



Working Parents & Child Care Report

How an Uncertain Economy Is Straining Work, Family, and Care

November 2025

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Executive summary

Families and employers are navigating a period of economic strain. Inflation and rising costs are squeezing household budgets, while companies face mounting pressure to justify every dollar spent.

For families, the child care crisis hasn't disappeared; it has shifted behind the scenes. Return-to-office policies and job insecurity have brought parents back into the office, but caregiving challenges persist. Although absences are down, stress among parents remains very high, creating an illusion of stability that is unsustainable.

UrbanSitter's latest Working Parents & Child Care Survey shows the toll this quiet crisis continues to take. Among respondents, 86% say they need child care to do their jobs, yet 43% still lack reliable backup care. About 35% report high or very high stress, and 68% have made career sacrifices because of caregiving challenges.

Cutting child care and broader caregiving benefits may seem like an easy budget fix, but it's shortsighted. Eliminating them now will cost far more in lost productivity and turnover later. The data shows that investing in caregiving benefits delivers measurable returns and proven ROI.



About this study

UrbanSitter's annual Working Parents & Child Care study examines how families across the United States balance work and caregiving, and how access to reliable care affects their ability to thrive at work. The study provides an annual snapshot of the state of working parenthood, highlighting shifts in stress, costs, and benefit preferences in a changing economy.

In 2025, more than 500 working parents from across the U.S. participated in the survey. Respondents represented a diverse cross-section of households and industries, offering a clear view of how work and caregiving intersect.

Gender: Most respondents identified as female (91%), 7% as male and 2% preferred not to say or selected non-binary/third gender.

Age: Most respondents were between 35–54 years old (35–44: 37%, 45–54: 38%). 18% were 25–34, and smaller groups were under 25 (1%), 55–64 (5%), and 65+ (1%).

Number of children: Families most commonly had two children (44%), followed by one child (33%), three (19%), and four or more (4%).

Age of children: Infant 19%, Toddler 40%, Preschool 37%, Elementary 43%, Middle School 18%, and High School 17%.

Note: Families with multiple children contributed to more than one age group.

Location: Respondents represented major U.S. metros. Top locations included New York City (13%), Los Angeles (11%), Chicago (6%), and San Francisco (5%).

Household income: The survey included working parents from different annual household income brackets: \$150–174K (24%), \$175–199K (17%), \$200–249K (17%), \$250–299K (6%), \$300K+ (13%), \$100–149K (9%), \$75–99K (4%), \$50–74K (3%), \$35–49K (1%), \$0–20K (1%), preferred not to say (5%).

Company size: Respondents worked across all company sizes: 1–10 employees (5%), 11–50 (5%), 51–100 (4%), 101–200 (9%), 201–500 (12%), 501–1,000 (17%), 1,001–2,000 (14%), 2,001–5,000 (13%), 5,001–10,000 (9%), and 10,000+ (12%).

Industry: Survey respondents worked in a variety of industries including Healthcare & Pharmaceuticals (13%), Information Technology & Software (12%), and Education (10%). Additional representation spanned Finance & Financial Services (6%), Food, Hospitality & Tourism (5%), Government (4%), Business Support & Logistics (4%), Legal Services (4%), Advertising & Marketing (3%), Manufacturing (3%), and others.

Ethnicity/race: The sample included White (71%), Black or African American (9%), Hispanic or Latino (9%), Asian (5%), prefer not to say (4%), and smaller shares identifying as Middle Eastern or North African (1%), Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (1%), or another race/multiple ethnicities (1%).



The state of care

Why the care crisis is far from over

Child care remains a defining challenge for working families. In the study, 86% of parents said they need child care to work and 45% need more than 30 hours per week. Yet 43% say it's difficult or very difficult to find child care, and 43% lack adequate backup options.

Layered over this, costs continue to rise faster than wages, with some families spending more than 30% of their household income on child care, a level considered unaffordable by economists.

Working parents are also caring for other loved ones: 60% of respondents said they care for pets and 29% for an aging relative, underscoring that care responsibilities rarely stop with children.

