

Discipline and Development:
**A Meta-Analysis of Public Perceptions of Parents, Parenting,
Child Development and Child Abuse**

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Method

The following meta-analysis of opinion research is based on a review of PCA America’s research on child abuse, as well as existing, publicly available opinion research regarding parenting, child development, child abuse and discipline, and the political landscape for child abuse prevention policies. The objective of this phase of research is to develop an understanding of the public beliefs that may influence policy support, with the ultimate goal of developing effective communications to advance policy.

Since survey results can be skewed by the context of the survey (for example, a survey about balancing work and family will likely result in different assumptions about child care policy than a survey about welfare and poverty), the analysis relies primarily on research for which the entire survey was available. More than 100 surveys and focus group reports were reviewed (totaling thousands of public opinion questions). All surveys were conducted within the past six years, except for specific long-term trends.

This report is not intended to represent a catalogue of all available data, nor is it a review of policy evaluation efforts. Rather, this analysis is designed to offer strategic insights that will prove useful to later stages of the research process; accordingly, only the most relevant and useful findings have been incorporated.

The interpretation offered in this review is the author’s alone. Other analysts might provide a different interpretation of the data.

Strategic Summary

Developing effective communications to advance policies that prevent child abuse requires a broad analysis of the public's perceptions of a number of topics: parents, parenting, and child development, as well as perceptions of abuse. "Child abuse" is, in itself, a frame that brings to mind a certain way of thinking about policies to address a range of situations affecting children. This review of public opinion was deliberately designed to explore a wide array of related perceptions, to explore the advantages and disadvantages of the child abuse frame, as well as to uncover other possible frames. While this review does not recommend re-frames, it does suggest alternatives that deserve further investigation.

The issue of child abuse exists in a cultural context that influences how people view the issue. First, the public has very serious concerns about the nation's children. They see the next generations as irresponsible and unlikely to make the country a better place in the future. The public holds parents responsible, reporting that parents are doing a worse job than earlier generations and that parental inattention is a more serious problem facing families than drugs, divorce or inadequate schools. The problem, according to the public, is the decline of two-parent families and the rise of dual income families. The public believes children are better off when one parent is at home to look after them. This dynamic both helps and hurts efforts to advance child abuse prevention policies: people want to help children, but the focus on parents as the problem reduces support for policy solutions.

Additionally, a significant proportion of the public is misinformed about child development and many adults define a variety of developmentally appropriate actions as spoiling. This is critical to PCA America's work, because developmentally inappropriate expectations of children may influence how parents choose to discipline and may undermine worthy policies, programs and activities.

A third element of the cultural context is that the term "child abuse" brings to mind extreme physical harm. The public struggles with where to draw the line between "discipline" and "abuse." Spanking and many other physical punishments are not necessarily abusive, according to the public, depending on the age of the child and the severity of the act. At the same time, spanking is not the public's preferred disciplinary option and few say they spank their children often. Most do not believe that spanking helps children develop self-control and many understand that violence leads to violence.

These dynamics provide some insights about the ways in which various frames may influence support for prevention policies. First, the extreme picture of child abuse may add to the public's perception that child abuse is a serious problem, and may even build public support for solving the problem. However, the research suggests that it may also define the problem too narrowly and attempts to broaden the definition of "abuse" may not improve public perception or action. Those who are stern disciplinarians will not

think of themselves as abusers, and most are reluctant to accuse a friend or neighbor of abuse unless the situation is obvious. Because of its extreme image, child abuse may be popularly defined within a “crime” frame, leading to accusation, embarrassment, and support for criminal punishments for parents, rather than education and support. The following phases of research can help to explore this notion further.

Furthermore, while many say that child abuse can happen in any segment of society, most point to factors such as parental alcohol and drug abuse, poor parenting skills, a past history of abuse, and economic stress as reasons for child abuse and neglect. These factors may cause people to see abuse – and more particularly, neglect – as being confined to troubled families, rather than to understand how pervasive abusive behavior actually is in our society. Even if the image of child abuse and neglect can be de-criminalized, the belief that it is more prevalent in troubled families could cause the issue to be viewed as a problem for a narrow segment of society, rather than for society as a whole.

If the communications frame is shifted to “parenting,” then the issue faces other opportunities and barriers. First, society is just as concerned about leniency as it is about abuse. Many believe that children are disrespectful and ill-behaved because parents are too permissive. This perspective can easily lead to *more* physical punishment, unless parents have other appropriate and effective forms of discipline to rely upon. If the public believes the problem facing children is a spare-the-rod mentality among parents, then it is difficult to make a case for programs to assist parents. Furthermore, if this issue is about “parenting,” it may face another barrier, which is the public’s concern about privacy and government intrusion in family life. Even so, it may be possible to create a dialogue about parenting without offending parents. The research suggests that a message about parent preparation, such as the following, might prove effective in mobilizing Americans to support training for new parents: “How many of us felt fully prepared when we had our first child? Lack of experience can cause parents to make bad decisions that can lead to neglect or abuse. Parenting is the toughest job in America, but with more opportunities for parent education and coaching, parents can get off to the right start.”

Finally, it may be possible to make this issue about “education and child development” and shift parents’ views of discipline away from punishment towards teaching and correct neglectful behavior that is due to a lack of understanding of developmental needs. That would mean, for example, characterizing physical discipline as inappropriate because it does not accomplish the goal of discipline, i.e., to have self-control and self-discipline. Parents want their children to learn self-discipline and to be able to think for themselves, yet most parents believe they have not accomplished these goals with their own children. A teaching mentality could create an environment for talking and timeouts rather than hitting, and could allow for a conversation about all forms of abuse and neglect, rather than emphasizing physical abuse or ignoring a crying child. This approach could provide an appropriate context for parent education as a policy priority – parents need training to be good teachers for their children – and might allow abusive and neglectful parents to be perceived as in need of training, not jail time.

Perspectives on Parents, Children and Development

Views on child abuse do not exist in a vacuum. Instead, these views are interwoven with perspectives on parents, parenting, views of children, and knowledge of child development. This section examines the perceptions of broader societal issues that can influence the public's views of the narrower issue of child abuse. The research suggests that the public has serious concerns about the nation's children, seeing them as irresponsible and unlikely to make the country a better place in the future. The public holds parents responsible, reporting that parents are doing a worse job than earlier generations and that parental inattention is a more serious problem facing families than drugs, divorce or inadequate schools.

Much of the problem, according to the public, is the decline of two-parent families and the rise of dual income families. Americans believe that two parent families are best for children, but just having two parents is not enough. The public gives the same dismal ratings to dual income families that it does to single parents. Americans want one parent to stay at home or work part-time, but not because they are against women in the workplace. In fact, they support working women and think women's rights have not gone far enough. Instead, the public is concerned about the high proportion of dual income families because it believes children are better off when one parent stays home, and it suspects that greed has outpaced sacrifice, when it comes to family priorities.

In many ways, the public has a good understanding of child development. Americans know that a child's environment and relationships can influence development and recognize the importance of emotional closeness between parent and child. Similarly, they recognize the detrimental effects of a child witnessing violence between parents. In other ways, however, a significant proportion of the public is misinformed about development. Many people have developmentally inappropriate expectations of children that may influence how parents choose to discipline.

Perspectives on Parents and Children

Americans are deeply worried about the nation's children. While life has improved for most groups, the public believes that, since the 1950s, life has gotten worse for teens and children. Many see teens and children as rude, wild, and without a strong sense of right and wrong. Less than half believe today's young people will make America a better place.

People have serious concerns about the status of teens and children, in part because they fear children's lives have become more difficult and troubled compared to earlier generations. As Americans look back on the century, they note that most people in the country are better off today than in the nostalgic 1950s. However, there are a few for whom life has worsened, with teenagers and children at the top of the list behind farmers. Americans believe life has worsened for farmers (65% worse, 20% better), teenagers

(56% worse, 33% better), and divide over whether life is better or worse for children (44% worse, 46% better). Pluralities believe life has gotten better for every other group of Americans including various ethnic, class, and lifestyle groups.¹

The public holds negative perceptions of teens and children. Ask the public for the words that come to mind when they think of teens, and three-quarters (71%) respond with negative descriptions, such as “rude,” “wild,” or “irresponsible.” Children fare only slightly better: 53% of adults and 58% of parents of children under 18 describe children in negative terms.² Less than half (40%) of parents of children under 18 say that today’s children will make America a better place. Fewer among the general public (38%) believe that today’s children will make America a better place, and even among teenagers, few believe children will make America a better place (32%).³ Many see a lack of values as the top problem facing today’s children: 45% point to “children learning respect and rules” as a bigger problem than education (39%), health care (29%), crime (29%), drugs (26%) or income (17%).⁴

While adults have complained about youth morality for generations, this view is significantly more pronounced than in past generations. The proportion who believe that young people today do not have “as strong a sense of right and wrong as they did, say, fifty years ago” has shifted from a minority opinion in the 1950s, to an overwhelming majority in recent years. Today, fully 76% believe that young people do not have as strong a sense of right and wrong.⁵ When asked in 1965, the public was divided, with 46% saying they do not have as strong a sense of right and wrong, and 41% saying they do.⁶ In the prior decade (1952), a strong majority (57%) believed young people had a strong sense of right and wrong, while only 34% felt they did not.⁷

Many parents are doing a poor job raising their children, the public asserts. Most think parents today are doing a worse job than their own parents did. At the same time, the public overwhelmingly believes it is much more difficult to be a parent today than in earlier times.

When the public considers the problems that children face, they hold parents responsible. Topping the list of a series of problems facing families is “parents not paying enough attention to what’s going on in their children’s lives” (83% say it is a very serious problem). This is rated higher than peer pressure to use drugs (68%), the influence of sex and violence in the media (67%), divorce (63%), or inadequate schools (56%).⁸ Additionally, 45% point to “children learning respect and rules” as a bigger problem than education (39%), health care (29%), crime (29%), drugs (26%) or income (17%).⁹

The public is very critical of parents. Majorities believe poor parenting is common: “people who have children before they are ready to take responsibility for them” (59% say this is very common); “parents who break up too easily instead of trying to stay together for the sake of their kids” (53%); and “parents who think buying things for kids means the same thing as caring for them” (52%). Few (23%) say “parents who are good role models and teach their kids right from wrong” are very common. At the same time,

a majority (53%) notes that “parents who sacrifice and work hard so their kids can have a better life” are very common.¹⁰

Parents of school-age children give today’s parents a poor rating for the job they are doing: 36% say parents are doing an “excellent” or “good” job while 61% say they are doing a “fair” or “poor” job. Furthermore, a majority (53%) of parents states that today’s parents are doing a worse job than in the past, while 37% say they are doing about the same. When parents of school-age children compare themselves to their own parents, most (55%) report that they are doing “about the same” job as their parents, while 37% say they are doing better. While they are critical of other parents, they also recognize that the job of parenting is getting more difficult. Three-quarters (76%) of parents of school-age children say it is a lot harder to raise children today compared with when they were growing up.¹¹

In fact, parents report that they conduct a variety of actions on a daily basis that benefit their child’s well being and development.

