



The Business Case for Supporting Parents & Carers in the NHS & Healthcare Sector

Modern Families Index UK 2025:
NHS & Healthcare Sector Report



Bright Horizons®

Introduction

The 2025 UK Modern Families Index (MFI) surveyed 3,000 randomly-selected UK working parents including 345 from the NHS & Healthcare sector. Participants indicated their gender as 31% male, 69% female with no-one stating a different gender. 15% further identified as carers of adult dependants.

In the MFI survey population, there were also 50 parents working in the Biotech, Pharmaceuticals, Life Sciences & Scientific Research sectors (described later as Biomedical/Life Sciences). They were 51% male, 49% female. 22% of these are also carers of adults. We have included some responses from this related sector for further comparison below.

Bright Horizons has published the UK Modern Families Index annually since 2012, exploring the changing needs and expectations of working parents and carers.

This year, the overall Report focused on The Key Trends, The Business Case for Supporting Parents & Carers; and Actions for Employers based on that evidence. This report focuses on the findings and implications for the NHS & Healthcare sector.



Read our full report here!



The Business Case for Supporting Parents & Carers in the NHS & Healthcare Sector

The NHS and Healthcare sector provides vital supports to life in the UK. Despite the rise of AI, stakeholders still agree that quality of care is all about the people: it hinges on the satisfaction, wellbeing and commitment of those delivering it. The 2024 NHS Staff Survey shows that levels of these important factors are broadly similar to, and not greatly increased on, the previous year.

This matters when national priorities* for 2025/2026 include a workforce target with a Key Performance Indicator to reduce agency staff spend by 30% and bank staff by 10%. Although NHS England will now be phased out over the coming two years, these recently published national priorities remain relevant. To have people in place to deliver on these aims, recruitment and retention remain a key focus, as highlighted by the Royal College of nursing** among others.

There is a tension between national targets and what working families among NHS and Healthcare staff are telling us about their need for support. For example, with high levels of childcare and adult/eldercare breakdown affecting staff availability, it will be hard to deliver on reducing agency spend. Practical solutions such as back-up care and onsite nursery provision already play a key role in some NHS Trust organisations. This report shines a light on areas where greater support would further shore up national priorities.

* <https://www.england.nhs.uk/publication/2025-26-priorities-and-operational-planning-guidance/>

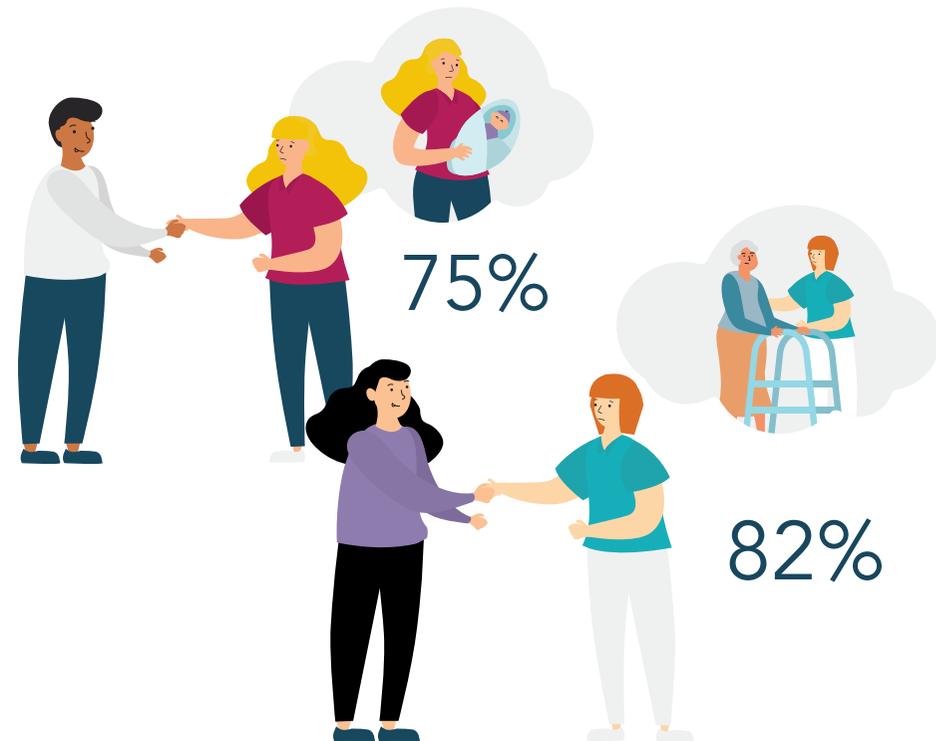
**<https://www.rcn.org.uk/news-and-events/Press-Releases/nhs-long-term-workforce-plan-will-be-10000-new-nurses-behind-target-by-2025>

