



Together Alone: **The new face of** **family isolation**

May 2026

HOME
START

“ I didn’t expect anyone to notice how low I was feeling. I was exhausted, overwhelmed and depressed. I was struggling to hold myself together. I had three children under four. I had no family close by, no friends I could call on, and the children’s dad was working out of town every day. I didn’t have much help and felt completely alone.”

Elizabeth, Greenwich



Introduction



Parents across the UK are isolated, lonely and worried about the impact on their children.

This loneliness and lack of social connection not only affects parents' mental health, it makes navigating significant challenges relating to health, housing and poverty so much harder.

Through our support for children and families in homes and communities across the UK, Home-Start has seen the challenges that families face increase in recent years.

Over half of all families referred to Home-Start report a challenge with their mental health (56%), up from 41% since 2015. Around a third of families referred are struggling with debt and finance, an increase of 52% in just four years, and around two thirds are in households with no one in employment. The number of families living in unsuitable housing has almost doubled since 2020-21 and is as high as two thirds of families in some London boroughs.

At the same time, parents feel more disconnected. Face time with services has reduced, and thresholds for specialist support have risen. Parents are increasingly turning to on-line sources for support. Together this creates a perfect storm - leaving families isolated at exactly the point when help is needed most.

To investigate the extent of the problem, Home-Start UK commissioned a survey of 1,027 parents across the UK to find out how they are impacted by loneliness and isolation, its causes, and their concerns for their and their children's wellbeing. This builds on a survey we first undertook in 2024.

Nearly half of parents with children under five feel lonely or isolated, and over one fifth rarely or never have meaningful contact with another adult.

Our research reveals that half of parents (49%) with children under five feel lonely or isolated. One-in-six (17%) feel this way often or always. More than one-in-five (21%) rarely or never have meaningful contact with another adult outside their household.

Of those who report being lonely, half are concerned that this is affecting their mental health. But parents are not only worried about themselves, they are also concerned about their children.

Half are concerned that their loneliness is impacting on their children's happiness, and 44% are concerned that their loneliness is affecting their children's development.

Rising parental isolation and loneliness is a concern not only for today, but for children's future life chances.

It has severe consequences for mental and physical health, for family relationships and for the capacity parents need to provide the best possible start for babies and young children.

The earliest years of a child's life, from pregnancy to the age of five, lay the foundations for lifelong physical and mental health. During this time, babies' brains are developing rapidly and are at their most adaptable, shaped by the relationships and experiences around them.

These early years are a time of both great opportunity and vulnerability. Children thrive when they experience warm, responsive and nurturing relationships, when their home environment supports their development, and when parents feel confident and supported in their role, and part of a community

Giving every child the best start in life means ensuring parents are not left to navigate these challenges alone, but are surrounded by the support and connection they need to nurture their young child's development.

Home-Start believes that as a society we should be building a compassionate community around all parents. We need a society that understands the power of human connection – that provides safety for families facing isolation, and that supports people to make those connections at times of stress and difficulty.

Without real investment in community-based relational support, parental isolation will continue to grow. The costs will be felt not only in parental mental health but in children's health, learning and wellbeing. Rebuilding the village starts with recognising how urgently it is needed.

“I used to feel like my world was shrinking to the four walls of our little house. My husband works full-time, and I was with the children on my own daily. I was exhausted, frightened to go out, and convinced everyone was judging me.”

Becci, Wiltshire

Q1. How often, if at all, would you describe yourself as feeling lonely or isolated?



Half of all parents (49%) with a child under five say they feel lonely or isolated at least some of the time, with around one-in-six (17%) parents reporting that they often or always feel lonely or isolated.

This was felt more by women than men with 55% of women saying they feel lonely or isolated at least some of the time, compared to 45% of men.

Some groups were affected more than others. Younger parents (under 35) are most likely to feel lonely or isolated, parents who are not working are far more likely to report feeling lonely or isolated, and loneliness is more commonly reported among parents in C2DE households than those in ABC1 households.

