



The New Family Norm

September 2020



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About the report

This report is based around research conducted from 16 June to 30 June 2020. The study consisted of 5,048 Australian parents, with at least one child aged under 19 living with them.

This research explores the impacts to, and strength of the Australian family unit in the face of COVID-19. Along with what the lasting effects of this unprecedented health crisis are likely to be.

The breakdown in children's ages are as follows:



*Multiple answers allowed

Important things to observe about the charts

- ! Footnotes directly underneath the charts (e.g. * Respondents with children aged below 5 years old) mainly refer to the sampling involved per question. This is to differentiate who was asked that particular question in the survey.
- ! Any chart without a specific note on its sampling was asked to all respondents.
- ! It also differentiates the types of questions asked. For instance, 'Multiple answers allowed' appears when the question called for more than one answer from the respondent.



Key findings

Key findings

Childcare arrangements have been challenged by the COVID-19 pandemic

- Just over half (52.1%) of respondents with children under the age of five say they were actively avoiding sending them to childcare because of COVID-19.
- For those that continued to send their children to childcare, over half (54.7%) noted that they were still concerned with the health risks.
- Only around one quarter (27.4%) said that it was business as usual.

Beyond childcare, those with school-age children have also been impacted

- A majority (88.0%) of Australians with school-age children have had to home school their children at some point during the pandemic. Many have struggled, with only a small minority (13.3%) saying it's been 'very easy'.
- However, most have found it manageable (50.0%), with a smaller proportion of just over a third finding it 'reasonably hard' (23.2%) and an even smaller number saying it has been 'very stressful' (13.5%).
- Of those who feel they haven't managed well, keeping their children focused (73.9%) and being able to complete their own home duties (61.2%) have been the major challenges.
- Parents are also concerned about their children's ability to socialise (43.5%), the increased screen time (40.4%) and reduced quality of education (38.2%). With that being said, every cloud has a silver lining, and parents have generally enjoyed spending more time with their children (55.5%), seeing them adapt (43.1%) and are gaining new insights into their children's education (42.6%).

Online education has had its impacts beyond the education itself

- Over half of respondents (53.2%) say home schooling had an impact on their children's mental health. Thankfully, 31.9% say it was short-lived.
- 3 in 10 (30.7%) feel COVID-19 will leave a lasting long-term impact on their children's education, and ability to get into university/certain jobs. This group says it has created gaps in their knowledge (47.0%), lack of key skill development (41.7%) and stunted their progress (39.2%). About a quarter (24.6%) even believe their child will have to repeat a year as a result.



Key findings

Australians are optimists, and families are finding their own ways to make the best of things

- Despite the challenges, an overwhelming majority say that their family has found new ways to connect and make the best of things (87.7%), and surprisingly, the pandemic has actually brought their family closer together (80.3%).
- Other positives from the crisis include the quality time with family (58.2%), being more grateful for what they do have (57.5%) and being reminded of the importance of family community (56.6%).
- With that being said, most have struggled with the fact that the pandemic has made visiting family who don't live nearby or with them hard (76.9%).

The impacts of social distancing on children are relatively pronounced

- In the short-term, parents have noticed (at least to some extent) that their children are more anxious about hygiene and touching things (59.7%). Most say they've had trouble adapting to the new rules (57.0%), and that they struggle to understand why they couldn't – and in some instances still can't – visit their grandparents (50.5%).

The pandemic has had its effect on traditional family roles and dynamics too

- Over half of respondents (54.4%) say that their family dynamics have changed as a result of the COVID-19 crisis.
- Parents say they've become dynamic duos and stepped up their teamwork to manage (85.0%), and some even report that their children have taken on new responsibilities (79.2%).
- There have been shifts amongst the roles played, with mum (75.1%) and dad (71.2%) both stepping up to take on roles they didn't have before.
- Unfortunately, single parents have found this crisis much tougher to manage (78.7%).



Key findings

Working from home has also had a part to play in the management of family during the crisis

- Australians are loving working from home, with a little over half wanting to continue doing so a few days a week (51.4%) and other wanting to do so full-time (39.8%).
- The benefits to family life are also clear, with families spending more time together (67.2%), feeling less hassle with no need to commute (53.0%) and becoming more involved in family learning and experiences (52.9%).

Social connectivity has been a saviour for many

- In the technological age, Australians have found solace in the fact that they can use apps to make isolation feel less lonely. Zoom (40.0%), Facebook (23.7%) and Messenger (19.0%) have all been widely downloaded in response to the pandemic.
- Technology also helps people pass the time, with many saying they have taken up online social games (42.1%), virtual social spaces (18.9%), and even virtual parties (16.9%) and dance challenges (14.8%).

Despite the increased social connectedness, technology is still seen as taking away quality time

- Exactly two thirds of parents (66.6%) believe that quality family time is time spent away from technology.
- 2 in 3 also believe technology is robbing them of time they could spend with their children to 'some extent' (47.9%) or to a 'great extent' (18.4%).
- A majority of parents (70.9%) agree that their children's screen time has increased at least 'somewhat' during this pandemic, and a similar proportion (71.2%) also agree that this is at least a 'reasonable concern' for them.

Beyond technology, family time has changed in this time of crisis

- Families have noted that the way they spend their 'family time' is shifting. Families have started cooking and eating more together (47.2%), watching more movies and shows together (46.7%), and even playing more games and puzzles together (35.8%).
- Half (50.4%) say that there is a sport or exercise that they've engaged in more as a family as a result of this pandemic, with walking (34.0%) the most popular option.



Key findings

Australians are problem solvers, even in the face of lost income and its stresses

- Unfortunately, over 3 in 5 (60.2%) have experienced some sort of reduction in their work/income.
- The response has been one of optimism, with a large proportion seeing this as a good time to build skills that make them a better worker (69.7%).
- Self-driven skill building is the most popular approach (65.8%), with online groups (55.0%) and online courses (50.0%) also popular.

Charity has taken a back-foot for some

- About a quarter (25.2%) of Australians say they're less likely to get involved in their community and in charitable work during this time, however almost 1 in 5 (19.9%) say they're actually more likely.
- Of those who are more likely to get involved, a large majority (72.3%) see this as a continued change. They say they do it because they've seen that people are in need now more than ever (72.7%) and are motivated by a sense of guilt because they're doing ok themselves (36.4%).



This time of great uncertainty and trouble has rallied people together

- Australian families noted certain community events have helped maintain positivity through this crisis. Examples include teddy bear spotting in windows (39.6%), local drives to help neighbours in need (27.5%), driveway events (21.0%), and even dressing up to take the bins out (17.4%).

