

Experiences of Albertan Children During the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Brief Report from the All Our Families Cohort



June 2021



@AllOurFamilies



Acknowledgements

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Introduction

On January 25, 2020, Canada had its first presumptive case of the novel coronavirus, COVID-19, and by March 5, 2020, Alberta's first presumptive case of COVID-19 was reported in Calgary. By March 15, 2020, physical distancing and isolation orders were put in place by the Alberta Provincial Government to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

The psychological, economic and social effects of the pandemic are pervasive for families and children navigating challenges with school closures, home-schooling, and disruptions in routine activities.

Contemporary quality data on family coping during this unprecedented global pandemic is crucial to inform strategies and resource allocation to minimize adverse health, mental health and financial outcomes for families and children. Results from this survey, coupled with longitudinal follow-ups can identify opportunities for prevention and intervention to promote well-being and resilience during future waves or periods of lockdown.

Overview

This report describes data from a COVID-19 Impact Survey from July 2020 - August 2020 of children of mothers who were participants in AOF (All Our Families) and who responded to a maternal pandemic survey.

This report:

Describes AOF child experiences during the pandemic within the first 3-4 months, including:

- Physical activity and household activities
- Device use
- Sleep time
- Social connectedness
- School and social life
- Mental well-being

**For the full technical report, visit
allourfamiliesstudy.com**

About the All Our Families Cohort:

Children who were invited to participate in the child COVID-19 Impact Survey are the children of mothers who were part of a longitudinal cohort in Alberta called the AOF cohort (formerly the All Our Babies study). These women have been participating in this study since pregnancy, 8 to 12 years ago. Specifically, women were recruited into the AOF study between 2008 and 2011. Since then, information has been collected twice during pregnancy and at 4 months, 1 year, 2 years, 3 years, 5 years, and 8 years postpartum.

About this survey:

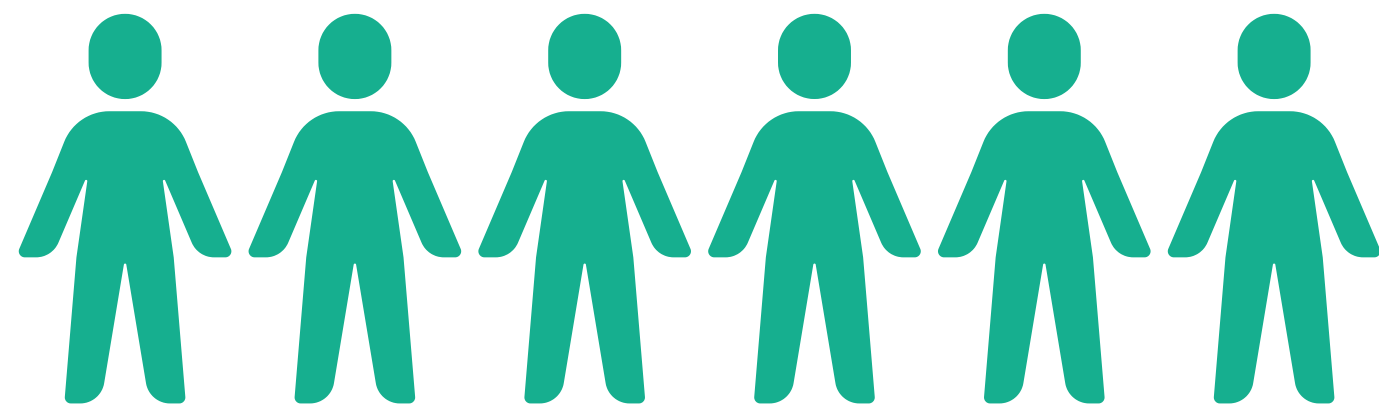
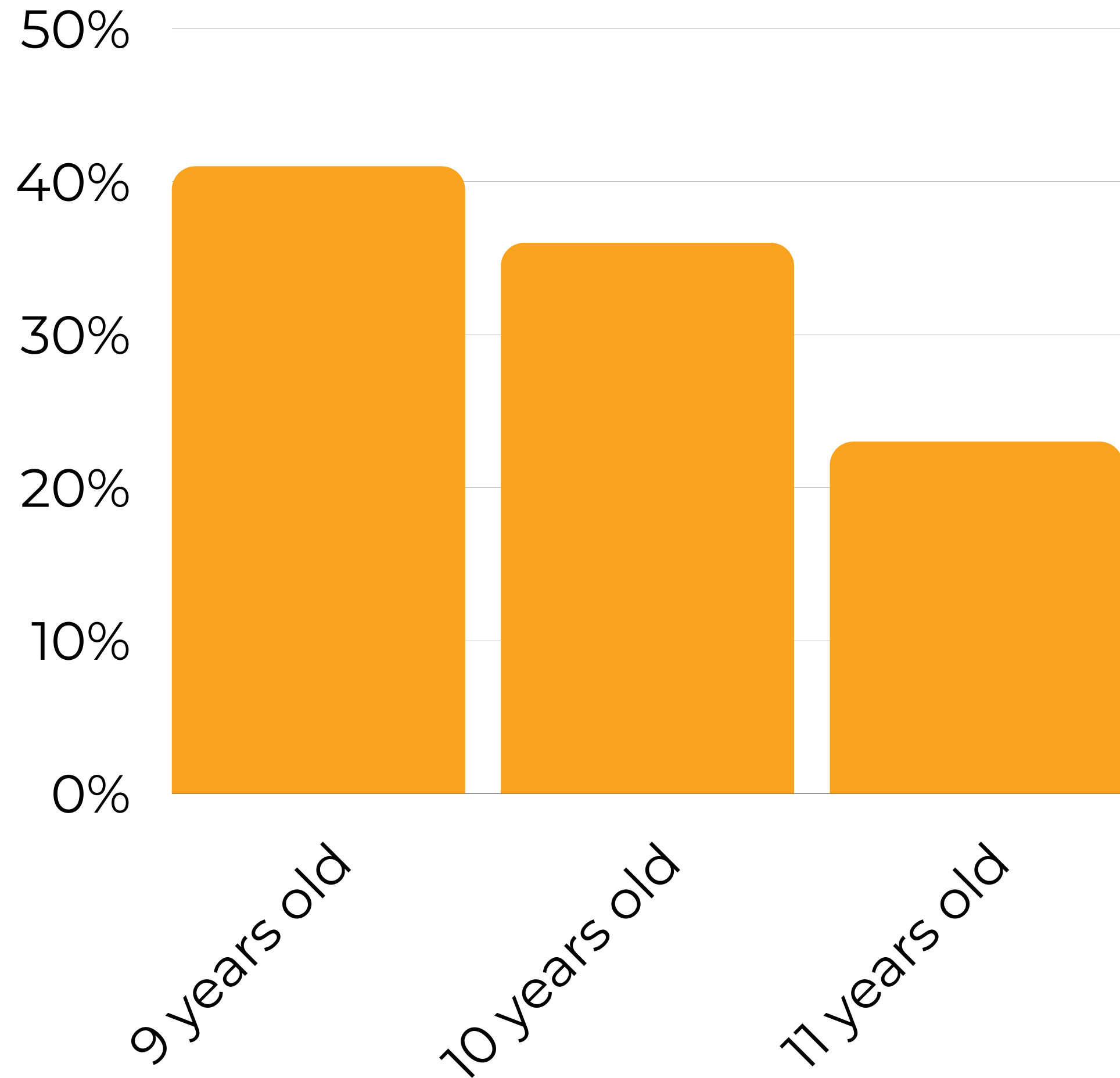
The eligible cohort sample was composed of 1285 mothers from AOF who had completed the maternal COVID-19 Impact Survey (available at allourfamiliesstudy.com).

