





# Understood.org Neurodiversity and Stigma Study

# Background and research premise

Over the past two-plus years, the world has shifted, bringing unprecedented change and challenges to all kids. But for the millions of kids with learning and thinking differences (LTDs), like ADHD and dyslexia, challenges with emotional, mental, social, and academic development have become even more pronounced. So have the impacts of the stigmas they've faced that are often associated with LTDs.

To better understand children's experiences with LTDs — and parents' perceptions of these differences — Understood.org conducted an online study in April 2022. The Understood.org Neurodiversity and Stigma Study surveyed 1,500 nationally representative parents of children ages 5–18 [750 parents of kids with LTDs, and 750 parents of those without], asking about:

-  What they know, or think they know, about LTDs
-  Stigmas they've experienced or that they believe exist related to LTDs
-  Emotional, mental, social, and academic challenges their child has faced over the past two years
-  If and how they've taken actions to engage with their child around challenges, and what the impact has been

Findings from Understood.org's Neurodiversity and Stigma Study were paired with data from the Understood and MarketCast 2021 Impact Study (Spring 2021), a multiwave study that surveyed ~1,000 U.S. parents of neurotypical kids, kids with LTDs whose parents did not know Understood.org, and kids with LTDs whose parents used Understood.org once or more in the last six months.

# Summary of findings

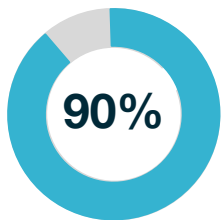
- ▶ **90% of all surveyed parents believe LTDs are real, but they also believe in myths and stigmas attached to LTDs.** Nearly one-third of parents of kids with and without LTDs falsely believe that the school system contributes to a child's LTDs. And nearly one-fifth falsely believe that parenting decisions contribute to LTDs.
- **These stigmas can prevent parents from taking action to support their child and can negatively impact children's mental health.** Nearly 70% of parents of kids with LTDs say that the associated stigma negatively impacts their child's health and well-being.
- **When parents of kids with LTDs take actions like engaging with their child, talking with a teacher or pediatrician, or exploring resources, 80% feel their child has shown improvement.** 43% of parents of kids with LTDs who provided support for their child saw improvements in their child's behavior and mood.

# Key findings

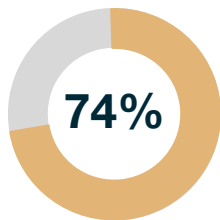
# Section 1

*Parents believe LTDs are real and that they know a lot about them. But the data shows that parents still believe in myths and have misconceptions.*

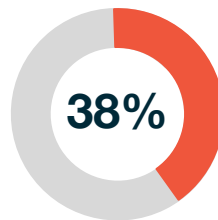
# A majority of parents believe in LTDs and think they know a lot about them. But the percentage shifted when parents were asked specifics about their level of knowledge.



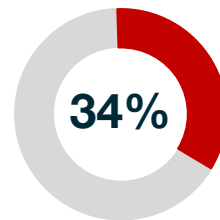
90% of all parents surveyed believe there are children with learning and thinking differences.\*



When we asked parents of typical kids how knowledgeable they are about learning and thinking differences (like ADHD and dyslexia), a remarkable 74% told us they are somewhat or very in-the-know.\*\*



But when we asked parents of typical kids how many people they know who have LTDs, only 38% said they personally know someone with LTDs.\*\*



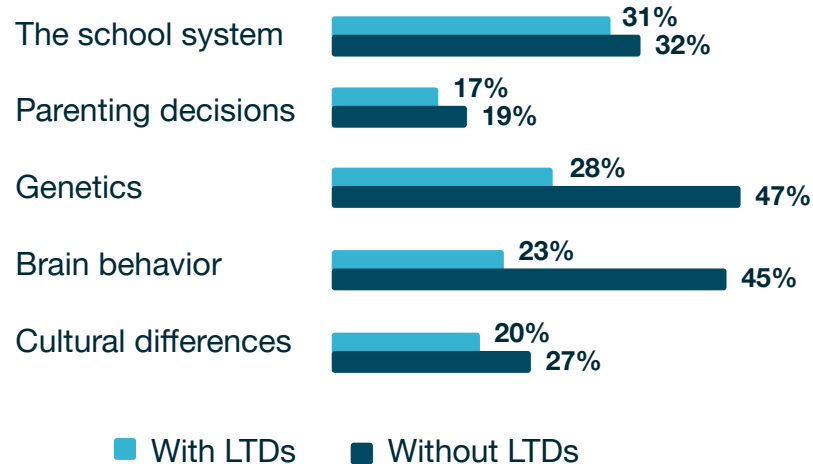
And when we asked parents how often they remember hearing, seeing, or reading about LTDs, only 34% told us they'd recently noticed this.\*\*

## Sources:

- \* Understood.org Neurodiversity and Stigma Study
- \*\* Understood and MarketCast Impact Study 2021

**A majority of parents believe in LTDs, but myths and misconceptions are still very real. Among all parents surveyed, about one-third falsely believe the school system contributes to LTDs. And about one-fifth falsely believe that parenting decisions contribute to LTDs.**

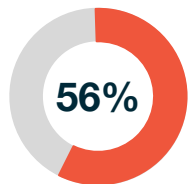
## Parents' beliefs about what contributes to LTDs



**The majority of parents acknowledge that there are stigmas associated with LTDs and have witnessed the challenges kids face because of these stigmas. Among all parents, 3 in 5 agree that they've seen their child or another child with LTDs referred to as “lazy” or “not smart.”**

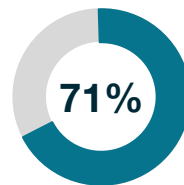


Two-thirds of all parents say that children are too easily diagnosed with LTDs these days.\*\*

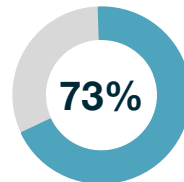


56% of Understood users incorrectly believe that neurodivergent children can outgrow learning differences.\*