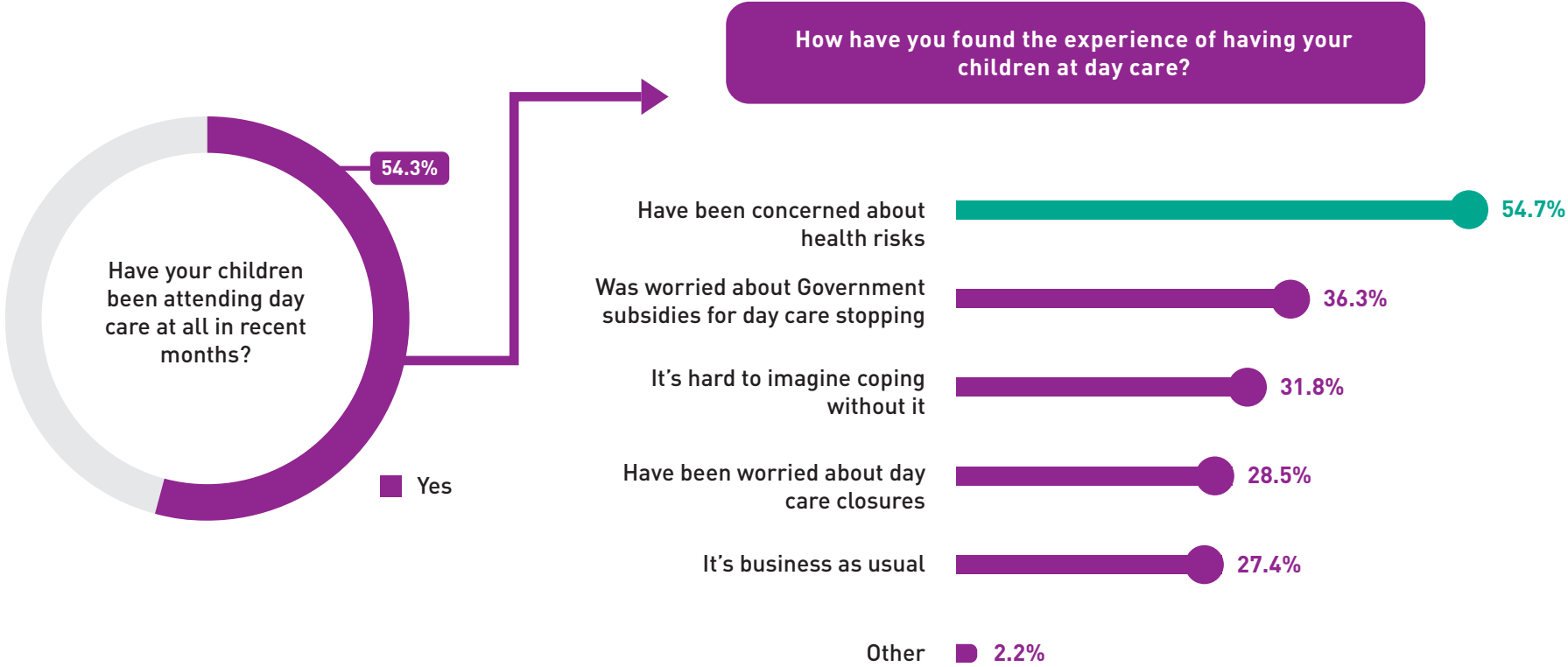
Looking forward, most see COVID-19 as having a lasting impact on today's youth (both good and bad)

- If this crisis continues for an extended period, an overwhelming majority of Australians believe that it will impact how the younger generation behaves and sees the world (85.6%), how resilient they are (83.7%), their mental health (78.5%), and their financial wellbeing (76.9%).



The pandemic and education

Childcare attendance compounds stresses and worries for parents



*Respondents with children aged below 5 years old

*Multiple answers allowed

**Respondents with children aged below 5 years old and whose children have been attending day care in recent months

Despite a majority of Australian parents continuing to send their children to daycare, there are still major concerns which worry them. The health risks, as well as the uncertainty around subsidies and the continuation of daycare operations created a great deal of stress. With only a little over a quarter seeing things as business as usual.

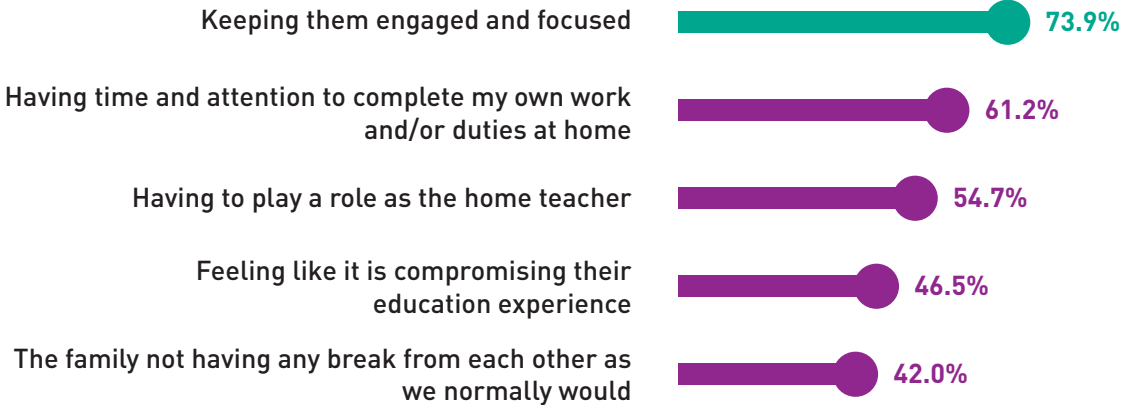
Parents have coped well with home schooling

How have you/did you find the experience of having your children home schooled?



What have been/are the hardest things to deal with regarding home schooling?

*Respondents with children aged 5 to 18 years old and whose children have been home schooling in recent months

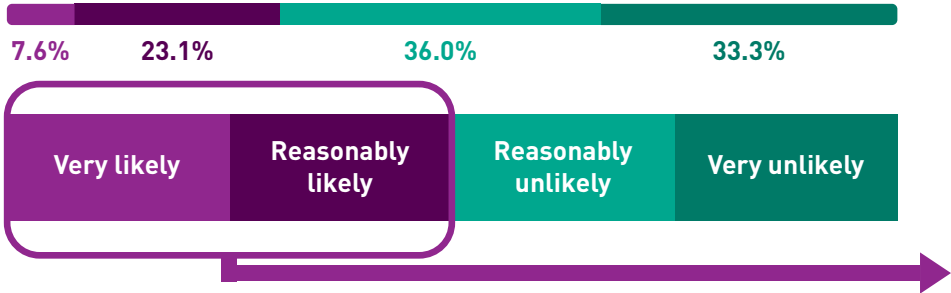


*Multiple answers allowed
 *Top 5 answers only
 **Respondents with home schooled children aged 5 to 18 years old and find home schooling hard or stressful

A majority of Australian parents with school-aged children seem to have managed at least 'reasonably well' with the change in situation. Those who found it a bit more difficult say they had trouble keeping their children focused, and were unable to allocate enough time to their own tasks with their children at home.