“We’d not long moved to London so my husband could be closer to his family and community. We were closer to them, but still not close enough. I didn’t have any friends nearby or any family support of my own, and my mental health was at its lowest point. Most days, I didn’t leave the house. I stayed in my pyjamas all the time, and didn’t brush my hair, I didn’t see the point.”

Gina, Camden

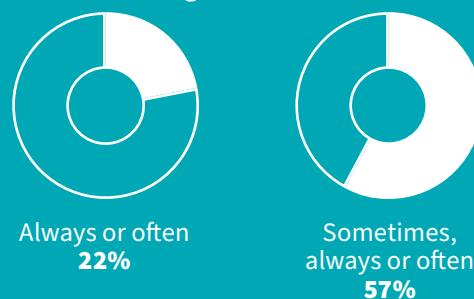
All parents



Sometimes, always or often



**Younger parents
Aged 25 – 34**



Parents who work



Parents not working / other



Parents in ABC1



Parents in C2DE



2026 survey: Sample size of 1,027 parents of children aged 18 and under. Fieldwork was undertaken between 8th - 9th April 2026.

2024 survey: Sample size of 999 parents of children aged 18 and under. Fieldwork was undertaken between 31st July - 2nd August 2024.

Surveys carried out online by YouGov on behalf of Home-Start UK. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all UK adults (aged 18+).

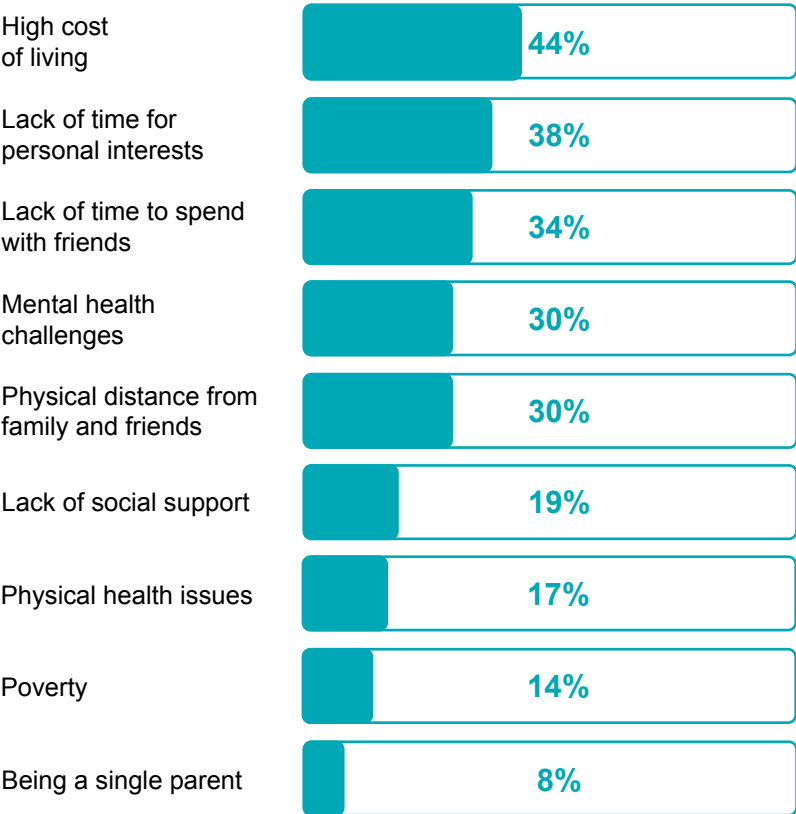
Q2. Which, if any, of the following factors do you feel can contribute towards your feelings of loneliness or isolation?



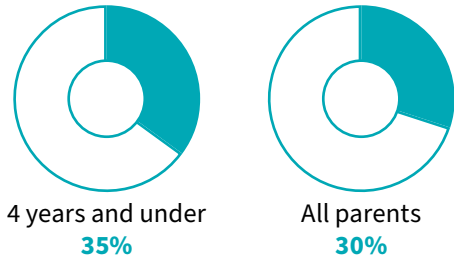
44% of parents say that the high cost of living is a cause of their isolation and loneliness, with 14% of parents reporting poverty as a factor. After financial factors, parents most often cited lack of time to see friends or for personal interests as the main cause.

