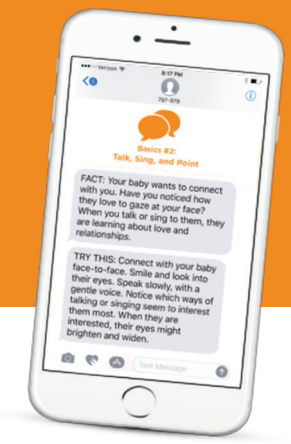
BASICS ISSUE BRIEF, MAY 2026

Parental Use of Basics Insights Text Messages when Children Have Delays Or Disabilities



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Basics Insights text messaging program delivers twice weekly messages to caregivers of children aged from birth to 5. Messages align developmentally with typical age and stage progressions, with no accommodation for developmental delays or disabilities. Nonetheless, many parents of children with developmental delays or disabilities are subscribers. This brief summarizes their perspectives regarding the program and compares their experiences to those of caregivers whose children do not have identified delays or disabilities.

The data for this brief is from the Spring 2024 and 2025 administrations of the *Basics Parental Assessment of Child Developmental Status* (BPACDS), a caregiver questionnaire that captures parent-reported indicators of children's cognitive and social-emotional development. Reading-related behaviors—a child asking to be read to or trying to read to themselves—are also covered. The assessment is administered annually to subscribers whose children are at least eighteen months of age and have been receiving Basics Insights text messages for at least six months.

KEY FINDINGS

Based on parents' BPACDS responses, children at any given age who have diagnosed delays or disabilities show fewer social-emotional and cognitive skills compared to their peers.

Even so, this brief finds **no systematic differences** in the responses given by parents whose children have been diagnosed with developmental delays or disabilities and their peers whose children have not been. Comparing the two groups of parents, response patterns are essentially the same regarding the following:

- The frequencies with which they apply each of five Basics-related parenting practices
- The number of Basics Insights text messages they try to use (i.e., all, most, some, few, none)
- Levels of agreement regarding whether the parent:
  - would recommend the Basics Insights program to others
  - learns new things from Basics Insights about their child
  - learns new things from Basics Insights to do with their child
  - because of Basics Insights, thinks more about how to help their child learn

INTRODUCTION

Prevalence estimates vary, but surveys over the past decade find that between 5 and 20 percent of U.S. children have a diagnosed developmental delay or disability (DD) (*Zablotsky et al.*, 2019; *Zablotsky et al.*, 2023).

Compared to other parents, parents of these children tend to report less confidence in their parenting practices and lower satisfaction with being a parent (*Jandrić & Kurtović*, 2021; *Wilder et al.*, 2004). They also report higher levels of parenting stress (*Baker et al.*, 2003; *Webster et al.*, 2008) and exhibit more negative affect and behavior (*Brown et al.*, 2011).

The Basics Insights (BI) text messaging program does not tailor its content to account for DDs, yet it may still provide meaningful support for a caregiver whose child has a DD.

QUESTIONS THIS ISSUE BRIEF ADDRESSES

1. **Child Development.** How do parents' responses to BPACDS items that measure social-emotional and cognitive skill differ depending on whether the child has a DD?
2. **Parenting Practices.** Compared to other parents, do those whose children have a DD differ in how often they apply Basics-related parenting practices?
3. **Use of Messages.** Compared to other parents, do those whose children have a DD report using fewer of the BI texts, the same number, or more?
4. **Helpfulness of Messages.** Compared to other parents, do those whose children are diagnosed with a DD consider the messages to be as useful?

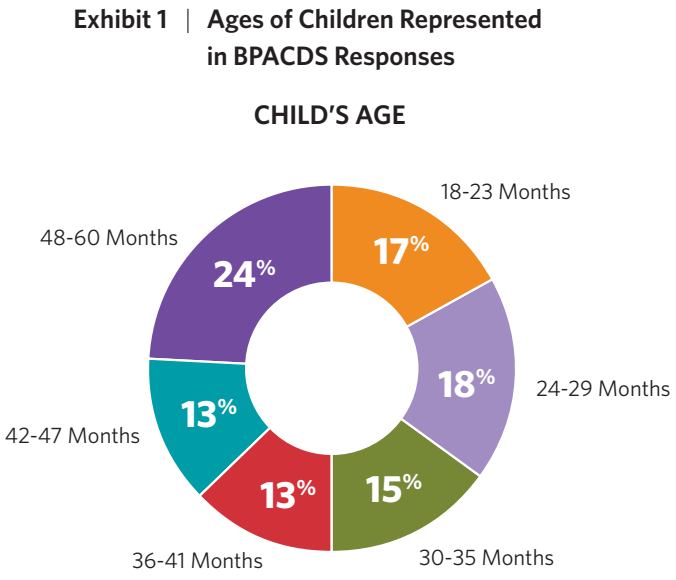
THE SAMPLE

The data come from the Spring 2024 and Spring 2025 rounds of the *Basics Parental Assessment of Child Developmental Status* (BPACDS). Parents were invited to participate if they had been enrolled in Basics Insights for at least six months and the child was at least 18 months of age at the time of the survey. A total of 2,259 caregivers completed the survey.[1]

