For Working Parents, the Boundary Between Work and Family is Often Blurred

Pew Research Center | Rachel Minkin, Luona Lin, Dana Braga and Kiley Hurst | June 16, 2026

Moms and lower-income parents face distinct challenges



(kali9/Getty Images)

This Pew Research Center report looks at the experiences of working parents in the United States, including how they navigate the demands of work and family life, how they divide responsibilities at home, and how workplace benefits and arrangements shape their experiences.

Why did we do this?

Pew Research Center does research to help the public, the media and decision-makers understand important topics.

This research is part of Pew Research Center's ongoing effort to understand how Americans navigate work and family life and the changing demands placed on parents.

How did we do this?

The report is based primarily on a Pew Research Center survey of 2,242 U.S. working parents conducted March 2-15, 2026. Everyone who took part is a member of the Center's American Trends Panel. The survey represents the views of U.S. working parents.

Here are the survey questions used for this report, the detailed responses and the survey methodology.

In addition to survey data, the report also includes analysis of parents in the labor force using data from the U.S. Census Bureau's Current Population Survey.

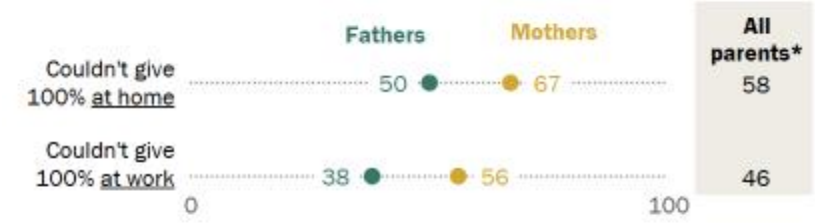
For many U.S. parents who work full time, the line between work and family is not well defined:

- 70% say they take care of **parenting-related tasks while they're working.**
- 59% say they take care of **work-related tasks when they're with their children.**
- 54% say it's **difficult for them to balance** their work and family responsibilities.

Parents – especially moms – often carry the mental load that comes with trying to balance what their families need with what their work demands. And with so many obligations, it's not surprising that working parents **sometimes feel like they can't give 100% at home or at work.**

Full-time working moms are more likely than dads to feel they can't give 100% at home or at work

Among parents employed full time, % saying that in the last 12 months they felt they ____ because they were juggling work and family responsibilities



* Based on all parents who are employed full time.
Note: Parents were first asked if they have experienced each situation, then asked if they experienced it mainly because they were juggling work and family responsibilities or mainly because of some other reason. Refer to topline for full question wording.
Source: Survey of U.S. working parents conducted March 2-15, 2026.
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As one mom in the survey told us about the difficulty balancing work and family:

"I'm supposed to work like I don't have kids and supposed to parent like I don't have a job."

For this project, we surveyed 2,242 working parents from March 2 to 15, 2026, to understand how they navigate these spheres of their lives.

Key takeaways

- **About half of full-time working parents (52%) say their job makes it harder to be a good parent.** On the flip side, 45% say being a parent makes it harder to advance at work.

- **Compared with dads, working moms take on more at home and have a harder time finding balance:** 62% of full-time working moms say it's difficult for them to balance work and family responsibilities, compared with 47% of dads. In different-sex couples where both parents work full time, 52% say the mom takes on more parenting tasks, while smaller shares say the dad does more (10%) or that these tasks are shared equally (39%).

- **Access to workplace benefits that help working parents differs widely by income level.** Full-time working parents with lower family incomes are consistently the least likely to say they have access to benefits such as paid time off (PTO), paid leave separate from PTO and health insurance through work (among those who aren't self-employed). This group is also the most likely to worry about losing pay – or losing their job – if they miss work because their child is sick or childcare falls through.

- **Most full-time working parents say having flexibility to work from home when needed would be extremely or very helpful** (among those who aren't self-employed). But only 24% of these parents report that they have a lot of flexibility to telework. Those who regularly work from home see some advantages to this arrangement, like being able to attend their children's activities when they overlap with work hours. Still, they're no more likely than those who work from home less often to say balancing their job and family life is easy.

- **Across income levels, parents say cost is the biggest hurdle in finding childcare.** Lower- and middle-income parents are more likely than those with higher family incomes to rely on family, friends or neighbors for childcare. Most upper-income parents use paid care, such as daycare or preschool.

