

# Modern Families Index 2020

## SUMMARY REPORT



## The *Modern Families Index* is the most comprehensive study of how working parents manage the balance between work and family life in the UK.

Now in its 8<sup>th</sup> year, it has been published annually by Working Families and Bright Horizons Family Solutions since 2012.

### Who took part in the *Index*?

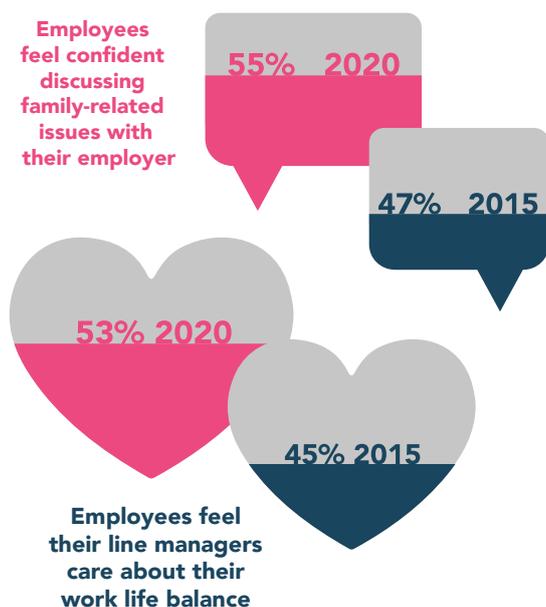
The *Index* provides a snapshot into the lives of working families across the UK: 3,090 working parents and carers responded with at least one dependent child aged 18 or younger who lives with them some or all the time.

Respondents represented a range of household incomes and family structures, equally distributed between the regions and nations of the UK apart from Scotland, where the sample size was deliberately increased to 507 parents. The median household income for couple families was £38,000. For single parents it was £20,000.

The sample gathered slightly more mothers than fathers (53% and 47%). The majority (76%) of parents are between the ages of 26 and 45. The vast majority are white British (83%), and 62% are either married or in a civil partnership, with a further 14% cohabiting. 12% of parents in the sample were single parents. In couple households, a very high proportion had both parents working (96%), and in 74% of couple households both parents work full-time.

To download the full report and for helpful advice and information for working parents, carers and employers, please visit [workingfamilies.org.uk](http://workingfamilies.org.uk) and [solutions.brighthorizons.co.uk](http://solutions.brighthorizons.co.uk).

## The rise of the family-friendly workplace



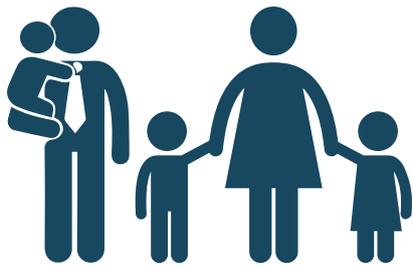
### Comparing what working parents reported in 2015 to today, it's clear the UK's employers are on a journey toward more flexible and family friendly workplaces.

- More than half (55%) of working parents said they feel confident discussing family-related issues with their employer, rising from 47% in the 2015 *Index*.
- More than half (53%) of parents feel their line manager cares about their work-life balance. This is compared to 45% of parents in 2015. Similarly, half reported their organisation cares about their work-life balance, compared to 42% of working parents in 2015.
- More working parents feel flexible working is a genuine option in their workplace. More than half (51%) feel flexible working is a genuine option for women and 46% feel it is a genuine option for men. In 2015, 44% of parents felt flexible working was a genuine option for women and men, implying an overall increase.
- However, the number of parents working flexibly appears to have stalled. Fifty-eight per cent of parents who took part in the 2015 *Index* said they work flexibly, falling to 55% in this year's study. There is clearly more to be done to ensure employers and workers aren't missing out on the mutual benefits of flexible working.

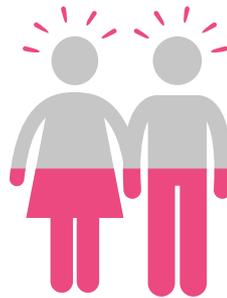
## The care equation

### Many parents have made the decision to share care of their children equally.

- Almost a third (31%) of working parents said they split childcare equally. 83% of parents said they do this by choice, not necessity. Fifty-six percent of parents who split childcare equally reported above average wellbeing, compared to 49% of all working parents in the *Index*.
- More than three quarters of parents who split childcare equally (77%) find it easy to arrange with their employer and maintain in practice, indicating it's becoming more acceptable. However, one in five said it is viewed negatively by their employer and by their work colleagues.
- Working parents splitting childcare equally are evenly divided across the range of job levels, indicating sharing care isn't the preserve of managers and professionals with the seniority to make this choice.
- Couples who split childcare equally are roughly evenly distributed across salary bands, suggesting it is not exclusive to those on high incomes. Just over a quarter (26%) of parents with a combined household income under £15,000 said they split childcare equally, rising to a third of parents earning £25-50,000 and to 36% of parents earning over £100,000.



