



California Secondary Analysis Report of the Kidsave-Gallup National Study “Americans’ Views of U.S. Foster Care”

In collaboration with Gallup, Kidsave’s EMBRACE Project conducted a national study on American’s perspectives of foster care to better understand and find solutions for the overrepresentation of Black children in the foster care system. In 2020, Black children made up 23% of all kids in foster care in the U.S., even though they only represent 14% of the total child population, according to the 2021 Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS). This secondary analysis report of the national study focuses on Californian Americans’ perspectives of foster care.

Methodology

Data for this study were first collected by Gallup as part of the Kidsave-Gallup Study, “Americans’ Views of U.S. Foster Care: Elevating Black Americans’ Perspectives and Experiences” (Gallup). The full methodology for the study can be found in the report on the Kidsave EMBRACE website. This state-level report is a secondary analysis of that data, conducted by Kidsave, analyzing responses of the 592 California study participants.

Why the Focus on California?

- California has over 47,800 youth in foster care ([California, 2021](#)).
- Of those, 15,386 are waiting to be adopted ([AFCARS Report: California, 2022](#)).
- Los Angeles has one of the largest child welfare systems with over 15,879 children in out-of-home placements as of November 2023 ([Monthly DCFS Data Fact Sheet November 2023](#)).
- Black youth are significantly disproportionately represented in the LA County child welfare system. Black youth make up only 7.4% of the child population but make up 24% of youth in foster care ([Monthly DCFS Data Fact Sheet November 2023](#)).

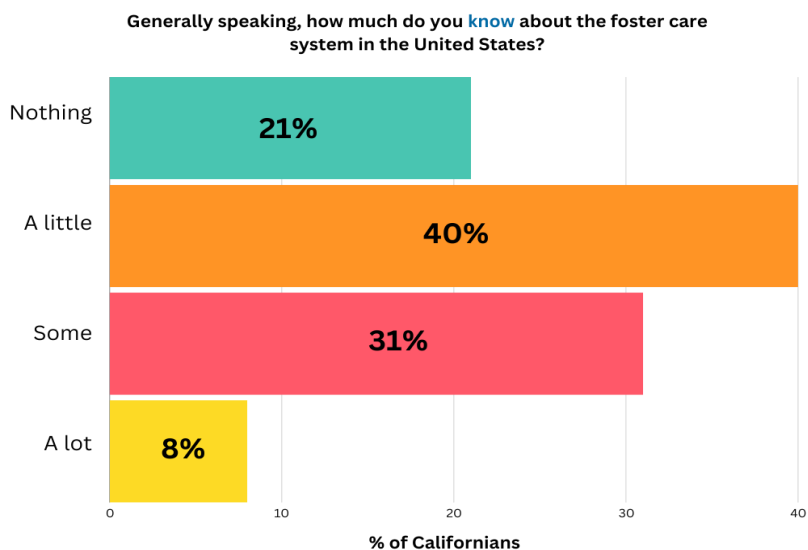
Our goal with this state-level sub-report is to learn more about Californians' confidence in and perceptions of the foster care system, adoption from foster care, and barriers preventing Californians from positively engaging in mentoring, fostering, and adopting youth in care. With these learnings in mind, recommendations for actionable steps can be made for community leaders, child welfare practitioners, and policy makers to help improve outcomes for the 15,000+ kids—many of whom are children of color—languishing in foster care.

Key Findings

- 61% of Californians reported that they know little or nothing about the U.S. foster care system. (Figure 1)
- 65% of Californians do not know if they are eligible to provide foster care. (Figure 2)
- Only 39% of Californians have ever considered or thought a lot about participating in a program to work with children in foster care out; 51% were not aware that these types of volunteer programs (outside of providing foster care) existed. (Figure 3)
- 46% of Californians say not having enough resources is a major barrier to providing foster care.

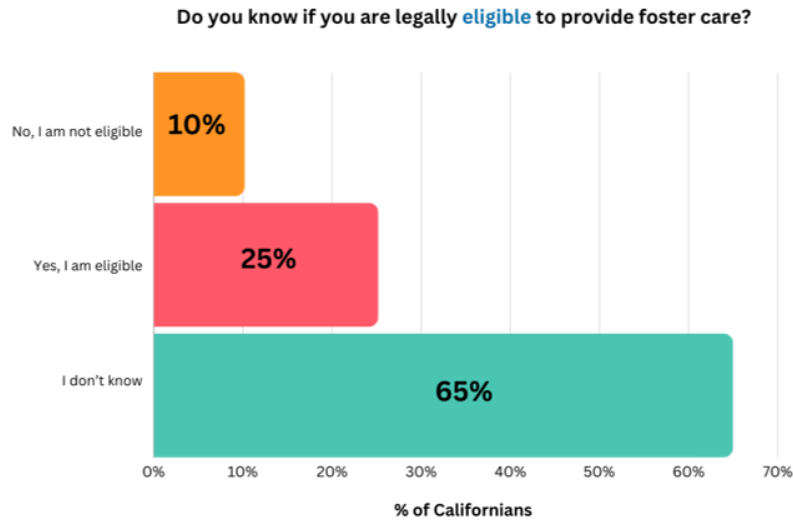
The following are key findings from the sub analysis conducted on Californians' responses when asked questions regarding their personal perceptions of, confidence levels in, and barriers to engaging with the U.S. foster care and adoption systems.

Figure 1: Californians' knowledge level of the U.S. foster care system



When asked about their knowledge of the foster care system in the United States, the majority of Californians (61%) reported knowing either “a little” or “nothing” whereas the minority (39%) reported knowing “some” or “a lot.”

Figure 2: Californians' knowledge level of eligibility within the U.S. foster care system



While 51% of Californians reported that they are interested in providing foster care, 65% of Californian respondents are unsure whether they are eligible to provide foster care.

Figure 3: Number of Californians who have participated in programs to work with youth in foster care

1 OUT OF 8 Californians



have participated in a program to work with children in foster care

12.5% of Californians reported that they have participated in a program to work with children in foster care. For those who haven't participated in such a program, they reported a high rate (39%) of considering participating in a program to work with children in foster care, but over half (51%) did not even know such programs existed.

Conclusion

While interest in providing foster care and adoption is high among Californians, their self-reported lack of knowledge about the foster care system and eligibility to provide foster care or adopt shows a need for education and awareness programs. Additionally, for Californians who reported a lower level of interest in providing foster care or adoption, participation in a mentorship program in which they could spend time with the child before making a commitment and receiving adequate training and support to ensure they felt prepared and safe at all times could increase their interest and comfort. Awareness and education campaigns about the training and supports that currently exist for foster and adoptive parents and the implementation of additional, ongoing mental health supports could lead to more Californians considering foster care and adoption. More mentoring programs or an increase in participation in existing mentoring programs that work with youth in foster care could lead to more Californians providing foster care and adopting in the future.

Sources

Administration For Children and Families (AFCARS). (2022, June 28). *The AFCARS Report: California*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/cb/afcars-tar-ca-2021.pdf>

Gallup, Inc., & Kidsave, (2024, July 8). Americans' Views of U.S. Foster Care: Elevating Black Americans' Perspectives and Experiences. <https://s43633.pcdn.co/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Americans-Views-of-U.S.-Foster-Care-Kidsave-Gallup-Report-Web-v2.pdf>

Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services. (2023, November). *Monthly DCFS Data Fact Sheet November 2023*. Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services. <https://dcfs.lacounty.gov/resources/data-and-monthly-fact-sheets/>

U.S. Census Bureau. (2021, October 1). *California, 2021*. U.S. Census Bureau.

<https://cwoutcomes.acf.hhs.gov/cwodatasite/pdf/california.html>



Kidsave-Gallup Study
California
Secondary Analysis Report
December 2023

METHODOLOGY

- Data for this study were first collected by Gallup as part of the Kidsave-Gallup Study, “Americans’ Views of U.S. Foster Care.” The full methodology for the study can be found in the report on the Kidsave EMBRACE website.
- In the original study, data were collected using both mail and web in March through April 2023. Respondents were primarily identified through the Gallup Panel, a probability-based panel. About one-quarter of respondents were identified through a third-party opt-in sample. Gallup conducted weighting to ensure that the national sample matched national demographics of gender, age, race, Hispanic ethnicity and education, with cross-classified targets within race.
- This state-level report is a secondary analysis of that data, conducted by Kidsave, using new weighting procedures for state-level estimates.

METHODOLOGY

- As part of the current study, Kidsave conducted post-stratification weighting to adjust the national-level weights to state-level demographic targets.
- Demographic weighting targets were based on the March 2023 Current Population Survey estimates for the age 18+ population.
- For the **592** California respondents, the adjusted margin of error was ± 6.4 percentage points.