This analysis focuses primarily on the experiences of full-time working parents, who account for 73% of U.S. parents with children younger than 18 – including 89% of dads and 59% of moms as of 2025, according to Pew Research Center analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau.

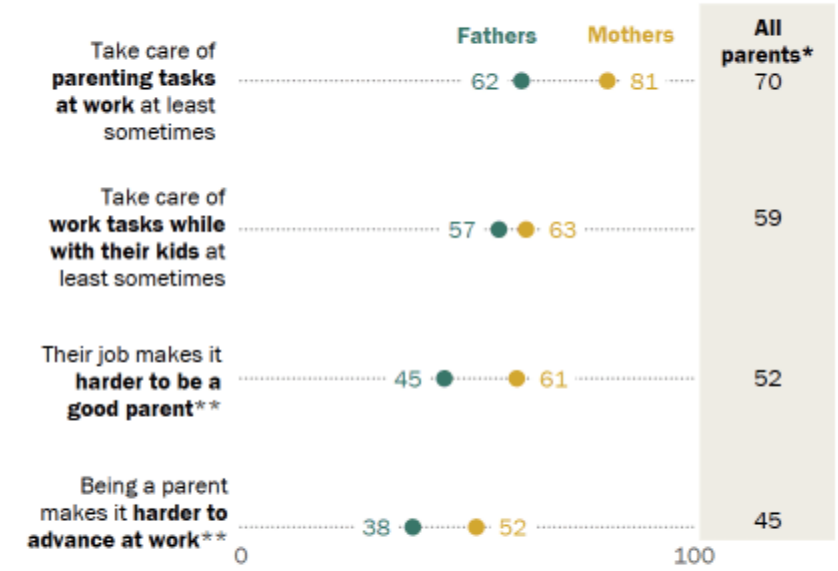
The blurred lines between work and home

Working parents don't always see a clear separation between their work and family life. As one father in the survey wrote:

"My work responsibilities feel never ending, thus making it difficult to set them down in the evening to focus on my family."

Juggling work and family life impacts moms and dads differently

Among parents employed full time, % saying (they) ...



* Based on all parents who are employed full time.
** "Somewhat/A lot harder" responses are combined.
Note: Refer to topline for full question wording.
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For majorities of full-time working parents, work tasks come home and parenting tasks end up at work. **This overlap is especially notable among moms.** About eight-in-ten full-time working moms (81%) say they take care of parenting tasks while at work at least sometimes. This includes 38% of moms who say they do this extremely or very often – about double the share of dads who say the same (17%).

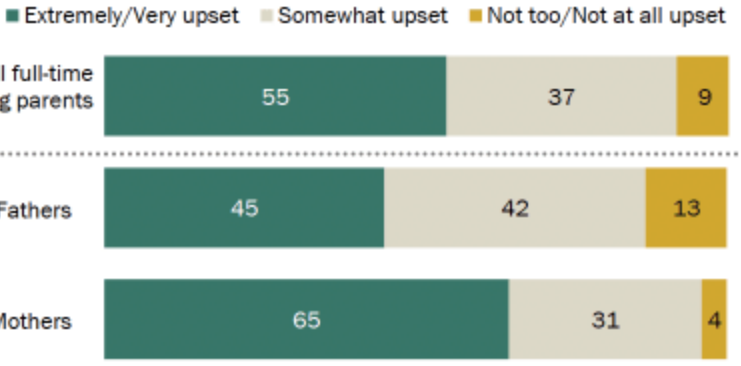
Still, many dads also feel this tension. Majorities of full-time working dads say they take care of parenting tasks while at work (62%) and work tasks while with their children (57%) at least sometimes.

When work gets in the way of parenting

A majority of full-time working parents (60%) think they spend too little time with their children – and far more say this is because of work obligations than other reasons.

