

The Modern Family Index

Bright Horizons® has spent 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 2025, this landmark piece of thought leadership, conducted by the Harris Poll for Bright Horizons, focuses on important topics impacting families, with several waves of survey data released throughout the year.

The child care cliff: how lack of child care is costing a generation of working parents' careers.

The rising tension between career ambitions and family responsibilities is becoming increasingly harsh, particularly for working parents who overwhelmingly report that current work environments fail to address the difficulty (and necessity) of finding child care. The latest Modern Family Index shows the consequences: a workplace out of sync with modern families, and the vast majority of parents feeling forced to choose between their professional growth and their caregiving responsibilities.

The data underscores a stark reality: that for working parents, reliable child care is not just a support system, but a crucial pillar for career success and financial stability. Those with dependable child care say it offers significant benefits such as enhanced focus at work and the ability to chase career goals; those without it face increased workplace stress and blocked professional pathways. The data highlights the need to reevaluate workplace policies and support systems to better integrate the realities of parenting into professional domains, and to adapt in ways that genuinely support work-life balance and acknowledge the dual roles many employees must manage.



A costly gap between employers and working parents

- **80%** of working parents say the workforce still hasn't adjusted to reflect the **care needs of modern families**.
- **67%** of working parents feel **forced to choose** between focusing on their career or taking care of their family.
- **79%** of working parents agree that working parents must **choose between sacrifices made at home or at work**.

Negative impacts at work

- **76%** of working parents believe it's **easier for people without children** to succeed at work.
- **62%** of working parents admit they are cautious when talking about their family/child(ren) in front of their colleagues to avoid judgement — **up from 45%** in January of 2024.
- **82%** of working moms agree that it's **easier for people without children** to succeed at work — versus **72%** of working dads.
- **62%** of working parents feel it's impossible to be a working parent without having **negative impacts on their career**.

Costs to financial stability

- **94%** of working parents who rely on child care say **having reliable child care is important** for their success at work — **70%** call it very important.
 - **78%** of these parents report the reliability of their children's child care has a **direct impact on their career success**.
- **78%** of working parents who rely on child care agree that, if they had reliable child care, they could **pursue their career dreams** without constantly worrying about their child(ren)'s care.
- **61%** of working parents who rely on child care report that not having it has **impacted their family's financial stability**.

Benefits beyond parents

- **53%** of working parents with reliable child care say it supports their ability to focus on their work responsibilities.
 - **52%** say it bestows **greater peace of mind**.
 - **41%** say it helps with their ability to **pursue their career goals**.

Method statement

The research was conducted online within the United States by The Harris Poll between September 23-25, 2025, among 2,095 adults ages 18 and older — among whom 719 are a parent or guardian of child(ren) under 18 years of age ("parents"), and 588 are an employed parent or guardian of child(ren) under 18 years of age ("working parents"). Data are weighted where necessary by age, gender, region, race/ethnicity, household income, education, marital status, size of household, 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 ± 2.5 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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