The cumulative strain is reshaping careers, with 68% reporting at least one career change because of caregiving challenges.

The need for care isn't expected to slow down. According to another recent study, 50% of caregivers anticipate their responsibilities will increase in the year ahead,¹ signaling that the pressure will only grow.

More broadly, 73% of all U.S. adults are caregivers in some capacity,² making the care crisis a workforce-wide issue that touches nearly every employee.

The illusion of stability

In this year's study, working parents reported missing an average of 5 work days in the past 12 months due to child care issues, down from 11 days in last year's study. On paper, that looks like progress.

In reality, many parents are simply pushing through. Return-to-office policies and job insecurity have made missing work harder, not less necessary. Parents still face school holidays and limited caregiver availability. Last-minute solutions often come at a high cost. The reduced absences reflect obligation, not relief.

This illusion of stability masks a deeper strain that affects both employees and employers. When parents feel pressure to show up despite inadequate care, productivity, engagement, and well-being all suffer, a hidden cost that can't be tracked in attendance logs. The result: growing stress among working parents.

Stress levels remain high

Stress among working parents is at record-high level. According to the data, 35% report high or very high stress—virtually unchanged from last year.

The leading source of stress is juggling work and home responsibilities, followed closely by caregiving issues and financial strain, as depicted in the chart below. Many of these sources of stress are closely linked and revolve around balancing work and family life.

When asked specifically about the stress of child care responsibilities, 39% of parents say they're stressed several times a week and an additional 17% say they're stressed everyday.

Parents may be showing up to work more consistently, but stress levels remain high.

The price of care keeps rising

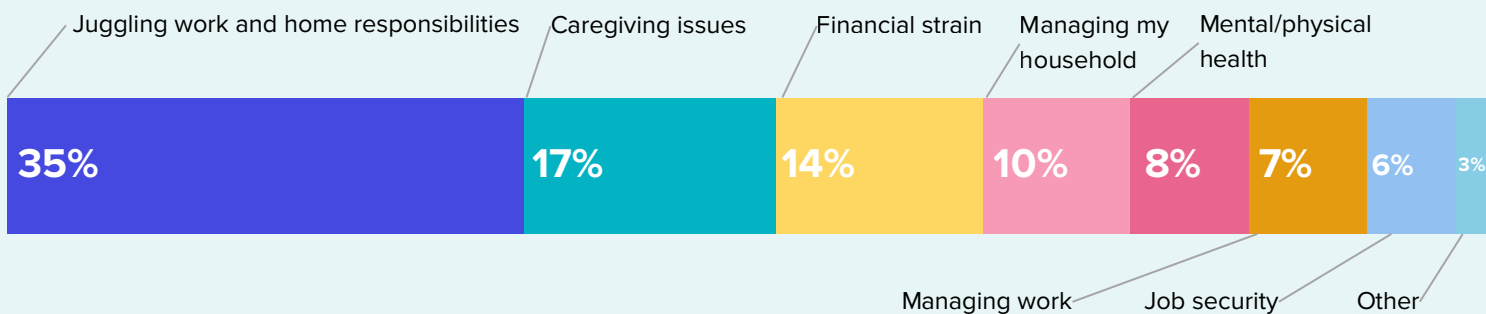
Behind the stress is a financial equation that no longer adds up for many families. The price of child care continues to climb, forcing parents to spend more or cut back on their usage.

In 2025, 56% of working parents reported spending more than \$1,000 per month on child care, with 29% spending more than \$2,000 per month.

A third of families spend over 20% of their household income on child care, and 1 in 10 spend more than 30%—a level economists define as unaffordable.

The rise in child care costs has outpaced inflation for several years due to a shortage of supply and a reduction in government assistance after the pandemic.

Top Sources of Stress for Working Parents



The career cost of care gaps

Long-term career progress is slipping for working parents. 68% of working parents say they've made at least one career change because of caregiving challenges, up from 66% in 2024 and 61% in 2022.

