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One in four parents feel they are failing their children, and more than a third say they have lost faith in their parenting ability during the COVID-19 pandemic, a new report finds.

Almost 40 per cent of parents worry that their stress is adversely affecting the wellbeing of their children, and almost a third fear the coronavirus and its consequences will have lasting mental health effects on their children, including heightened anxiety, the study by the Australian Childhood Foundation finds.

The results, based on a national survey taken before Victoria's stage-four lockdown began, may even be underplaying the pandemic's impact, foundation chief executive and report author Joe Tucci said.

"I think it will be worse for some parents by now," Dr Tucci said. "There was a confluence of factors: the worry about money, the concern about getting sick, and their understanding that this was flowing through to their children. Given what has happened in Victoria since, with the extended lockdown, and the uncertainty around numbers in NSW and even in the other states, I think those feelings will have only been exacerbated."

The report, *A Lasting Legacy*, also examines children's responses to the pandemic, finding the vast majority missed playing with friends and seeing extended family during lockdowns. They also missed playing sport.

Supporting people in their role as parents should be a specific government pandemic policy, Dr Tucci said. "It is critical (governments) realise that support needs to be offered to parents to help them perform better.

"As the COVID-19 crisis moves into different phases, children will feel the legacy of their experiences linger. They will have been through a collective trauma the likes of which had not been part of their life to date.

"They will have missed out on friends, anniversaries, birthdays, sport. They have lost a lot and found only a little in return."

That said, the study finds that 80 per cent of parents believe their family will emerge from the pandemic as a more cohesive unit, and about half say they are likely to change the way they parent their children as a result of the time spent in lockdown.

Parents are also worried about what children are doing while locked down in their room, with the report saying "a substantial portion ... were concerned about the safety of children online".