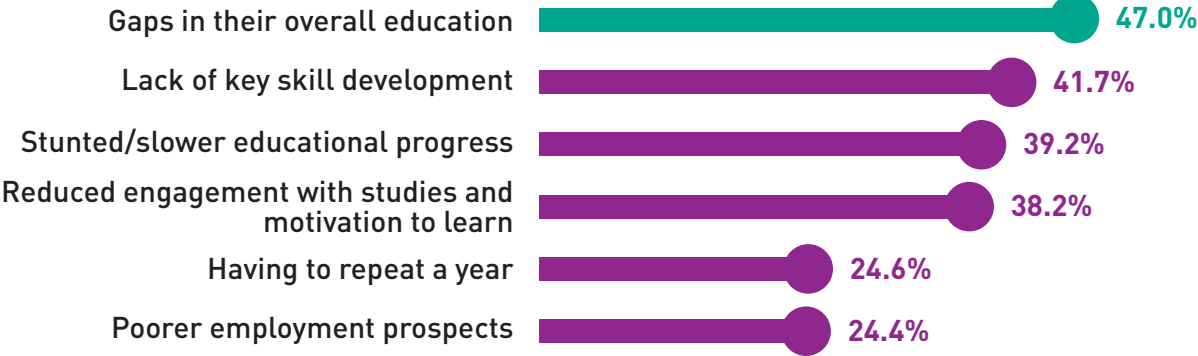
The impact of COVID-19 on education may last longer than we think

Do you feel the COVID-19 crisis disruption to your children’s education will lead to a long-term impact for them (e.g. effect their ability to get into university and/or their employment prospects)?



*Respondents with children aged 5 to 18 years old

What might this result in?

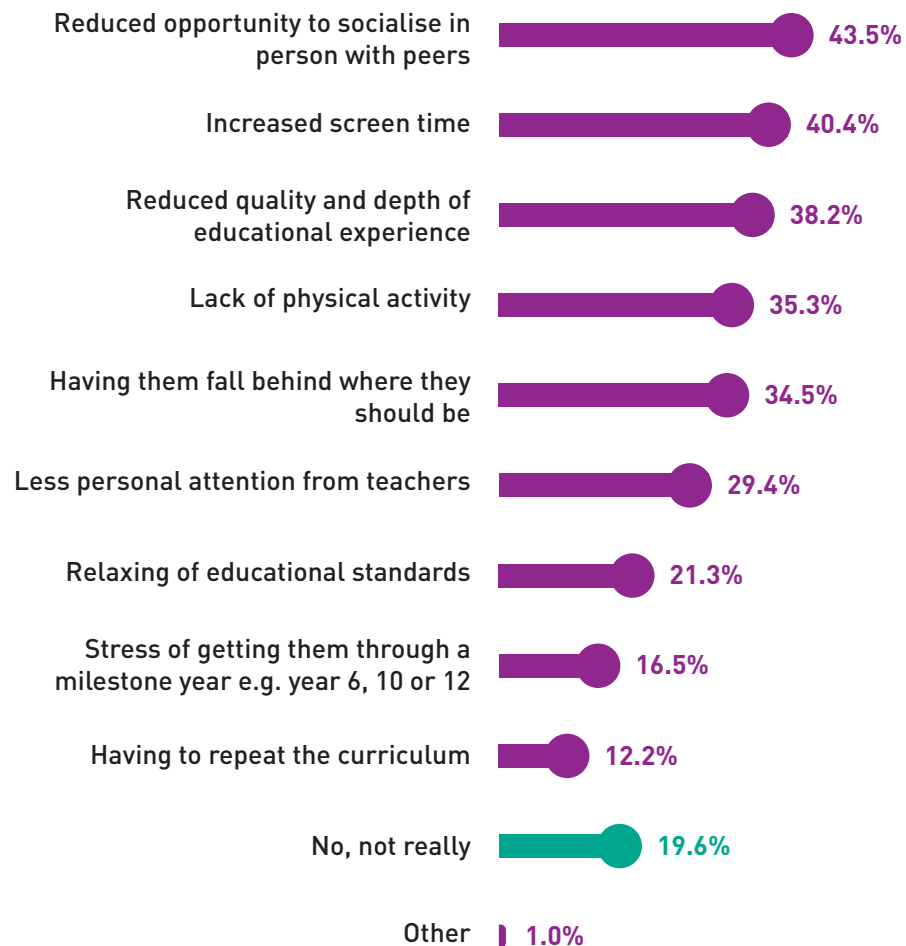


*Multiple answers allowed
**Respondents with children aged 5 to 18 years old and feel the COVID-19 crisis disruption will likely lead to a long-term impact on their children

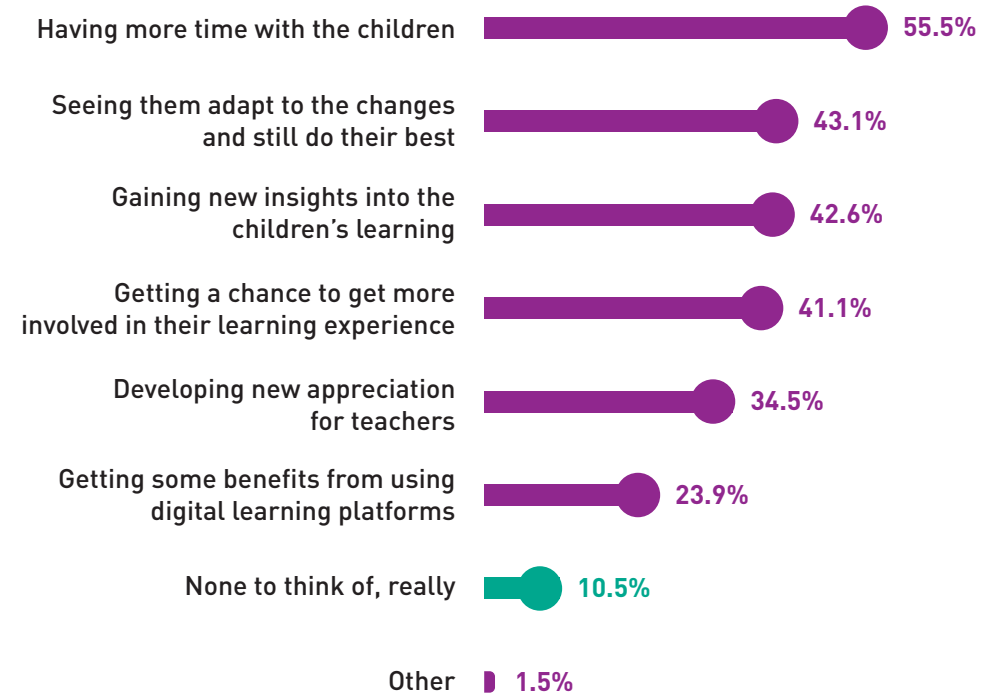
Of those who think that long-term impacts resulting from COVID-19 on their children’s education is at least ‘reasonably likely’, the main reasons cited are the gaps in their overall education, lack of key skill development, and overall slower educational progress. However, the good news is that over two-thirds of parents believe that their children’s education will not be impacted in the long run.

This new way of learning has both drawbacks and advantages

Did you have any concerns about having your children home schooled?



What were the best things about this home schooling experience?



