

Parent Experiences With the First 5 California *Kit for New Parents*

Research Brief



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The First 5 California *Kit for New Parents* is a free resource for California families. Packaged in a reusable tote bag, the *Kit* includes parenting books, children's books, and other information and resources to support families. The *Kit*, which represents a significant investment for First 5 California, is intended for all parents of young children, and is available in English, Spanish, Chinese, Korean, and Vietnamese. In the 2021–2022 fiscal year, approximately 83,000 *Kits* were distributed throughout the state.



F5CA contracted with the American Institutes for Research (AIR) and its partners, Social Policy Research Associates and Allen, Shea & Associates, to evaluate the *Kit for New Parents*—to assess the distribution of *Kits* to families across the state, to describe the experiences of families that receive the *Kit*, and to estimate outcomes associated with *Kit* receipt. This research brief explores parents' experiences with the *Kit* and their perceptions of its benefits. Findings highlighted in this brief draw on interviews with 119 parents from across the state who received the *Kit*. (The *Data Sources and Study Sample* box at the end of the brief provides further details about the interview sample.)

Parents Reported Positive Experiences With the *Kit* Resources

Overall, parents had very positive reactions to the *Kit*, which includes two parenting books; two children's books; information on poison control, establishing legal parentage, and children's oral health; an infant toothbrush; and a KN95 mask.

Most parents reported that the parenting books were the most useful resources in the *Kit*. The *Kit* includes *What to Do When Your Child Gets Sick*, which provides basic safety, healthcare, and first aid instruction and advice for parents. Parents described the book as comprehensive, practical, and accessible, with easy-to-read, step-by-step guidance. Parents reported that the book provided current, credible, and time-sensitive information. First-time parents found the book especially helpful.

The *Kit* also includes the *California Parent Guide*, which provides guidance on pregnancy, children's growth and development from birth to age 5, and advice on child-rearing and supporting learning and healthy development. Parents describe this resource as comprehensive and user-friendly, with useful tips for supporting young children and helpful information about child development and developmental milestones.

Most parents shared positive feedback about many of the other resources in the *Kit*. Parents appreciated the *Kit*'s other physical resources that can be used with children, such as the infant toothbrush and the *Numbers Touch-and-Feel* children's book. Additionally, many parents appreciated the Healthy Smiles brochure and reported placing the *Kit*'s poison control magnet on their refrigerator for easy access in case of an emergency.

"I thought that the information [in *What to Do When Your Child Gets Sick*] was super informative and beneficial ... as much as I try to stay educated, there are a lot of things in there that I wasn't aware of."

— Expecting parent

"It's really nice to have that little backup, because it always seems that when something does happen, it's at 2 in the morning, on the weekend, when you can't call the doctor."

— Parent of 18-month-old

"The Parent Guide [is] very succinct [and] to the point ... good topics, and by age, and I like that. What do I need to know? What do I need to do? Nobody tells you how to be a parent. Watching our parents, it doesn't necessarily mean that they have the best answers ... but this [Parent Guide] is good."

— Parent of 4-year-old

A few of the items in the *Kit* received mixed reviews from parents. Many parents liked *Three Brainy Birds Spreading the Word*, a children's book that intentionally lacks text so parents can create their own stories with their children. However, some parents found the book confusing (and some lacked the energy to make up a story while facing the demands of caring for a baby). Parent response to the *Give Your Child the Legal Rights They Deserve* brochure, which provides information about obtaining a voluntary declaration of parentage, was even more divided. Among those parents who provided direct feedback about this brochure, about half said that it was useful because it educated them about a topic that they were not aware of previously, but the other half indicated it was not useful, primarily because it was confusing or not relevant to their family situation. Similarly, although many appreciated the KN95 mask, about one third did not find it useful because they did not need it.

Parents Highlighted Benefits of the *Kit*

Parents described a number of benefits of receiving the *Kit*, including increased knowledge, confidence, and ability to care for their child.



Parents found the *Kit* resources particularly beneficial in helping them support their children's health.