Respondents were asked to indicate whether their child had been diagnosed with a delay or disability in any of the following domains: cognitive, physical, communication/language, social-emotional, adaptive development, or other areas of development. They could select more than one domain, if applicable.

Exhibit 1 presents the age distribution of the children represented in the sample.

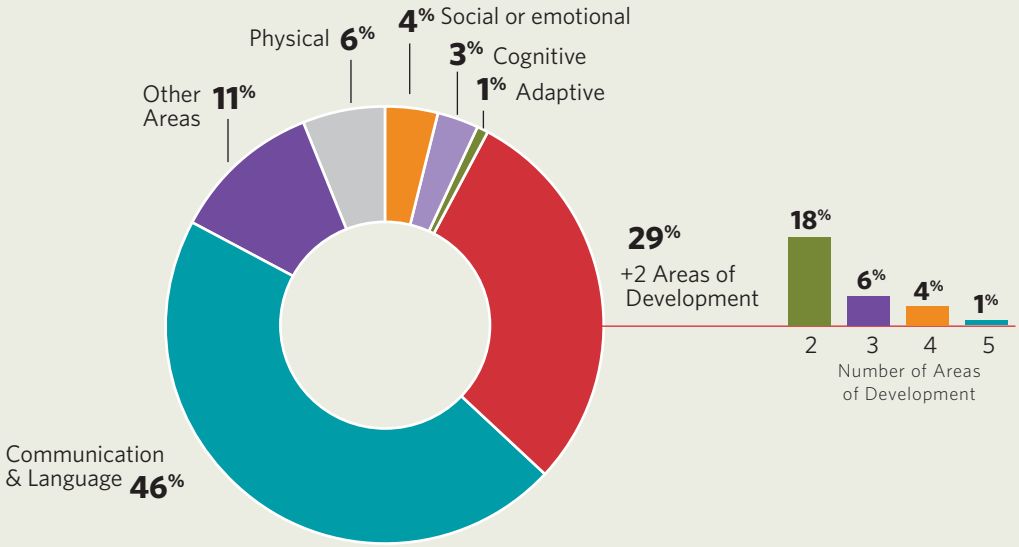
Exhibit 1 | Ages of Children Represented in BPACDS Responses



1 The racial/ethnic composition was as follows: 41.2% White or Caucasian, 14.6% Hispanic (Spanish-speaking), 12.4% Hispanic (English-speaking), 13.0% Black or African American, 4.3% Asian, and 14.4% from other racial and ethnic categories. Regarding education level, 49.5% had a four-year college degree or higher, 28.3% had some college experience, and 22.2% had a high school diploma/GED or less.

Exhibit 2 shows that 85.4% of parents reported no child-related DD. Among the 14.6% who did report a DD, the most common domain was communication and language delays, identified by 46% of these parents. Nearly a third of parents who reported any DD selected more than one domain (n=98).

Exhibit 2 | Patterns of Developmental Delays and Disabilities (Among the 14.6% with a DD)