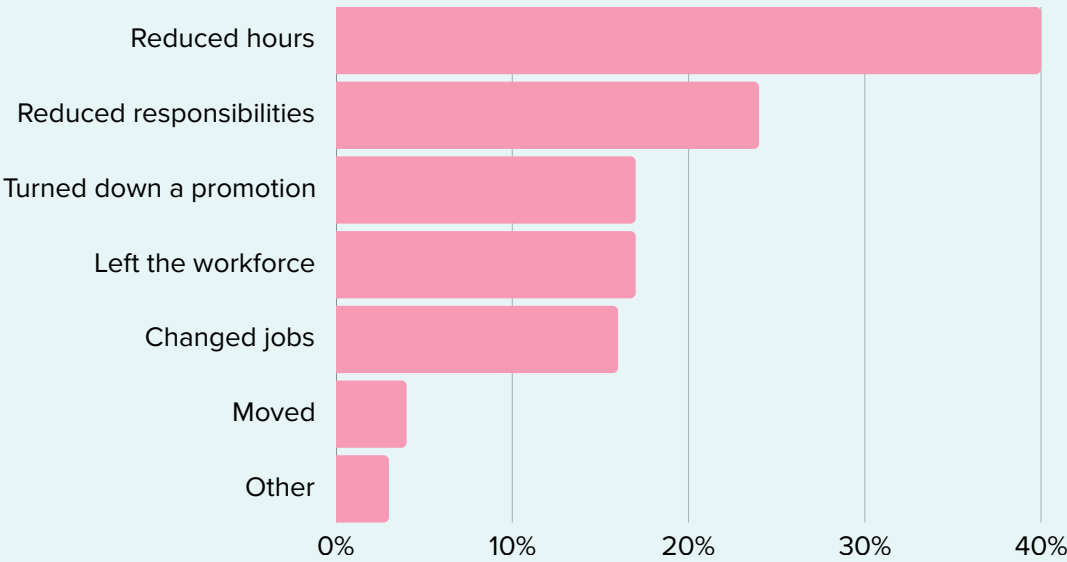
The most common career changes include:

- 40% reduced hours
- 24% reduced their responsibilities
- 17% declined promotions
- 17% left the workforce entirely
- 16% changed jobs

With every passing year, working parents lose earning power, advancement, and representation in the workforce.

For employers, replacing lost talent and productivity often costs far more than providing child care support. Yet only about one in five employers currently offer such benefits.

Career changes made by working parents





43%

of working parents lack adequate
backup care

56%

of working parents say they're
stressed about child care several
times a week or everyday

56%

of working parents spend over
\$1,000 per month on child care

68%

of working families say they've
made a career change due to
caregiving issues



The patchwork of care

Most working parents can't do their jobs without child care and they know it. 86% say they need care in order to work, a number that has held steady over the past several years. Nearly half of parents (47%) report needing more than 30 hours of care each week just to cover their work schedules, the equivalent of a full-time job's worth of coverage.

To make that possible, families layer together multiple forms of support. A daycare or preschool may cover the core hours, but many parents rely on relatives for pickups, before- or after-school programs to bridge the gap, and sitters for evenings and backup care.

During the summer months, the puzzle gets even more complicated, with families stitching together short-term camps and temporary arrangements to fill the weeks when school isn't in session.

How families combine care

This year's data show a familiar pattern: parents depend on several overlapping types of child care rather than a single solution.

Most common care types:

- Daycare or preschool – 51%
- Relatives or extended family – 44%
- Occasional babysitter or nanny – 36%
- Before or after school programs – 34%
- Emergency or backup care – 29%

