



2025  
State of Parenthood Study:

# How Families Are Navigating Life, Media, and Everything in Between

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# MOONBUG

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# Why We Commissioned This Study

At Moonbug, we work at the intersection of media, childhood, and parenthood. And while we've always known that families are evolving, what we kept hearing from parents, advertisers, and our own teams made us pause. Despite all the products, platforms, and programs built "for families," parents consistently told us the same thing: "This isn't made for me."

That disconnect between the realities of raising kids today and how brands and media engage with modern families is what sparked this project. We weren't just curious.

**We felt a responsibility.** As a company deeply rooted in children's content, we wanted to better understand the broader context families are navigating. We wanted to help our partners see the full picture.

This study was designed for anyone who wants to reach families in a way that resonates:

**CMOs** looking to drive affinity and loyalty with modern parents.

**Brand Strategists** crafting narratives that align with real-life challenges.

**Content Creators** developing co-viewable stories that invite both generations in.

**Advertisers** looking to foster meaningful connection and trust in moments that matter, whether it's mealtime, bedtime, or a moment of emotional overwhelm.

**Media Planners** seeking to understand the evolving family media landscape

We commissioned this research not just to describe what's happening, but to open up new possibilities.

**It's a roadmap for brands ready to lead with empathy, show up meaningfully in families' lives, and be part of the positive change modern parents are hoping for.**







## Executive Summary

# Parenting Has Changed Because Everything Around It Has Changed.

**The support systems that once helped families thrive, like affordable childcare, stable jobs, close-knit communities, have become harder to find.**

And while more families are living in multigenerational households, it's often driven by financial pressure, not because there's a built-in village offering help. Today, nearly a quarter of U.S. children are raised by single parents<sup>1</sup>, and many families are navigating rising costs, limited safety nets, and the pressure to “do it all” with shrinking time and resources. In a society where caregiving is increasingly privatized, parents are absorbing more emotional and logistical labor than ever before.

And with fewer external supports, they're simply spending more time with their kids. One study found that today's fathers spend nearly 3x as much time with their children as dads in the 1960s, and mothers are spending more time, too, even while working more outside the home<sup>2</sup>. The changes parents are experiencing today stem from deeper structural realities, not just shifting cultural expectations.

**And it's happening in a more fragmented world.** The old saying “it takes a village” feels increasingly out of reach for many parents. In fact, **over 60% of U.S. parents say they often feel isolated in their parenting journey**, with limited community support to rely on<sup>3</sup>. The result is a generation of caregivers doing the most important job of their lives, largely on their own.

### Modern parents are juggling more than ever.

They're managing their kids' emotional growth, trying to protect their own mental health, holding down jobs, and running households, often without much help.

And they're doing it all under the constant scrutiny of digital culture, where every decision can be picked apart in real time.



Despite the flood of parenting books, expert advice, and influencer content, many parents are left thinking, “None of this really speaks to me.”

They don’t see their families — the mess, the culture, the emotional weight, or the exhilarating fun — in the media or advertising that claims to understand them.

That gap doesn’t just feel frustrating; it feels isolating. And for brands, it’s a huge missed opportunity to reflect the full, real experience of modern family life.

**Our research shows that when brands stop trying to present the perfect family and start reflecting real life, parents notice.**



**Whether it’s the stress of a chaotic morning, the compromise of turning on a screen just to get a break, or the tiny, quiet wins that define the day, these honest moments matter.**

They create a sense of being seen. And that emotional connection leads to loyalty. Parents rewatch, recommend, and rally around brands that reflect their truth. That’s the power of authenticity. **When brands truly “get it,” parents don’t just relate, they respond.** They seek out more content, share it with their community, and stick with the brands that understand what parenting really looks like today.

This report brings to life the insights from Moonbug’s 2025 State of Parenthood Study, which includes a nationally representative survey of 1,000 U.S. parents with kids under the age of 10, along with in-depth interviews with 15 parents from across the country.

**It’s a guide for marketers, content creators, and strategists who want to genuinely connect with modern families and earn their trust.**



## All the Jobs, All at Once: What Parenting Really Looks Like in 2025

Ask any parent what the hardest part of raising kids is, and chances are you'll get a long pause or just a deep breath.

Because today's parenting isn't one job.  
**It's all the jobs.**



When we asked parents to name the biggest challenge they face as parents, the results were nearly split:

47%

said managing  
their child's  
emotions and  
behavior

46%

said balancing  
work and  
family

It's no surprise.

These challenges are deeply connected.  
**Today's parents are emotional anchors,  
calendar managers, career jugglers, and  
caretakers all rolled into one.**

They're expected to raise kind, well-adjusted kids and keep the wheels of daily life turning, all while fielding outside opinions from every corner.



## The Nuances

### The Age of Your Kid Changes Everything

**Parenting isn't one long, steady road. It shifts constantly as kids grow up.** The data shows just how different the experience can be depending on a child's age.

Parents of younger kids (ages 0–5) are in full-on survival mode. They're juggling diapers, daycare drop-offs, and developmental milestones all at once.

**It's also the phase where financial stress hits hardest.**

Among parents with kids aged 3–5:

45%

say they're struggling financially.

47%

say balancing work and parenting is a major challenge

**This stage is intense.** Every day feels like a balancing act between childcare, early learning, emotional meltdowns, and just getting through the day.

Then, as kids hit ages 6–9, the rhythm starts to shift. These kids are a bit more independent, school days bring more structure, and parents begin to step back...just a little. Only 25% of parents with kids in this age group say they're still focused on "making decisions that center my child's development," a big drop from earlier stages.

**But "easier" isn't the right word.** The challenges don't go away; they just change. Now it's less about nap schedules and more about screen time battles, social dynamics, and after-school chaos. The hands-on care might ease up, but the emotional and logistical load is still very real, just in different ways.





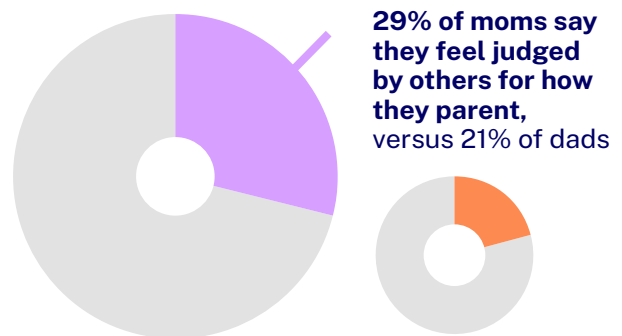
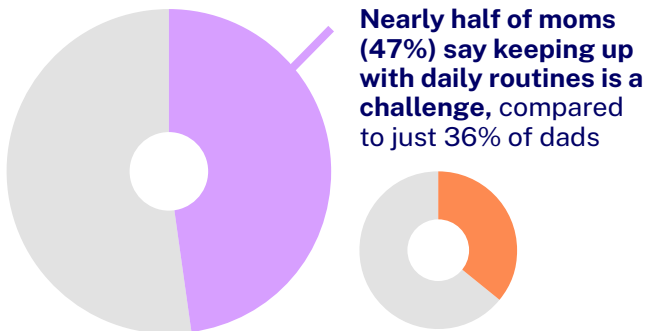
## The Hidden Load Is Still on Moms, And It Shows

Here's where things get especially revealing. Even as parenting roles shift on the surface, **the behind-the-scenes work, the planning, managing, worrying still falls mostly on moms.**

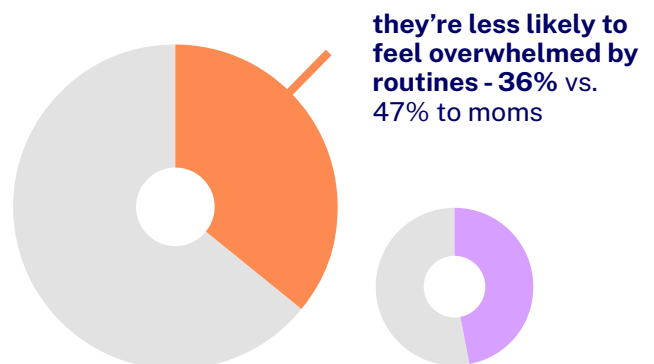
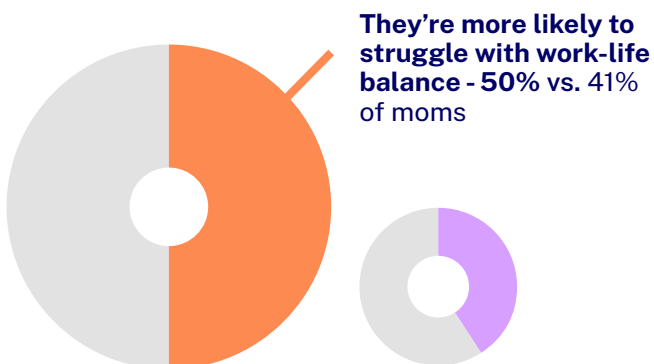
**It's a clear reminder that equality in parenting isn't just about who's doing bedtime or making lunch, it's about the invisible weight of thinking ahead, keeping track, and being emotionally available for everyone.** And right now, that weight still isn't evenly shared. Of course, family structures vary widely.

In same-sex couples and other non-traditional households, these dynamics may look different, but the question of who carries the mental and emotional load remains central. What's clear across the board is that the emotional complexity of parenting often goes unseen and unacknowledged.

Let's break it down:



Meanwhile, dads are feeling pressure too, but in different ways.