Why the Focus on California

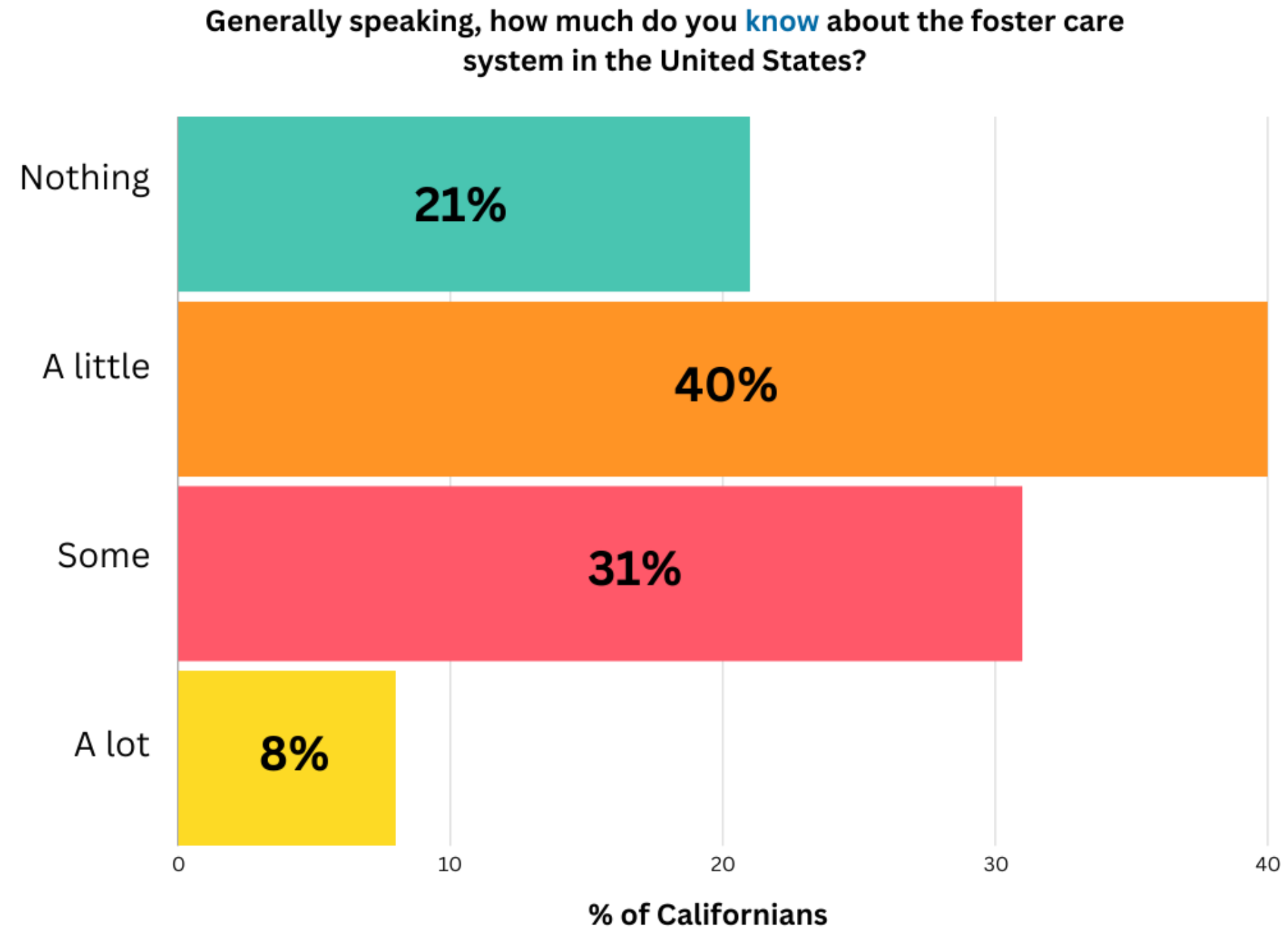
Why California?

- California has over 47,800 youth in foster care ([ACF, CA](#))
- Of those, 15,386 are waiting to be adopted ([AFCARS, CA](#))
- Los Angeles has one of the largest child welfare systems with over 15,879 children in out-of-home placements as of November 2023 ([Los Angeles County DCFS](#)).
- Additionally, Black youth are significantly disproportionately represented in the LA County child welfare system. Black youth make up only 7.4% of the child population but make up 24% of youth in foster care ([Los Angeles County DCFS](#)).
- By learning more about Californians' perceptions of the foster care system and adoption from foster care, we can hopefully help bridge the gap between the community and the 15,000+ kids—who are mostly children of color—languishing in foster care.

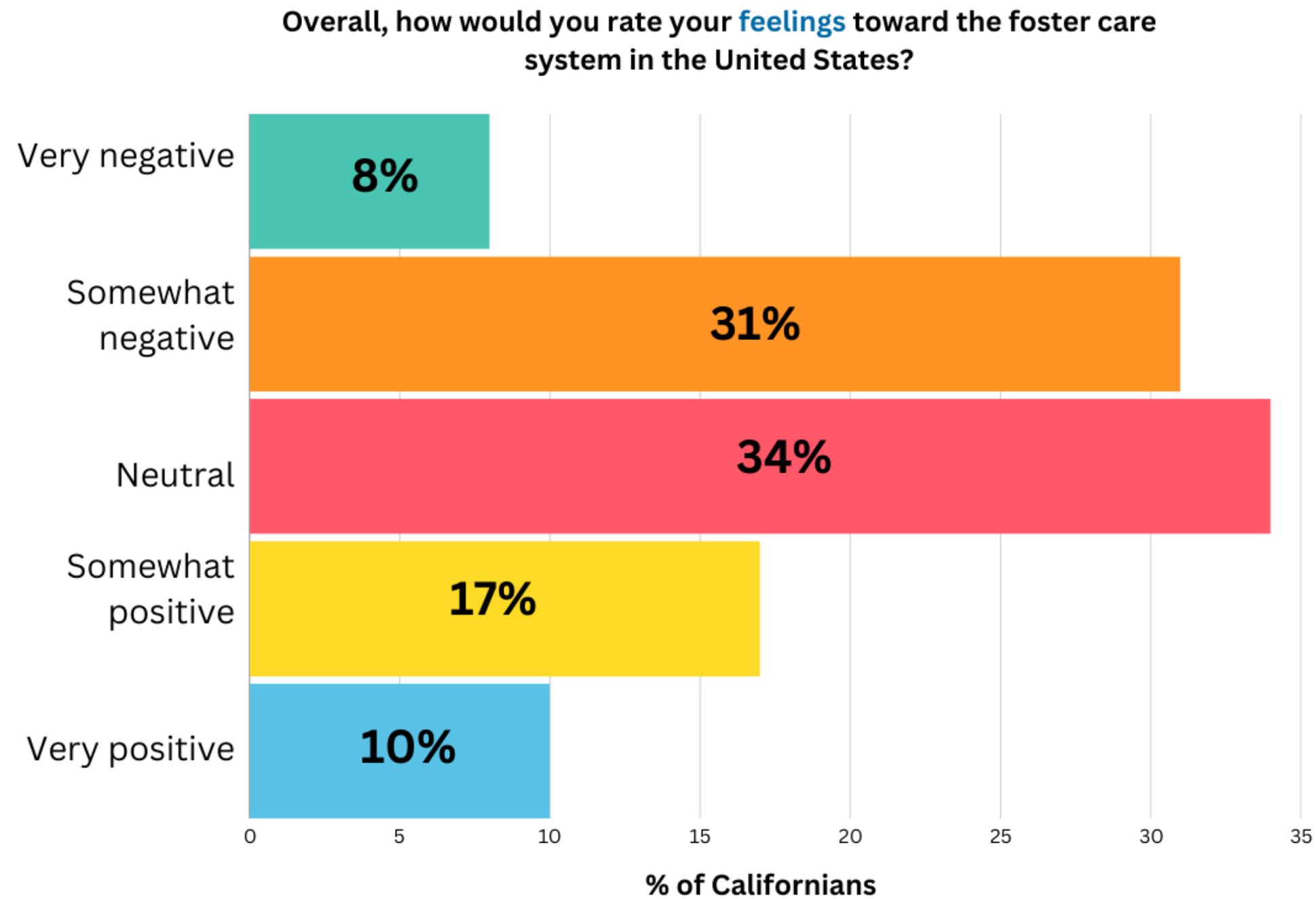
The foster care system:

Perceptions, barriers, and interest

Californians know little about the foster care system

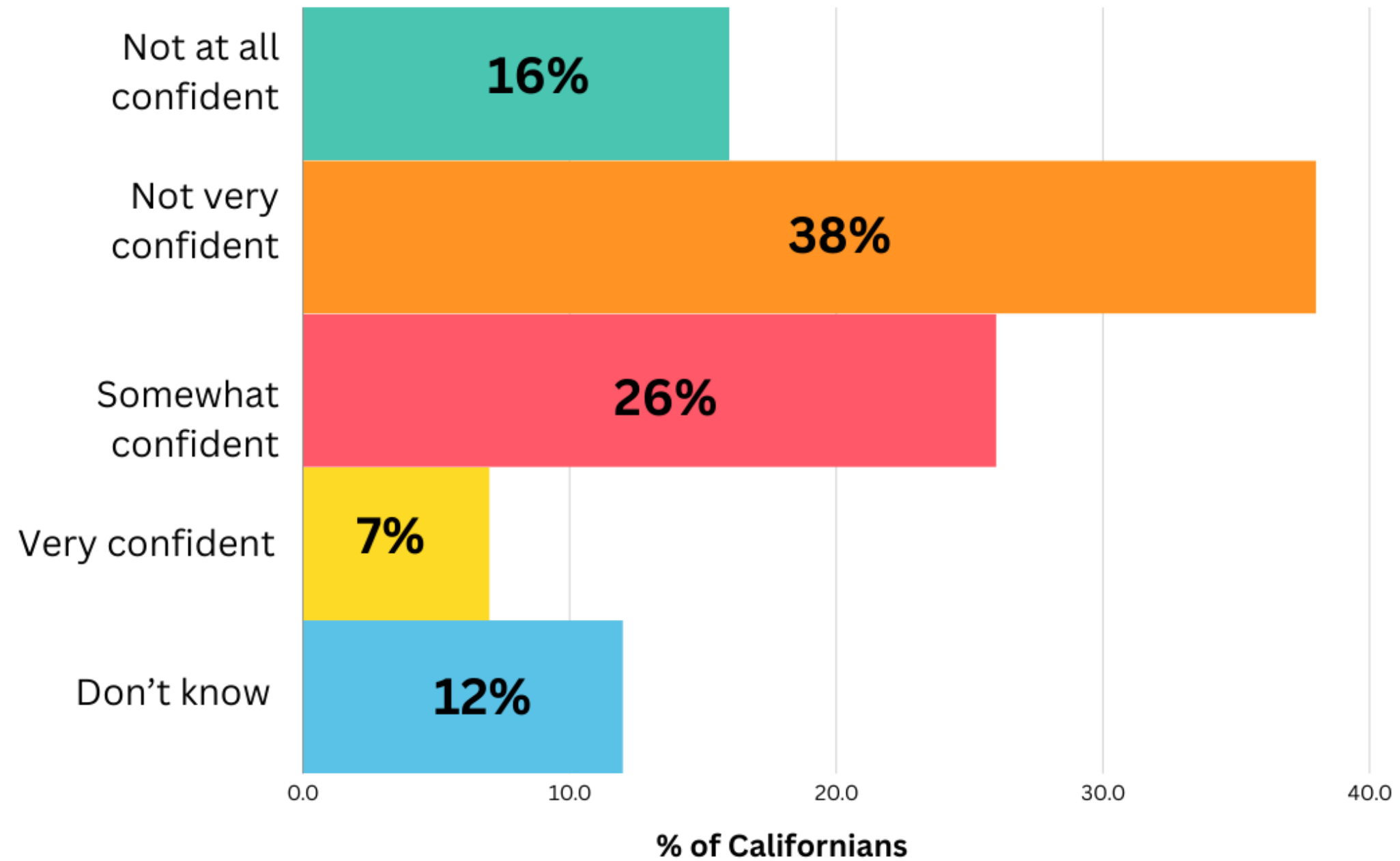


Just one in four Californians have a positive view of the foster care system

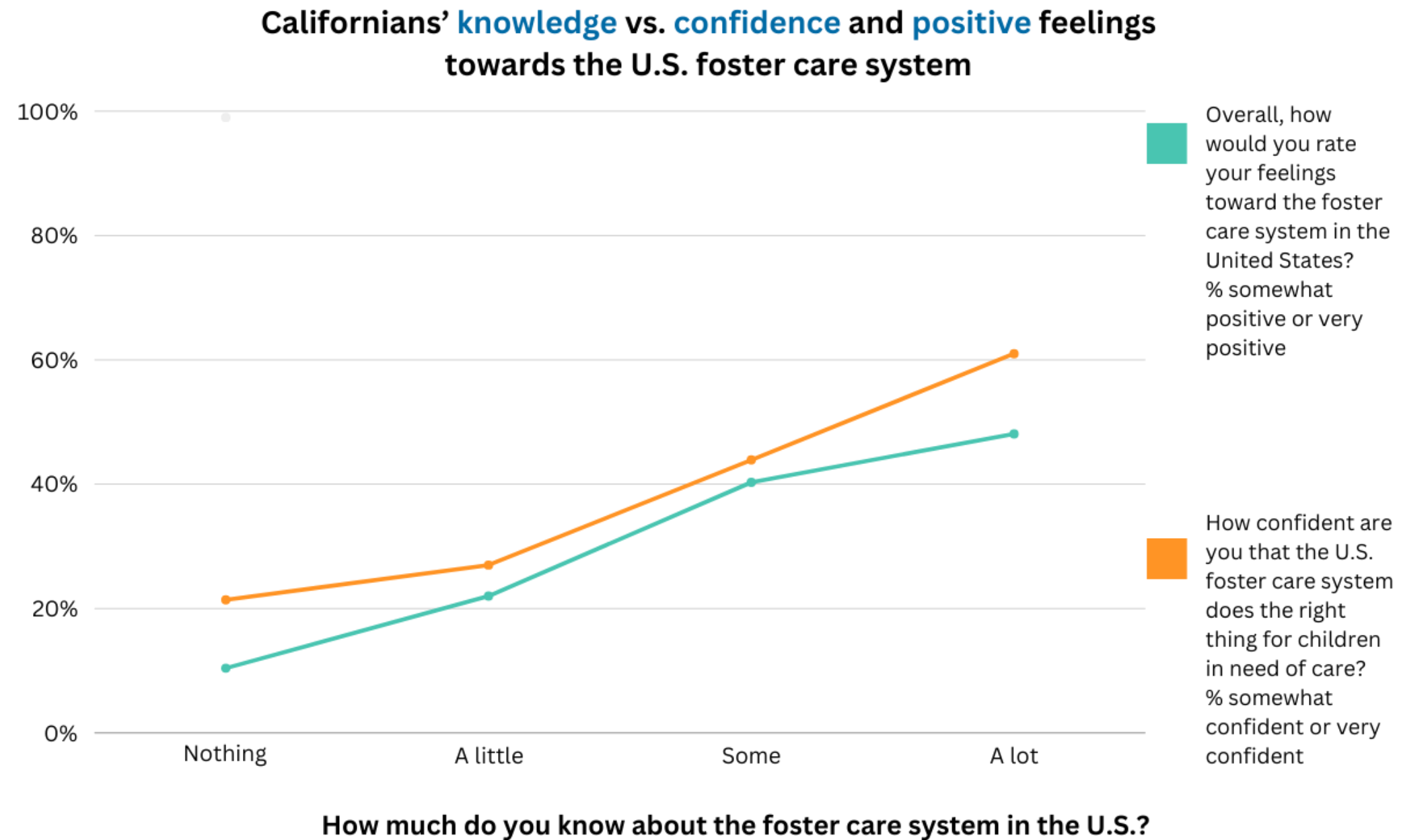


And over half are not confident in the system

How **confident** are you that the U.S. foster care system does the right thing for children in need of care?

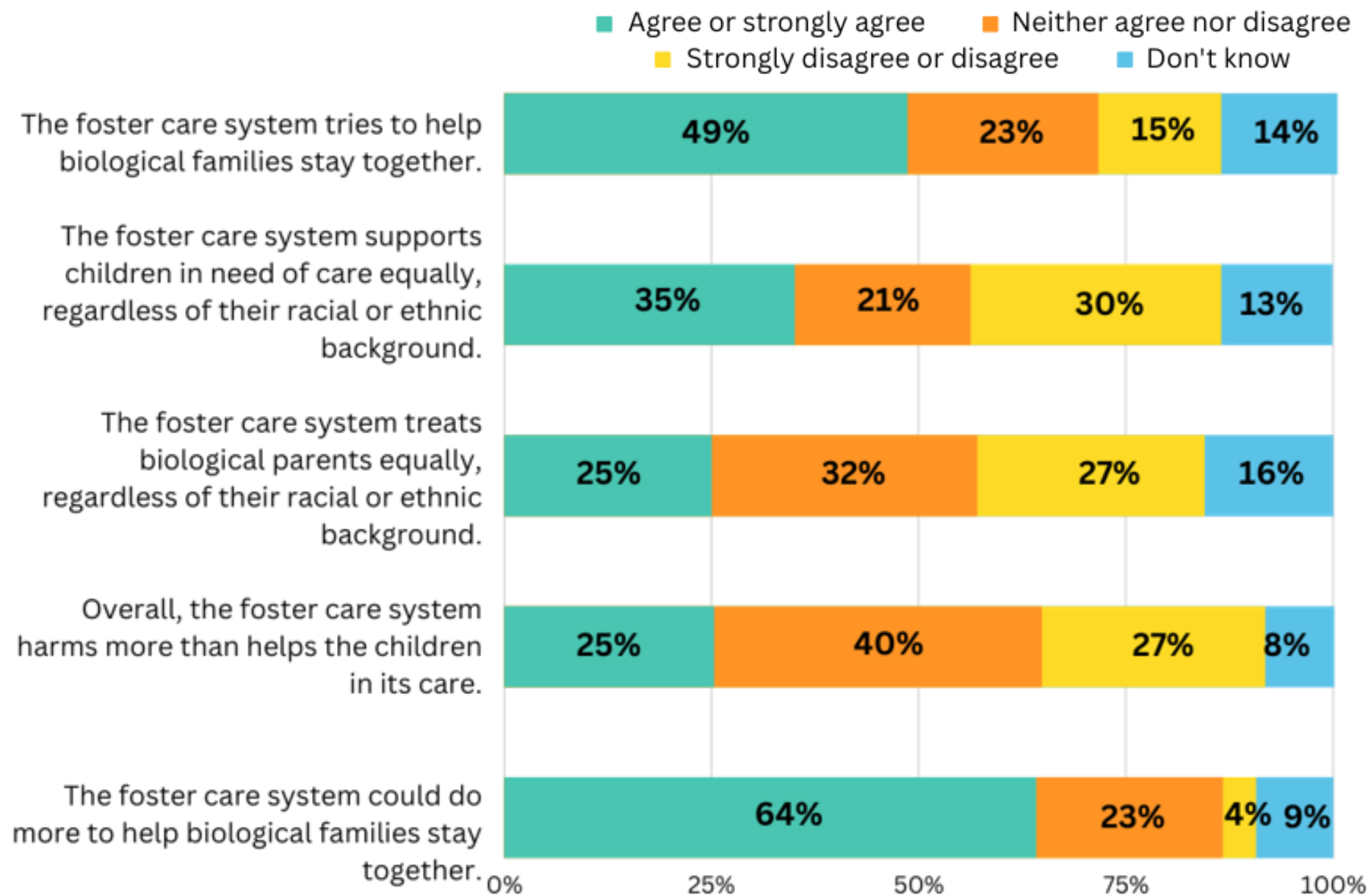


Generally, more knowledge about the system relates to more positive feelings and confidence in it