FINDINGS

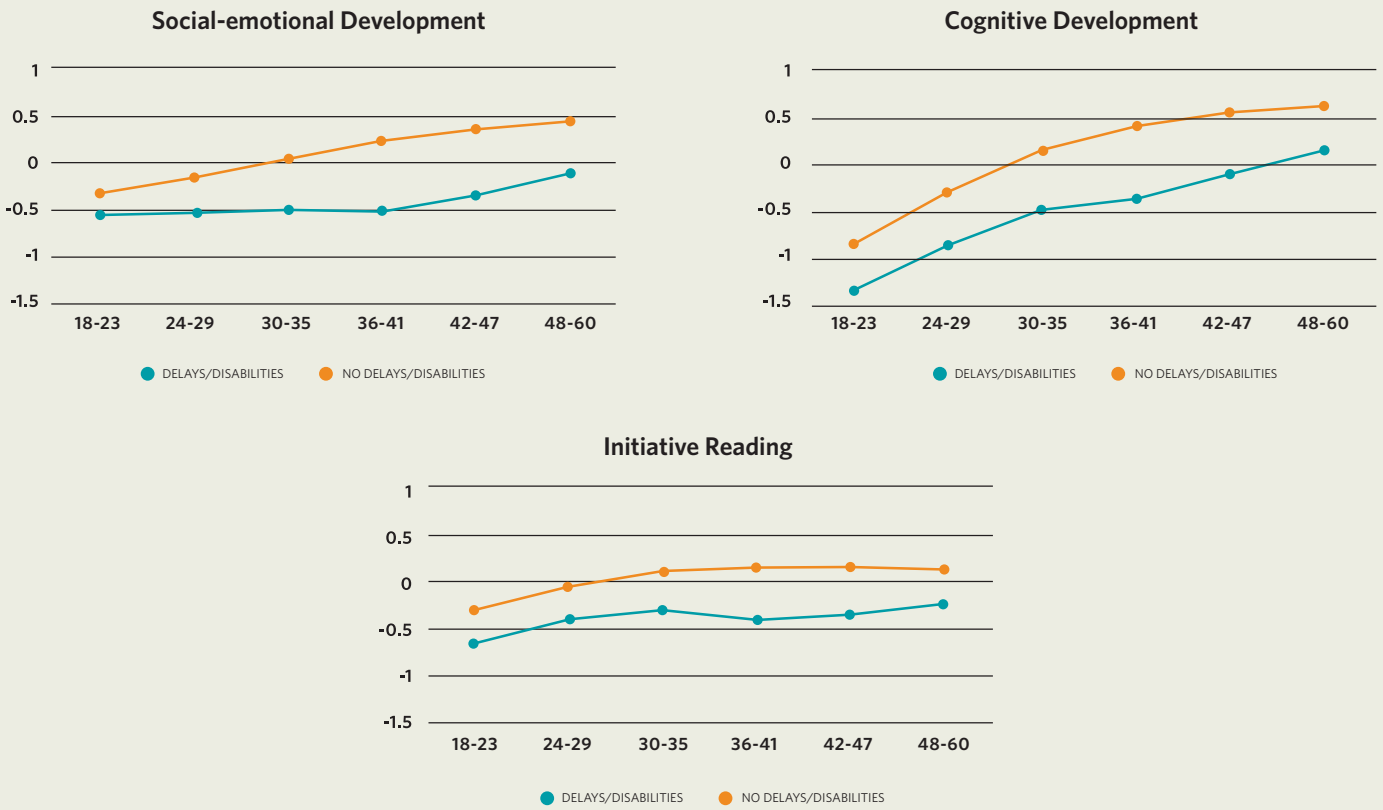
Child Development Differences

The child developmental items on the BPACDS questionnaire pertain to social-emotional and cognitive skills and reading-related behaviors. The latter refer to how often the child asks the parent to read and how often they try to read or pretend to read to themselves.

Panels A, B, and C of **Exhibit 3** show the patterns across these domains.[2] First, regardless of developmental diagnosis, the relationship between skill and age is positive: the linear relationship between age and development is upward sloping in all domains except reading-related behaviors, where the lines level off after about 30 months. Second, at every age, children with one or more DDs show lower average scores in all three domains compared to peers without a DD.

2 Each line on Exhibit 3 was smoothed using a 3-point moving average. For example, the value shown for ages 24-29 months reflects the average of three adjacent groups: 18-23 months, 24-29 months, and 30-35 months. This approach clarifies the overall age trend by reducing the impact of unsystematic variation at individual points. The first and last points on each line use the actual point values for 18-23 months and 48-60 months because there are no adjacent groups on one side to include in the average.

Exhibit 3 | Developmental Outcomes in Children With or Without Delays or Disabilities



Controlling for child age, the average skill differences between children with and without DDs are 0.51 standard deviation (SD) for social-emotional development, 0.60 SD for cognitive development, and 0.43 SD for initiative reading. In addition, controlling for race/ethnicity and parental years of schooling has no impact on these findings.

Parenting Practices Appear Unrelated to DDs

The survey questionnaire includes 5 questions about parenting practices. Parents report how often they:

1. hug and cuddle with their child;
2. talk about feelings (theirs or the child's);
3. talk about numbers or count objects;
4. play together;
5. read or look at books together.