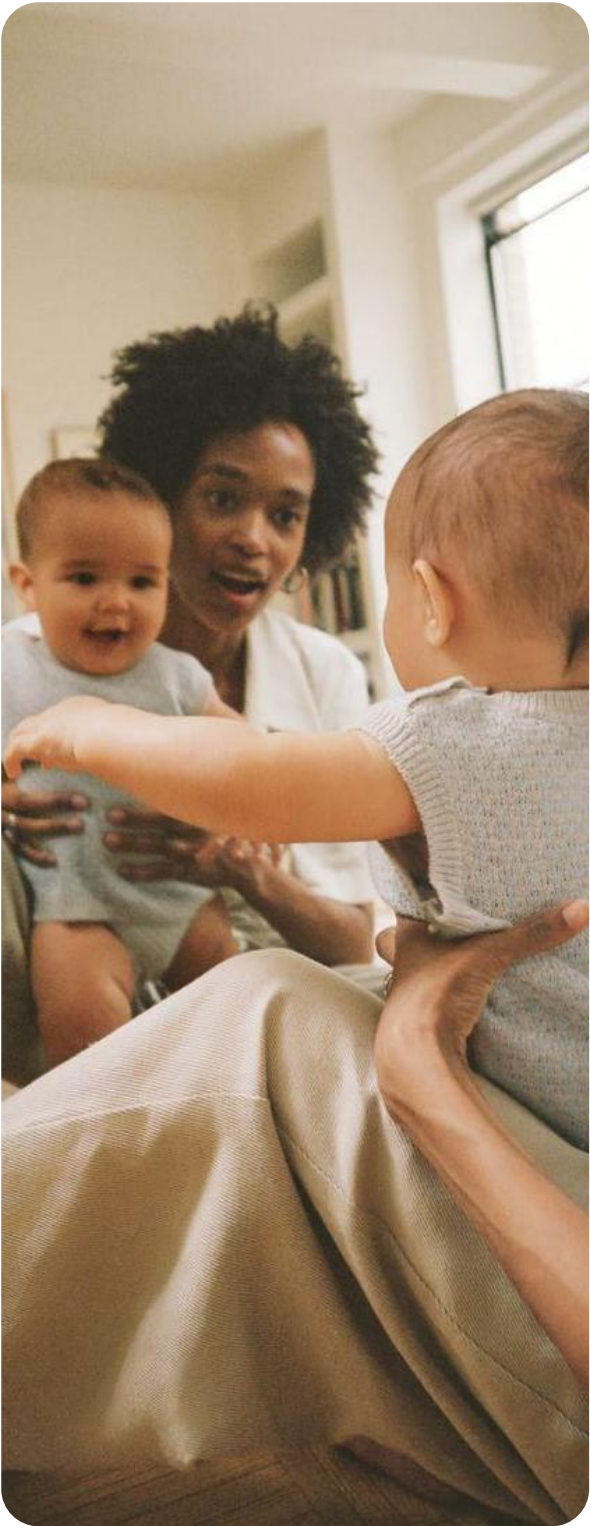
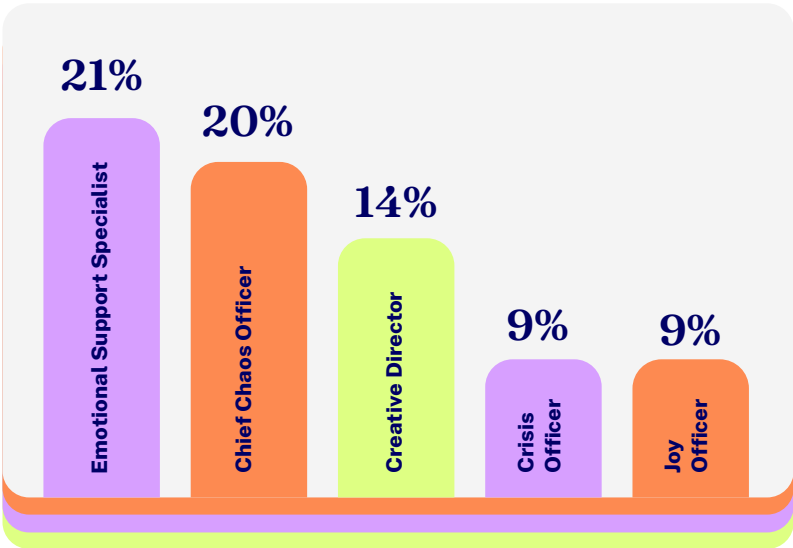




# Parenting Today Has No Job Description

When we asked parents to describe their everyday role, the answers had nothing to do with titles like “Mom” or “Dad.” Forget the traditional labels. **Modern parents see themselves as emotional lifeguards, chaos coordinators, and last-minute problem solvers.**

Here’s how they described thier real-life roles:



**And 13% said none of these titles fit, which says a lot.** Parenting today isn’t one job. It’s dozens of jobs, layered on top of each other, constantly shifting based on what the day throws at you.

These parents are rejecting the idea that it’s one-size-fits-all. One minute they’re calming a meltdown, the next they’re juggling snacks, screen time, and self-care. They’re building emotionally healthy kids, keeping the household running, and trying not to lose themselves in the process, sometimes all before 10 a.m.

## Same Team, Different Roles: How Moms and Dads Experience Parenting Differently

Moms and dads are both running on empty, but the way they see their roles often tells two very different stories.

**Mothers are more likely to view themselves as the emotional core of the family.** Nearly one in four (24%) chose “Emotional Support Specialist” to describe their day-to-day role, compared to just 17% of dads.

Interestingly, moms were also less likely to call themselves the “Creative Director” of the household, only 9% picked that title, while 19% of fathers did. This suggests that moms tend to focus more on emotional caretaking, while dads often frame their role around fixing, solving, and innovating.



Dads were more likely to see parenting as a series of creative puzzles: figuring out how to entertain a fussy toddler, get dinner eaten without a fight, or squeeze in homework between soccer and screen time.

**This doesn't mean one group is doing more or less.**

It just means the work feels different. For many moms, parenting is emotionally all-consuming. For many dads, it's a challenge to solve. And that difference shapes not just how they parent, but how they see themselves.



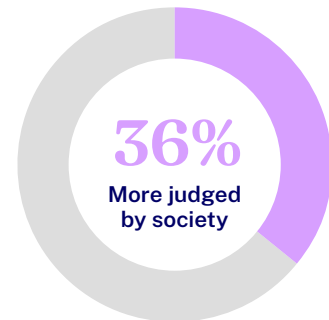
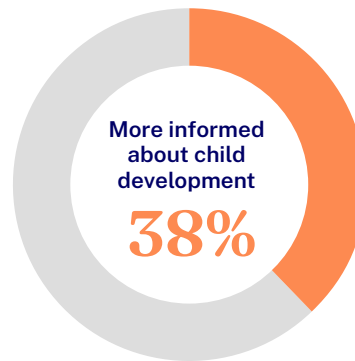
## The Generational Shift – *What Makes Parenting Different Today*

### Parenting Today Means Knowing More and Stressing More

Ask parents what makes their experience different from how they were raised, and one answer comes up again and again: technology.

**Over half (56%) say the nonstop presence of screens and digital access is the biggest shift. Devices are only part of the picture.** The real challenge lies in the constant comparisons, nonstop advice, and pressure to keep up that come with them.

Tech isn't the only thing different about parenting today. **Many also report feeling:**



And for many, especially moms, that spotlight feels more critical than supportive.

**42%** of mothers say they feel  
judged by others

compared to  
**30%** of fathers

**35%** of moms say they have  
less personal time

compared to  
**26%** of fathers



While society loves to cheer on “involved dads,” moms often get less grace and more scrutiny. **Being visible doesn't always mean being valued.** It can feel more like you're being graded on every move.



## Endless Advice, Zero Peace of Mind

**Parents today have access to more parental tools than ever: apps, blogs, webinars, forums, even AI. But that doesn't mean they feel more supported.** Only 28% say parenting is easier now because of these resources. And just 5% say it feels about the same as when they were growing up.

### So what's going on?

More advice doesn't always mean more clarity. In fact, it often does the opposite. When you're flooded with options, it's easy to fall into a spiral of second-guessing:

What if I pick the wrong sleep method?

What if screen time is ruining their brain?

What if I'm not doing what all the other parents are doing?

**In theory, parents today should feel more equipped than ever.**

They have the research.  
The resources.  
The parenting podcasts.

**But instead of making life easier, all that information often just raises the stakes.**

With so much input, every decision starts to feel high-stakes,




## Parents Trust What Feels Close to Home

When parents are looking for advice, they don't usually turn to experts or official sources first. They start with the people they know.

**More than half (56%) say friends and family are their go-to for parenting questions.**

Other common sources include:

Google (36%)

Social Media  (29%)

YouTube (28%)

**What parents are looking for is advice that's relatable, timely, and easy to access, something that speaks to what they're going through in the moment.**

A quick search or a text to a friend often feels more useful than digging through formal research or waiting for a scheduled appointment.

Parents approach advice with intention. They take what's helpful, apply it to their own lives, and use a mix of personal connections and digital tools to make confident choices on their own terms.



## Moms and Dads Look for Help in Different Ways

Moms and dads often navigate parenting advice in their own ways, gravitating toward different formats, seeking out different sources, and looking for support that fits their unique needs.

**Dads tend to be more visual and solution-focused. Over a third (37%) turn to YouTube for help, compared to just 19% of moms.**

They're often drawn to quick, how-to answers; things like installing a car seat or packing the perfect preschool lunch.



**Moms are more likely to seek connection and context.**

62% go to friends and family for guidance, compared to 50% of dads. Their questions go beyond logistics. They want to hear what worked for others, how it felt, and what to expect emotionally.

**These patterns highlight an important truth: the way we share information matters.**

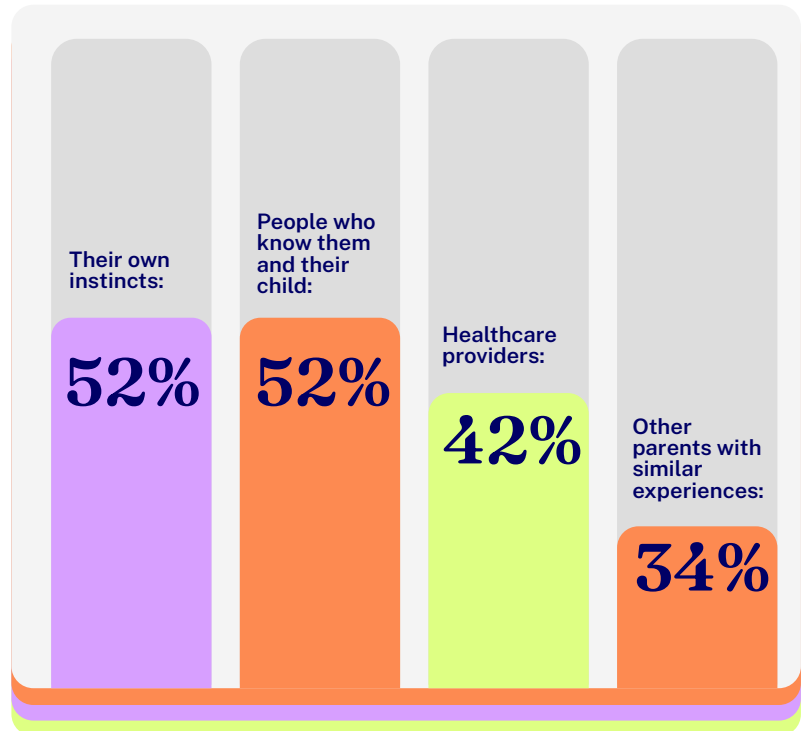
Moms often respond to empathy and shared experience. Dads tend to value clarity and actionable steps. Tailoring how we communicate to each audience makes all the difference.





## Who Parents Actually Trust

When we asked parents whose advice they genuinely trust, the answers were clear:



Trust, for most parents, comes down to relevance and personal connection. They want guidance that fits their specific situation and feels emotionally in tune with their everyday reality.

### The Nuances

#### There are also some gender differences.

Mothers are more likely to trust their intuition, with 54% saying they rely on it, compared to 49% of fathers. They are also less likely to put stock in broad parenting groups; only 21% say they trust them, versus 34% of dads.

This may reflect a growing frustration with advice that feels too generic or contradictory.

Many mothers are reaching a point of advice fatigue. They are sifting through noise, relying more on their own judgment, and choosing what works based on lived experience and the needs of their own families.