### Among parents of kids without LTDs:



71% agree there is a stigma associated with children who have learning disabilities.\*\*



73% agree they have seen or heard of children being treated or judged unfairly based on their challenges with learning or thinking.\*\*

Sources:

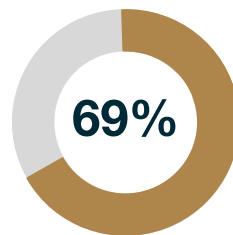
- \* Understood and MarketCast Impact Study 2021
- \*\* Understood.org Neurodiversity and Stigma Study



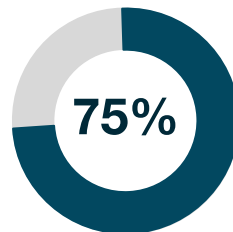
## Section 2

*The stigmas and challenges that children face can negatively impact their well-being and mental health, and can prevent parents from properly supporting their child.*

**Nearly 70% of parents of kids with LTDs say the stigmas associated with LTDs negatively impact their child's mental health and well-being.**



69% say they feel like they're the only one who understands their child's LTDs.



75% agree that others will treat or judge their child unfairly based on their LTDs.

**This school year, kids with LTDs were more likely to face emotional and academic challenges compared with their neurotypical peers. Kids with LTDs struggled with managing emotions (73%), anxiety about attending class (71%), and self-confidence (69%) — more than double what kids without LTDs experienced.**

Percentage of parents who strongly or somewhat agree (compared to year one of the pandemic)

My child has...	With LTDs	Without LTDs
Struggled to stick to a routine	75%	33%
Had difficulty managing their emotions	73%	27%
Complained of boredom in class	71%	38%
Been more anxious about attending class	71%	34%
Suffered from emotional fatigue in keeping up with lessons and/or classes	70%	25%
Struggled with self-confidence or self-esteem	69%	27%
Avoided social interactions or gatherings	67%	28%
Experienced behavioral problems	67%	20%
Had difficulty socializing	64%	22%

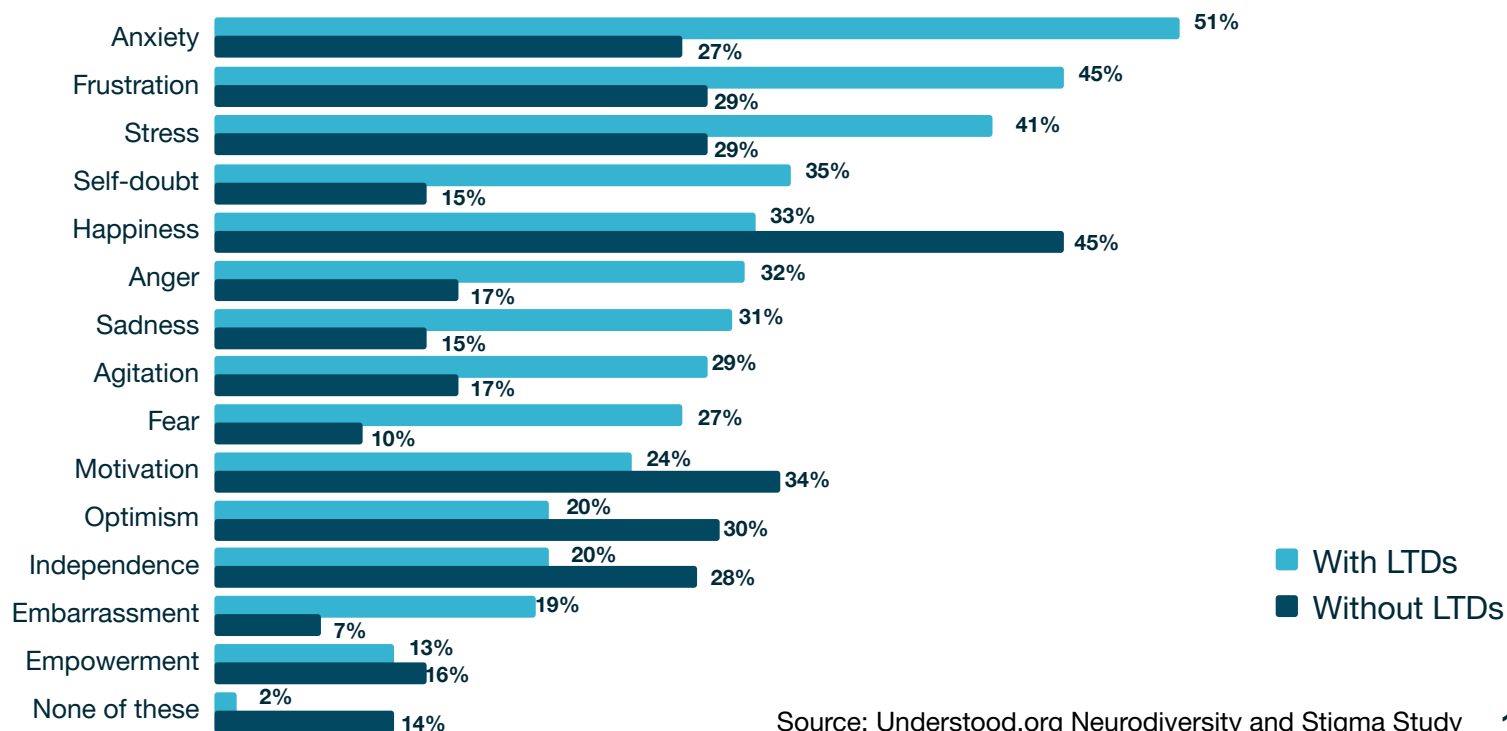
**This school year, kids with LTDs also faced increased academic challenges compared to neurotypical peers. More than 80% of kids with LTDs struggled to pay attention in class, compared to only 35% of kids without LTDs.**

