



TOGETHER ESTRANGED

SUPPORT | EMPOWER | DESTIGMATIZE



COMMUNITY NEEDS SURVEY REPORT

Insight & Findings 2026



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Foreword

Family estrangement remains one of the least understood and most stigmatized social experiences within our society. Yet, for millions of adults, family estrangement becomes their only remaining option – impacting their emotional wellbeing, identity, and daily lives.

At Together Estranged, we focus on building a community for Estranged Adult Children (EAC), drawing on a set of values that aims to foster an ethos of understanding.

This report represents a collective effort to listen deeply to the experiences of those in our community whose voices are too often overlooked or minimized. Family matters. Not having a place in one impacts so many aspects of our lives. The insights shared in these pages highlight both the challenges and resilience within this community.

Guided by a trauma-informed approach, our survey was designed to prioritize safety, dignity, and empowerment – to offer space for reflection without retraumatization. We extend our sincere gratitude to every individual who contributed their time, trust, and story.

I hope you feel that your voices are captured in these pages— they are helping shape a future at our small grass-roots nonprofit organization. We are grateful for the direction these contributions have given us, and aim to be led by community need, not assumptions.

Together, we will shape not just our community, but a future in which family estrangement is seen, understood and approached with compassion. We invite you to explore the full breadth of our resources, join our community events, and stay connected as we continue this journey.

Angel Cassin

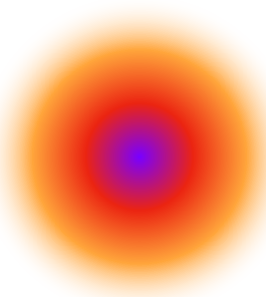
Mission & Values

85%

Our Mission

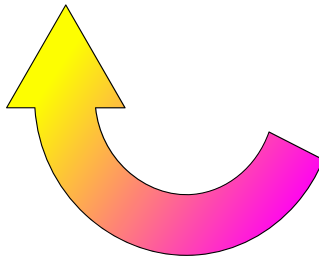
To support and empower estranged adult children, while enhancing social understanding for the destigmatization of estrangement.

- **85%** of respondents stated that they felt the current TE Mission Statement represents the work we need to do for this community.



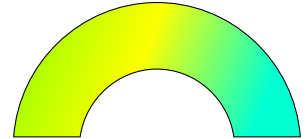
PASSION

A desire to change the world and work hard towards a better future.



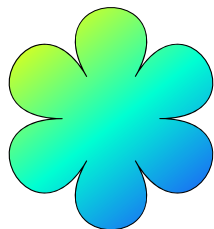
EXCELLENCE

Striving to be the best at what we do both as an organization and as individuals.



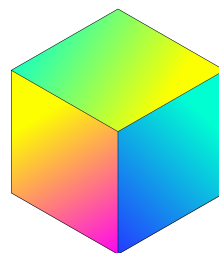
DIVERSITY

Leveraging and appreciating individuals' unique backgrounds, experiences and skill sets for optimum growth.



COLLABORATION

Working together yields much greater outcomes than working alone.



ADAPTABILITY

The ability to grow and change with the needs of the organization.

Research on Frequency of Family Estrangement

Research within the last 15 years in the US and the UK bears witness to the reality that family estrangement is more widespread in the general population than is generally assumed.

Research in the United States:

27%

of Americans reported being estranged from a family member.



In 2020, Karl Pillemer, a sociologist at Cornell University, published the book *Fault Lines* which featured the first and largest national survey on focussing on family estrangement via the Cornell Family Estrangement and Reconciliation Project. That research revealed:

- Over one quarter of **Americans - 27%** - reported being estranged from a family member - which extrapolates to an estimated population of 67 million people.
- Around 10 percent were estranged from a parent or child which extrapolates to an estimated population of **25 million people**.
- **85%** reported being estranged for a year or more and fully half of respondents had not had contact with that family member for four years or more.

Another commonly cited study on this topic was published by Reczek et al. in the *Journal of Marriage and Family* in 2023 that estimated population level research on estrangement using regression models from other study data.

While the original data sets in this research (The National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1979 Child and 2018 Young Adult Supplements) were not specifically focused on estrangement, the sample sizes are significant enough (12,686 and 8,585) to extrapolate to the population level in the United States. Those extrapolated results showed:

- **46% reporting** a period of estrangement from mothers with average age of first estrangement at 26 years old.

26% reporting estrangement from fathers, with the average age of first estrangement beginning at 23 years old.

Research in the United Kingdom

1 in 5

1 in 5 UK families- 12 million people- were found to be impacted by family estrangement.



In 2014 the nonprofit Stand Alone and IpsosMori did a survey of 2,082 adults in Great Britain to determine the prevalence of family estrangement in the UK.

1 in 5 UK families- 12 million people- were found to be impacted by family estrangement.

27% of survey respondents said they knew someone impacted by family estrangement.

These research studies clearly demonstrate the millions of people whose experience of estrangement has been overlooked. To bridge this gap, Together Estranged was founded to support Estranged Adult Children, and make their stories matter and their voices heard.

Introduction to CNS 2026

This is the second Community Needs Assessment (CNA) conducted by Together Estranged, with the first being conducted in 2020. The purpose of this Community Needs Assessment was to continually evaluate the needs of our community and our services.

Both the 2020 and 2025 assessments gathered quantitative (numerical) and qualitative (individual responses) data, in alignment with our founder's intention that our needs assessment "highlights similarities while also recognizing distinctions that make up everyone's unique responses" (Together Estranged, 2020). The 2020 needs assessment had a quantitative survey and focus groups for qualitative data.

98%

of respondents identified as estranged adult children.



This report was developed from the results of 129 respondents answering an online survey. 98% of survey respondents identified as estranged adult children. Estranged Adult Children - **EAC** - Are the adult children of parents or family from whom they are estranged. They were the child in the adult-child relationship, and are now an adult.

Individuals were asked to self report estrangement within familial relationships they are currently estranged from. The majority of survey respondents were estranged from someone in their immediate family, either their mother (22%), father (21%), or siblings (22%).

Of survey respondents, 44% noted that being estranged from one family member led to estrangement from another family member. Approximately 5% of our respondents also were estranged from their own children. Less than 1% reported being estranged from their entire family. 61% of people who took part in this survey reported that they were not parents.

Methodology

The 2025 survey was an online mixed-methods analysis, gathering both statistical and in depth responses from community members. The survey was deployed in April 2025 on our website, newsletter, and social media platforms.

The survey was designed using designed our survey using a trauma-informed approach to ensure that estranged adult children (EAC) felt respected, validated, and safe while sharing their experiences. Moreover, trauma-informed design is widely recognized as a best practice (SAMSHA, 2014) and in recognition that trauma or abuse has consistently shown to be a significant reason why adult children are estranged (Agllias, 2017).

Gentle, non-judgmental language is incorporated throughout, with clear content warnings provided before sensitive questions so participants can decide what feels comfortable to disclose. Recognizing that reflecting on family trauma can be emotionally taxing, the survey includes structured breaks and optional guided grounding practices and visualizations to support emotional regulation and prioritize participant wellbeing. All questions that can be optional are optional, and participants may skip questions or exit the survey at any time without penalty.

Privacy, anonymity, and autonomy are emphasized throughout the process, and collaboration with individuals with lived experience of estrangement helps ensure the survey supports empowerment, emotional safety, and a sense of control over personal narrative.