## It's Not Just Entertainment Anymore

When parents talk about screen time today, they're not just referring to cartoons in the background. **Screens have become a practical tool, something families use to educate, manage daily life, support emotions, and even connect with each other.**



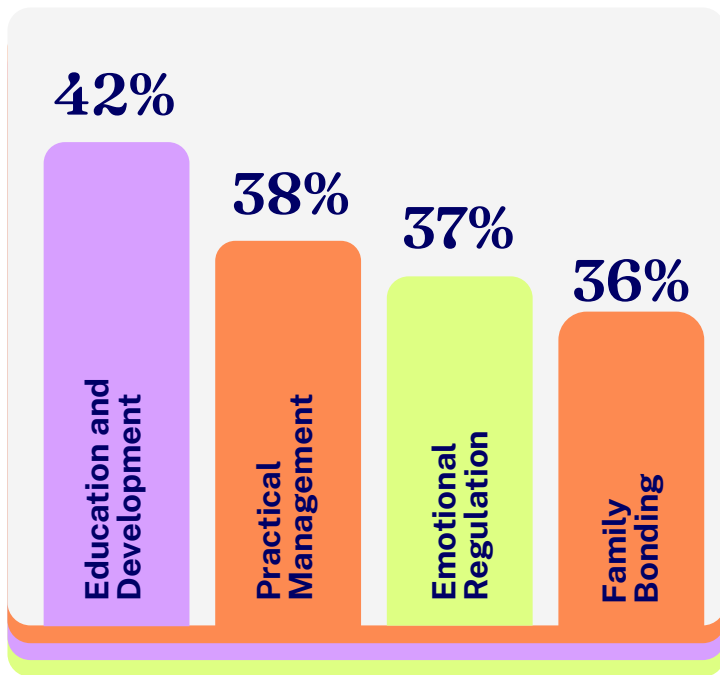
**Here's how parents say they're using screen time right now:**

**Education and Development :** Parents are using videos and digital games to support learning. From teaching letters and numbers to building social-emotional skills, screens are helping reinforce what kids are already picking up at home or in school.

**Practical Management :** On busy days, screens give parents the space to get things done. Whether it's jumping on a work call, preparing a meal, or catching up on chores, screen time helps create pockets of calm in a packed schedule.

**Emotional Regulation :** Many parents turn to screens when emotions run high. It might help a child cool down after a meltdown, or give a parent a few minutes to collect themselves.

**Family Bonding :** Watching together gives families something to talk about. Shows and characters become shared reference points that bring parents and kids closer, even during hectic routines.



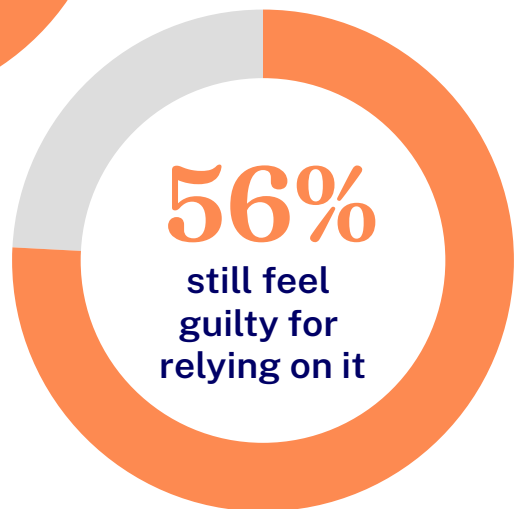
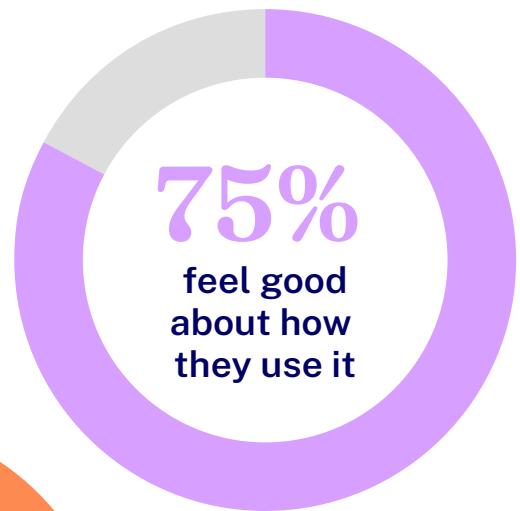
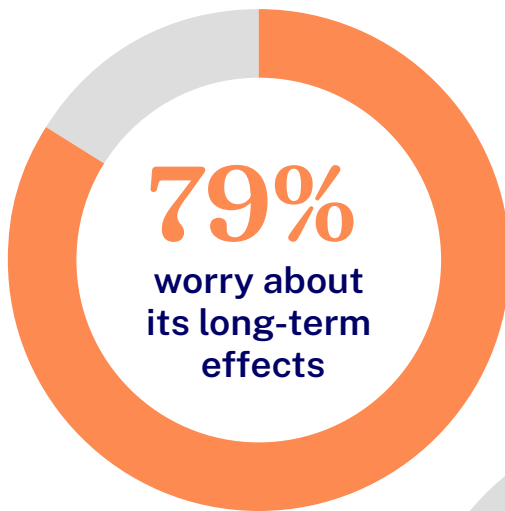
**Parents are using screen time thoughtfully and out of care for their children's needs.**

This isn't about cutting corners; it's about finding practical tools that actually fit into the rhythm of daily life.



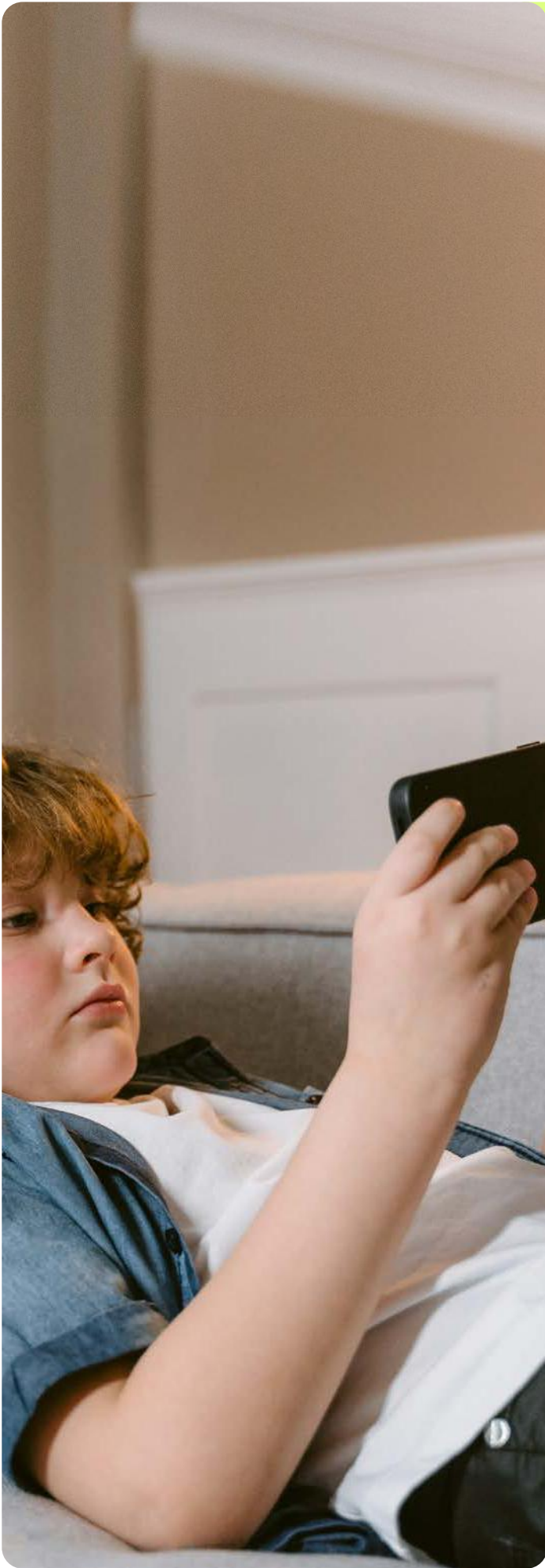
# The Emotional Whiplash of Screen Time

One of the clearest takeaways is that many parents feel torn. They appreciate the benefits of screen time, but they're also uneasy about its potential downsides.



**Parents describe a constant push and pull, relief that screen time helps, and guilt for needing that help.**

They are making thoughtful trade-offs every day, weighing short-term needs against long-term hopes. This doesn't come from a lack of care or awareness. It simply reflects the reality of what parenting looks like today.

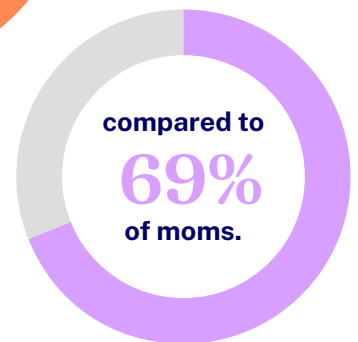
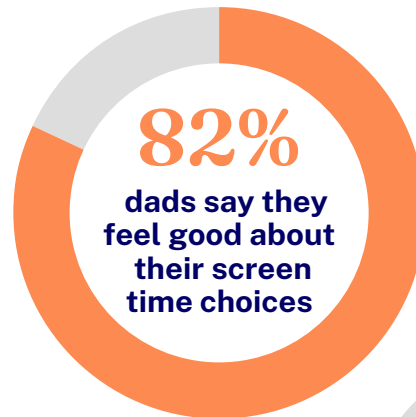


## The Nuances

### Dads Feel Strategic, Moms Feel Stretched

Most parents rely on screen time in some way, but how they feel about using it often depends on their role.

**Dads report more confidence in how they use screens.**



They are also more likely to use it as a behavior management tool, with 70% saying they turn to screens during meltdowns, compared to 51% of moms.

**Moms, on the other hand, report feeling more conflicted.**

**Moms may lean on screen time to get through the day, but that doesn't ease their concerns. 75% worry about its long-term effects, even though only 57% are actively setting limits.**

This difference in emotion does not suggest that one group is doing it right and the other is not. It highlights the unequal expectations placed on mothers to always be present, emotionally engaged, and fully in control, even while managing work, household responsibilities, and their own well-being.



# Parents Want Permission, Not Shame

Parents are tired of hearing that screens are always harmful.

What they're looking for is content that:

- i Acknowledges their need for breaks without judgment.
- ii Frames screen time as a meaningful tool for learning, connection, or emotional relief.
- iii Offers clear educational value they can feel good about.
- iv Creates moments of connection instead of replacing them.

# Parents Want Content That Actually Helps

Entertainment is part of the equation, but it is not enough. **Parents want content that actively supports their children's growth and emotional needs.** That includes content that:

- i Reinforces learning goals they already care about.
- ii Helps kids through tough moments like transitions or meltdowns.
- iii Sparks conversations after the screen is off.
- iv Models positive behaviors, emotional skills, and everyday problem-solving.

# Parents Want to Share the Experience

**When content is made for both kids and adults, screen time becomes something families can enjoy together.** Parents are looking for content that:

- i Feels like a shared experience, not something they simply endure.
- ii Gives them and their kids something to talk about, laugh about, or quote later.
- iii Builds inside jokes, references, and traditions that the family can return to.
- iv Inspires real-world activities like cooking, pretend play, or creative projects.