Percentage of parents who strongly or somewhat agree (compared to year one of the pandemic)

My child has...	With LTDs	Without LTDs
Struggled to pay attention/concentrate in class	82%	35%
Had difficulty with organization	77%	25%
Had difficulty following directions	73%	21%
Had difficulty expressing ideas through speech or writing	69%	16%
Received lower grades compared to before the pandemic	68%	26%
Had difficulty reading	66%	13%
Refused to do schoolwork	64%	19%
Skipped classes or missed school days more frequently than before the pandemic	58%	26%

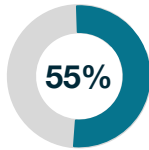
**Kids with LTDs were nearly twice as likely to experience increased anxiety and about three times as likely to experience self-doubt this school year, compared with kids without LTDs.**

### Emotions displayed by children during school year

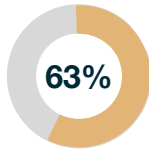


**Despite parents recognizing challenges kids are facing, stigmas can prevent parents from taking action to help their child. 55% of parents of kids with LTDs say they are afraid to tell others about their child's LTD because of the associated stigmas.**

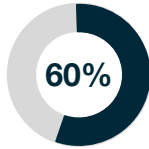
**Among parents of kids with LTDs:**



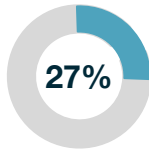
- 55% say they've had difficulty convincing their spouse/partner or their child's other parent/guardian that their child has learning or thinking differences.
- 55% are not sure how to initiate a conversation with their child around LTDs or challenges with learning and thinking.



63% of parents of kids with LTDs say they're not sure how to help their child manage their emotions, compared to 36% of parents of kids without LTDs.



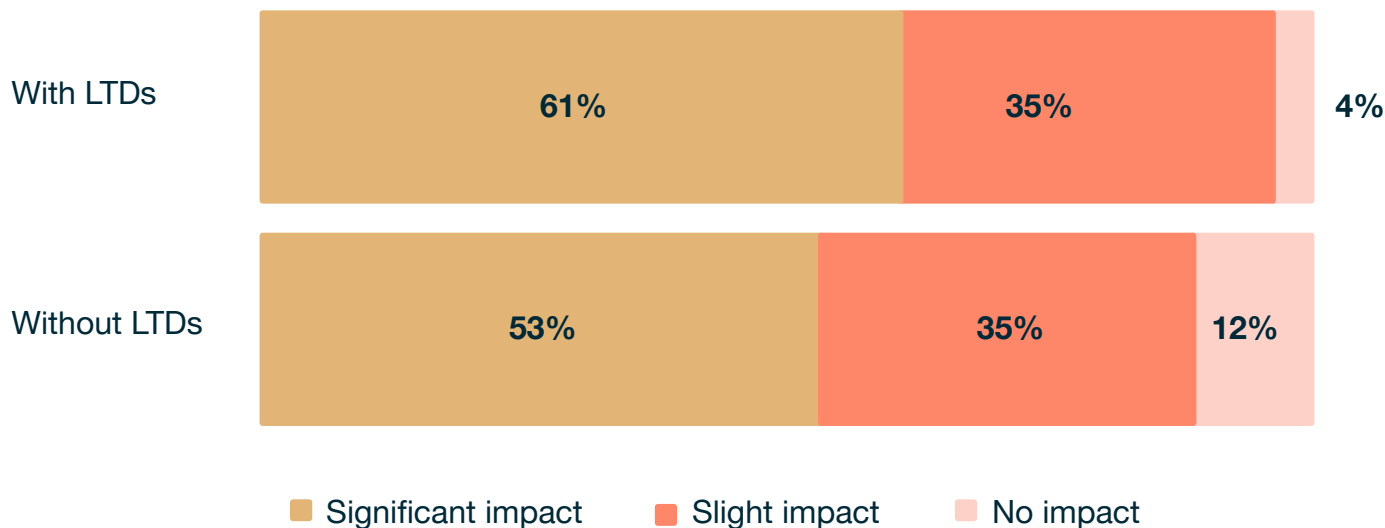
60% of parents of kids with LTDs are not sure how to help their child with their academic challenges, compared to 27% of parents of kids without LTDs.



27% of parents of kids without LTDs suspect their child has an LTD, but are waiting for their child's teacher to initiate a conversation before taking any action.

Parents are also experiencing challenges, and know that when *they* experience challenges emotionally, their mindset has a large impact on their kids.

