

# Nurturing the Next Generation The Parent Experience Study



## Research Questions

1. What are the positive and challenging experiences of new parents in Peel?
2. What formal and informal supports are helpful and what resources do parents wish were available?

## Methods

- 23 focus groups (n=150) and an online survey (n=118) were completed.
- Participants were parents with a child 0 to 2 years of age.
- Peel Public Health collaborated with colleagues from Trent University to conduct the study and analyze the data.

## Key Findings

- Becoming a parent is a significant life transition which includes the loss of familiar roles and behaviours, and the stress of learning new ones.
- In addition to the birth of a baby, parents experience a second major transition towards the end of their parental leave. This is a particularly stressful time as most parents contemplate the costs and benefits of working versus paying for child care.
- Many parents are geographically and socially isolated. This means they are learning parenting skills and knowledge on their own without the benefit of family members or experienced peers. For those parents who become socially connected, there is great relief as they gain both informational and social support.
- Parents experienced anxiety from wanting to, but not knowing how to, “do things right”. Other challenging experiences for parents included the stress of managing exhaustion, learning new skills, negotiating changing relationships, and forming new identities as parents.
- Social learning helps parents cope. How easily they transition to parenthood depends on their personal and social supports and whether or not they access community resources.

## Opportunities for Public Health

- Develop initiatives that use social learning principles (e.g., social modelling, parent-to-parent connections, self-regulation skills) to support the transition to parenthood. These initiatives should be aimed at reducing parental anxiety and supporting self-efficacy.
- Evaluate communication strategies to ensure they provide information that is “just-in-time” which boosts parental efficacy, rather than information which increases parents’ sense of anxiety, indecision and “information overload”.
- Foster formal and informal social connectivity among new parents in order to reduce social isolation and facilitate peer-to-peer learning and affirmation.
- Advocate for changes that support family wellbeing such as affordable child care, and improvements to the built environment.