RESPONDENT FEEDBACK



Respondents expressed appreciation for the trauma-informed approach:

"Thanks for the breaks and the plentiful response options. One of the best surveys I've ever taken."

"Loved the moments of self-care built in. Great choice of pictures."

"It's very comprehensive. I appreciate that it ends with a poem and helplines."

"I'm glad that you are asking these questions. There is so much stigma around estrangement which makes the grief and pain more unbearable so any focus on this topic is very positive."

"This felt cathartic to fill out. Thanks for offering the survey."

"It's very comprehensive. I appreciate that it ends with a poem and helplines."

Because of the stigma around estrangement and challenges with finding resources on coping with estrangement and communicating about estrangement, survey designers considered that taking a survey on estrangement could be simultaneously empowering and challenging.

Review of the feedback on the survey design was primarily positive or neutral, showing that approximately 74% of respondents had a positive or neutral response with the survey. Comments from survey participants reflected this:

"It was hard and long...but I see the relevance...and grateful for the interest and support"

Demographics

The demographic profile of respondents in this survey largely reflect those collected across our social media platforms. In terms of gender, 79% of individuals who participated identified as female (88% and 91% of TE's followers on Facebook and Instagram).

In terms of location, our top five country profile confirms that the majority of this international, virtual, non-profit are based in the United States (65.9%), with 13.2% from Canada and 10.9% from the United Kingdom, 3.9% from Ireland and 2.3% from Australia.

Comparing this with our social media following, shows us our profile of respondents largely reflects the larger pool of our members (3000 individuals as of 2026) from across the organization (USA: 53%, UK: 25%, Canada: 5%, Australia: 4% and Ireland: 2%).

