

media release

Realities of childcare ease guilt for Australian parents

Goodstart Early Learning launches nationally with commitment to champion early years

Tuesday 15 November 2011: Australian parents are unnecessarily dealing with feelings of negativity and guilt when it comes to placing their child in childcare, research commissioned by Goodstart Early Learning found today.

The consumer research study found that while more than seven in 10 (75 per cent) parents say they initially have negative feelings such as anxiety and guilt when placing their child in childcare, more than nine in 10 parents (91 per cent) feel positive about their decision once their child had been in care for some time.

Parents say that the positive reality of childcare – including the relationship they build with staff and the fact their child enjoys being there to learn, develop and grow in confidence – helped alleviate initial concerns.

The findings were released today to coincide with the announcement that more than 650 ABC Learning centres across the country will be officially renamed Goodstart Early Learning. Goodstart has owned and operated the ABC Learning Centres – Australia’s largest childcare and early learning network – since 2009, with a workforce of more than 15,000 staff caring for and educating more than 72,000 children.

The announcement of Goodstart Early Learning was made by the Minister for Child Care, the Hon Kate Ellis MP, at a centre in Indooroopilly, Queensland.


Speaking at the launch event today, CEO Julia Davison said the organisation’s transformation had gone far beyond a new name and logo.

“As a non-profit founded by four of Australia’s most recognised charitable organisations, we’ve turned a challenge into an opportunity and set out in a new direction that places children and families at the heart of everything we do,” Ms Davison said.

“We know parents’ decision to place their child in childcare isn’t taken lightly, which is why it’s crucial we support parents and families by helping to settle their child into the centre and making their days with us stimulating, social and fun.”

The consumer research revealed that one in five parents often feel alone and overwhelmed making decisions for their child and confirmed that 43 per cent of all parents feel there’s so much information out there, it’s hard to know what’s right and wrong.

Childhood development expert Professor Collette Tayler, Chair of Early Childhood Education and Care at Melbourne University’s Graduate School of Education, said while the importance of young children’s health and wellbeing was widely accepted, greater understanding was needed about the impact early experiences have on brain development, and the important role that early learning plays.



“While the brain is the base for vital functions such as breathing and heart rate, it drives the higher functions of language and reasoning too,” Professor Tayler said.

“We know that conditions and experiences in early life shape how our brain develops. Parents may be surprised to know the extent to which an infant and very young child’s environment influence the way they learn to think. Interacting and responding to children’s interests really makes a difference.

“It is the role of both parents and educators to support our very youngest children. Research across the neurobiological, behavioural and social sciences tell us the first five years of life are hugely important for children’s learning and development.”

Goodstart’s consumer research found that once made aware that evidence shows learning and development is cumulative and that what takes place in the first five years of a child’s life lasts a lifetime, 50 per cent of parents place more importance on early learning than they did before.

Ms Davison said Goodstart had initiated an organisation-wide change program to lift the quality of early learning, collaborating with others in the sector as well as sharing this important message with all parents across the country.

“Given the science, it’s important we get the message out about the importance of the first five years and engage families to actively promote early learning with their children, whether it’s in a home or childcare environment,” she said.

“Early learning can take place in all environments, including the home, but it’s important that we break the ‘guilt cycle’ that’s often associated with formal childcare and early learning.”

Ms Davison said the new name signalled a more outward-looking focus for the organisation after a period of enormous change.

“Partnership is a key part of the Goodstart story,” Ms Davison said. “We are committed to help raise the quality of early learning in Australia. To do this, we need to partner with our fantastic staff, committed families, governments, the community and the childcare sector to give Australia’s children the best start in life.”

Goodstart officially opened the first Goodstart Early Learning centre in Indooroopilly today – the first of more than 650 centres across the country making the transition from ABC Learning to Goodstart Early Learning over the coming months.

Goodstart Early Learning Indooroopilly was badly damaged in the January floods and has been entirely re-built and re-fitted. All centres across Australia will transition to the new signage over the coming months, marking the occasion with local celebrations.