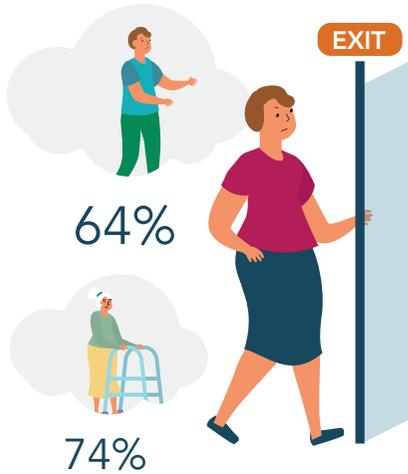
Talent attraction & retention

This survey tells us three-quarters (75%) of NHS & Healthcare sector parents carefully consider their childcare options before accepting a promotion or new job. Over 8 in 10 (82%) of those caring for adult dependants similarly consider their adult care options.

35% of NHS & Healthcare sector parents are planning to look for new employment in the coming year. This rises to 43% among those with adult dependants. Therefore, for NHS & Healthcare employers, demonstrating understanding of the role of family care is vital to retention.

NHS & Healthcare sector parents (75%) and carers (82%) carefully consider their childcare or adult care options before accepting a promotion or new job.





64% of parents and 74% of adult carers in the NHS & Healthcare sector had a breakdown in care arrangements that clashed with work.

Productivity: physical presence

Nearly two-thirds (64%) of these NHS & Healthcare sector parents had childcare breakdowns that clashed with work in the last year. For adult carers, around three-quarters (74%) had to take a day or more off for adult/eldercare.

74%



74% of NHS & Health sector parents have at least some concerns about their children's mental health.

Productivity: mental load

In a sector in which ability to focus can literally have life changing implications, there is a lot of attention paid to employee wellbeing with some exemplary programmes of staff support in the sector. However, unfortunately against that backdrop, there is a downward trend in employees feeling NHS & Healthcare employers are supporting family. This can be a huge barrier to mental and emotional readiness to work. It is concerning that NHS & Healthcare sector parents and carers feel their employer cares less about their work-home balance than last year and the year before:

- 2025: 55%,
- 2024: 61%,
- 2023: 62%

It has also become progressively less possible to talk about family at work:

- 2025: 56%
- 2024: 64%
- 2023: 71%

Realising potential

There is a central drive to retain talent – and see careers progress – in NHS & Healthcare settings where physical presence is often key. There is also an understanding that talent can be drawn away to other sectors which appear to offer more flexibility. It is vital, therefore, to know what will make the difference and support presence in person and, through that, talent retention.

Top of the wish list after flexibility of days and hours comes help with childcare costs (36%). This is followed by commuting costs (26%), childcare cover such as back-up care (24%), onsite childcare (19%) and several other educational / family supports.



Nearly 1 in 10 (9%) seek help with pet care



What would support physical presence at work?



Trends in the NHS & Healthcare Sector

High Stress

Nearly 3 in 10 (28%) of parents in the NHS & Healthcare sector indicate the highest stress levels, in line with 29% in the overall MFI population.* However, fewer in the sector have low stress levels (11%) than the overall population at 18%.

So, NHS & Healthcare participants reported an average stress level of 6.3 out of 10 versus 5.7 in Biomedical/Life Sciences and 6.0 in the overall survey population.