In total, 1,021 mothers provided consent for their children to participate, and 895 children assented and completed the survey (88% participation rate).

Standardized measures for areas of relevance were used (e.g. child behavior, screen time), complemented by investigator-driven questions specific to the pandemic. This report presents descriptive statistics as percentages.

With the exception of household demographics, all results reflect child self-reported information.

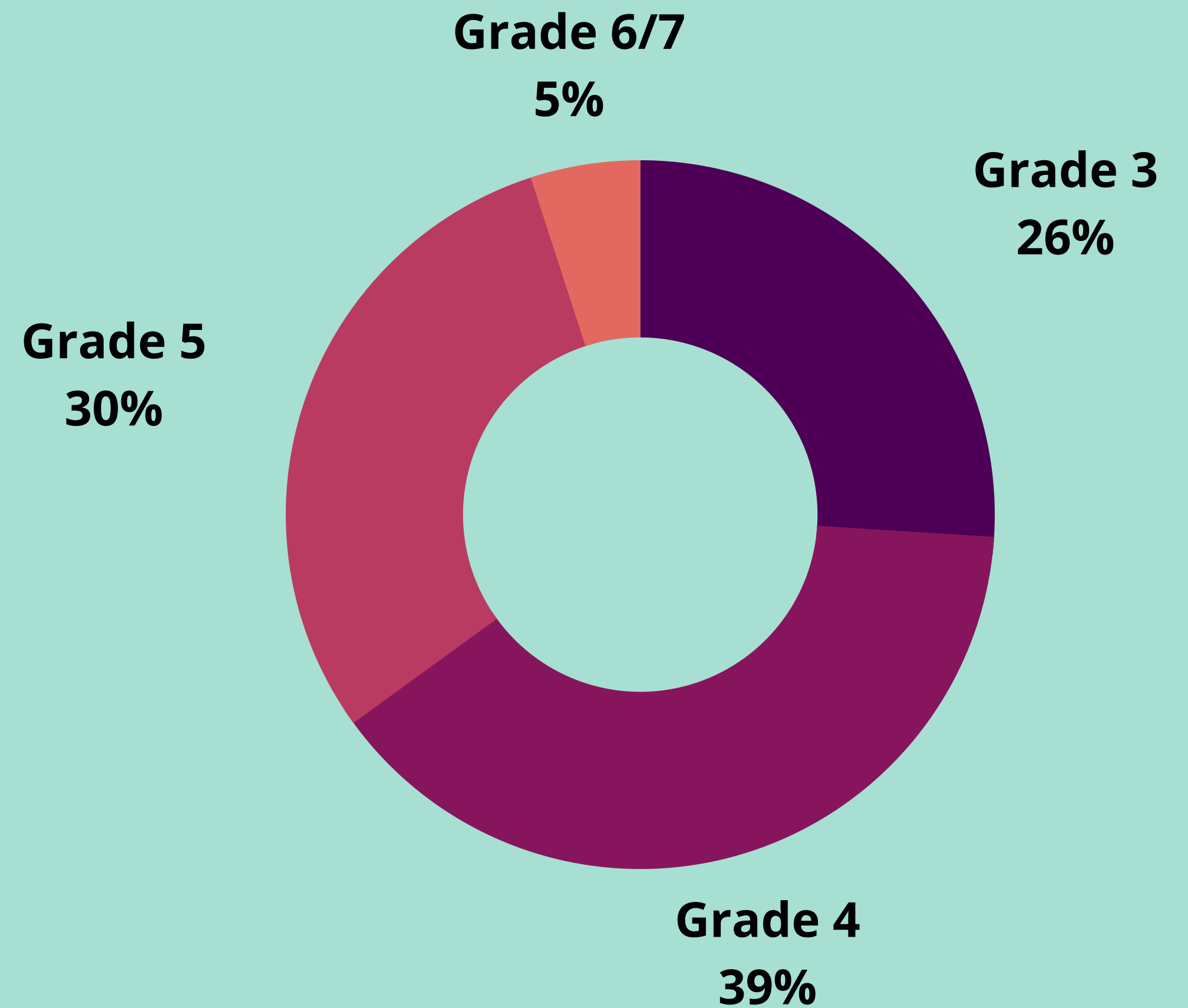
Child Demographics



47% identified as female

53% identified as male

*Less than 1% preferred to self-identify



Household Demographics

Children came from households where:

85%

reported annual household income of at least \$80,000.

82%

of mothers identified as Caucasian.

59%

reported at least one partner experience negative financial impacts.

95%

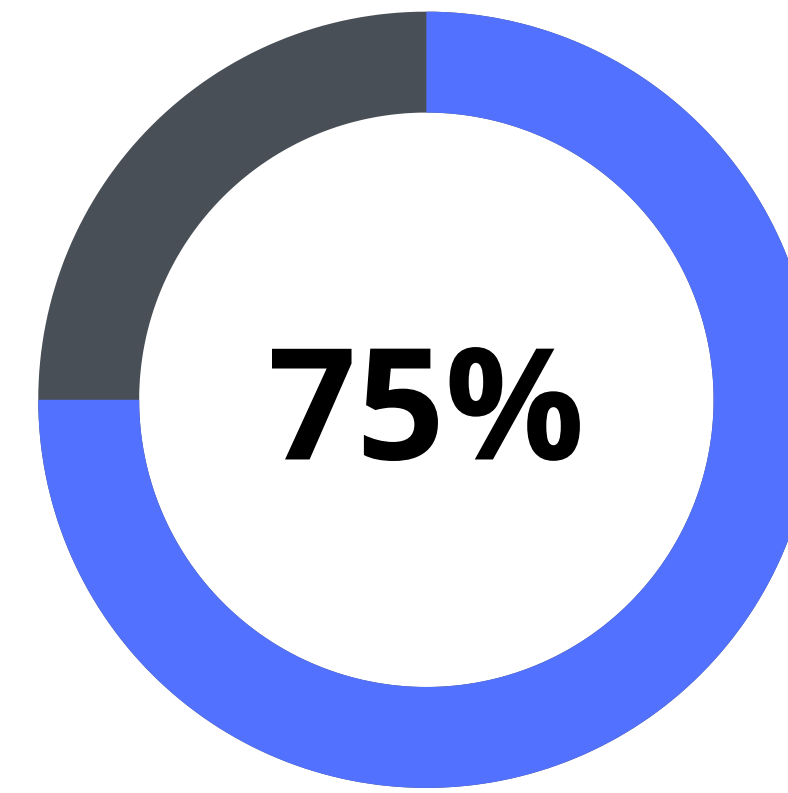
of mothers reported at least some post-secondary education.

These families reflect the parenting population of many urban centres in Canada. They are building careers and supporting their children in developing the life skills they will need for the future.

Physical Activity & Nature

Children were asked about their physical activity engagement in the week prior to completing the survey.

Although 79% of youth reported at least 60 minutes of physical activity in at least four days the last week, less than half of all youth (42%) reported meeting the daily physical activity guidelines of at least 60 minutes every day.



Of children reported engaging in physical activity such as 'playing sports and/or exercising for fun' on a daily basis.



