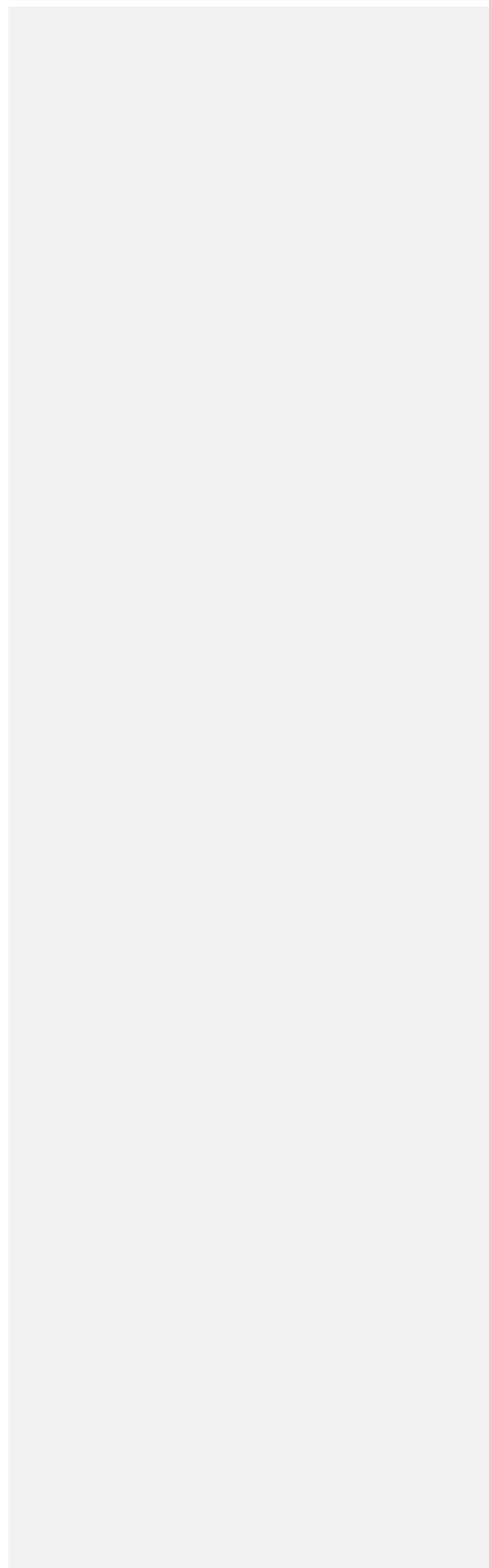


London Borough Barking and Dagenham
Start for Life – Strengthening Families Strengthening
Communities Programme Impact report

July 2025



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Executive Summary

From April 2024 to March 2025, the Race Equality Foundation continued its delivery of the Strengthening Families, Strengthening Communities (SFSC) parenting programme across the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham. This report builds on the 2023–24 analysis, offering an updated picture of who took part in the programme, how they engaged, and what changed as a result.

A total of 102 parents and carers participated in SFSC courses this year. The programme reached a broad demographic, with the largest ethnic groups being Bangladeshi (40%) and African (21%). Participants represented a wide age range, though most were aged between 31 and 45. The majority were mothers or female carers, and over half identified as being in single-parent households. Educational attainment varied, with many participants educated up to GCSE or A-Level equivalent, and a smaller proportion reporting no formal qualifications.

Socioeconomic data continued to show that SFSC is reaching families experiencing financial hardship: over half of participants reported annual household incomes below £20,000. This pattern was consistent with last year's findings and reflects the ongoing relevance of SFSC to families facing economic disadvantage. Most participants were not new to parenting support — around a third had previously attended a parenting course, suggesting both a continued appetite for structured support and trust in the programme's value.

Motivations for taking part were wide-ranging but broadly aligned with previous cohorts. The most frequently cited reasons included improving their child's behaviour, building confidence as a parent, and helping their child do better at school. These reasons were consistent across ethnic groups, suggesting a shared desire for positive change in parenting and family relationships.