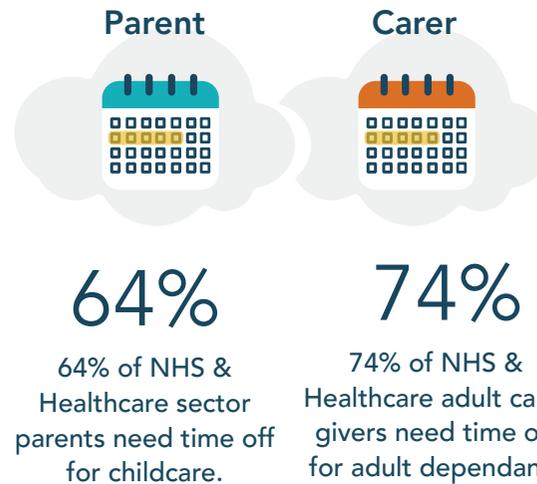
28% of NHS & Healthcare participants report high stress levels. Just 11% report low stress.



Productivity Risks – especially among carers

There is a strong risk of productivity being impacted by care breakdowns in the NHS & Healthcare sector, which was also true last year. In this year's survey, nearly two-thirds (64%) of parents needed to take at least one day off for childcare reasons in the last year, the same as in the survey overall and comparable to the NHS figure of 65% last year. As context, this figure was at its highest (80%) in Biomedical/Life Sciences and lowest (49%) in the Manufacturing, Consumer Product and FMCG sector.

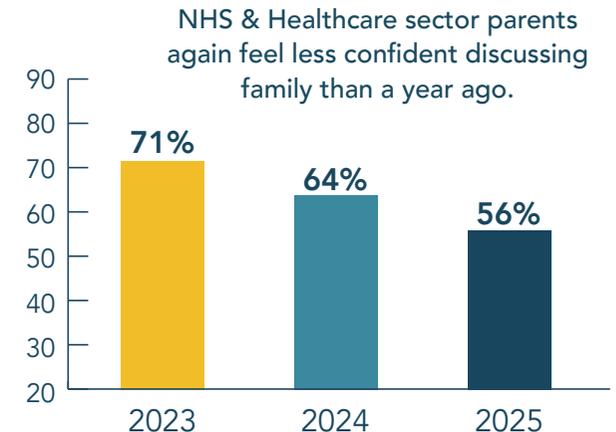
For NHS parents who are also caring for adult dependants there is an additional productivity risk: 74% lost at least a day to adult care breakdowns in the last year.



Low perceptions of employer support

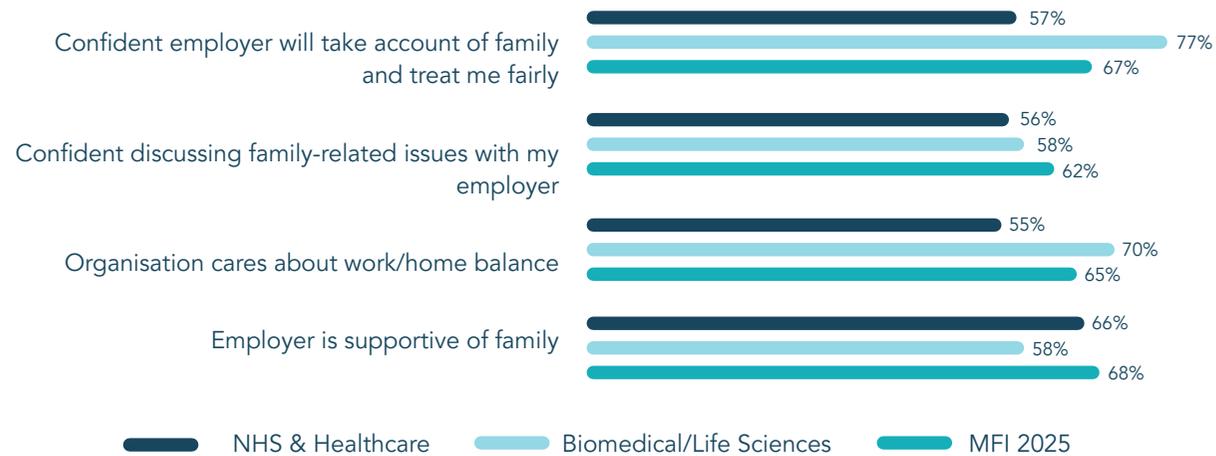
The MFI offers some worrying insights for a sector focused on attracting and retaining talent. As the chart on the next page shows, many NHS & Healthcare sector employees do not believe they will be treated fairly around family, or that the organisation cares about work-home balance. It is, surprisingly, harder to talk about family at work in the NHS & Healthcare sector than in the wider population on average (56% vs 62% in the main survey). These figures do not sit well against the 2024 MFI where 61% in the NHS & Healthcare sector agreed the organisation cared about their work-home balance (vs 55% this year and 62% in 2023).

