

THE POWER OF PARENTING TV PROGRAMMES – HELP OR HAZARD FOR TODAY'S FAMILIES?

**National Family and Parenting Institute Survey
Conducted by Ipsos MORI
August and September 2006**

Parents, in all their diversity, form the basis for our society and the foundation for the future. But parents are navigating through unpredictable times and tend to feel less confident and more uncertain as parents than they think their own parents were.

Issues such as the commercialisation of childhood or the balance between earning a living and raising children affect day to day lives. There is overwhelming interest in parenting, about the risks parents may pose to their children and about how to do the best possible job as a parent. Facts and information often clash: new ideas emerge about raising children, keeping them safe and trying to make sure they are happy.

Sources of help and information are changing. The parenting industry has well and truly taken off, with arrays of books, websites, advisors and television programmes available.

Television is now a key source of information on parenting; and parenting TV programmes dominate primetime schedules on many channels. New formats are constantly being developed and families in severe difficulties are often featured. There has already been debate about the quality of the information and advice provided. Some commentators are concerned about the possibility of negative effects on the families and children who participate.

This survey aims to understand more about public attitudes to parenting TV programmes and about parents' reactions to them.

Key findings

- Parenting programmes are extremely popular, especially for parents: almost three-quarters (72%) of parents have watched at least one parenting programme and 55% of adults have watched at least one parenting programme
- Parenting programmes are directly influencing parenting behaviour: more than eight in ten parents (83%) who have watched parenting programmes found a technique from the programmes helpful to them
- But parenting programmes are considered to sensationalise family problems for public entertainment by a large minority (37%) of their viewers.

The Survey

Between 31 August and 20 September 2006, Ipsos MORI conducted face to face interviews with a representative sample of 3,938 adults across Great Britain. Of those

interviewed 1,077 were parents of children under 16 who live with them. This group defines the parents referred to throughout this report. Non parents refers to adults who do not have children aged under 16 who live with them, although many of this group may be parents of older children or children who do not live with them.

Information sources for parents

Parents turn to a wide range of sources for information about parenting and we asked them which were useful.

- Friends and family remain the most popular source of parenting information, with six in ten (59%) parents saying this is the source they do or would find most useful
- Schools and playgroups were cited by 40% of parents
- Television programmes were popular at 37%
- Books, magazines and the internet were also popular, each mentioned by 30%.

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Who found television programmes useful?

Television programmes as a source of parental information are more popular among mothers than fathers (40% compared with 32%), younger parents, particularly those aged 15-24 years (47% compared with 37% of those aged 25-44 years and 30% of those aged 45+) and those who do not work (41% compared with 35% among those who do work).

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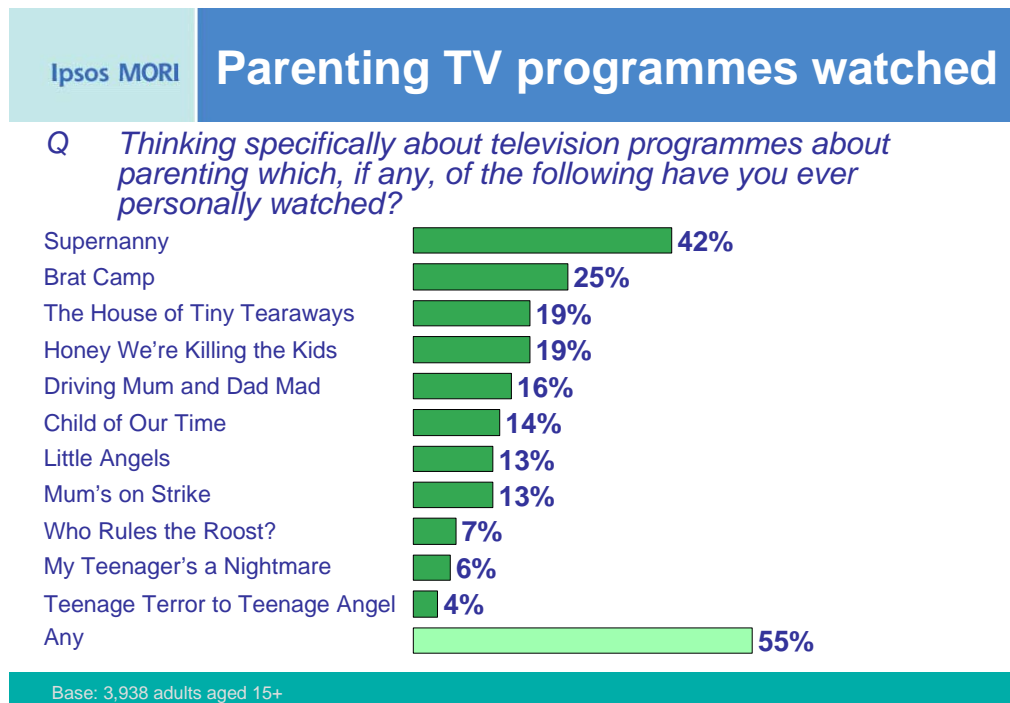
Parenting TV programmes as a source of information