DATA OVERVIEW



Parents
represented

44.2%

of the primary
estrangements
recorded in this
survey



Those aged
between **31 and**
40 years make up

over half of
survey
respondents



76% of
individuals who
responded to this
survey were

white

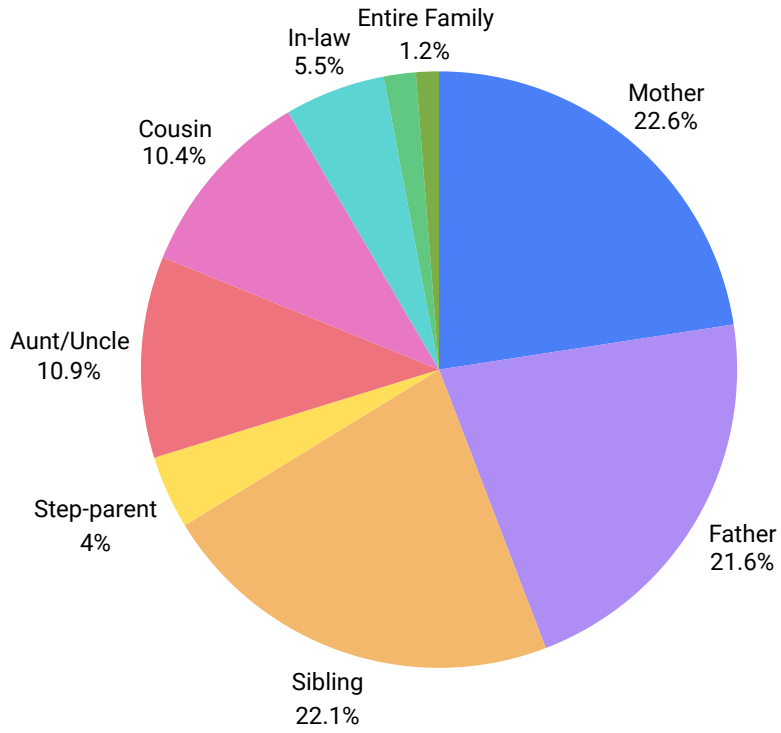


The majority of
participants -

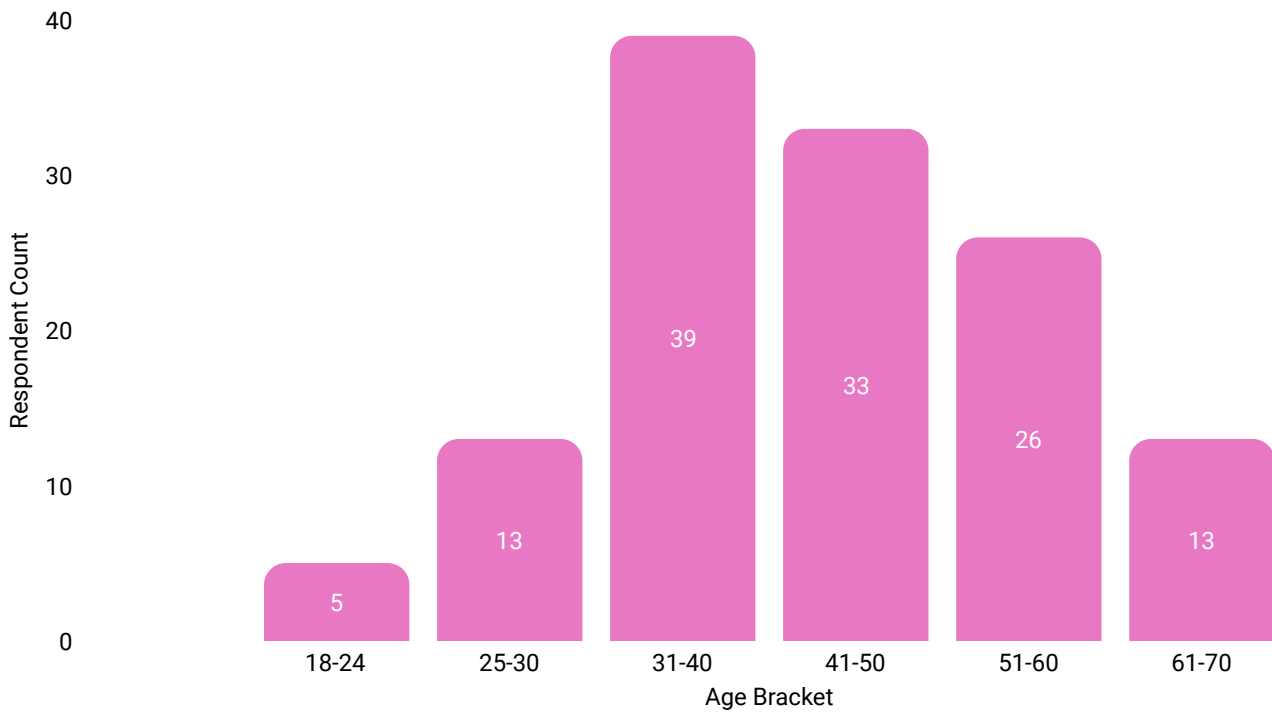
79.8%

identified as a
woman

Estrangement - Relationships Impacted

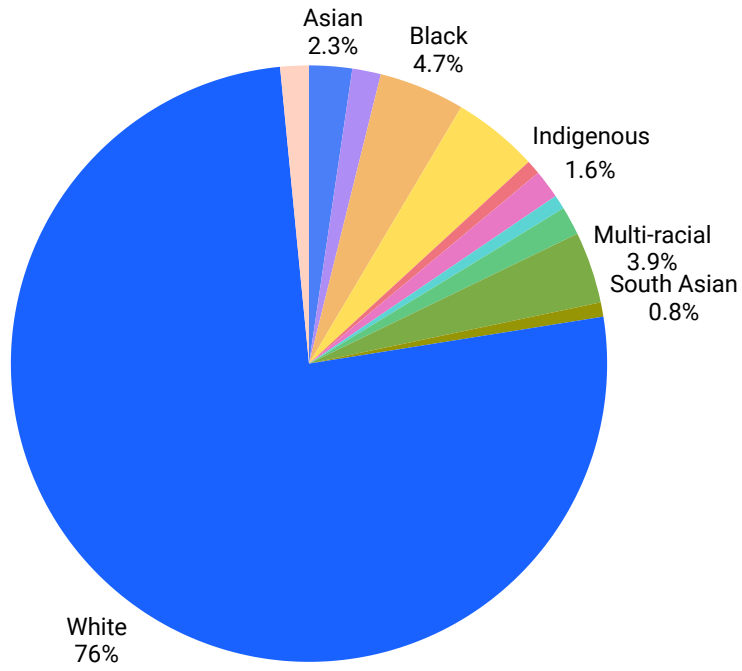


Respondent Age

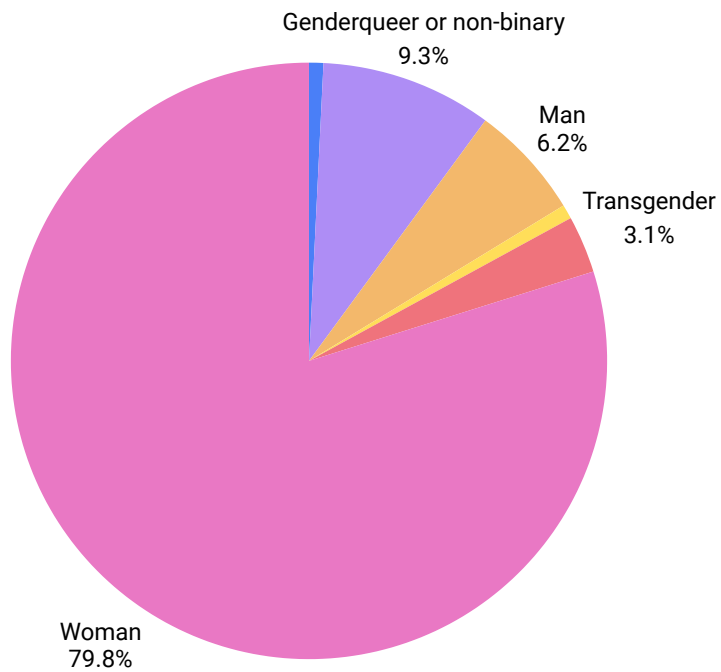


Race or Ethnicity of Respondents

129 Respondents



Gender Identity of Respondents



Education and Income

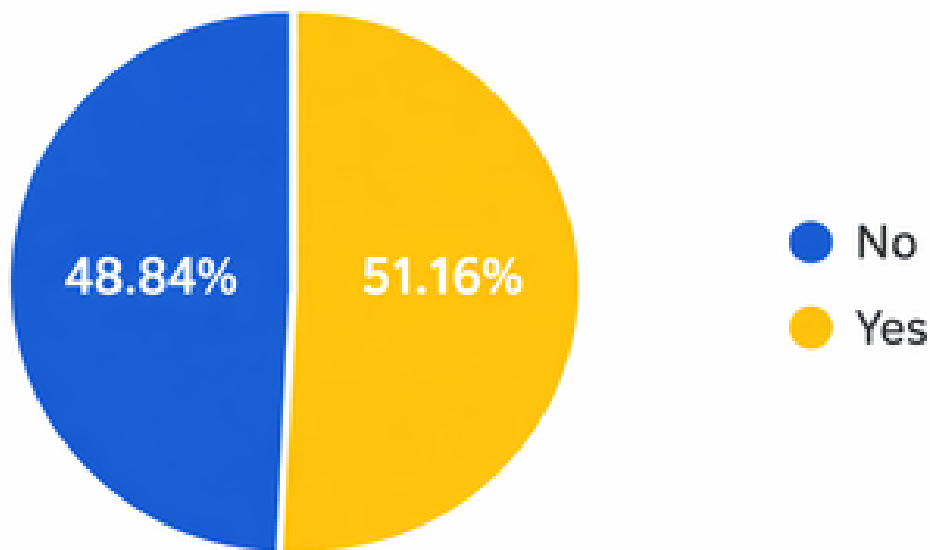
Over half of respondents had a university degree, with one third reporting post-graduate level education. 71% of the individuals surveyed reported that they were in full or part-time work.

Disability

Importantly *almost half* of the respondents to this community needs survey reported that they are a person living with a disability or chronic condition. This is significantly greater than population level data published in 2025 by The Center for Disease Control (CDC) in the United States.

Their data shows that more than 1 in 4 adults in the US, or approximately 28.7%, have some form of disability. The data from our respondents places our cohort significantly above average in their lived experience of a serious personal challenge in addition to the social impediments that family estrangement can cause.

Respondent Self Identification of Disability



Characteristics and Processes of Estrangement

The following section covers characteristics of estrangement, including the definition and language of estrangement, and processes associated with estrangement, such as the spectrum of contact, cycles of estrangement, and length of estrangement. This helps elevate our understanding of the experience and frames our language and general communication of family estrangement as we move forward with our work at TE and in how we engage with the wider public.

Definition of Estrangement

We provided our definition of estrangement for survey participants:

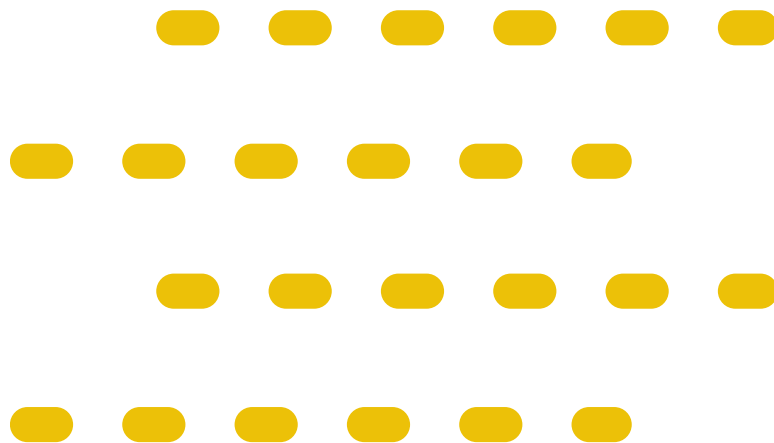
Family estrangement defined as the condition of being physically and or emotionally distanced from one or more family members, either by choice or at the request or decision of the other. It is generally enacted to reduce implicit or explicit conflict, anxiety or tension between the parties. It is characterised by a lack of trust and emotional intimacy, disparate values, and a belief that resolution is highly unlikely, unnecessary or impossible.

“

It involves some level of dissatisfaction by at least one party. However, it is important to note that dissatisfaction does not necessarily mean that the dissatisfied party wants to reconcile. Rather dissatisfaction usually relates to unmet relational expectations that elicit some level of negative emotion (Agllias, 2016) often to the extent that there is little or no communication between the individuals involved for a prolonged period of time (Scharp, 2014).

These family members can be biological or adoptive, step-family, extended family, or in-laws.

Language of Estrangement



As research and reporting on estrangement is a newer phenomena, and we aspire to empower our community, we considered how community members use language to define their experience (Melvin, 2024). We asked:

Given the wide range of terms used to describe family estrangement, what language do you prefer to use?