### Impact of a parent's mindset on their child's attitude



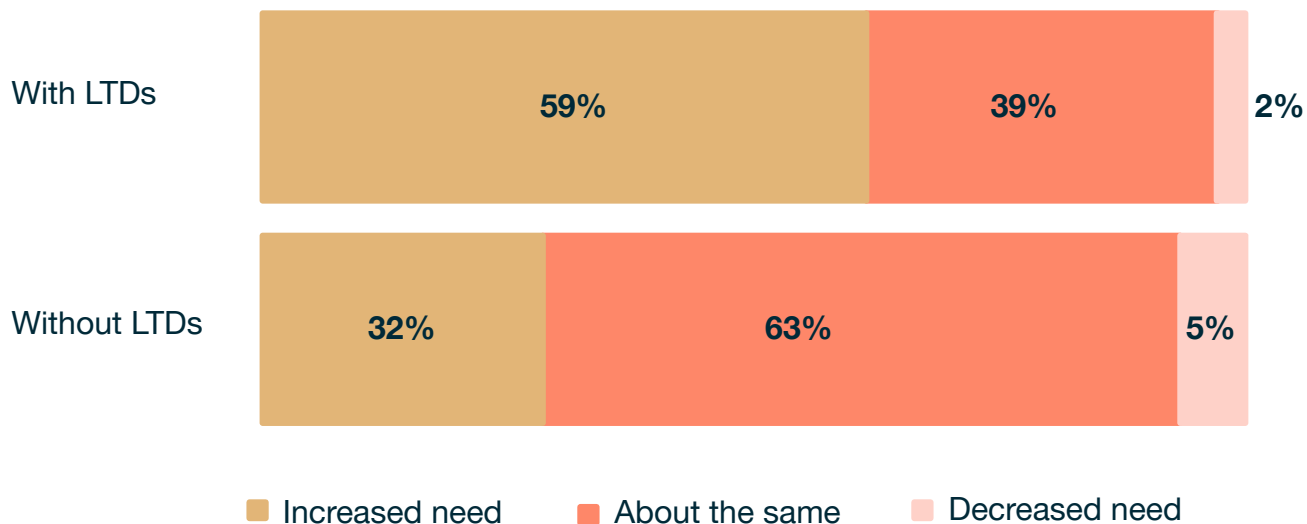
## Section 3

*It's difficult for many parents to engage around emotional and academic challenges. But when parents take steps to support their child, their child's mental health and confidence improve.*



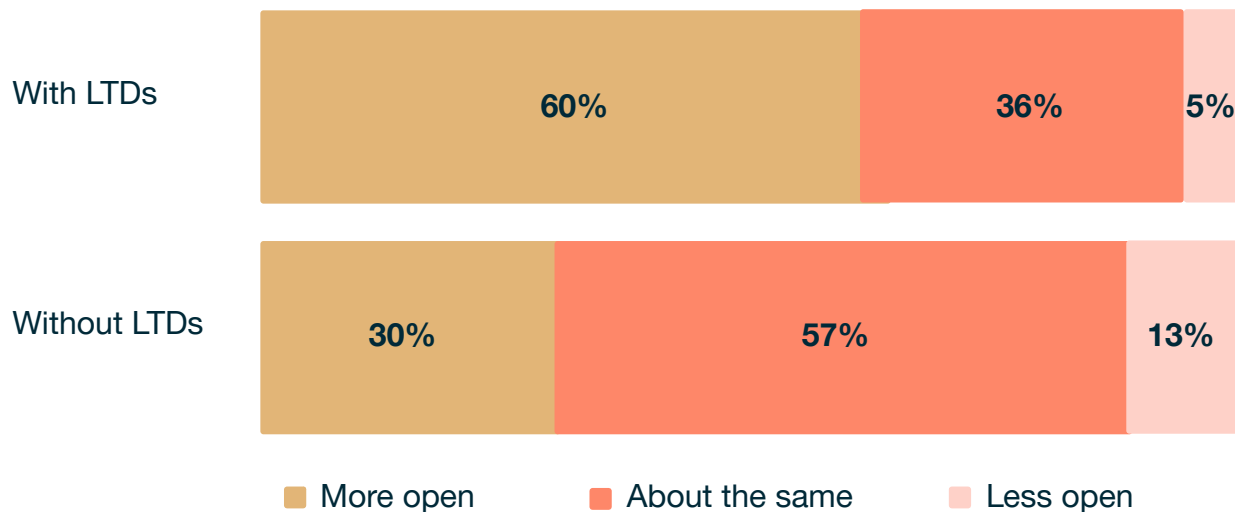
**Parents are noticing the emotional and academic challenges their kids are facing. Many parents feel an increased need to discuss these challenges with their child.**

Current need to discuss challenges vs. beginning of pandemic



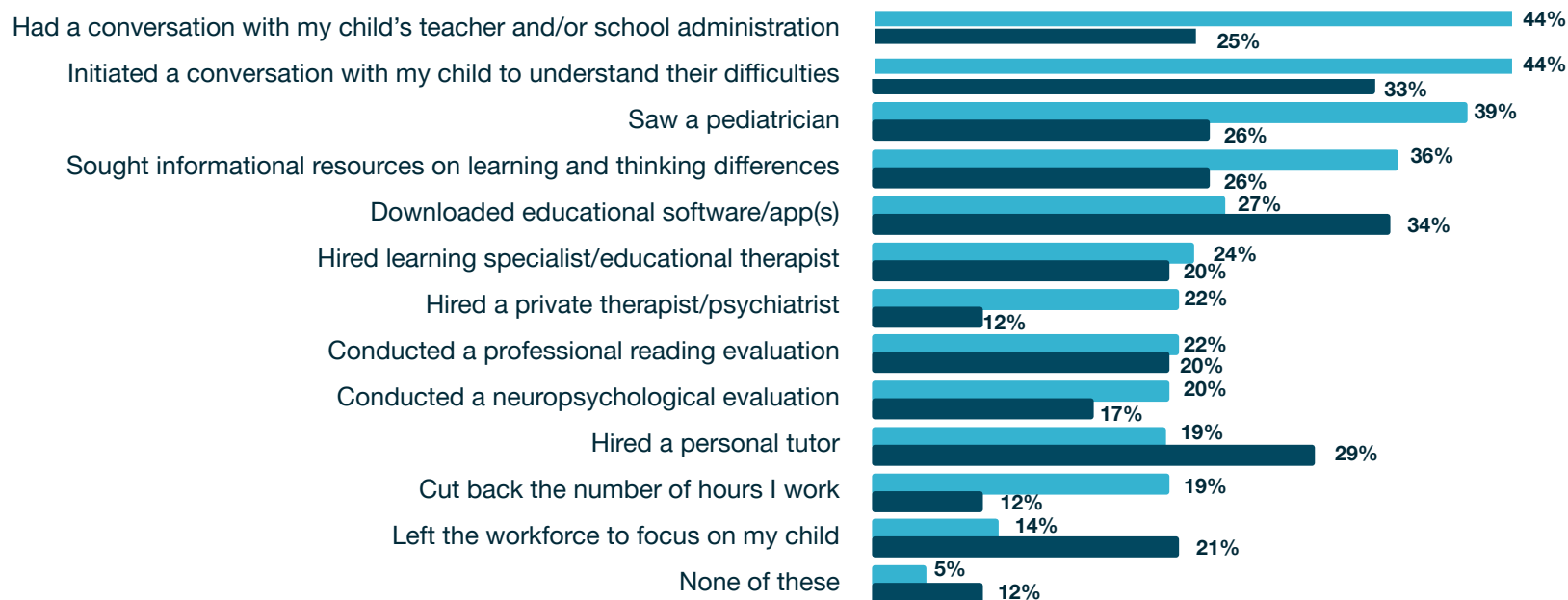
**Compared to before the pandemic, some parents of kids without LTDs are now more open to the possibility that their child's struggles are a result of LTDs. But the majority have not shifted their views.**

### Openness to struggles being a result of LTDs



# Parents don't always know how to engage around these challenges. Parents of kids with LTDs focused on having conversations, while parents of kids without diagnosed LTDs focused on academic improvement.