**31%** of parents share childcare equally  
**83%** do so out of choice



**56%** of parents who share childcare reported an above average level of wellbeing



**77%** of parents found childcare easy to arrange with their employer



## A helping hand

**Manageable workloads, flexible working and a supportive employer help parents to be more involved in childcare.**

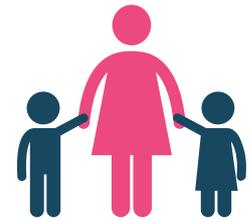
- There is a link between parents' workload and their involvement in childcare. For 67% of parents in the *Index* who tend to work extra hours, their partner does the majority of their childcare. This falls to a quarter (25%) of the parents in the *Index* who don't work extra hours.
- Similarly, working flexibly is an enabling factor. Of the 55% of parents in the *Index* working flexibly, almost two thirds (63%) do the majority of childcare themselves, compared to 37% of parents not working flexibly.
- A supportive employer helps. Of working parents in the *Index* who said their employer cares about their work life balance, 57% do the majority of the childcare. This falls to 44% of parents that don't feel their employer cares.



**67%** of parents who work extra hours take the back seat with childcare



**37%** of parents that don't work flexibly do the majority of childcare



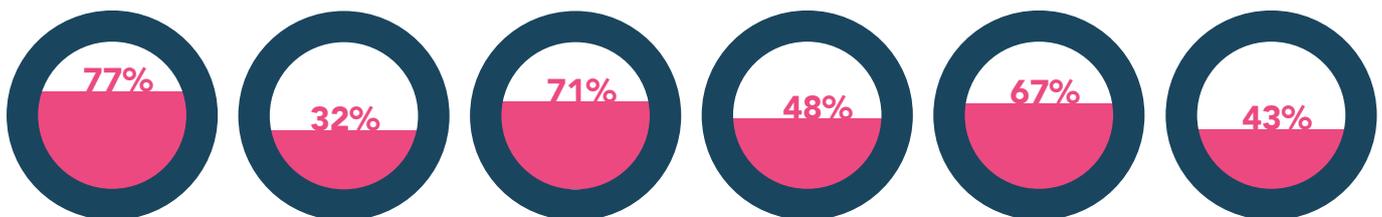
**63%** of parents working flexibly do the majority of childcare themselves



## The family-friendly working haves & have nots

Despite the progress made, having a family-friendly workplace and access to flexible working can be a lottery for working parents.

- Amongst parents who don't work flexibly, more than three quarters (77%) indicated they want to (74% of fathers and 79% of mothers). Almost a third (32%) reported that flexible working is 'not available' where they work.
- More than a third (38%) of parents admitted to lying about their family-related responsibilities that get in the way of work. Similarly, more than a third (37%) admitted to pretending to be sick to meet their family commitments.
- Overall, millennial parents are more likely to work flexibly (62%), compared to half of parents aged 36-55 and 48% of parents aged over 56. This rises to 78% of millennial fathers, who clearly have different expectations around work-life balance compared to previous generations.
- Flexibility is linked to seniority. The more senior the job, the more likely parents were to report working flexibly. Seventy-one per cent of senior managers or directors work flexibly, compared to 48% of parents in junior-level roles.
- More than two thirds of parents earning over £50,000 reported working flexibly, compared to over two in five (43%) earning £15-20,000.
- The least flexible sector is construction, where just 4% of parents work flexibly. Parents working in the professional services industry – law, accounting and management consultancy for example – are most likely to work flexibly (73%).
- 40% of mothers in the *Index* work part-time, often in sectors where flexibility is least available. Part-time work does not necessarily afford more flexibility. Fifty-two percent of parents working part-time said they work flexibly, compared to 53% working full-time.



**77%** of parents who don't work flexibly would like to  
**32%** of parents who don't work flexibly said it isn't available where they work

**71%** of senior managers work flexibly compared to  
**48%** of those in junior level roles

More than **two-thirds** of parents earning over £50,000 work flexibly, compared to over **two in five** parents earning £15-20,000

## Family-friendly and flexible working: a double-edged sword

**Creating family-friendly and flexible workplaces helps employers retain parents. But flexible working can, for some parents, be a double-edged sword because they can feel 'trapped' in flexible roles, hesitant to seek new opportunities for fear they won't get the support and flexibility they have now, elsewhere.**

