



# Modern Families Index: The State of Childhood Report 2025



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# Introduction

As the world of work continues to evolve, so do the priorities and concerns of working parents. Employers are aware of the talent retention imperatives driving support for employees with families. They are seeking data and evidence to understand the unique challenges parents face, and discover how to intervene positively. These new findings show the huge impact of concerns for parents regarding their children's development and aspirations for their future prospects.

The State of Childhood Report 2025 builds on the findings of our annual Modern Families Index, which surveyed 3,000 randomly-selected UK working parents and carers\* about the needs and challenges faced by working families. This year's Modern Families Index\*\* found that nearly a third of UK working parents and carers are very stressed\*\*\*. Of those, 80% are finding it hard to focus on work. In addition, all the post-pandemic gains in satisfaction about employers' caring attitudes have been eroded. There's an 11% drop in parents and carers finding their employers 'supportive' of family compared to 2023 and 31% drop in parents feeling their employer is 'highly supportive' compared to 2023.

This State of Childhood Report focuses on examining key parental concerns in four critical areas: educational development, social skills, physical health, and mental health. Additionally, we explore the skills parents believe will be most important for their children to succeed in a rapidly changing world shaped by technological advancements and shifting societal expectations.

This report also provides employers with a deeper understanding of how they can support their workforces by addressing both the immediate and long-term concerns of working parents. By doing so, organisations can strengthen their culture and employee experience, support productivity, promote inclusivity and encourage retention while helping to prepare the next generation for the challenges and opportunities of the future.

\* These parents are sampled at arm's length from the UK population. They are not associated with either Bright Horizons' clients or Bright Horizons' Early Education settings.

\*\* <https://solutions.brighthorizons.co.uk/resources/research/modern-families-index-2025>

\*\*\* Selecting 8 or above on a scale of 1 to 10.







# Four key areas of concern

## Three quarters (75%) of parents have concerns about their children's mental health.

Concerns about mental health and educational catch-up are present for at least 70% of parents throughout preschool, primary years and right up to age 15. Two-thirds (66%) of parents of 16-17 year olds also express at least some concerns about their young people's mental health.

**Employers note:** There is a real opportunity here for employers to support working parents' wellbeing. Those who provide solutions for parents to address this additional mental load will improve their employees' ability to focus and be productive at work.

Areas of Parental Concern	Educational development / catch-up needs	Social skills	Physical health	Mental health
NET: at least a little concerned*	71%	70%	67%	75%

\*In the main MFI report, we used figures for parents expressing they were 'concerned or very concerned'. Here we have also drawn on the figures for parents expressing they were 'at least a little concerned'.



## Parental Concern by Child Age

NET: At least a little concerned	0 to 2	3 to 4	5 to 6	7 to 11	12 to 13	14 to 15	16 to 17	18 or older
Educational development / catch – up needs	72%	73%	74%	72%	71%	72%	66%	58%
Social skills	72%	74%	73%	74%	72%	69%	69%	59%
Physical health	70%	69%	70%	69%	69%	65%	64%	56%
Mental health	72%	74%	75%	77%	78%	77%	79%	72%

## In their own words: Parents' worries revealed

### Education development/catch-up needs:

"Covid disrupted their education, and we have had to pay privately to catch-up".

"I'm concerned about us having less time to help with their studying, homework, reading and educational activities".

"Not being there to help with homework and revision as I'm in work and therefore my child won't do it or do it half hearted".

"The youngest one is dyslexic, and school is problematic for her. She is behind by a few years".

"They sometimes need to be out of class due to sensory overwhelm/meltdown. They miss a lot of school. My youngest was out of school for 18 months due to there not being suitable provision".

### Social Skills:

"Covid interrupted my middle child's emotional and mental development, so her social skills took a hit as well".

"I have concerns about my children developing empathy and understanding social cues. Making and maintaining friendships, building resilience and coping with bullying or teasing".

"I worry because of the use of technology - kids don't like to interact with humans anymore".

"I worry about my child's conflict resolution skills".