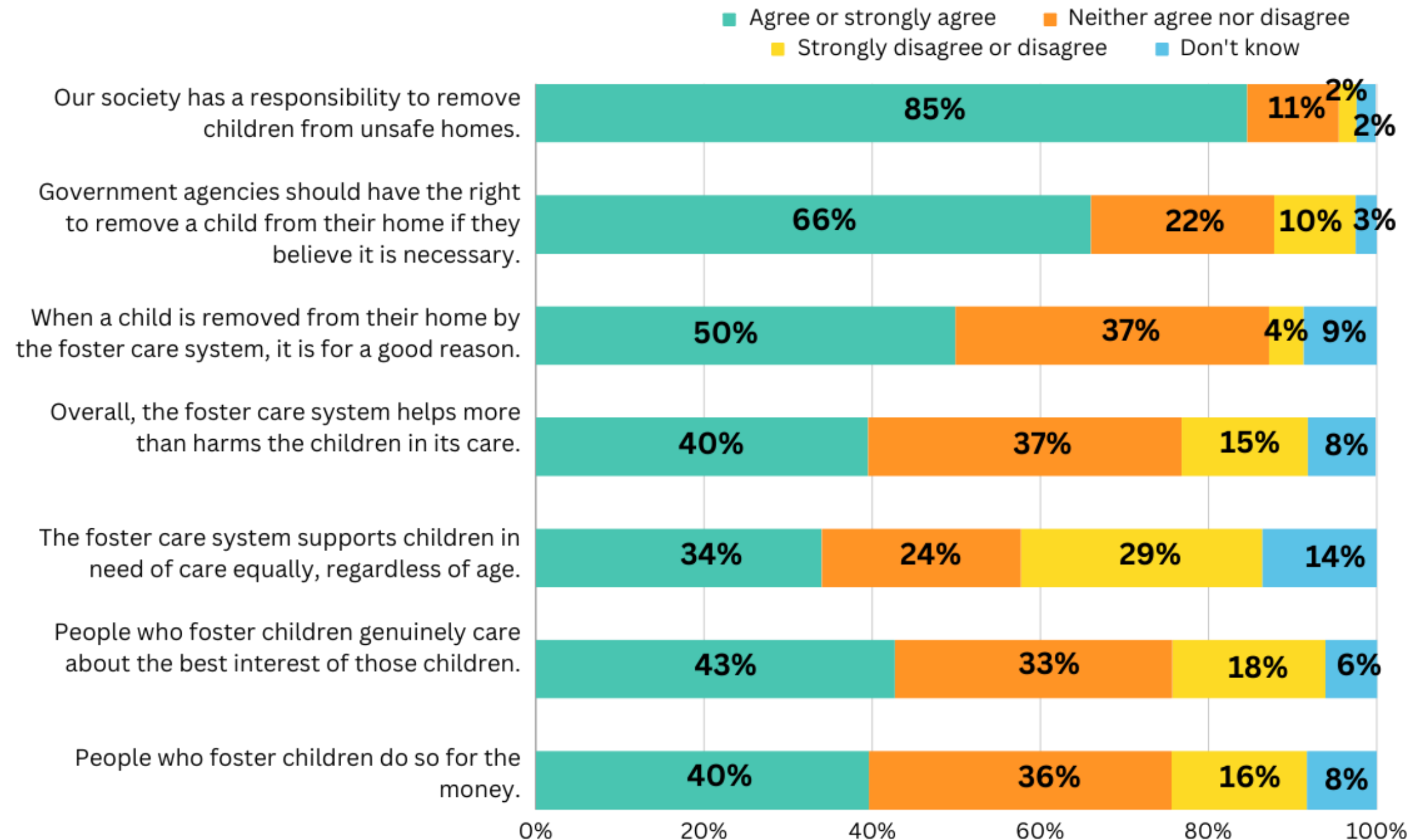
Most Californians believe the foster care system could do more to help biological families stay together.

With your current understanding of the U.S. foster care system, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?



Most Californians believe the foster care system has certain responsibilities

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?



Barriers to providing foster care

Top 5 Most Common Barriers to Providing Foster Care Among Californians

% Major barrier

1. The possibility the child will have behavioral or emotional challenges. **46.6%**
2. Not having enough training and resources to feel prepared to foster. **45.6%**
3. The changes I would have to make to my home or living situation in order to foster. **45.4%**
4. My age or stage in life. **44.3%**
5. Not having enough access to mental health resources for the child, myself, or my family. **43.3%**

Lack of training and resources are significant barriers to providing foster care

Three of the top five barriers to fostering a child **could be improved with training and supportive resources**, especially those related to child and family mental health.

The possibility the child will have behavioral or emotional challenges.



Not having enough training and resources to feel prepared to foster.



Not having enough access to mental health resources for the child, myself, or my family.

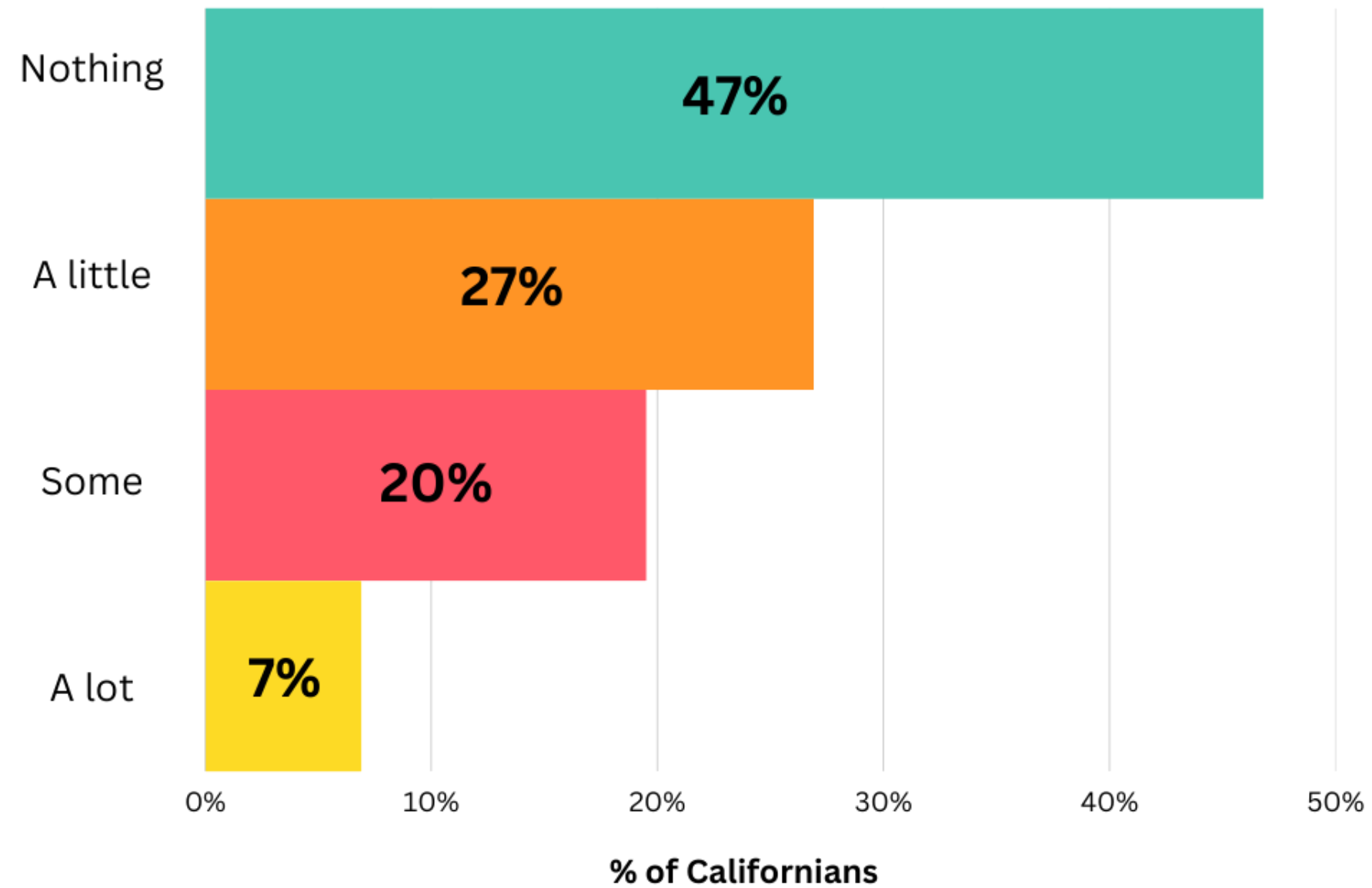


Adoption from foster care:

Perceptions, barriers, and interest

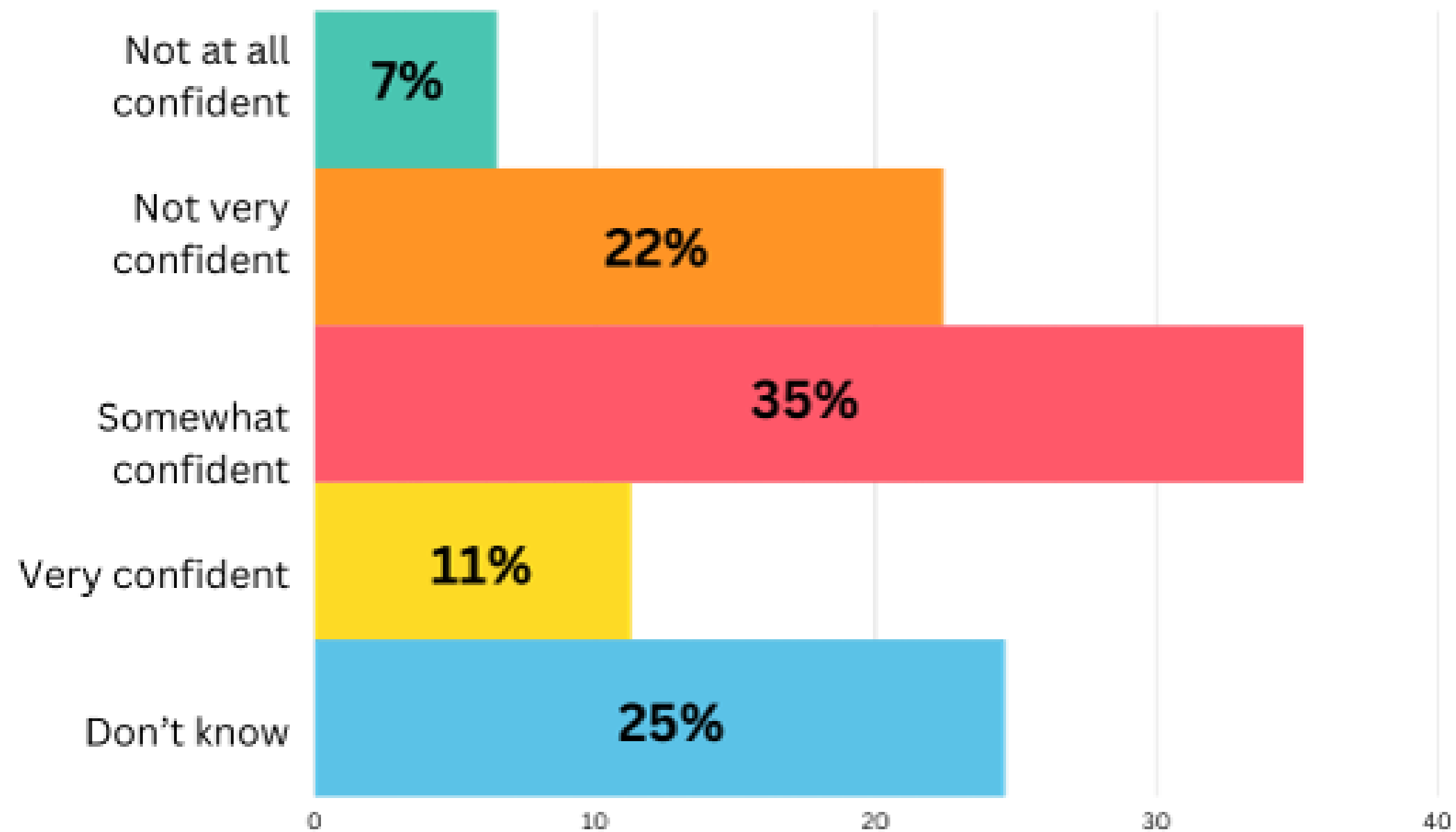
Californians also **know little to nothing** about adoption from the foster care system...

Generally speaking, how much do you **know** about adoption from the foster care system?



...and are also somewhat or not very confident in organizations that facilitate adoption

How **confident** are you that organizations that facilitate adoption from foster care do the right thing for children in need of adoption?



Barriers to adopting from foster care

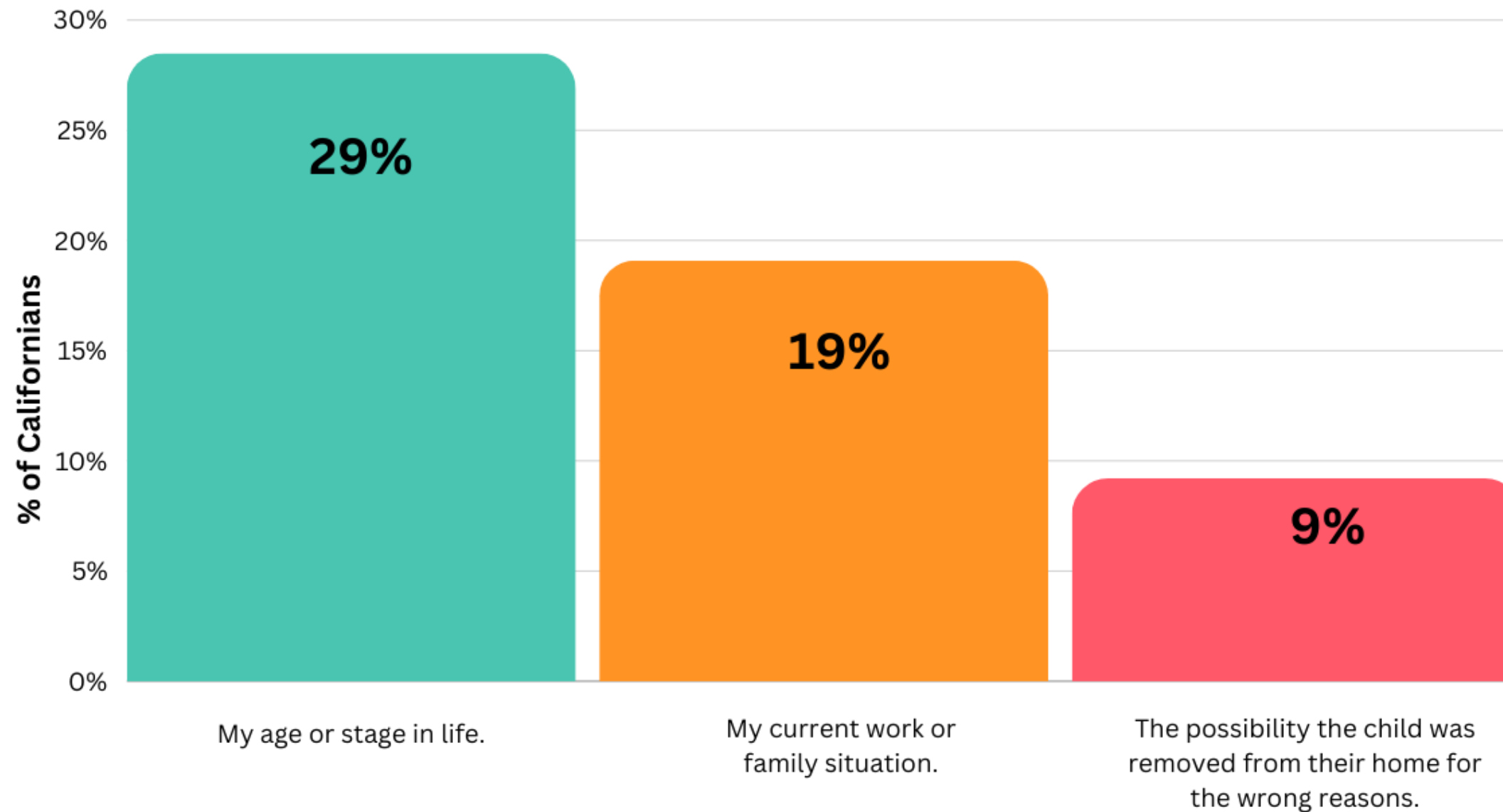
Top 5 Most Common Barriers to Adopting from Foster Care Among Californians

% Major barrier

1. My age or stage in life. **52.3%**
2. My current work or family situation. **49.1%**
3. My desire to add a child or have children (i.e., I do not want a child or more children). **45.7%**
4. The possibility the child was removed from their home for the wrong reasons. **44.8%**
5. The changes I would have to make to my home or living situation in order to foster. **44.4%**