Responses range from *more than once a day* to never (including the *child is too young).*

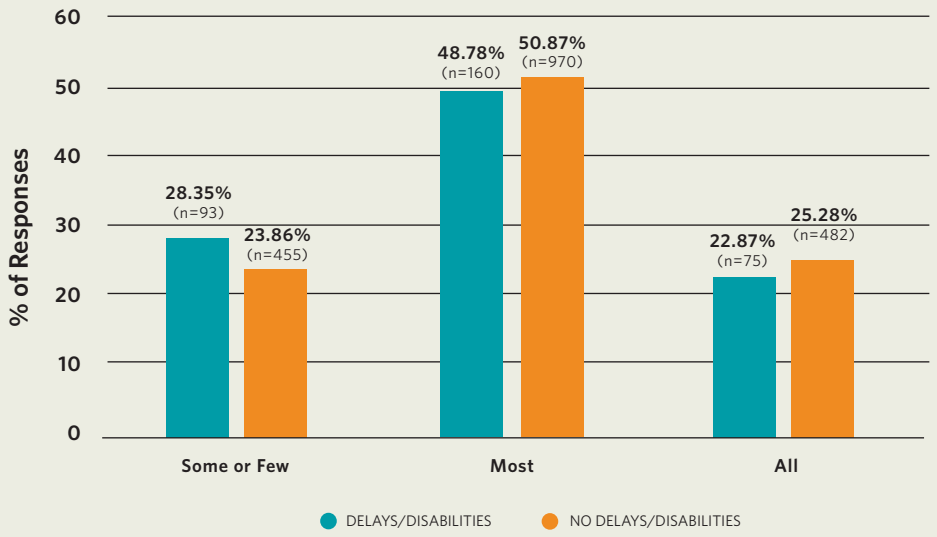
The BPACDS show no significant differences between parents of children with one or more DDs and those of children without a DD in how often they use these practices. In addition, analyses find no statistically significant relationships between how frequently parents engage in a particular activity and the types of DD they report.

Use of the Text Messages

Parents were asked how many of the Basics Insights messages they had tried to use with their child in the past few months. Response options were *All*, *Most*, *Some*, *Few*, or *None*. Exhibit 4 combines *Some* and *Few* because only a small percentage reported *Few* and no one responded *None*.

Exhibit 4 shows that, whether or not their child has a DD, more than 70% of parents report trying to use all or most of the messages.

Exhibit 4 | Use of Basics Insights Messages and Presence of a Delay or Disability