*Multiple answers allowed

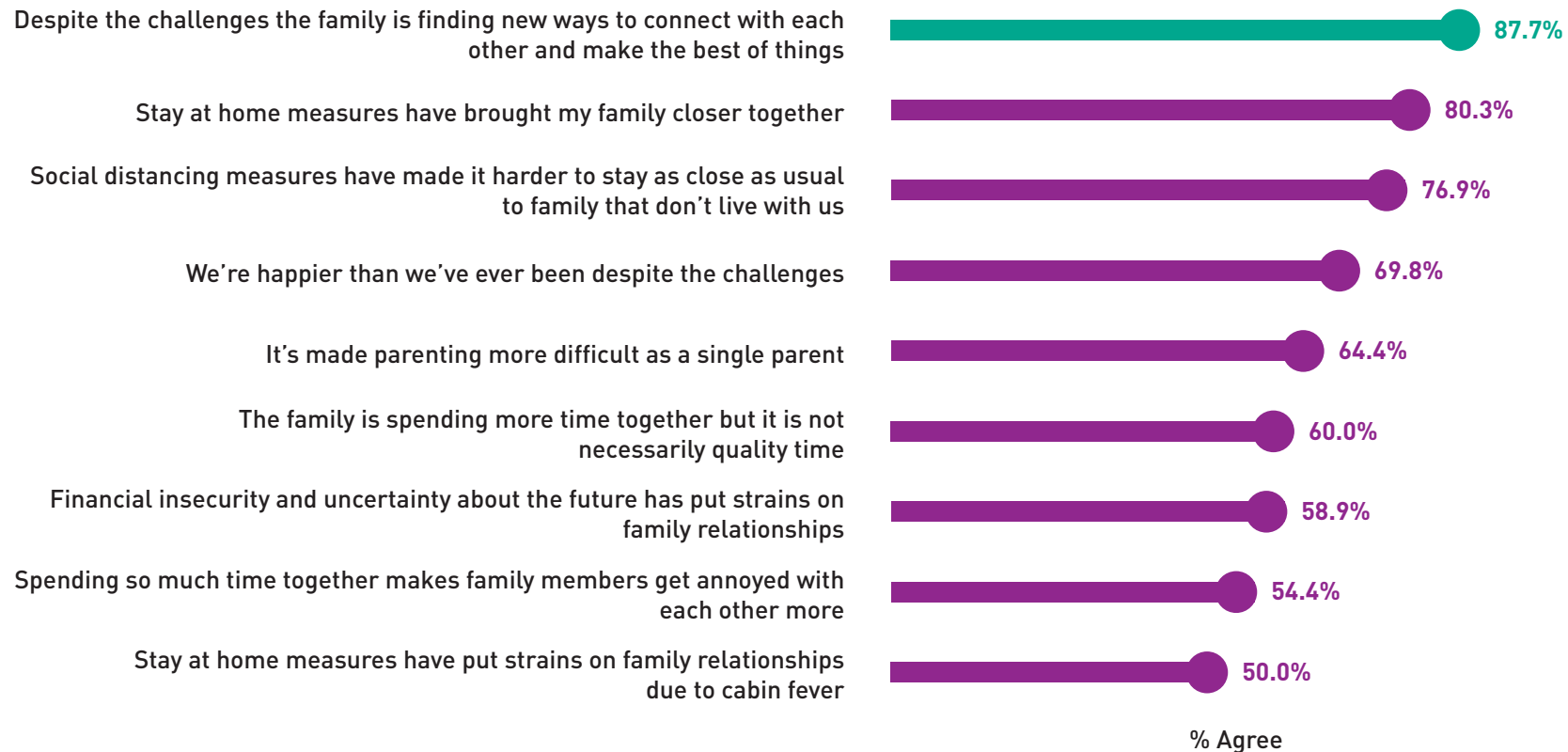
* Respondents with children aged 5 to 18 years old and whose children have been home schooling in recent months



The family unit

In times of crisis comes strength

How much do you agree with the following statements about the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on your family relationships?



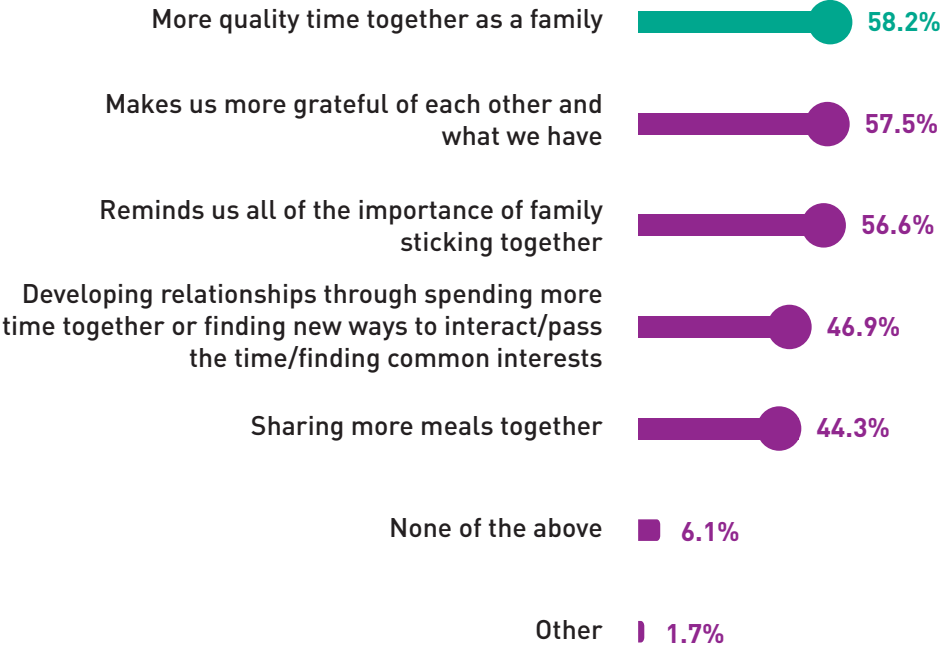
Something that comes up time and time again when Australia faces a crisis, is the strength of families and communities. We're a nation that always manages to find the silver lining, and this pandemic has been no different.

Despite hardships, most Australians value the way this pandemic has brought families closer together and kept us more connected.

In fact, over two-thirds say they're happier than they've ever been as a family.

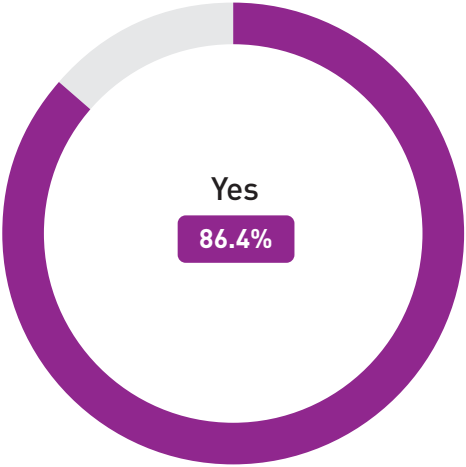
The positive impacts to the family unit are expected to last

What are some of the best 'silver linings' of the COVID-19 crisis for your family relationships?



The silver-linings of this pandemic aren't expected to be short-lived. An overwhelming majority of parents say that they're more grateful and have better quality time together as a family.