Looking at the sub-set of parents with children under 5, lack of time and physical distance from family and friends were felt more acutely. 42% said lack of time with friends contributed to loneliness and isolation, and 35% said distance was a factor.

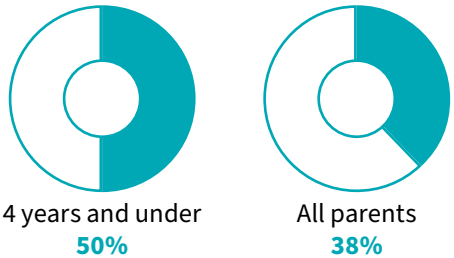
Causes of parents isolation and loneliness



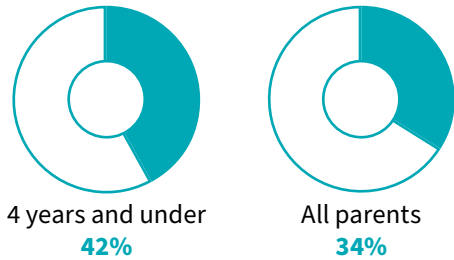
Physical distance from family and friends



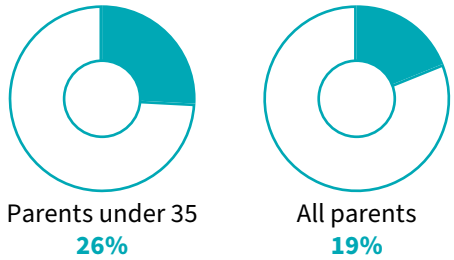
Lack of time for personal interests



Lack of time to spend with friends



Lack of Social Support



Q3. How often, if at all, do you feel like you have meaningful contact with other adults outside your household?

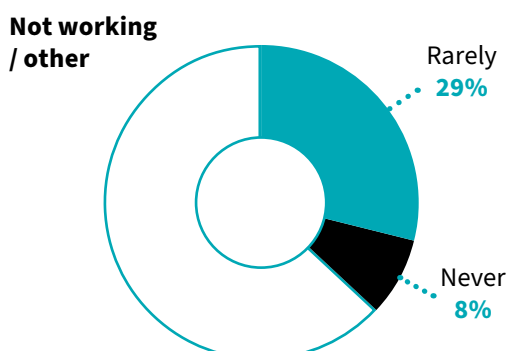
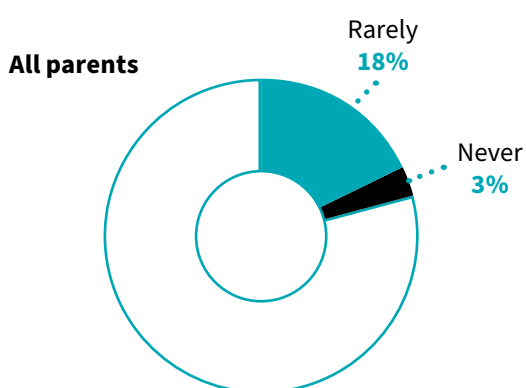


Parents of children aged under five are significantly more likely to suffer from a lack of social contact, compared to parents overall.

Only 37% of parents with children in this age group always or often have meaningful contact with another adult, compared to 41% of parents overall with more than 1-in-5 (22%) reporting they rarely or never have contact with another adult outside the home.

Parents in social grade C2DE are even more likely to lack contact with others, with a quarter (25%) saying they rarely or never have contact with another adult outside the home, and only 30% of parents with children under 5 in social grade C2DE always or often having meaningful contact with another adult, compared to 40% of parents with children under 5 in social grade ABC1.

Those parents who are not working are the most likely to say they are isolated, with 37% reporting they rarely or never have meaningful contact with another adult outside the home.

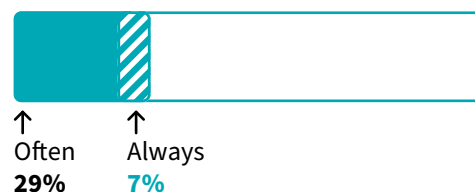


How often do you always or often have meaningful contact with someone outside of your household?