Activities

Activities with family and households were reported often by children during the pandemic. Activities with family were reported daily by 72% of children and an additional 25% reporting weekly. About half of children reported helping with household activities daily (56%) and 38% reported at least weekly.



Reading for fun was reported daily by more than half of children (57%).

About half of children reported playing games (excluding video games) on a weekly basis (49%) and another third reported playing games daily (36%).

Arts and crafts, and building things (e.g., models, forts) were reported slightly less frequently with 48% and 42% reporting weekly activity, respectively.

74%

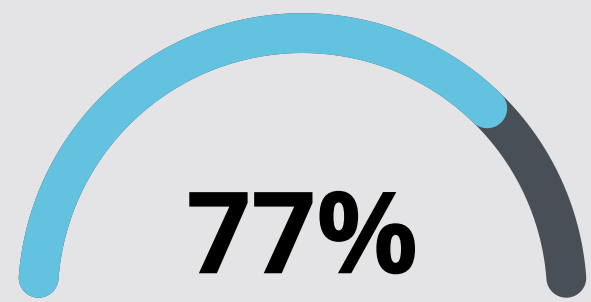
Of children reported learning a new hobby

34%

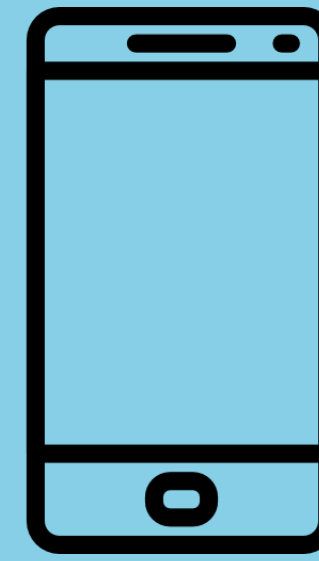
Of children engaged in music daily

Device & Sleep Habits

Children were asked about sleep duration and screen time during the COVID-19 pandemic.



reported nine or more hours of sleep



In the hour before bed:

56% used a digital device some nights

25% used a digital device every night



64%

reported never sleeping with a digital device in their room

What Children Told Us

I feel really happy to spend more time with my family. Sometimes Covid seems scary but we talk about it then I feel better.

I really liked the time I could spend with my parents/ I thought that the time we spent was really nice!

Would have liked to attend school at least a couple of days per week.

I felt like everything was going downhill at first, but then I realized that everything will be ok and I started getting more fresh air and going outside.

I have connected very well with my dad. He is amazingly cool.

It's annoying, but it gives me more time to read, write, and think about my life.

I don't like Covid because it restricts us from doing stuff we like to do. I hope it will go away soon.

It's not very fun. I miss hockey and my friends.

The COVID-19 time is very stressful, and I want everyone to safe and happy.

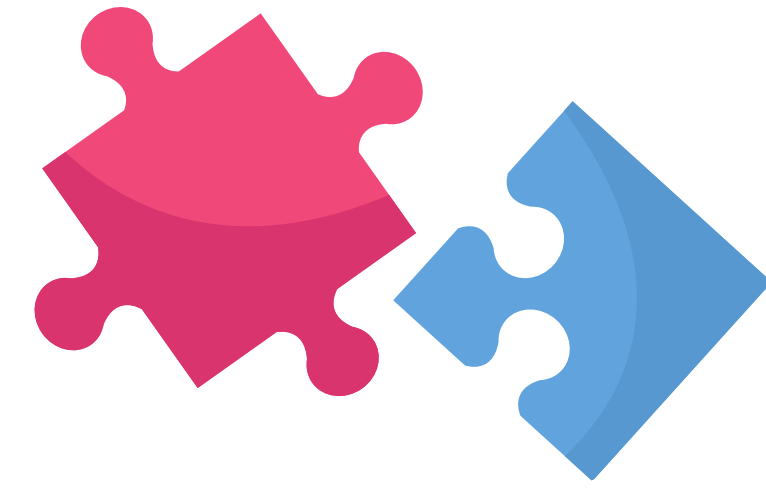
I miss my friends and teachers and wish I could see them soon.

When I'm old I'm going to remember social distancing and not being able to travel. I'll also remember having to wear a mask in public.