"My son prefers to play on his own and doesn't interact much with other children, I worry about how this will affect him when he's older".



## Physical Health:

"As a result of his limited food intake and the foods he eats, I worry for his health both short and long term and the effect it will have on his body".

"My child has an eating disorder, and refuses medication".

"My elder child is starting to get quite addicted to video games which we try and limit as we want him to stay active".

"I worry about whether my child is getting a good night's sleep".

"Worried about having enough time to prepare a balanced diet for their daily needs, while ordering takeaway is inevitable if I am too busy".

"I lack funds for extracurricular activity".

"My concerns about my children's physical health include ensuring they maintain a balanced diet and stay active, especially with the increase in sedentary activities like screen time. I'm also worried about their access to outdoor play and exercise opportunities, as well as the importance of regular check-ups and promoting healthy habits to support their overall wellbeing".

## Mental Health:

"Has suffered with bouts of anxiety, depression and self-harm due to confidence issues".

"I feel like my teenage son has not adjusted well to high school and is not enjoying education any more".

"I'm worried the fast growing world is having a toll on their mental health".

"I worry she is masking her ADHD and autistic traits".

"I am concerned about not being present enough throughout their childhood".

"My child is currently struggling with her mental health and we're not able to access CAMHS".

"I have concerns about my children's mental health including their ability to cope with stress and anxiety, especially in today's fast-paced environment. I'm also worried about the impact of social media and peer pressure on their self-esteem and emotional wellbeing, as well as the importance of maintaining healthy relationships and finding balance in their lives".

"My daughter is suffering emotionally and has depression. She is unable to go out and do her daily routine which is also affecting me mentally".

"I'm concerned that me being busy at work may affect them mentally and they may also grow up thinking I wasn't present in their lives growing up".

"I am concerned they don't feel like part of the community because of bullying in school".







## Future skills for young people

### — Parents' most desired capabilities for young people are all centred on social skills, resilience and problem-solving

Looking to the future, interpersonal and social skills and resilience / ability to cope with change are still top of the list for parents, as they were last year. This reflects a continued emphasis on 'soft skills' in the face of changes in technology and work environments. This trend has remained stable despite an increase in the number of parents surveyed this year (we asked all parents this year, whereas in 2024 we asked parents with children of 3 years and over).

It is also interesting to note, the 55+ age group places a higher importance on interpersonal and social skills, compared to younger groups, suggesting a generational preference for capabilities that facilitate connection and cooperation, and the experience of parents with older children.

Meanwhile, parents aged 18-34 are the most focused on imagination, creativity, and problem-solving (38%), highlighting a desire to nurture skills associated with innovation and adaptability in younger children.



We asked working parents: *'Thinking about the future of work, including the impact of AI and the wider employment landscape, which skills do you think your children will need the most? Please choose up to 5 options.'*

Base: All parents	Total	Male	Female	18-34	35-54	55+
Interpersonal and social skills	39%	37%	41%	34%	41%	47%
Resilience, ability to cope/thrive through change	36%	31%	41%	33%	37%	35%
Imagination, creativity and problem-solving	35%	34%	37%	38%	34%	31%
Written and spoken communication skills	35%	33%	38%	33%	36%	40%
Computer science / programming	35%	36%	34%	37%	34%	32%
Maths and data analysis	32%	33%	31%	31%	32%	35%
Management of AI	30%	33%	27%	30%	30%	33%
Self-defence / survival skills	26%	25%	26%	29%	24%	13%
Family / community building skills	25%	24%	26%	29%	23%	20%
Management of people	23%	26%	20%	22%	24%	23%
Ability to use leisure time well	20%	21%	19%	21%	19%	18%
Ability to conserve the environment and biodiversity	17%	19%	15%	21%	15%	13%
Other (please specify)	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%
Don't know	7%	6%	8%	4%	9%	11%

Beyond the obvious prominence of interpersonal skills, change management and creativity, there are some interesting nuances. Overall, self-defence and survival skills have risen in the rankings since last year (now 8th compared to 11th). However, there is a noticeably lower priority placed on self-defence and survival skills among older parents (presumably with older children). The 18-34 age group may be expressing new anxieties around the safety of children.