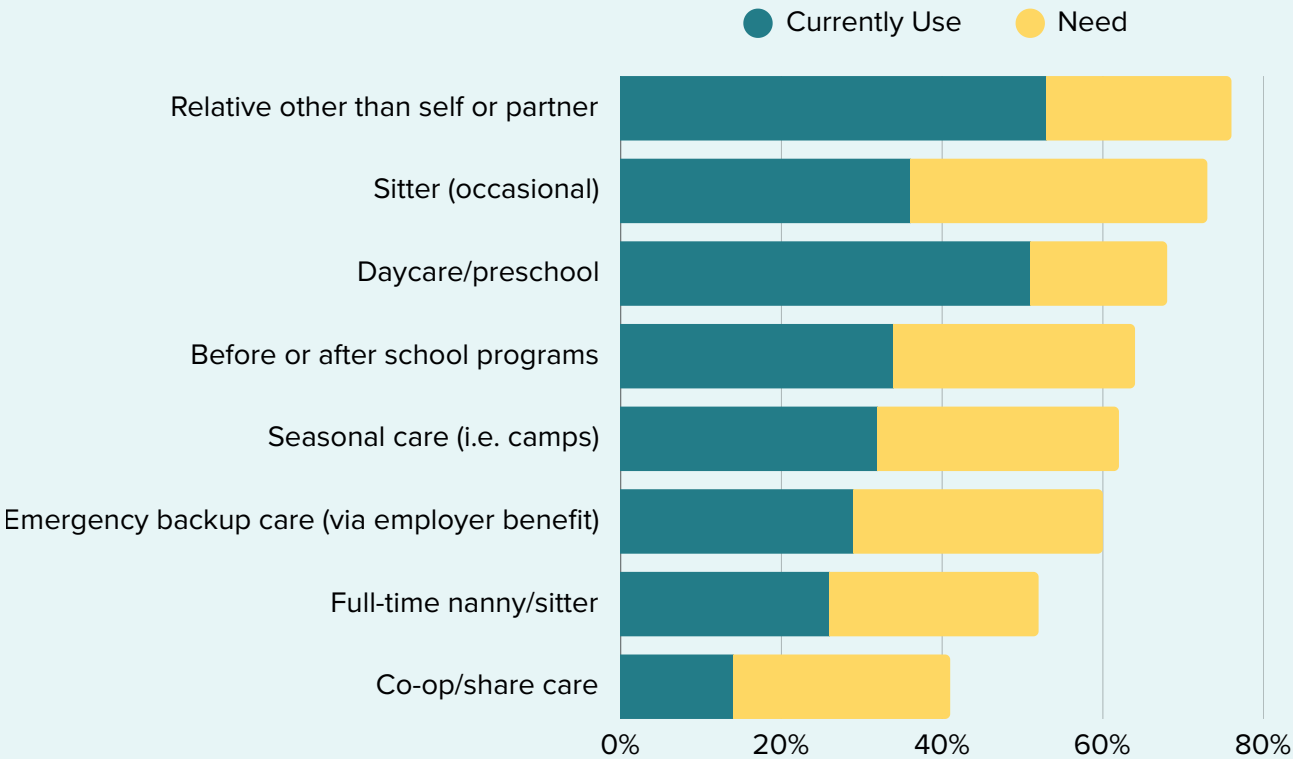
Despite layering multiple types of care, coverage remains incomplete. 78% of families have at least one unmet child care need, underscoring the persistent instability of care access. Parents piece together child care like a puzzle that never quite fits.

What the gaps reveal

Across the last four years of survey data, the utilization mix of child care resources has changed little. Usage of relatives and family help has edged upward slightly, suggesting more parents are turning to low-cost or unpaid options as prices rise. Meanwhile, access to backup and emergency care have remained stubbornly limited.

These trends make one thing clear: even as spending climbs and schedules evolve, families are still relying on the same imperfect system of overlapping care. The next section examines what parents want most from employers.

Current use vs. needed
child care types



The benefits that matter most

Working parents are laser-focused on benefits that make life more manageable. Their priorities are practical and deeply tied to the realities of care. They want benefits that save time, reduce stress, and make finding reliable child care possible.

Top five most desired employer benefits

1. Child care subsidies or benefits – 45%
2. Flexible work schedules – 33%
3. Four-day work week – 32%
4. 401(k) matching – 24%
5. Work-from-anywhere policy – 22%

Child care support and flexible work options dominate the list, outranking traditional perks such as bonuses, catered meals, or on-site gyms. Parents are prioritizing time, stability, and reliable child care over benefits that don't relieve daily strain.