**“I feel like it always shows perfect parenting when most of us are far from it.**

**It makes us feel like we aren't doing enough or a good job”**

(Female, 29; kids: Boy age 1, Boy age 3)

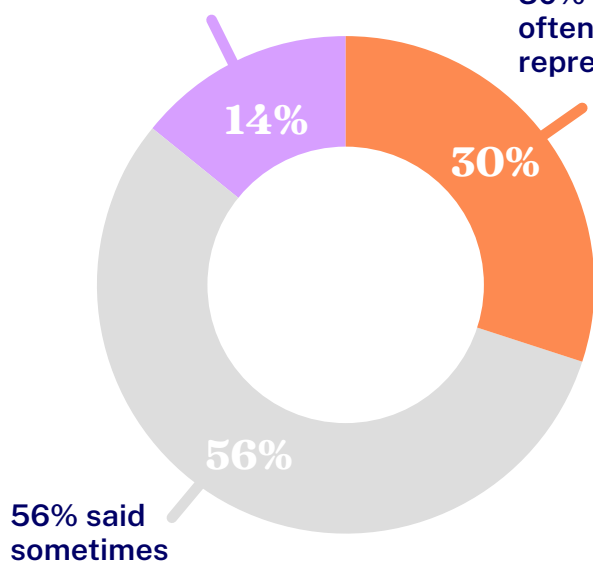
# What's on Screen and What Happens at Home

With so many shows, characters, and platforms available, you might expect families to feel well represented in kids' content.

But when we asked parents how often they see families like theirs, the responses told a different story:

14% said they rarely or  
never see themselves  
reflected at all

30% said they  
often feel  
represented



**Families aren't missing from the screen, but their reality often is.** Parents see spotless homes, endlessly patient caregivers, and children who recover from tantrums in seconds.

What they don't see are the chaotic mornings, the emotional ups and downs, and the unpredictable moments that make up real-life parenting.

**That gap between polished portrayals and lived experience is where many parents feel left out.** Representation doesn't just mean including a mom or dad on screen.

**It means making those characters feel real.**





## Moms and Dads Notice Different Things

The feeling of not being represented in kids' content shows up differently for moms and dads. **Only 23% of moms say they often see themselves in children's content, compared to 37% of dads.**

Mothers tend to look for emotional nuance and moments that reflect the hidden layers of parenting. Fathers are generally more content with what they see on screen.



**“Family looks different everywhere. Some families are multigenerational, blended, adoptive, queer, unconventional.**

**It would be incredible to see more representation that reflects the wide spectrum of family structures and cultures, rather than defaulting to just one narrow, idealized version.”**

(Female, 24; kids: Girl age 3)

Many shows still focus on task-based parenting, such as getting the kids dressed, solving problems, and completing routines. That version often leaves out the emotional side of parenting, which is where many mothers spend most of their energy.

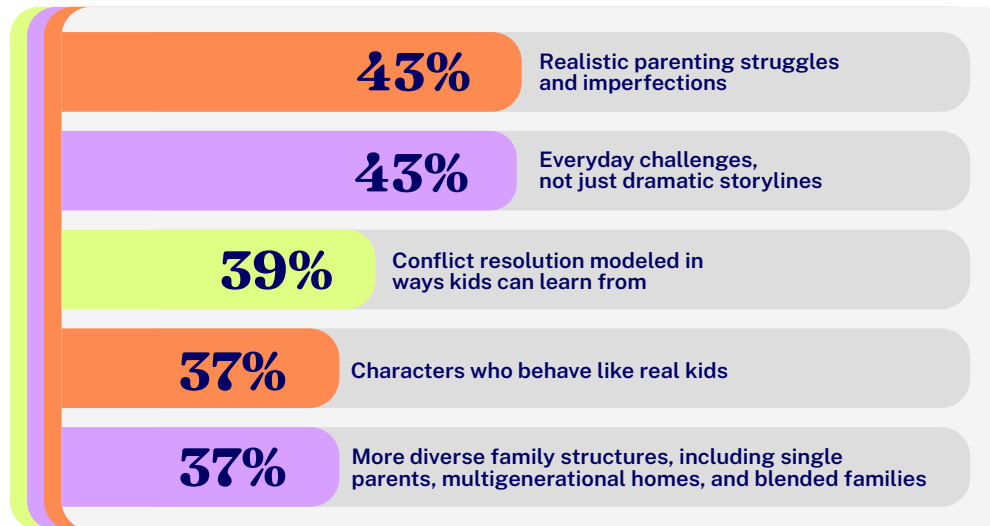
**For moms, parenting includes the behind-the-scenes work:** comforting a child after a nightmare, managing emotional meltdowns, sensing when something feels off.

When that kind of care is absent from content, it can feel like a major part of their daily experience has been overlooked.

# What Parents Actually Want to See

When we asked parents how children's content could better reflect real family life, the message was clear. **They are asking for more diversity and more honesty.**

Here's what parents would love to see more of in kids content:



**Only 12% of parents said that current content already reflects their reality.**

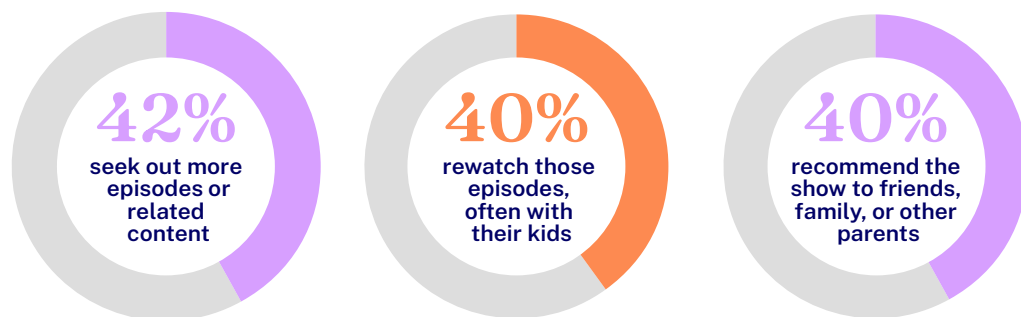
That leaves a wide-open opportunity for creators who are ready to show what parenting actually looks like: unfiltered, relatable, and real.



## When Families Feel Seen, They Show Up Differently

**When families see their real lives reflected in content**, how they parent, what their home feels like, or what their kids experience, **they connect with it on a deeper level.**

**The difference is clear. When parents feel a show or character gets it right:**



**Only 11% said that good representation had no impact on how they interacted with the content.**

For nearly everyone else, it made the experience more personal and more meaningful. When content reflects real family life, it takes on a bigger role. Parents revisit it, talk about it with their kids, share it with others, and weave it into everyday moments. It becomes a way for families to connect.



## Moms and Dads Engage in Different Ways

Both moms and dads respond positively when they feel represented, but their engagement looks a little different.

**Moms are more likely to return to content that resonates.** 44% of moms say they revisit shows that feel meaningful, showing the lasting impact of emotionally resonant content.



**Dads are more likely to explore beyond the show itself.** 46% say they seek out extras — spin-offs, behind-the-scenes clips, toys, or books. They are also more likely to make purchases based on the content (33%), showing their engagement through follow-up actions and brand interest.



**“[Advertisers should] focus on the idea that moms and dads handle things differently, and that's ok”**

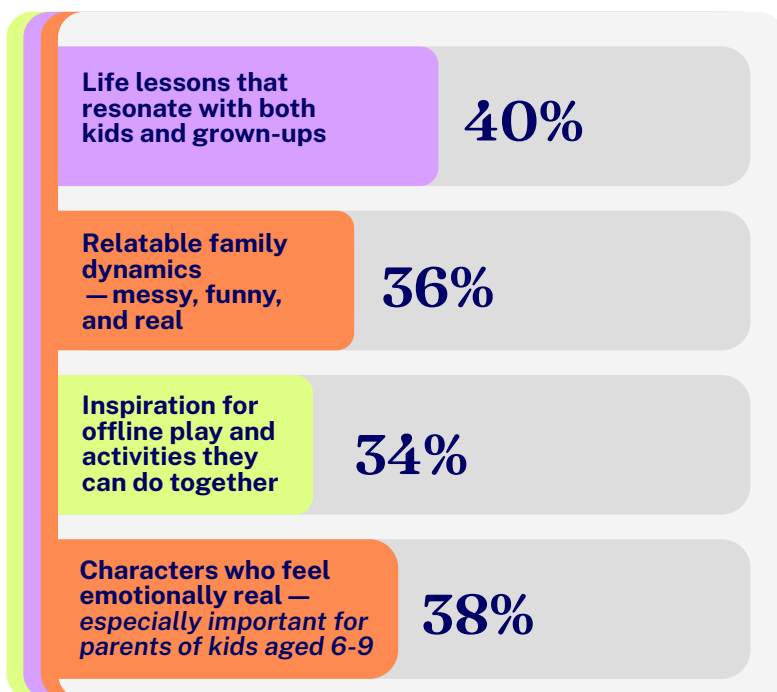
(Male, 29; kids: Boy age 1, Boy age 3, Girl age 7)

## The Co-Viewing Sweet Spot

When parents talk about what they want from kids' content, one theme comes up again and again: they want to actually enjoy it, too.

**84% of parents say they prefer shows they can truly watch with their kids, not just have on in the background.** But finding content that keeps both kids and adults engaged? That's still tricky.

So what makes a show genuinely co-viewable? According to parents, it comes down to a few key ingredients:



When content strikes this balance, it turns into a moment families can share—a reason to talk, laugh, and connect.

Parents aren't only looking for screen time. They're looking for shared time.

They want stories that help them understand how their kids think, spark meaningful conversations, and build a bridge between everyday life and a child's imagination.



**“[Watching certain things with them] it helps me get into their own psyche cause they're little. We don't know what's going on in their brains.”**

(Female, 34; kids, Girls ages 3 and 5)



# So Much to Watch, Still So Much Missing

Despite the abundance of shows, characters, and platforms available today, many parents still feel like something is lacking. **Parents are looking for content that resonates and feels meaningful.**

When we asked what feels missing, parents pointed to several key gaps:



Parents want stories that help raise thoughtful, emotionally aware kids while also reflecting the real ups and downs of family life.



**“I would really suggest you show more love to the parents.”**

**These shows are for kids, yes, but a lot of the time, we are watching with our kids. it is important to show that stumbling as a parent is okay, and parents within shows should be portrayed realistically.”**

(Female, 35; kids: Boy age 1, Boy age 6, Girl age 12)

# How Parents Decide What to Watch

Parents aren't making random choices when it comes to screen time. They're selecting content based on a mental checklist that balances fun, values, and trust.