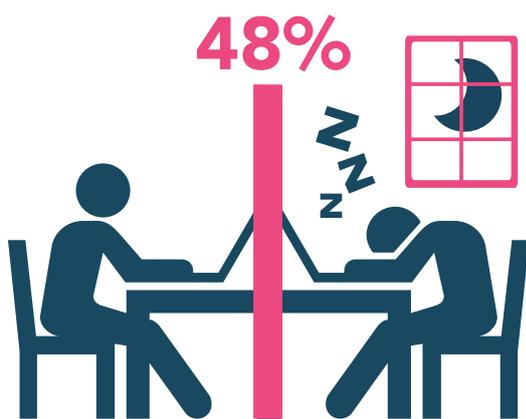
- Parents working flexibly were more likely to say they are happy in their current job and have no plans to change jobs than parents who said they don't work flexibly (58% vs. 41%, respectively).
- More than three quarters (78%) of working parents in the *Index* who feel their organisation cares about their work life balance said they are happy in their current job and have no plans to change, falling to 34% of working parents in the *Index* who don't feel their organisation cares about their work life balance.
- Working parents are clear about the benefits of having a family-friendly and flexible employer. More than half said people would feel happier at work (59%), be more likely to stay with their employer (52%) and feel more motivated and productive (51%). Forty-eight per cent said it would encourage them to 'go the extra mile' at work and said it would make them recommend their employer as a good place to work (45%).



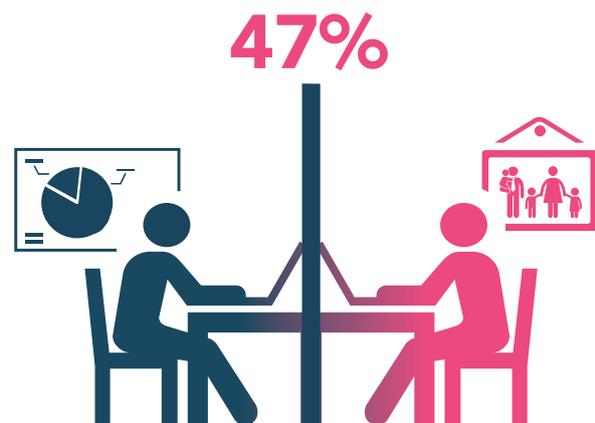
## Wellbeing and 'switching off'

**Too often, the potential wellbeing benefits of family-friendly and flexible working are being undermined by poor job design and workplaces where working extra hours is part of the culture.**

- Three in five parents who work extra hours said they have to because it is the only way to deal with their workload (60%, falling to 47% for parents working part-time). More than half of those who work extra hours (52%) said it is part of their organisation's culture.
- For many parents, technology has jeopardised their work-life balance. Almost half (47%) agreed it has blurred the boundary between work and home. Similarly, 48% agreed that being able to work from home has probably increased the hours they work.
- 44% of parents in the *Index* said they check emails or do other work in the evening. Three quarters felt they had no choice in this.
- Parents who tend to work extra hours were more than twice as likely to think about work issues whilst they are with their family regularly or all the time (41%) compared to 20% of parents working within their contracted hours.
- Parents staying in 'work mode' were more likely to say work impacts negatively on their relationship with their partner and their children. Fifty-four percent said work led to arguments with their children and 57% said it led to arguments with their partner, compared to parents better able to 'switch off' (7% and 9% respectively).
- 72% of parents staying in 'work mode' said they feel stressed, compared to one in five parents better able to 'switch off'.
- Parents staying in 'work mode' were more than twice as likely to report their wellbeing as 'poor' or 'very poor' (15%, compared to 7% of parents better able to 'switch off').
- Manageable workloads are a factor in parents' decisions about work. Just over one in ten parents (11%) who don't work extra hours say they have plans to change jobs, rising to 16% of parents tending to work extra hours.



of parents said that being able to work from home had probably increased the hours they work

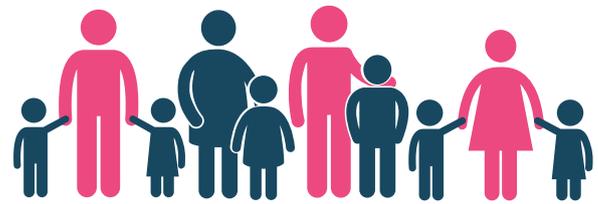


of parents agree that technology has blurred the boundary between work and home

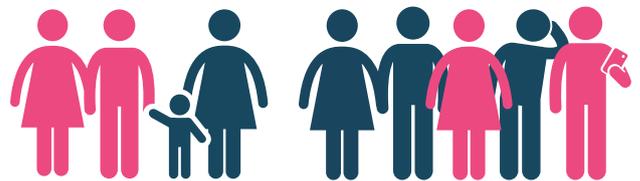
# Family-friendly and flexible working – a lifecycles approach

It's clear from the *Index* that flexible and family-friendly working is required by parents and carers throughout their careers.