It is interesting to note that fathers place somewhat more emphasis on responding to environmental concerns than mothers do, though unsurprising that the youngest parents see the greatest urgency in this.

Women value interpersonal and resilience skills most highly, whereas men place a little more emphasis on maths/data/science skills alongside social skills.

These differences could be a reflection of current societal expectations, for instance:

- Might women's valuing of resilience higher than men's be a reflection of the additional challenges many women still face in the workplace; something which fathers of young daughters may not yet have fully encountered?
- Could the fact that men ranked 'the management of people' higher than women did be a reflection of the legacy expectations of men's careers? Notably, across all ages and genders, the management of AI is given higher priority than the management of people.
- Despite some of these more gendered responses, it is encouraging that both fathers and mothers value family and community building skills almost equally.





## Educational Philosophy: The Bright Horizons Nurture Approach

Looking at the two skills valued the most by parents...

- Interpersonal and social skills
- Resilience and the ability to cope/thrive through change

...the aspirations of parents for their children also align with the uniquely holistic educational approach practised in Bright Horizons nurseries.

The Nurture Approach is the outcome of extensive research, and is deeply rooted in neuroscience. This educational philosophy places equal emphasis on building children's emotional wellbeing, confidence, sense of self and soft skills as it does their practical and academic progress. Only once children have secure emotional foundations can they be in a position to learn and develop fully.

This approach nurtures the whole child, supporting and providing the groundwork for mental wellbeing from the very beginning. This sows the seeds for lifelong success and ensures children grow up as resilient, compassionate individuals ready to thrive in an ever-changing world.

The Bright Horizons Nurture Approach is comprised of three core elements, each interlinking and of equal importance:

- holistic learning
- emotional wellbeing
- inspirational teaching and exceptional care





# Supports parents seek from employers

Among those with **babies or preschoolers**, over a third of younger parents are looking to their employer for coaching and support with their children's behaviour.

We asked: "What, if any, further support would you and/or your baby/preschooler like from your employer with your child/ren's educational development? Please select all that apply"

Base: Parents of children 0-4 years old	Total	Male	Female	18-34	35-54	55+
Support on parenting such as workshops or coaching on helping with children's behaviour	30%	33%	27%	34%	25%	20%
Support with transition from early years / nursery to primary school	30%	30%	29%	33%	24%	20%
Subsidised access to care / early years education	29%	27%	31%	29%	29%	24%
Coaching or workshops for you on work-life balance or blend	27%	27%	26%	29%	24%	16%
Assistance with Special Educational Needs, including Disability, and Neurodiversity	18%	20%	15%	19%	16%	19%
Other (Please specify)	0%	1%	0%	0%	0%	12%
N/A – I / my child would not expect any support for their educational development	26%	23%	28%	20%	34%	31%

Nearly ¾ of parents with children aged 0-4 expect some kind of support in their parenting, or help for their child, from their employer. The need is most strongly expressed by parents aged 18-34. Overall, the most wanted supports include help with children's behaviour, the transition from nursery to preschool and subsidised early years education. Strikingly, parents seek their employer's provision of parenting advice / parent coaching more than they expect support with their own work-life balance. This wish for such direct advice on parenting may come as a surprise to some corporate leaders.

## Employers note:

Workplace Nurseries or Nursery Partnerships offer subsidised places for employees' children, addressing the wish for subsidised access to care through substantial savings in employee tax and National Insurance as well as employer National Insurance savings.

The Nurture Approach, uniquely practised in Bright Horizons nurseries, ensures children are confident, resilient and better able to recognise and regulate their own emotions by placing central and pre-eminent weight on their wellbeing and skills throughout their time at nursery. Academic achievement flows from this foundation. With a comprehensive, research-led Ready for School programme, children are supported to develop the skills needed for a successful and confident transition from nursery to preschool.



Driven by findings such as those in this report, Bright Horizons will be offering workshops for working parents based on The Nurture Approach as a way for employers to provide effective, child-centred parenting support for their employees.