Last year, 64% of NHS & Healthcare employees felt confident discussing family-related issues (vs 56% this year and 71% in 2023).



*We treated those indicating stress ratings of 8-10 out of 10 as highly stressed and those indicating of 1-3 out of 10 as having low stress levels.

Employees' perception of employer support is lower in the NHS / Healthcare sector



A mixed picture on flexibility

'We work flexibly' is a key theme of the NHS People Promise. As context, the 2024 NHS Staff Survey showed a 'We work flexibly' score of 6.31 (on a scale up to 10) which although higher than 2022 and 2021, remains similar to 2023.

However, just a quarter (26%) indicated here that they are able to work more flexibly than the previous year: lower than the 28% in the overall MFI survey.

In the overall survey, a fifth (20%) said their employer or role blocks flexible working. This was 22% in NHS & Healthcare, which is higher, though might be expected given the nature of much of the work.

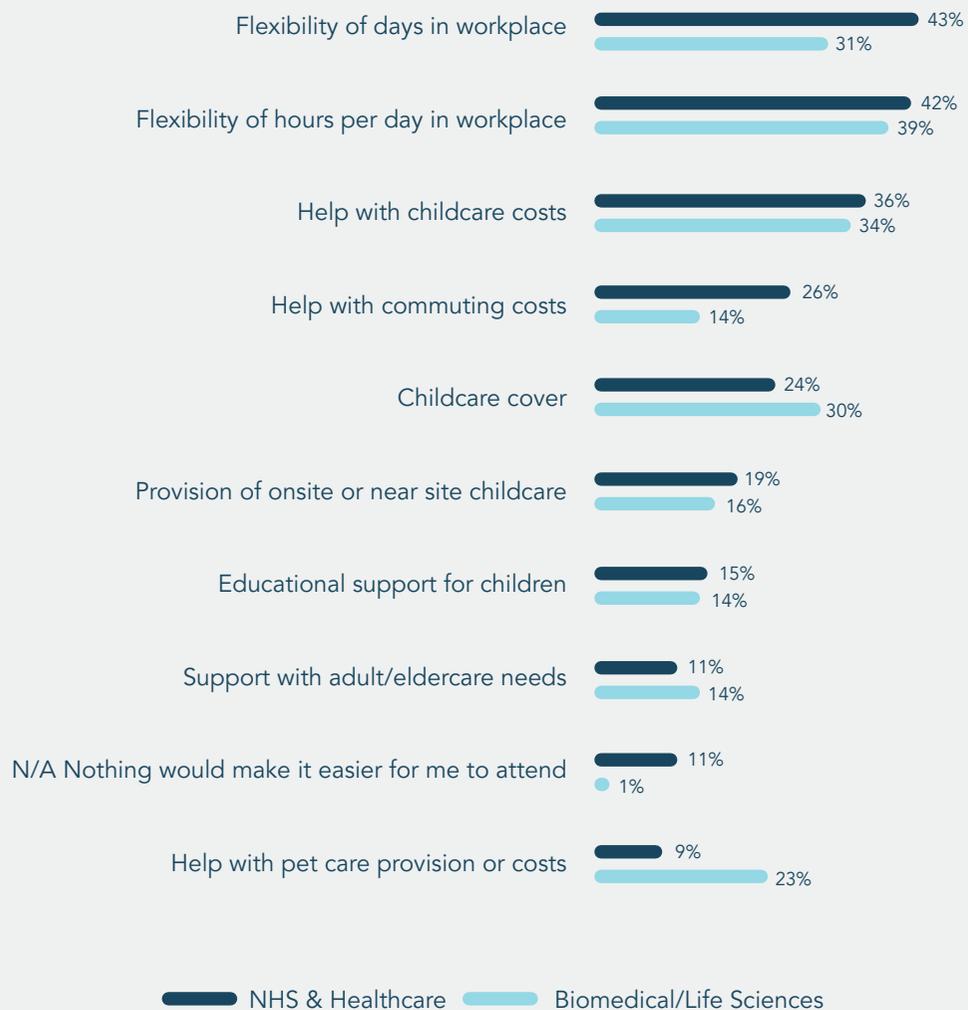
Two-thirds (67%) of these NHS & Healthcare sector parents are confident that they can progress their careers whilst working flexibly (similar to the 68% in the survey overall and 69% in Biomedical/ Life Sciences), placing expectations on NHS & Healthcare employers to make this work. Flexible start and finish times are the most requested option in this sector.