Nearly every parent shows love and affection for their child on a daily basis (97%), teaches their child basic values (88%), helps their child feel they are good at doing something (87%), and helps their child work hard at school (81%). (Table 1)

Table 1: Parents Who Do Actions
% Daily, % Weekly¹²

	Daily	Weekly
Show love and affection for your child	97%	2%
Teach your child basic values such as equality, honesty, and responsibility	88%	10%
Help your child feel he or she is good at doing something	87%	11%
Help your child enjoy learning new things or work hard at school	81%	15%
Teach your child social skills such as how to understand the feelings of others	74%	19%
Teach your child to get along with people of different races and backgrounds	72%	16%
Get to know child’s friends	64%	27%
Ensure your child participates in arts, sports, recreation, or educational programs or activities outside of school	53%	34%
Encourage your child to help other people, including volunteering in his or her school, congregation, clubs, or community	46%	33%
Encourage other adults you respect to spend positive time with your child	41%	32%
Ensure your child is active in a church, synagogue, mosque, or other religious organization	32%	44%

Adults universally agree that it is essential to teach children to be honest, courteous, self-disciplined, and to do well in school. However, far fewer believe they have been successful in teaching their children these lessons. If they had to prioritize just one goal of parenting, adults say being able to think for themselves is most important in preparing children for life.

There are many lessons that parents assert are essential to teach children, but the most frequently-cited lessons are to be honest, courteous, have self-discipline, and achieve in school. Fewer believe they have actually been successful in teaching these lessons to their children. The gap in teaching self-discipline is particularly notable: 83% say it is essential to teach children to have self-control and self-discipline, but only 34% say they have succeeded in teaching this to their own children. (Table 2)

Table 2: Essential to Teach Children and Have Succeeded
% Absolutely Essential, % Have Succeeded¹³

	Absolutely Essential	Have Succeeded
To be honest and truthful	91	55
To be courteous and polite	84	62
To have self-control and self-discipline	83	34
To always do their very best in school	82	50
To be independent and to do for themselves	74	38
To save money and spend it carefully	70	28
To have good nutrition and eating habits	68	40
To help those who are less fortunate	62	55
To have strong religious faith	61	53
To exercise and to be physically fit	51	53
To enjoy art and literature	33	51

To be able to think independently is the ultimate goal in raising children. What children need to be prepared for life, they assert, is “to think for themselves” (63%), rather than “to be obedient” (29%).¹⁴ Even when the choice of characteristics is broadened, adults still prioritize the ability of children to be able to think independently as the most important preparation for life (50% choose it first among a list of five characteristics). The characteristics “work hard” and “help others” are closely rated as second and third in priority (67% chose hard work as second or third; 66% chose helping others). The ability “to obey” receives a mix of ratings, but a plurality (41%) rates it fourth in importance. Finally, three-quarters see being well liked or popular as the least important of the five characteristics in preparing children for life (75%). (Table 3)

Table 3: Which in this list is most important for a child to learn to prepare him or her for life? Second most important? Etc.¹⁵

Rank Order	Think for Him/Herself	Work Hard	Help Others	Obey	Well liked/ Popular
1 st	50%	21%	14%	15%	-
2 nd	20%	35%	31%	13%	1%
3 rd	13%	32%	35%	16%	4%
4 th	12%	10%	17%	41%	20%
5 th	5%	2%	3%	16%	75%

Parenting is viewed as an important responsibility, though many did not feel prepared when they first became parents.

Parenting tops the list of adults’ life priorities. Nearly all adults (95%) point to “being a good parent” as “one of the most important priorities” (41%) or a “very important priority” (54%). The importance of parenting is closely followed in importance by “having a successful marriage” (86%, 31% “one of most important”). Success in a “high paying career” is last among the priorities tested.¹⁶ (Table 4) Finally, 89% agree “Being a parent is wonderful – I wouldn’t trade it for the world.”¹⁷

Table 4: Personal Priorities in Life¹⁸

	One of Most Important	Very Important	Summary Importance
Being a good parent	41%	54%	95%
Having a successful marriage	31%	55%	86%
Having a satisfying sexual relationship with a spouse or partner	15%	58%	73%
Having close relationships with your relatives	17%	54%	71%
Having close friends you can talk to about things that are happening in your life	14%	51%	65%
Having an active sex life	14%	44%	58%
Living a very religious life	15%	37%	52%
Having lots of free time to relax or do things you want to do	8%	41%	49%
Being successful in a high paying career or profession	9%	32%	41%

As much as they value being a good parent, few (35%) felt well prepared for parenthood when they had their first child. College-educated parents of young children are more likely to report being quite well-prepared (41%) than those with a high school education or less (30%). For information and advice on children and parenting, mothers of young children frequently rely on their spouse and mother (69% and 67% respectively) followed by their pediatrician (58%). Fathers of young children report much more reliance on their spouse (87%) with far fewer relying on their pediatrician (49%) and their mother (41%).¹⁹

While Americans assert that one person can successfully raise children alone, they also believe that children with two parents are better off. But just having two parents is not enough. The ideal situation, according to the public, is a two-parent family in which one parent stays at home or works part-time.

The public believes that one adult can successfully raise a child alone, even a child of the opposite sex. Fully 80% say women are “capable on their own of successfully raising boys into men” and 68% say men are “capable on their own of successfully raising girls into women.”²⁰

They do, however, think children of single parents are at a disadvantage. Two-thirds (66%) report that children who grow up in one-parent families are worse off (19% much worse off) than children in two-parent families. Only 21% think they are just as well

off.²¹ Two-parent families provide children with advantages: children with fathers active in their lives “tend to develop more self-confidence” (90%) and “tend to be better problem-solvers” (80%) than children who lack an active father in their lives.²²

Additionally, the public sees work status as an indicator of a person’s ability to do a good job of parenting. Most women think that families with a stay-at-home parent, or a parent who works part-time are better able to do a good job than other families. In fact, families with two full-time working parents receive ratings similar to those of single parents. (Table 5)

Table 5: Rating of Ability to Do a Good Job as Parents²³
(Ratings by Women)

	Most Can	Some Can
Couples in which the father works full-time and the mother stays home	66%	29%
Couples in which the father works full-time and the mother works part-time	54%	38%
Couples in which both the father and mother work full-time	29%	50%
Single mothers	28%	54%
Stepmothers	28%	52%
Divorced couples who split custody so the children live with each parent some of the time	17%	50%

They rate divorced parents as the least able to do a good job parenting, and most would like divorce to be harder to obtain than it is now (62%).²⁴ Even so, they are divided about whether or not an unhappy couple with young children should get divorced (46% think they should, 50% think they should not).²⁵ As they look to the future, most (67%) predict that more babies will be born out of wedlock, rather than fewer (29%).²⁶ They fear that the family structure they think is best for children will vanish. A majority (52%) believes that “mothers staying home to raise their children” will have disappeared within 30 years.²⁷

Americans continue to feel conflicted about working mothers. While they do not want to limit women’s options, they believe it is better for families if one parent can stay home with the children. The public is worried about the pressures of managing work and family, and is concerned that children will pay the price.

One at-home parent is the preferred option for families today. More than three-quarters agree (80%, 52% strongly) that “It may be necessary for mothers to be working because the family needs money, but it would be better if she could stay home and just take care of the house and children.”²⁸ A plurality (41%) says that one parent staying home to raise the children is ideal, followed by one parent working part-time (24%) or one parent working from home (17%). The option favored by the fewest is both parents working full-time (13%). Older Americans are most in favor of one parent staying home (56% of seniors support this option, compared to only 31% of those under 30).²⁹

The public’s preference for a stay-at-home parent has little to do with public opposition to women in the workplace. Fully 83% believe that women entering the workforce has been a change for the better,³⁰ and 71% disagree (48% completely) with the statement

“women should return to their traditional roles in society.”³¹ Nearly two-thirds (61%) disagree that “It is much better for everyone involved if the man is the achiever outside the home and the woman takes care of the home and family.”³² In fact, 66% of women and 58% of men agree “we still need to go further in establishing equal rights for women.”³³

What the public is concerned about is the stress on families and lack of attention to children that they believe characterizes dual income households. Two-thirds (65%) of women and 72% of men believe that women who work outside the home face more stress than those who stay at home.³⁴ They believe that changes in gender relationships have made it harder “for parents to raise children” (80%) and “for marriages to be successful” (71%).³⁵ Majorities agree “It’s much harder for families to do a good job raising kids when both parents have to work” (51%) and “To be a single parent has got to be the most stressful thing in the world” (51%).³⁶

The public’s worry is the effect of dual-income households on children, not women. Three-quarters (74%) agree “It is better for children if one parent works outside the home while the other parent stays home with the children.”³⁷ Substantial percentages of women and men think society has gone too far in the amount of time that young children spend in child care (58% of women, 60% men believe this change has gone too far), and too far in the number of mothers who work rather than staying at home with children (39% of women, 44% of men).³⁸ A slim majority (54%) disagrees and a substantial percentage (46%) agrees with the statement “A preschool child is likely to suffer if his or her mother works.”³⁹ Two-thirds (67%) believe it is true, and 45% report it is *definitely* true that “Children usually have stronger bonds with parents who do not work and stay home than they do with parents who work full time outside of the home.” More fathers of young children say this statement is true (72% true, 53% definitely) than mothers of young children (53%, 33% definitely).⁴⁰

However, the public does not believe that a child of a working mother is *automatically* worse off. Nearly two-thirds (63%) agree “A working mother can establish just as warm and secure a relationship with her children as a mother who does not work.”⁴¹ Nearly three quarters (71%) believe “A woman can have a very successful, high-paying career and also be a very good mother” while only 27% think “A woman must decide between having a very successful, high-paying career or being a very good mother.”⁴²

The end result is that the public is conflicted over whether or not mothers should work. Only a slim majority (51%) of both men and women believe “It’s fine for a mother with young children to take a job if she feels she can handle both responsibilities,” over “A mother who is able to financially should stay at home with young children” (43% of women, 41% of men agree).⁴³

Most adults assert that dual income families exist because both parents need to work, but the public also believes that society would be better if one parent could stay home with children. Importantly, a sizable minority thinks many families could have one parent at home if they were willing to sacrifice material things.

A majority (57%) reports that most dual income families work because they need two incomes to make ends meet. However, a sizable percentage sees other motivations: 22% think most dual income families are motivated by the desire to live in good neighborhoods with better homes and schools and 18% think they just want more money for things they could really do without.⁴⁴ People are struggling with values as they consider these issues. They do not want material things to stand in the way of parents’ ability to raise children themselves (the preferred state). Yet, they recognize that families need to decide what is best for their own situation.

Most parents prefer to work outside the home, except mothers of very young children who would, in large percentages, prefer to stay home. What mothers most want in a job is flexibility in their work schedule.

If they were free to do either, most adults would prefer to work outside the home (62%) rather than stay at home and take care of the house and family (35%). This response is driven by men, who far prefer working outside the home (73%). Women overall are divided, with a slight majority (53%) preferring to work outside the home, and 45% saying they would prefer to stay home.⁴⁵ Mothers of young children favor the at-home option most. Fully 80% of mothers of children under 6 years old would prefer to stay home.⁴⁶

Rather than work part-time or work from home, most mothers want flexibility in their work schedule. Three-quarters (73%) choose a flexible work schedule as very important in a job – much higher than part-time work, telecommuting or on-site childcare.⁴⁸ (Table 6)

Flexible work schedule	73%
Part time hours/job sharing	42%
Telecommuting	42%
On-site child care	41%

Most working parents feel they have sufficient time for their children, and can alter their work situations for their family. However, most also feel guilty when they leave their children for work in the morning, and see day care as an option of last resort.