## Parents with primary school children are looking to their employer for holiday camps, and for support with mental health.

We asked: "What, if any, further support would you and/or your primary school aged child like or expect from your employer with your child/ren's educational development?"

Please select all that apply"

Base: Parents of children 5-11 years old	Total	Male	Female	18-34	35-54	55+
Holiday camps	25%	26%	24%	30%	22%	29%
Mental health support for your child	25%	25%	25%	28%	24%	6%
Behavioural support e.g. dealing with bullying	23%	24%	22%	29%	20%	13%
Support with transition from primary to secondary school	23%	22%	24%	25%	21%	24%
Additional tutoring	22%	22%	21%	26%	19%	25%
Support on parenting such as workshops or coaching on helping with children's behaviour	21%	23%	18%	26%	17%	4%
Advice and practical insights for parents e.g. on finances for different educational / development pathways	20%	21%	18%	24%	17%	4%
Coaching or workshops for you on work-life balance or blend	19%	21%	15%	22%	16%	10%
Assistance with Special Educational Needs, including Disability, and Neurodiversity	15%	15%	14%	16%	14%	4%
Virtual revision camps e.g. for SATS, 11+, secondary school entrance exams	15%	16%	12%	19%	12%	11%
Other (Please specify)	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
N/A – I / my child would not expect any support for their educational development	25%	24%	26%	16%	31%	39%

Notably, for the primary school age group, the additional supports most requested by parents were holiday camps and mental health guidance.

### Employers note:

- Bright Horizons Back-Up Care solutions provides access to over 1,450 holiday camps throughout the UK.
- Bright Horizons' Back-Up Care options include virtual tutoring sessions, addressing the 22% of primary school parents calling for additional tutoring support.
- The Work+Family Space information hub, which our clients' employees can access 24/7 at their own convenience, alongside the 1:1 Speak to an Expert Service, both provide valuable insight, tips and advice for parents. This includes guidance on how to support their children's wellbeing and mental health, address bullying, successfully navigate school transitions and much more.



Parents with **secondary school children** are looking to their employer for support with mental health, further education and tutoring, as well as other parenting topics.

We asked: “What, if any, further support would you and/or your secondary school aged child like or expect from your employer with your child/ren’s educational development? Please select all that apply”

Base: Parents of children 12-18 years old	Total	Male	Female	18-34	35-54	55+
Mental health support for your child	27%	24%	31%	28%	28%	21%
Information / support on further education pathways e.g. universities, colleges, apprenticeships	21%	20%	23%	30%	20%	17%
Additional tutoring	20%	19%	20%	21%	20%	14%
Virtual revision camps e.g. for GCSEs	18%	16%	20%	15%	19%	14%
Early teen study/holiday camps (e.g. 12-14 year olds)	17%	16%	18%	24%	16%	9%
Behavioural support e.g. dealing with bullying	16%	17%	14%	25%	14%	12%
Advice and practical insights for parents e.g. on finances for different educational / development / career pathways	15%	15%	15%	22%	15%	9%
Coaching or workshops for you on work-life balance or blend	14%	15%	14%	21%	14%	6%
Support on parenting such as workshops or coaching on helping with children’s behaviour	14%	14%	14%	22%	14%	5%
Assistance with Special Educational Needs, including Disability, and Neurodiversity	12%	14%	10%	13%	12%	9%
Other (Please specify)	0%	1%	0%	0%	0%	1%
N/A – I / my child would not expect any support for their educational development	32%	30%	35%	20%	33%	44%

Four out of the top five supports requested by parents of this age group are education-focused. The top ask reveals continuing concerns around support for their young people’s mental health.