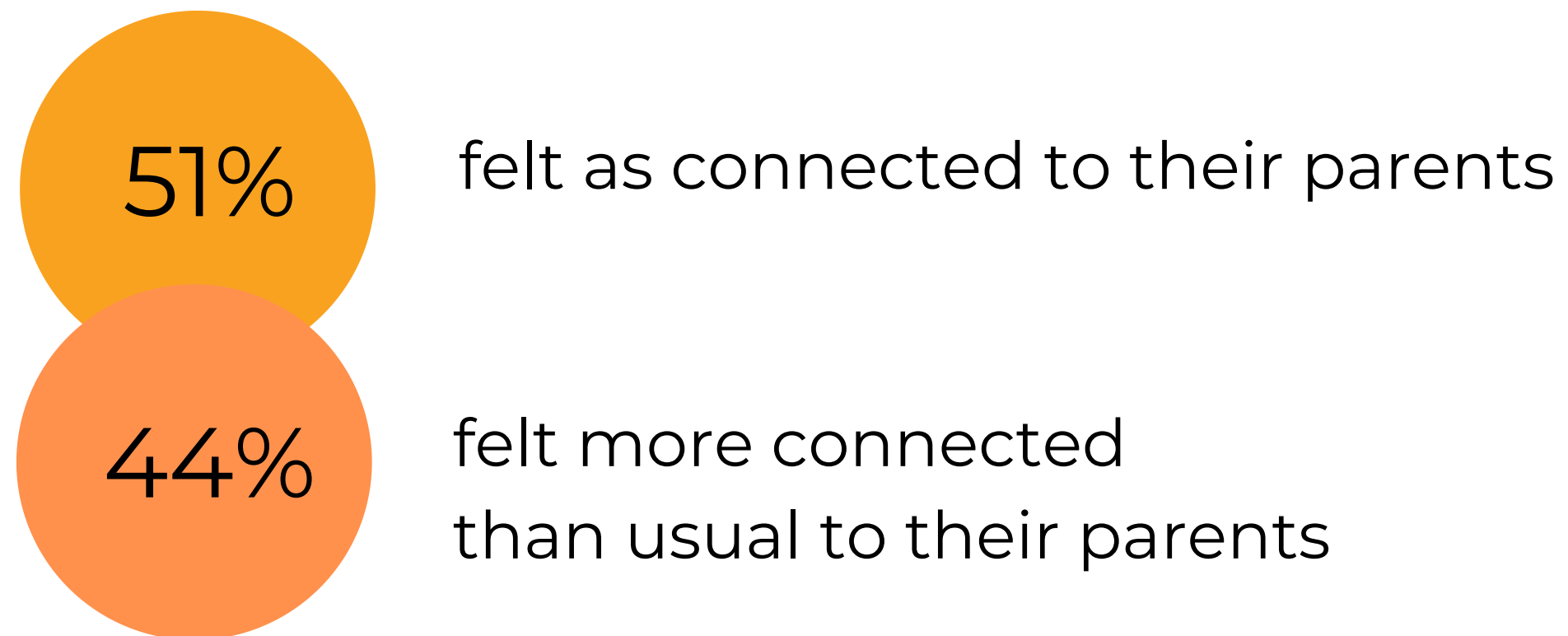
I wish my mom and dad had a sister for me to play with.

Social Connectedness

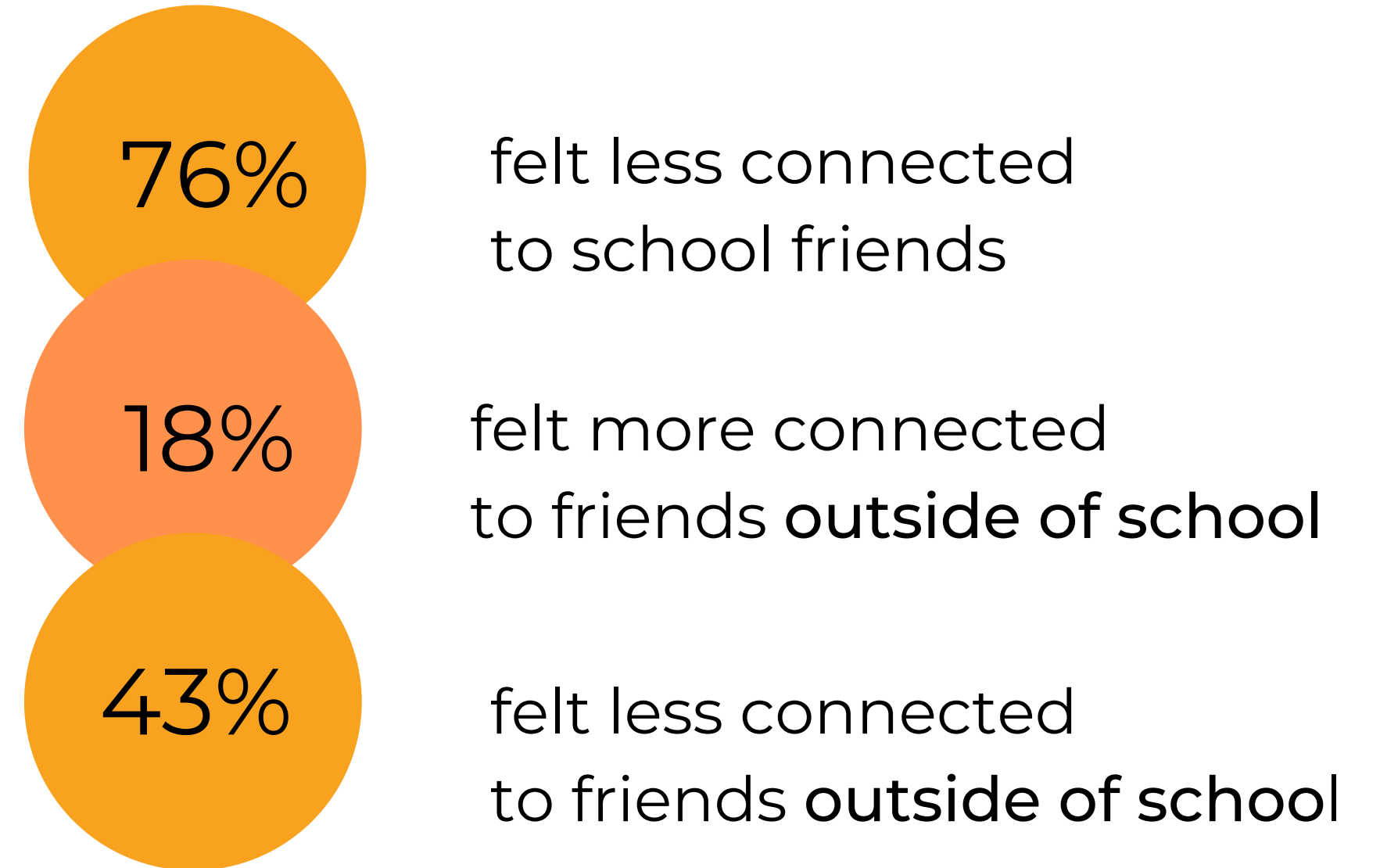
Children were asked about their feelings of connectedness to family and friends during the pandemic.