We provided the following frequently used terms with an option for people to enter their own words: *Estranged, No Contact, Cutting Off, Disowned, Low Contact/Not Talking, Alienated, Grey Rocking*

Overall respondents chose a wide range of language to describe family estrangement, and many chose more than one term.



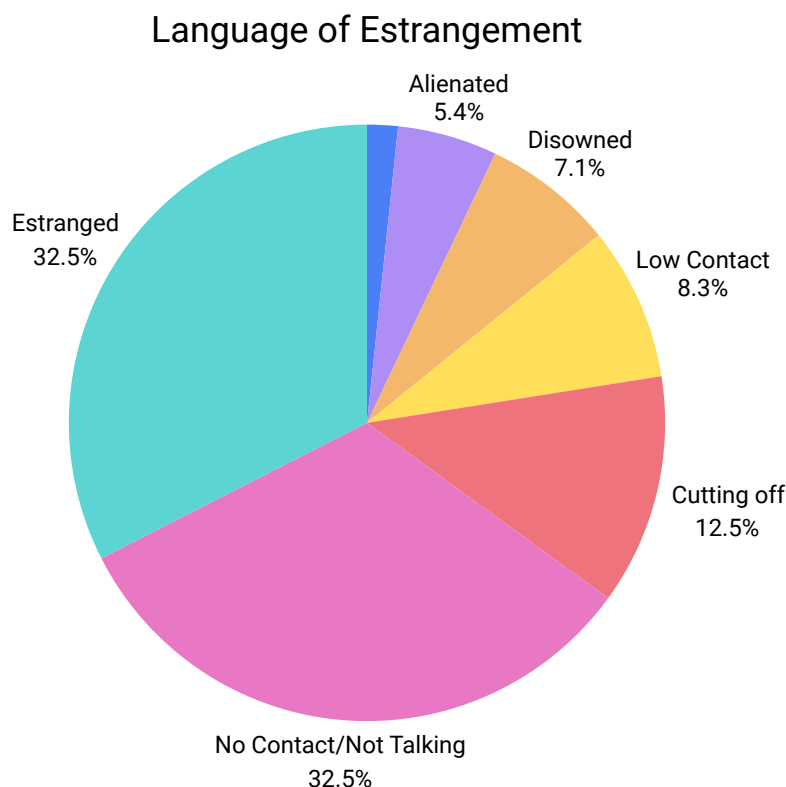
What this shows is that people often use two kinds of language simultaneously: an umbrella identity word—like estranged, disowned, or alienated—to name what the relationship is, and a word to define the nature of the boundary or type of contact —like no, low contact, cutting off, or grey-rocking— describing what the relationship looks like in daily life.

In the results, two terms stood out as the most common—“Estranged” (33%) and “No Contact/Not Talking” (33%)—suggesting a shared “main vocabulary” for describing the experience. At the same time, a meaningful portion of respondents also selected additional terms which suggests that many people combine a broad label with a contact-level description.

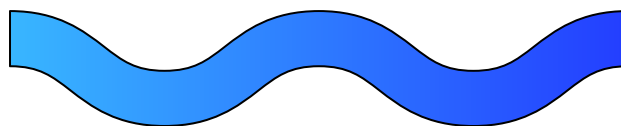
In the results, two terms stood out as the most common—“Estranged” (33%) and “No Contact/Not Talking” (33%)—suggesting a shared “main vocabulary” for describing the experience. At the same time, a meaningful portion of respondents also selected additional terms such as “Cutting off,” “Low Contact,” “Disowned,” and “Alienated,” which suggests that many people combine a broad label with a contact-level description to better capture their reality.

A smaller group added write-in language (for example, “setting boundaries,” “taking space,” or “no language feels right”), highlighting that standard terms don’t fit everyone and that some people prefer relationship- or boundary-based wording rather than a single identity label.

In summary there was no single primary descriptor for the estrangement experience among respondents. While this could reflect the personal experience of the individual estrangement experience of the participants, it also highlighted that way in which language is important when fostering a sense of community for EAC, in the work of our organisation.



Spectrum of Estrangement



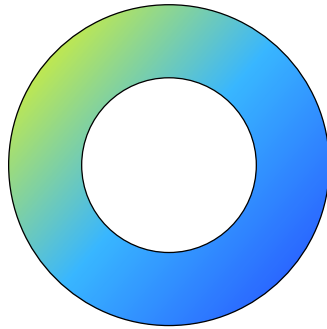
The spectrum of estrangement reflects the fluid nature of relationship dynamics over time, in how individuals move in and out, or along a continuum of contact-types with their family (Melvin, 2024) (Scharp,2014). This relates to the language of estrangement with umbrella identity words and simultaneously boundary/contact words.

The spectrum model of contact we used in our survey has four stages which include cordial, low, and no contact, as well as complete estrangement. The majority of our community - 85% of our respondents- stated that they are currently in the no contact or complete estrangement portion of the spectrum. Just 9% identify with the umbrella term of estrangement, while remaining in low contact with their family. For these individuals, the paradoxical experience of identifying as being estranged, while maintaining some form of contact is often overlooked.

The remaining 6% did not know how to identify their estrangement or answered none of the above. Owning the experience often begins with having the language to describe it. Work is required to reach individuals who have not yet found their place in our community, or the wider EAC space, caused by restrictive or misunderstood application of language and labels



Cycles of Estrangement



Responses from our community and research show that estrangement is not a linear progression. An estrangement cycle can be a fluctuation of the amount of contact or types of contact over time (Agllias, 2017). 72% of people reported moving along the spectrum of estrangement in cycles of contact, with 23% reporting no cycles.

Responses to this and other questions suggest that types of contact, and length of estrangement, can differ over time and between various family members. These fluctuations can be confusing for the individuals involved and their place in support-orientated communities like Together Estranged.

The impact of estrangement changes over time: it is not linear.

Estrangement doesn't usually move in a neat arc from pain to peace. It's more like a spiral staircase. Individuals revisit the same themes—grief, anger, doubt, relief—but from a slightly different height.

Over three quarters of respondents reported they cycle through periods of no contact, tentative reconnection, a new rupture, a stronger boundary, which is supported by the a broader body of research on the subject (Agllias, 2017) (Standalone, 2015) (Scharp et al, 2015).

Reasons for Estrangement

We asked the following question:

What would you say is the reason or reasons for the estrangement with family members? (Check all that apply and please feel free to add your reason)

This question allowed people to select more than one reason for estrangement. Most respondents selected multiple reasons for the estrangement pointing to the complexity and nuance of the phenomenon. Estrangement was rarely described as “*one thing that happened, that determined the decision.*” It was usually described as a pile-up of factors over time. These factors generally fell into the following three categories:

1. Lack of Safety in the Relationship with the Family Member

Two sub-categories, *Absence of Emotional Safety* and *Harmful Experiences*.



This can be supported by the meta-analysis finding that emotional abuse and neglect are the most prevalent forms of childhood maltreatment globally and the most damaging (Carr et al, 2015). Our CNS and membership are providing further support for that body of research.