Outcomes were assessed through matched pre- and post-programme questionnaires completed by 54 participants. Across sixteen parenting indicators, participants reported consistent and often substantial improvements — particularly in their ability to set limits calmly, show affection, and understand their child's needs. These results mirrored the pattern observed in 2023–24, further strengthening the evidence of the programme's impact.

While the analysis cannot claim causation, it does offer a compelling narrative of positive change, as reported by those who took part. SFSC continues to play a vital role in the borough's early help offer, equipping parents with tools to build stronger relationships, more consistent routines, and more confident parenting practices. The Foundation looks forward to deepening this work in partnership with families and services across Barking and Dagenham.

Introduction

This report presents an analysis of the Strengthening Families, Strengthening Communities (SFSC) parenting programmes delivered in the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham between April 2024 and March 2025. Commissioned by the local authority for a second consecutive year, the report builds on the 2023–24 evaluation and aims to provide insight into programme reach, participant demographics, reasons for attending, and the outcomes experienced by families.

As in 2023–24, the programme was delivered as part of the local authority's Start for Life programme. Referral criteria required participants to have **at least one child aged under five** or to be expecting a baby. The child age data presented in this report reflects questionnaire completion rates rather than the actual cohort profile, which by design comprised parents and carers of children in the early years

SFSC is a nationally recognised, evidence-based parenting programme that supports parents and carers to strengthen their parenting skills while promoting resilience, positive identity, and cultural pride. It is particularly valued for its relevance to families from diverse ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds, and for addressing the broader social determinants that shape parenting experiences—such as poverty, racial discrimination, and mental health pressures.

This year's analysis draws on data submitted by 101 participants who enrolled in SFSC courses delivered across Barking and Dagenham. Of these, 54 parents completed both a pre-course and post-course questionnaire, enabling the report to examine changes in parenting confidence, behaviours, and family relationships over time. Alongside a detailed exploration of parent characteristics—including ethnicity, income, language, and household context—the report also considers trends in how parents found out about the programme, their motivations for taking part, and their prior engagement with parenting support.

Comparisons are made with the 2023–24 cohort where relevant, highlighting areas of continuity and change in programme reach and impact. The report also incorporates findings from the wider national evaluation of SFSC, allowing for further contextualisation and consideration of long-term benefits.

Together, the evidence illustrates not only the continued demand for culturally rooted parenting support in the borough but also the transformative potential of SFSC in strengthening families and promoting positive community outcomes.

Chapter 2: Programme delivery summary

Between April 2024 and March 2025, a total of ten SFSC programmes were delivered across the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham. These courses were held in a variety of community-based and educational settings, including children's centres, faith spaces, and schools, ensuring local accessibility and cultural familiarity for participating families. Delivery partners continued to include a combination of trained facilitators from the voluntary and community sector, as well as those embedded within statutory services.

Each programme followed the standard SFSC curriculum, which includes 13 weekly sessions covering themes such as cultural and spiritual identity, enhancing relationships and communication, managing behaviour, and promoting resilience. Facilitators tailored delivery where appropriate to reflect local needs and the specific backgrounds of participants, many of whom come from racially minoritised communities or face significant economic pressures.

Programme delivery overview

The total number of parents enrolled across the nine programmes delivered in 2024–25 was 101. This marks a significant increase from the 47 participants across six programmes in 2023–24, reflecting both an expansion in delivery and growing demand for the SFSC programme in Barking and Dagenham. Retention and completion rates remained high: the majority of those who enrolled attended at least two-thirds of the sessions, and several groups reported strong peer bonding, consistent attendance, and active participation throughout the course duration.

In addition to standard session delivery, facilitators collected monitoring and evaluation data through pre- and post-programme questionnaires. These were used to assess baseline characteristics, motivations for attending, and changes in confidence, behaviour, and family relationships. Of the 101 enrolled participants, 54 completed both pre- and post-course questionnaires, providing a robust evidence base for evaluating outcomes.

Outreach and recruitment continued to draw on a range of methods, including referrals from local professionals (such as health visitors and social workers), promotion through schools and children's centres, word-of-mouth within community networks, and the ongoing contribution of programme graduates who act as informal ambassadors.

