



Modern Families Index UK Report 2025



Bright Horizons®

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Who took part?

Our survey population:

Who

3,000 working parents, with at least one child aged 0-17 years, were randomly selected from across all UK regions and industry sectors.

Age

34% are aged 18-34
59% are 35-54
7% are over 55

Working hours

78% work full-time, 22% work part-time (29 or fewer hours per week).

Status

19% also have a caring responsibility for an adult or elder.
82% are in an opposite sex couple sharing a household.
4% are in a same-sex couple sharing a household.
13% are in a single parent household.

Identity

1,422 (48%) identify as male, 1,566 (52%) identify as female.
No participants selected 'Other' or 'Prefer not to say'.

76% identified as White, 12% as Black / African / Caribbean / Black British, 7% as Asian / Asian British. 4% as Mixed / Multiple ethnic group and <1% as Other ethnic group.



Executive Summary: If you've got just two minutes, here's what you need to know...

The Key Trends

Nearly one third of UK working parents and carers are very stressed. Of those, 80% are finding it hard to focus on work.

- All the post-pandemic gains in satisfaction about employers' caring attitudes have been eroded.
- 11% drop in parents and carers finding their employers supportive compared to 2023.
- 31% drop in parents feeling their employer is highly supportive compared to 2023.

Parents and carers are looking for more flexibility from their employers as well as greater support to cover a diverse range of family responsibilities.

- 22% drop in parents and carers being able to work flexibly compared to last year.

The Business Case for Supporting Parents & Carers

The stark findings in this year's report provide compelling evidence for employers to invest in support for parents and carers, even in a cost-conscious environment.

One way of reducing costs is to ensure talented people stay with the organisation, saving the recruitment spend on replacement and enabling individuals to fulfil their career potential. Another commercial imperative is to support productivity through workers who are present and well enough to perform to their best at work, as well as at home. All this includes supporting people to integrate successful careers with their family life, whatever that entails: children, adult dependants or pets.

Providing relevant, practical and inclusive support is key to retaining talent, realising potential and shoring up productivity: whether that's productivity in person when care breaks down or emotional presence supported through helping with the mental load.

Take Action

The findings of this report give multiple signposts for urgent action by employers. The backward trends over the last two years sound alarm bells.

Despite other pulls felt by employers, reducing support for working families will only exacerbate stress, absence and overwhelm according to the results here.

It is clear that there are many priorities for employers. The cost of employing people is rising with the April 2025 increase in employer National Insurance Contributions and Minimum / Living Wage, alongside the Employment Rights Bill enhancing day 1 rights and removing employer-weighted flexibility of contracts, among other impacts.

Still, to have a high-performing, engaged, committed and sustainable workforce, it is vital that employers encourage open, solution-focused conversations about family at work, pay attention to career development for parents and carers and provide practical support and advice for managing family life.

As a focus, we offer 3 core areas for action with practical tools:

- Action to support greater office presence
- Action to support and retain carers
- Action to encourage use of care breakdown support by all employees



A. Key Trends

We have some big questions to explore: How are parents and carers doing? Do employers care? And how do parents and carers want to work?

A1

How are parents and carers doing?

Working parents and carers are stressed. Nearly 3 in 10 (29%) have very high stress levels: 26% of men and 32% of women. Just 18% (20% of men, 14% of women) report very low stress.*

We did not ask the same question in 2020, however, we did find that 49% of parents reported their wellbeing was good or very good pre-pandemic in 2020.

Who is feeling very stressed?

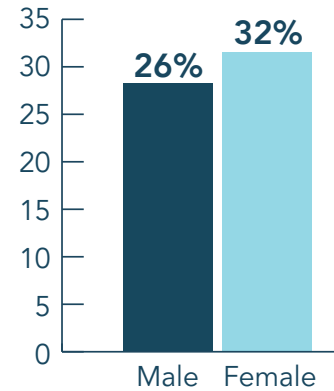
We have highlighted here some of the demographic groups reporting the highest stress levels.**

*On a self-rating scale of 1-10, asking for an indication of average stress levels, we considered 8-10 to be very high and 1-3 to be very low.

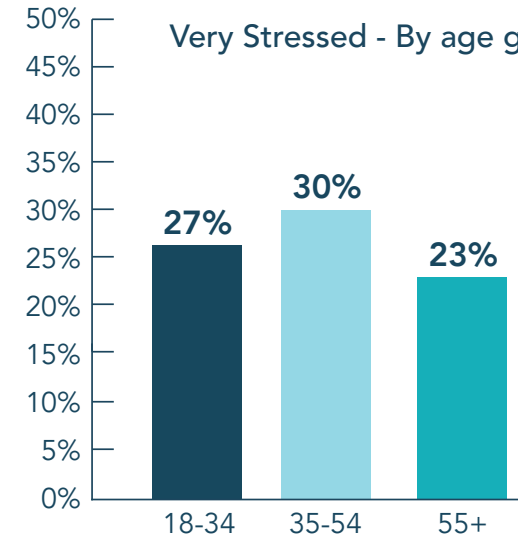
**In some cases, we have displayed the full set of demographic data to show the comparisons.