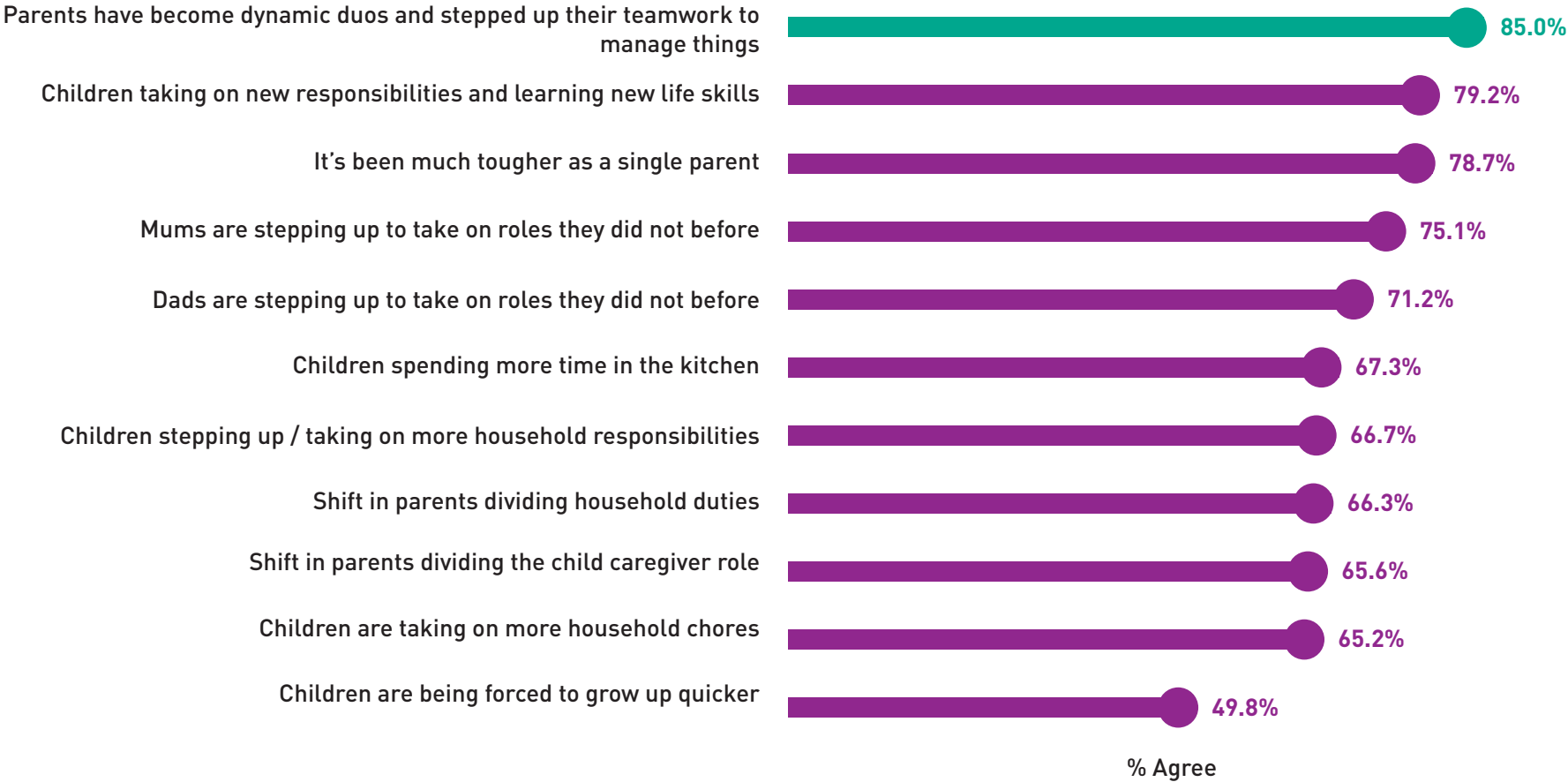
Now that restrictions are easing are these 'silver linings' continuing?



*Multiple answers allowed

Handling the pandemic is easier as a team, making things tough for single parents

How much do you agree with the following statements about family roles in your household during the COVID-19 crisis?

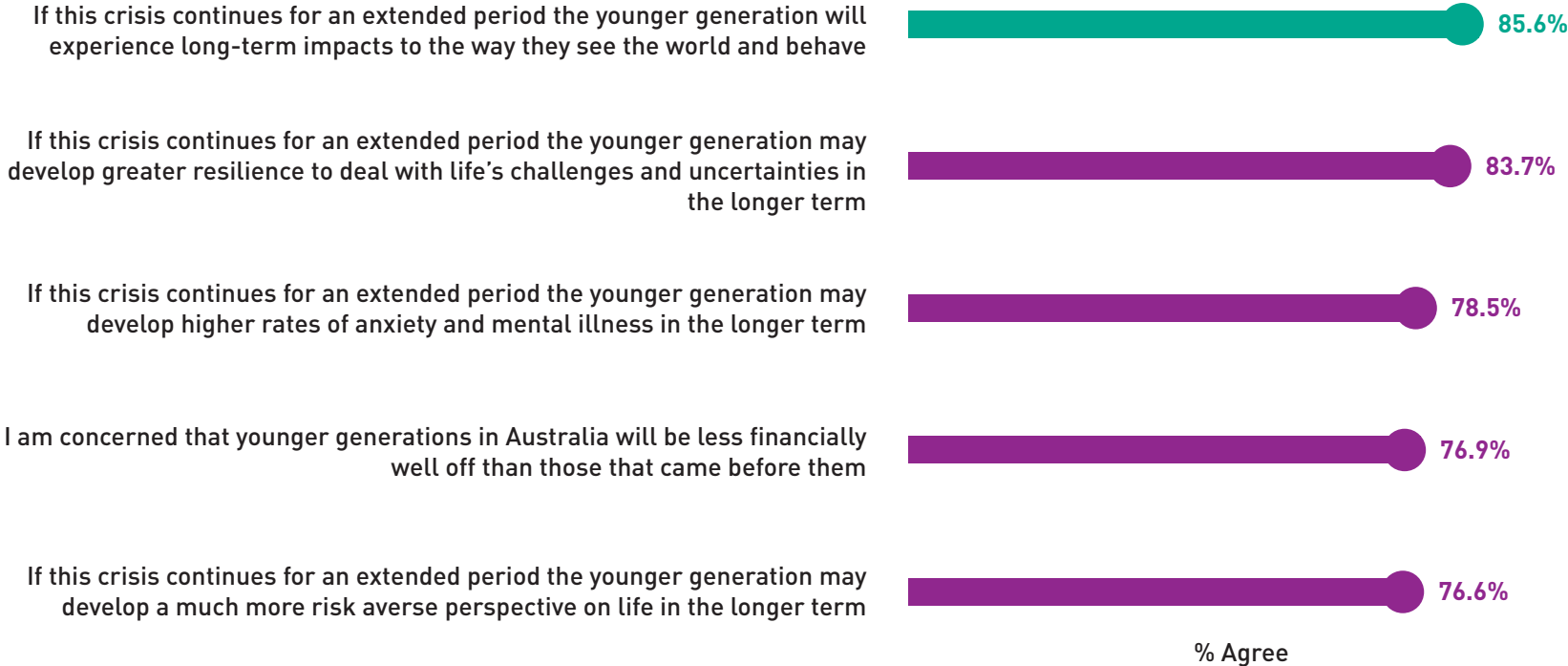


Parents are facing this crisis as a united front, stepping up their teamwork, having dynamic roles in the household, and teaching their children to take on more responsibility. Making things easier to manage for families.