Many moms and dads feel extremely or very upset when they miss their kids' activities because of work

Among parents employed full time who have at least sometimes missed activities their children were participating in because of work responsibilities in the past 12 months, % saying they normally feel ___ when this happens



Note: Shares of respondents who didn't offer an answer are not shown.
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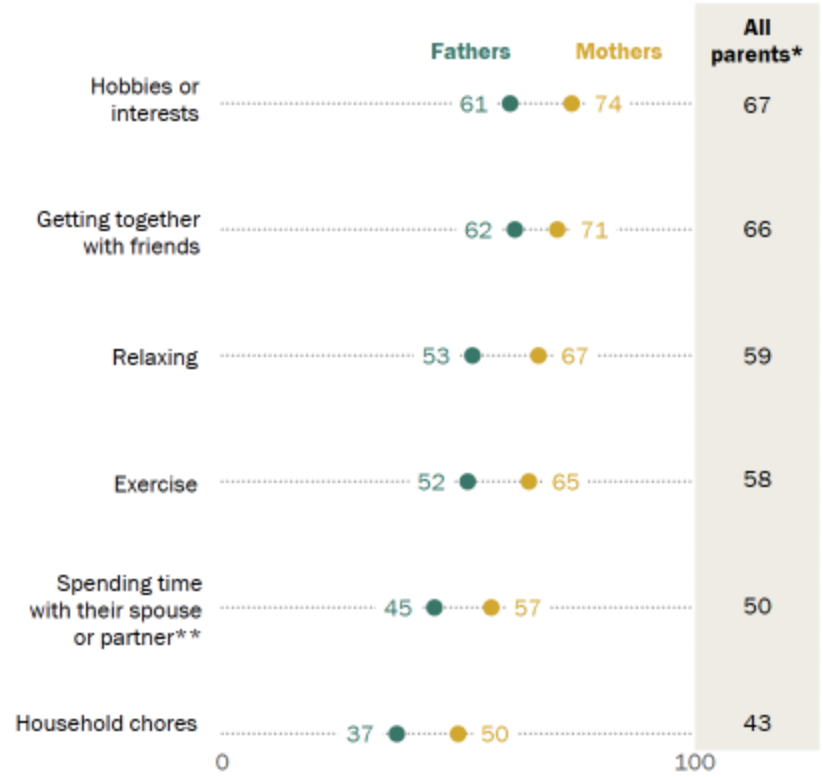
In addition, nearly half (47%) say their work responsibilities at least sometimes cause them to miss activities their children are involved in, such as school concerts or sporting events.

Moms are particularly likely to say they feel upset when they miss their kids' activities because of work: 65% feel extremely or very upset, compared with 45% of dads. Still, most dads say they feel at least somewhat upset when this happens.

Limited time for hobbies, relationships and self-care

Most full-time working parents are strapped for time, especially moms

*Among parents employed full time, % saying they **don't have enough time** for ...*



* Based on all parents who are employed full time.
** Among those who are married or living with a partner.
Note: Refer to topline for full question wording.
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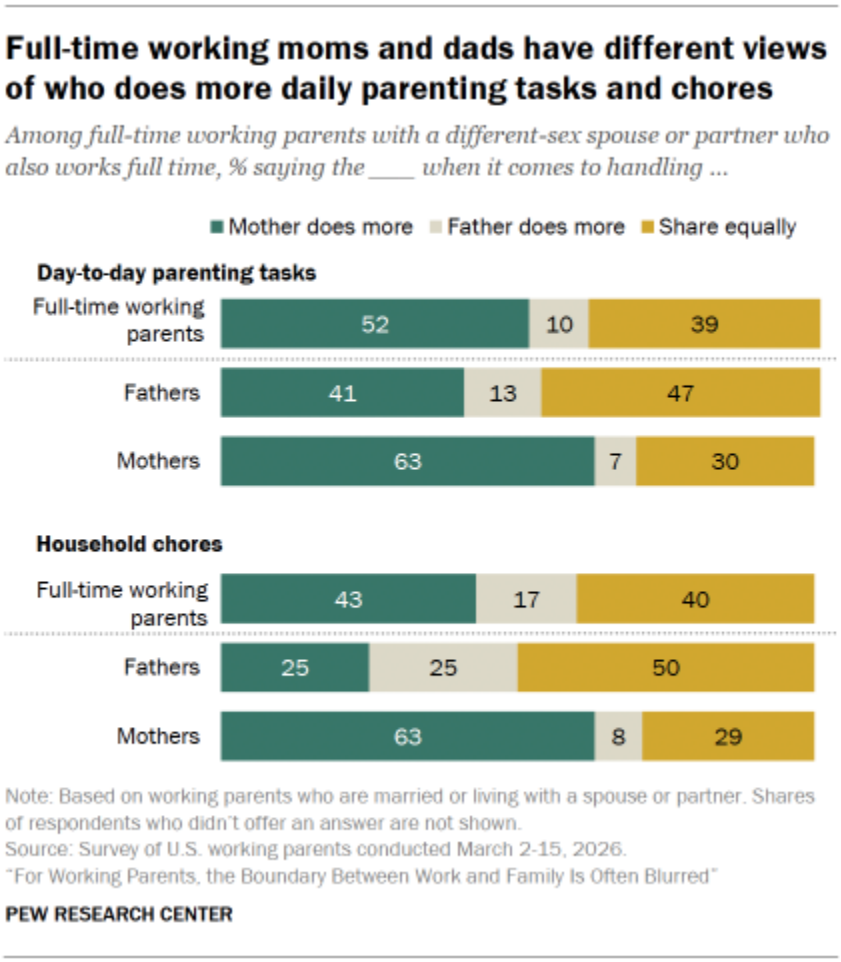
Among both moms and dads who work full time, about half or more say they don't have enough time for things like hobbies, seeing friends, exercise or relaxing.