29% feel very stressed

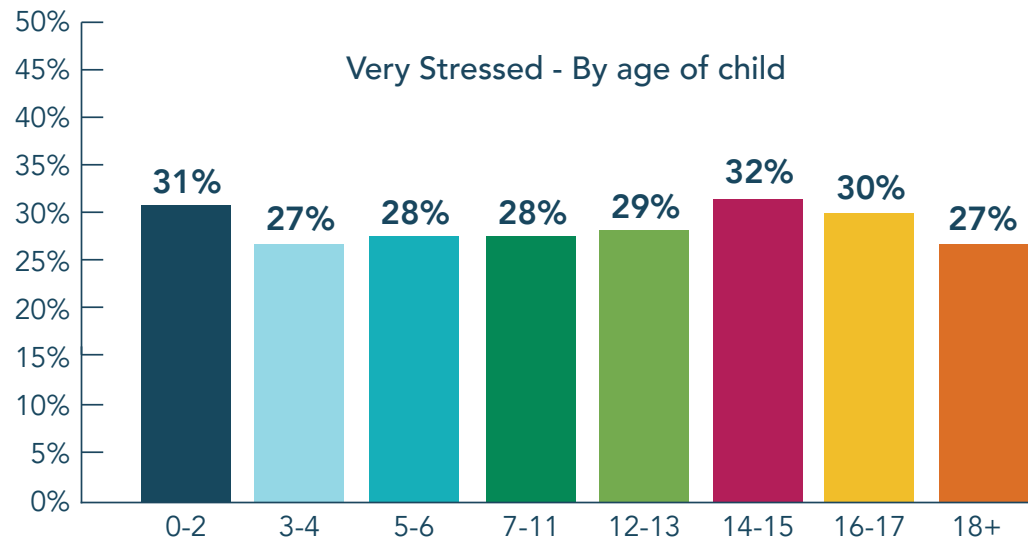
Very Stressed - By Gender

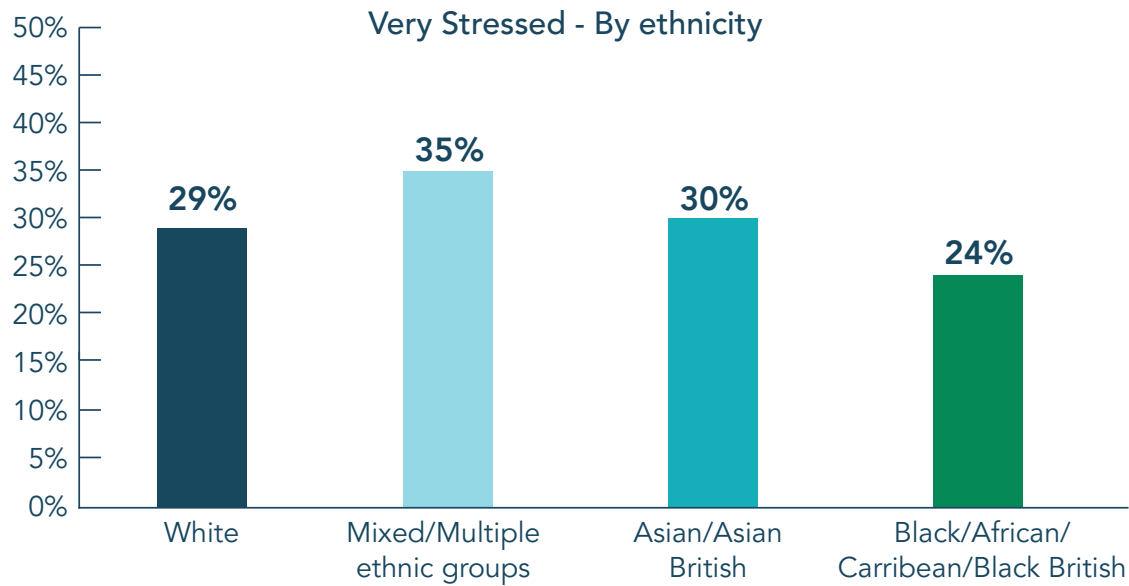


Very Stressed - By age group



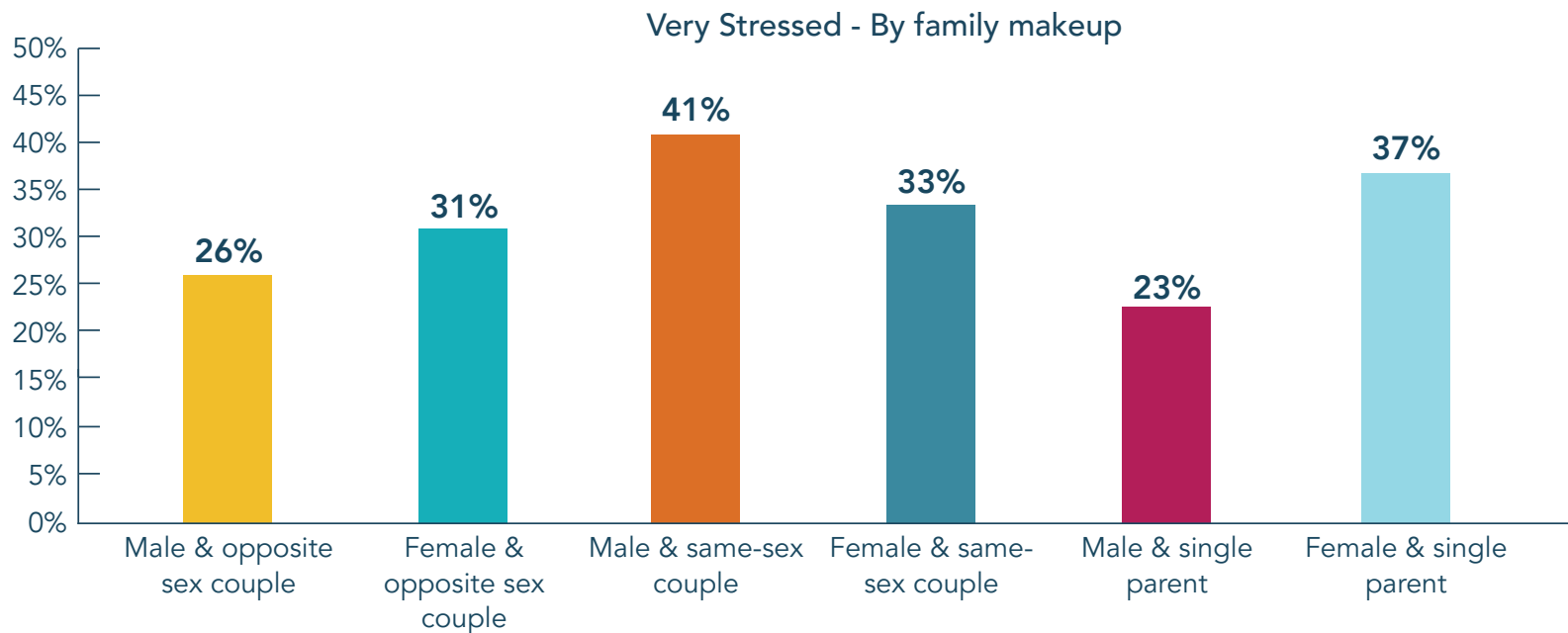
Very Stressed - By age of child





In 2025, those parents with high stress scores also say they are overwhelmed and find it hard to focus. Of those reporting very high stress levels, 72% indicate 'Most days my stress is completely overwhelming' (70% men, 73% women); 80% say 'Stress makes it hard for me to focus' (77% men, 83% women).

8 out of 10 who are very stressed say this makes it hard to focus



Do employers care?

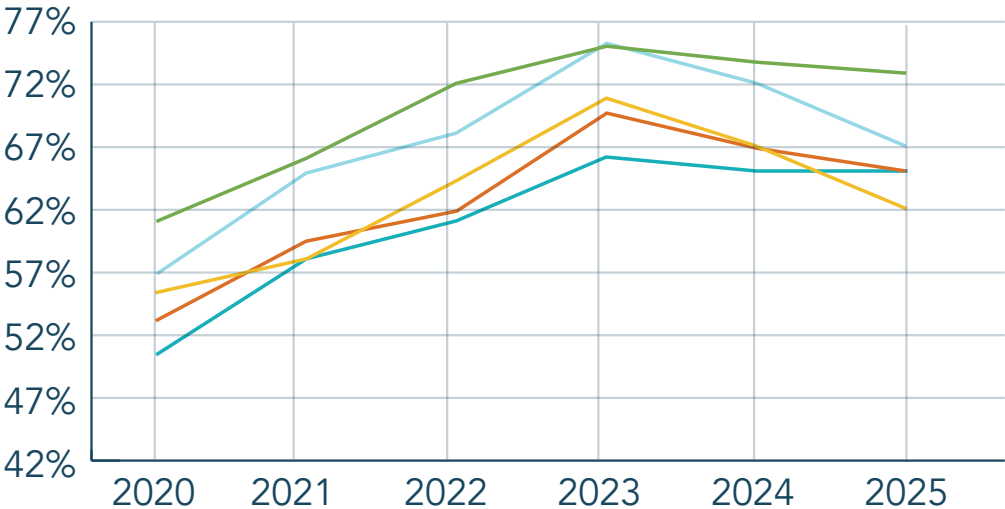
Post-pandemic family support continues to ebb away.

2025 is a good moment to take a look back in time to the 2020 Modern Families Index just before Covid. The pandemic accelerated a shift in employee expectations, and at first employers leaned in with greater support and a focus on wellbeing. While there have been improvements overall from the 2020 pre-pandemic state, employees' perception