



# Modern Families Index 2021

## SPOTLIGHT REPORT



**Bright Horizons®**

# In a year of seismic change, the lives of working parents were similarly transformed.

The pandemic caused a sharp increase in home working, flexibility and hands-on childcare for many. These changes have laid wide open the work + family conversation, with the spotlight on employee support, and many working parents will remember the approach their employer took in this regard long after the pandemic is over.

Throughout the crisis, men and women have been doing triple time as employees, teachers and parents. While the world stagnates, many employees will have put their career aspirations on hold to juggle their increased responsibilities, but companies cannot afford to become complacent.

Our survey shows an emphasis on forward planning, with patterns also indicating that the sandwich generation is younger than you might think. Employers who support their staff now will hold on to talented employees once the crisis eases and the job market opens once more.

Employers need to recognise that employees are expressing a desire for hybrid working to continue past the pandemic, and work-life priorities cannot be overlooked. In fact, it is the younger respondents who are most likely to consider the family support options of a potential employer before switching jobs, and those considering workplace eldercare support are also surprisingly young.

**This study was based on a survey of 1,000 working parents around the UK regions and nations, with children aged 18 and under who live in their household. There is a fuller account of the survey population in the Appendix at the end of this report.**

## Hidden Hazards For the Future

The pandemic is currently causing high concern about job security, with accompanying gratitude to be in a job and a reluctance to risk change and rock the boat.

The hidden hazard now for employers is that new expectations sit below the surface like an iceberg.

When the job market opens up again and we return to 'normal', employers who have recognised the heightened priority of family life and provided practical support for their staff will retain - and gain - talented employees, while those who do not will lose out.

## Support Staff Now...

**...or lose the talent later.**

Talented employees are taking stock of the current support offered and may jump ship when the crisis eases





## Effect of Lockdown on Health



**40%** perceived a negative impact of lockdown on **mental health**

**30%** had seen a negative impact on **physical health**

**44%** felt lockdown had had a **positive impact on family life**



# How Flexibly Can Employees Work Now?

The pandemic's arrival last year meant flexible working options opened up overnight, with two fifths of respondents saying they are able to work more flexibly than a year ago. Employee expectations are that the new blend of remote working and office-based working will continue, with only 7% considering flexible working as a barrier to their career progression.

Remote working is especially popular with younger generations but more than 1 in 5 workers are still either not working flexibly or working less flexibly than a year ago.

**5%**



I am working less flexibly than a year ago

**17%**



My role or employer does not allow for flexible working

**36%**



My working conditions have remained similar as I could already work flexibly

**41%**



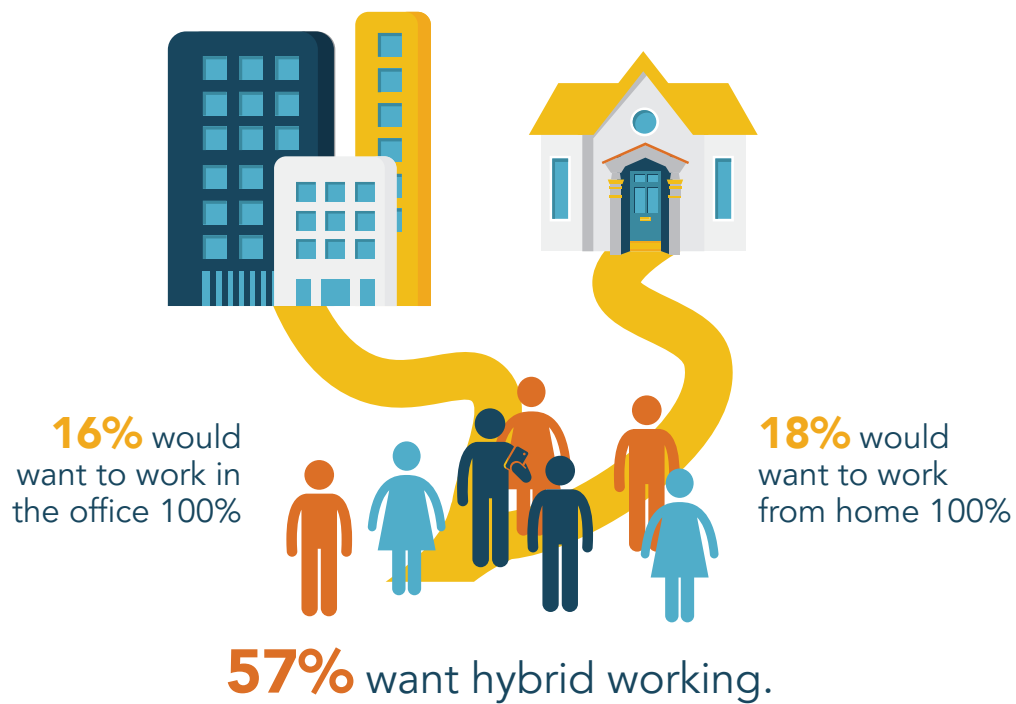
I can now work more flexibly than a year ago





# Preferences Around Hybrid Working

A third of working parents feel flexible working allows them to work more effectively and efficiently.



## Gender Split





## Reasons for Wanting to Work Flexibly



**36%** attribute their flexible working arrangements to their childcare commitments.



**29%** choose flexible working to manage their own wellbeing



**14%** say they work flexibly for eldercare commitments.



## Concerns About Childcare and Eldercare Impact Career Choices Early

The highest level of concern about balancing caring with career progression features sooner than many might think in a career path, and affects men and women similarly. The age group in our survey most concerned with childcare options before accepting a new job is 16-25 year olds, while eldercare considerations are the most prominent for 35-44 year olds. The younger generation's considered approach to career choices is a wake-up call to employers that being family-friendly counts right from the start.



