

# 8<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL MODERN FAMILY INDEX

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## **Working Parents After the Pandemic:**

Demanding Change at Work and Ready To Look Elsewhere To Find It





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## A GREAT REALIZATION FOR WORKING PARENTS

The pandemic has redefined what it means to be a working parent. Never before have working parents had to do it all (work, teach, take care of families), all at the same time. **And the constant pedaling has exacted a toll.**

Two full years after the virus first appeared, this year's Bright Horizons Modern Family Index, commissioned by **Bright Horizons**<sup>®</sup> and conducted by Material, illustrates the continuing impact on working parents, including burnout on the job, emotional and physical exhaustion, and an inability to perform effectively both at home and at work. How bad is it? **Nine out of 10 (90%) working parents are stressed at their jobs and three in five (61%) describe their stress as overwhelming.**

Yet as much as the pandemic has created a period of upheaval, data show that for parents, it's provided a moment of introspection as well. As they begin to emerge from a period that promises to reverberate for years, parents are starting to take stock of what matters most to them, driving a "Great Realization" among key employees who are ready to make dramatic career moves in order to align work with their personal priorities.

# PANDEMIC FATIGUE LEADING TO BURNOUT BOTH AT HOME AND ON THE JOB

Last year's Modern Family Index showed parents struggling with upended home lives and concerns about their children's (and their own) mental loads. Twelve months later, key themes are emerging from the continuing upheaval.

Two years of unpredictability have left parents worn thin and unhappy at their current jobs. Many are at high risk for burnout. Most (88%) employed moms and dads report they are currently suffering through some level of exhaustion and fatigue at work, and 40% report that they feel this way frequently.

And there's little respite, with factors contributing to their emotional and physical exhaustion coming from all sides: work, home, and world events. In fact, nearly two-thirds (60%) of working parents feel fatigued and exhausted due to trouble managing their workload, lack of work-life balance, working longer days, or never being able to truly disconnect from work. Worse, for many working parents, the exhaustion feels like a never-ending loop where they are unable to focus on work due to family (23%) and unable to focus on family due to work (18%). The result is a chronic cycle of fatigue, an inability to see a way forward, and parents constantly at risk of burning out.



## WORN OUT

**88% of parents** are sinking under **exhaustion** and **fatigue** at work

## Women Disproportionately Impacted

**The crash of families into work life has taken an exceptional toll on working moms.** Working mothers are much more likely than dads to be experiencing frequent fatigue and exhaustion at work (43% vs. 36%); they're less likely than dads to feel their company is doing enough to support them (63% vs. 74%); and they're also less likely to say they're getting the right kind of support they need to do their jobs (63% vs. 70%). Saddled with most of the family responsibilities, they're also less likely than dads to say their companies have changed policies (48% vs. 59%) and benefits (46% vs. 58%) to help them during the pandemic. It's harder for moms who do not have the option to work remotely, with 48% reporting burnout, and 16% reporting that their fatigue and exhaustion is constant.

**What's more is that nearly a quarter (23%) of working moms report that they've been unhappy with the reliability of child care during the pandemic, compared to 15% of working dads.**

Further illustrating the work-family divide is the effect on dads, and the fact that they are more likely than moms to cite longer workdays (33% vs. 24%) and the inability to disconnect from work (25% vs. 20%) as the source of their exhaustion.

## DRIVEN BY A “GREAT REALIZATION” TO CHANGE JOBS

Working parents overwhelmingly agree they need more help. Most (90%) say they need support to meet their responsibilities at work and home. Yet only half say their employers have modified or added new policies (53%) and benefits (51%) to help them. Among these working parents, one-in-three feel their employers could have done a better job providing enough (33%) and the right kind of (34%) support; and 63% say the pandemic has made them realize their current benefits are insufficient to both take care of their family and get their jobs done.