Overall, delivery in 2024–25 maintained a strong local presence, with high levels of cultural relevance, facilitator commitment, and engagement from families. In the chapters that follow, we present a more detailed picture of the participants who took part, their motivations, and the impact of SFSC on their parenting and family life.

Chapter 3: Participant profile

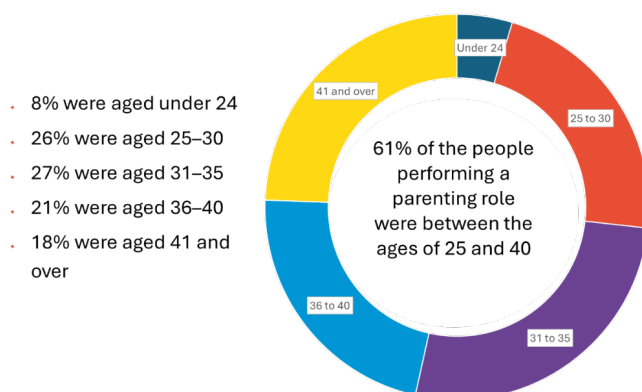
This chapter presents a demographic and socioeconomic profile of the 101 parents and carers who participated in the SFSC programmes delivered across Barking and Dagenham in 2024–25. This data helps illustrate the breadth and diversity of families engaged by the programme and provide important context for understanding motivations, barriers, and outcomes later in the report.

Ethnicity

SFSC continues to engage a wide range of families from racially and ethnically diverse backgrounds. The largest ethnic group represented was Bangladeshi (29.7%), followed by African (17.8%), Indian (16.8%), and White British (12.9%). Smaller numbers of participants identified as Mixed heritage (5.9%), White Other (3%), Chinese (2%), Pakistani (1%), and Other ethnic group (1%). In 9.9% of cases, ethnicity was recorded as “unknown/not stated” where participants did not provide this information.

These figures reflect both the diversity of the borough and the SFSC programme’s ability to reach and support families from a wide range of racial and ethnic backgrounds.

Gender and age



As in previous years, most participants were female (95%), with a small number of male carers also taking part. As the exhibit below shows, participants ranged in age from under 24 to over 50, with the highest concentration falling between 25 and 40 years old.

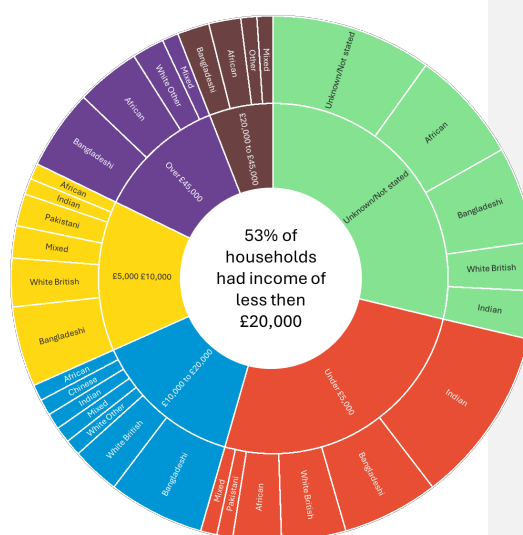
This indicates that the programme continues to engage people performing the role of parents across a broad age range.

Household income and ethnicity

Over half of all participants (approximately 53.5%) reported household incomes below £20,000, with many concentrated in the lowest bands. A much smaller proportion reported annual incomes over £45,000.

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To visualise the intersection of income and ethnicity, a sunburst chart has been included. This presents income bands at the centre, with ethnic group distributions within each band. The chart reveals, for example, that Bangladeshi and Indian participants were heavily represented in the lowest income bands, while White Other and African participants were distributed across a broader income range. This reinforces findings from the previous year regarding the financial pressures experienced by many families.