The need to consider childcare options before accepting a promotion or new job is highest among **16-25 year olds** at **81%**



The sandwich generation is surprisingly young, with eldercare considerations most prominent for **35-44 year olds** at **84%**

## Greater Involvement in Childcare, for Men and Women

Though media commentary about homeschooling largely suggests childcare falling onto female shoulders, our survey largely shows a picture of shared care, with an appetite for this to continue.

More mothers than fathers continue to carry the greater share of childcare, but of the quarter of all parents who have taken on more care, the vast majority want to continue doing so, across genders.



**26% (a quarter)**  
of men stated that they  
now do more childcare





## The Value of a Supportive Employer – But a Need to “Walk the Talk”

Respondents indicated that, although their employers expressed an understanding of family support, there was a lack of real practical support. Employees welcomed their employers’ assurances around flexibility and wellbeing, but wanted this to be backed up with practical care solutions and real support.

High on the wish list was that line managers be more knowledgeable and understanding about the needs of working parents – perhaps also indicating that more coaching in this area is needed.

Most of all, working parents want to be treated as grown-ups and trusted with the autonomy to manage their own flexible working to help with the frequently changing working life scenarios.



**While employers’ attitudes towards childcare vary, only a third actually provide practical support**

## Top Wished-for Support from Employer



- 24%** Personal autonomy over workload
- 22%** A positive attitude to flexible working
- 22%** A focus on employee wellbeing
- 19%** Supportive line managers
- 17%** Access to employer-subsidised childcare





## Our Recommendations for Employers:

- Employers can't afford to be complacent as employees are currently treading water. **Employers need to get their plans in place and be advocates of their staff's wellbeing now**, so they don't face a talent drain once this crisis is over.
- **There is no single, simple solution.** Employers should support all staff in a variety of ways, looking at holistic solutions to support the diverse needs of their workforce.
- **Employers need to be aware of – and plan for – the expectation for hybrid/remote working from younger employees.** Flexible working options will help them attract and retain talented staff.
- **Employers should also be mindful that working parents still value time at the office** and connecting with colleagues physically.
- Everyone has a reason to want to work flexibly, whatever their life stage or situation. **Employers should provide equity of benefit for their whole workforce**, so all employees feel supported whether they are working parents, carers or want to pursue other accreditations, passions or goals.
- Younger generations are looking at practical and strategic considerations regarding family and work-life balance. **Employers need to provide, make easily accessible and widely publicise their options to support this.**
- The sandwich generation is getting younger and employers would be wise to plan for this.
- An understanding attitude is not enough; to be an employer of choice both now and post-pandemic, **you need to provide meaningful practical help.**
- **80% of men who are doing more childcare want to continue**, so forward-looking employers who facilitate this will become more attractive to prospects.
- **There is an identifiable need for employers to make practical supports available** and to flag these widely throughout the organisation so they are understood and taken up.
- **Line managers need to have coaching and training so that they are confident, knowledgeable and have the tools to support their teams' work life management**, including provisions for maternity/paternity, adoption leave and dependant care.

# Appendix

## Who Took Part?

- The Index seeks gender balance in its responses; this year the split was 55% mothers / 45% fathers. Two people (less than 1%) selected 'Other' gender.
- 84% were in opposite sex couple households, 4% were in same-sex couple households and 12% single parents.
- In terms of age, the biggest group was between 35-44 years. The overall profile of these working parents looked like this: 16-25: 5%; 26-34: 25%; 35-44: 37%; 45-54: 25%; 55+ 7%
- Regarding family size, 43% had 2 children; 38% had one child and 20% had 3 or more children under 18 at home.
- In this sample, 30% of these working parents also reported caring responsibilities for an adult over 18. 59% of participants reported that they spend more than a day a week overall on their adult caring responsibilities.
- Working patterns were mainly full-time with 75% working 30+ hours per week, 22% working 8-29 hours per week and 3% working part-time fewer than 8 hours per week. This pattern was fairly consistent across age groups although the 16-25 years group had least full-time working at 64% with 32% working 2-29 hours. In all other age groups at least 73% worked full-time.
- These working parents work across a wide range of sectors with no one sector having more than 10% representation. Those above 5% included: Construction 6%; Education 7%; Financial Services / Banking 7%; Healthcare 6%; IT/Computing 8%; Legal Services 6%; Manufacturing 6%; Wholesale, retail & franchising 8%; with several sectors at 5% including Pharmaceutical, Professional Services, Marketing, Media, Hospitality & Leisure.
- Employer size ranged evenly from large to small. The three largest groups were: 17% with an employer size of 2,500+; 12% employer size 100-250; 10% employer size 50-99.
- Regionally, the sample was drawn from across 12 UK regions and nations and represents a broad picture although 87% are based in England. The biggest representations were Yorkshire & Humberside (14%), East of England (13%), London (13%), South-West (10%) and East Midlands (10%).
- As for seniority of role, there was an even split with over a third (34%) were senior managers, board directors or similar, 16% middle managers, 16% junior managers / supervisors, 33% with no managerial responsibility
- In income terms, nearly one third reported an annual household income of between £20,000 and £40,000, with the whole sample distributed like this: <£20K: 11%; £20K+ to £40K: 32%; £40K+ to £60K: 24%; £60K+ to £80K: 16%; £80K+ to £100K: 8%; £100K+ to £120K: 2%; >£120K: 3% (5% 'Prefer not to say')
- In order to reach a broad representative sample, a research agency sourced the panel of working parents, so this population is fully independent of Bright Horizons and its clients.



## About Bright Horizons

Bright Horizons partners with more than 1,200 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](https://solutions.brighthorizons.co.uk)** or call us on **0345 241 5309**

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