Parenting TV programmes are popular with adults across GB and especially with parents.

- A majority of adults have watched at least one parenting TV programme (55%)
- Most parents have watched at least one programme (72%)
- Women are more likely than men to have watched at least one parenting programme (66% compared with 44%)
- Those aged under 45 are more likely to have watched at least one programme than those aged 45+ (67% compared with 44%).

Supernanny was the clear leader, watched by 42% of adults, followed by Brat Camp (25%), the House of Tiny Tearaways (19%) and Honey We're Killing the Kids (19%).

It should be noted that while all the programmes listed are relatively current, not all were being shown on television during the fieldwork period and not all are available on terrestrial television channels.



What do people think of parenting TV programmes?

We uncovered widely varying attitudes towards parenting TV programmes amongst those who had watched at least one programme.

Many people believe the programmes are positive in their impact

Many of those who had watched at least one programme believe they offer helpful insight into children's needs and into the impact that the adults in the family have upon the children.

- The programmes were believed to help adults understand more about children's needs and feelings by around half of those who have watched at least one parenting programme (51%)
- The difficulties that parents experience were often seen as the source of children's problems for nearly half of those who have watched at least one parenting programme (48%)
- Suggestions for alternative ways of disciplining children other than smacking were welcomed by two fifths of those who have watched at least one programme (40%).

But significant minorities had serious concerns

- The programmes were believed to sensationalise family problems for public entertainment by almost four in ten (37%) of those who have watched at least one parenting programme
- A focus on children as problems was reported by 15% who wanted to see more about the joy they bring
- The effects on the participating children worried some (14%)
- The programmes were believed to put people off having children by some (12%).

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Who was concerned about the impact of the programmes?

Women tend to express more positive attitudes towards parenting TV programmes than men and are less likely to feel that they sensationalise family problems for public entertainment (33% compared with 44% of men).

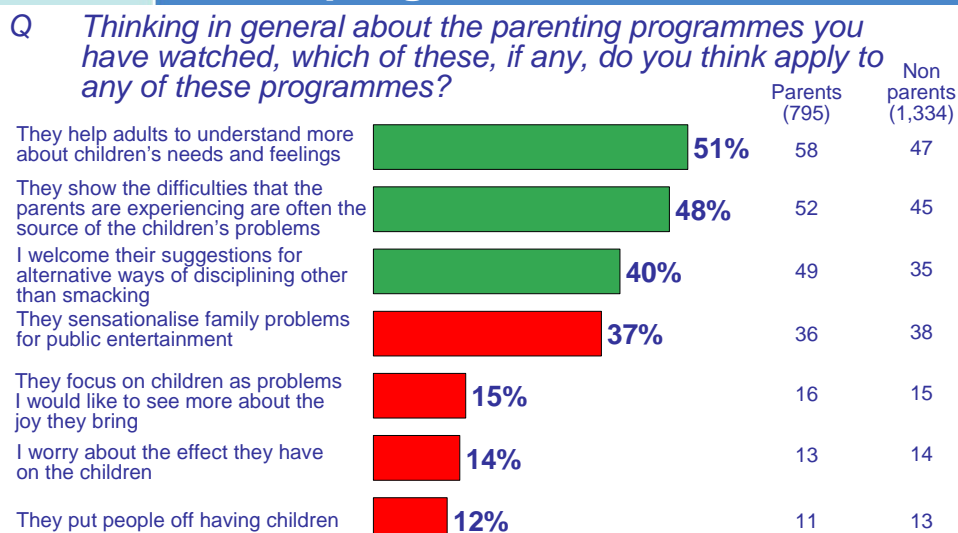
Other groups more inclined to be critical of the entertainment element include over 35s (40%), ABC1's (42%), those who work (39%), are married or co-habiting (40%), those with a household income in excess of £30K (45%) and broadsheet readers (48%).