of employer support has lost ground year on year since 2023. Being able to talk about family at work and feeling confident that employers will take account of family life and treat people fairly have both seen a sharp drop. Both are linked with women's perception of employer support which rose sharply in 2023, but has now fallen away (see next page).

In 2023, we introduced a specific question: 'How supportive of family would you say your employer is, overall?' (see next page). Supportiveness has fallen from 77% (2023) to 72% (2024) to 68% in 2025. In 2023, 29% felt their employer was 'Highly supportive', now just 20% feel the same. Today, 12% say their employer is 'Unsupportive' vs 7% in 2023.

Given the levels of stress and anxiety found among working parents in this year's MFI, employers would be wise to guard against cutting back crucial work and family support that helps ensure continued employee performance and wellbeing.

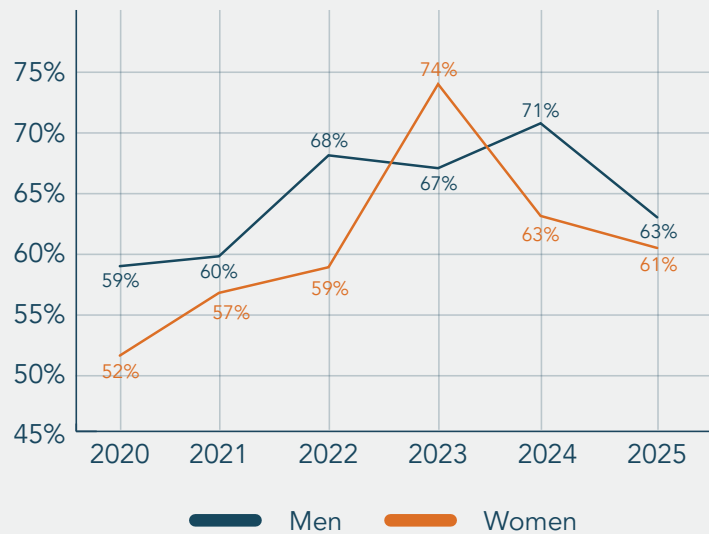
Confidence in employer support rose post-pandemic but has fallen in the last two years