Year-over-year trends

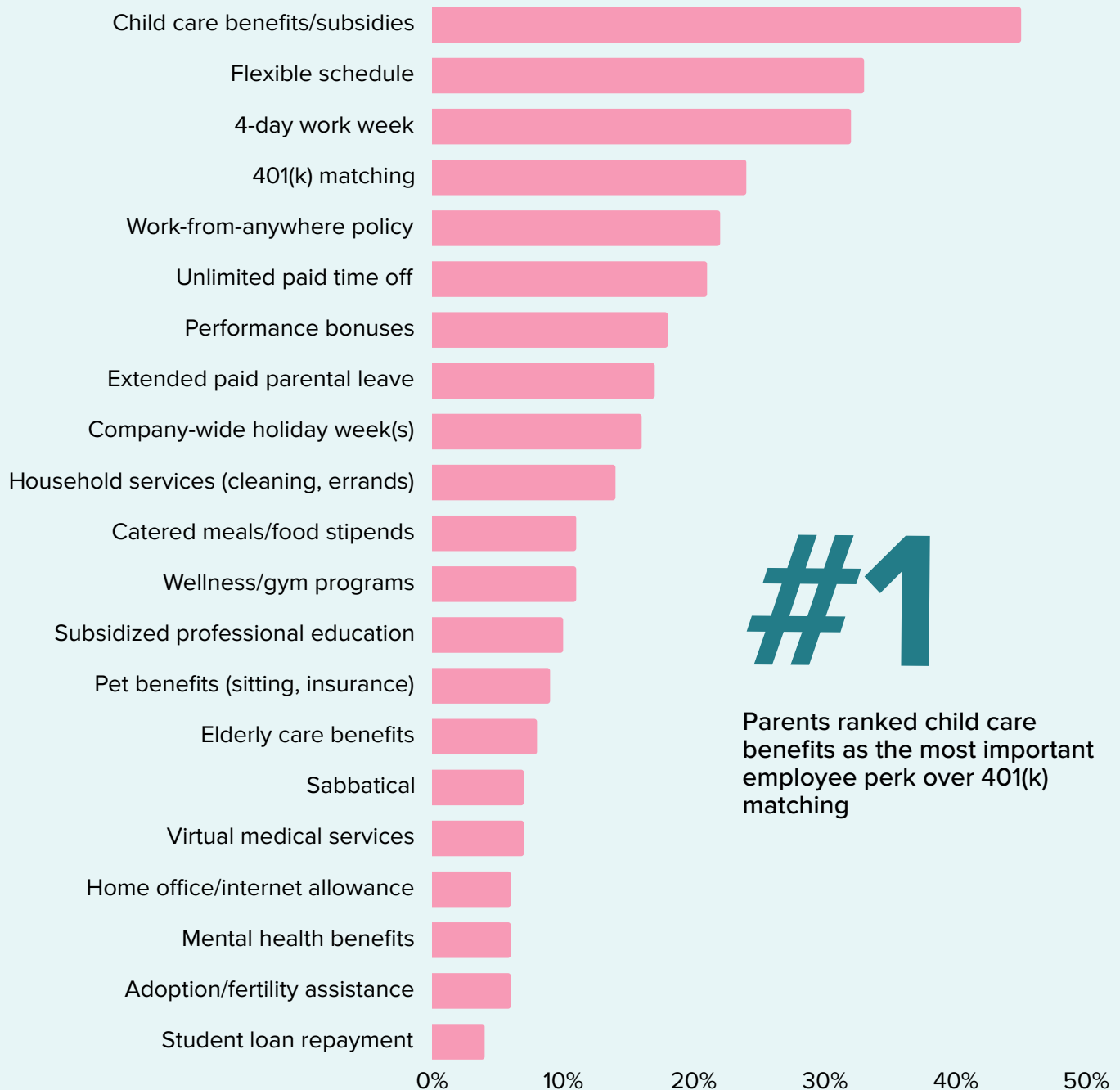
Child care benefits and subsidies have remained the top benefit choice every year since the annual survey began in 2022, proving that these benefits hold their value even through economic uncertainty.