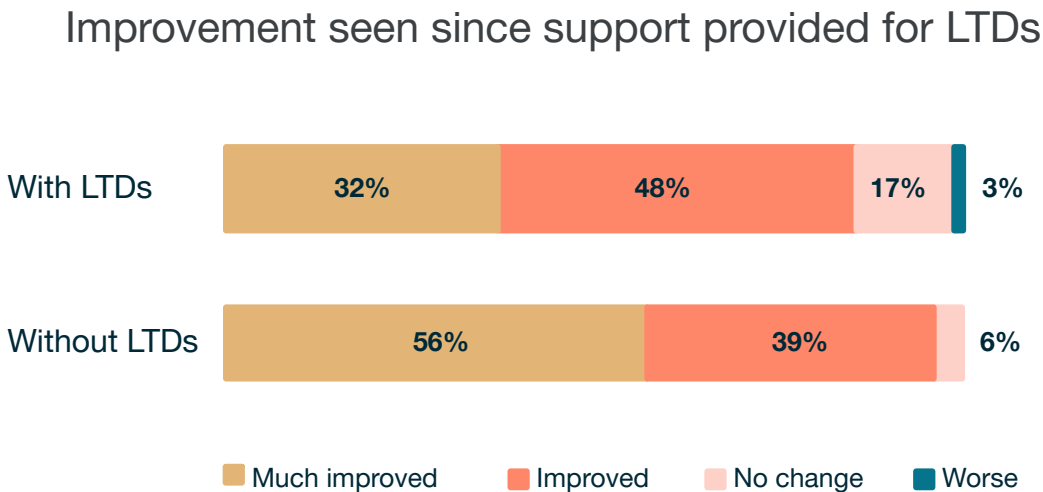
## Actions taken to support children's diagnosed or potential LTDs in 2022



## When parents of kids with LTDs took any of these actions to provide support, 80% of them saw improvements in their child's life.

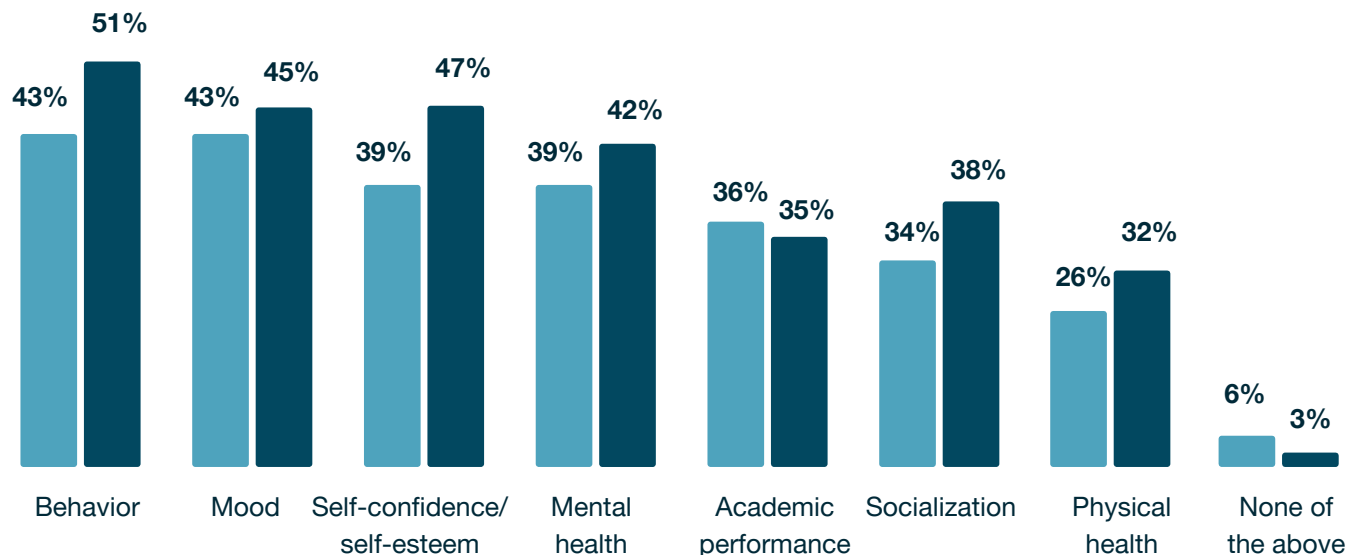
Additionally, **95% of parents of kids without LTDs** who provided support also saw improvement.

**For parents of kids with LTDs, nearly two-thirds (63%)** regret not seeking assistance sooner.



Since providing support, parents most often saw improvement in their child's behavior, mood, self-confidence, and mental health.

### Areas of improvement since providing support for LTDs



# Key takeaways

- While a vast majority of parents believe LTDs exist, most are still influenced by myths, misconceptions, and stigmas associated with LTDs.
- ✱ Most parents of kids with and without LTDs have experienced or seen these stigmas play out in real life.
- ✱ Kids with learning and thinking differences are facing increased challenges with emotional and mental health compared to their neurotypical peers. These stigmas only add to the problem, as they negatively impact the mental health of most kids with LTDs.
- ◆ While parents acknowledge that their kids are facing these challenges, many — especially parents of kids with LTDs — find it difficult to take action to support their child or don't know how to initiate a conversation.
- ◐ But when they do engage with their child around the challenges, most parents of kids with and without LTDs say their child has improved emotionally and academically.