1. Family Systems Dynamics

2. Values and Identity Conflicts

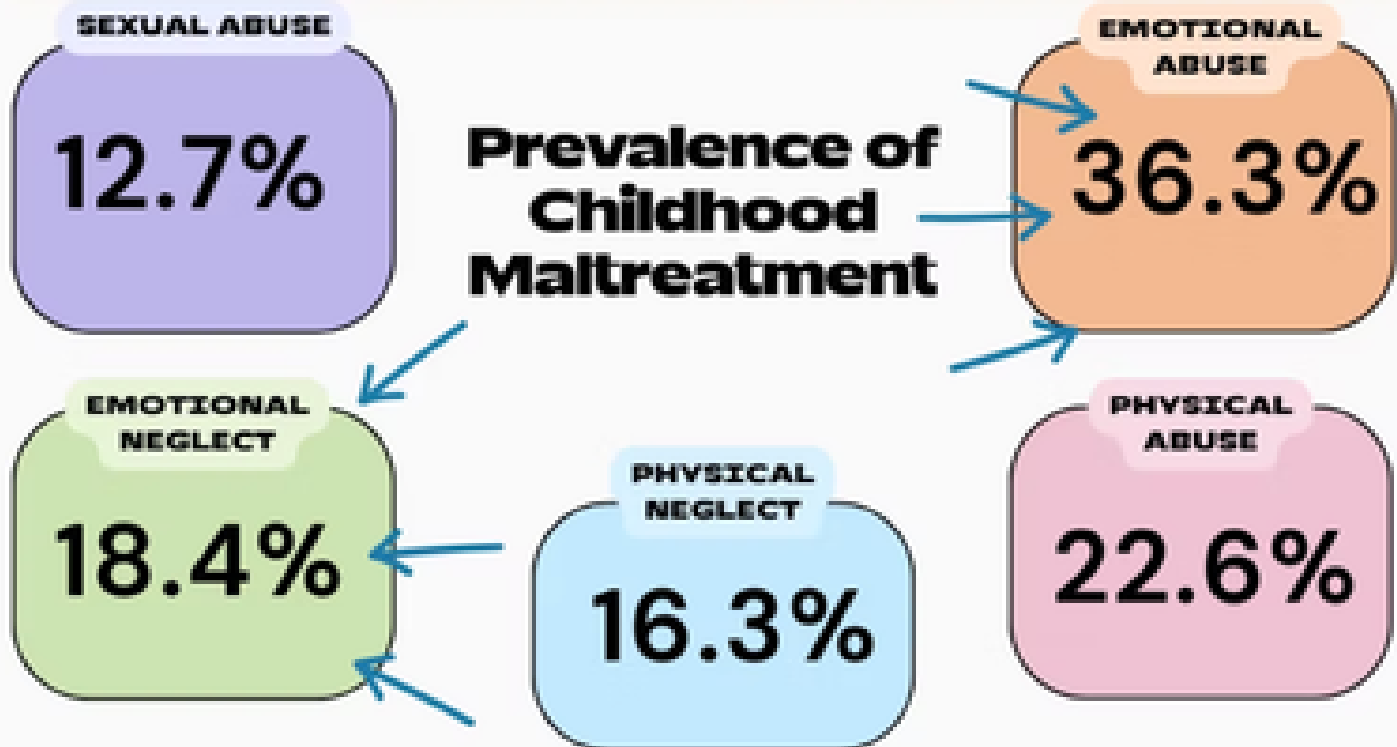
While none of the 129 respondents checked “none of the above”, to our list of reasons, a smaller group of 22 respondents used the write-in option to add nuance—often expanding on context for a response or describing complicated family dynamics that didn’t fit neatly into our checkboxes.

CHILDHOOD MALTREATMENT

"Childhood maltreatment consists of abusive or neglectful acts perpetrated by parents or caregivers having the potential to 'harm or threaten a child'.

Five subtypes of childhood maltreatment are commonly recognized: physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, physical neglect and emotional neglect.

In terms of prevalence, a worldwide meta-analysis estimated rates of: "



Lack of Safety in the Relationship with the Family Member

The top 4 reasons people selected for reasons for estrangement from family members all fell within the category of Lack of Safety. These were psychological or emotional abuse (81%), family member's narcissistic tendencies (66%), experiencing trauma or violence in the relationship with the family member (62%), and neglect (51%).

Lack of Safety in the Relationship with the Family Member has two sub-categories, Absence of Emotional Safety and Harmful Experiences. Emotional safety involves a secure attachment in which the relationship can function for individuals to express themselves without fear or rejection.

Absence of Emotional Safety in the Relationship with the Family Member

The most common reasons for estrangement were centered on emotional safety in the relationship. The American Association of Pediatrics report originally published in 2012 and re-affirmed in 2023 that psychological abuse or "maltreatment" has profound negative impacts on a child's wellbeing yet is often minimized and not recognized (Hibbard et al., 2012).

Psychological and emotional abuse also tends to co-occur with other family circumstances (Hibbard et al., 2012) noted by respondents, such as a family member's narcissism (66%), family member's mental illness (38%), family member's substance abuse (27%) and domestic violence/spousal abuse between parents (26%).

Harmful Experiences in the Relationship with the Family Member

Nearly two-thirds- 62%- of respondents reported experiencing trauma or violence in the relationship with the family member. 51% experienced neglect, 36 % of participants reported experiencing physical abuse and 20% reported experiencing sexual abuse. 5% of respondents were removed from their home by social services. Medical abuse or neglect was noted in qualitative responses, as well as spousal abuse.

Given that the lack of safety was the primary reason for estrangement for respondents, estrangement could be interpreted as a necessary action and psychological requirement for an EAC to seek safety away from continued harm in the relationship. The following quote illustrates how an EAC might experience a lack of safety in relating to a family member and illuminates how trauma-related physiological responses could significantly impact a person's capacity to stay in a family relationship, indicating innate self protection instinct.

"Honestly, I push back on the idea that it was even a choice for me, particularly in relationship with my mom. Is it a choice to take your hand off of a hot stove you accidentally touched? Is it a choice to jump out of the way of an animal trying to bite you? I got to a point in which I literally could not see another path forward.... She was unable to offer acknowledgement, accountability, or compassion for me. This hurt so much that what kicked in was a self-preservation instinct not that different than avoiding a physical injury."

Family system dynamics

Many respondents also pointed to broader family-system dynamics as a reason for estrangement, with family systems related words such as "scapegoat" and "black sheep" in write-in responses. The 5th top reason for estrangement was because of their estrangement with another family member (44%) or 'secondary estrangement'. 72% of the respondents who reported that their family member ended their relationship, did so because of another family estrangement.

19% of respondents noted that financial issues or differences such as inheritance were a reason for estrangement. Parental divorce accounted for 9% of the responses, an indication of low relevance versus other factors already named, reinforcing other research that indicates Estranged Parents put greater emphasis on divorce than Estranged Adult Children. Adoption was a reason 4% of the time.

Values and Identity Conflicts

A third cluster of reasons involved values and identity conflicts. A meaningful portion of respondents selected political values or differences (34%) or religious values or differences (23%). Rejection of LGBTQ+ identity- homophobia or transphobia- contributed to the estrangement for 27% of our group.

Harmful Experiences in the Relationship with Family Member

What harmful experiences did you have in your relationship with the family member?

62% Experiencing trauma or violence in the relationship with the family member



What People Get Wrong

Our primary qualitative question was *“What do you think people who are NOT estranged get wrong about you or your estrangement when you share your story of estrangement?”*

Respondents described a consistent set of misunderstandings. Most responses did not point to one single misconception; instead, people often named multiple ways they feel misunderstood.