Today’s parents are very involved with their children and desire to be even more involved. Three-quarters (74%) of parents say they are more involved in their children’s education than their parents were, and 71% wish they could be doing even more.⁴⁹ Most working parents report they have enough time to spend with their kids (67%), but not enough time for themselves (56%). To meet their family needs, most working parents say their employer would allow them to work fewer hours (69%), have flexible hours (67%), and take paid leave (53%). Few (27%) believe it would hurt their career if their employer heard they wanted more time with their kids.⁵⁰ However, half (47%) also report that, when their childcare falls through, it causes problems at work.⁵¹

A majority of married parents who work agrees (53%, 29% strongly agree) that they “feel bad about leaving my kids in the morning when I go to work.”⁵² Men and women

respond similarly to this question. The public views day care as a last resort: 71% agree (28% strongly agree) “parents should only rely on a day care center when they have no other option.”⁵³

Perspectives on Child Development

This section reviews findings from a unique and comprehensive public opinion survey of development knowledge entitled, “What Grown Ups Understand About Child Development,”⁵⁴ which provides an indication of the perspective adults bring to child development issues. The findings from this survey demonstrate that adults understand that several factors can influence a child’s development for the long-term, including the emotional closeness between parent and child, a child’s sense of safety and security, and violence between parents. It also suggests that many people have developmentally inappropriate expectations of children that may influence how parents choose to discipline.

Adults understand that babies are influenced by their environment and relationships. They report that a child’s abilities are not predetermined at birth, and that early experiences influence children later in life. Adults believe brain development can be influenced from birth (or earlier) and this early influence will have an impact on later school performance. Emotional development, they believe, is also influenced by these early years, with high percentages of survey participants responding that emotional closeness influences intellectual development, that violence can have long-term effects, and that self-esteem is developed early.

People understand that children are shaped by their relationships and environment. For example, 77% of adults point to the following statement as “false,” with 63% saying it is “definitely” false: “Children’s capacity for learning is pretty much set from birth and cannot be greatly increased or decreased by how their parents interact with them.”

Furthermore, the public believes parental influence begins early: 71% of adults say a parent can begin to significantly affect a child’s brain development right from birth or even before birth. And the early influence can have long-term effects: 76% of adults choose the statement “Some people say that a child’s experiences in the first year of life have a major impact on their performance in school many years later” over the competing statement “Others say babies 12 months and younger are too young for their experiences to really help or hurt their ability to learn in school later in life.”

Much of the early influence on development that the public can identify is grounded in emotions and relationships. Eight out of ten believe “Parents’ emotional closeness with their baby can strongly influence that child’s intellectual development.” A majority of adults (58%) and 72% of parents of children age 6 and younger say that an infant can recognize his mother’s voice within the first week after birth, and two-thirds of adults (66%, 78% of parents of children age 6 and younger) believe that children begin to develop their sense of self-esteem before age two. Finally, three-quarters reject the

statement “A child aged six months or younger who witnesses violence, such as seeing his father often hit his mother, will not suffer any long term effects from the experiences, because children that age have no long term memory.”

While adults believe that children are influenced by their surroundings right from birth, many do not understand how significantly babies interact with the world around them and how sensitive they are to emotions.

While three quarters (72%) believe a “child begins to really take in and react to the world around them” within the first 6 months of life, only 26% understand that infants react to the world around them right from birth or in the first week of life. Only 40% of adults understand that babies can be affected by their parents’ mood in the first 1-2 months of life and only 13% understand that a baby 6 months old or younger can experience depression.

Adults recognize the value of play and the kinds of activities that benefit children such as reading and providing a sense of security.

Of several activities that child development experts say benefit children, some are universally understood by adults to be effective activities, including: reading with the child (95% all adults rate this activity 8, 9, or 10 on a 10 point scale), talking with the child (92%), providing a sense of security and safety (86%) and providing a healthy diet (84%).

People also understand the value of play in social development (92% of adults rate its importance 8, 9, or 10 on a ten point scale), intellectual development (85%) and language skills (79%). They also recognize the importance of play for children of different ages. Eighty six percent of adults see play as important for a 5 year old, 80% say it is important for a 3 year old and 60% think it is important for a 10 month old.

The real gaps in public understanding of child development emerge when people are asked to consider expectations of children at various ages. Though most adults answer these questions correctly, a significant percentage set expectations of children too high and view developmentally appropriate responses as “spoiling.” Though a majority recognizes that spanking can lead to physical aggression in children, less than a third say it is never appropriate to spank a child. Inappropriate expectations and views on spoiling and punishment can lead to poor parenting skills as well as undermine worthy policies, programs and activities.

There are many indications in the survey data that substantial percentages of adults hold developmentally inappropriate expectations of children. For example:

- Most adults (72%) understand that “three years old is too young to expect a child to sit quietly for an hour,” though a sizable minority of parents of young children as well as non-parents (26% each) thinks three-year-olds should be able to sit quietly for this length of time.

- Two-thirds (67%) of adults say a six-year-old who shoots a classmate could not understand the results of his actions, though a sizable minority (26% of adults and 30% of parents of children 6 years old or younger) believes a six-year-old would understand the consequences of this act.
- When asked for the motivation of a 12-month-old who turns the TV on and off repeatedly, most appropriately answered that the child could be trying to get her parents' attention (89%) or is trying to learn what happens when buttons are pressed (88%). However, nearly half of adults (46%) incorrectly think that a child might do this because she is angry with her parents and is trying to get back at them. Even among parents of young children, 39% believe this motivation is likely.
- Adults set expectations too high for sharing, with a majority (55%) of adults saying that a 15-month-old should be expected to share her toys with other children. Subgroups more likely to expect a 15-month-old to share include non-parents (59%), grandparents (57%), and parents with a high school education or less (59%).

Views on spoiling demonstrate a pervasive misunderstanding of child development.

Nearly two-thirds (62%) believe a six-month-old child can be spoiled. Grandparents are particularly likely to hold this view (64%), but even a majority of parents of young children believes a six-month-old can be spoiled (57%). Furthermore, many adults define a variety of developmentally appropriate actions as spoiling, including picking up a three-month-old every time she cries (55%), letting a two-year-old get down from the dinner table to play before the rest of the family has finished their meal (44%), and letting a six-year-old choose what to wear to school every day (38%). Again, grandparents are particularly likely to believe these actions constitute spoiling: 60% of grandparents think picking up a three-month-old every time she cries is spoiling and 46% think letting a six-year-old choose what to wear to school every day is spoiling. Fathers of young children are more likely than mothers to see these actions as spoiling. A majority of fathers of young children (52%) think picking up a three-month-old is spoiling, compared to just 37% of mothers. Thirty-nine percent of fathers think letting a six-year-old choose their clothes every day is spoiling, compared to just 33% of mothers of young children. Educational attainment also matters in views of spoiling: a majority (54%) of those with a high school education or less think picking up a three-month-old every time she cries is spoiling, compared to 31% of those with a college degree or more.

Misunderstanding child development can lead to neglect. A significant percentage of adults (42%) believe that if the cries of a three-month-old are frequently not responded to by her caregivers it is likely the baby will learn good coping skills. A majority (53%) of future parents agree. More than a third (36%) of parents of young children believes this is true, with less educated parents more likely to believe this (46%) than college-educated parents (25%).⁵⁵

Perspectives on Child Abuse

Severity of the Problem

Americans see child abuse as a very serious problem, as serious as such other high-profile health issues as AIDs and heart disease. They assert that reducing child abuse is an extremely important priority for the nation. However, it is less clear that the public understands the magnitude of the problem, i.e. how frequently children experience abusive behavior and what constitutes abuse.

Nearly all Americans (89%) say child abuse is a serious problem (62% very serious problem).⁵⁷ In considering a series of health issues, Americans rate child abuse as serious a problem as heart disease and AIDs. (Table 7)

Similarly, among a series of health policies, fully 51% say it is “extremely important” to make “additional efforts to reduce child abuse.” More prioritize child abuse than drunk driving, medical research, reducing violence, or any other health issue surveyed. (Table 8)

Table 7 -- Rating of Health Issues
% Very Serious Problem⁵⁶

HIV/AIDs	80
Child abuse	79
Heart disease	79
Prostate cancer	61
Depression	56
MS or multiple sclerosis	55
Brain injuries	54
Deafness and other communications disorders	35
Tuberculosis	33
Baldness	11

Table 8 -- Priority for Nation’s Health Agenda
% Extremely Important⁵⁸

Making additional efforts to reduce child abuse	51
Making additional efforts to reduce drunk driving	46
Spending more for medical research on cancer, HIV/AIDS, and heart disease	43
Making additional efforts to reduce violence	41
Making additional efforts to reduce drug abuse	40
Doing more to prevent the spread of new infectious diseases such as Ebola Mad Cow, and West Nile Virus	38
Making additional efforts to reduce alcohol abuse	33
Increasing research to understand better the things that affect our health	31
Providing more support for research and public education about how to help people change their habits so they can be healthier in the future	29
Decreasing the number of Americans who smoke or use other tobacco products	27
Increasing the services and activities available to people who have very little contact with friends and family members	21

Even when forced to choose just one health issue as most important, half (50%) choose child abuse, followed by drug and alcohol abuse (20%), and chronic illnesses (18%). Furthermore, people feel they understand this issue. Most (87%) say they are informed about

Table 9 -- Public Health Issues⁵⁹

	% Most Imp.	% Informed
Child abuse and neglect	50	87
Drug and alcohol abuse	20	92
Chronic illnesses like heart disease and cancer	18	90
Sexually-transmitted diseases like HIV/AIDs	12	84

child abuse and neglect. (Table 9)

However, when people consider issues facing children beyond just health issues, child abuse rates lower than other concerns for children, such as a lack of parental involvement. In fact, “lack of discipline” rates higher as a concern than “child abuse and neglect.” (Table 10) Furthermore, few are personally involved in the issue of child abuse, and few express any desire to get involved: only 10% say they are already doing something about child abuse; and only 10% are considering doing something about it. They do, however, say they would like to see something done about it (75%).⁶¹

Lack of parental involvement	28
Lack of discipline	14
Breakdown of the family unit	10
Drugs	10
Child abuse and neglect	6
Declining values	6
Lack of quality after school and summer programs	5
Increased crime and violence	4
Lack of role models	4
Poor schools	3
Lack of quality child care	2
Poor health care	1

Importantly, focus groups by Hart Research suggest that people may not define “serious problem” in the way advocates might expect. Focus group participants noted that child abuse is a “serious” problem, but at the same time raised questions about the *magnitude* of the problem. Nationally, 43% say child abuse is a problem in their community⁶² and, in a statewide poll by the Wyoming chapter of Prevent Child Abuse America, only 29% rated the *incidence* of child abuse and neglect as a major problem in their community, far lower than concerns about families with both parents working (53%) or children growing up without the emotional or financial support of both parents (53%).⁶³ Public assessments of seriousness of this problem may, in fact, relate to the crime frame we noted earlier and less to the pervasiveness of the problem.

Frequency of Abuse

Americans have personal experience with child abuse, though they may not recognize it as such. Nearly all adults experienced yelling and spanking as a child, and many were hit hard enough to result in injury or saw one parent hit the other. One-quarter reports that they have witnessed child abuse, but when given examples of abusive behavior, the percentage who remember abusive behavior increases. Emotional abuse is seen most frequently, followed by neglect. More than half have taken some kind of action, though far fewer have reported abuse to authorities.

Nearly all adults (89%) say their parents yelled at them, 82% were spanked (16% were spanked often), 19% witnessed one parent strike the other, and 27% say they were struck hard enough as a child to result in an injury or bruise (6% often).⁶⁴

One-quarter of Americans (25%) report that they have witnessed an act of child abuse; most (53%) are referring to physical abuse. Nearly all Americans (92%) say they would report child abuse if they suspected it, but in reality, only 34% of those who have

witnessed abuse have actually reported it. One-third of all American adults (32%) say they have intervened in some way to stop child abuse, and 19% say they have reported an abusive parent to authorities.⁶⁵

When people are given examples of what constitutes abuse, the percentage reporting that they have witnessed abuse increases. The most frequently witnessed form of abuse is emotional abuse. Two-thirds (66%) have seen an adult emotionally abuse a child, such as insulting, taunting or harassing. Nearly half (47%) have seen an adult neglect a child, such as ignoring their needs, failing to feed or withholding affection. One-third (32%) has seen an adult physically abuse a child. In these instances, more than half (56%) asserts that they took action.⁶⁶

Defining Child Abuse

The term “child abuse” brings to mind extreme physical harm. This image is likely drawn from the extensive media coverage of child abuse, coverage that does little to advance an informed public policy dialogue about the issue. The public struggles with where to draw the line between “discipline” and “abuse.” Spanking and many other physical punishments are not necessarily abusive, according to the public, depending on the age of the child and the severity of the act. At the same time, majorities see a variety of actions as abusive, particularly actions that harm a fetus during pregnancy.