Education and language

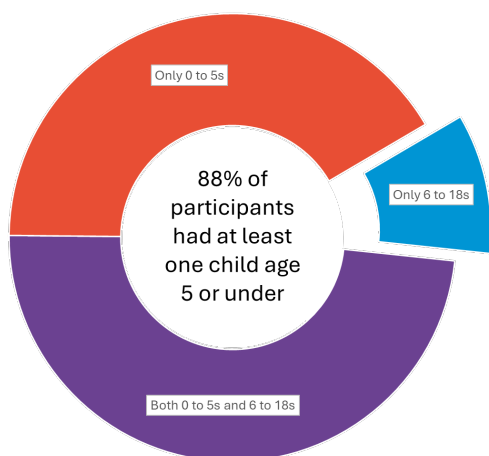
Participants reported a wide range of educational backgrounds. Around one-third had achieved GCSE-level qualifications, while a significant proportion reported no formal qualifications or qualifications below GCSE. A smaller number indicated they had attained qualifications at A-level or higher.

Around half of participants (51 individuals) reported that English was not their first language. Among those who specified their home language, Sylheti was the most frequently spoken, followed by Urdu, Turkish, and Albanian. This linguistic diversity reflects the borough's community profile and underscores the importance of culturally and linguistically inclusive approaches to programme delivery, including translated materials, bilingual facilitation, and community-based outreach.

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Household composition and parenting

Most participants described themselves as living in two-parent households (62%), while 22% identified as single parents. A smaller number attended in their role as grandparents (6%), non-custodial parents, relatives, or educators/advocates.



When asked about the age of children in their care:

- Nine in ten had at least one child under the age of five (although almost 100 per cent do if we include women who were pregnant at the time)
- 47.5% reported caring only for children aged 0–5
- 9.9% cared only for children aged 6–18
- 40.5% had children in both age groups

This range indicates that SFSC continues to be relevant across

different stages of child development—from early years through to adolescence, but is nonetheless reaching the core cohort for this project of parents/carers of young children. A small number of participants did not record child age on their forms; given the referral criteria, these participants are also understood to have had children in the early years.

Chapter 4: Engagement and referral pathways

Understanding how participants learn about and access the SFSC programme is essential to sustaining reach and improving inclusivity. This chapter outlines the main referral and engagement routes used by parents and carers who joined the 2024–25 SFSC programmes in Barking and Dagenham.

Overview of referral sources

Participants were asked how they heard about the programme, with the option to select multiple sources. The most frequently cited referral pathways were:

- School or early years settings (33 participants)
- Health professionals, including health visitors and GPs (21 participants)
- Word-of-mouth, including family and friends (9 participants)
- Other sources, specified in free-text responses (2 participants)

These results indicate that schools and healthcare professionals remain the primary conduits into the programme, consistent with previous years. Informal channels, such as word-of-mouth, also continue to play a role, potentially reflecting the reach and reputation of the programme within local communities.

Referral sources and ethnicity

When analysed by ethnic group, the overall pattern of referral remains broadly consistent. For example:

- Bangladeshi participants most commonly reported being referred through schools and early years settings.
- African and Indian participants also showed significant engagement via schools and health professionals.
- White British participants were slightly more likely than other groups to report word-of-mouth referrals.

However, these differences are not large, and given the sample sizes involved, they should be interpreted cautiously.

Comparison with 2023–24

The pattern of referral pathways in 2024–25 closely mirrors that of 2023–24. In both years, schools and health professionals served as the main points of referral. Word-of-mouth referrals also remain a consistent route into the programme. The overall consistency of referral sources highlights the programme's sustained integration into local education and healthcare systems.

Reasons for attending the programme

Parents and carers participating in the SFSC programme were invited to share their motivations for enrolling by selecting one or more predefined reasons. This provides valuable insight into what families are seeking from the programme and highlights the alignment between participants' needs and the SFSC curriculum.

In 2024–25, the most frequently selected reasons were:

- To become a better parent (81 participants)
- To improve my relationship with my child (10 participants)
- To meet other parents (3 participants)
- Other reasons (3 participants)

These motivations reflect a consistent desire among parents to strengthen family relationships, improve parenting techniques, and gain emotional and social support. Compared to the previous year (2023–24), the same top three motivations remain dominant, suggesting ongoing relevance of the programme's focus on strengthening parenting confidence and enhancing family communication.