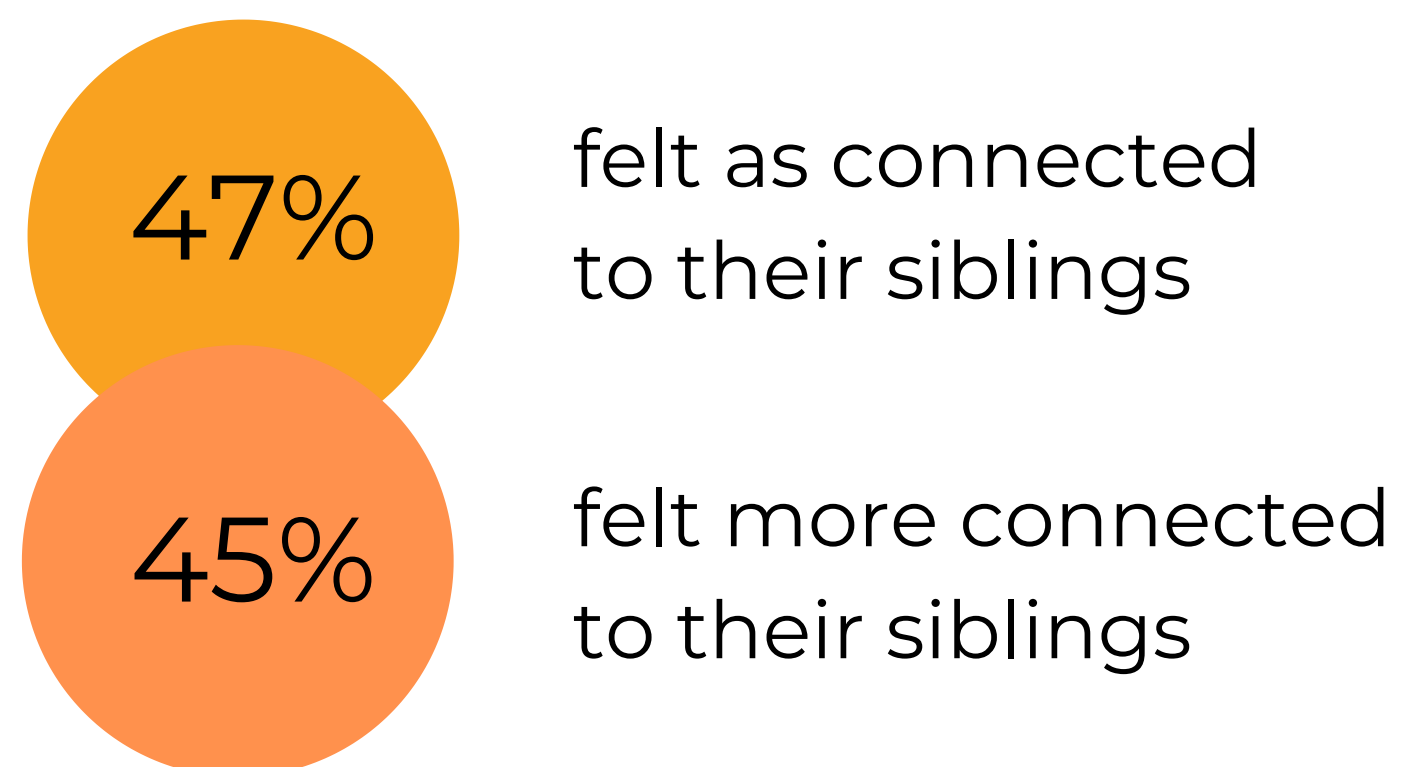
Parents/Adults In the Home



Friends

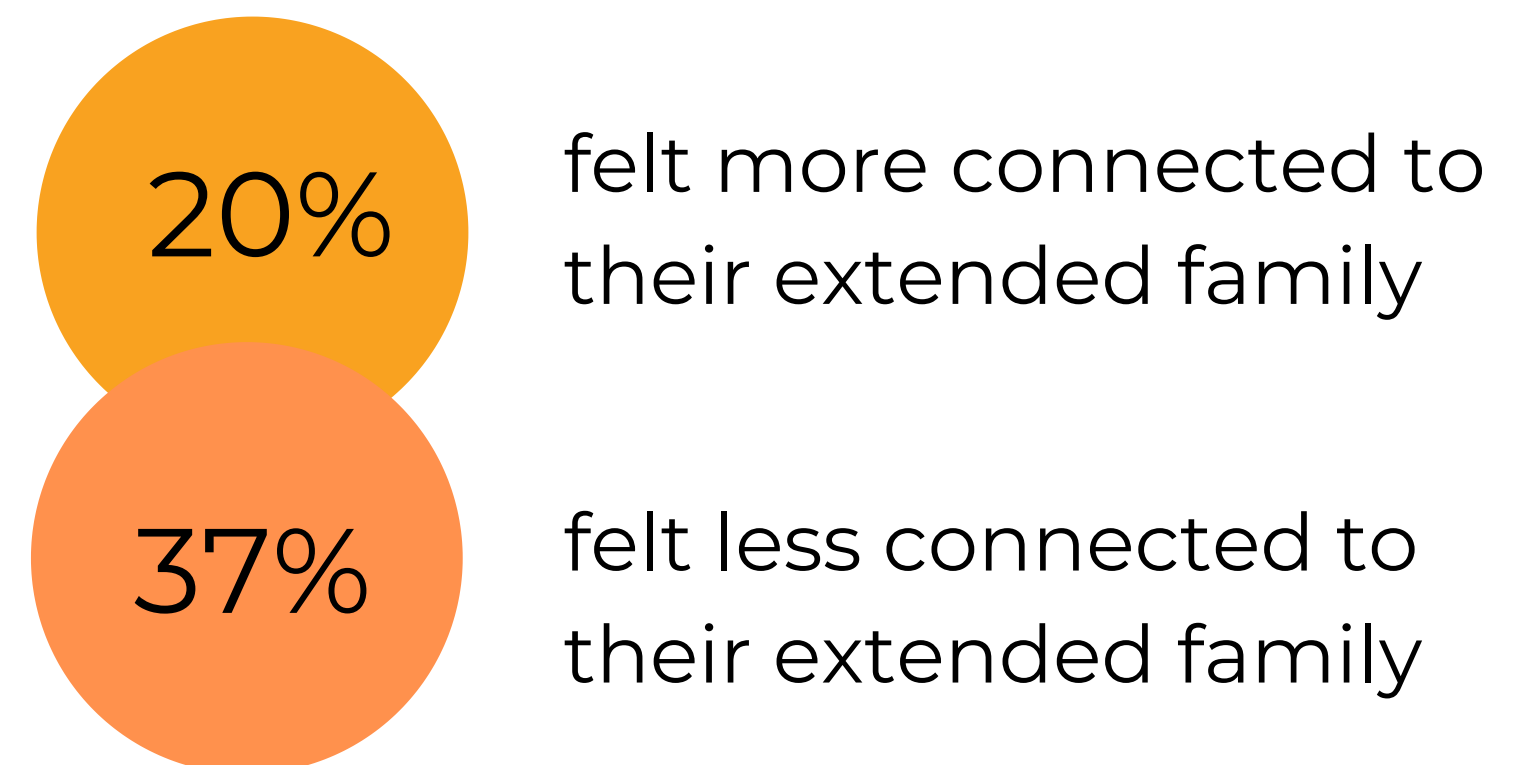


Siblings



Extended Family

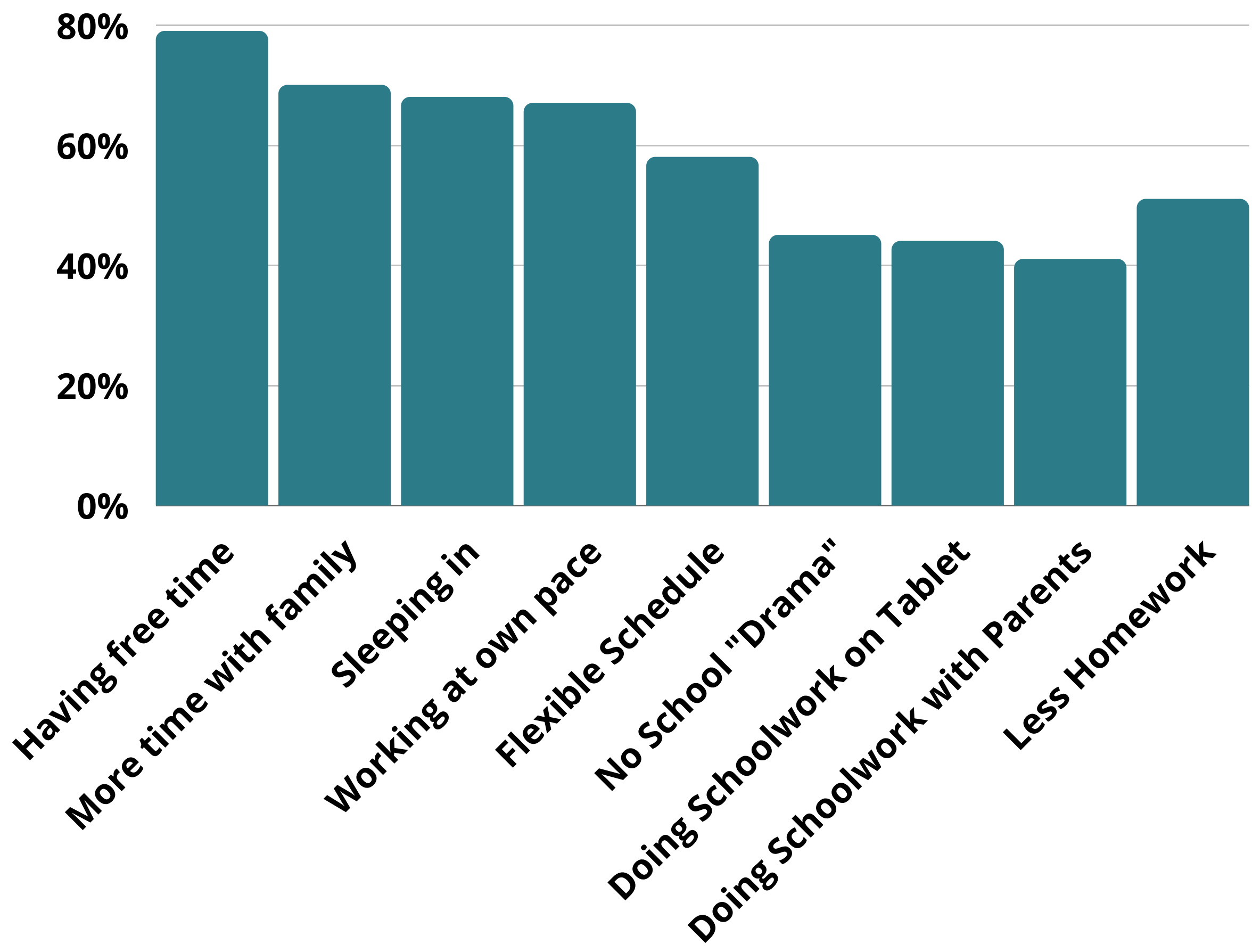
(grandparents, cousins)



*these percentages exclude only children from denominator

Schooling

"What are some things you have liked about doing school work from home during COVID-19?"



Seeing friends (94%), seeing the teacher (73%), and participating in special events at school (65%) were the most frequently missed aspects of school. Just over half of children (between 50% and 59%) reported missing recess, getting out of the house, learning in a classroom, getting in-person instructions from the teacher, and participating in clubs or sports. Although seeing other adults at school (i.e., librarians, principals), and having a daily routine had the lowest proportions, 45% of children reported missing both.

47% Felt it was 'almost always' or 'always easy' to do school work from home.

52% Had enough help from teachers 'almost always' or 'always'.

Mental Well-Being