When the public thinks of “child abuse” most (55%) think first of physical abuse, with fewer associating the term with emotional abuse (13%), sexual abuse (9%) or neglect (8%). The public struggles with where to draw the line between what constitutes abuse and what constitutes discipline. For example, while using a belt to spank a two-year old is considered abuse by three-quarters (74%), only 54% see it as abuse if the child is twelve years old. If spanking leaves marks, 60% say that is abuse for a two-year-old, but fewer (53%) say it is abuse for a twelve-year-old. If spanking a two-year-old with a hand does not leave marks, 71% say it is not child abuse.⁶⁷ Since only 34% think that physical punishment of a child leads to injury to the child “very often” or “often,” it seems most adults believe that most physical punishment is not abuse.⁶⁸

Focus groups commissioned by PCA America and others provide insight into how people define abuse. While focus group participants can cite all forms of abuse, the term “child abuse” causes people to think of severe physical trauma. According to an analysis by Martin & Glantz in 1997, “the phrase ‘child abuse and neglect’ seems to almost always bring up images of the most extreme and high profile cases which quickly moves the discussion to the problem of dealing with the most severe cases.”⁶⁹

It should be no surprise that people have this reaction to “child abuse” since a great deal of the news coverage about children consists of abuse and neglect stories. A media content analysis by the Casey Journalism Center found that news about children overwhelmingly consists of stories about violence done to children or by children. Of the newspapers reviewed, 53% of the stories about children were about youth crime and

violence and 40% were about child abuse and neglect. The remaining three categories reviewed were childcare (3%), teen childbearing (2%) and child health insurance (1%). Furthermore, the child abuse stories do little to help people understand the issue in a meaningful way. Only 45% of child abuse stories include some historical context (defined as information at least 1 year old) compared to three-quarters or more for other types of stories. Only 2% of the stories include information of practical use to parents, 9% include statistical information, 17% include information about policy issues, and only 5% include the kind of contextual information deemed important for understanding by experts on this issue.⁷⁰

Even when people set aside the most extreme, newsworthy cases, they still struggle with the definition of “abuse.” Throughout all of the focus groups reviewed, participants consistently express confusion over how to distinguish between discipline and abuse. A report by Lowe/Lintas, 2001 notes, “Respondents discuss at length what is discipline and what circumstances change it into child abuse. The upshot is that most believe abuse occurs when discipline is out of control, when it is administered with anger, when, if it is physical discipline, visible signs result and when, if it is verbal discipline, words go beyond reprimand and reasonable to hurtful and demeaning so that here too the outcome, even if not visible, is long-lasting.”⁷¹

At the same time, large percentages of the public see a number of actions as child abuse. Actions that harm a fetus during pregnancy are considered abuse: smoking crack cocaine during pregnancy (81% say this is child abuse), drinking alcohol (75%), smoking marijuana (75%), and smoking cigarettes (56%). Furthermore, an inability to take certain actions is seen as abuse: failing to properly feed a child (77%), or not providing medical treatment due to religious reasons (65%). Nearly two-thirds (63%) believe it is child abuse if one parent angrily strikes the other in front of the child. Finally, some physical actions are considered abuse: using a belt to spank a two-year-old child (74% say this is abuse), shaking a child in anger (69%), or punishment that leaves marks on a two-year-old (60%).⁷² Three-quarters (74%) think repeated yelling and swearing leads to long-term emotional problems for the child “very often” or “often.”⁷³

Discipline

As noted earlier, people struggle with drawing a definitive distinction between abuse and discipline. However, defining “abuse” may not improve public perception or parental action. Those who are stern disciplinarians will not think of themselves as abusers, and few will see a friend or neighbor as an abuser for many types of physical punishments. Furthermore, society may be as concerned about leniency as they are about abuse. Many believe that children are disrespectful and ill-behaved because parents are too lenient. This dynamic suggests that child advocates may need to have a dialogue about appropriate and effective discipline.

Altering people’s definition of abuse requires changing their definition of discipline. Those who believe they are using appropriate disciplinary techniques, even if it includes hitting, will not see their actions as abusive. An analysis of focus groups by Campbell-

Ewald (1983) suggests that “it matters little how intricately discipline is differentiated from child abuse if those occupying the ‘sterner’ end of the spectrum fail to acknowledge that extreme physical punishment is, by definition, child abuse.”⁷⁴

Public Agenda describes four prominent parenting styles based on their analysis of self-reported perceptions of parenting decisions. Importantly, three of these styles implicitly question a parent’s ability to be strict enough with discipline:⁷⁵

- Parents in Chief (18% of parents) which Public Agenda describes as “parents who run a tight parenting ship”
- Overwhelmed (17%) described as “parents who feel stressed and not in control of how their child turns out”
- Softies (17%) described as “parents whose first inclination is to give in or look the other way”
- Best Buddies (8%) described as “parents who want to think of themselves as their child’s best friend”

Views of discipline can differ between cultures and can even differ between spouses. One out of five couples disagree about discipline: 22% of women and 19% of men say they frequently disagree with their spouse about how to discipline the children.⁷⁶ There are cultural distinctions as well. In a focus group of young, lower-income African American women who are single parents, strict physical discipline was discussed as acceptable. In fact, white parents were viewed as too lenient.⁷⁷

Leniency may concern society as much as abuse. An analysis by Lowe/Lintas, 2001 notes that parents “are often described as too lenient or too detached, with the result that children grow up with no respect for their elders or for social institutions.”⁷⁸ A related complaint is that parents can no longer discipline appropriately because they fear being labeled as abusers. Indeed, this belief may have become so common that it has emerged as a kind of folk myth. A report by Hart research, 2002 explains “In every voter group, anecdotes emerge about parents whose child is taken away because they are witnessed spanking their child and then are unfairly accused of child abuse.”⁷⁹

Many parents describe themselves as being too lenient. Sixty percent say when it comes to enforcing rules for their child, they sometimes give in depending on the circumstances, while 32% say they stay very consistent. Majorities report they sometimes do too much explaining (55%) and they sometimes let too many things go (52%). Majorities also believe that “Parents have to pick their battles – you can’t fight your child over everything” (59%) and “Being too strict can backfire because kids will do things behind your back” (52%).⁸⁰

Significant percentages, however, hold strict views about discipline: 50% of parents agree “When I say something I expect my child to listen – not to question me;” 41% agree “I would have never dared to say to my parents some of the things that my child says to me;” and one-third (33%) believe “When a child doesn’t know how to behave it usually means parents are not doing their job.”⁸¹

Parents believe that “Children do best when parents set limits and enforce them” (80%), but most also believe that “Sometimes you have to let kids make mistakes and deal with the consequences on their own” (68%).⁸²

Most parents rely primarily upon non-physical punishments, such as grounding, denying privileges, or confining a child to their room. However, significant percentages have hit a child or used verbal abuse. The public views spanking as an appropriate form of discipline. Most agree that spanking is sometimes necessary and approve of its use. At the same time, spanking is not the public’s preferred disciplinary option and few say they spank their children often.

Most adults prefer non-physical discipline such as discussing and explaining the behavior with the child (31%), using time-outs (19%), or removing privileges (19%). Only 8% think spanking is the best way to discipline a child.⁸⁴ However, nearly two-thirds (63%) think it is sometimes necessary for parents to rely on punishment or threats, while only 33% say it is realistic for parents to think they can raise well-behaved children by relying solely on positive reinforcement and teaching by example.⁸⁵ Majorities resort to various disciplinary techniques once in a while: spanking (53%), bribing kids with a reward (61%), and yelling or threatening to punish (67%). Less than 10% rely on any of these techniques “often:” spanking (4%), bribing (5%) and yelling (9%).⁸⁶ The most common punishments are non-physical. Most parents have restricted friends (77%), denied privileges (60%) and confined children to their room (53%). Significant percentages have not paid attention to emotional needs (45%), spanked or hit (43%) or insulted or swore (37%). Very few (2%) have kicked or punched. (Table 11) At 43%, the use of spanking is down significantly from 62% in 1988.⁸⁷ While these figures represent disciplinary practices for all ages of children, research demonstrates that parents are more likely to use physical punishments with younger children, and denying privileges or insulting with older children.

Not allowed them to see friends or watch TV	77%
Repeatedly denied privileges	60
Confined to a room	53
Not paid attention to emotional needs	45
Spanked or hit	43
Insulted or swore	37
Kicked, hit or punched	2

Even higher percentages of adults *support* spanking as a disciplinary tool. Three-quarters (73%, 30% strongly) agree “that it is sometimes necessary to discipline a child with a good, hard spanking.”⁸⁸ This level of support has been relatively consistent over the past 10 years, but represents a decline from the mid 1980s when 83% agreed with the statement, 27% strongly. Problematically, while the overall percentage agreeing with the statement has declined, the percentage that strongly agrees has increased. As of the most recent surveys in 2002 and 2001, 30% and 31% respectively strongly agree with the statement, up from 26% or fewer through the 1990s.⁸⁹

When asked if they approve or disapprove of spanking, 65% say they approve. In fact, only one-third (32%) believes “Parents who never spank can do as good a job

disciplining children as parents who do spank.”⁹⁰ Sixty-eight percent of adults think it is appropriate to spank a child as a regular form of punishment, with 31% saying this form of punishment can begin at age two or younger, 18% think it can begin at age three or four, and 13% think it can begin at age five or older. College-educated parents of young children are more likely to say it is never appropriate to spank a child (37%) than those with a high school education or less (25%).⁹¹

Depending on the survey, somewhere between 40 and 55% have spanked their children, but fewer use spanking as a *frequent* form of punishment. Southerners are the most likely to spank their children (62%), compared to just 41% in the rest of the country. Among college-educated parents, 38% spank their kids, while a majority (55%) of less-educated parents do.⁹² One-quarter (23%) of parents report that they spank their children often or sometimes, 46% do not spank often and 29% do not spank at all. Parents who were spanked as a child are more likely to use spanking than parents who were not spanked. Among parents who say they were often or sometimes spanked, 26% spank often or sometimes; among parents who were never spanked, only 13% spank often or sometimes.⁹³

High percentages approve of spanking and use spanking as a form of punishment, even though they believe spanking has negative consequences. Most do not believe that spanking helps children develop self-control. A majority of adults (57%) and even more parents of young children (61%) reject the notion that “Spanking children as a regular form of punishment helps children develop a better sense of self control.” Mothers and college-educated parents of young children are more likely to say this statement is false (68% each) than future parents (49%), fathers of young children (54%) or high-school educated parents of young children (56%).⁹⁴ In addition, people understand that violence leads to violence. Sixty percent agree “Children who are spanked as a regular form of punishment are more likely to deal with their own anger by being physically aggressive.” Mothers of young children are more likely to say this statement is true (66%) than fathers of young children (55%).⁹⁵

Sex Abuse

The age and gender of the parties involved influence a person’s interpretation of whether or not certain actions constitute child sex abuse. Furthermore, the public sees sex abuse as likely to lead to somewhat different consequences for a child than physical abuse.