The fallout has risks for employers. Data shows that working parents are a significant force in resignations, driven by a reality check – what might be called a “Great Realization” – that they need to find a better balance of work and family. Employers can expect the turnover to continue, since roughly half (46%) have left or considered leaving their job in the past year; more than a third (37%) are likely to leave their job in 2022; and 11% say they are extremely likely to do so.

Such turnover is most profound among Gen Z and Millennial parents, who are more likely than Gen X and Boomers (43% versus 30%) to leave their jobs. Perhaps that’s not surprising since these moms and dads have younger children, and so more extreme caregiving conflicts. More than half (56%) are raising at least one child under the age of 5; 42% have frequent stress (versus 34% of Gen X and Boomers) and 43% have frequent fatigue (versus 36% of Gen X and Boomers) on the job. This younger generation of parents is also more likely than their older coworkers to leave their jobs for better benefits (29% vs. 25%) and jobs that fit better with their family responsibilities (18% vs. 13%).

There is a bright spot. Although working parents have been struggling, 75% commend their employers for being sympathetic to their situation and feel their employers understand the needs of working parents.

### Delicate Balance

**90% of parents**

**need help** to manage work and personal lives

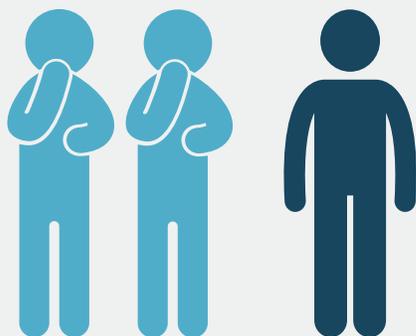


## INCONSISTENCY IN CARE TAKES TOLL ON PARENTS

Care needs may differ by family, but most parents agree that reliable child care is essential to engagement and productivity on the job. And parents are clear on what “reliable” means. The majority of working parents say what they call reliable care keeps their children safe (64%) and healthy (55%); reliable child care can always be counted on to be available (60%); consistent (never backing out) (47%); and accessible during emergencies (47%). Just as important, it provides more than just health and safety, with many working parents viewing child care as a means to help educate (38%) and entertain their children (30%) while they are at work.

Yet 30% of working parents say they have gone without such care during the pandemic, and it’s taking a toll. Working parents without consistent access to child care are nearly twice as likely to be unhappy at their current job compared to those with consistent access (19% vs. 11%); they’re more likely to experience greater levels of stress (48% vs. 34%); more likely to experience fatigue/exhaustion on the job (50% vs. 35%); and are most at risk for leaving their current jobs (48% vs. 32%).

**SOS!**  
**Two thirds**  
**of parents say they’re not**  
**getting enough help from**  
**employer benefits**



## Frontlines Under Siege

**The COVID-19 pandemic has weighed exceptionally heavily on frontline employees, particularly working parents who were more likely than other parents to feel exhausted, burned out, and ready to leave their jobs.**

Like their peers in remote jobs, working parents in frontline roles reported extreme stress, but they were more than twice as likely as other working parents to say the stress was constant, and 72% more likely to say the stress was barely manageable or that they couldn’t manage it at all.

When it comes to the companies they work for, 28% of frontline workers say:

**“I like the organization I work for”**  
(versus 35% of non-frontline workers)

**“My organization offers great benefits”**  
(versus 33% of non-frontline workers)

**“I feel healthy and safe working at my current job”** (versus 32% of non-frontline workers)

Perhaps not surprisingly, working parents in frontline roles are also considerably less likely to stay in their current jobs. Frontline workers are 23% more likely than non-frontline workers to have considered leaving (or left) their job in the last year. They are also 29% more likely to say they’ll leave their job this year, and 44% more likely to call such a job change “extremely likely.”

## BENEFITS DRIVING JOB CHOICES

Two years of work-life conflicts have put benefits in the spotlight, with employees clear about what they have – and what they desperately need. In fact, most (89%) working parents agree that the pandemic has highlighted the need for more equitable benefits for all working parents, despite their role or job function; and nearly 90% feel the unpredictability of the pandemic has made more people aware of how important it is to provide access to reliable child care (89%) and elder care (81%). Nearly two-thirds (63%) say the pandemic made them realize their current employer benefits simply aren't enough to address their needs.