Overall, the themes clustered around a central tension: outsiders tend to treat estrangement as a simple conflict or moral failure, while respondents described it as a safety decision that often includes grief, complexity, and ongoing loss. Estrangement can paradoxically be tremendously freeing for adult children, and simultaneously bring difficulties such as social stigma or bias.

Notable patterns in the data in the response to this question include:

Notable Patterns from the Data
What patterns emerged from the responses to this question?

- 1** Minimization or Denial of Trauma or Abuse in a Family
- 2** Projecting Assumptions of Family as Being Inherently Good
- 3** Judging or Shaming the Adult Child for the Estrangement
- 4** Ongoing Grief and Renegotiation of the Loss of Family
- 5** Assumption of the Estrangement as Temporary Versus Permanent
- 6** Being Queer Is Not Necessarily the Reason for Family Estrangement
- 7** Bias Towards Reconciliation and Forgiveness

The infographic features seven numbered items, each with a corresponding illustration. Item 1 shows a man and woman in a family setting with lightning bolts. Item 2 shows a family of four. Item 3 shows a man pointing at a man sitting at a desk. Item 4 shows a woman looking at a laptop with a house icon and a question mark. Item 5 shows a woman looking at a laptop with a question mark. Item 6 shows a man and woman talking with a rainbow flag. Item 7 shows two hands shaking.

These patterns are what lie beneath the stigma and prevent productive dialogue on the subject of family estrangement, and are further elaborated upon in the following paragraphs.

Minimization or Denial of Trauma or Abuse in a Family Relationship

Many respondents described feeling deeply misunderstood when others downplay what happened in their family. Instead of hearing the harm taken seriously, people often reported receiving responses that reframe abuse or chronic dysfunction as “normal family stuff,” misunderstand trauma responses, or treat estrangement as an overreaction. Respondents noted that people often fail to note the importance of estrangement to their safety and well-being. This minimization can feel invalidating and can make people less willing to share their story.



“They are quick to say their childhoods were also rough, and that their parents fought, etc. completely invalidating my CRIMINAL upbringing... was actually recognized as a crime victim this year by the state for what I witnessed and what was done to me.”

“People who have not experienced physical abuse and highly controlling parenting are not able to grasp what that feels like and why someone would need to get completely away from that person to preserve their own well-being”.

“Despite my being completely no contact for 21 years with my father due to childhood sexual, physical, and emotional abuse, he stalks and harasses me when he sees me at public events. Other people have not always been understanding of the lengths I need to go to protect my psychological and physical well-being and safety from the threat he poses.”

Projecting Assumptions of Family as Being Inherently Safe or Good

A recurring theme was the belief that family is automatically safe, loving, or worth preserving—no matter what. Respondents described others leaning on dominant cultural values like “family is family” or “blood is thicker than water,” which can erase the reality that some family relationships are unsafe or damaging. These assumptions often ignore the long-term work, efforts and significant adjustments and compromises people have already done before reaching estrangement.



“That it’s a reasonable option for me not to be estranged and that all parents love and care for their children”

“They project their own experiences of family into their interpretation of your words. Their own identity is so blended with their family role, they do not have the capacity to comprehend it. They are egocentric about tolerating their own family’s behavior and believe your outcome is their worst nightmare.”

“They can’t understand parents being abusive, that because they are my parents they are lovely, caring and that it must be my fault. Or they don’t grasp the reality of having grown up in an abusive, violent, narcissistic and neglectful environment.”



“I don’t share with too many people because most people don’t understand. Those I have shared with have kept their distance.”

– Community Member

Judging or Shaming the Adult Child for the Estrangement

Many respondents said that when they share their story, people often make character-based judgments rather than staying curious about context. Adult children may be labeled as selfish, unforgiving, dramatic, or ungrateful. This shaming can intensify isolation and make estranged people feel like they have to defend their integrity rather than simply describe their experience. The larger story being told regarding this pattern is the cultural preference for the parental narrative, the "honor thy mother/father" and the infantilization of the adult child and their experiences.



"I don't share with too many people because most people don't understand. Those I have shared with have kept their distance."

"Judgment about what they think the true problem is and whether they believe reconciliation is possible."

"They don't understand the full picture, seem to think I'm just being petty or taking it lightly or over-reacting; people don't ask me, "What did they do to you?"

"That my experience of abuse and neglect was "not that bad" or "normal" and shouldn't impact me. That my parents are nice people so I must not be a very nice person for feeling anger or not speaking to them."

Ongoing Grief and Renegotiation of the Loss of Family

Respondents frequently emphasized that estrangement is not a one-time decision with a clean emotional ending, instead having characteristics of ambiguous loss (Boss, 2006) or disenfranchised grief, where the “reality of the loss itself is not socially validated.” Where someone “experiences a loss, but the resulting grief is unrecognized by others. The person has no socially accorded right to grieve that loss or to mourn it in [socially traditional] ways.” (Kenneth Doka, Disenfranchised Grief).

Of survey respondents, 69% report experiencing prolonged grief. Even when estrangement is necessary for safety, it can involve ongoing grief, longing, sadness, and complicated love. Some described continually renegotiating what “family” means, mourning milestones, and carrying an invisible loss that outsiders don’t always recognize.



“I also feel pressure from others to be done with grieving and be a fully happy liberated person, but this process is so hard. I don't think I will ever stop grieving, and I think that's okay.”

“They simply don't understand how devastating it is. They don't know what it's like to have no family and how vulnerable you feel. They don't understand the anger and the feelings of betrayal.”

“They also don't always understand how difficult the decision is and how big the grief is, it is a big ambiguous loss that often goes unrecognized (with the exception of the amazing TE support, which does recognize the grief and challenges, thank goodness).”

Assumption of the Estrangement as Temporary Versus Permanent

Another common misunderstanding was the assumption that estrangement is just a phase. Respondents described how non-estranged people failed to understand the reasons for their estrangement or deciding after multiple unsuccessful repair attempts to end the relationship permanently. This is further supported by research conducted by Linden, A.H. and Sillence, E. (2021) titled "I'm finally allowed to be me": Parent-Child Estrangement and Psychological Wellbeing, Families, Relationships and Societies.



"That efforts were not completely exhausted at the point of decision to go no contact. There is a lack of understanding that no contact is a result of years of unsuccessful attempts to address the dysfunction. It is not the starting point."

"That this is temporary, that things will work out. I am not saying that the door isn't there if I feel like I want to try again or if they acknowledge my pain and try to mend things but just a little time without any real change is not going to help. I stopped speaking to them because they hurt me over and over again and not even seeing the pain that their behavior is causing me."

"I spent over a decade trying various low-contact options, attempted to address pain and issues directly many times. The big "zero contact" era began after one last attempt to get her to acknowledge the sexual abuse that had happened by other family members, and the large pile of evidence that she was at least partially aware of what happened and turned a blind eye."




"People often try to pin down one reason why, but there are so many reasons why I am estranged. It is messy and complicated. They also assume that I will want to resume contact at some point."

— Community Member

Being Queer Is Not Necessarily the Reason for Family Estrangement

Some respondents to this question said that others often look for a single, simple explanation for estrangement—and queer identity can become an easy assumption. While homophobia and transphobia contribute to estrangement in some families—reported by 27% of respondents—qualitative responses indicate that they are rarely the sole cause.

