

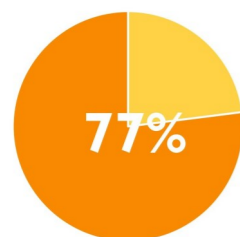
# COVID-19 PARENT GROUP LEADER SURVEY

In January 2021 we set up a survey to capture the voices and experiences of our Parent Group Leaders (PGLs) during this unprecedented time. We kept the survey open until July 2021 and we received 314 responses. A big thank you to everyone who participated. We asked what the **main challenges** were in delivering the [Nurturing Programme](#) online, whether there were any **unexpected benefits**, and how the pandemic impacted their **in person** work with parents.

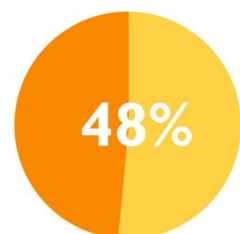
*"I would like to give credit to the parents and families who have continued their work with me in the face of the unknown"*



1 in 3 practitioners delivered groups and 1:1 support to parents in person throughout the pandemic



During the pandemic, 77% of PGLs who responded offered the Nurturing Programme online



Almost half of the Parent Group Leaders surveyed attended a Family Links via Zoom or Teams training

One reflection shared by many PGLs was that while the pandemic had been challenging, it had also been rewarding. Many practitioners rightly felt very proud of how they had adapted and creatively connected with families, offering continued support throughout the pandemic with no break in service provision. The pandemic also created opportunities for new ways of working and reaching parents that otherwise wouldn't have been explored.

For PGLs who were able to deliver **in person** during the pandemic, difficulties reading facial expressions due to wearing masks proved challenging. These restrictions also made it harder for parents with English as an Additional Language, hearing impairments or learning disabilities. Building relationships in person with new parents took longer, and a lot more thought was needed in how to offer the usual nurturing approach with food, drinks, games and activities in the groups. When groups weren't able to happen this was regarded as a good opportunity to strengthen individual relationships with parents, and PGLs felt they were able to offer more personalised 1:1 support, which they wouldn't have been able to outside of the pandemic.

One of the **main challenges** that PGLs found delivering online was keeping the nurturing element of the groups alive and witnessing the loss of the bonding between parents that happens so naturally at an in-person group. The lack of body language and eye contact made it difficult to read groups and ensure that parents had taken in and understood key messages. It was also challenging not being able to comfort a parent when they were visibly distressed. PGLs often had to work hard to engage parents before starting the online programme and some wanted more digital resources from Family Links. When running the groups, parents were often distracted by children being at home and other family members being in the same room, impacting group confidentiality. Other challenges for parents included intermittent Wi-Fi, digital poverty, and the confidence to contribute to group discussions online.

There were however some **unexpected benefits** to delivering online. By offering more flexibility around when the groups were run (and parents not having to worry about travel time and costs, childcare and social anxiety), PGLs were able to improve accessibility for some parents. Namely, more dads, working families and partners engaged with the programme. It also meant that PGLs in more rural areas were able to deliver county-wide and reach parents that wouldn't have otherwise been able to access a group during the pandemic. However, despite these advantages, an overwhelming number of PGLs mentioned how they can't wait to get back to face-to-face delivery and being able to nurture parents in person again.

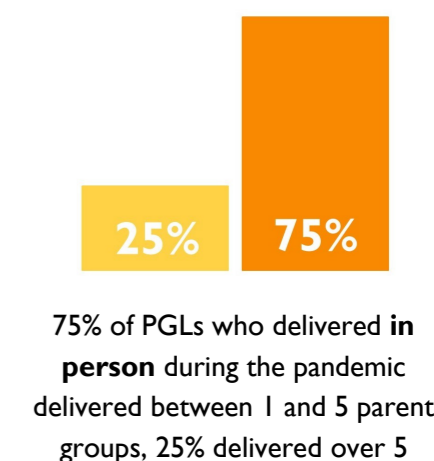
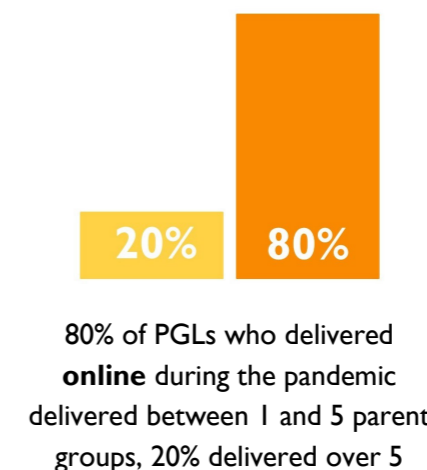
*"By not being able to deliver to a group, dilutes the essence of peer support, building friendships with other parents and sharing thoughts, experiences and ideas. All of these are important aspects when you are trying to 'nurture' a parent and, making them feel like they are not the only parent that is struggling"*

*"The hardest part has been the things we would normally talk about 'around' the meeting or groups. The ordinary chatting that allows us all to get to know each other better. These are the times that develop the trust and connections between us and the parents as well as between the parents and carers themselves"*

*"The contact with parents has been crucial throughout this pandemic. Many have faced mental health challenges, feel isolated and have been impacted by the lack of social contact. Many have stated that they are worried that their children, babies and toddlers have had limited social contact with other children, and they are worried about what impact this will have on them in the coming months"*

*"It has been challenging but also a very rewarding time. Never before have I felt more connected to the parents, understanding their family dynamics, their needs and their experiences and building a real relationship with each of them. This I feel is because we have time to talk to them individually, build that time in to have 1:1 discussions as well as when they attend the groups"*

*"I am missing the two-minute catch ups at the start and end of the day and the 'Have you got a minute?' conversations that often led to so much more support"*



To find out more visit [www.familylinks.org.uk](http://www.familylinks.org.uk)