Desired types of flexible working

We asked: "What, if any, flexible working initiatives would you like your employer to offer?"



There are also many ways employees are now expecting employers to support their attendance at a central place of work. Help with childcare costs comes second only to flexibility in the NHS and Healthcare – for well over a third (36%) of parents.



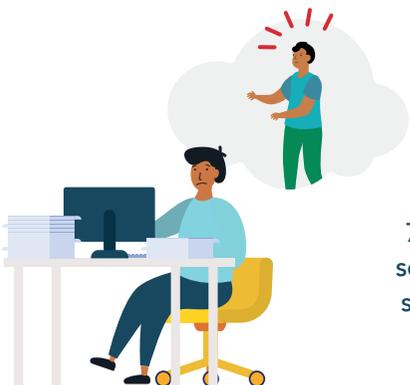
The clash of work with parental concerns about children

NHS & Healthcare sector parents are looking for more support from their employer.

A headline in this year's MFI was that parents' concerns about their children's wellbeing and development had risen for the first time since after the pandemic.

It is helpful to see that NHS & Healthcare sector parents mostly had lower concerns about children's mental health and educational catch up than the overall population. Educational catch-up concerns have been less pronounced in this sector since this question was first posed just after the pandemic, perhaps due to front line workers having greater access to educational support during lockdowns and therefore not now feeling such an acute sense of being 'left behind'?

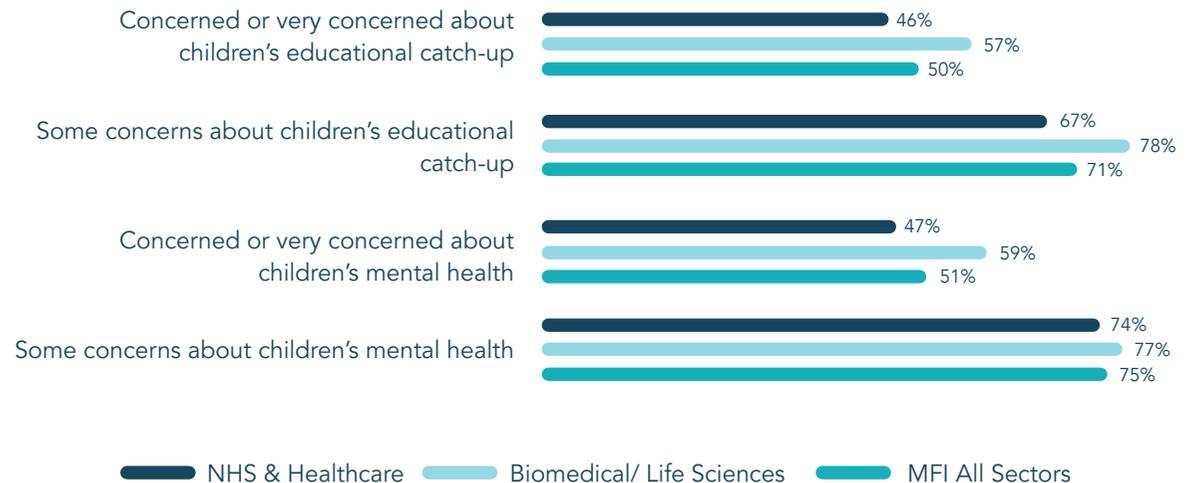
Comparing with last year however, we see a strong rise in those in the NHS & Healthcare sector having at least some concerns about their children's mental health (74% in 2025, 65% in 2024).



74%

74% of NHS & Healthcare sector parents have at least some concerns about their children's mental health.