All Parents:



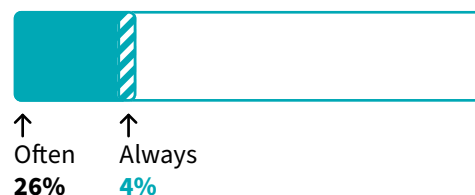
Parents with children under 5:



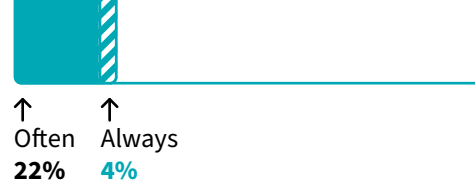
Parents with children under 5 in ABC1:



Parents with children under 5 in C2DE:



Parents not working:



“ I felt isolated. We don’t have a big local support network, most of our friends are in the military and live far away. I needed somewhere safe, where I could talk without being judged.”

Craig, Stroud

Q4. How concerned, if at all, are you about the impact that feeling lonely or isolated has on the following?



Half of parents (51%) said they are concerned that feeling lonely is affecting their mental health.

But parents are not only worried about themselves, they are concerned about how their loneliness and isolation is impacting their children.

Half of parents (49%) say they are concerned that their loneliness is impacting on their children's happiness, and 44% of parents say they are concerned that their loneliness and isolation is affecting their children's development.

“There were days we didn't go out at all. And then your mind spirals. I started catastrophising and feeling that I was failing him. I worried he wasn't getting the interaction he needed to develop. That kind of thinking feeds into anxiety and depression. It just grows and grows.”

Grace, Camden

Concerned about your mental health

All parents - 51% concerned



Young parents - 57% concerned



Not working / other - 63% concerned



Concerned about your children's development - All parents - 44%



Concerned about your relationship with your children - All parents - 37%



Concerned about your children's happiness - All parents - 49%



Q5. In general, how positive or negative do you feel about you and your children's future?



Feeling isolated or lonely has a big impact on how positive parents feel about their and their children's future.

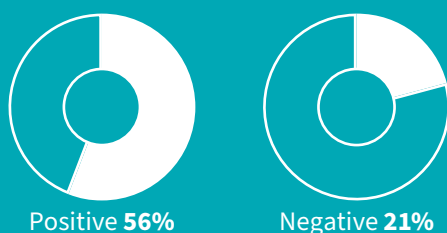
Only just over one third of parents who often feel lonely (35%) feel positive about the future, compared to more than two-thirds (68%) of parents who rarely feel lonely and only 40% of people who rarely or never have meaningful contact outside of their household feel positive about the future, compared to 68% of those who often or always have meaningful contact.

We have also seen a fall in parents saying they feel positive about the future since 2024, from 61% of parents to 56%.

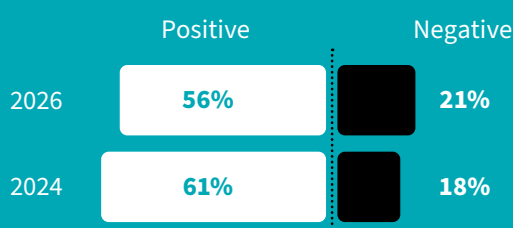
“We started small, for example, we arranged for a table to be put outside a local café because I couldn't face going inside. It started with small steps, I went into the café instead of sitting outside, we went to the park, then to a baby group together. It sounds insignificant when I say it out loud, but these things were huge to me. Kirsty helped me see myself as more than just a struggling mum. She helped me rediscover myself, when I had completely lost sight of who I was. I began taking pride in myself again.”