Just as the public distinguishes between discipline and child abuse based in part on the age of the child, the public’s definition of sexual abuse differs based on the gender and age of those involved. If a 25-year-old female and 15-year-old male have sexual relations, 69% believe it is child abuse. When the genders are reversed, more (76%) see it as abuse.⁹⁶

The public views child sexual abuse as different from physical abuse in other ways. They believe a victim of child abuse is more prone to consequences such as depression (67%

think sex abuse contributes greatly to depression, 48% physical abuse), problems at school (54%, 48%), and eating disorders (37%, 25%). Physical abuse contributes more to violence, according to the public, than sex abuse (62% physical abuse, 44% sex abuse). Furthermore, the public is more likely to see experiences with physical abuse and neglect as leading to abuse and neglect as a parent (87% and 84% respectively) than sexual abuse (67%).⁹⁷

Recent survey data concerning child sex abuse revolves around the scandal involving Catholic priests accused of abuse, and the actions of the church to address the abuse. The polling clearly illustrates that the public wants priests who abuse to face severe consequences.

When told “the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops plans to make apologies to victims of abuse, remove priests found guilty of abuse, and adopt mandatory reporting of child sexual abuse to government authorities,” 70% of adults nationally say they need to do more.⁹⁸ Fully 91% favor an absolute policy that would banish from the Church any priests who have been proven to commit sexual abuse of minors and 89% favor a policy that would remove any Catholic bishop or cardinal who knew about sexual abuse and had moved the priest to another parish instead of reporting him to the police.⁹⁹

In a separate poll, the policy was described as follows:

As you may have heard, U.S. bishops approved a policy on Friday (June 14, 2002) to deal with the issue of sexual abuse of children by priests. Under the new policy, a priest who has sexually abused a child cannot serve as a pastor or chaplain and is barred from all other public church duties. The policy does not require that this priest be automatically removed from the priesthood.¹⁰⁰

A majority (60%) opposes this policy while only 38% support it. The opposition is due to the public’s belief that the policy does not go far enough (75%). Even when given a hypothetical situation of “a priest who had committed a single act of child sexual abuse many years ago and had successfully completed a treatment program,” two-thirds (66%) think he should “be prohibited from serving as a pastor or chaplain and barred from all other public church duties.” Even higher percentages (85%) believe that Catholic bishops who did not report allegations of sexual abuse to public authorities and instead relocated these priests, should resign.¹⁰¹

Catholics feel just as strongly. Fully 86% of Catholics say the Pope should remove a bishop or cardinal who knew that a priest had been sexually abusing young people and had moved the priest to another parish rather than report him to the police. Two-thirds (66%) want the church to remove from the priesthood any priest found guilty of a single instance of sexually abusing a young person, and if the priest is guilty of repeated instances, the percentage supporting removal increases to 79%.¹⁰²

It is not clear how much of this reaction is driven by the heinous nature of child sexual abuse and how much is due to the public’s reaction to priests as the perpetrators. Most

(70%) believe that child sex abuse is just as much of a problem in other walks of life.¹⁰³ However, 62% also agree that “Priests are not more likely to sexually abuse young people than these other groups but abuse by priests seems more shocking because they have taken a vow to abstain from sex,” while only 15% select the alternative statement “Priests are more likely to sexually abuse children and young people than other groups with easy access to young people such as teachers, coaches, and youth organization leaders.”¹⁰⁴

The public, including Catholics, are dissatisfied with the Church’s handling of the issue, and believes the leadership was more concerned about covering things up than dealing with the situation.

Three-quarters (74%) think the US leadership of the Catholic Church has done a poor job in handling the charges, and 68% think the Pope and Vatican have done a poor job handling the charges. The public and Catholics are dissatisfied (44% and 38% respectively) and angry (29% each) about how the Church acted.¹⁰⁵

Two-thirds (68%) believe the Catholic Church is “trying to cover up things to avoid more damage and get the situation behind them” rather than “trying to get all the facts and deal with the whole situation” (22%).¹⁰⁶ Furthermore, a majority (54%) thinks the bishops in Dallas were more concerned about the priests accused of abuse than the victims.¹⁰⁷

The end result is that people have little faith that the Church is doing what it can to address this issue, and opinions of the Catholic Church have declined dramatically. A majority (53%) is “not very confident” or “not at all confident” “that the Catholic Church is now doing everything possible to prevent future sexual abuse of children by priests.”¹⁰⁸ Furthermore, favorable opinions of the Catholic Church have declined over the past year. In February 2002, 63% had a favorable opinion of the Catholic Church. By December of the same year, it had dropped to 40%. Over the course of the scandal, views of how the Church handled the issue worsened, with a majority (59%) disapproving in April of 2002, increasing to 76% by December of the same year.¹⁰⁹

The public believes that the Church’s actions – not calling police, inadequately screening candidates for the priesthood, celibacy, and homosexuality – contribute to abuse.

Two-thirds and higher believe that a variety of practices have contributed to the problem of sexual abuse of children by priests: not calling the police when a priest is accused of sexual abuse (95%); inadequate screening and preparation of priest candidates in the seminaries (79%); the church’s policy of not allowing priests to marry (75%); and the number of priests who are homosexuals (69%).¹¹⁰

Fully 88% believe superiors should turn accusations over to local law enforcement for investigation while only 6% think the Church should investigate the accusations themselves.¹¹¹ To prevent abuse by priests, a plurality (35%) believes the church should allow priests to get married, enforce its current standards (17%) and allow women to become priests (8%). Fourteen percent want to see all these changes made.¹¹²

Causes and Consequences

While many say that child abuse can happen in any segment of society, most point to factors such as parental alcohol and drug abuse, poor parenting skills, a past history of abuse, and economic stress as reasons for child abuse and neglect. These factors may cause people to locate abuse in troubled families, rather than appreciating how pervasive abusive behavior is in our society.

According to several of the focus groups reviewed, people believe that abuse occurs in all segments of society. However, people also understand that external factors, such as economic stress, substance abuse, and lack of good parenting skills, can lead to abuse. Therefore, the public tends to link abuse to substance abuse, poverty, and lack of education.¹¹³ Public opinion polls substantiate that most people cite alcohol and drug abuse as a cause of child abuse and neglect (69%) followed by lack of parenting skills (67%) and a history of abuse in the family (64%). Fewer point to the presence of non-family members (48%), hard-to-control kids (39%) or lack of religion (2%).¹¹⁴ (Table 12) When drug and alcohol abuse are removed from the choices and adults are forced to choose just one cause for child abuse and neglect, most point to a parental history of abuse (31%) and parental emotional problems (28%), followed by poverty-related stress (13%).¹¹⁵

Increased alcohol and drug abuse by parents	69%
Lack of parenting experience or skills	67%
Abusive parents were abused as children	64%
Presence of non-family members in the home	48%
Kids are harder to control these days	39%
Lack of spiritual guidance/God/religion	2%

The public sees several consequences of child abuse and neglect, and believes that children who were abused will grow up to abuse others.

In a survey of North Dakota residents, survey respondents demonstrate that they believe child neglect, child abuse, and child sex abuse can lead to serious difficulties for children, including violence, substance abuse, problems at school, and depression. The most likely consequence of physical abuse, according to the public, is violence (62%) and the more likely consequence of sex abuse is depression (67%). The most likely consequences of neglect are violence (49%) and substance abuse (47%). (Table 13) Additionally, a Massachusetts poll indicates that a majority (57%) thinks that “more than half of abused/neglected children go on to develop behavior and learning problems.”¹¹⁷

	Child Neglect	Physical Abuse	Sex Abuse
Violence	49	62	44
Substance abuse	47	50	53
Problems at school	45	48	54
Depression	44	48	67
Eating disorders	22	25	37

Children who experience these abuses are likely to repeat them as adults, people assert. North Dakota residents overwhelmingly believe that abused and neglected children are more likely to abuse and neglect as parents (87% and 84% respectively). A significant

percentage, though fewer, believe the same is true of children who are abused sexually (67%).¹¹⁸

Politics and Policies

This section reviews child abuse and neglect within the context of a perceived public mandate for government action and funding.

The shifts in issue priority caused by the events of September 11th continue to be reflected in public opinion polls. In early 2000, prior to the drop in the economy and the terror attacks, the public most wanted the President and Congress to improve education. By early 2002, concerns about education were eclipsed by the public’s desire to handle terrorism and improve the economy. Terrorism, the economy and jobs continue to dominate the agenda, with education following in priority.

As George Bush was sworn into office, the public was clear about its expectations for the newly elected President. Americans wanted the Bush Administration and Congress to prioritize the economy and education, and placed crime, Social Security, Medicare and prescription drugs just slightly lower in priority. Following the terrorist attacks, the war on terrorism became the top priority, which continued into early this year. Several other issues declined in intensity as terrorism overtook the public agenda. (Table 14)

If they had to select just one or two priorities, however, most want the President and Congress to address strengthening the economy (57%), followed by fighting terrorism (36%), dealing with health care costs (25%) and protecting Social Security (15%).¹²⁰ Americans are looking for the President to turn his attention to the economy and other domestic issues.

	2003	2002	2001	2000
Defending the country from future terrorist attacks	81	83	-	-
Strengthening the nation’s economy	73	71	81	70
Improving the job situation	62	67	60	41
Improving the educational system	62	66	78	77
Taking steps to make the Social Security system financially sound	59	62	74	69
Taking the steps to make the Medicare system financially sound	56	55	71	64
Adding prescription drug benefits to Medicare coverage	52	54	73	54
Strengthening the US military	48	52	48	-
Regulating health maintenance organizations (HMOs) and managed care plans	48	50	66	56
Dealing with the problems of poor and needy people	48	44	63	55
Reducing crime	47	53	76	69
Providing health insurance to the uninsured	45	43	61	55
Developing a national missile defense system to protect against missile attacks	42	39	41	-
Dealing with the nation’s energy problem	40	42	-	-
Reducing the budget deficit	40	35	-	-
Dealing with the moral breakdown in the country	39	45	51	48
Protecting the environment	39	44	63	54
Working to reduce racial tensions	33	-	52	46
Making the cuts in federal income taxes passed in 2001 permanent	30	-	-	-

They believe that George Bush is spending the right amount of time (68%) dealing with the war on terrorism. Meanwhile, majorities feel the President is spending too little time on the economy (51%) and on other domestic issues such as Social Security, prescription drug benefits and education (57%).¹²¹

The economy is the nation’s top policy priority. The public’s ratings of economic conditions are the lowest they have been since the end of 1993 and beginning of 1994. Most know someone who has been laid off and most say the economy is in recession. Americans have little faith in the country’s leadership on this issue – they give the President low marks for the job he has done on the economy.

Americans are pessimistic about the state of the nation’s economy, with 78% rating current economic conditions as “only fair” or “poor.”¹²² The public’s assessment of the economy since the beginning of 2003 represents the worst ratings since the end of 1993 and beginning of 1994. A majority (56%) says the economy is in a recession,¹²³ 48% say the economy is getting worse,¹²⁴ and 60% know someone who has been laid off or fired recently, the highest this measure has been since 1994.¹²⁵ As a result, the President’s job performance rating on the economy is low. For most of 2003, George Bush’s economic job approval hovered in the mid-40s. As of the end of April, his rating improved slightly and stands at 52% approval of the job he is doing on the economy.¹²⁶

As of this writing, the public continues to give President Bush high approval ratings overall and on several specific issues. After declining early in 2003, his overall approval rating rebounded with the war in Iraq but has begun to decline again. Bush receives his highest ratings for security issues.