## Here's what matters most:

### Top Priorities (85% and above):

- Shows that teach while entertaining
- Shows with positive role models
- Familiar characters or creators they already trust
- Stories that reflect their values

### High Importance (80–84%):

- Content that both parent and child genuinely enjoy
- Content that sparks meaningful conversations
- Shows that won't require constant monitoring

### Moderate Consideration (75–79%):

- Diversity and inclusion, especially for families looking for cultural representation
- Recommendations from friends or other parents
- Nostalgic shows that connect parents and kids across generations

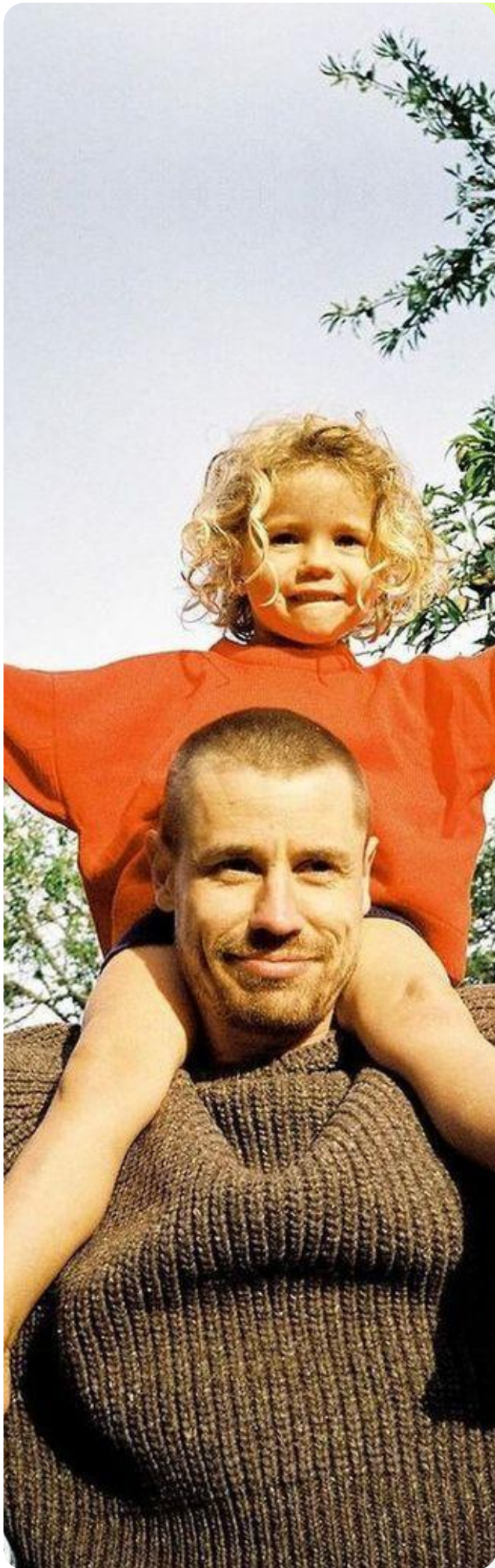
Parents are making thoughtful decisions and choosing content that fits their family's needs, values, and everyday routines.

**“I watched Moana in its entirety with my daughter... and I enjoyed it just as much as she did.”**

(Female, 29; kids: Girls ages 3 and 9 months old)







## The Nuances

# The Difference Between Moms and Dads

Moms and dads both care about quality, but they tend to prioritize different things.

These differences matter when developing or recommending content for families.

### Dads often look for:

Shows that tap into their own childhood memories.  
65% of moms vs.

83%

High-quality animation .  
21% of moms vs.

33%

Humor that they enjoy, not just jokes aimed at kids.

24%

### Moms tend to focus on:

Life lessons and stories with strong values.

44%

Calmer music and pacing that feels less overwhelming.

25%

**These preferences reflect different ways parents approach family life.**

Each is looking for content that fits into the kind of home they want to create and the type of connection they want to build with their children.

**“Everyone is different and all parents have their different approach so don’t tarnish them all with the same brush”**

(Male, 40; kids: Girl age 5)

# What Families Need at the End of a Long Day

After a long day of tantrums, work stress, and nonstop logistics, parents turn to TV not simply for distraction, but for something more meaningful: **relief, connection, and a way to reset the emotional tone of the home.**

Here's what they say they need most:

Shared laughter that helps everyone feel closer

46%

Content that's age-appropriate and relevant

44%

Shows that create calm, rather than add to the chaos

44%

Stories that are uplifting/inspiring

37%

And are fun, but grounded in reality

32%

These preferences highlight the important role content can play in family life, helping everyone regulate emotions, reconnect, and recharge together.







## Make It Matter After the Episode Ends

**The most meaningful content doesn't stop when the credits roll.**

It carries into everyday life, giving families something to talk about, act on, and return to.

**Parents say they value content that offers:**

**Simple, doable activity ideas** they can try at home — nothing complicated or overly curated

**Conversation starters** that keep the learning or laughter going after the show

**Practical tools or resources** that help them build on what the content introduced

**Community spaces** where they can connect with other families and share what's working

This kind of content becomes woven into daily life, shaping routines and creating moments where families bond, learn, and grow together.



## What Brands Keep Missing

Parents are feeling stretched thin and unseen.

**41% say they have never come across a brand that genuinely reflects their parenting experience, with moms being more likely than dads (49% vs. 32%).**

Time and again, they tell us that the hardest, most personal parts of parenting are the ones brands continue to overlook.

**When asked what's most often missing from advertising, parents pointed to:**

The emotional weight and toll on their mental health

40%

The mental load — the constant list of tasks running in the background

36%

The financial pressure that comes with raising kids

34%

The complexity of balancing multiple roles and responsibilities

33%

The small wins and joyful parts of parenting

30%

The wide range of family structures and realities

29%

Their identity beyond being a parent

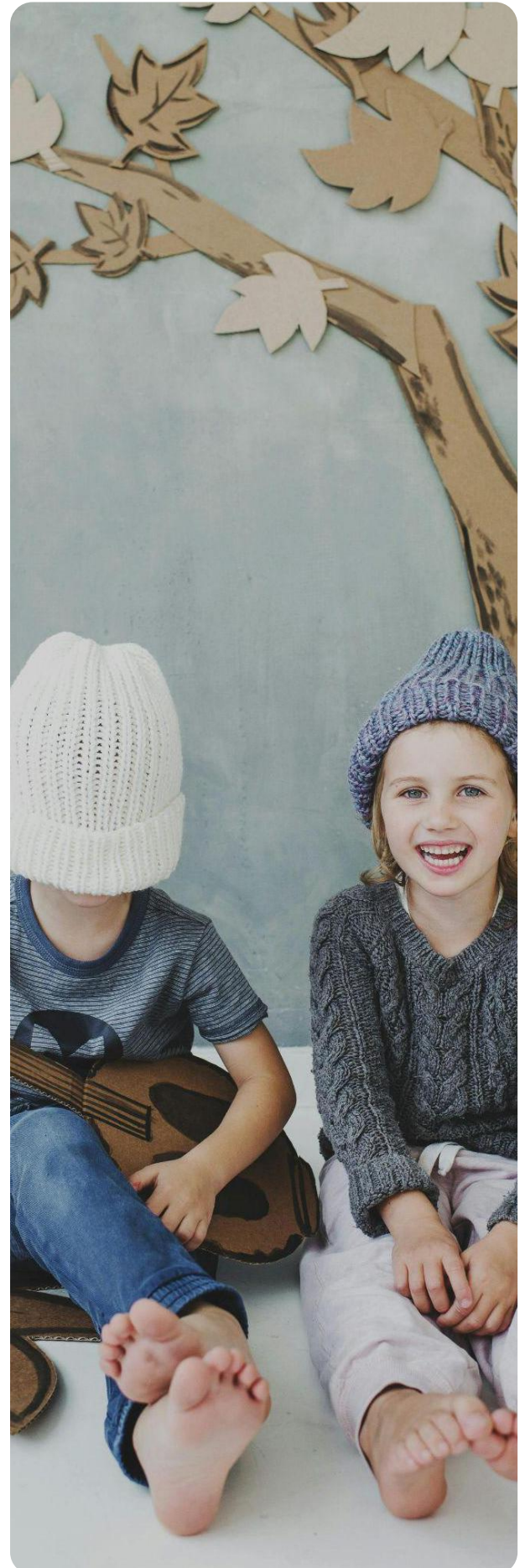
26%

The everyday humor in parenting situations

25%

These gaps reflect the core realities of raising a family today.

When brands leave out these truths, it sends a message that they aren't really listening, and that disconnect adds to the exhaustion parents already feel.



## The Nuances

Every parent has moments where they feel invisible, but the blind spots aren't the same for everyone. Moms and dads notice different gaps in how brands reflect family life.

### Moms are more likely to feel the emotional weight is being ignored:

- 41% say the mental load is rarely acknowledged (compared to 32% of dads)
- Many say the emotional strain of parenting is often left out entirely
- They're also more likely to feel like their identity outside of caregiving doesn't exist in brand narratives



### Dads often feel like the joyful side of parenting is missing:

- 32% want to see more celebration of small wins, like getting through bedtime or trying a new veggie
- 28% wish ads included more humor that reflects the chaos and comedy of everyday parenting

These differences show that emotional validation and positive reinforcement matter, but in different ways.

**Moms want brands to recognize the burden. Dads want them to capture the joy.**

**There's room to speak to both.**



# What Real Connection Looks Like

When brands truly connect with families, it goes beyond surface-level gestures. The messaging feels emotionally honest and grounded in real life

Here's what parents say makes them feel seen:

## Emotional Truths:

- Showing real, imperfect moments of parenting. Not just smiling families in spotless homes (47%)
- Making parents feel emotionally understood (43%)
- Aligning with values that matter to families, such as kindness, resilience, and honesty (44%)
- Empowering both parents and kids to grow, make mistakes, and learn without shame (41%)
- Programs that sparked a meaningful family conversation (37%)

## Practical Support:

- Recognizing that parenting is hard (39%)
- Providing real solutions, not just polished products (37%)

## Parents are looking for something that feels genuine.

They want to feel like the brand understands what life with kids is really like and is offering support that feels both meaningful and realistic.



**“If I could improve the way advertising or media companies portray families like mine, I would tell them to focus on authenticity and diversity. Show real, everyday moments instead of unrealistic perfection.”**

(Male, 34; kids: Boy age under 1)

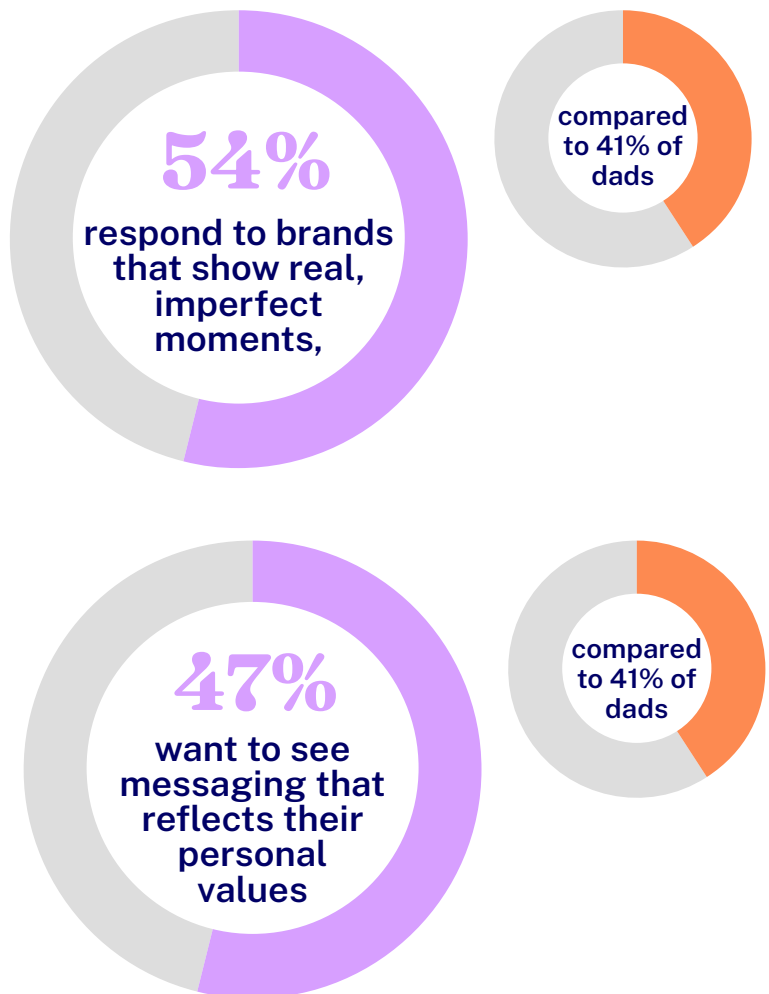


## The Nuances

### Moms and Dads Respond to Different Messages

While both moms and dads value authenticity, they tend to connect with different aspects of it. Their responses reflect how they relate to their parenting role and what they look for in brand messaging.