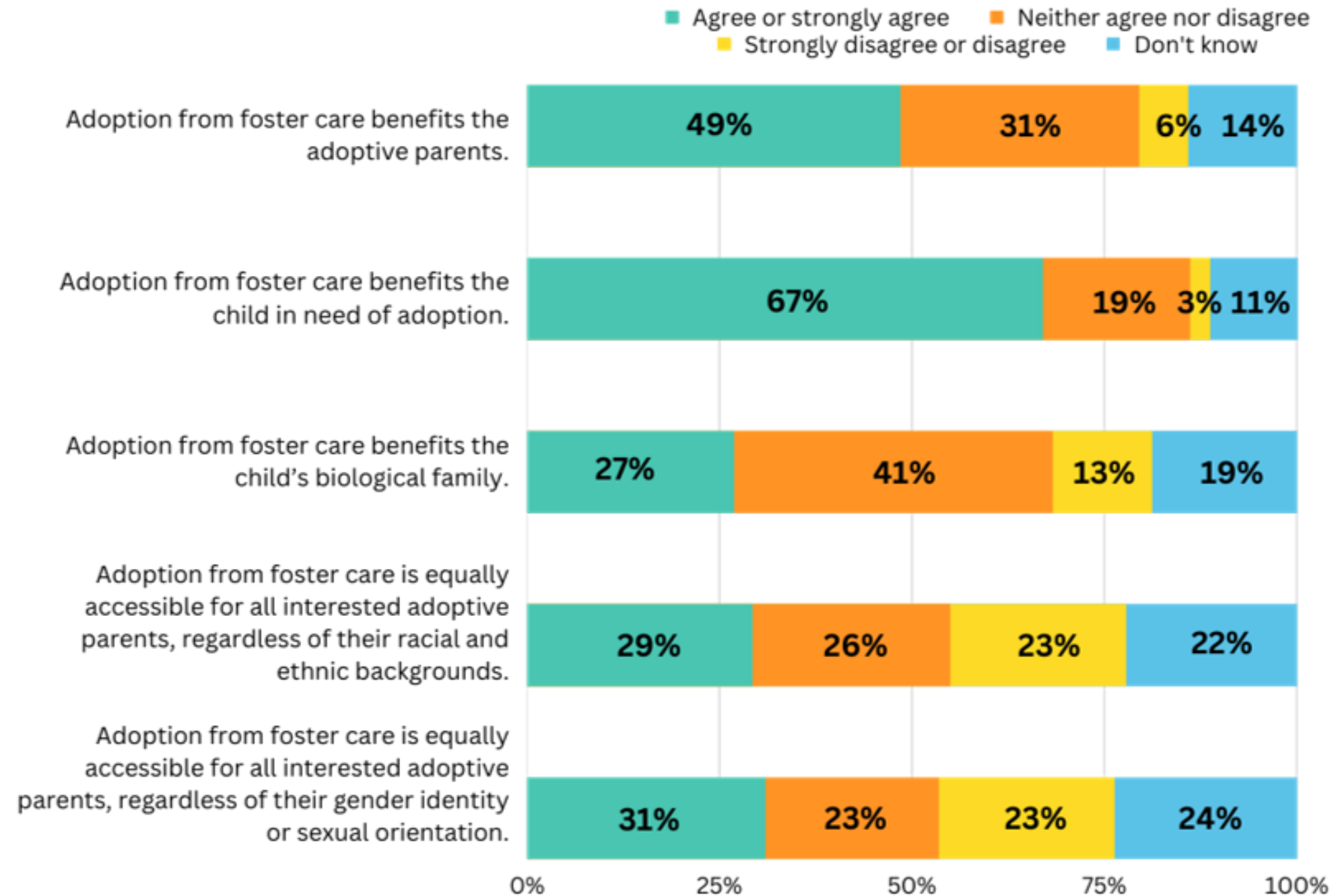
Californians also cite "age or stage in life" and "work/family situation" as their **top barriers to adopting**

If you had to choose only ONE barrier as the **most important** to you, which of the previous barriers would you choose?



Not many Californians believe adoption is an equally accessible or equally beneficial process

How much do you agree with the following statements?



Interest in adoption from foster care

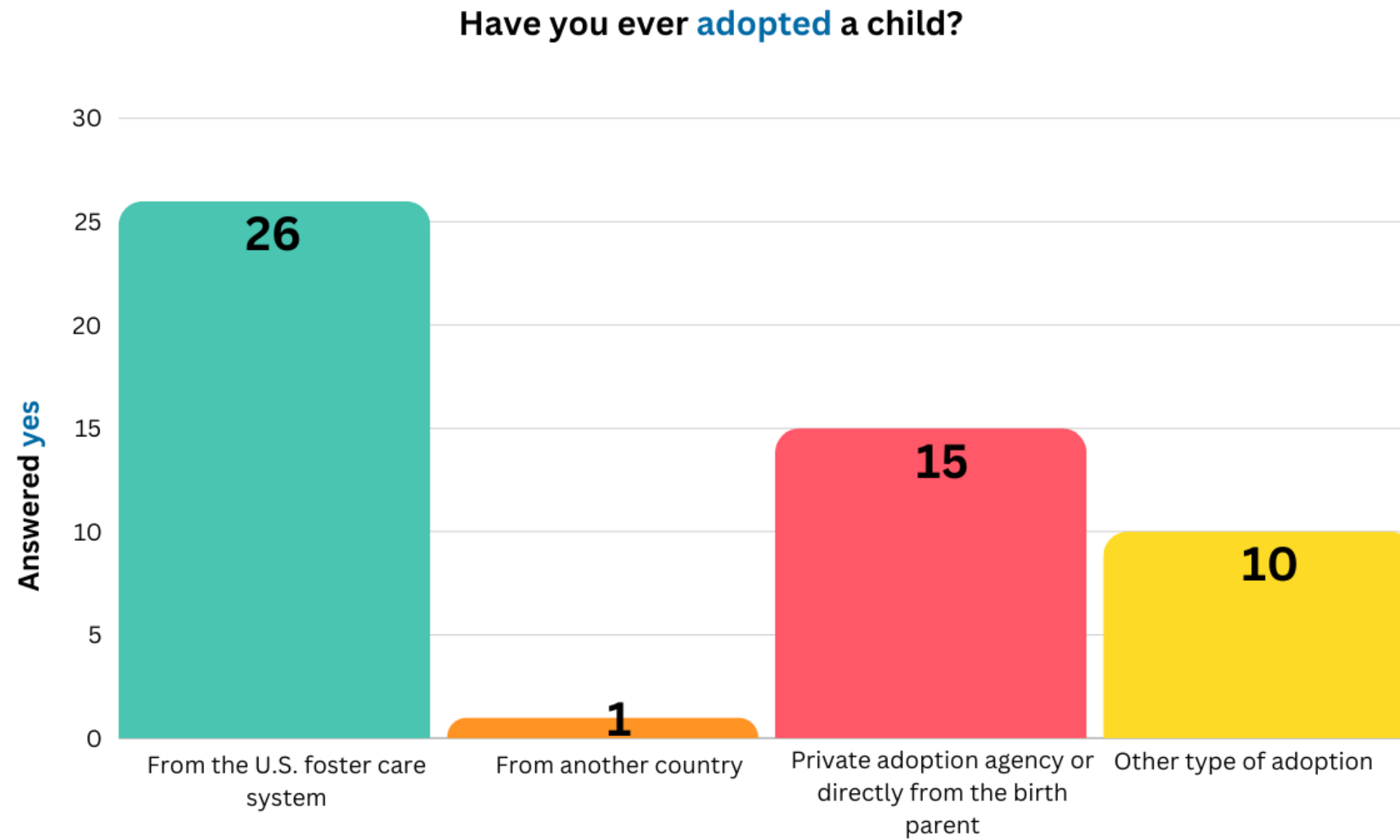
"If the following were true, would it make you more or less likely to consider adoption through foster care in the U.S.? If I knew...."

% somewhat more or a lot more likely



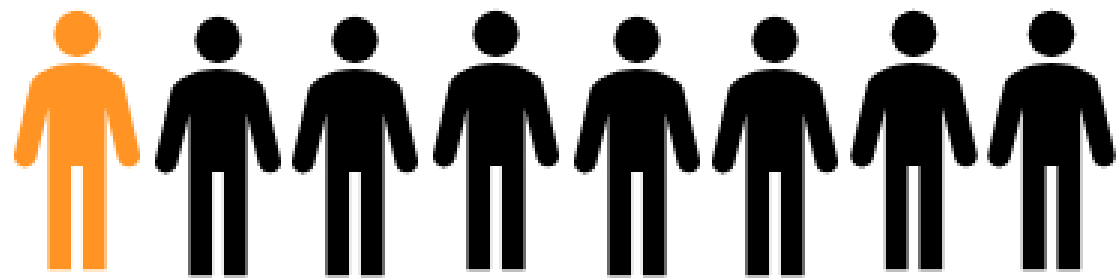
The plurality of Californian adoptions are from U.S. foster care

Out of 52 total adoptions



Mentorship program experience

1 OUT OF 8 Californians



have participated in a program to work with children in foster care



39% of Californians have ever considered or thought a lot about participating in a program to work with children in foster care.



51% were not aware that these types of volunteer programs (outside of foster parenting) existed.