Children were asked to self-report their feelings of optimism and happiness, in addition to a list of questions related to anxiety, depression, hyperactivity, and inattention.

Approximately 14% of children were in the at-risk or clinically significant category for **anxiety** symptoms.

Between 8% and 10% of children scored in the at-risk or clinically significant category for symptoms of **depression** (8%), **hyperactivity** (10%), or **inattention** (10%).

*Optimism refers to the mindset of having positive expectations for the future and happiness, or subjective wellbeing, refers to how content or satisfied children are with their lives

39%

indicated low optimism

48%

indicated high optimism

36%

indicated low happiness

45%

indicated high happiness



Summary

Children between the ages of 9 and 11 years from urban Alberta families described their experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic - a time when access to peers was limited, social distancing and online schooling was enforced, and extracurricular activities were cancelled.



Overall:

- Most children reported adequate levels of sleep (9+ hours per night), whereas they struggled to meet physical activity and screen time guidelines.
- Almost half of the children reported feeling more connected to their parents and siblings, and less connected to peers.
- Despite the challenges posed by the pandemic, two-thirds of the children reported medium or high levels of happiness and optimism and only a small portion struggled with mental health or behavioural difficulties.

It is important to note that the information presented in this report is only a snapshot of how these children were doing during COVID-19.

More information is needed to establish if the routines and mental health and behavioural patterns reported here were maintained throughout the pandemic and into a post-pandemic future.

Next Steps

- Further disseminate information to inform programs and policies helping families through the pandemic
- Implement third COVID-19 survey in Fall 2021.



For the full technical report visit
allourfamiliesstudy.ca