#### Moms are drawn to emotional validation:



**They are more likely to seek out content that feels emotionally honest and grounded in everyday experience (41% vs. 36%).**

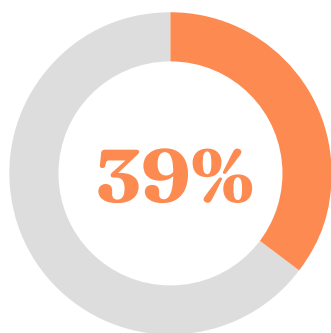
These differences highlight the need for messaging that speaks to each parent's mindset, whether they're looking for emotional connection, practical support, or a mix of both.



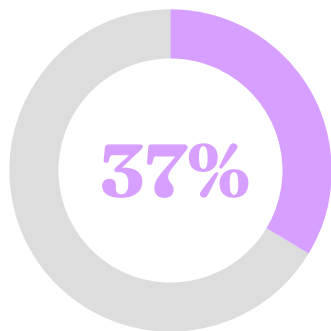
# What Parents Want from Brands

When we asked parents what kind of brand messaging actually makes them feel more connected to a brand, the top answers, again, had little to do with polish or perfection. What stood out was honesty and support.

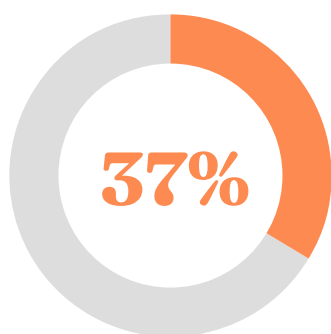
Here's what parents said resonates most:



want brands that support their child's development while recognizing that parenting is far from perfect



appreciate brands that offer practical help, not just a product

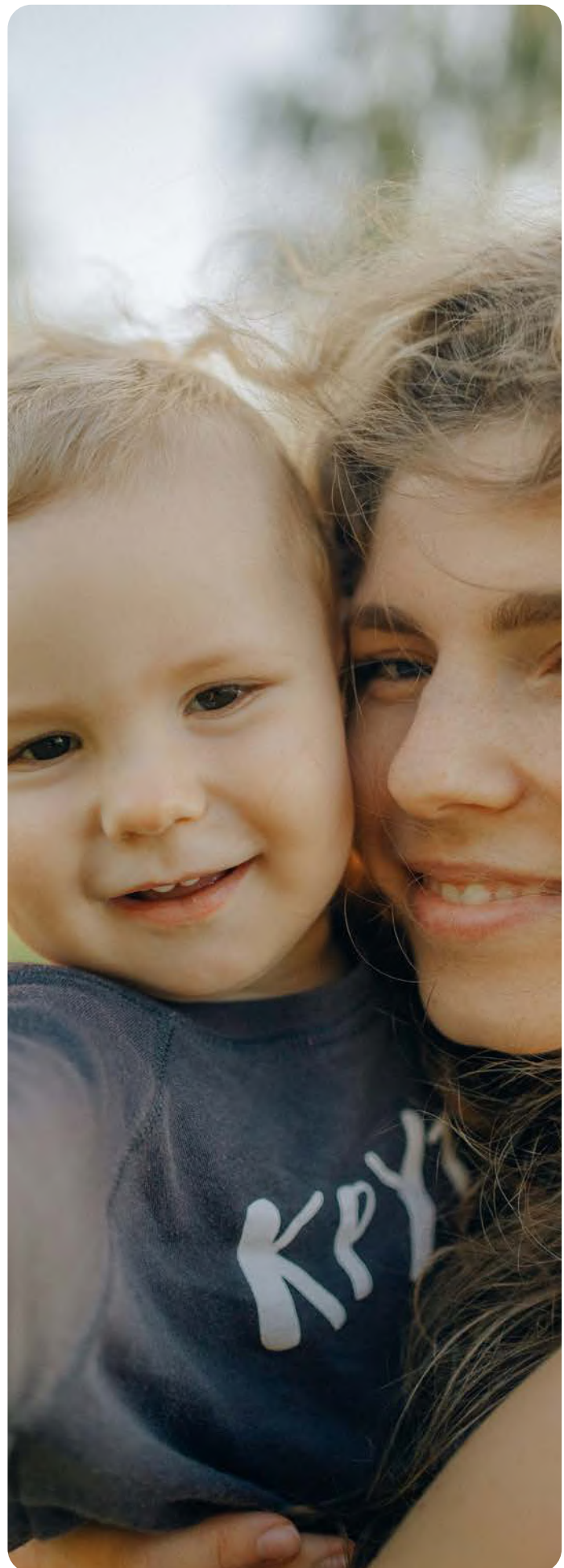


connect with messages that reflect everyday family chaos — the spills, the tantrums, and the moments when nothing goes as planned

**Parents are not looking for advice on how to be better.**

**They want encouragement.**

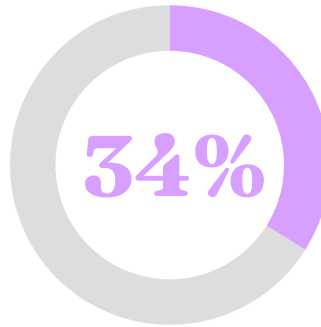
They want to hear, “You’re doing enough, and we’re here to make things a little easier.”



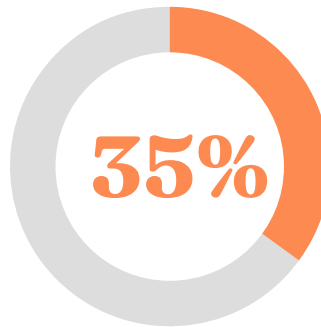


## Give Us a Break, Not a Lecture

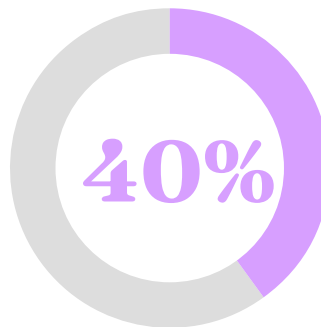
One message came through clearly:  
parents want help without guilt.  
They want the permission to be human.



say they value brands  
that make life easier  
without making them  
feel bad about their  
choices



This matters even  
more to mothers  
(vs. 32% of fathers)



Parents of  
preschoolers (ages  
3-5) are especially  
sensitive, and are more  
likely to notice  
messaging that  
triggers guilt

This group is carrying a heavy load. They are juggling work, childcare, developmental milestones, and countless invisible tasks. They don't need reminders of where they're falling short.

**They need brands that say, "You're doing great, and it's okay to just get through the day."**

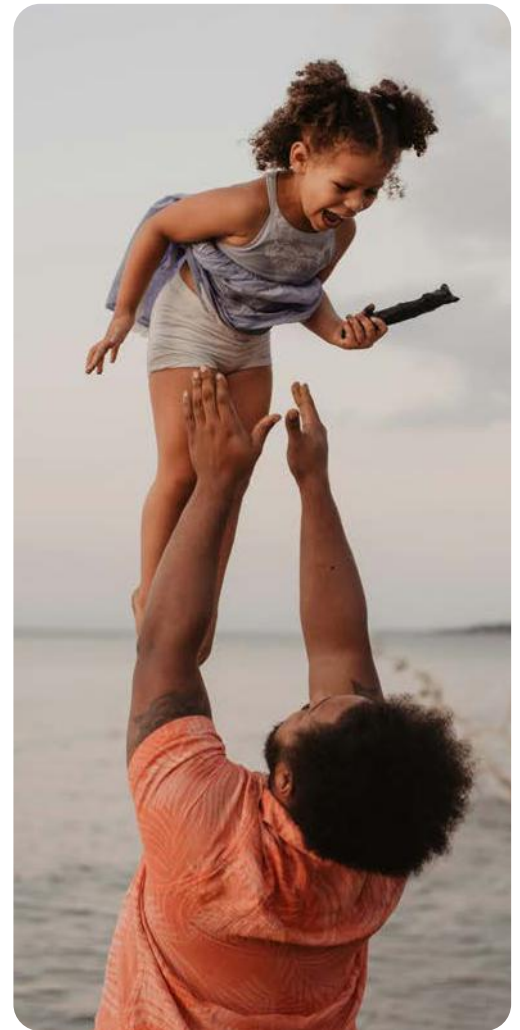
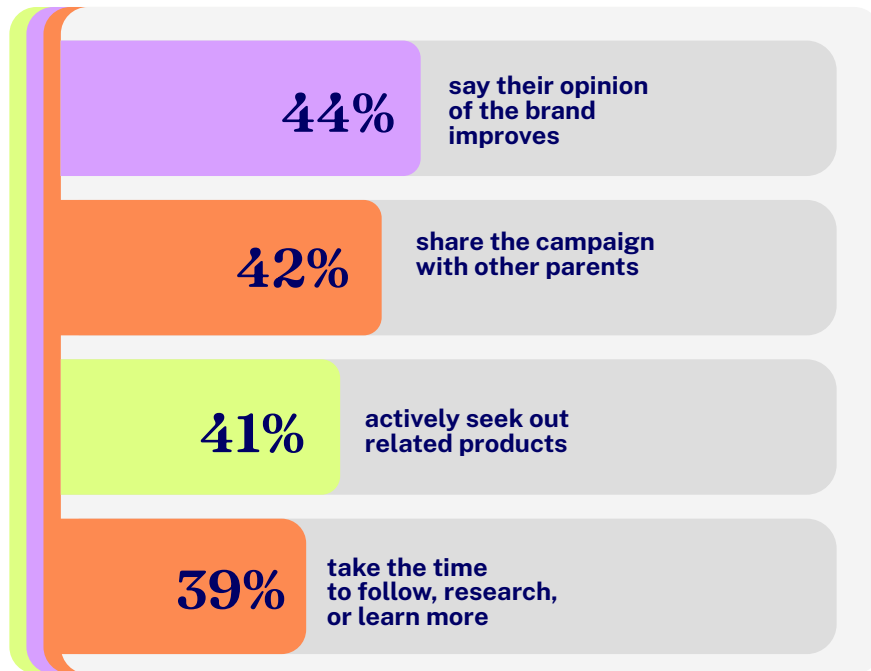




# What Happens When a Brand Gets It Right

When parents feel seen, supported, and respected by a brand, the impact extends beyond a good impression. It fosters emotional loyalty and motivates meaningful action.