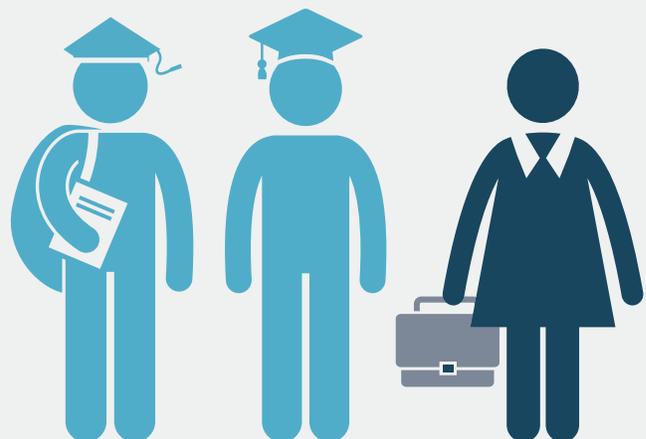
Yet they're also clear about what would be enough, and which benefits would make them more likely to stay with their current employer. While medical, dental, and vision coverage (81%) and COVID-19 benefits (74%) are critical, dependent-care benefits hold a lot of sway:

- ▶ 66% of working parents would be more likely to stay for mental health coverage
- ▶ 60% would stay for emergency child care
- ▶ 58% would remain loyal for everyday child care
- ▶ 59% would stay for educational financial support

Such concerns are most important to Gen Z and Millennials, who are a third more likely than their Gen X and Boomer counterparts (71% versus 52%) to say the pandemic made them realize their benefits aren't enough to address their needs.

## Planning for the Future

**Two thirds**  
of working parents  
**want financial help**  
to pursue education goals



## PRIORITIZING BENEFITS WHERE THEY WORK

The pandemic has brought parents' challenges – once hidden from view – careening to the surface. And after two years of struggle, these employees are clear about their priorities, what they'll work for, and what they need. As the Great Resignation rolls on, salary alone isn't enough to keep them. In fact, grappling with the unpredictability of the pandemic has made nearly 90% of working parents realize just how important reliable child care is. Many want employers to provide both regular child care (29%) and emergency child care (29%). What's more, as academic worries for children continue, some parents are hungry for employers to help their older children by offering college prep (18%) and academic tutoring resources (16%). Just as important are demands about how they work – with half (51%) saying companies should give their employees flexible hours to do their work, and 41% of the mind that companies should allow employees to work remotely as much as they want. For frontline employees, who do not have luxury of remote work, the call for benefits is even louder, with the majority saying they would stay for benefits like regular child care (60%), emergency child care (63%), and mental health coverage (68%).

Perhaps more pointedly, today's working parents call a job that works well with their family responsibilities and child care just as strong a motivator to stay with their employer over the next 12 months as doubling their compensation (35% and 36% respectively).

What's clear is that working mothers and fathers are worn down by the uncertainty of child care and school, stressed by COVID exposures, and drowning under the weight of trying to balance return-to-office with already packed home lives. And as the Great Resignation continues to roil the talent market, employers have much to gain. Organizations that adapt their benefits and policies to meaningfully support these important employees will reap the benefits of a happier workforce who will be both more productive, and willing to stay.

## Teetering on the Brink

The unpredictable pandemic has

**90% of parents**

saying it's **even more important** for employers to provide access to **reliable child care and elder care.**



### ABOUT THE BRIGHT HORIZONS MODERN FAMILY INDEX

The Modern Family Index is an internet-based survey conducted by Material from January 20 to February 2, 2022. The sample consisted of 2,107 working parents aged 18+, with children under the age of 18 at home. The survey was conducted online and has a margin of error of +/- 2.1%.

\*Note: Please refer to the survey as the Bright Horizons Modern Family Index



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