Most parents agreed that the *Kit* resources helped reduce their concern and anxiety about their children's health and helped them feel more confident caring for their child when they are sick. The *Kit* also provides information to help parents implement healthy practices. In particular, parents reported that the *Kit* helped them to:

- Identify and respond to minor illnesses at home (e.g., fevers, congestion), reducing visits to the doctor and emergency department.
- Improve children's dental hygiene (e.g., starting toothbrushing at an earlier age, implementing consistent toothbrushing).
- Improve children's diets, by introducing healthier foods and drinks.
- Address home safety issues, such as ensuring children do not have access to medicine or other toxic substances.
- Implement safe sleep practices with infants.



Parents reported that the *Kit* helped improve their knowledge of child development.

Most parents agreed that the *Kit* resources helped them better understand how to help their baby grow and develop. In particular, parents identified the *California Parent Guide* in the *Kit* as one of the most helpful resources for bolstering their knowledge of children's developmental milestones and strategies to support children's growth.



Parents felt the *Kit* helped improve their parenting confidence.

Many parents reported that the *Kit* increased their confidence in their parenting skills. Most of these parents pointed to the *Kit*'s guidance on parenting practices, health and wellness, pregnancy and child birth, and safety. In general, parents felt more informed, less anxious, and better prepared because of the *Kit* resources.



Some parents reported that the *Kit* helped them implement new parenting practices.

Some parents said the *Kit* gave them ideas for fostering their children's learning and development, such as talking, singing, and playing, and implementing consistent routines. However, some parents shared that the *Kit* did not change their parenting strategies. Most of these parents reported having an older child and feeling confident in their parenting approach because of this experience.



“The resources have made me feel more confident in parenting and figuring out how I want to parent and be a parent, versus getting a lot of advice from my own parents, my in-laws, or everyone else that's a parent suggesting to do it the way they did it, which may not be the best thing or may not be what I want to do. So, getting actual information that's not just a myth or just a ritual of someone else's family is more helpful.”

– Parent of 2-month-old infant



Most parents reported that the *Kit* improved their understanding of

existing services their family may need. The *Kit* includes information and links to websites that families can refer to when seeking additional information on child care and child development, among other topics. Parents appreciated learning about programs and services such as WIC, CalFresh and food banks, poison control, and child care options.

“When [the Parent Guide] mentions websites, phone numbers, that has been really helpful because that’s information [and] other additional resources that I didn’t know about. That has been really helpful, especially the major websites to take care of yourself or your kids or health. It’s free information, it’s always available, but I didn’t know about [it].”

– Parent of 2-month-old infant

Considerations for the Future

Throughout interviews, parents provided feedback on ways that the *Kit* could be improved. Only a few parents suggested removing items from the *Kit*, such as the *Three Brainy Birds* children’s book and the KN95 mask, primarily because they do not use them or do not plan to use them. Others had suggestions for additions or modifications:

- Simplify the legal rights brochure and provide more context about why the brochure might be useful given specific family situations.
- Consider adding digital resources, but maintain a focus on physical items given parents’ preferences for tangible resources and concerns about accessibility for all parents.
- Add more resources focused on parenting strategies and guidance on developmental guidelines.
- Supplement the *Kit* with supports for parents with older children.
- Add resources related to parental leave, maternal and mental health, and breastfeeding and using formula.
- Include information on how parents can obtain basic items for their baby.

Other parents felt that the *Kit* was useful as is and did not recommend additions or modifications to its contents.

DATA SOURCES AND STUDY SAMPLE

The study team recruited 119 parent recipients of the *Kit* to participate in interviews to provide more in-depth feedback. These parents were recruited through organizations that distribute the *Kit* and from the pool of respondents to the study’s online survey. The study team conducted one round of interviews with parents soon after they received the *Kit* and again approximately 2 months later to gather their reflections over time. Ninety parents from the original group also participated in the second round of interviews.

Interview participants represented 24 counties across the state and were fairly diverse. More than half of the 119 parents in the first round of interviews identified themselves as Hispanic (67%). Others identified as Asian (11%), White (9%), Black (3%), multiracial (8%), or other (2%). Forty-five percent of parents reported an annual household income of \$30,000 or less. The demographic profile of the subsample completing the second round of interviews was comparable to the full sample completing the first round.