Unfortunately, single parents don't have the same options, and are finding things much tougher to manage.

The long term impacts of COVID-19 on families are widely agreed

How much do you agree with the following statements?



The longer that COVID-19 hangs around, the more Australian families will struggle. Most believe that if the crisis lasts a while, the younger generation will be affected in how they see the world and how they cope with anxiety and mental illness.

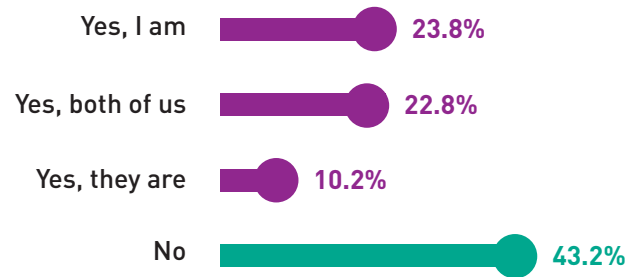
But it's not all doom and gloom, parents think the younger generation will also be more resilient and equipped to deal with life's uncertainties.



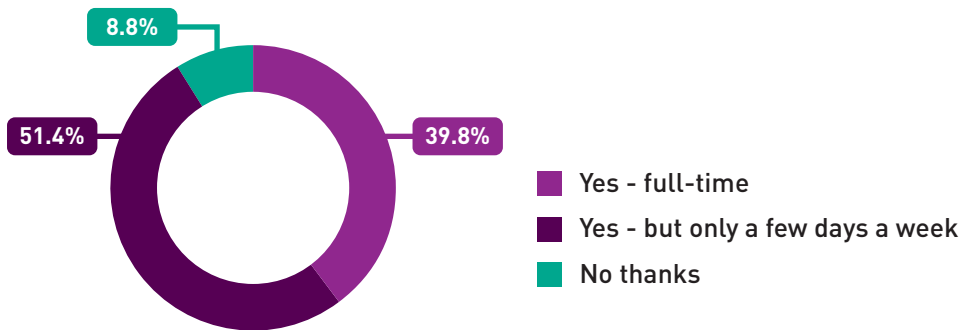
New ways of working

Working from home, even just a few days a week, is becoming the new normal

Have you or your partner been working from home during the COVID-19 crisis?



Given your experience over the COVID-19 crisis to date, after this is over would you want to work from home again?



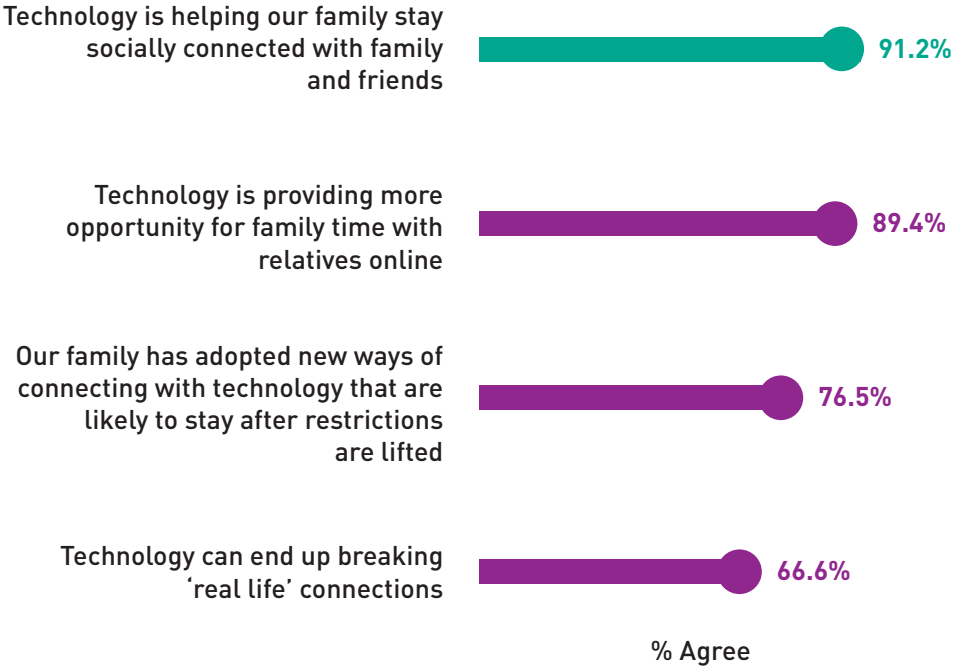
*Respondents who have been working from home during the COVID-19 crisis



Crises in the digital age

The technological era has made dealing with this crisis easier

How much do you agree with the following statements about the impact of new technology and social apps to stay connected?



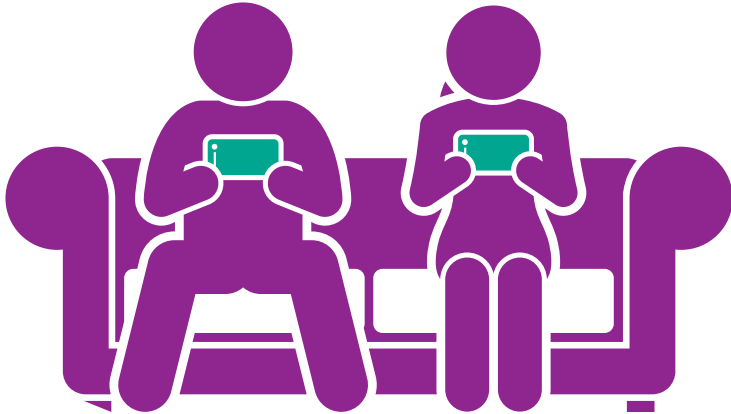
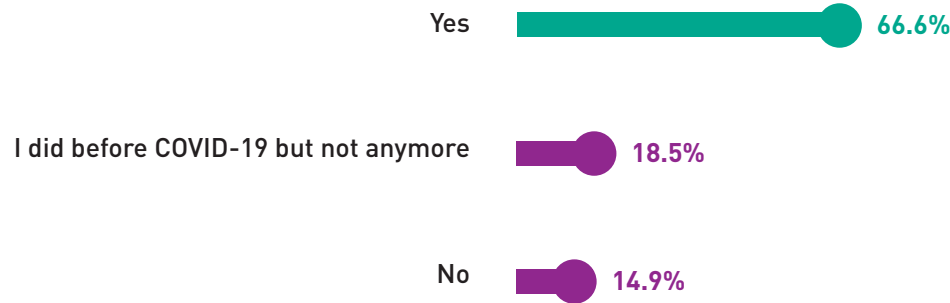
A pandemic is never a welcome occurrence, but the dawn of the digital age has definitely made things more manageable, as we deal with this crisis. An overwhelming majority of Australians say it's helped them stay socially connected with family and friends, and has even provided more opportunities to spend family time with relatives.