 *“They think it's all about me being trans. And maybe for some of the people I'm estranged from it is? But with the people that it hurts the most with, it's because they are perpetuating abuse patterns in one form or another that existed in my childhood home. The fact that these people are *also* transphobic is the icing on the cake, but the problem is much older and deeper than that.”*

“I think there is an assumption that I was disowned for being queer. The truth is so nuanced it's hard to communicate that I had to estrange myself because I couldn't tolerate their intolerance. I couldn't agree to disagree about the most beautiful and joyful part of my life.”

Differences in values and beliefs and lack of support for identity is a category within the factors cited by EAC in research on the subject of family estrangement ([APA, 2024](#)) ([Carr, et al, 2015](#)).

Bias Towards Resuming Contact, Reconciliation, and Forgiveness.

Many respondents described pressure to end the estrangement, disregarding the pressure,—explicit or subtle—to “reconcile”, “reconnect”, “forgive”, “make up,” or “give it time,” as if the only acceptable outcome is reunion. This can feel intrusive or unsafe, especially when estrangement is rooted in repeated harm, boundary violations, or a lack of safety or accountability in the family relationship that has not changed.

“People assume I haven't tried repair or reconnecting. People don't understand that estrangement is for my safety, physical and psychological - because they cannot imagine cutting off a family member entirely or why anybody would or could.”



“I am frequently told "but they're your parents you have to talk to them"”

“That I'm supposed to deal with it and stay connected, sacrifice. That mistreatment is acceptable and should be to me too / also.”

Additionally, a non-estranged person is unlikely to understand how an estrangement might function in a EAC's family system, or the emotional costs of endlessly hanging onto hope.

“They assume all of it was my choice and I'm the one that should initiate reconciliation. Some of these people chose to walk away from me. Some of these people have refused multiple requests to repair. They also don't understand that no contact is the safest thing for all of us to some degree. I can no longer lie or pretend, so that would be upsetting and unpredictable to my immediate family. They would not know how to manage that.”



“Most often, I hear things that I know are meant well like "Maybe someday..", or "I hope you can have hope that someday". The thing is, I spent my entire life hoping, which is why I finally had to draw the line.”

— Community Member

Impacts of Estrangement

We had four questions related to the impacts of estrangement, asking participants to note which were current or historical. Three of them were drawn from our [2020 survey](#) and an interest in the social determinants of health (Dahlgren & Whitehead, 1991). These questions focussed on the social impacts of estrangement, as well as the impacts on personal wellbeing, and life circumstances. Our fourth question explored the positive impacts of estrangement.

Estrangement rarely lands as one clean decision followed by relief. It's more like a reorganization of personal and social life structures. Participants who shared their insights as part of this survey referenced impacts on their nervous system, identity, support network, and day-to-day logistics. Some people felt immediate peace. Some felt immediate collapse. Most EAC who took part in this community needs survey experienced a mix of emotions and practical changes that varied across time.






Social Well-Being

Social challenges are often the most persistent because they are triggered by the calendar and by cultural assumptions. Holidays can feel like a spotlight. Milestones can feel like a hole. People report isolation, pressure to reconcile, shaming, stigma, ripple effects with extended family, loss of support during positive life events, and even practical gaps for something like not having an emergency contact for routine dental work.

One respondent put the social judgment in blunt terms: *"They think it's selfish."* Another described the suspicion people carry: *"It's assumed that I've done something really bad... or that I've not tried hard enough."*

This is where "current vs. historical" impacts can be a helpful distinction. Even when someone's internal world steadies, social life can complicate that steadiness. Whether an estrangement is temporary or permanent community members have lost a significant source of social capital.

Of respondents, 87% of respondents cited the following issues as their primary issues at present

	SHAMING
	PRESSURE TO RECONCILE
	LACK OF FAMILY SUPPORT AT MILESTONES
	ISOLATION
	LACK OF CONNECTION AT HOLIDAYS

Support After Family Estrangement

Among those who have accessed support to help them grieve, heal, or make sense of their estrangement, 87% report attending talk therapy. More than half of respondents also cite participation in online support groups, reading relevant books, and leaning on friends as primary sources of support, while 40% identify content from websites.

At the same time, half of respondents report being unable to find any or only very limited information and support related to family estrangement. One third report finding some resources, and just 20% report access to many relevant supports.

These findings suggest that while talk therapy is an essential resource for many individuals experiencing estrangement, greater availability of relevant, diverse online content would help address gaps in support and improve pathways to individualized resources.

Personal Well-Being

Personal challenges often include the inner weather: anxiety, stress, depression, loneliness, prolonged grieving, feeling unsafe, trauma symptoms, low self-esteem, and the ache of missing family history. These aren't "side effects" so much as understandable nervous-system responses to rupture, loss, and chronic invalidation of challenging experiences.

One participant named the common myth people project onto estranged folks: *"That it's the 'easier' option to go no-contact."*

The timing matters. Early on, many people feel raw, disoriented, hypervigilant, and stuck in loops of second-guessing themselves. Later, those same people may still carry grief, but it starts to feel less like a daily emergency and more like a scar: tender sometimes, not always bleeding.

The five most reported impacts of estrangement on personal wellbeing include **stress, anxiety, loneliness, depression and low self-esteem**. 65% of respondents cited these issues as their current experience, stressing the need for proactive efforts to engage with the media and wider public around misconceptions and the need to establish systems of support to care for, rather than shame, individuals living through family estrangement.

	LOW SELF ESTEEM
	DEPRESSION
	LONELINESS
	ANXIETY
	STRESS

Life Circumstances After Family Estrangement

Challenges to life circumstances refers to the point at which estrangement stops being an emotional experience and becomes material. People report job instability, difficulty working, poverty, housing stress, trouble accessing personal paperwork, schooling disruptions, the need to move or hide for safety, legal complications, and in some cases homelessness.

This is also where timing can vary most. Some people experience the biggest practical consequences early, when they've lost financial support, childcare support, housing, or community ties. Others live with long-term effects when estrangement intersects with disability, caregiving responsibilities, safety risks, or legal and financial entanglements.

Admin of Estrangement



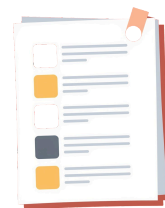
Many EAC who attend our online support groups describe the “tentacles” or administrative ramifications of estrangement in anguish. In losing a key element of their social support network, medical records, legal paperwork, all means that society is harder to navigate, with more barriers and hurdles to overcome alone. Over half (55%) of respondents cited the following issues as part of their current experience.



housing security



legal safeguarding



accessing information



unemployment



poverty



education access

A significant challenge noted by participants centered on legal safeguarding - how to protect themselves following the decision to become estranged from their family. Understanding the safeguards available to them in their legal jurisdictions, accessing legal aid and the practical enforcement of these rights, presents multiple challenges for those experiencing the emotional toll of estrangement noted above.

In addition, by leaving the family unit, many also leave their actual family home - and without anywhere else to reside, they face homelessness or precarious living conditions in temporary or unsuitable homes. This is further exacerbated by lack of adequate resources (poverty) to build a life away from the established safety net that family members often provide.

Without access to their family network, home, or resources to address the financial and practical needs they have, many find themselves unable to continue or access employment or further education, with long-term ramifications on their ability to establish a safe and nurturing life outside their family of origin.

It is evident that a comprehensive roadmap is required for this community of EAC, that adequately considers the vast array of services required to address the fallout of becoming estranged from family, in keeping with other research on the subject by Kylie Agllias (2017): *Missing Family: The Adult Child's Experience of Parental Estrangement*.



