



Parenting mindsets

An unlock to helping parents help their kids

A market research segmentation of parents whose children learn and think differently

Over the years, studies have looked at how [parenting styles affect a child's life](#). Parents may be categorized as [authoritarian vs. authoritative](#). Or as having an [ambivalent vs. avoidant](#) attachment with their kids.

But parenting is a unique experience. Every family is unique. Understood wants to reach every parent, right where they are.

Parents of kids with learning and thinking differences, like ADHD and dyslexia, face day-to-day challenges that studies may not account for. And when they're not accounted for, these stories go unheard.



Why this matters

Fifty-seven percent of parents whose kids learn and think differently [aren't sure how to help them](#). Where to even *begin*. When these parents come to recognize their own strengths, they can lean into strategies that come more easily to them. And they can get help in areas that are harder.

When we at Understood know a parent's mindset, we can more easily reach them. *Really* reach them. Which means they'll be on their way to helping their child more quickly and with fewer bumps along the way.

Our approach

This research, done in three phases, was conducted in 2019. It was carried out by Understood in partnership with Consumer Dynamics, a market research firm, who recruited the samples. Quantitative analyses were conducted using rigorous statistical techniques ensuring a <5% margin of error.



Qualitative exploration

8 phone interviews and 10 in-person ethnography interviews in homes of parents of kids who learn and think differently across the country



Quantitative discovery

Survey of ~1,000 parents of kids who learn and think differently from a nationally representative panel

Findings

- 1. **Almost all parents take action when their kids are struggling with learning and thinking differences. But they do it in their own way and on their own timeline.**

The research revealed **five distinct mindsets** among parents whose kids learn and think differently. Each of these mindsets has tremendous strengths. No one mindset is better than another.

21%

Empathizing

Open-minded and nurturing. These parents feel their children’s emotions – both the ups and bumps.

18%

Determined

Involved and supportive. These parents take pride in instilling the importance of hard work. At times, they can get distracted by that.

19%

Persevering

Caring and attentive. These parents know how to be resilient themselves. They may be dealing with a lot.

22%

Optimistic

Loving and present. These parents have a glass-half-full perspective on life – and sometimes may overlook the details.



19%

Self-Reliant

Trusting and strong. These parents value teaching independence. They might have very high expectations.

2. **Anybody can have any of these mindsets.** Things like race, gender, income, marital status, and type of school don't make a difference.

Across the five mindsets, these factors played no statistically significant role:

Demographics

(gender, race, religion)

Socioeconomic factors

(income, where people live)

Household dynamics

(family size, marital status)

Support resources

(type of school, type of support system)

3. **Parents in the same household usually don't have the same parenting mindset.** In nearly every two-parent family we interviewed in the qualitative portion of the research, the parents had different mindsets. The quantitative survey showed that in 55% of the households, a spouse or partner shared parenting decisions equally. Each parent bringing a different perspective can be helpful. But it may also create some friction.



My husband doesn't believe in this stuff. He thinks it's an excuse. So I couldn't even bring it up with him.

— Parent



In sum

Each parenting mindset we identified has immense strengths. Every parent brings their own gifts to the table. Maybe it's positivity. A deep sense of nurturing. Or a sense of trust they've built with their kids.

Each mindset also has areas of opportunity — things that take more work or that parents can lean on other people for.

Our hypothesis is that the more a parent knows who they are and what they're good at, the easier and potentially faster it'll be for them to get the support their child needs.

How we're acting on this

These five mindsets have helped us create content, community groups, and exercise modules. We've looked at how parents with these mindsets may respond to different products and solutions. For example, Empathizers might benefit from a how-to on managing big feelings. Determineds might be more receptive to checklists and schedules that showcase how hard everyone is working.

A note

Our research focuses on parents of kids who learn and think differently. But what we learned can apply to *all* parents. We know that parenting challenges are [universal](#).

For more info

We'd love to discuss this research with you, hear about your research, and partner with you on new research. Reach out at knowledge@understood.org.

Other reference materials

In developing this research, the team at Understood referenced a wide range of field literature. Some are noted above. These others, while not cited, were helpful background.

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