Older people aged 55+ are particularly likely to think that the parenting programmes they have watched focus on children as problems and would like to see more about the joy they bring (20%).

Younger people (aged 15-24 years old) are more likely than others to think that the programmes put people off having children (19%).

Box ends

Attitudes towards parenting programmes watched



Base: 2,129 adults aged 15+ who have watched at least one parenting TV programme

Parenting TV programmes reassure some parents

The programmes may be tapping into some parents' lack of confidence in their own approach to parenting. A large proportion of parents who have watched at least one parenting TV programme say they feel reassured when they see the behaviour of other parents experiencing problems.

- The programmes offer reassurance that lots of parents have problems to around half (47%) of parents
- But they reassure only one third (35%) that they are good parents.

Parenting TV programmes give good parenting tips

Many parents who had watched at least one programme said they have used parenting advice featured in the programmes.

- Good parenting tips are cited by 45%
- The experts featured are effective and inspiring for 34%
- The opportunity to get help and advice in privacy is welcomed by 27%.

Parenting TV programmes are encouraging a small minority to seek further help

A small but significant minority of parents who had watched at least one programme said they were encouraged to seek help from others. Programmes could be an important

way to encourage parents with serious problems to seek help and they could help to publicise available sources of help.

- 8% of parents said they had been encouraged to seek help from others.

But some see the programme suggestions as a quick fix

For some parents who had watched at least one programme, the programmes do not offer usable help or advice

- The suggestions given by the experts are considered to be a quick fix which will not work in the long term by one in ten parents (11%)
- While a similar proportion say that they generally don't trust that the advice will work in real family life (9%)
- In contrast to the reassurance the programmes provided for many parents, they also make some (5%) feel their family has serious problems.

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More about parents' views on parenting TV programmes

Parents' views on the programmes were strongly mediated by their personal circumstances. Parents within social groups AB are more likely than those in lower social groups to feel reassured that they are good parents (41% AB compared with 32% in lower social groups).

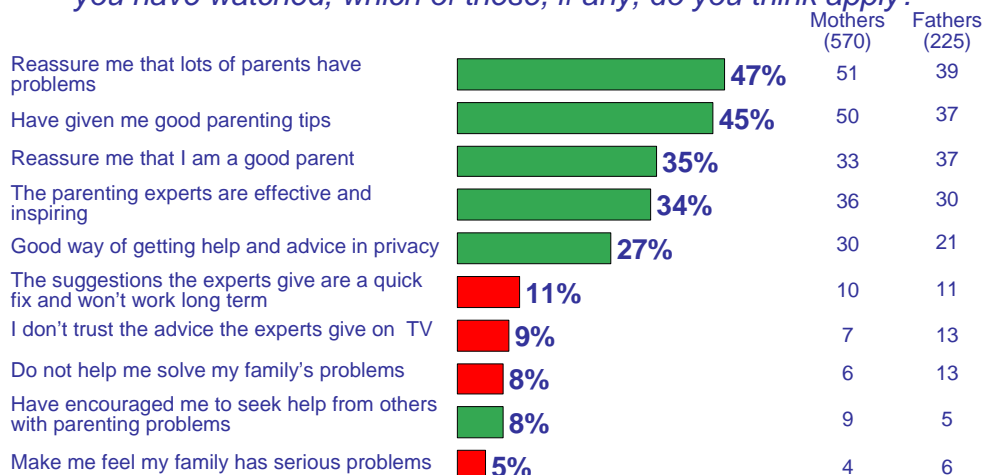
Young parents (aged 15-24) are less likely to feel reassured about their parenting abilities (24%) compared with 35% of all parents who have watched at least one of the programmes. Importantly parents aged 15-24 are among those more likely to seek help from others about parenting (17%) compared with 8% of all parents who have watched at least one programme.

