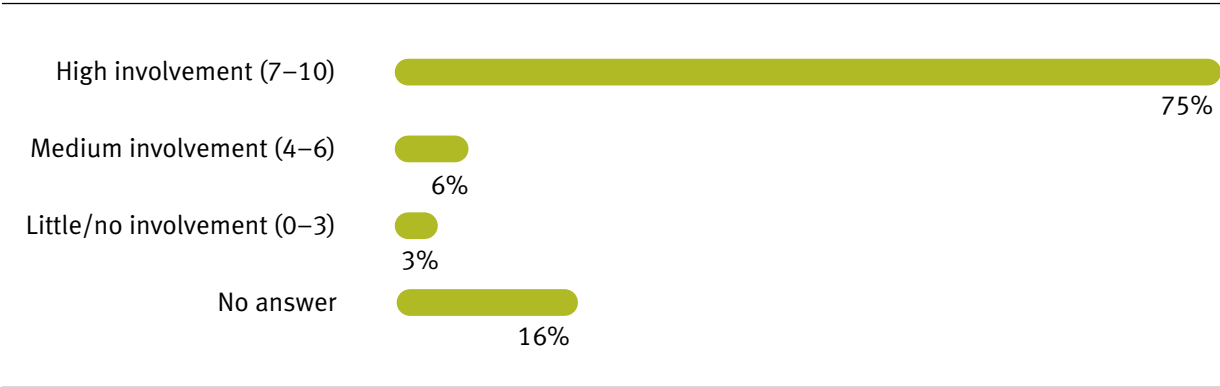
**Q** After your child was diagnosed, in general, how would you rate how your child was treated by the following? (Scale of 0–10)  
*Base: 422 Canadian parents of children with diagnosed mental health conditions.*



- While doctors are generally credited with treating diagnosed children well, there is more ambivalence about the behaviour of social services and schools. Barely one-half of parents rate their child’s treatment by these groups as good.
- Other parents performed about the same as schools and social services, while other children were not much worse.

# Most parents of diagnosed children report being heavily involved in their children's treatment

**Q** How involved are you/or did you play a role in your child's program of treatment? (Scale of 0–10)  
*Base: 422 Canadian parents of children with diagnosed mental health conditions.*



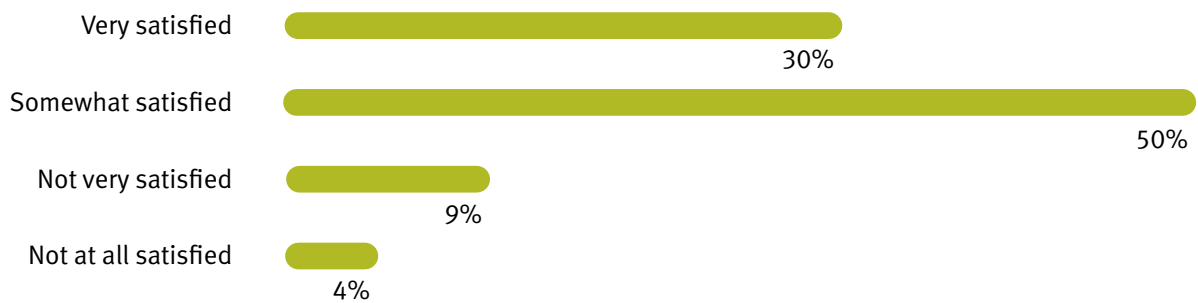
- Less than 10% of parents of children with diagnosed mental health conditions say they are not highly involved in their child's treatment.
- Women (78%) are more likely than men (70%) to say they are highly involved.

## Less than one-third of parents of diagnosed children very satisfied with child's program of treatment



Overall, how satisfied are you/were you with your child's program of treatment to help them deal with their mental health condition?

*Base: 422 Canadian parents of children with diagnosed mental health conditions.*



- Most parents are satisfied with their child's program of treatment to some extent, but their satisfaction is somewhat lukewarm. Less than one-third says they are very satisfied.

# Demographics

Age Group	Total
Base: All Respondents	2,556
18–34	19%
35–54	76%
55+	5%
Average age	41.7 years of age

Gender	Total
Base: All Respondents	2,556
Male	47%
Female	53%

Family Status	Total
Base: All Respondents	2,556
Single Parent	21%
Couples	78%

Number/Age of Children	Total
Base: All Respondents	2,556
Average number of children, 18 and under	1.8
Average age of children, 18 and under	9.8 years of age

Household Income	Total
Base: All Respondents	2,556
<\$30,000	9%
\$30K to \$59.9K	24%
\$60K to \$99.9K	34%
\$100K+	32%
Average	\$74,000

Region	Total
Base: All Respondents	2,556
Atlantic	7%
Quebec	23%
Ontario	40%
Manitoba/ Saskatchewan	6%
Alberta	12%
British Columbia	12%





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