- ENDS -

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Notes to Editors:

About the research methodology:

The consumer research was commissioned by Goodstart Early Learning, and conducted through an online survey of Australian parents by The Clever Stuff Market Research over the period of 2nd November to 7th November 2011. A nationally representative sample of 1,000 Australian parents with children 18 and under living at home was surveyed for the research.

Research data:

- *The Importance of Early Learning*

To understand the importance parents place on early learning and other stages of learning parents were required to do the following task: For this task you have been allocated 100 tokens that represent the importance of various stages of your child's learning and development. You are required to allocate the 100 tokens according to how important you believe each stage is.

Later on parents were asked to complete the task again after they read the following statement about early learning. "Evidence shows learning and development is cumulative; and the learning and development which takes place in the first five years of a child's life lasts a lifetime."

Table 1 – Importance of the stages of learning

	Allocation Before	Allocation After
Early years (0-5 years old)	30	42
Primary school (6-12 years old)	27	24
High school (13-18 years old)	25	20
Tertiary education (university, TAFE)	17	14
Total	100	100

Overall parents placed the most importance on early years (30), followed by primary school (27), high school (25) and tertiary education (17). After parents read the statement about early learning 50% of parents placed more importance on early years overall (42) and slightly less on the other stages of learning. Similar results were reported for the largest 3 states, NSW 48%, VIC 51% and QLD 53%. Bringing greater awareness to early learning has increased the perceived importance of early learning to parents.

- *Feelings Towards Long Daycare*

Parents say that the positive reality of childcare, including the relationship they build with staff and the fact their child enjoys being there to learn, develop and grow in confidence, helped alleviate initial concerns.

Overall of parents 46% (n=464) had used long daycare and of these 39% (n=182) are currently using long daycare now. Parents that have used long daycare were asked about how they first felt and then how they felt after some time of using long daycare.

Table 2 – Difference in feelings when first used long daycare and then after some time

	All Feelings		Main Feeling	
	Initial	After	Initial	After
Accepting	21%	32%	5%	11%
Anxious	44%	5%	17%	1%
Confident	19%	38%	5%	12%
Depressed	5%	1%	0%	0%
Fearful	15%	2%	2%	0%
Guilty	33%	9%	11%	4%

Happy	20%	41%	4%	16%
Nervous	48%	3%	15%	0%
Neglectful	8%	3%	1%	1%
Optimistic	26%	20%	8%	3%
Proud	12%	15%	2%	3%
Organised	19%	28%	2%	5%
Relaxed	12%	42%	2%	13%
Relieved	15%	25%	4%	8%
Respected	12%	15%	0%	1%
Sad	30%	5%	7%	2%
Shameful	3%	1%	0%	0%
Stressed	21%	4%	3%	2%
Supported	31%	39%	4%	12%
Understood	17%	23%	1%	3%
Welcomed	38%	35%	6%	4%
All Positive	72%	91%	44%	90%
All Negative	75%	20%	56%	10%