# Methodology



# Demographics

Gender	LTD Parents	Typical Parents
Male	41%	34%
Female	59%	66%

Age Range	LTD Parents	Typical Parents
18-24	1%	1%
25-34	25%	16%
35-44	53%	45%
45-54	15%	24%
55+	6%	14%

Region	LTD Parents	Typical Parents
Northeast	21%	17%
Midwest	17%	19%
South	44%	45%
West	18%	19%

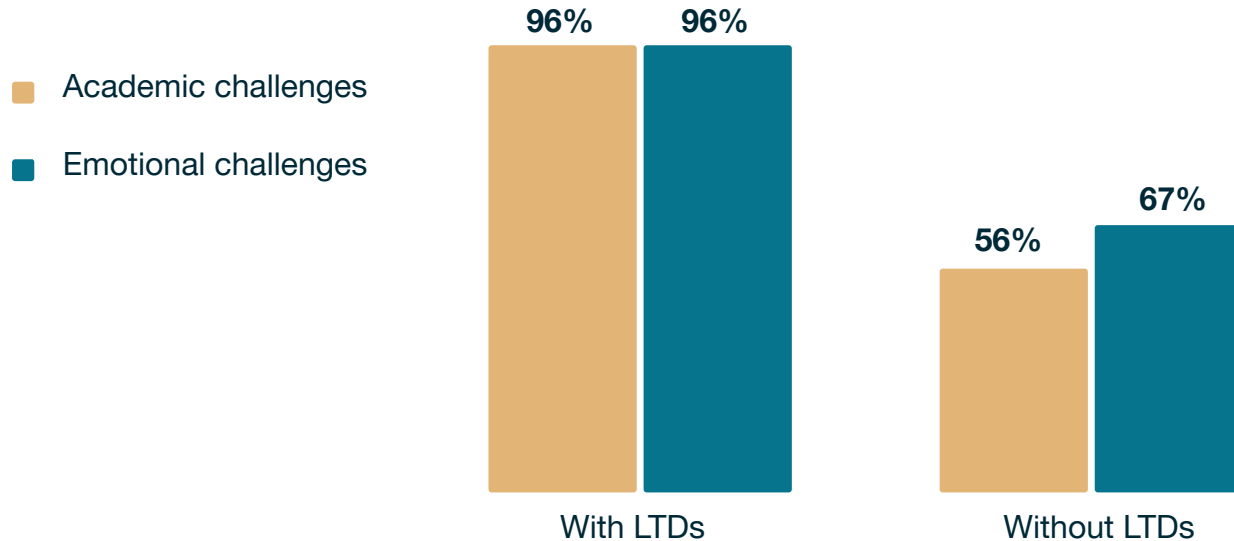
Employment Status	LTD Parents	Typical Parents
Employed full-time	68%	57%
Employed part-time	11%	14%
Homemaker	11%	12%
Unemployed	6%	8%
Retired	2%	7%
Student	1%	1%
Prefer not to answer	0%	1%



# **Appendix: Additional study findings**

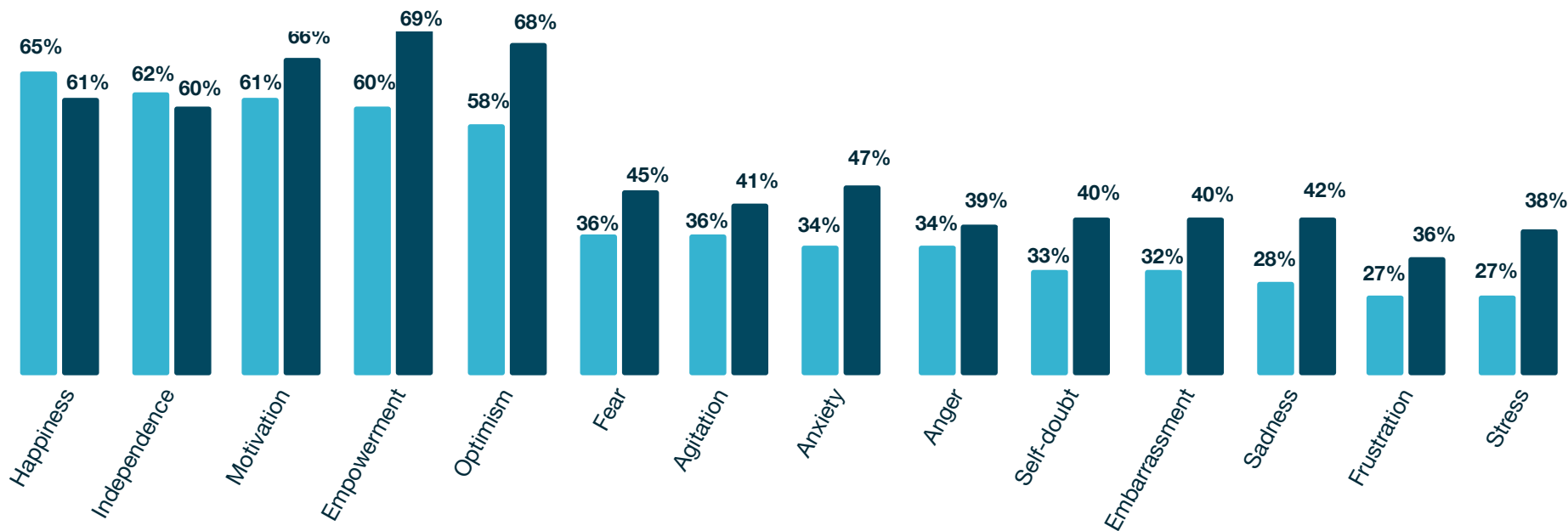
**Two years after the beginning of the pandemic, most parents agree their child has faced emotional and academic challenges during the past school year.**