Reasons for participating and ethnic group

Analysis by ethnic group indicates that motivations for participating in the programme were broadly consistent across all groups. The desire to become a better parent was the most common reason cited by participants in all major ethnic groups, including Bangladeshi, Indian, and African parents. While small differences emerged in the selection of secondary motivations, these did not suggest strong patterns of variation. For example, the motivation to improve parent-child relationships or to meet other parents was selected by a small number of participants from different backgrounds, without significant differences in frequency.

This uniformity of motivation suggests that parenting challenges and aspirations are shared across communities, underscoring the cross-cultural relevance of the SFSC programme.

Chapter 6: Participant outcomes

This chapter presents the impact of the SFSC programme on participants' attitudes, behaviours and knowledge, based on responses from the 54 parents who completed both the pre- and post-programme questionnaires in 2024–25.

As highlighted in the previous year's report, interpreting self-reported change requires careful consideration. Some parents may begin the programme with an overly optimistic view of their parenting, only to recalibrate their responses by the end, as they gain deeper insight into positive parenting practices. Despite this, the overall trend in the data reveals meaningful growth in areas related to parental warmth, communication, discipline, and understanding of children's needs and rights.

To help interpret the 16 items, this analysis is grouped into two themes: parenting styles and behaviours and understanding of children and their development. Where relevant, comparisons are drawn with results from the 2023–24 cohort.

The results are presented in full in Appendix A.

Parenting styles and behaviours

Across this group of questions, the data show a clear and positive shift towards more affirming, calm, and supportive parenting practices.

Participants reported stronger emotional connection with their children by the end of the course. The proportion who said they "always show love and affection to their child" (QCF1) rose from 70.4% to 83.3%, and those who said they "praise or encourage their child when they do something good" (QCF3) increased from 61.1% to 75.9%. These are important indicators of nurturing parenting, and the upward trend mirrors improvements seen in the previous year.

Similarly, emotional regulation improved over the course of the programme. The number of parents who said they "lose their temper when disciplining their child" (QCF7) fell sharply: from 9.3% reporting "Always" at the start, to just 1.9% by the end. Those selecting "Often" also dropped significantly. This pattern was matched by more parents indicating that they "handle upset calmly" (QCF9) — increasing from 35.2% to 53.7% reporting "Always".

Parents also showed reduced reliance on ineffective or coercive strategies. The proportion who said they "use threats or bribes" (QCF11) fell from 11.1% to just 3.7% for "Always", and the percentage who responded "Often" was halved. These results reflect the intended outcomes of the SFSC curriculum: promoting boundaries without fear or manipulation.

Understanding of children and their development

As well as changing how they act, parents also demonstrated improved awareness and understanding of their children's experiences.

For instance, by the end of the programme, 53.7% of parents said they "always think about how their child feels before acting" (QCF12), up from 31.5% at the start. This suggests growth in empathy and reflective practice. The same trend appears in QCF13, where the number of parents who said they "help their child solve problems" increased from 46.3% to 64.8% for "Always".

Parents also deepened their knowledge of developmental impact and child rights. In QCF14, 75.9% of parents said they "understand the impact of their parenting on their child's development", up from 53.7%. Similar improvements were found in QCF15, with 74.1% affirming they knew the "difference between discipline and punishment", and in QCF16, where the same proportion reported that they "understand their child's rights and how to respect them" — an increase of over 25 percentage points from the start.

These improvements echo the 2023–24 results, but the 2024–25 cohort saw even stronger gains on several items related to rights-based parenting and emotional reflection, suggesting that facilitators' approaches may be becoming even more effective.

Summary

Overall, these results confirm that parents completing the SFSC programme are making measurable progress in key areas that underpin positive, respectful and effective parenting. The strongest improvements were seen in emotional regulation, use of affirming strategies, and understanding of the child's developmental and emotional world. While some participants began the course with high scores, the consistency and scale of positive change across the cohort point to a programme that continues to deliver meaningful outcomes.