Heather, Cambridgeshire

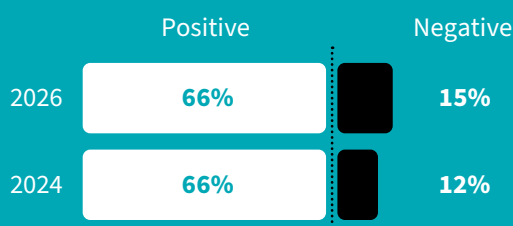
All parents



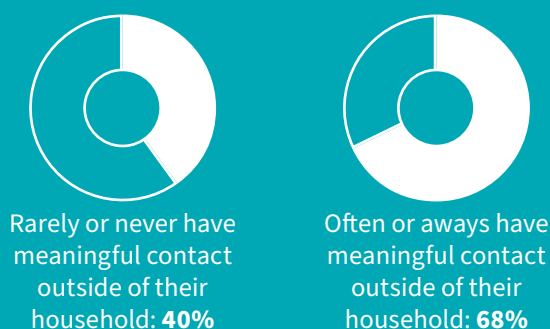
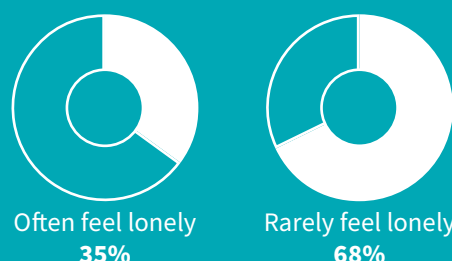
All parents



Parents with children under 5



Percentage of parents who feel positive about their and their child's future



Methodology



The survey information in this report was carried out by YouGov on behalf of Home-Start UK.

This analysis for Home-Start UK draws on a parent sub-set of an online interview administered to members of the YouGov Plc UK panel of 2.5million+ individuals. Emails are sent to panellists selected at random from the base sample, inviting them to take part in a survey through a generic survey link. Once a panel member clicks on the link they are sent to the survey that they are most required for, according to the sample definition and quotas. Invitations to surveys don't expire and respondents can be sent to any available survey. The responding sample is weighted to the profile of the sample definition to provide a representative reporting sample. The profile is normally derived from census data or, if not available from the census, from industry accepted data.

2026 survey

Total sample size was 4,434 adults of which **1027**, are parents of children aged 18 and under with 345 being parents of children under 5. Fieldwork was undertaken between 8th - 9th April 2026. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all UK adults (aged 18+).

2024 survey

The data from 2024 in Q5 was drawn from a survey with total sample size of 4270 adults of which **999**, were parents of children aged 18 and under with 341 being parents of children under 5. Fieldwork was undertaken between 31st July - 2nd August 2024. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all UK adults (aged 18+).



“ Home-Start has given me support and connection, such important things. Sometimes I also attend a Home-Start group, which is very close to my home, where I can meet other mums, children, and staff. I get to sit down, have a drink and a snack, and feel like a person again. The children play, laugh, and meet other children their age. We are making friends together.”

Grace, Norfolk

About Home-Start



Home-Start is a national federation of 167 independent local charities supporting families in communities across the UK. During 2024-25, Home-Starts supported 74,000 children in 58,000 families.

By supporting parents to **connect to networks of support, grow their skills and confidence as parents, and improve their emotional wellbeing**, we **strengthen home and family environments** and help **more children have the best start in life**.

Families invite Home-Start into their homes and lives, and we form trusted relationships so that our highly trained volunteers and expert staff can offer non-judgemental, compassionate support.



At the core of Home-Start's model is volunteer-led home-visiting service. Families struggling with isolation, parent-infant relationships, mental and physical health issues, bereavement, poverty and many other issues receive the support of a trained volunteer who spends around two hours a week in a family's home supporting them in the ways they need.

Alongside home-visiting support, Home-Starts deliver a range of other services, including community engagement, group-based support and evidence-based interventions to.

Home-Start works alongside families, offering trusted, relational and non-stigmatising support to families experiencing isolation and disadvantage. Each local Home-Start offers services tailored to the needs and geographies of their local communities, with a few delivering early education and childcare, and family hubs.

“ Before Home-Start, I felt really lost. When we arrived, we didn’t know anyone and felt very isolated. My husband works full-time and, while he’s always supportive, I needed ways to get out with my little boy. I had some friends, but everyone has their own lives. I’ll be honest, I was very lonely. What I needed was people. People I could talk to without feeling judged. A safe space. That’s what Home-Start gave me.”

Inas, Paisely



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