Challenges experienced over the last school year

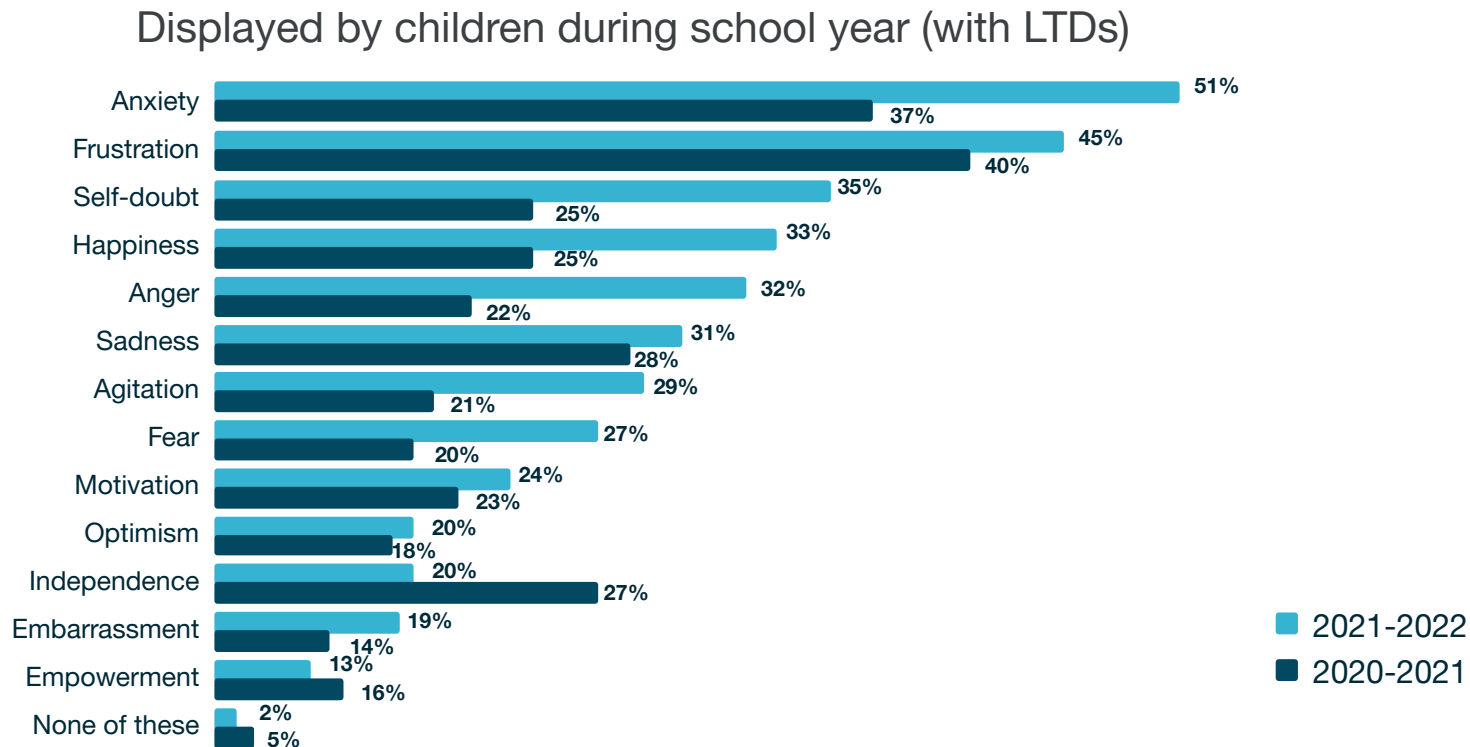


# Comparing children with and without LTDs, fewer children with LTDs saw improvement in their levels of optimism, anxiety, sadness, frustration, and stress over the course of the school year.