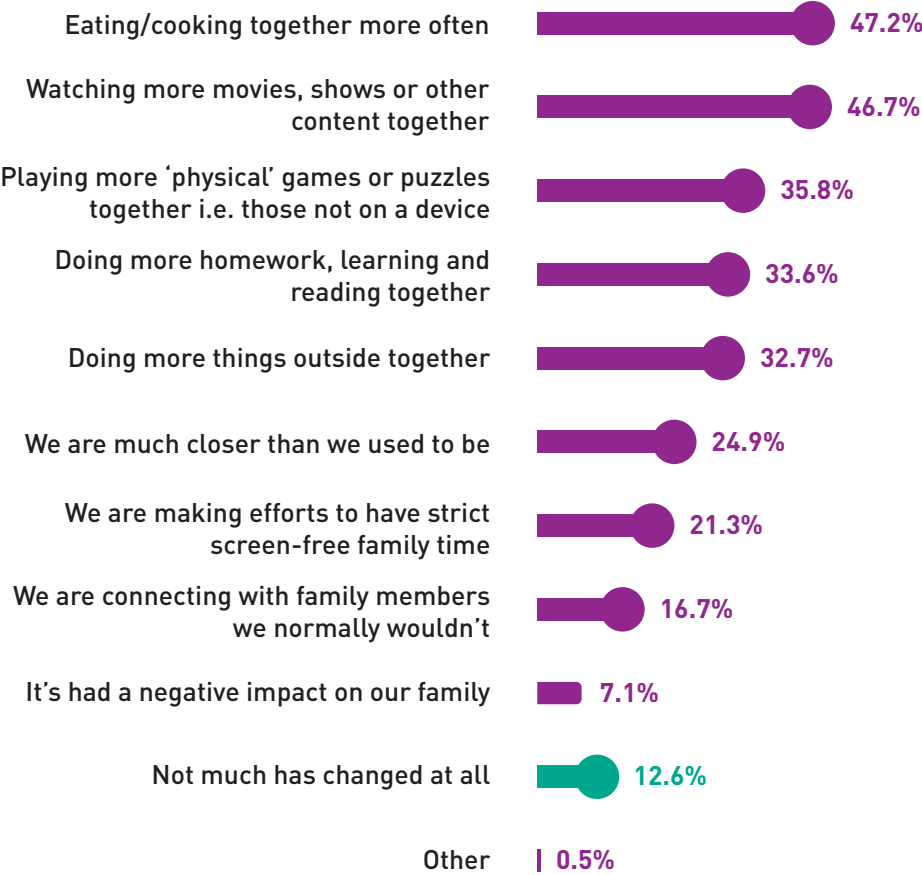
Tech is more part of 'family time' than ever before

Almost one-fifth of Australians think 'family time' can now be more digitally focused in light of COVID-19. But they are also spending more time outdoors and doing other activities like cooking.

Do you consider 'family time' to be time away from digital appliances/applications or devices?



How has 'family time' changed since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic?



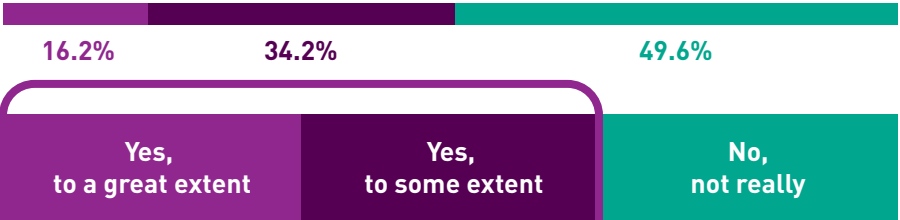
*Multiple answers allowed



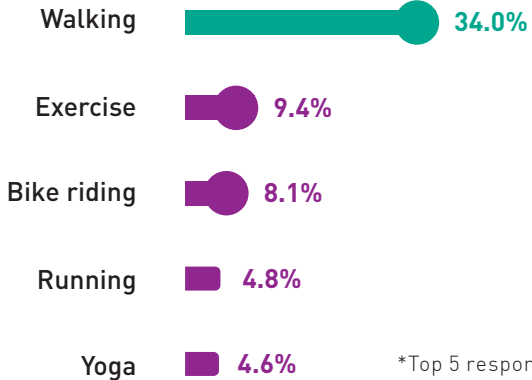
Reprioritising life

Australians are using the extra time to focus on their health

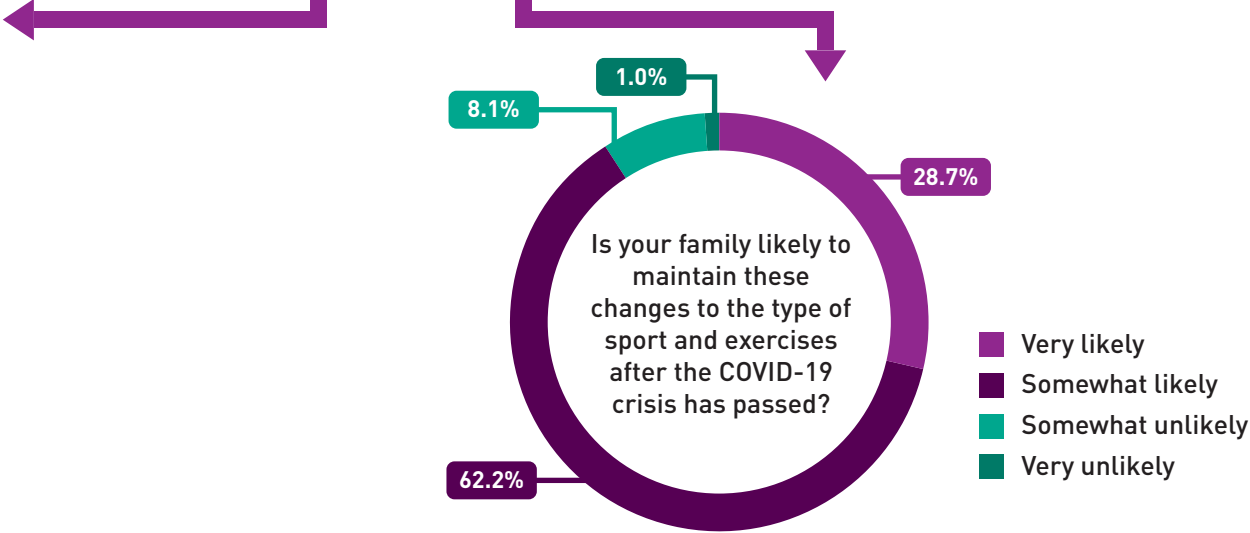
Is there a particular sport or exercise activity your family has engaged in much more than usual during this COVID-19 crisis period?



What sporting or exercise activity have you been engaging in more during the crisis?