Two-thirds (66%) approve of the job George Bush is doing as President. After declining earlier this year, the President’s approval ratings climbed in late March and April 2003 during the war with Iraq, but as of mid-May, his approval ratings are showing a decline again.¹²⁸ Americans give President Bush the highest job approval ratings for security issues, including the campaign against terrorism (79% approve), Iraq (75%), and homeland security (74%). The domestic policy that receives the highest approval rating is education (59% approve). (Table 15)

The US campaign against terrorism	79
The situation in Iraq	75
Homeland security	74
The situation with North Korea	61
Education	59
The situation between Israel and the Palestinians	54
The economy	52
Taxes	50
Social Security	49
The environment	49
Prescription drug benefits for the elderly	44
The federal budget	43
The cost, availability and coverage of health insurance	34

In addition to high approval ratings on security and defense issues, the public believes George Bush is better able than the Democrats to handle these issues. Importantly, the President currently has a slim advantage over the Democrats in dealing with the economy.

The public believes George Bush is better able to handle security and defense issues than the Democrats. The President holds an advantage on Iraq (52 percentage point margin over the Democrats), terrorism (51 points), North Korea (34 points), homeland security (33 points) and defense and the military (31 points). George Bush also holds a slim 10-point advantage on the emerging national priority, the economy. Other than the economy, the public does not give an advantage to the President on any other domestic issue. However, only three issues show a strong Democratic advantage: prescriptions, health insurance, and the environment. (Table 16)

	George Bush	Democrats	Margin Bush - Dem
The situation in Iraq	72	20	52
The U.S. campaign against terrorism	72	21	51
The situation with North Korea	62	28	34
Homeland security	63	30	33
Defense and the military budget	63	32	31
The economy	51	41	10
Education	45	46	-1
Taxes	46	49	-3
Social Security	43	50	-7
The cost of prescription drugs	39	52	-13
The cost, availability, and coverage of health insurance	35	56	-21
The environment	34	60	-26

Most voters understand that states are facing serious budget deficits, and that spending cuts will be necessary. Voters are very clear that they want policymakers to prioritize education in the current economic climate.

A majority (58%) of registered voters reports that their state is likely to face an extremely serious (23%) or a very serious (35%) budget deficit. Of all the programs that could be cut, the one program that voters most want to protect is education (54%) followed by health care (32%). Furthermore, in rating a series of funding priorities, the public rates education as the highest priority for federal and state funds. (Table 17)

	Federal	State
Education	55	58
Health care	51	52
Creating jobs and economic development	37	40
Retirement and Social Security/pensions	36	30
Terrorism and security	28	32
Tax cuts	16	19
Transportation, roads and transit	10	11

The public is willing to have the federal government run a deficit for three priorities: to “increase spending for the war on terrorism and our nation’s military and defense” (78% would support a deficit to fund this priority); to “increase spending on education for students from kindergarten through college” (67%); and to “increase spending on steps to stimulate the economy” (62%). Far fewer would support deficit spending to “increase spending on prescription drugs” (46%) or to “make permanent the federal tax cuts implemented last year” (39%).¹³¹

The existing economic climate will make it difficult to advance new policies within state legislatures. State legislators see their state budgets as requiring spending cuts, and view education, the economy, jobs and a balanced budget as the highest priorities.

More than two-thirds (68%) of state legislators report that their state’s economy has gotten worse over the past year. Policymakers are preparing to make tough choices: 54% of state legislators say they will be “looking at making spending cuts” in dealing with their state’s budget (20% say the cuts will be “substantial”).¹³³

State legislators’ top priority is education, with 45% saying that improving public education is “one of the most important priorities.” The economy, creating jobs and balancing the state budget are the next highest priorities (40%, 39% and 39% respectively). (Table 18)

When the role for government and employers is defined broadly, parents appreciate the role both can play in addressing parents’ concerns, though they do not see either entity doing much now.

Parents are divided in their assessment of how much government is doing about parents’ concerns – 36% say government is doing a “great deal” or “somewhat” while 50% say government is doing “not very much” or “nothing at all.” They rate employers similarly, with 44% saying employers are doing something to address parents’ concerns and 48% reporting they are not doing much. However, 81% believe government could do quite a bit (44% “a great deal,” 37% “somewhat”) and just as many (79%) say employers could do quite a bit (38% “a great deal,” 41% “somewhat”).¹³⁴

Concerning child abuse specifically, most believe it is possible to prevent child abuse before it starts. The most popular prevention strategy is to educate parents about child development.

Most (83%) believe it is possible to prevent child abuse and neglect before it starts, and 49% say it is “very much possible.” More than two-thirds assert that “educating all new parents about their child’s developmental needs and stages” is a very effective prevention strategy (69%). Majorities also say, “providing treatment for abused or neglected children” is a very effective strategy (58%), followed by “removal of the abused or

Improving public education	45%
Improving state economy	40%
Creating jobs	39%
Balancing state budget	39%
Reducing the number of people on welfare	36%
Providing after school programs	33%
Helping low-income families with children	30%
Provide affordable child care	28%
Reduce hunger and homeless	27%
Reducing child poverty	27%
Insure uninsured children	27%
Health insurance for child of working poor	26%
Affordable housing	26%
Help vulnerable families	24%
Hold down taxes	23%
Cut state spending	22%
Combat terrorism	21%
Increasing state minimum wage	18%
Cutting taxes	17%
Improve family values	16%
Protect patients in HMOs	15%
Protect environment	15%
Closing tax loopholes	13%
Fighting crime	12%

neglected child from the home” (51%). A significant percentage (41%) thinks “voluntary at-home visitation programs for new parents” is effective.¹³⁵

Even higher percentages support a range of policies to prevent abuse. Eighty-two percent (82%) of parents and 73% of those without children in the home support government funding for home visitation services.¹³⁶ Fully 86% support parent education classes taught in schools and 71% support tougher penalties against child abuse. To fund these policies, 55% would support a specific proposal to fund child-related programs from an inflated tobacco tax.¹³⁷

The public states that child abuse is an issue they can do something about personally, but they do not see government intervention as effective. Two-thirds (65%) agree and 31% strongly agree that there are things they can do to prevent child abuse in their community, slightly higher than the response for drug abuse (60% agree, 26% strongly), but lower than the response for crime (71%, 31%).¹³⁸ Very few think intervention by government officials would be very effective: “intervention by social service agencies or child protective services” (27%) or “intervention by police” (25%).¹³⁹

An effective message to advance PCA America’s solutions takes more than a dialogue about effective policies alone. The policies need to be combined with broader, compelling values that motivate action and support.

In an analysis of focus groups, Hart Research discusses the importance of combining the moral imperative to protect children with a demonstration that programs can work. “Advocates should also return often to the argument that preventing child abuse and neglect is a moral imperative. Hard data is vital in proving that prevention services lower rates of abuse and neglect over time. And one argument has a powerful emotional impact on voters and lawmakers and thus cannot be repeated often enough: If we do nothing, children’s lives will be destroyed.”¹⁴⁰

Furthermore, survey data demonstrate that the public gives its highest rating to a simple moral statement, which outranks prevention messages: “No child deserves to be abused or neglected” (9.6 average rating on a 10-point scale); “Abused and neglected children are more likely to become abusive parents” (9.0); “Abused and neglected children are more likely to become violent as teenagers and adults” (8.9); “Child abuse and neglect may cause problems with a child’s brain development” (8.7); “Abused and neglected children are more likely to have drug and alcohol problems as teenagers or adults” (8.6); “It is more expensive to treat child abuse and neglect than to prevent it in the first place” (8.3); “Abused and neglected children are more likely to have chronic health problems as adults” (7.9).¹⁴¹

Pediatricians are important actors in advocating for and implementing child abuse policies. Most pediatricians see victims of child abuse in their practices. Compared to domestic violence and community violence, pediatricians are more confident in their abilities to identify child abuse, are more comfortable speaking with parents about abuse, and feel they have had adequate training to deal with child abuse.

Pediatricians believe community-based programs can be effective, and think pediatricians should be involved in community efforts to prevent child abuse. Most feel they spend too little time on violence prevention, but they also feel there is insufficient time to deal with these issues during health visits.

According to a poll conducted in Massachusetts, health care professionals are trusted spokespeople on these kinds of issues: health care professionals (50% would trust), non-profit advocacy organizations (25%), law enforcement officials (11%), business leaders (4%), and political leaders/state officials (2%).¹⁴²

As would be expected, pediatricians have more experience with child abuse than with domestic violence generally. A majority (57%) of pediatricians say they have treated injuries from child abuse in the preceding year. This compares with 39% who have treated injuries from domestic violence and 44% who have treated injuries from community violence. More feel confident in their ability to identify children at risk of injury from child abuse (65%), than for domestic violence (37%) or community violence (33%). They are also more comfortable discussing child abuse with parents (64%) than discussing community violence (58%) or domestic violence (45%). This confidence may be due in part to widespread training efforts in child abuse. Half (50%) feel they have had adequate professional training in child abuse, but far fewer feel they have had adequate training for domestic violence (21%) or community violence (17%).

Pediatricians believe community-based programs can be effective against child abuse (75% say they can be effective), domestic violence (72%), and community violence (76%). Furthermore, they believe pediatricians should be involved in community efforts to prevent child abuse (95%), domestic violence (76%), and community violence (72%). Nearly all pediatricians believe they should screen for child abuse (94%), and significant percentages of pediatricians feel they should screen for community violence (71%) and domestic violence (66%).

Nearly three-quarters (71%) of pediatricians say they spend too little time on violence prevention issues. At the same time, few believe there is sufficient time in health visits to address child abuse (17% of pediatricians agree with this statement), domestic violence (13%) and community violence (16%).¹⁴³

Conclusions

- The issue of child abuse exists in a cultural context that strongly colors how people view the issue:
 - The public is concerned about children. They see the next generations as irresponsible and unlikely to make the country a better place in the future. The problem, according to the public, is the decline of two-parent families and the rise of dual income families. The public recognizes that parenting is problematic, but for different reasons than children's advocates do.
 - A significant proportion of the public is misinformed about child development and many adults define a variety of developmentally appropriate actions as spoiling. Developmentally inappropriate expectations of children may influence how parents choose to discipline and may undermine worthy policies, programs and activities which appear to fly in the face of public understanding.
 - "Child abuse" brings to mind extreme physical harm. The public struggles with where to draw the line between "discipline" and "abuse." Spanking and many other physical punishments are not necessarily abusive, according to the public, depending on the age of the child and the severity of the act.
- Because of its extreme image, child abuse may be defined by a "crime" frame, leading to accusation, embarrassment, and support for criminal punishments for parents rather than education and support. Even if the image of child abuse can be de-criminalized, the belief that it is largely localized in troubled families could cause the issue to be viewed as a problem for a narrow segment of society, rather than for society as a whole.
- If the communications frame is shifted to "parenting," then the issue faces other opportunities and barriers. Society is as concerned about leniency as it is with abuse, which can lead to *more* physical punishment. If this issue is about "parenting," it may cue public concern about privacy and government intrusion. Even so, one message alternative to explore is public support for preparation, in the form of parent education and training for new parents.
- Finally, it may be possible to make this issue about "education and child development," shifting parents' views of discipline away from punishment and towards teaching: physical discipline is inappropriate because it does not accomplish the goal of discipline, i.e., to have self-control and self-discipline. This approach could provide an appropriate context for parent education as a policy priority and allow abusive parents to be seen as in need of training, not jail

time. Additionally, this approach might afford an advantage by offering new information – brain science, developmental research – and a new reason to engage the public in re-examining and re-considering its current child-rearing practice and policy preferences. Further research should explore this possibility.

¹ Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, conducted by Princeton Survey Research Assoc., 1546 adults nationwide, April 6 - May 6, 1999.

² “Kids These Days ’99,” sponsored by Ronald McDonald House Charities and the Ad Council, conducted by Public Agenda, 1005 adults nationally (including 384 parents of children under 18), and 328 teens, December 1-8, 1998.

