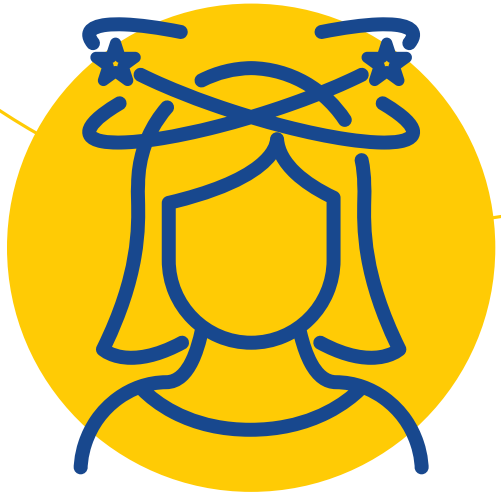
The Modern Family Index

Bright Horizons® has spent more than a decade tracking trends in working families, with the annual Modern Family Index research study highlighting parents' unique challenges and priorities over the course of a consequential period in history. In 2026, this landmark piece of thought leadership, conducted by The Harris Poll for Bright Horizons, will focus on a variety of important topics impacting families, with waves of survey data released throughout the year.

The Cognitive Cost of Child Care Challenges for Working Parents

When reliable child care is uncertain, the challenge extends beyond logistics. Working parents carry a significant cognitive burden, constantly planning, adjusting, and preparing for potential disruptions while wondering whether care will be available when they need it. This ongoing vigilance creates a mental load that affects both family life and workplace focus, productivity, and well-being.



Managing child care logistics and responsibilities creates a cognitive burden for working parents

- **70% of working parents** say they feel like they are "always on" because of child care-related logistics/responsibilities
- **66% of working parents** often worry about potential disruptions to their child care plans
- **66% of working parents** feel mentally exhausted by managing child care logistics

The child care to-do list regularly enters the workday

- **91% of working parents** have handled at least one child care-related task during working hours
- **59% of working parents** are interrupted by child care logistics during the workday once a week or more, including about a quarter (23%) who are interrupted daily
- **66% of working parents** say managing child care logistics sometimes makes it difficult to focus on work
- **77% of working parents** feel reliable child care is essential to their ability to succeed at work, including their ability to focus and remain productive
- **82% of working parents** report at least one negative impact from managing child care-related logistics, most commonly (37%) having difficulty concentrating at work and/or at home

Working parents look to employers to ease the burden

- **87%** of **working parents** say at least one employer-provided benefit would likely reduce the time or mental energy they spend managing child care
- **52% of working parents** say access to care and camps during school breaks, holiday closures, or summer would help
- **37% of working parents** identify back-up care as an employer-provided benefit that could make a difference if primary care falls through
- **28% of working parents** point to subsidized care or on-site child care as an employer-provided benefit that could make a difference

Method statement

This survey was conducted online within the United States by The Harris Poll on behalf of Bright Horizons from September 22-23, 2026, among 696 employed U.S. adults ages 18 and older who are parents of kids under 18. Data were weighted where necessary by age, gender, race/ethnicity, region, education, marital status, household size, household income, and political party affiliation, to bring them in line with their actual proportions in the population.

Respondents are selected among those who have agreed to participate in our surveys. The sampling precision of Harris online polls is measured by using a Bayesian credible interval. The sample data is accurate to within +/- 4.4 percentage points using a 95% confidence level. This credible interval will be wider among subsets of the surveyed population of interest.

All sample surveys and polls, whether or not they use probability sampling, are subject to other multiple sources of error which are most often not possible to quantify or estimate, including, but not limited to coverage error, error associated with nonresponse, error associated with question wording and response options, and post-survey weighting and adjustments.

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Contact us to learn more

newsroom@brighthorizons.com
brighthorizons.com/newsroom