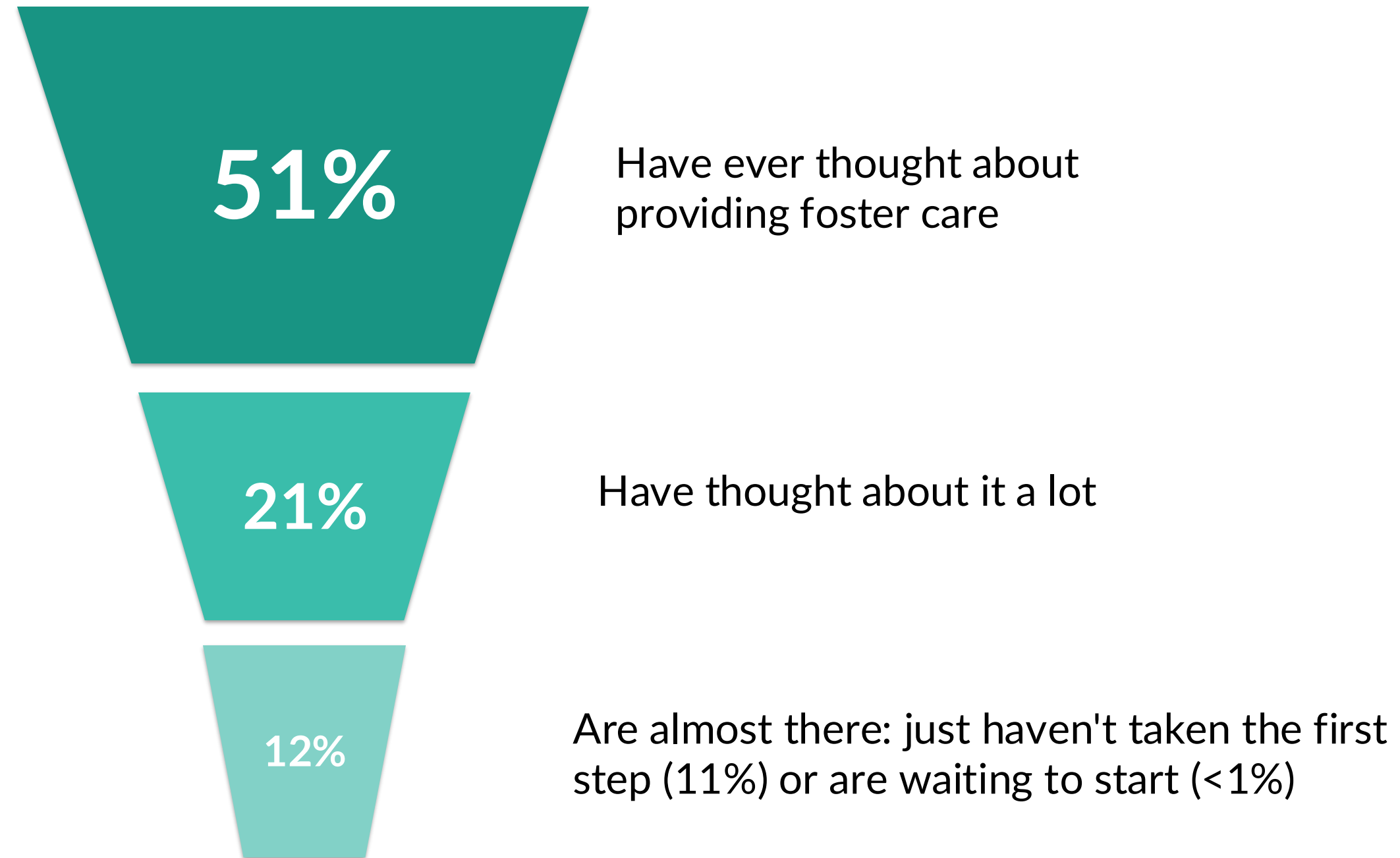
Mentorship program experience

Most Californians say **training and the opportunity to form a meaningful relationship** could make them more likely to participate in a program working with a child in foster care.

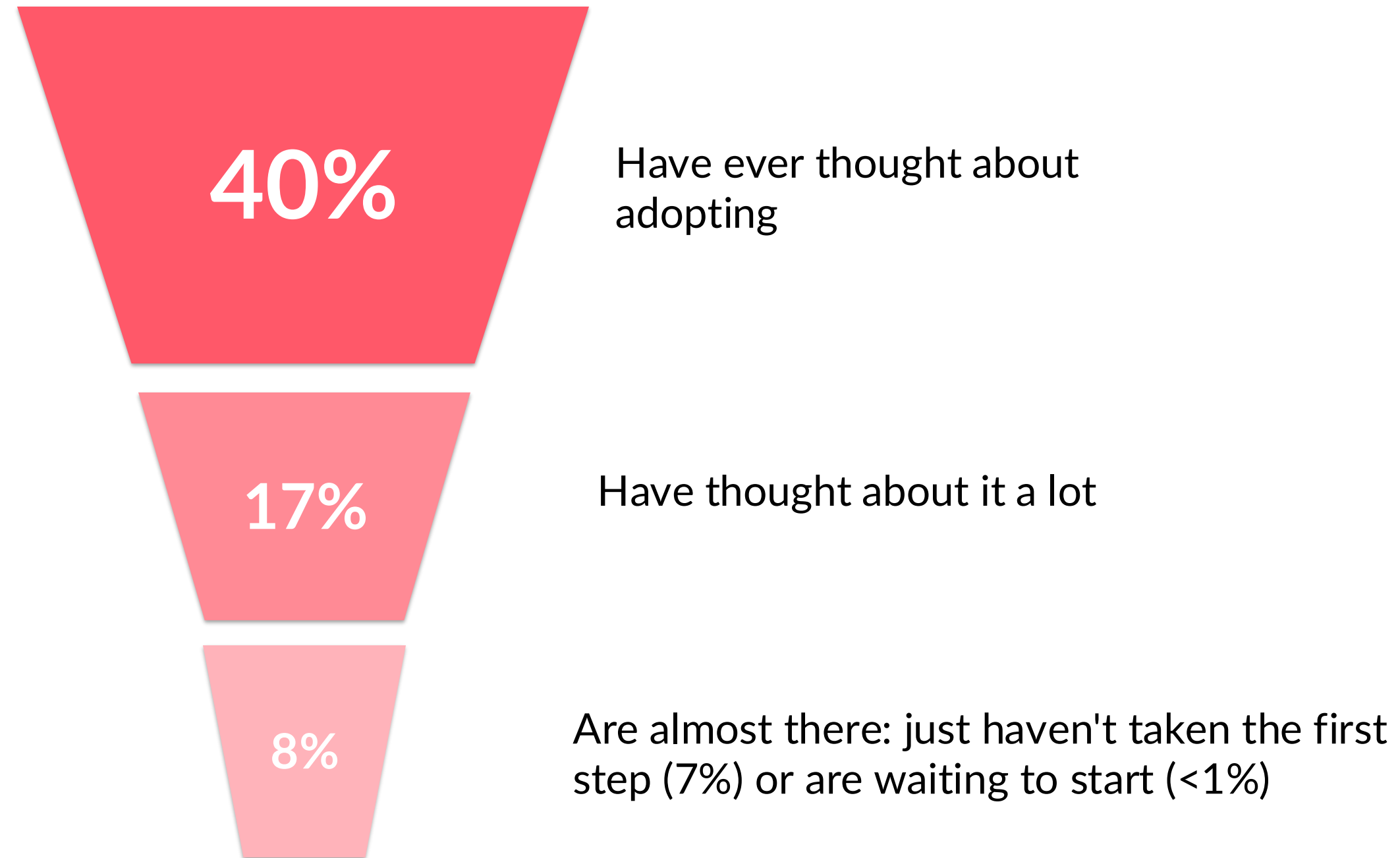
% who say the following would make them more or much more likely to consider participating:

- **77%** Having training and support to ensure I know how to help the child I support.
- **73%** Having training and support to ensure I felt safe at all times.
- **70%** Knowing the child has a say in whether they spend time with me.
- **69%** Getting to meet and spend time with the child before making a commitment.