³ “Kids These Days ’99,” sponsored by Ronald McDonald House Charities and the Ad Council, conducted by Public Agenda, 1005 adults nationally (including 384 parents of children under 18), and 328 teens, December 1-8, 1998.

⁴ Greenberg/Quinlan Democracy Corps, 12/99.

⁵ Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, 2002 adults nationally, February 25 – March 10, 2002.

⁶ Sponsored by the Catholic Digest, conducted by the Gallup Organization, 2783 adults nationally, Nov. 1965.

⁷ Conducted by Ben Gaffin and Associates, 2987 personal interviews with adults nationally, June – July 1952.

⁸ Hart and Teeter/NBC/Wall Street Journal, 6/99.

⁹ Greenberg/Quinlan Democracy Corps, 12/99.

¹⁰ “Kids These Days ’99,” sponsored by Ronald McDonald House Charities and the Ad Council, conducted by Public Agenda, 1005 adults nationally (including 384 parents of children under 18), and 328 teens, December 1-8, 1998.

¹¹ “A Lot Easier Said Than Done,” by Public Agenda, 1607 parents or guardians of children age 5-17, July 31 – August 15, 2002.

¹² “*Building Strong Families*” by the YMCA of the USA and Search Institute, conducted by Global Strategy Group, 1005 parents nationally, May 5-15, 2002. The authors caution that the low response rate indicates the responses may not be representative of all parents.

¹³ “A Lot Easier Said Than Done,” by Public Agenda, 1607 parents or guardians of children age 5-17, July 31 – August 15, 2002.

¹⁴ NORC General Social Survey, 1994.

¹⁵ Conducted by National Opinion Research Center, University of Chicago, personal interviews with 2765 adults nationally, February 6-June 26, 2002. Part of a continuing series of social indicators conducted since 1972. Data provided by The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut.

¹⁶ Washington Post/Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard University Gender Poll, 1,202 adults nationally, Aug. 14-Sept. 7, 1997.

¹⁷ “A Lot Easier Said Than Done,” by Public Agenda, 1607 parents or guardians of children age 5-17, July 31 – August 15, 2002.

¹⁸ Washington Post/Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard University Gender Poll, 1,202 adults nationally, Aug. 14-Sept. 7, 1997.

¹⁹ “What Grown Ups Understand About Child Development,” sponsored by Civitas, Zero to Three and the Brio Corporation, conducted by DYG, Inc. 3000 adults nationwide, including 1066 parents of children aged newborn through six. June 12 – July 5, 2000.

²⁰ Washington Post/Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard University Gender Poll, 1,202 adults nationally, Aug. 14-Sept. 7, 1997.

²¹ Roper Center/University of Connecticut, 3/97.

²² “What Grown Ups Understand About Child Development,” sponsored by Civitas, Zero to Three and the Brio Corporation, conducted by DYG, Inc. 3000 adults nationwide, including 1066 parents of children aged newborn through six. June 12 – July 5, 2000.

- ²³ “Motherhood Today -- A Tougher Job, Less Ably Done,” sponsored by the Pew Research Center for The People & The Press, conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates, 1,101 women nationally, March 14-26, 1997.
- ²⁴ Washington Post/Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard University Value Study, 2,025 adults nationally, July 29-August 18, 1998.
- ²⁵ Washington Post/Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard University Value Study, 2,025 adults nationally, July 29-August 18, 1998.
- ²⁶ Princeton Survey Research/Pew, 5/99.
- ²⁷ The Shell Poll, conducted by Peter Hart Research, 1264 adults nationally, November 5-8, 1998.
- ²⁸ Washington Post poll. 1,477 registered voters on September 7 -17, 2000.
- ²⁹ Conducted by the Gallup Organization, 1,015 adults nationally, April 20-22, 2001.
- ³⁰ 1999 Millennium Survey, sponsored by the Pew Research Center, conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates, 1546 adults nationally, April 6 – May 6, 1999.
- ³¹ Sponsored by the Pew Research Center, conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates, 1411 adults, October 7-11, 1999.
- ³² “General Social Survey 2002” conducted by National Opinion Research Center, University of Chicago, personal interviews with 2,765 adults nationally, February 6-June 26, 2002. Part of a continuing series of social indicators conducted since 1972. Data provided by The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut.
- ³³ The Shell Survey, conducted by Peter Hart Research, 1040 women and 413 men, January 7-13, 2000.
- ³⁴ The Shell Survey, conducted by Peter Hart Research, 1040 women and 413 men, January 7-13, 2000.
- ³⁵ Survey of Americans on Gender in the Workplace, sponsored by the Washington Post, Kaiser Family Foundation, Harvard University Survey Project, conducted by Chilton Research Services, 804 adults nationally, November 17-23, 1997.
- ³⁶ “A Lot Easier Said Than Done,” by Public Agenda, 1607 parents or guardians of children age 5-17, July 31 – August 15, 2002.
- ³⁷ Los Angeles Times Poll, 2071 adults nationally, June 8-June 13, 2000. Data provided by The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut.
- ³⁸ The Shell Survey, conducted by Peter Hart Research, 1040 women and 413 men, January 7-13, 2000.
- ³⁹ “General Social Survey 2002” conducted by National Opinion Research Center, University of Chicago, personal interviews with 2,765 adults nationally, February 6-June 26, 2002. Part of a continuing series of social indicators conducted since 1972. Data provided by The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut.
- ⁴⁰ “What Grown Ups Understand About Child Development,” sponsored by Civitas, Zero to Three and the Brio Corporation, conducted by DYG, Inc. 3000 adults nationwide, including 1066 parents of children aged newborn through six. June 12 – July 5, 2000.
- ⁴¹ “General Social Survey 2002” conducted by National Opinion Research Center, University of Chicago, personal interviews with 2,765 adults nationally, February 6-June 26, 2002. Part of a continuing series of social indicators conducted since 1972. Data provided by The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut.
- ⁴² Washington Post/Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard University Gender Poll, 1,202 adults nationally, Aug. 14-Sept. 7, 1997.
- ⁴³ The Shell Survey, conducted by Peter Hart Research, 1040 women and 413 men, January 7-13, 2000.
- ⁴⁴ “Necessary Compromises” by Public Agenda, 815 parents of children 5 years old or under, as well as 444 parents of children 6 to 17 and 214 adults who are not parents. It also includes responses from a nationwide mail survey of 218 employers and 216 children's advocates, June 1 and June 15, 2000.
- ⁴⁵ Conducted by the Gallup Organization, June 11-17, 2001.
- ⁴⁶ “Necessary Compromises” by Public Agenda, 815 parents of children 5 years old or under, as well as 444 parents of children 6 to 17 and 214 adults who are not parents. It also includes responses from a nationwide mail survey of 218 employers and 216 children's advocates, June 1 and June 15, 2000.
- ⁴⁷ “Motherhood Today -- A Tougher Job, Less Ably Done,” sponsored by the Pew Research Center for The People & The Press, conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates, 1,101 women nationally, March 14-26, 1997.

- ⁴⁸ “Motherhood Today -- A Tougher Job, Less Ably Done,” sponsored by the Pew Research Center for The People & The Press, conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates, 1,101 women nationally, March 14-26, 1997.
- ⁴⁹ “Playing Their Parts: Parental Involvement in Public Schools Survey,” conducted by the Public Agenda Foundation, 1220 parents of children in public school, December 10-20, 1998.
- ⁵⁰ “What will parents vote for” by Charney Research for the National Parenting Association and Offspring Magazine, 500 American parents and oversamples of 50black parents, 50 Latino parents, and 50 parents who were welfare recipients, January 26 to February 8, 2000.
- ⁵¹ Washington Post/Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard University Gender Poll, 1,202 adults nationally, Aug. 14-Sept. 7, 1997.
- ⁵² Washington Post/Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard University Gender Poll, 1,202 adults nationally, Aug. 14-Sept. 7, 1997.
- ⁵³ “Necessary Compromises” by Public Agenda, 815 parents of children 5 years old or under, as well as 444 parents of children 6 to 17 and 214 adults who are not parents. It also includes responses from a nationwide mail survey of 218 employers and 216 children's advocates, June 1 and June 15, 2000.
- ⁵⁴ “What Grown Ups Understand About Child Development,” sponsored by Civitas, Zero to Three and the Brio Corporation, conducted by DYG, Inc. 3000 adults nationwide, including 1066 parents of children aged newborn through six. June 12 – July 5, 2000.
- ⁵⁵ “What Grown Ups Understand About Child Development,” sponsored by Civitas, Zero to Three and the Brio Corporation, conducted by DYG, Inc. 3000 adults nationwide, including 1066 parents of children aged newborn through six. June 12 – July 5, 2000.
- ⁵⁶ Sponsored by Harvard School of Public Health, interviewing conducted by ICR--International Communications Research, 1001 adults nationally, June 20-June 24, 2001. Data provided by The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut.
- ⁵⁷ Sponsored by Children’s Institute International, conducted by Penn, Schoen & Berland, Inc., 981 adults nationwide, late April through mid-May, 1999.
- ⁵⁸ Sponsored by Harvard School of Public Health, interviewing conducted by ICR--International Communications Research, 1008 adults nationally, April 27-May 1, 2001. Data provided by The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut.
- ⁵⁹ “Public Awareness Study,” sponsored by PCA America, 2000.
- ⁶⁰ Sponsored by Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, conducted by The Tarrance Group and Lake, Snell, Perry & Associates, 800 registered voters nationally, August 17-August 20, 1998. Data provided by The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut.
- ⁶¹ PCA America tracking post-wave 2, 465 adults nationally, January 5 – February 8, 2003.
- ⁶² PCA America tracking post-wave 2, n=465, January 5 – February 8, 2003.
- ⁶³ Sponsored by PCA Wyoming, conducted by Phone Based Research, 500 adults in Wyoming, November 27 – December 5, 2002.
- ⁶⁴ Sponsored by Children’s Institute International, conducted by Penn, Schoen & Berland, Inc., 981 adults nationwide, late April through mid-May, 1999.
- ⁶⁵ Sponsored by Children’s Institute International, conducted by Penn, Schoen & Berland, Inc., 981 adults nationwide, late April through mid-May, 1999.
- ⁶⁶ Sponsored by Prevent Child Abuse America, conducted by Schulman, Ronca and Bucuvalas of New York City, 1250 adults nationally, 1999.
- ⁶⁷ Sponsored by Children’s Institute International, conducted by Penn, Schoen & Berland, Inc., 981 adults nationwide, late April through mid-May, 1999.
- ⁶⁸ Sponsored by Prevent Child Abuse America, conducted by Schulman, Ronca and Bucuvalas of New York City, 1250 adults nationally, 1999.
- ⁶⁹ Focus groups reviewed: PCA America, by Campbell-Ewald Company, 1983; PCA America, by Qualitative Research and Consulting, 1997; DC Hotline, by Frederick Schneiders Research, 1997; Community Partnerships for Protecting Children, by Martin and Glantz, 1997; Public Children Services Association, by Triad Research Group, 2000; PCA America, by Lowe/Lintas and Partners, Nicholas Research, 2001; I Am Your Child, by Peter Hart Research Associates, Market Strategies, 2001; PCA America, by Peter Hart Research Associates, American Viewpoint, 2002.