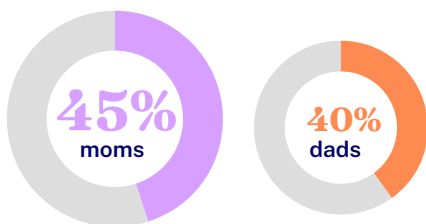
How parents respond :



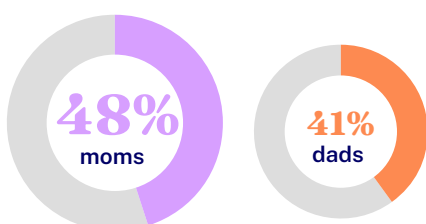
## The Nuances

### Moms and Dads Follow Through In Different Ways:

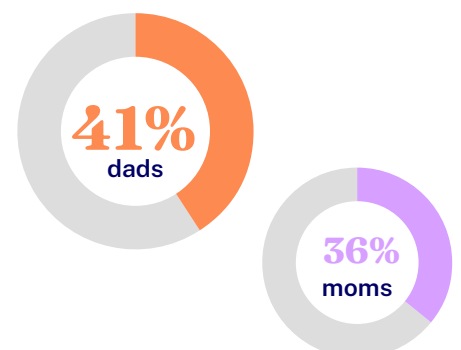
Moms are more likely to advocate for the brand



and say it changed how they view the brand



Dads are more likely to look up or follow the brand on social media, showing that emotional connection often leads to different outcomes for each group.



# Relevance Matters During Family Time

Parents are not ignoring ads entirely, but they are quick to tune out anything that feels off-base or irrelevant. When families are watching kids' content together, some ad categories naturally feel more in sync with the moment, while others don't always align as intuitively.

**The ad types parents find most relevant are those that meet their immediate needs as caregivers:**

- Parenting tools and resources (63%)
- Health and wellness products (61%)
- Family entertainment (60%)
- Food/drinks (61%)
- Family travel/hospitality (58%)
- Cleaning/HH products (55%)

**Ads that are still relevant, but sometimes overlooked:**

- Financial services (51%)
- Automotive (49%)
- Tech products (49%)
- Subscription services (46%)

**This doesn't mean certain categories are a bad fit.**

It just means brands in these spaces need to be more thoughtful about context.

Ads that align with the caregiving mindset, whether they offer support, enrichment, or shared enjoyment, are more likely to be welcomed.

**Ads that feel out of sync with the moment are more likely to be ignored.**







## The Nuances

### Moms and Dads Respond Differently to Ad Relevance

Dads and moms don't always agree on what feels relevant during family viewing.

Across nearly every category, dads tend to rate ads as more relevant, while moms are more selective.

**The biggest differences appear in these categories:**

**Tech Products:**

**37%**  
moms

**62%**  
dads

**Automotive Ads:**

**40%**  
moms

**59%**  
dads

**Financial Services:**

**38%**  
moms

**64%**  
dads

These gaps suggest that dads may be more open to a wider range of ads, while moms tend to filter messages through a more practical and emotionally attuned lens. They are more likely to focus on whether the content aligns with family needs, tone, and values.

**For brands, this highlights a key insight: just because parents are watching together doesn't mean they interpret messages the same way.**

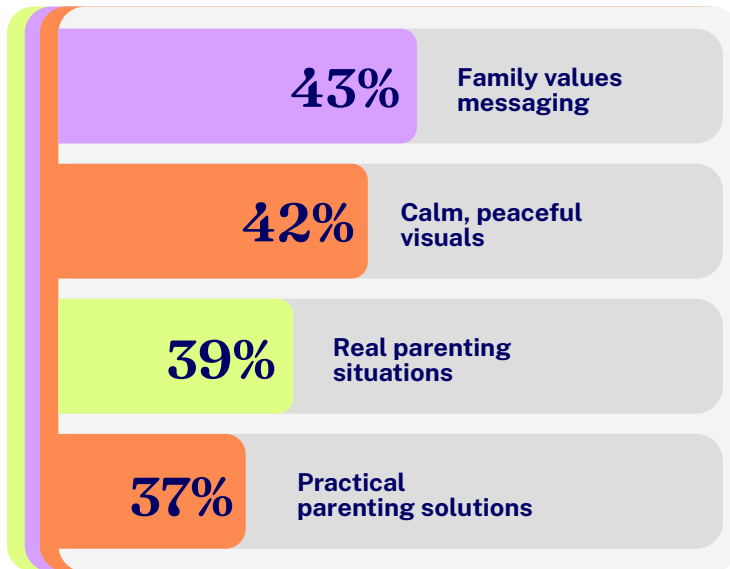
Effective family marketing should account for the different ways moms and dads evaluate what matters.



# How to Create Ads That Parents Actually Notice

When an ad captures a parent's attention during kids' content, it's usually not because of bright colors or catchy music. It's because the message feels honest, useful, or emotionally in tune with their everyday life.

Here's what parents say makes an ad stand out:



**Family values messaging:** messages centered on care, connection, and doing right by your kids

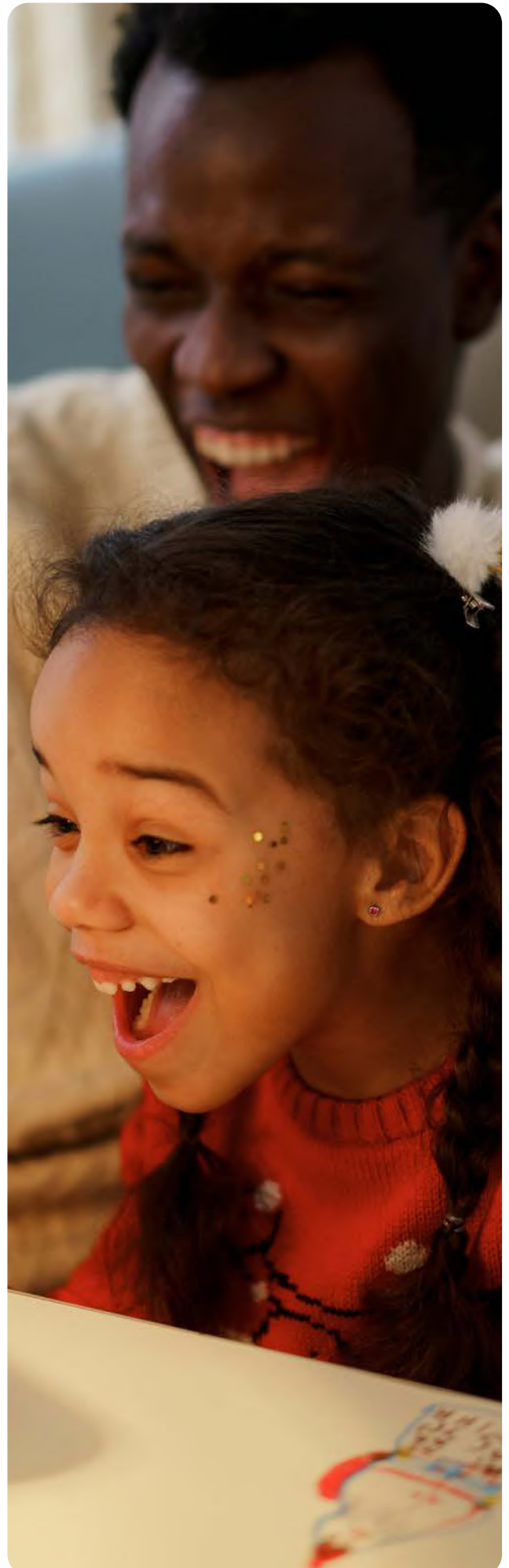
**Calm, peaceful visuals:** a welcome break from the noise and overstimulation of typical ads

**Real parenting situations:** moments like bedtime chaos, power struggles, or emotional reconnection after a meltdown

**Practical parenting solutions:** products or advice that solve real problems in a realistic way

**Parents are looking for something that feels genuine.**

They want to feel like the brand understands what life with kids is really like and is offering support that feels both meaningful and realistic.



## The Nuances

### Why Messaging Needs to Evolve as Kids Grow

The age of a child plays a big role in shaping what parents notice and respond to in ads.

As kids grow, parents shift their focus from early development needs to shared experiences and more complex storytelling.

#### Parents of younger children (ages 0–2) are especially drawn to:

- Realistic depictions of parenting, with 45% responding to these moments compared to 32% of parents with older kids
- Calmer tones over humor, with only 23% responding positively to joke-driven ads (compared to 34% of parents with older children)

#### Parents of older children (ages 6–9) are more likely to respond to

- Humor and clever storytelling, especially content that they can enjoy alongside their kids
- Narratives with more emotional and cultural depth, where characters and storylines reflect families' backgrounds, not just songs and visuals (32% vs. 25%).

As kids grow, what feels relevant to parents evolves. **Messaging that speaks to a child's stage and the parent's mindset at that stage is far more likely to land.**

**“All children are individuals and each child is different from one another.”**

(Female, 33; kids: Girl age 1, Boy age 12)

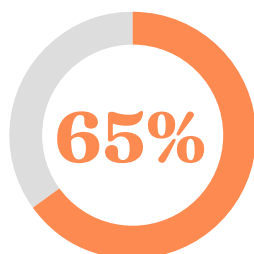




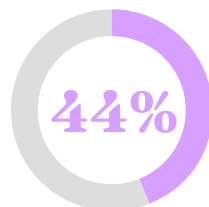
## It's Not Just Mom Anymore

For years, marketers have assumed that moms are the primary product-finders in the household. But the data tells a different story — dads are actually leading discovery across almost every channel.

### Take YouTube:



of dads use  
it daily to  
discover new  
products



of moms  
say the  
same



### The trend shows up on other platforms, too:

- 52% of dads are daily Instagram users (vs. 34% of moms)
- 37% of dads read parenting blogs — nearly double the rate of moms (21%)
- Even in-person events and product demos draw more dads (34%) than moms (19%)

**Dads aren't just receptive; they're proactive.** They're out there searching, exploring, and sharing. If brands aren't speaking to them directly, they're missing half the conversation.

### The Nuances

## Moms and Dads Discover Differently

Dads tend to be more active on discovery platforms, and they engage with them differently than moms do.

### Consider this:

- 20% of moms say they never use TikTok (vs. 17% of dads)
- 23% of moms don't use Instagram at all, compared to just 8% of dads
- 18% of moms never visit parenting blogs, while only 9% of dads say the same

### But this isn't about who's more "online." It's about how parents approach discovery.

- Dads tend to be more exploratory: scrolling for hacks, tools, and new ideas to solve specific challenges
- Moms are more relational: they rely on peer reviews, real-life recommendations, and trusted voices before making a decision

**Dads might be casting a wider net, but moms are the filter,** quietly deciding what actually belongs in the home. Both roles matter. And the smartest brand strategies speak to both.