- Childcare is an ongoing concern for parents. In 2015, 59% of parents said they would carefully consider their childcare options before accepting a new job or promotion. Almost three quarters of working parents in this *Index* said childcare is a concern, rising to 83% of millennial parents.
- Nearly two thirds (65%) of parents said their need for flexibility was greatest when their children were in pre-school (66% of mothers and 63% of fathers).
- Two in five parents said their need for flexibility was greatest when their children were in primary school (40%, 38% of fathers and 42% of mothers).
- More than two in five fathers said their need for flexibility was greatest during their child's transition to secondary school (41%, compared to 32% of mothers). This fell slightly to 38% for fathers during their children's time at secondary school, compared to 28% of mothers.
- Two thirds of working parents with caring responsibility for an elderly relative or other adult said that work impinges on their ability to care for them. Sixty-eight percent said their work life is becoming increasingly stressful, compared with 42% of working parents without caring responsibility for an adult.

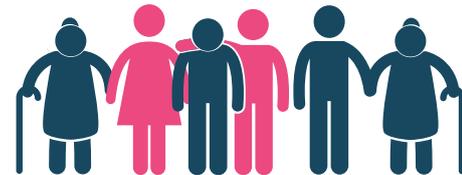


Childcare is a concern for almost **three quarters** of parents



Nearly **two thirds** of parents said they needed flexibility most when their children were in preschool

**2 in 5** parents said they needed flexibility most when their children were in primary school



**Two thirds** of parents with caring responsibilities said that work impinges on their ability to care for an elderly loved one



**More than two thirds** of fathers said their need for flexibility was greatest during their children's transition to secondary school



## Recommendations

1. To support families establishing their role in caring for their children, an additional, individual, non-transferable entitlement to 12 weeks of leave and pay should be introduced for fathers and partners to spend time with their new child. This will allow more families the opportunity to share childcare equally and for both parents to fulfil their potential at work and at home.
2. For parents' labour market mobility, family-friendly and flexible workplaces must be the norm. Building on gender pay gap reporting, the UK government should require employers to be transparent about their flexible working and parental leave and pay policies (supported by more than three in five parents in the *Index*), and to advertise their vacancies on a flexible basis (also supported by more than three in five parents in the *Index*). This will help more parents join the flexible and family-friendly working 'haves'.
3. The government should ensure it pays to work once childcare costs are covered from the day parents return from maternity and shared parental leave. More than half of parents in the *Index* (52%) have to take time off work if their childcare arrangements break down. Employers are encouraged to provide solutions to better support working parents with childcare and to publish details of the childcare support they offer alongside their flexible working and parental leave and pay policies, as part of a wider family-friendly working offer.
4. Similarly, as part of their family-friendly working offer, employers should consider publishing their policies to support carers, and any eldercare support they offer. This will help ensure the 'sandwich generation' of parents understand what their current and any future employer offer to help them balance work and care and for employers to be seen as companies of choice for families.
5. Building on this, employers are encouraged to take a 'lifecycles' approach to flexible and family-friendly working, moving beyond support focused on parents with pre-school and primary school age children to parents who might be juggling caring for their own teenage children and an elderly relative. To help both parents with children of all ages to balance work and care, the government should ensure some of parents' unpaid parental leave entitlement is paid, in line with the EU's Work-Life Balance Directive.
6. Having access to flexible working isn't enough to impact positively on a parent's wellbeing. Employers should take an organisation-wide, strategic approach to job design – proper consideration of the tasks each role requires and whether these can be done in the hours allotted, as well as of which types of flexible working would work. This will help ensure jobs are more 'human-sized', allowing parents to better balance work and home life. Job design is the starting point for using the *Happy To Talk Flexible Working* strapline and logo.
7. Employers need to better manage technology to ensure it supports rather than inhibits work-life balance. This could include introducing robust policies around the use of technology to work flexibly, so that parents know they can and should disconnect without penalty, and senior managers role-modelling 'switching off'.



## About Working Families

Working Families is the UK's work-life balance charity. We help working parents and carers — and their employers — find a better balance between responsibilities at home and in the workplace.

We provide free legal advice to parents and carers on their rights at work. We give employers the tools they need to support their employees while creating a flexible, high-performing workforce. And we advocate on behalf of the UK's 13 million working parents, influencing policy through campaigns informed by ground-breaking research.

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## About Bright Horizons

Bright Horizons partners with more than 1,100 leading employers globally to address the work-life and dependant care challenges that can otherwise negatively impact productivity and engagement. Solutions are tailor-made to support clients' evolving business needs and include workplace nurseries and nursery place arrangements; back-up care for adults and children of all ages; maternity/paternity coaching and work-life consulting. We are proud of the longevity of our client relationships – reflecting decades of consistently high levels of satisfaction with our services.

To learn more, please visit: **[solutions.brighthorizons.co.uk](http://solutions.brighthorizons.co.uk)**

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