Chapter 7: Conclusions and considerations for future delivery

The 2024–25 delivery of Strengthening Families, Strengthening Communities (SFSC) in Barking and Dagenham continued to demonstrate significant reach and meaningful engagement with a diverse group of parents and carers. Over the course of the programme, participants reported positive developments in parenting practices, emotional awareness, and understanding of child development and rights.

Summary of outcomes

Among those who completed both the pre- and post-programme questionnaires, the data indicate widespread improvements in:

- Expressing warmth and affection towards children
- Managing discipline more calmly and constructively
- Avoiding coercive strategies such as threats or bribes
- Empathising with children's feelings and supporting their problem-solving
- Understanding child development, discipline, and rights

These trends are consistent with the changes observed in the 2023–24 cohort, strengthening confidence in the programme's coherence and delivery approach. Importantly, the positive shifts were evident across different ethnic and linguistic backgrounds, affirming SFSC's cultural responsiveness and inclusive design.

Considerations and cautions

As highlighted in previous reports, there are important caveats to these findings. Because the evaluation relies on self-reported data and uses a pre/post comparison without a control group, we cannot definitively attribute changes to programme participation alone. Other life circumstances, services, or learning experiences may have contributed. Additionally, parents may overstate their effectiveness at the beginning and become more self-reflective and realistic by the end, introducing complexity into how change is measured.

That said, the consistency of the direction and scale of change — combined with strong retention, improved completion rates, and alignment with previous findings — provides a persuasive indication of SFSC's value to local families.

Strengths of the 2024–25 delivery

- High levels of engagement across a socioeconomically and ethnically diverse group
- Increased data quality, with a higher number of matched pre/post questionnaires than the previous year

- Strong community linkage, with many participants learning about the programme through local networks and professionals
- Clear articulation of need, with parents citing behavioural and emotional challenges, and a desire to learn new strategies, as reasons for participation

Areas for further development

- Support for sustained engagement: While completion rates have improved, continued attention is needed to ensure all participants are supported to complete the programme and final questionnaires.
- Ongoing data development: Future iterations could explore complementary forms of evaluation — such as facilitator observations or brief follow-up interviews — to better contextualise reported change.
- Exploration of broader family impact: Given that many participants care for multiple children, there may be value in exploring how the programme affects wider family dynamics over time.

Final reflections

The 2024–25 results affirm SFSC’s ongoing relevance and impact in Barking and Dagenham. The programme continues to offer a trusted space for parents and carers to reflect, learn, and connect — equipping them with practical tools and emotional insight to support their children’s development. As the borough continues to respond to challenges facing local families, SFSC remains a key part of the preventative and early support offer, rooted in evidence and driven by community voice.

The Foundation welcomes the opportunity to continue this partnership and looks forward to building on the lessons learned in the year ahead.