Challenging the Assumption that Family Estrangement is All Bad

We asked: Have you experienced any of the following as a result or by-product of family estrangement? Noted in the graph below are the top five positive impacts of family estrangement for participants in this survey.

Respondents described the misconception that estrangement is purely negative. While many acknowledged pain and grief, they also depicted estrangement as protective, stabilizing, and sometimes life-giving. Outsiders may miss that two truths can exist at once: estrangement can be heart-breaking and it can create space for safety, healing, and a more grounded life.

TOP FIVE POSITIVE IMPACTS



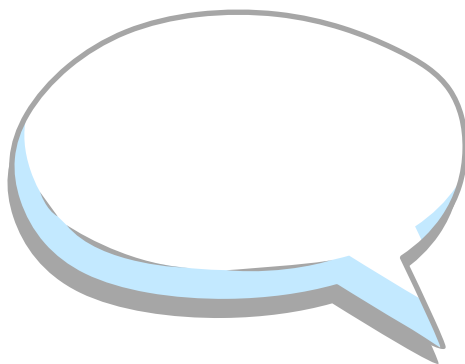
SAFETY



PEACE



FREEDOM



HONESTY



AUTHENTICITY

Personal positive effects are real, and they're not a betrayal of the pain. Participants described a more authentic sense of self, more freedom to be who they are, a clearer relationship to truth, increased safety, decreased stress, and a growing sense of peace.

Sometimes estrangement makes room for coming out, for reclaiming your body, for sleeping through the night, for building intuition and acting on this without feeling the need to apologize for it. Post-traumatic growth doesn't mean estrangement was "worth it." It means that once the old system stops being all consuming, individuals can finally develop and mature.

Social positive effects often show up as a re-building of community for participants: chosen family, truer friendships, relationships with less performative loyalty and more actual care. Some people notice they become better at boundaries, better at noticing red flags, and more honest in intimacy. Estrangement can strip away forced roles and leave you with relationships based on consent instead of obligation. In many cases, the social gains aren't more people, they're better people.

This Looks Like...



The positive effects on life circumstances can look like stability returning to those more material areas once the initial chaos stops: safer housing, less financial sabotage, better health, and more capacity to plan. Participants found that once they were no longer managing family conflict, their work improved, their decision-making sharpened, and their life became more predictable.

What We Do at Together Estranged

Together Estranged provides support in an online community setting, through virtual meet-ups and events, and by partnering with services that can offer one-to-one therapeutic support.

The results from this Community Needs Survey (CNS) help inform our communication with established support structures, and the media, to more accurately describe the challenges faced by EAC, in the face of much misinformation and stigma around the decision to become estranged from family members.

Together Estranged operates across three strategic pillars:

- Supports [S] - specific offerings that provide care to EAC.
- Empowerment [E] - programming and content that provide opportunities for growth.
- Distigmatization [D] - content and outreach that work against misinformation.

We are developing our next 3-year strategic plan around these pillars, informed by the results from this Community Needs Survey (CNS) Report.

Commitment



While Together Estranged cannot commit to addressing the vast array of services required to be described throughout this survey report, it is critical that a roadmap or signposting is available to EAC, enabling them to navigate through the systems available to them - joining the dots to guide their way forward and out from under the challenges faced following estrangement from family. Partnering with external support services, and building awareness of estrangement within those organizations and institutions is critical if we want to avoid people falling through the cracks at their most vulnerable.

Resources available at TE are primarily accessed through our website, with 65% of respondents citing this as their primary platform for engaging with us. This was followed by both our social media accounts at 42% (Facebook) and 29% (Instagram), despite having a higher following on Instagram. This may be in part due to our private support group forum being hosted on Facebook, with more engaged members interacting with content and support that way.

Of the available resources at TE, our online peer-to-peer support meetings and online informational content were both utilized by more than 50% of the respondents, while over a quarter of those who took part in this survey access the private support forum and article series available on our website. Over 85% of people said they found it easy to access the available resources at Together Estranged.

The most important aspects of supports for the respondents



Regular, Peer to Peer Support Group Meetings

- ✓ Consistent Meetings
- ✓ Shared Experiences
- ✓ Sense of Community



Maintaining Free Events

- ✓ Accessibility
- ✓ Financial Inclusivity
- ✓ Increased Participation



Professionally Facilitated Supports

- ✓ Expert Guidance
- ✓ Structured Sessions
- ✓ Safe Environment

Our **peer-to-peer facilitated monthly support group meetings** are lead by three volunteers across two meetings. These meetings aim to provide a sense of community, validation, reflection and learning among community members. Survey respondents scored this offering 4.5/5.



Our **information content channels** are used to signpost relevant content, educate members on specific topics, empower the community to make healthy changes and bring a greater level of nuanced understanding to the subject of family estrangement. Respondents marked this 4/5.



Our **Annual Event Series (Togetherness Series)** takes place in November through to December, and provides a safe and joyful virtual experience for our members. We host a series of online events, capturing a specific theme, with guest speakers and facilitators events. This scored 4/5.



Our **General Events (Concepts Talk)** play host to guest speakers and facilitators who wish to share information, personal experiences, and resources on relevant topics with our members. This scored 4/5.



Our **private support group** is a Facebook group in which individuals support each other. It is moderated by volunteers. This scored 3.8/5.



Insights

What this tells us is that our current offering is highly rated by members of the community, while there is always room for improvement and inclusion of wider scope of supports.

Addressing Gaps

The areas participants wished to be covered to a greater extent and we recognize there are these gaps and will endeavor to address them in the development of our strategic plan.



- Sibling estrangement
- Transgenerational estrangement
- Older persons experiences
- Minority representation
- Discussion of religious differences in context of estrangement
- Family Sexual Abuse
- Developing Relationship-building skills
- Neurodiverse resources

Recommendations

Our aim is to work towards addressing all of the findings, where resourcing and capacity allows. In supporting individuals in our community with the challenges outlined in this report, we must first acknowledge the limitations of our small grass-roots non-profit organization. We acknowledge the dedication of their work, while noting the limitations of this voluntary operation. As such, we have defined five broad headings from the findings in this report to capture the areas we will dedicate our efforts.

Advocacy, Skills & Capacity Building

Working alongside and on behalf of those in our community to destigmatize family estrangement in society while establishing offerings and practices that empower Estranged Adult Children.

Diversity & Accessibility of Content

Working to advance our understanding of the needs and experiences of our EAC to develop tailored and accessible information to better enable community-building and self-empowerment.

Consistency & Connection in Supports

Working to develop inclusive community spaces that meet the diverse needs of our members.

Research, Measurement & Feedback Loops

Working to establish and administer useful data capture points to inform research and impact measurements within the organization and external partners that provide allyship and support.

Acknowledgements

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The meticulous research undertaken by volunteer Jen Maher means that this report and much of the content on our website is of the highest standard. For Dr. Steiger Bryke and Thomas Bentz for their expert guidance, valuable insights, and support in shaping the survey and reporting process as dedicated volunteers and members of the community.

We extend our sincere gratitude to Giorgia Ieraci Assumma and Andrea Baidoo, communications and design aficionados, who made the publication of this report on multiple platforms possible and impactful.

Most importantly, we thank every participant who shared their lived experiences with us.

Your courage and honesty are the heart of this report. Without your trust, openness, and willingness to reflect on deeply personal stories, this work would not exist. We honor your resilience and are committed to ensuring your voices help build a more compassionate and informed future for all who face estrangement from family. **We are estranged, but not alone.**

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