Moms are far more likely than dads to say they don't have enough time for each of these. For example, 65% of moms say they don't have enough time for exercise, compared with 52% of dads. Similarly, moms are more likely than dads to say they don't have enough time for relaxing (67% vs. 53%).

How full-time working moms and dads share the load at home

We also find differences in how full-time working moms and dads navigate parenting tasks and household chores. (This analysis focuses on families with both a mother and a father who are

employed full time, because that's the most common work arrangement for different-sex couples with kids.)



Among married or cohabiting parents in this type of family, 52% say the mom does more parenting tasks than the dad, while 39% say both parents contribute equally. Similar shares say the mom does more of the household chores (43%) or that they're shared about equally (40%). Much smaller shares say the dad does more of the parenting or household chores.

Moms and dads tend to have very different views of how parenting tasks and household chores are divided. Most moms say *they themselves* handle more of these responsibilities than their spouse or partner. Dads are more likely than moms to say these tasks are *shared equally*.

When it comes to paid work, similar shares of parents in these families say that the dad spends more time working in a typical day (41%) or that the mom and dad spend about the same amount of time working (39%). About one-in-five (21%) say the mom spends more time working. But even in families where the mother spends *more time* working than the father, parents are much more likely to say the mom does more parenting and household tasks than to say the dad does more.

The experiences of parents employed part time

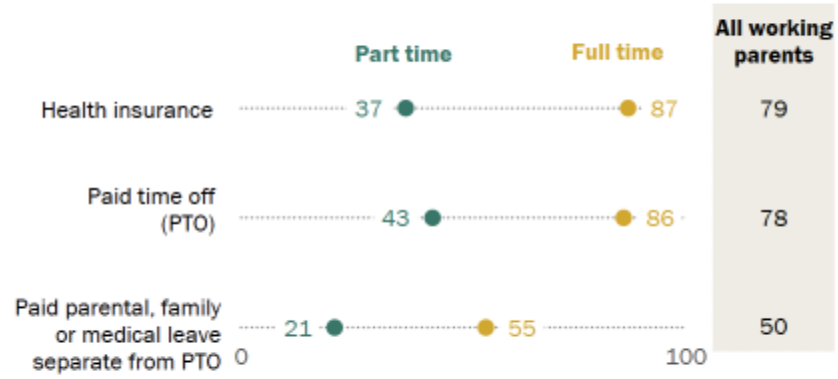
Parents who work part time stand out in certain ways. Most are women (79%). And a majority (58%) live in households with lower incomes, while 33% have middle incomes and 6% have upper incomes.

The nature of their work hours also differs, with parents working part time more likely than those working full time to say:

- Their schedule is unpredictable (23% vs. 11% of full-time working parents)
- They have a lot of flexibility to choose when they work their required hours (41% vs. 26%)

Fewer than half of part-time working parents say key benefits are available through their job

% of working parents saying ____ is available to them at their current job, among those who are employed ...



Note: Refer to topline for full question wording.
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Part-time working parents are less likely to have access to workplace benefits such as health insurance, paid time off and other paid leave through work. For example, 37% of part-time working parents have access to health insurance through work, compared with 87% of full-time working parents.

Despite their different work arrangements, **part-time working parents face many of the same challenges as those who work full time.** Similar shares of parents who work part time (51%) and full time (54%) say it's difficult for them to balance work and family responsibilities. And similar shares also say they've felt they couldn't give 100% at work in the past year because they were juggling work and family responsibilities (42% and 46%).