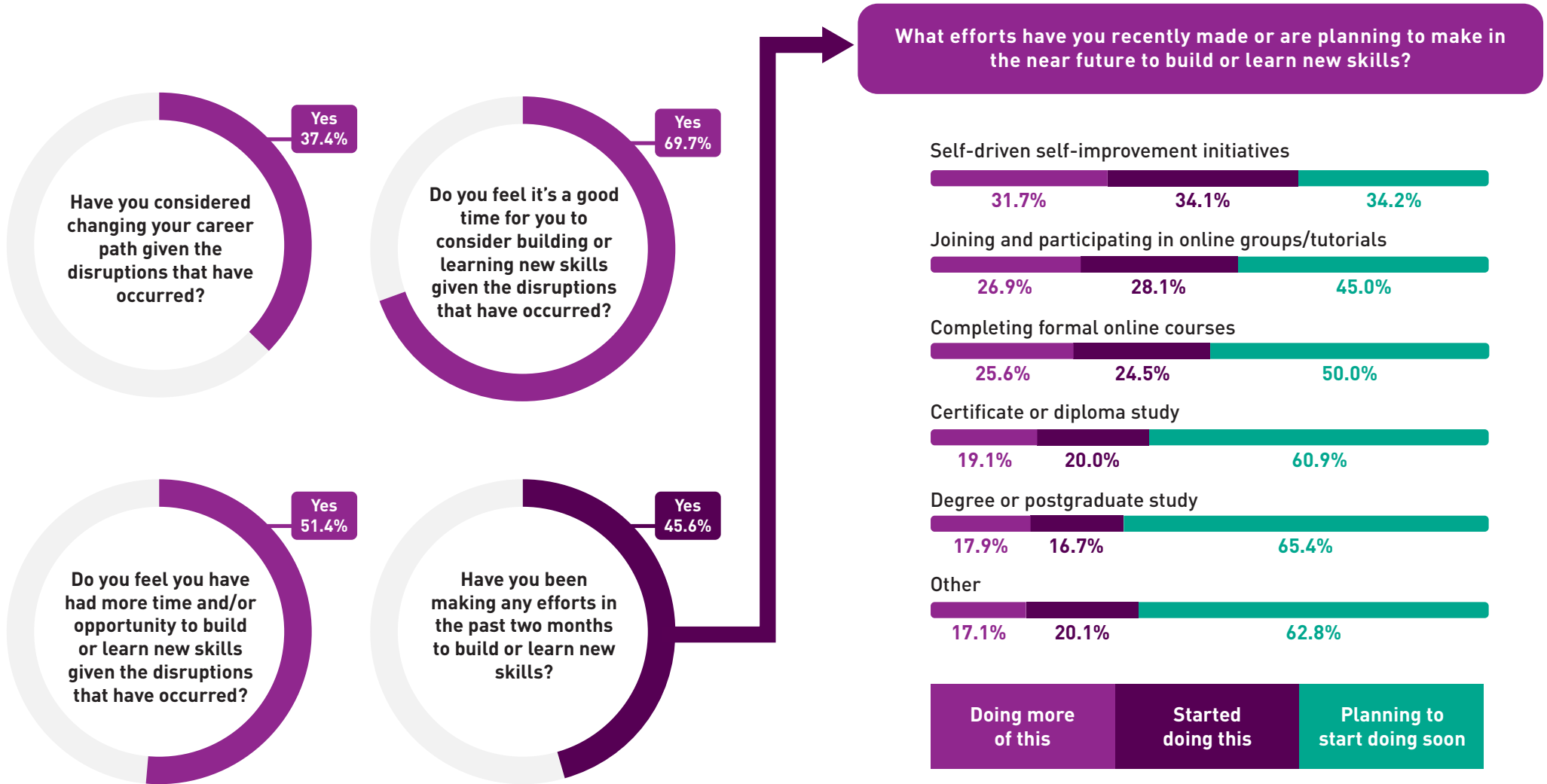
*Top 5 responses only



*Respondents who have engaged in a particular sports or exercise activity much more than usual with their family during the COVID-19 crisis

A majority of Australians have used the downtime of this pandemic to engage in a sport/activity more often than they usually would. Walking, exercising, and cycling are all very popular choices of recreation.

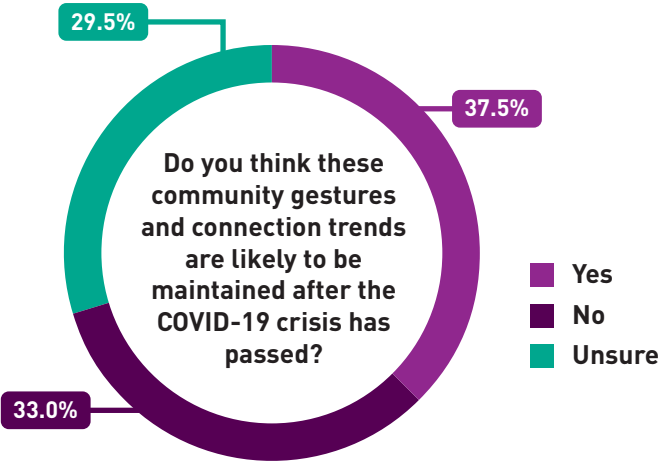
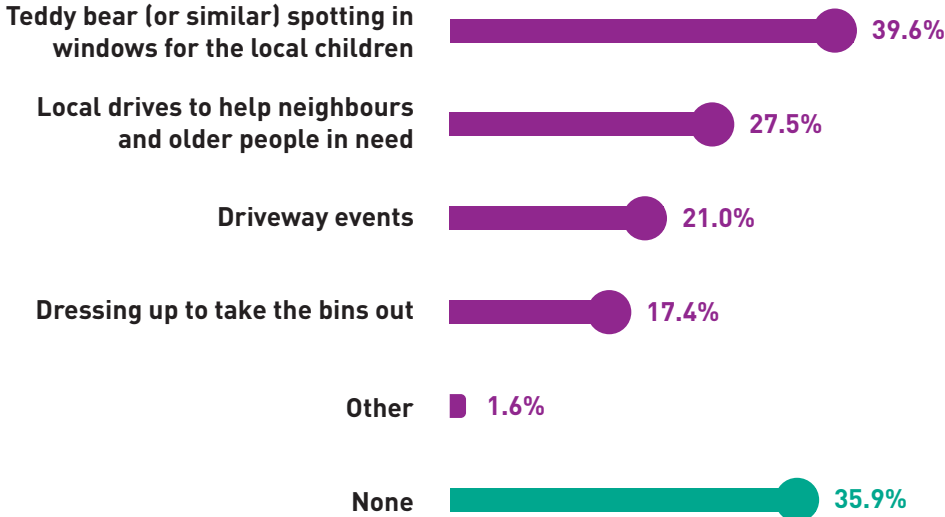
Many are picking up new skills to become better workers



*Respondents who have been making or planning to make efforts to build a new skill

The strength of community is key in weathering this crisis

What kind of community gestures and connections have you witnessed in your community during the COVID-19 crisis?



*Multiple answers allowed
*Respondents who have witnessed community gestures during the COVID-19 crisis

The strength of the Australian community in a crisis is unparalleled. Mateship continues to permeate our culture, and this has shown once again during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Australians have come together with community gestures like driveway events, local drives for those in need, and teddy bear spotting for children.

More of the real deal from Real Insurance coming soon...

About Real Insurance

Real Insurance is an award-winning Australian Insurer specialising in life, income protection, funeral, pet, car, home, landlords, travel and bike insurance. In the market since 2005, Real Insurance has protected the quality of life of many Australians, through the delivery of innovative and affordable products. Real Insurance has been the recipient of the Feefo Gold Trusted Service Award 2019, Readers Digest Quality Service Award in the life and funeral categories 2019. Real Insurance is a trading name of Greenstone Financial Service Pty Ltd and The Hollard Insurance Company Pty Ltd.