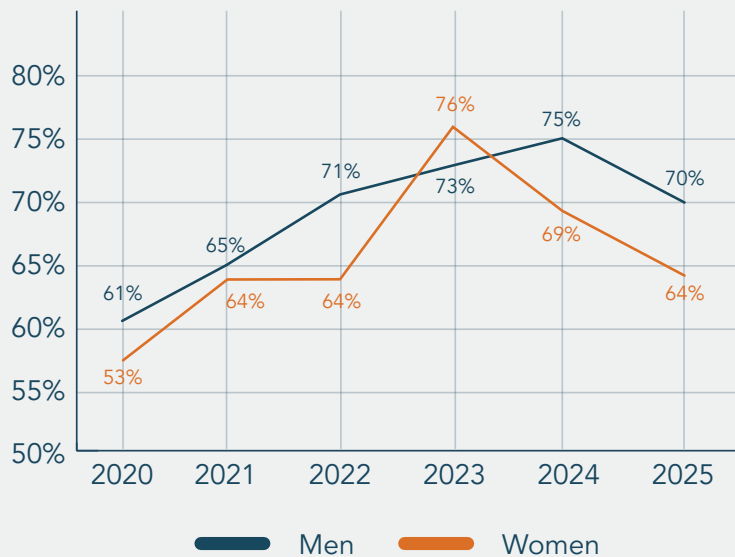
	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
My organisation cares about my work and home balance	50%	58%	61%	66%	65%	65%
My manager cares about my work and home balance	53%	59%	62%	69%	67%	65%
I feel confident discussing family-related issues with my employer	55%	58%	64%	71%	67%	62%
I feel confident my employer will take account of my family responsibilities and treat me fairly	57%	65%	68%	75%	72%	67%
I feel confident discussing work-related issues with my employer	61%	66%	72%	75%	74%	73%



Confident discussing family-related issues with my employer



Confident my employer will take account of my family responsibilities and treat me fairly



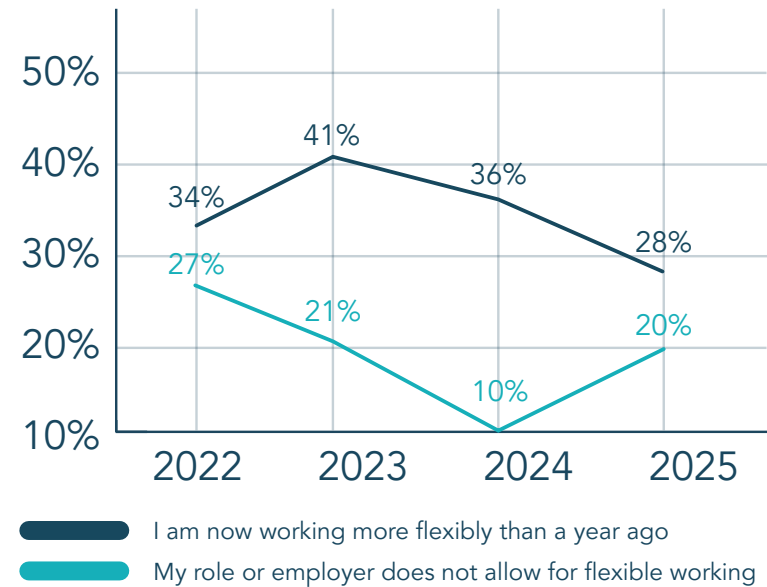
A3

How do parents and carers want to work in 2025?

'Thinking about your working life, has your ability to work flexibly changed over the past year, if at all?'

While there is more flexibility now than in pre-pandemic times, this year's findings compared to 2024 reveal a drop in overall flexibility and an increase in respondents saying their role or employer does not allow flexible working. More than twice as many people as last year say they are working less flexibly than a year ago.

Flexibility rose to a peak in 2023 and has since fallen. Flexibility is also more often discouraged now.



What kinds of flexibility are valued?

In light of the Employment Rights Bill and its promise of default flexibility, we asked 'What, if any, flexible working initiatives would you like your employer to offer?'. Interestingly for employers, the top two employee wishes mirror pre-pandemic reality, when the most popular types of flexible working in use were 'flexitime' (57%) and 'flexible working place' (43%).

Looking to the year ahead, a staggering three-quarters (75%) of those aged 18-34 declared some concerns about an increased return to office; over two-thirds (68%) of the whole survey population felt the same. Employers can support return to office mandates by having childcare support in place along with other provisions such as flexible hours.

Flexible working & career progression

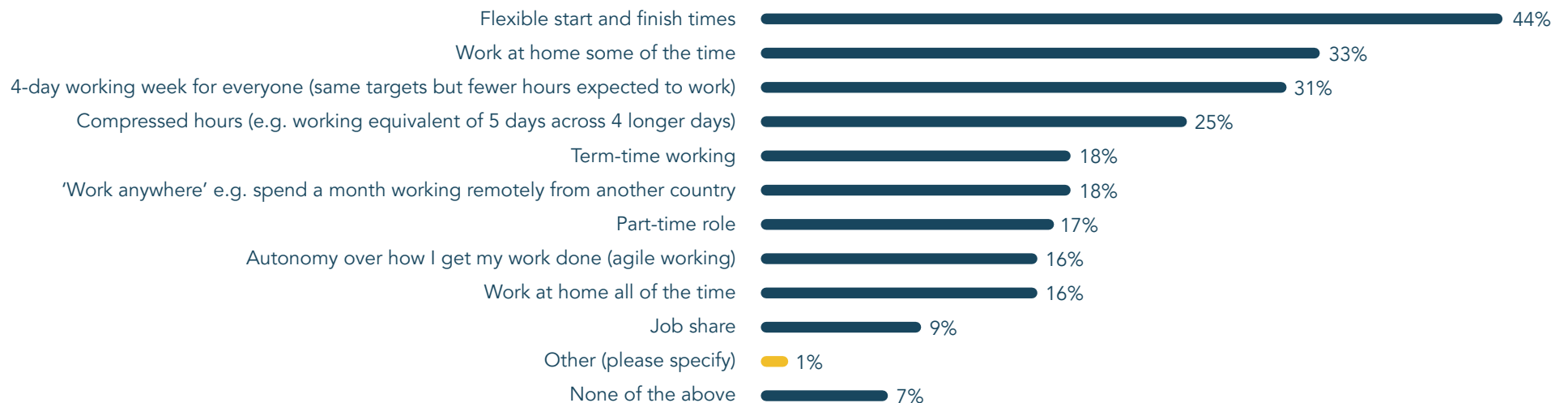
Since 2022, we have asked: 'To what extent do you agree or disagree that you are still able to progress in your career while working flexibly?' Over half (56%) agreed in 2022. Since 2023, this has remained steady at two-thirds (2023: 68%, 2024: 67%, 2025: 68%).