- ⁷⁰ “Coverage in Context: How Thoroughly the News Media Report Five Key Children’s Issues,” by the Casey Journalism Center, University of Maryland, content analysis covering 12 major circulation newspapers and four national television news sources, April 21 – July 20, 2001.
- ⁷¹ PCA America, by Lowe/Lintas and Partners, Nicholas Research, 2001.
- ⁷² Sponsored by Children’s Institute International, conducted by Penn, Schoen & Berland, Inc., 981 adults nationwide, late April through mid-May, 1999.
- ⁷³ Sponsored by Prevent Child Abuse America, conducted by Schulman, Ronca and Bucuvalas of New York City, 1250 adults nationally, 1999.
- ⁷⁴ PCA America, by Campbell-Ewald Company, 1983.
- ⁷⁵ “A Lot Easier Said Than Done,” by Public Agenda, 1607 parents or guardians of children age 5-17, July 31 – August 15, 2002.
- ⁷⁶ “Virginia Slims Poll 2000” sponsored by Philip Morris USA, conducted by Roper Starch Worldwide, based on personal interviews with 2177 adult women and 826 adult men, May 15 – July 22, 1999. Data provided by The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut.
- ⁷⁷ DC Hotline, by Frederick Schneiders Research, 1997.
- ⁷⁸ PCA America, by Lowe/Lintas and Partners, Nicholas Research, 2001.
- ⁷⁹ PCA America, by Peter Hart Research Associates, American Viewpoint, 2002.
- ⁸⁰ “A Lot Easier Said Than Done,” by Public Agenda, 1607 parents or guardians of children age 5-17, July 31 – August 15, 2002.
- ⁸¹ “A Lot Easier Said Than Done,” by Public Agenda, 1607 parents or guardians of children age 5-17, July 31 – August 15, 2002.
- ⁸² “A Lot Easier Said Than Done,” by Public Agenda, 1607 parents or guardians of children age 5-17, July 31 – August 15, 2002.
- ⁸³ “Public Awareness Study,” sponsored by PCA America, 2000.
- ⁸⁴ Sponsored by Children’s Institute International, conducted by Penn, Schoen & Berland, Inc., 981 adults nationwide, late April through mid-May, 1999.
- ⁸⁵ “A Lot Easier Said Than Done,” by Public Agenda, 1607 parents or guardians of children age 5-17, July 31 – August 15, 2002.
- ⁸⁶ “A Lot Easier Said Than Done,” by Public Agenda, 1607 parents or guardians of children age 5-17, July 31 – August 15, 2002.
- ⁸⁷ “Public Awareness Study,” sponsored by PCA America, 2000.
- ⁸⁸ Conducted by National Opinion Research Center, University of Chicago, February 6-June 26, 2002 and based on personal interviews with a national adult sample of 2,765. Part of a continuing series of social indicators conducted since 1972. Data provided by The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut.
- ⁸⁹ NORC General Social Survey trend.
- ⁹⁰ “A Lot Easier Said Than Done,” by Public Agenda, 1607 parents or guardians of children age 5-17, July 31 – August 15, 2002.
- ⁹¹ “What Grown Ups Understand About Child Development,” sponsored by Civitas, Zero to Three and the Brio Corporation, conducted by DYG, Inc. 3000 adults nationwide, including 1066 parents of children aged newborn through six. June 12 – July 5, 2000.
- ⁹² Sponsored by ABC News, interviews conducted by ICR-International Communications Research, 1015 adults nationally, October 25-October 29, 2002. Data provided by The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut.
- ⁹³ Sponsored by Children’s Institute International, conducted by Penn, Schoen & Berland, Inc., 981 adults nationwide, late April through mid-May, 1999.
- ⁹⁴ “What Grown Ups Understand About Child Development,” sponsored by Civitas, Zero to Three and the Brio Corporation, conducted by DYG, Inc. 3000 adults nationwide, including 1066 parents of children aged newborn through six. June 12 – July 5, 2000.
- ⁹⁵ “What Grown Ups Understand About Child Development,” sponsored by Civitas, Zero to Three and the Brio Corporation, conducted by DYG, Inc. 3000 adults nationwide, including 1066 parents of children aged newborn through six. June 12 – July 5, 2000.
- ⁹⁶ Sponsored by Children’s Institute International, conducted by Penn, Schoen & Berland, Inc., 981 adults nationwide, late April through mid-May, 1999.

⁹⁷ “ND Statewide Child Abuse Survey: 2002” funded by the Child Protection Services in the Division of Children and Family Services within the North Dakota Department of Human Services, conducted in cooperation with the Department of Neuroscience, Medical Education Center, University of North Dakota, and the State Data Center at North Dakota State University, interviewing conducted by the Center for Social Research North Dakota State University, 460 respondents statewide, March and April 2002.

⁹⁸ Sponsored by NBC News, Wall Street Journal, conducted by Hart and Teeter Research Companies, 1008 adults nationally, June 8-June 10, 2002. Data provided by The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut.

⁹⁹ Sponsored by NBC News, Wall Street Journal, conducted by Hart and Teeter Research Companies, 1008 adults nationally, June 8-June 10, 2002.

¹⁰⁰ Sponsored by Washington Post, conducted by TNS Intersearch, 1004 adults nationally with an oversample of Catholics, June 16-June 17, 2002. Data provided by The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut.

¹⁰¹ Sponsored by Washington Post, conducted by TNS Intersearch, 1004 adults nationally with an oversample of Catholics, June 16-June 17, 2002. Data provided by The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut.

¹⁰² Conducted by CNN, 1,002 adult Americans, including 212 Catholics, conducted April 29-May 1, 2002.

¹⁰³ Conducted by CBS News, 1119 adults nationally, April 15-April 18, 2002. Data provided by The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut.

¹⁰⁴ Sponsored by Newsweek, conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates, 1000 adults nationally, April 25-April 26, 2002. Data provided by The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut.

¹⁰⁵ CBS News Poll, 892 adults nationally, including 197 Catholics, June 18-20, 2002.

¹⁰⁶ Sponsored by NBC News, Wall Street Journal, conducted by Hart and Teeter Research Companies, 1008 adults nationally, June 8-June 10, 2002.

¹⁰⁷ CBS News Poll, 892 adults nationally, including 197 Catholics, June 18-20, 2002.

¹⁰⁸ FOX News/Opinion Dynamics Poll, 900 registered voters nationwide, June 18-19, 2002.

¹⁰⁹ ABC News/Washington Post Poll, field work by TNS Intersearch, 1209 adults nationwide, Dec. 12-15, 2002.

¹¹⁰ ABC News Poll, fieldwork by TNS Intersearch, 1004 adults, including 225 Catholics, June 7-9, 2002.

¹¹¹ CBS News Poll, 892 adults nationally, including 197 Catholics, June 18-20, 2002.

¹¹² Sponsored by NBC News, Wall Street Journal, conducted by Hart and Teeter Research Companies, 1008 adults nationally, June 8-June 10, 2002. Data provided by The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut.

¹¹³ Focus groups reviewed: PCA America, by Campbell-Ewald Company, 1983; PCA America, by Qualitative Research and Consulting, 1997; DC Hotline, by Frederick Schneiders Research, 1997; Community Partnerships for Protecting Children, by Martin and Glantz, 1997; Public Children Services Association, by Triad Research Group, 2000; PCA America, by Lowe/Lintas and Partners, Nicholas Research, 2001; I Am Your Child, by Peter Hart Research Associates, Market Strategies, 2001; PCA America, by Peter Hart Research Associates, American Viewpoint, 2002.

¹¹⁴ PCA America News Release, March 30, 1999, referencing the 1999 Public Awareness Survey by PCA America.

¹¹⁵ Sponsored by Children’s Institute International, conducted by Penn, Schoen & Berland, Inc., 981 adults nationwide, late April through mid-May, 1999.

¹¹⁶ “ND Statewide Child Abuse Survey: 2002” funded by the Child Protection Services in the Division of Children and Family Services within the North Dakota Department of Human Services, conducted in cooperation with the Department of Neuroscience, Medical Education Center, University of North Dakota, and the State Data Center at North Dakota State University, interviewing conducted by the Center for Social Research North Dakota State University, 460 respondents statewide, March and April 2002.

¹¹⁷ Sponsored by Massachusetts Citizens for Children, conducted by the University of Massachusetts Poll, Spring 2000.

¹¹⁸ “ND Statewide Child Abuse Survey: 2002” funded by the Child Protection Services in the Division of Children and Family Services within the North Dakota Department of Human Services, conducted in

cooperation with the Department of Neuroscience, Medical Education Center, University of North Dakota, and the State Data Center at North Dakota State University, interviewing conducted by the Center for Social Research North Dakota State University, 460 respondents statewide, March and April 2002.

¹¹⁹ Conducted by Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, 1,218 adults nationally, January 8-12, 2003.

¹²⁰ NBC News/Wall Street Journal Poll, conducted by Hart and Teeter research companies, 1000 adults nationwide, May 17-19, 2003.

¹²¹ Washington Post/ABC News Poll, conducted by TNS Intersearch, 1105 adults nationally, April 27-30, 2003.

¹²² The Gallup Organization, 1,005 adults nationally, May 5-7, 2003.

¹²³ The Gallup Organization, 1,001 adults nationally, April 22-23, 2003.

¹²⁴ Conducted by the Gallup Organization, 1014 adults nationally, May 19-21, 2003.

¹²⁵ The Gallup Organization, 1,018 adults nationally, April 7-9, 2003.

¹²⁶ Washington Post/ABC News Poll, conducted by TNS Intersearch, 1105 adults nationally, April 27-30, 2003.

¹²⁷ Washington Post/ABC News Poll, conducted by TNS Intersearch, 1105 adults nationally, April 27-30, 2003.

¹²⁸ CNN/USA Today Poll, conducted by the Gallup Organization, 1014 adults nationally, May 19-21, 2003.

¹²⁹ Washington Post/ABC News Poll, conducted by TNS Intersearch, 1105 adults nationally, April 27-30, 2003.

¹³⁰ “Demanding Quality Education In Tough Economic Times,” sponsored by Public Education Network and Education Week, conducted by Lake Snell Perry & Associates, 1050 registered voters nationally, including oversamples of 125 African Americans and 125 Latinos, January 22-January 28, 2003. Data provided by The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut.

¹³¹ Sponsored by the Committee for Education Funding, conducted by Ipsos Reid, 1000 adults, Feb. 1-3, 2002.

¹³² Sponsored by the National Center for Children in Poverty, conducted by the Mellman Group, 553 state legislators, February 15 – March 15, 2002.

¹³³ Sponsored by the National Center for Children in Poverty, conducted by the Mellman Group, 553 state legislators, February 15 – March 15, 2002.

¹³⁴ “What will parents vote for” by Charney Research for the National Parenting Association and Offspring Magazine, 500 American parents and oversamples of 50 black parents, 50 Latino parents, and 50 parents who were welfare recipients, January 26 to February 8, 2000.

¹³⁵ “Public Awareness Study,” sponsored by PCA America, 2000.

¹³⁶ Sponsored by Prevent Child Abuse America, conducted by Schulman, Ronca and Bucuvalas of New York City, 1250 adults nationally, 1999.

¹³⁷ Sponsored by Children’s Institute International, conducted by Penn, Schoen & Berland, Inc., 981 adults nationwide, late April through mid-May, 1999.

¹³⁸ PCA America tracking post-wave 2, 465 adults nationally, January 5 – February 8, 2003.

¹³⁹ “Public Awareness Study,” sponsored by PCA America, 2000.

¹⁴⁰ PCA America, focus groups by Peter Hart Research Associates, American Viewpoint, 2002.

¹⁴¹ “Public Awareness Study,” sponsored by PCA America, 2000.

¹⁴² Sponsored by Massachusetts Citizens for Children, conducted by the University of Massachusetts Poll, Spring 2000.

¹⁴³ Periodic Survey #38, American Academy of Pediatrics, Division of Child Health Research, initiated by the Task Force on Violence (TFOV). The mail survey was conducted from October - March 1998; after six mailings the response rate was 62%. Based on responses from 603 post-residency Fellows who provide direct patient care.