USEFULNESS

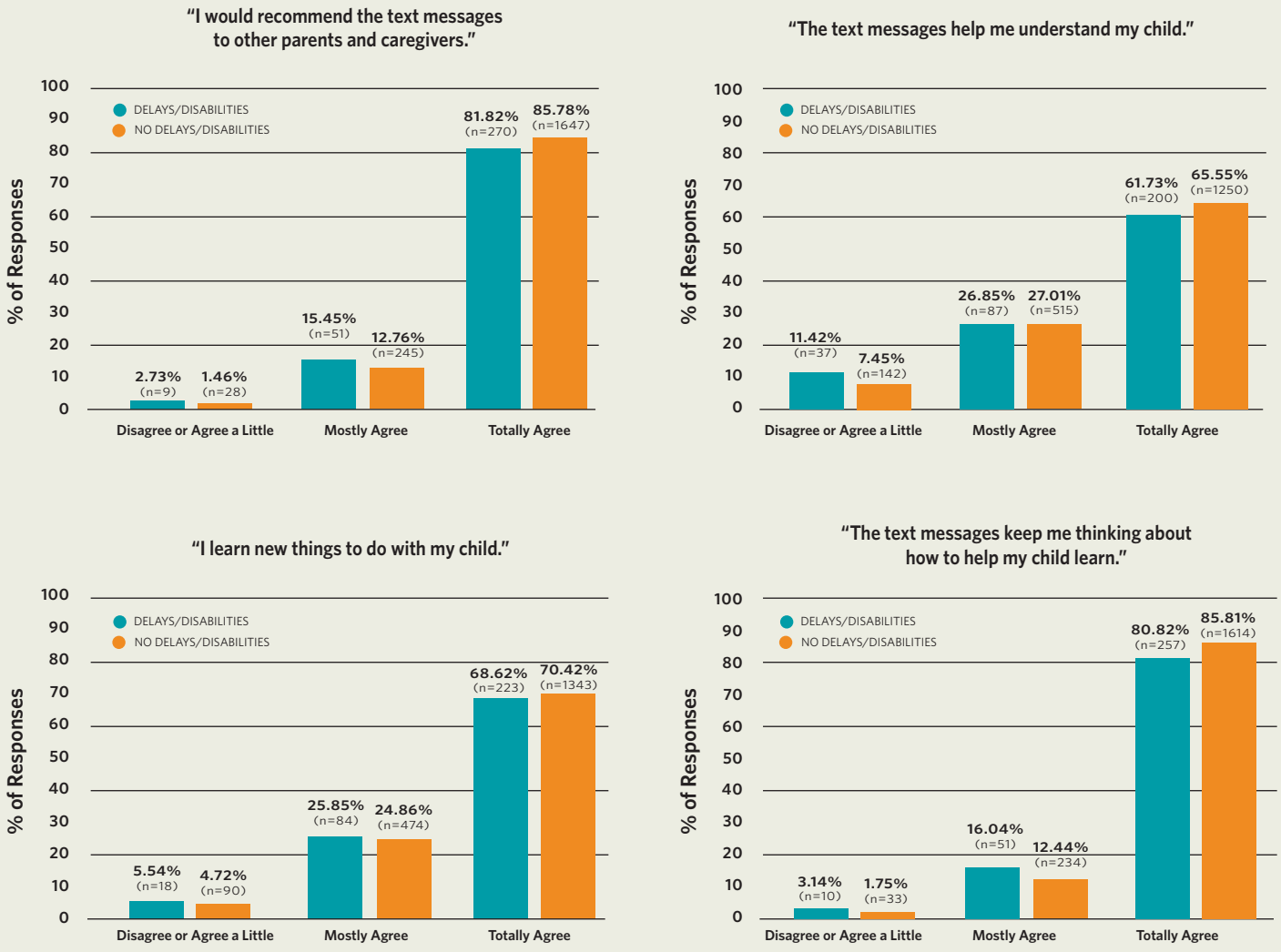
Exhibit 5 presents results on the perceived usefulness of messages. Similar to Exhibit 4, levels of agreement with the listed statements vary hardly at all by whether the child has a DD. Response options were *Totally Agree, Mostly Agree, Agree a Little,* and *Disagree*. On Exhibit 5, the lowest two levels are collapsed for reporting because very few gave those responses.

For the statements "*I would recommend the text messages to other parents and caregivers*" and "*I learn new things to do with my child*," the small differences between parents of children with and without DDs are not statistically significant.

For "*The text messages keep me thinking about how to help my child learn*" and "*The text messages help me understand my child*," the differences are statistically significant at 0.05 level, but as the exhibit shows, they are small.

The bottom-line conclusion from Exhibits 4 and 5 is that parents of children with and without a DD do not differ to any meaningful extent in the reported use or usefulness of the messages.

Exhibit 5 | The Basics Messages are Equally Useful for Parents of Children With or Without Delays/Disabilities



QUALITATIVE FEEDBACK

An item at the end of the survey asked parents, "Is there any other feedback on Basics Insights text messages that you would like to share?"

Responses from parents of children with diagnosed delays or disabilities largely mirrored the enthusiasm found across the broader subscriber base and many actively promoted the texts to others in similar situations.

At the same time, half a dozen expressed interest in receiving content specifically designed for children with developmental delays, neurodivergent children, or those on the autism spectrum. They noted that while they appreciated the texts, the activities described were sometimes too advanced.

While such requests represented a small fraction of all respondents, they point to a genuine need. Given the strong engagement that parents of children with delays and disabilities already demonstrate, there appears to be a receptive audience for more tailored content.

LIMITATIONS

Respondents are not a representative sample of all parents of children with and without delays or disabilities and independent of BI enrollment. All respondents were BI subscribers and chose to complete the BPACDS survey on which this report is based. The findings presented here may differ for parents who do not subscribe to BI and for BI subscribers who did not respond to the BPACDS. Respondents may be more engaged, confident, or more motivated than nonrespondents. These differences could affect estimates for both DDs and non-DD groups. Finally, there may be important differences related to DDs and BI that are not captured by the measures used for this report.

CONCLUSION

The science-based facts and activity ideas in the Basics Insights text messaging program are designed to align with typical progressions based on children's ages. Nonetheless, many parents of children with developmental delays or disabilities subscribe and report that the program is helpful. The analyses in this brief show clear and systematic differences in reported skills between children with diagnosed delays or disabilities and those without them. At the same time, the findings overall show no meaningful differences between parents in the two groups in how often they use Basics-related parenting practices, how many BI messages they try to apply, or how satisfied they are with the program.

The Basics®

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