However, part-time workers consistently see less opportunity for progression than full-time flexible workers. In 2025, 7 in 10 (70%) full-time flexible workers see scope for career progression against just 57% of those working part-time.

Examine bias against flexibility

As described, flexible part-time workers are 18% less likely to see scope for career progression compared to their full-time flexible colleagues.

Many parents and carers want to work in a bounded way, less than 5 days a week, usually for a pro rata salary. Employers should examine their promotion practices to remove any bias against those working (and paid) for less than 5 days a week. Part-time jobs should be meaningful with measurable impact on organisational goals and career pathways.



Themes shared under 'Other' include: "Encouraging hybrid work models."
"Offering flexible work hours."
"Providing flexibility in work time."



Concerns about children are rising: the post-Covid recovery has disappeared!

As well as many feeling stressed themselves, working parents are increasingly worried about their children.

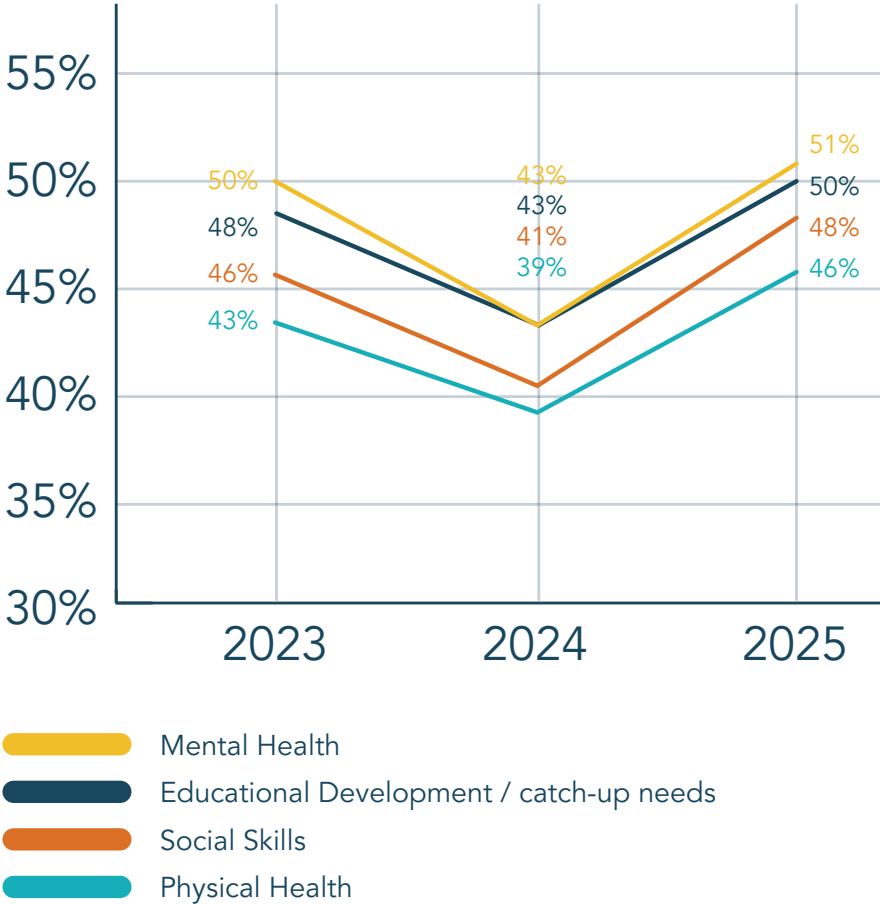
Since 2022, we have been asking parents whether they have concerns over their child/children's life and health. In 2022 we asked about post-pandemic impacts and 55% reported concerns about educational development / catch-up, while 54% were concerned about the pandemic's effect on their children's mental health. From 2023, we made these generic questions, not directly linked to the pandemic. Parents then reported lower concerns about educational catch-up and mental health in 2023 and again in 2024.

However, this year's findings see the 2024 recovery reversing, with parental concerns now higher than in 2023 for all areas of children's development.

This is a red flag for anyone concerned with working parents' wellbeing given these fears for their children and young people, our future citizens. There is surely a role for employers here in ensuring support for parents to address this additional mental load and support their ability to focus at work.

Concerns about mental health and educational catch-up are 50% or above throughout preschool and primary years, and at least 45% throughout the secondary school years, with half of parents of 14–15-year-olds having concerns about their young people's mental health.

Parents' worries about their children have also increased. Over half (51%) of parents are concerned or very concerned about their children's mental health.



B. The Business Case for Supporting Parents & Carers

With rising costs of employment, we provide here the much-needed data for internal champions to make the case for supporting working parents and carers.

B1

The business drivers for supporting **working parents**.

1. Retaining talent: To attract the best people and then keep them means meeting their recalibrated, new generational expectations of what it means to be an employer of choice.

Over a third of working parents (35%) plan to look for new employment in the next year (37% among 18–34-year-olds). Though slightly lower than last year, it still presents a risk to employers, given changes in the jobs market. Parents, and carers, often leave after years of valuable training and knowledge gathering. The cost of replacement (recruitment fees, productivity, team impact) is thought to range between 15% to 20% of the new hire’s annual salary, so £5,250 to £7,000 for an employee on an average salary.* Over three-quarters (76%) consider their childcare options, and 73% consider their employer’s support for family life before accepting/ applying for a promotion or a new job. So, providing and promoting inclusive family support is an essential retention strategy.