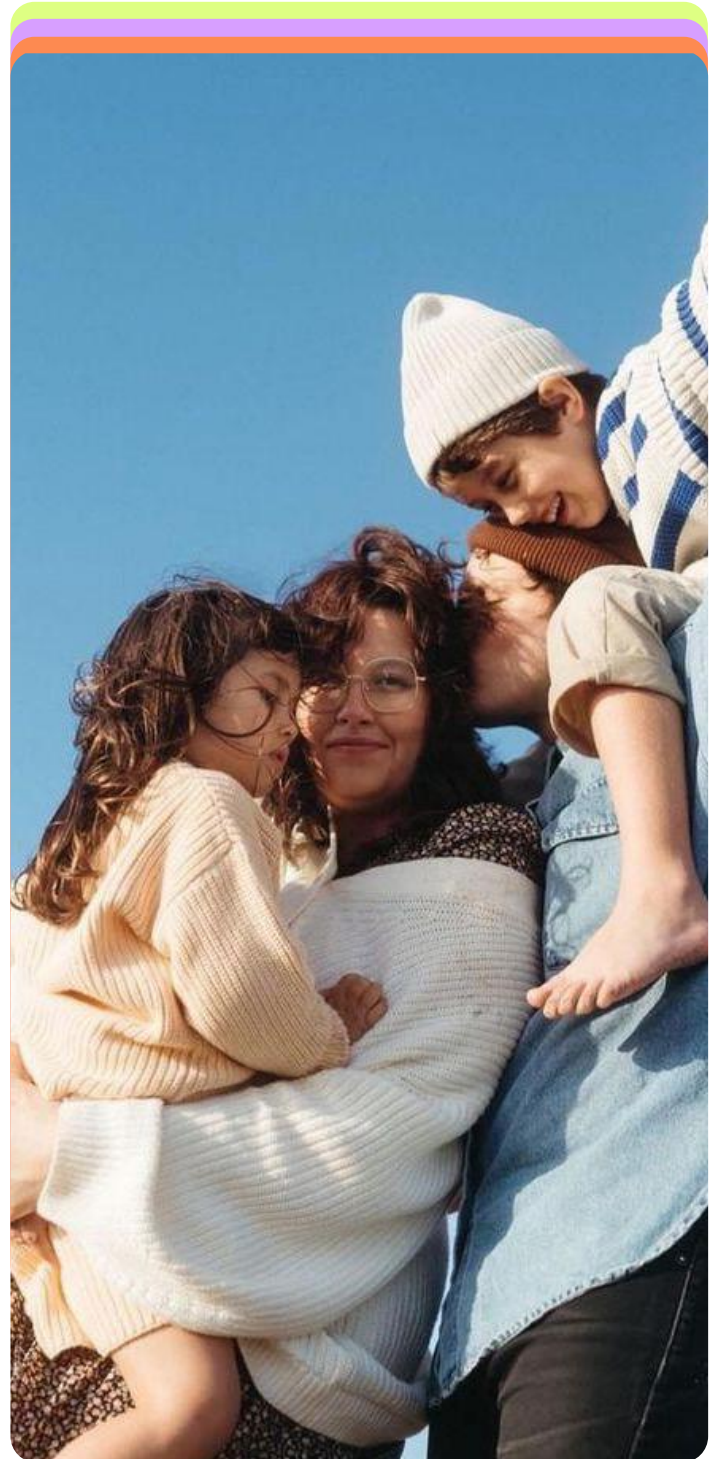
**Reaching today's families requires a dual approach: speak to both parents, meet them where they are, and tailor messaging to the unique role each one plays.** When brands acknowledge both perspectives, they earn greater trust and a place in the household.

## The Future of Family Engagement

**This research is a clear call to action. It's time to rethink how brands, content creators, and platforms show up for families.**

Parents today are managing emotional overload, financial strain, digital burnout, and constant social scrutiny, while still trying to raise kind, resilient kids.

**They're not looking for perfection. They're looking to feel understood. And they can tell when that's missing.**



What this moment calls for is a different kind of approach, one built on empathy, not assumptions.

**Real support, not polished spin.**

In a landscape crowded with noise, what stands out isn't just what you say, but how deeply you understand the people you're speaking to.



# The Three Foundations of Modern Family Engagement

## 1. Start with Emotional Recognition

Today's parents aren't moving through a neat, linear funnel. They're making decisions based on how well a brand understands their world.

The real path looks more like this:

**Recognition**  
"This reflects me."

**Resonance**  
"This fits my life."

**Advocacy**  
"Others should know about this"

Emotional clarity comes first. If parents don't feel seen right away, they move on. Their time and attention go to brands that get it quickly and genuinely.

## 2. Real Representation Builds Real Relationships

Families know when something feels authentic and when it doesn't. Representation only resonates when it reflects lived experiences, not just surface-level inclusion.

That means:

i

Hiring creators who bring a personal perspective and depth

ii

Showing families as they are: complex, evolving, and imperfect

iii

Portraying real dynamics: tension, tenderness, chaos, and care

iv

Making economic and structural diversity feel normal, not performative

When families see themselves in full, they don't just feel seen; they feel valued.

## 3. The Gender Gap Is a Blind Spot and an Opportunity

Moms often feel overlooked in brand messaging, even though they're the ones most likely to build community and advocate when something resonates. Dads, meanwhile, are taking a more active role in product discovery.

To close the gap, brands should:

i

Acknowledge the emotional load and mental strain moms carry

ii

Create messaging that affirms, not lectures

iii

Equip dads with clear, practical solutions

iv

Develop strategies that speak to each parent's role and mindset

Families are made up of different perspectives. Reaching them means honoring all of them.



## Other Factors To Consider:



### The Rise of Co-Viewing

Parents increasingly engage with the content their kids are watching — 84% say they seek out shows they can enjoy together as a family. This shift redefines what family programming must deliver. It's no longer enough to entertain children alone; content must also hold meaning for the adults in the room.

#### The most effective shows will:

- Include layers that speak to both kids and parents
- Spark conversations that carry on beyond the screen
- Reflect real emotions and family dynamics
- Create opportunities for bonding and shared routines

When content aligns with family life, it becomes part of how families connect.



### Rethinking Screen Time: From Guilt to Strategy

Screen time has long carried a cloud of guilt, but many parents now see it differently. With the right approach, it becomes a tool for connection, learning, and emotional support.

#### Parents say the best content:

- Regulates emotions rather than just wears kids out
- Offers real educational value beyond surface-level stimulation
- Brings families together instead of isolating them
- Relieves pressure at key moments in the day

The most effective brands will position screen time as a thoughtful choice that supports modern parenting, not something to apologize for.



### How Trust Really Spreads Among Parents

When it comes to discovering new products, parents lean on people they know. More than half (52%) say friends and family influence their decisions more than any brand message or platform. To reach families effectively, brands need to create the conditions where trust can move person to person.

#### That means:

- Highlighting authentic, lived experiences from real parents
- Partnering with credible experts who already hold parents' confidence
- Making space for community dialogue and shared recommendations
- Encouraging parents to speak on your behalf, because their voice carries more weight

Trust grows through connection. The brands that understand this will find themselves welcomed, not just noticed.





## The Path Forward

Reaching modern families requires more than louder messaging, it requires deeper listening.

The real opportunity lies in meeting parents where they are: in the middle of daycare pickups, dinner table meltdowns, shared screen time, and the beautiful mess of everyday life.

**At the heart of every family are three things: trust, care, and identity.**

In a world where parents are asking to be seen, supported, and understood, those who lead with empathy and honesty won't just get noticed, they'll be welcomed in.

**This is more than a market opportunity.**

It's an invitation into the everyday story of family. Handle it with the care it deserves.



## What the Industry Needs to Do Now

### For Content Creators:

- Remember, you're speaking to families, not just kids.
- Create with emotional nuance.
- Blend fun with function.

**When both generations feel seen, your content becomes something families return to and recommend.**

### For Advertisers:

- Step away from outdated assumptions like "mom as the sole decision-maker."
- Understand the unique roles parents play.

**Lead with empathy, reflect real trade-offs, and prioritize emotional honesty over polished perfection.**

### For Brand Strategists:

- Think beyond quick wins.
- Earning loyalty from families takes consistency, care, and long-term vision.

**The brands that support parents with meaning, not just messaging, build the strongest relationships.**

### For Platforms and Tech:

- Design experiences that reduce stress, not add to it.
- Help parents feel confident, safe, and supported.

**Prioritize tools that encourage co-viewing, connection, and ease over shallow engagement.**





The 2025 State of Parenthood Study combines a national survey of 1,000 U.S. parents of children aged 0–9 with 15 in-depth interviews with parents across the country, offering a layered view of modern family life and how brands and content creators can build deeper, more authentic connections with today’s families.

Partner	SH Focus Partners	Attest
Research Design	Virtual IDIs	Online survey via Attest
Sample Size	N = 15 Parents A18-44 with kids under the age of 10	N = 1,000 Parents A18-54 with kids under the age of 10  • Mothers (n=502), Fathers (n=483) • Child age groups: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>0–2 (n=344)</li><li>3–5 (n=344)</li><li>6–9 (n=297)</li></ul>
Fielding Date	April 7-14, 2025	April 28–May 5, 2025



Moonbug is an award-winning global entertainment company inspiring kids everywhere to laugh, learn and grow. The company is behind some of the biggest kids' entertainment brands in the world, including CoComelon and Blippi. Moonbug believes every child should have access to entertaining and enriching content, making its shows available on more than 150 video platforms globally including Netflix, Disney+, BBC iPlayer and YouTube Kids. The company is also a global leader in pre-school music and audio experiences, available on 100+ audio platforms globally. Moonbug brands extend far beyond the screen to include streaming music, consumer products and live events.

Moonbug is part of Candle Media, an independent, creator-friendly home for cutting-edge, high-quality, category-defining brands and franchises. By bringing together elite talent operating at the intersection of content, community, and commerce, it helps to position leading entertainment businesses for accelerated, sustainable growth in the current market and beyond. Candle is run by its Co-Chairmen and Co-CEOs, leading entertainment executives Kevin Mayer and Tom Staggs, and backed by investment capital from funds managed by Blackstone's flagship private equity business.

[moonbug.com](https://moonbug.com)

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## Research Partners:

Founded in 2015 and headquartered in London and New York, **Attest** is a consumer research platform that makes doing regular research less of a big deal. Attest's easy-to-use, self-serve dashboard is coupled with on-demand research expertise. Some of the largest brands in the world leverage insights from Attest to harness the ever-changing consumer landscape. To date, Attest has raised >\$100 million in venture capital with backing from investors such as Kismet, Schroders, and NEA.

[askattest.com](https://askattest.com)



**SH Focus Partners** is a qualitative recruitment firm founded in 2020 by Sara Haim. With over two decades of experience, the company specializes in sourcing high-quality participants for methodologies such as focus groups, in-depth interviews, ethnographies, and usability testing. They are known for their ability to recruit hard-to-reach audiences across the U.S. and globally, with a focus on understanding consumer psychology and behavior. For this study, SH Focus Partners provided both recruitment support and moderation services. Interviews were led by experienced moderator Begonia Martinez.

[shfocuspartners.com](https://shfocuspartners.com)



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