Chart 1 – Main initial feelings when putting children into daycare

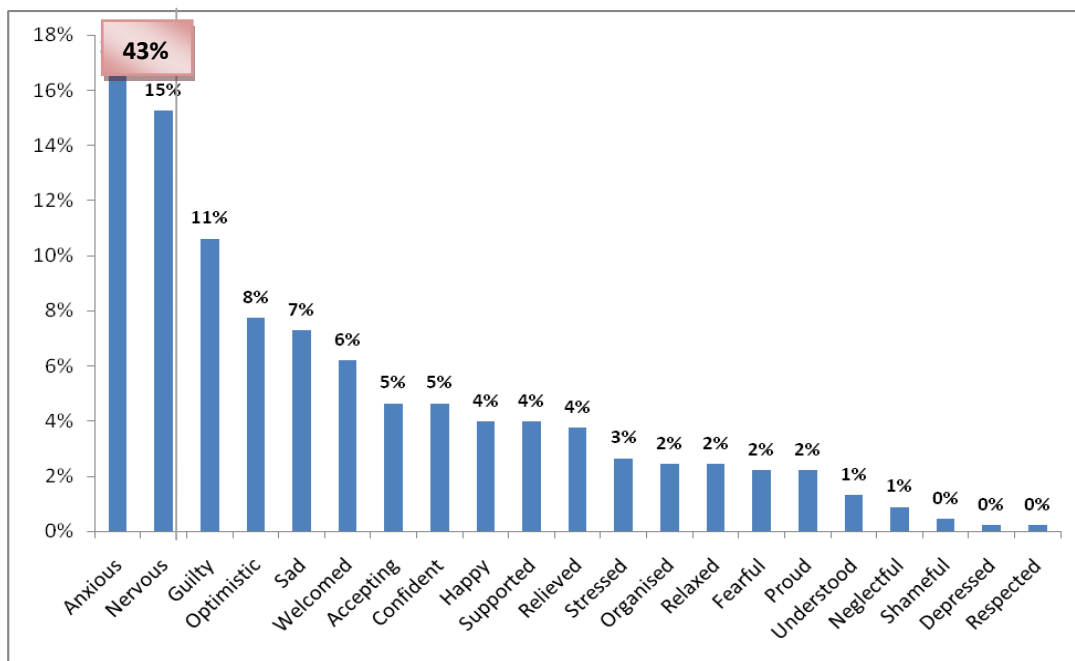


Chart 2 – Main feelings after children have been in daycare for some time

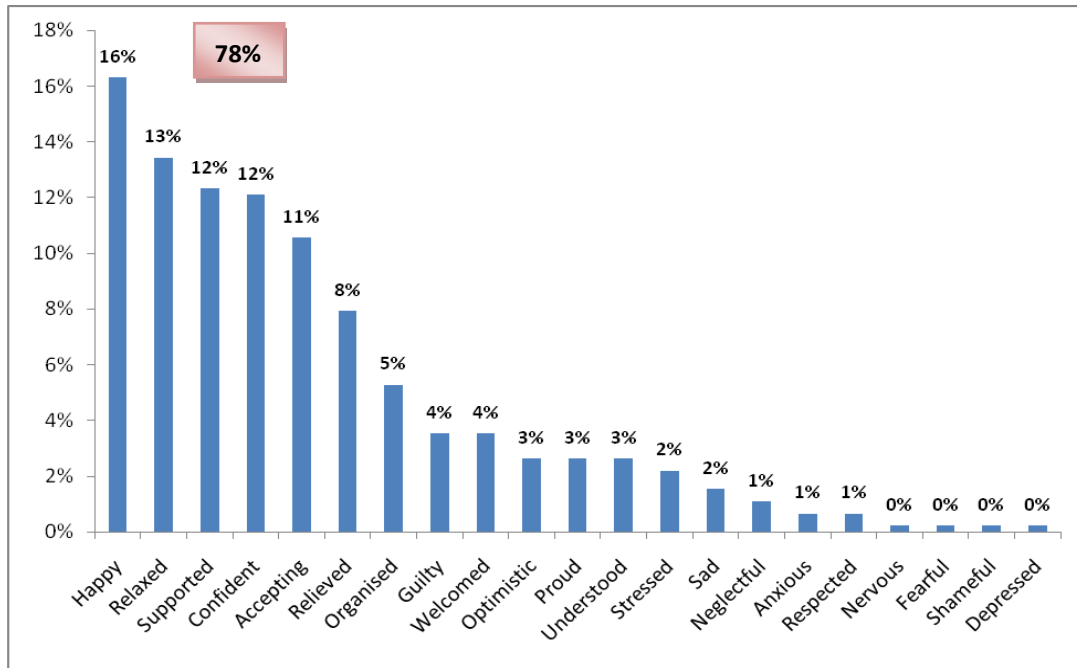


Table 3 – Mains reasons parents changed their feelings about daycare

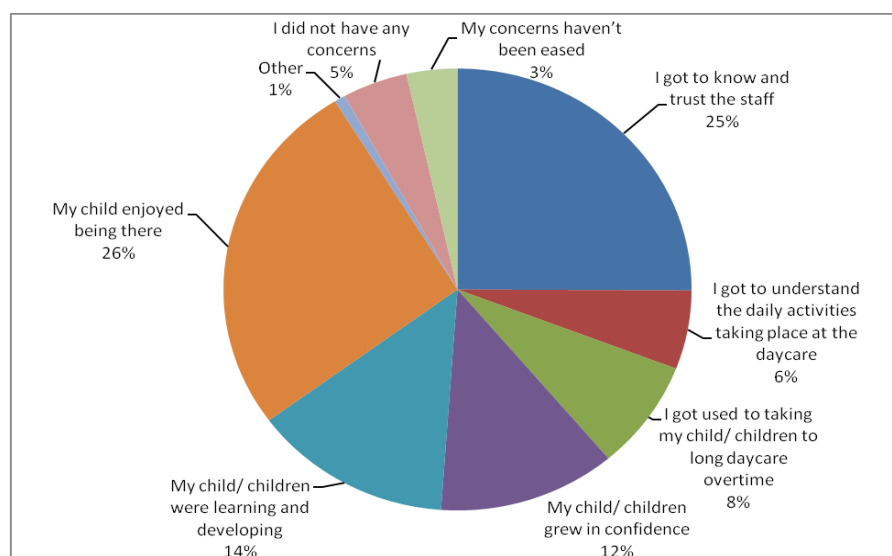
	Main Influence
Clear communication each day regarding your child e.g. sleep, food, activities	16%
Safe and secure environment	11%
Convenient to home or work	9%
Centre provides regular feedback on my child's progress	8%
Centre environment is positive and the children are happy, cont	7%
Staff have quality relationships with my child/ children	7%
Staff are warm and friendly	5%
Staff work well with me to help grow and develop my child	5%
Parent input in decision-making is encouraged	5%
Centre meets the needs of my child	4%
Availability at times/days you require	4%
Clear communication from centre regarding staff and operational	4%
High standard of hygiene/cleanliness	2%
A leader in early learning and care	2%
Good quality, qualified and experienced staff	2%
Innovative & creative programs assisting childhood development	2%
Convenient operating hours	1%
Good value for money	1%

High quality, modern and well maintained facilities and resources	1%
Stimulating room environments i.e. toys, books, artwork, education	1%
Other (please specify)	1%
A company that I trust	1%
Variety of indoor/outdoor space (shade protected)	1%
Uses a nationally recognised & accredited curriculum framework	1%
Centre actively engaged with local community	1%
Good balance between group and one-on-one activities	1%
Sleeping area is quiet and comforting	0%
Staff are clean and well presented	0%
High carer to child ratio	0%
Low staff turnover	0%
Owned by a viable and stable company	0%