35% plan to look for a new job this year.
76% consider their childcare before accepting a new role.



2. Productivity, helping people to be physically present: The productivity of nearly two-thirds (64%) was impacted last year by childcare breakdowns, averaging nearly 5 days in length, though many experienced longer disruptions. The usual ways in which working parents address these care breakdowns are not sustainable, nor are they conducive to wellbeing and continued productivity.

Along with help from family and friends, where available, these are some common approaches to managing childcare breakdowns.



*<https://www.cipd.org/globalassets/media/knowledge/knowledge-hub/reports/2024-pdfs/8662-resource-and-talent-planning-2024-report-web.pdf>



Interestingly, among men, over a fifth (22%) say that when childcare breaks down, 'I juggle work with childcare and it's a struggle but I manage', while 16% admit 'I juggle work with childcare and my work suffers' and 14% resort to taking sick leave. Nearly two-thirds (65%) of men have had one or more days of childcare breakdown in the past 12 months compared to 62% of women.

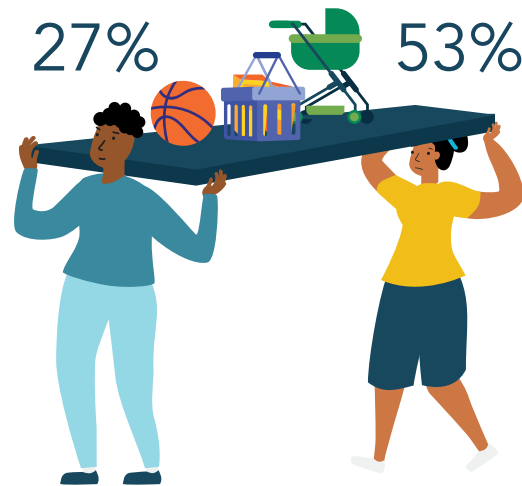


With earlier access to Statutory Sick Pay due to come in under the Employment Rights Bill, employers will be strongly motivated to avoid increased use of sick leave to cover family care.

3. Productivity: helping people to be emotionally and psychologically present: Over half of women (53%) and over a quarter of men (27%) say they carry the mental load for parenting in their household. In a positive development, there is a rise of 12 percentage points in women saying the mental load is shared (36% agree this year). However, the load is still uneven. This, in addition to the widespread levels of stress, and the 80% of those with high stress levels finding it difficult to focus, should raise alarm bells to employers. It is well documented that stress, depression and anxiety lead to a significant loss of working days.*



80%



27%

53%

*The Employment Rights Bill Impact Analysis quotes the Health and Safety Executive ('Working days lost in Great Britain' 2024) that 17.1 million working days were lost due to stress, depression or anxiety in 2022/23.

4. Realising potential: The Gender Pay Gap opens up around parenthood and never closes.** Organisational cultures must empower those who want to succeed to do so, while meeting their other life needs. Women still feel less able than men to progress their careers while working flexibly (65% vs 70%). Parents and carers in mid-life (age 35-54) feel less able to progress while working flexibly (65%) than those aged 18-34 (73%). This suggests the lived reality is harder than the promise of success in early career.

**<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5c7cdb3640f0b603d87fea05/WAGE-action-note1.pdf>

While 70% of fathers believe they can progress their careers while working flexibly, this falls to 65% among women.

65%

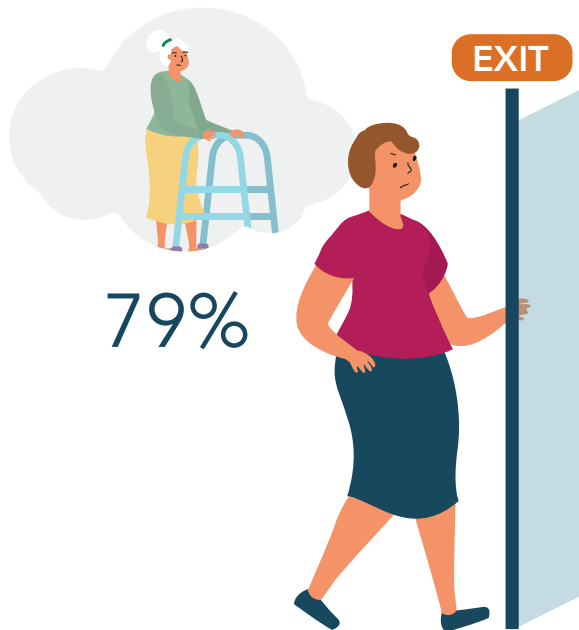
70%



The business drivers for supporting working carers.

1. Retaining talent: Retaining older workers is a known issue for UK employers given the 'great retirement' as part of the pandemic-induced 'great resignation'. Employers feel the skills shortages even though successive governments emphasise longer working lives, with later access to state pensions. Now, 38% of those with adult or eldercare responsibilities in the 2025 Index plan to look for new employment in the next year and nearly 8 in 10 (79%) consider their adult care needs before accepting a job or promotion.