By contrast, unlimited paid time off has quickly declined sharply in popularity, from 46% in 2022 to 21% in 2025. Many parents say they actually take less time off under unlimited policies, citing guilt, peer pressure, or fear of being perceived as less committed.

The message from working parents is clear: Dependable care and flexible work are their current priorities. As companies trim budgets, those that invest in family-focused benefits and policies will preserve productivity and protect their workforce's performance.



Most desired employer benefits and perks, as ranked by working parents



Smart strategies for today's economy

Working parents are clear about what they need: time, stability, and reliable child care. For HR leaders managing tighter budgets, the goal isn't only to cut costs—it's to cut the productivity drains that cost even more.

1. Invest in child care support.

Even partial child care subsidies or backup care benefits lower absenteeism and preserve productivity. They're low-cost safeguards against far higher turnover expenses.

2. Design caregiving benefits employees can personalize.

Serving a range of caregiving needs and letting employees direct their benefit dollars toward their choice of child, senior, pet, or household care helps maximize impact and perceived value.

3. Treat flexibility as infrastructure, not a perk.

Flexible schedules and remote options have ranked in the top three since 2022. When tracked against missed-day data, they correlate with higher retention and performance.

4. Measure and communicate ROI.

Use internal metrics: absences, engagement, turnover, to prove how caregiving benefits protect productivity. Share those results to defend benefit budgets during cost reviews.

In an uncertain economy, caregiving benefits aren't perks—they're performance drivers. The smartest cost control is investing in what keeps employees working, focused, and supported.





The ROI of care

When budgets tighten, caregiving benefits are often the first to go despite proven short- and long-term returns for employers.

Data from UrbanSitter's Corporate Care benefit program shows that parents with a backup care benefit miss 40% fewer workdays and are about 20% less likely to report high stress. Parents show up ready to work, not just present but productive.

Parents with a caregiving benefit are 77% less likely to turn down a promotion, 62% less likely to reduce their work hours, and 74% less likely to leave the workforce.

More broadly, 81% of all working parents surveyed reported that they would stay with their employer if caregiving benefits were offered, and 68% said caregiving benefits are a key consideration when choosing a new job.

This compelling data demonstrates the impact that a caregiving benefit can have on workforces in retaining top talent and avoiding costly churn.

Caregiving benefits also create a ripple effect that strengthens teams, not just individuals. When a parent misses work unexpectedly, projects slow and others absorb the load. Backup care and subsidies reduce that ripple effect, keeping workflows steady and preventing burnout across entire teams.

While it is tempting to trim caregiving benefits, the data shows that these benefits pay for themselves in what they prevent. Employers see fewer absences, steadier teams, and stronger retention—real, measurable ROI that strengthens productivity across the organization.



81%

would be more likely to stay with their current employer if caregiving benefits were provided

68%

consider access to caregiving benefits a deciding factor in accepting a new job

40%

fewer workdays missed with a caregiving benefit

50%

of caregivers expect their responsibilities to increase in the next year¹

About UrbanSitter Corporate Care

UrbanSitter Corporate Care is designed for cost-conscious organizations that want to support working caregivers without overspending.

The benefit provides reliable backup care and ongoing child care, including daycares and tuition discounts. It also supports senior, pet, and household care, helping employers meet the diverse needs of today's workforce.

Employers can customize which types of care to subsidize, set their own budgets, and enable out-of-network reimbursement for maximum flexibility. The result is a practical benefit that employees rely on and HR teams can justify, reducing absenteeism, improving productivity, and helping caregivers stay in the workforce.

Positive results across the organization, from employees to the C-suite.



40%

fewer workdays missed



77%

return to work after parental leave
Industry average: 57%



50%

reduction in attrition



\$672K/yr

time-cost savings for a 1,000-person company



Backup care



Daycares & preschools



Tutoring



Pet care



Household services



Senior care

For more information, visit benefits.urbansitter.com.

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