Concerns about mental health and educational catch-up



NHS & Healthcare
 Biomedical/ Life Sciences
 MFI All Sectors

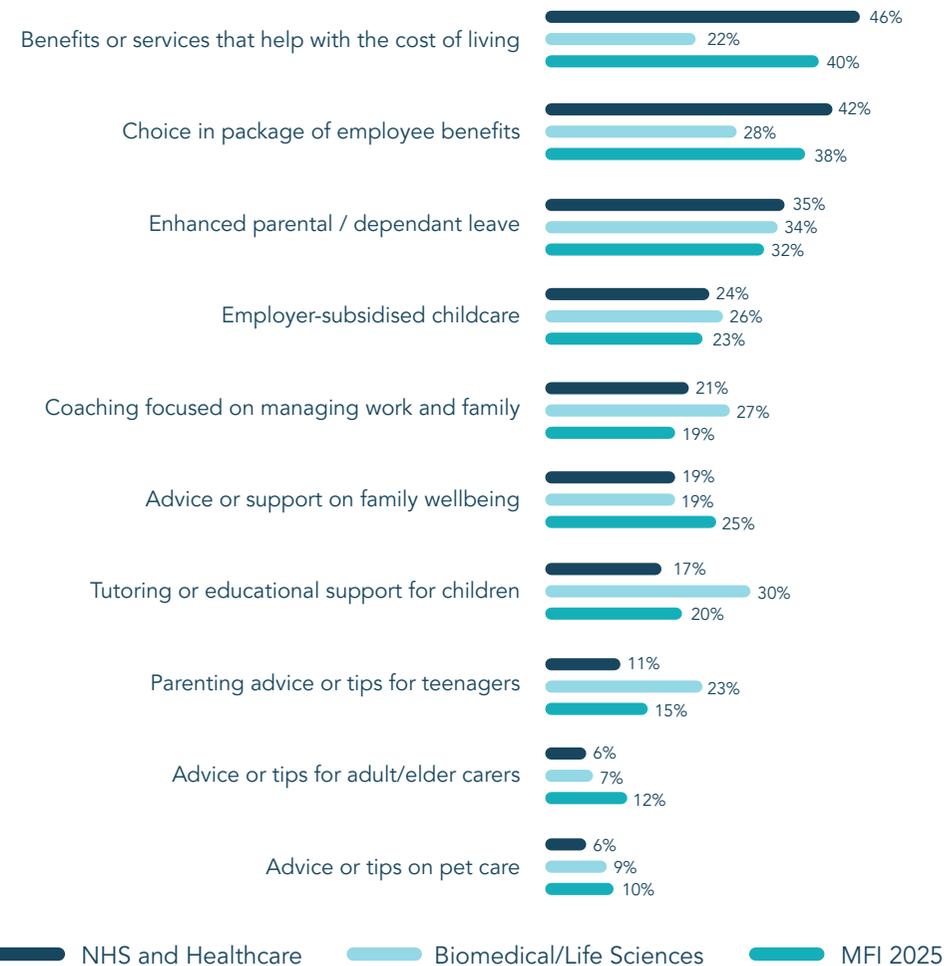
Key Considerations for Employers in the NHS & Healthcare Sector

- High stress levels call for practical support to ease the responsibilities of family life. However, as we have seen above, parents and carers in the NHS & Healthcare sector have much less confidence in their employers' support than they did a year ago.
- NHS & Healthcare sector employees also experience frequent care breakdowns with both childcare (64%) and adult care (74%). This is highly disruptive both to continuity of work and to the wellbeing of those individuals, their colleagues and other stakeholders impacted by short notice absence.
- Parents and carers in this sector carefully consider their childcare (75%) or adult care (82%) options before accepting a promotion or new job.
- There is therefore much pressing evidence for a renewed focus on family support in order to deliver on targets as well as supporting wellbeing and career continuity.

The chart here shows how NHS & Healthcare employees value benefits which save money (as family supports do), choice, good policies, childcare, and wider supports such as coaching, advice and direct educational support.

Top 10 Benefits in a good employer

We asked: Which benefits and services would you look for in a good employer for working families? Please select up to 5.



Whatever the comparisons, the concerns are there, and a strong message comes across that there is a role for employers. We saw earlier that it is becoming less easy to discuss family at work. Parents need to feel able to share their concerns with colleagues and managers at work, as well as receive practical support from employers in addressing them. This will enable them to be present and fully able to focus 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:

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Work + Family Solutions

This is **working.**



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