Appendix A

Question	Response	Pre Count	Pre %	Post Count	Post %
Qcf1 - Do you participate in Community Activities?	Always	36	66.7	44	81.5
	Often	16	29.6	8	14.8
	Not stated	2	3.7	2	3.7
Qcf2 - Do you participate in Youth Group Activities?	Always	19	35.2	25	46.3
	Often	32	59.3	24	44.4
	Not stated	3	5.6	5	9.3
Qcf3 - Do you and your children participate in Spiritual/Religious?	Always	32	59.3	36	66.7
	Often	21	38.9	15	27.8
	Not stated	1	1.9	3	5.6
Qcf4 - Are you actively involved in your children's Education/School?	Always	46	85.2	40	74.1
	Often	8	14.8	10	18.5
	Not stated	0	0	4	7.4
Qcf5 - Do you have a support network of friends and family that can...	Always	44	81.5	46	85.2
	Often	5	9.3	6	11.1
	Not stated	5	9.3	2	3.7
Q1 - How often do you - Kiss or hug your children?	Always	41	75.9	50	92.6
	Often	9	16.7	4	7.4
	Sometimes	3	5.6	0	0
	Rarely	1	1.9	0	0
Q2 - How often do you - Give children rewards?	Always	14	25.9	25	46.3
	Often	23	42.6	14	25.9
	Sometimes	13	24.1	15	27.8
	Rarely	2	3.7	0	0
	Never	2	3.7	0	0
Q3 - How often do you - Yell or shout at children?	Always	3	5.6	2	3.7
	Often	6	11.1	2	3.7
	Sometimes	30	55.6	24	44.4
	Rarely	14	25.9	19	35.2
	Never	1	1.9	7	13
Q4 - How often do you - Have fun together as a family?	Always	21	38.9	32	59.3
	Often	22	40.7	14	25.9
	Sometimes	10	18.5	7	13
	Rarely	1	1.9	1	1.9
Q5 - How often do you - Threaten or criticise children?	Always	0	0	1	1.9
	Often	1	1.9	1	1.9
	Sometimes	14	25.9	3	5.6
	Rarely	15	27.8	21	38.9
	Never	23	42.6	28	51.9
	Not stated	1	1.9	0	0
Q6 - How often do you - Talk about dangers of drugs/gangs?	Always	6	11.1	7	13
	Often	4	7.4	4	7.4
	Sometimes	13	24.1	17	31.5
	Rarely	6	11.1	5	9.3
	Never	24	44.4	16	29.6
	Not stated	1	1.9	5	9.3
Q7 - How often do you - Hit or smack children?	Often	2	3.7	0	0
	Sometimes	5	9.3	3	5.6
	Rarely	13	24.1	15	27.8
	Never	33	61.1	36	66.7
	Not stated	1	1.9	0	0
	Always	17	31.5	19	35.2
Q8 - How often do you - Spend time with individual children?	Often	12	22.2	21	38.9
	Sometimes	13	24.1	10	18.5
	Rarely	7	13	1	1.9
	Never	5	9.3	1	1.9
	Not stated	0	0	2	3.7
	Always	17	31.5	19	35.2

Question	Response	Pre Count	Pre %	Post Count	Post %
Q9 - How often do you - Ignore children when misbehaving?	Always	0	0	6	11.1
	Often	4	7.4	15	27.8
	Sometimes	18	33.3	26	48.1
	Rarely	20	37	4	7.4
	Never	10	18.5	3	5.6
	Not stated	2	3.7	0	0
Q10 - How often do you - Tell others about child's bad behaviour	Always	1	1.9	4	7.4
	Often	7	13	6	11.1
	Sometimes	19	35.2	16	29.6
	Rarely	13	24.1	10	18.5
	Never	14	25.9	17	31.5
	Not stated	0	0	1	1.9
Q11 - How often do you - Acknowledge (praise) for good behaviour?	Always	35	64.8	39	72.2
	Often	12	22.2	13	24.1
	Sometimes	7	13	2	3.7
Q12 - How often do you - Have family discussions to establish rule?	Always	14	25.9	15	27.8
	Often	7	13	16	29.6
	Sometimes	18	33.3	15	27.8
	Rarely	5	9.3	4	7.4
	Never	9	16.7	2	3.7
	Not stated	1	1.9	2	3.7
Q13 - How often do you - Go to cultural events together?	Always	7	13	22	40.7
	Often	14	25.9	9	16.7
	Sometimes	15	27.8	12	22.2
	Rarely	7	13	4	7.4
	Never	9	16.7	4	7.4
	Not stated	2	3.7	3	5.6
Q14 - How often do you - Get angry when children make mistakes?	Always	1	1.9	0	0
	Often	9	16.7	5	9.3
	Sometimes	27	50	15	27.8
	Rarely	8	14.8	23	42.6
	Never	9	16.7	10	18.5
	Not stated	0	0	1	1.9
Q15 - How often do you - Talk about sexual responsibility?	Always	2	3.7	4	7.4
	Often	1	1.9	7	13
	Sometimes	11	20.4	12	22.2
	Rarely	13	24.1	10	18.5
	Never	27	50	15	27.8
	Not stated	0	0	6	11.1
Q16 - How often do you - Listen to/ask for child's opinions and id...	Always	13	24.1	23	42.6
	Often	19	35.2	21	38.9
	Sometimes	17	31.5	7	13
	Rarely	2	3.7	1	1.9
	Never	2	3.7	1	1.9
	Not stated	1	1.9	1	1.9