79% of adult carers have care breakdowns clashing with work

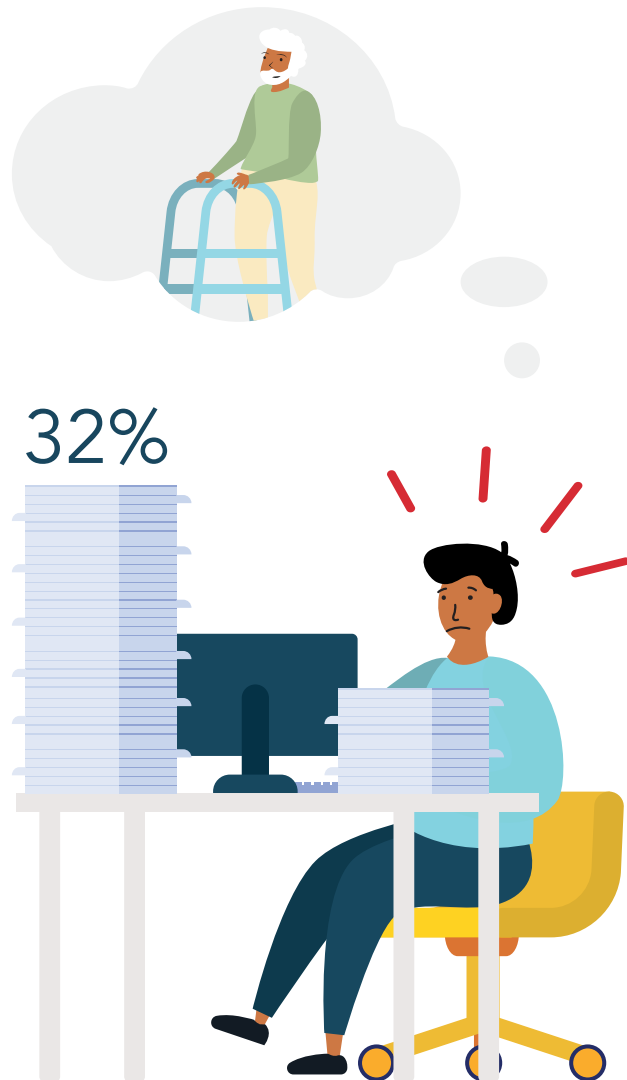


2. Productivity, helping people to be physically present: a staggering 79% (nearly 8 in 10) of adult carers needed to provide care or support in a way that clashed with work in the last year (e.g. supporting a medical appointment, attending to a loved one with sudden extra needs), averaging nearly 5 days in length, though nearly 1 in 10 had to cover ten days or more. For these employees, addressing breakdowns in adult dependant care is a need in addition to their childcare responsibilities.

Along with help from family and friends, where available, these are some common approaches to managing adult / eldercare breakdowns.



3. Productivity: helping people to be emotionally and psychologically present: Around a third (32%) of adult/elder carers report high levels of stress, so anything employers can do to lessen the mental load will help working carers to focus on work, as well as their wellbeing.

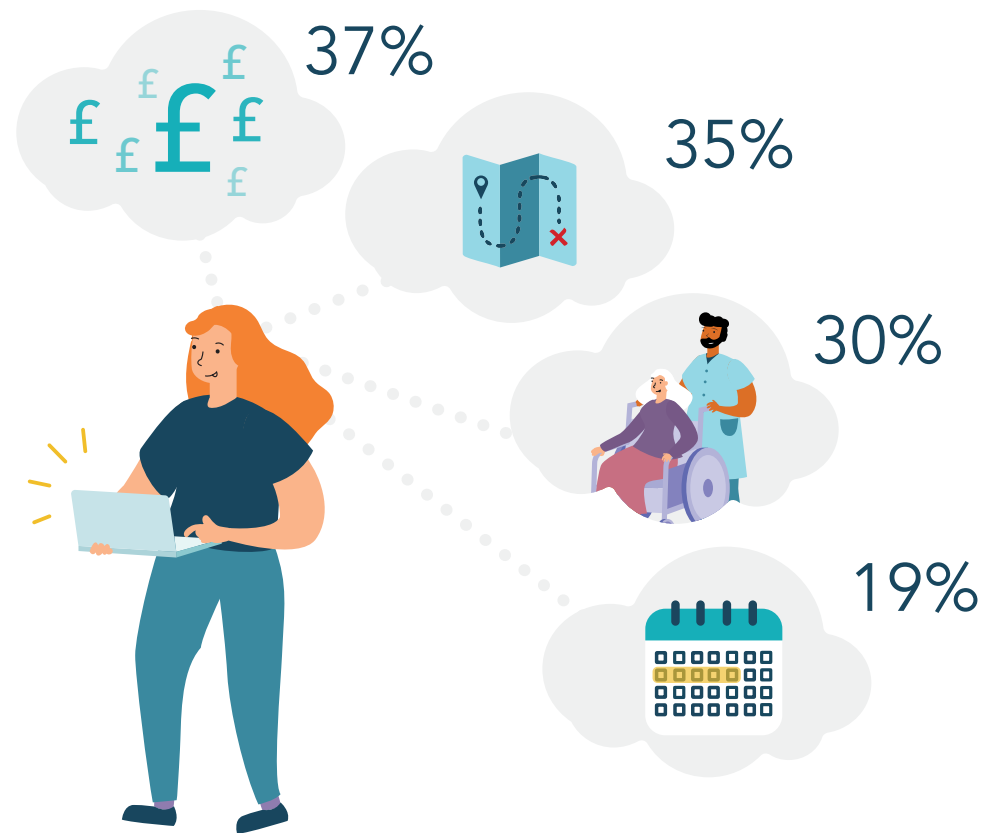


4. Realising potential: Six hundred people a day are giving up work to provide unpaid care to family members or friends.* Among carers of adults in this year's MFI, less than a fifth (19%) say they have used statutory Carer's Leave and found it helpful. Over 1 in 10 (12%) say they have used it, but it is not enough for their needs.

What else would help according to our MFI research?

- 37% - Financial help with care needs
- 35% - Help with finding care solutions
- 30% - Back-up care to cover gaps in care

Practical help goes further than time out in supporting carers.



*Carers UK research highlights that around 600 people a day are giving up work to provide unpaid care to family members or friends, 'due to a lack of flexibility and support in the workplace'.



The Business Case for Pet Care

Another type of caring which employers are increasingly recognising is pet care. Among this group of working parents, nearly half (48%) of pet owners needed to provide care or support in a way that clashed with work in the last year (e.g. last minute in-person work requirement, covering for an unavailable dog walker, etc). The average number of working days impacted was 4.2. Over 1 in 10 (11%) admit to taking sick leave for this purpose, among their other ways of coping.