### Employers Note:

1. Parental stress is present in the workplace, whether or not acknowledged by employers. Our wider MFI report shows a third (32%) of parents of children aged 14-15 declare high stress levels (8 or above on a scale of 1-10) and there is a strong link with being unable to focus at work.
2. Bright Horizons’ client experience indicates that most employers now give some attention to the parental leave transition, at least with coaching, mentoring or networks. However, parents of teenagers are the least supported demographic and often struggle to be visible in terms of their needs. Almost a third (32%) of parents with children aged 14-15 rate themselves as highly stressed. Employers can provide impactful support for this demographic through Bright Horizons’ Back-Up Care which also includes Virtual Tutoring for over 35 subjects from primary school to GCSEs and ‘A’ Level.
3. Bright Horizons’ Speak to An Expert service as part of the Work+Family Space platform reveals (and meets) regular need for support on teenage bullying, mental health and wider concerns from parents of secondary school children.



# Cost implications for employers, covering parents' concerns across all ages

The UK Mental Health Report 2024 by Deloitte\* found that working parents' concerns for their children's mental health cost employers around £8.3 billion annually, an additional 16% on top of the £51 billion employers spent on employee mental health-related costs in 2023.

- Staff turnover was the biggest contributor (at £3.2 billion) to the £8 billion cost to employers
- Presenteeism was second (at £2.9 billion)
- Absence was third (at £2.2 billion)

\* <https://www.deloitte.com/uk/en/about/press-room/poor-mental-health-costs-uk-employers-51-billion-a-year-for-employees.html>

## Next steps

So, there are costly outcomes of unaddressed children's mental health concerns: parents either leave the workforce altogether or turn up to work but are less than productive (presenteeism). Absence is also a strong factor, though interestingly lower than the first two, meaning the issue may remain hidden from employers. By equipping parents to support their children through offering a comprehensive range of services such as Back-Up Care to Virtual Tutoring, Work+Family Space and Speak to An Expert, many leading employers already reduce the worry and mental load that otherwise results in loss of talent and/or parents' decreased focus and productivity at work.



# About Bright Horizons

## What we do

For more than 35 years, Bright Horizons has been supporting the evolving needs of working families and their employers. We create, develop, and deliver solutions that remove barriers to performance, talent and diversity in our clients' businesses and help them succeed in their goals.

We address the wide range of challenges facing parents and carers in the workplace today, enhancing our clients' ability to attract and retain key talent, giving their teams the peace of mind and confidence to do their best work.

## How we do it

Bright Horizons' services include workplace and partnership nurseries, coaching and development provision, digital resources, and manager guidance, plus Back-Up Care for adults, children of all ages - and even pets.

We provide our clients with access to live usage and engagement analytics on their programmes, and also keep them updated with ongoing research findings and benchmarking data.

## Who we are

- We have operations in the UK, US, India, Australia, and the Netherlands. 1,300 clients globally, over 400 in the UK.
- We have been recognised as a UK Best Workplace by the Great Place to Work Institute every year since 2006, and are actively committed to Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging, and to Mindful Business practices.
- We strive to minimise negative environmental impact guided by our Future Earth green agenda and, through our registered charity the Bright Horizons Foundation for Children, to make a positive difference in the lives of children and families in crisis.

## Our family of services includes:



Reliable, flexible **Back-Up Care** options for children of all ages, adults and elders - **and even pets** - when usual arrangements break down or schedules change. Back-Up Care is a trusted Plan B that protects productivity and supports wellbeing.



One to one **Virtual Tutoring** in 35+ subjects for children (aged 4-22 years) and also school entrance exam preparation. Tailored tutoring helps confidence and achievement, while easing parents' concerns about their child's education and mental health.



**Work+Family Space**, an easily searchable and personalised hub for all matters work and family, and a vital resource for busy workers. Filled with a world of information, tips, webinars and expert advice, there's something for everyone - whatever their life stage or personal situation.



Our innovative **Parental Leave Toolkit** is a digitised coaching solution delivering timely checklists and advice to the individual and their manager at every point in the journey, making a significant difference to return rates.

Beyond the parent transition, we've developed tailored coaching programmes for our clients on many major life events.



**Workplace Nurseries and Nursery Partnerships** provide parents with reassuringly high-quality and convenient care at, or near, their workplace.

The ultimate "sticky benefit" and a real game-changer for retention.

Get in touch to discover how we can help your business and your employees:

 0345 241 5309

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