There is more scepticism about parenting TV programmes among older parents aged 45+ than those aged under 45 years. They are more likely to think that the suggestions are a quick fix and won't work in the long term (19%, compared to 9%) and they were more likely to distrust that the advice the experts give works in real day-to-day family life (16%, compared to 8%).

Box ends

Parents attitudes towards TV programmes watched

Q *And still thinking in general about the parenting programmes you have watched, which of these, if any, do you think apply?*



Base: 795 parents of children under 16 (living with them) who have watched at least one parenting TV programme

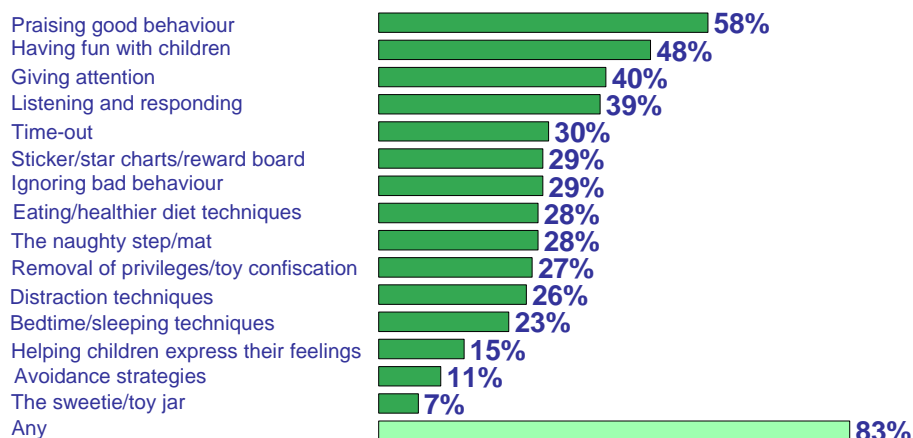
Using the parenting techniques shown in the programmes

We have seen that parenting programmes are very widely viewed. This survey suggests that the programmes are strongly influencing parental behaviours and techniques. They appear to be delivering information and advice that is being taken up on a very wide scale. Encouragingly techniques that encourage good behaviour were more widely considered helpful than those which punish bad behaviour.

- 83% of parents who have watched at least one parenting programme found at least one technique useful
- praising good behaviour was found helpful for 58%
- having fun with children was helpful for 48%
- healthier diet ideas within parenting programmes were helpful for 28%.

TV parenting techniques used

Q Which, if any, of the following parenting techniques featured in parenting television programmes, have you personally found helpful?



Base: 795 parents of children under 16 (living with them) who have watched at least one parenting TV programme

Teaching children the difference between 'right' and 'wrong'

We asked parents more generally about how parents can teach children the difference between 'right' and 'wrong'. This question was also asked in previous surveys carried out by MORI for NFPI in 1999 and again in 2001.

- In 2006, rewarding good behaviour was considered by 62% of parents to be an action that would help parents to teach their children the difference between 'right' and 'wrong' – up from 57% in 2001
- In 2006, smacking children was considered by 10% of parents to be an action that would help parents to teach their children the difference between 'right' and 'wrong' – down from 17% in 1999.

Parents who found the techniques in the programmes unhelpful were twice as likely as those who did find them useful to suggest smacking as a way of teaching children 'right' from 'wrong'.

How to teach 'right' and 'wrong'

Q Many people feel that one of the responsibilities a parent has is to teach the difference between 'right' and 'wrong'. From the following list, please tell me which actions, if any, you think would most enable parents to achieve this.

		1999 (758)	2001 (683)	Difference +/-
Making children feel happy and loved	67%	77	76	-9
Spending time with children	67%	80	70	-3
Parents setting a good example	67%	77	73	-6
Rewarding good behaviour	62%	65	57	+5
Reasoning with children	48%	68	54	-6
'Grounding' children	27%	39	31	-4
Creating diversion if doing something wrong	18%	22	20	-2
Smacking children	10%	17	15	-5

Base: 1,077 parents of children under 16 (living with them)

Summary

Parenting TV programmes appear to be well established in parents' viewing habits, with many parents saying they are using techniques from the programmes. The powerful influence that these programmes are having on a generation of parents should be recognised by those commissioning and producing such programmes. Their responsibility must be to deliver sound messages, grounded in the latest parenting research and theory, and to ensure that the families featured are offered meaningful support that lasts beyond the life of the programme.

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