Along with help from family and friends, where available, these are some common approaches to managing pet care breakdowns.



C. Take Action

Parents and carers are feeling stressed, worried about their families' wellbeing, finding challenges in progressing their careers and experiencing care breakdown clashes that reduce productivity at work. These concerns are considerable and provide strong drivers for all employers to recognise the value of supporting employees and take action.

Further, with the Employment Rights Bill raising standards across the board, how can organisations secure their position as an employer of choice?

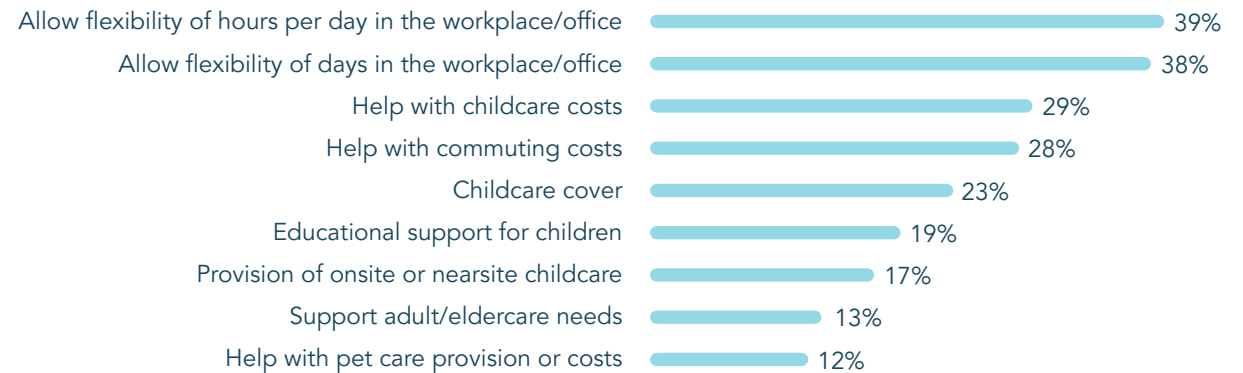
Supporting parents, carers, and also those with pets, by providing care solutions and advisory services is a clear guard against the losses of talent and productivity outlined above, and a marker of a leading employer.

We also offer three areas for specific action.

C1

Take practical action to support increased office presence

We asked: "If your employer or role requires you to increase your office / workplace presence, how could your employer help make it easier for you to attend?"



Many employers now wish to encourage employees to get together in person to collaborate, maximising creativity and knowledge transfer. Back-up care remains a fundamental need with 64% of parents and 79% of carers experiencing care breakdowns that clash with work. There are heightened employee concerns over a return to office – particularly among those aged 18-34 (75% concerned).

For employers wanting to drive in-person working, it's essential to facilitate the transition through supports and benefits that bring long-term viability. Over 1 in 3 18-34 year olds (34%) say help with childcare costs would enable office presence, while 23% favour onsite or near-site childcare to increase their presence in a central place of work.



C2

Build beyond Statutory Carer's Leave

Carers of adult dependants are clearly very stretched with nearly 8 in 10 experiencing care breakdowns and 1 in 3 feeling very stressed. Carer's Leave is a positive addition to the provisions available to carers, however it's important that the focus is not only on time away from work. Beyond the immediate needs of a crisis, carers are often highly focused on retaining their work role as an important part of their identity and are concerned that time out may impact their career. Practical support for carers goes a long way here.

We asked: "As a carer, other than time off, what, if any, additional support would you like from your employer? This can include support your employer already offers or support you would want them to offer".



Those 18-34-year-old working parents who also have adult caring responsibilities are seeking recognition and key supports: employers' financial support (41%), help finding care (39%), back-up care to cover care gaps (31%), carers' networks (30%) and coaching (26%).

Interestingly, while men express a higher interest in carers' networks than women (28% vs 23%), women are keener on coaching as carers (27% vs 23%). This underlines the need to ensure all supports are promoted in the most inclusive way.

C3

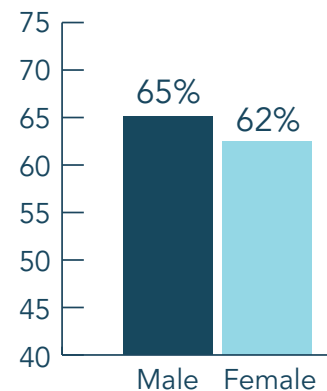
Encourage use of care breakdown support by all employees

With high levels of care breakdowns disrupting 5 or more days of work, emergency care cover is an essential benefit to ensure the continued productivity and presence of employees.

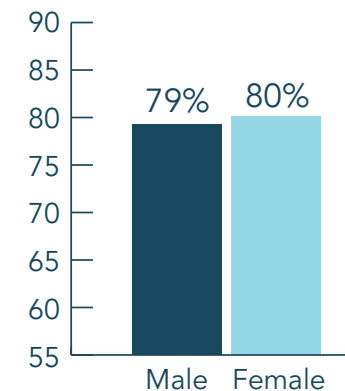
Even managers with diverse, multigenerational teams will find productivity and working days impacted. Disrupted days are balanced across genders, with 65% of men and 62% of women reporting a childcare breakdown affecting work. For those with adult caring responsibilities, 79% of men and 80% of women were affected.

Whilst the younger age groups were the most affected by childcare breakdowns that clashed with work (75% of 18-34 year olds), still nearly 3 in 5 (58%) of those aged 35-54 have also been impacted. Similarly, 85% of 18-34 year olds with adult care responsibilities have had an adult/eldercare breakdown, alongside 77% of 35-54 year olds.

Reported childcare breakdowns affecting work



Reported adult/eldercare breakdowns affecting 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 4-18 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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