Centre meets needs of my community	0%
Centre provides healthy, nutritious food	0%
Special events at centre e.g. Book Week, Dental Week	0%
The program is catered to your child's individual needs	0%

Overall the main reasons that parents changed their opinions about long daycare were due to communication between the centre and the parent (32%), the environment (28%) and the staff (18%).

When asked what eased their concerns about using long daycare parents who had used long daycare (n=399) felt it was getting to know and trust the staff (25%), their child enjoyed being there (26%) and children were learning and developing (14%). The results for the 3 largest states were it was getting to know and trust the staff (NSW 26%, VIC 28% and QLD 24%), their child enjoyed being there (NSW 25%, VIC 24% and QLD 27%) and children were learning and developing (NSW 14%, VIC 15% and QLD 16%).

Chart 3 – Eased concerns about using long daycare



- *Parenting*

Parents were asked to rate various statements on a 5 point scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree. All responses are reported in Table 4.

Table 4 – Parenting Statements

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Not applicable
I feel calm and in control as a parent	2%	8%	21%	48%	21%	1%
I often feel alone and overwhelmed making decisions for my child	15%	43%	21%	15%	5%	1%
There is so much information out there, it's hard to know what's right and wrong	5%	20%	31%	34%	9%	1%
I trust my instincts as a parent	1%	2%	11%	47%	38%	1%
No one knows my child better than me	1%	3%	16%	39%	40%	1%
Since having a second child, I feel more confident and self-assured as a parent	2%	4%	15%	33%	28%	20%
I seek other people's opinions often when it comes to parenting	5%	20%	38%	29%	6%	2%
I trust no one except for professional opinions	14%	42%	32%	7%	3%	2%