Better than beginning of school year

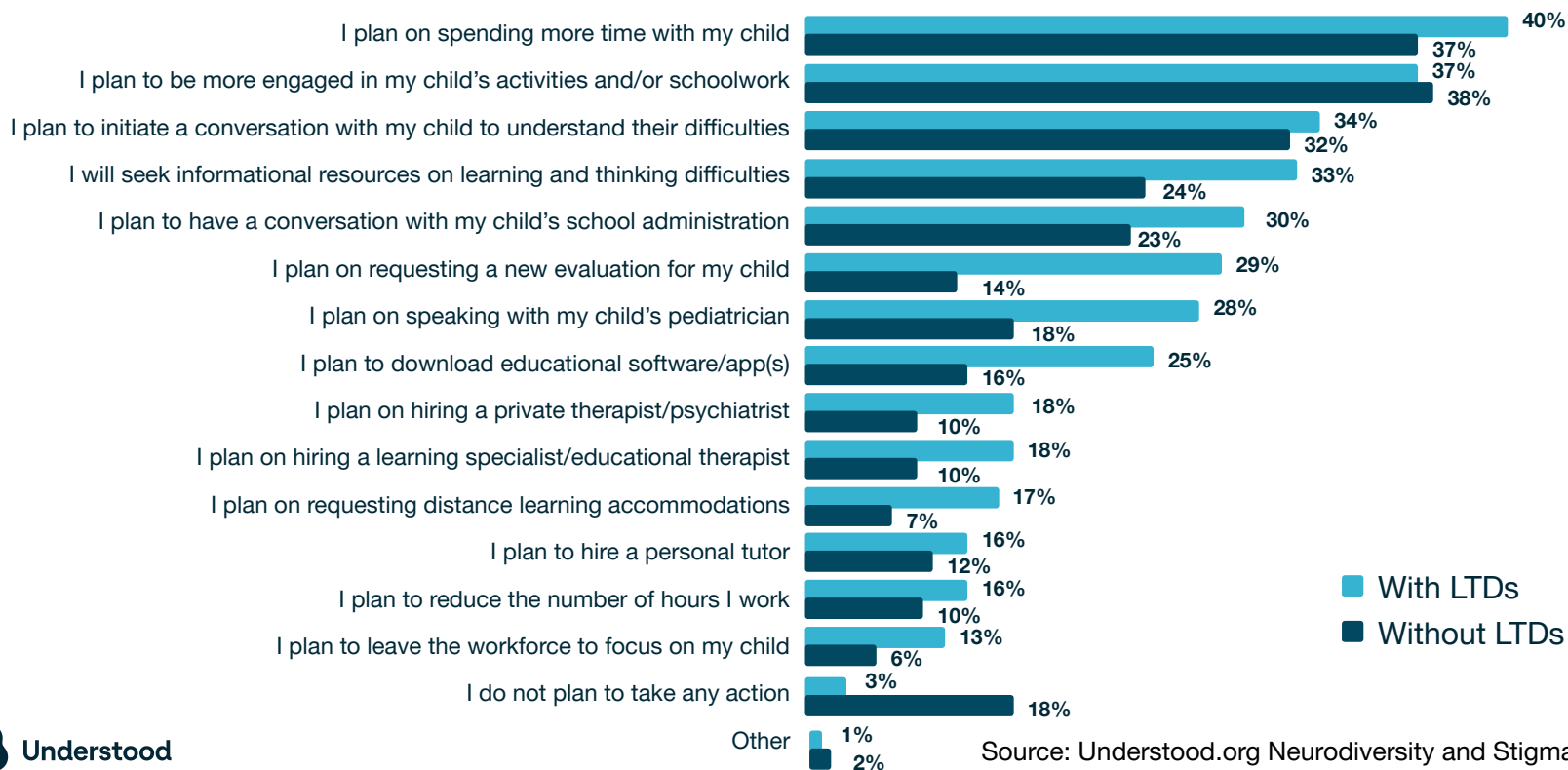


**Half of children with LTDs experienced anxiety during the 2021–22 school year, a significant increase compared to the prior year. Children with LTDs also experienced more self-doubt.**

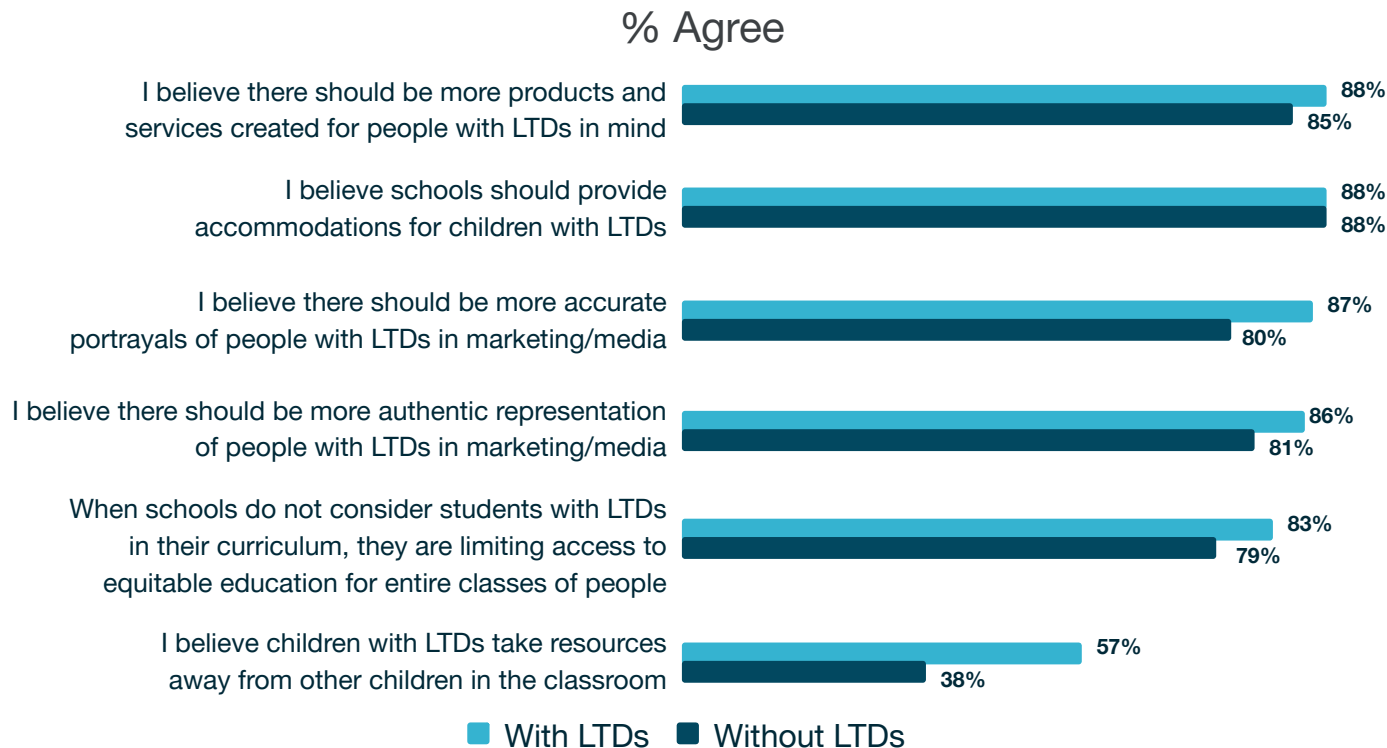


# Most parents plan to take some action(s) to support their child's emotional and academic challenges in the upcoming school year.

## Future actions to support child's LTDs or challenges



# Parents have varied perspectives on LTDs — and on what should be done to support people with LTDs.



For more  
information,  
visit  
Understood's  
[Media Center](#)