Working Parents: Tis' the Season for Stress and Mom Guilt?

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New research by Bright Horizons shows stress is at an all-time high and parental guilt rises when parents fall short of holiday expectations

NEWTON, Mass.--(BUSINESS WIRE)--Nov. 20, 2023-- It's no secret that stress is at its peak for parents during the holidays. With inevitably more on their plate, many are stretched thin due to increased demands from all aspects of their lives – from family, friends, work and beyond – as well as societal pressure to make picture-perfect holiday memories.

According to a survey of 500 employed U.S. parents of young children, commissioned by Bright Horizons and conducted by Opinium, among working parents who have increased stress levels during the holidays, 68% report that juggling work and child care is one of the top sources of increased stress during the holiday season.

One area where working parents increasingly need support amid the holiday season is child care, with nearly half (47%) reporting that working while their children are on break has left them needing additional help. Additionally, 34% report needing extra child care – such as back-up care or holiday camps – to help them bridge the gap due to child care disruptions this time of year.

In addition to stress, holiday guilt and the need to do it all also weighs heavily on working parents with a whopping 67% reporting that their guilt escalates when they fall short of their own or others' parenting expectations. Additionally, more than half (51%) report that guilt builds up when it comes to balancing family time with work, as well as with pressure to accomplish everything on their to-do list (53%), from decorating and shopping to attending events and cooking.

Additional findings from the study show:

- Guilt among working women parents, or "working mom guilt," is higher than men (69% vs 63%) during the holiday season, due to the pressure to do it all
- While only a little over a third (36%) of working parents report relying on child care support to complete holiday errands, nearly half (47%) report they could use more child care support to complete everything else on their holiday to-do list
- Working dads are more likely to report that they could use more support to complete everything on their holiday to-do list than working moms (53% vs. 45%)

Relatedly, earlier this year Bright Horizons' Modern Family Index found that most working parents (49%) wish their employers would do more to help lighten the child care burden. From offering to help to pay for child care (43%), providing emergency child care benefits (34%), offering on-site child care (32%), or providing an FSA for child care expenses (30%), there are many different ways working parents are looking toward their employer for support. Employers need to provide these benefits to parents not only in the holiday season but year-round to lessen the load and alleviate working parent guilt.

Opinium Methodology

The survey was administered to 500 employed U.S. adults (part-time or full-time) with children ages 0-12 years of age between October 13-17, 2023 by Opinium.

About Bright Horizons Family Solutions Inc.

Bright Horizons® is a leading global provider of high-quality early education and child care, back-up care, and workforce education services. For more than 35 years, we have partnered with employers to support workforces by providing services that help working families and employees thrive personally and professionally. Bright Horizons operates approximately 1,100 early education and child care centers in the United States, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Australia and India, and serves more than 1,400 of the world's leading employers. Bright Horizons' early education and child care centers, back-up child and elder care, and workforce education programs help employees succeed at each life and career stage. For more information, go to www.brighthorizons.com.

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