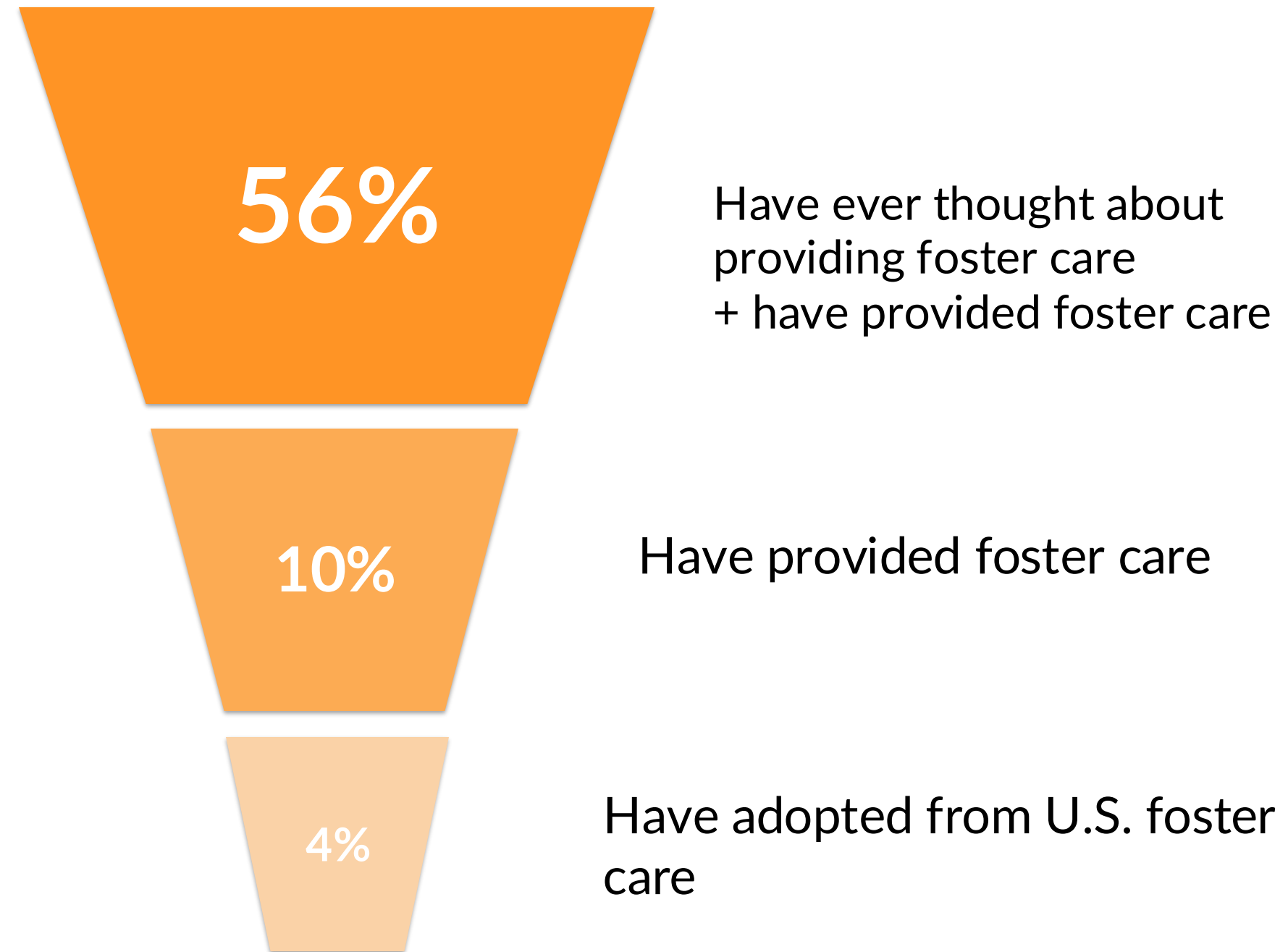
Most Californians have thought about providing foster care



Most Californians have thought about adopting from foster care

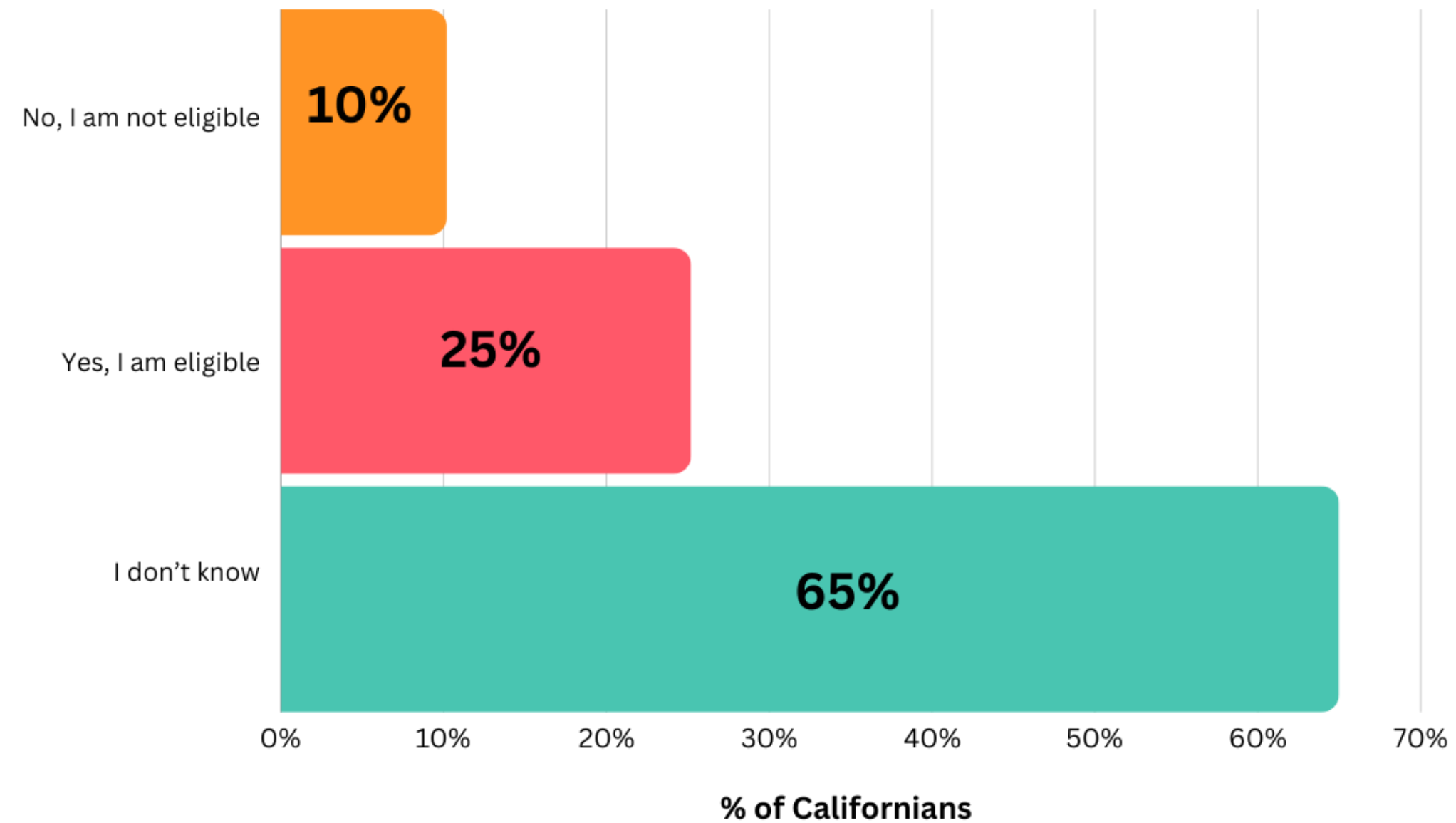


Fostering to adoption gateway



However, most Californians **don't know** if they're eligible to provide foster care

Do you know if you are legally **eligible** to provide foster care?



Key Findings from the Data

- Californians know little about foster care with **61%** self-reporting that they only know a little or nothing about the system.
- Despite this lack of knowledge, the majority (**73%**) felt either neutral or negative about the foster care system, with only one in four reporting positive feelings. Additionally, when asked how confident they are that foster care does the right thing by children, over half of Californian respondents (**54%**) said they were not very or not at all confident in the system.
- When asked about barriers to providing foster care, lack of resources were a major concern, such as adequate training and resources to feel prepared to foster (**46%**) or sufficient mental health resources for themselves and their family (**43%**). Other major barriers included fears around the child having behavioral or emotional challenges (**47%**).
- Interest in foster care and adoption is high among Californians at **56%** and participation in mentorship programs could increase this further. **69%** of Californians said getting to meet and spend time with a child would make them more likely to consider participating in a mentorship program to work with children in foster care.

Recommendations from the Data

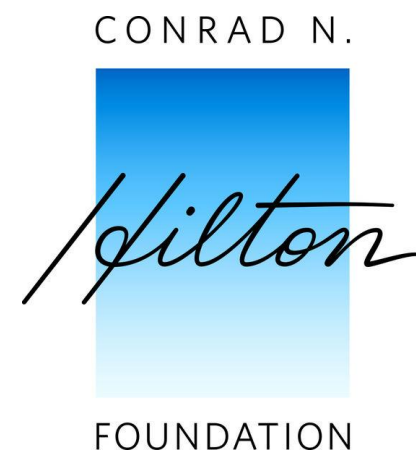
- Interest in foster care and adoption is high in California, but education around eligibility and how to get started could be helpful.
- Concerns about a lack of resources could be what's keeping many families from stepping up for children in foster care. Awareness campaigns about the resources that are available to foster and adoptive parents could help encourage more potential parents to take the first step. Additional resources such as mental health resources should also be developed to ensure potential adoptive families are adequately prepared and supported throughout the adoptive process and beyond.
- Californians responded that the fear that the child would have behavioral or emotional challenges was a major barrier to providing foster care. Education and awareness campaigns about myths and false stereotypes of youth in foster care—especially older youth—could help mitigate this fear. Mentorship programs that introduce youth to the community and allow families to get to know them and bonds to be built naturally over time can also be very beneficial.

Thank You!

To learn more about our ongoing research and how we are using the knowledge we've gained to reduce barriers preventing families from mentoring, fostering, and adopting, visit embrace.kidsave.org.

Interested in partnering with us? Contact Shantay Armstrong at shantay@kidsave.org.

Thank you to our amazing partners!



**Leslie Alexander
Foundation**