



# 'Paws and Playtime' Report



Sainsbury's Bank



## **In today's society, juggling work, family and social life is no mean feat. But what happens when you add furry friends into the mix?**

To explore the unique challenges and rewards of modern family life, Sainsbury's Bank carried out the Paws and Playtime report. It's a comprehensive survey of 1,000 parents – and 1,000 paw-rents – delving into the heart of family dynamics. The results uncover the similarities and differences between caring for two-legged – or four-legged – children.

# From parenting practices to financial furballs, this report reveals:

## The evolving landscape of parenting

How do child and dog parents differ in discipline and family needs?

## The impact of furry friends

How does owning a dog change a person's perspective on life, sense of responsibility and daily routine?

## The financial strains of family life

How much does it cost to become paw-rents? What do child parents and dog parents prioritise spending money on?

Paws and Playtime is more than a survey. Journey with us into the heart of modern family life and discover the dynamics of paw-rents vs parents.

**One thing's for sure – it's a wild ride, no matter who you're raising.**





# **Parents vs paw-rents**

# Introduction

The UK is a pet-loving nation. According to Statista, almost 60% of households owned a pet in 2023<sup>1</sup>, including 13.5 million dogs and 12.5 million cats<sup>2</sup>. We just can't get enough of their friendly licks, twitching whiskers and adorable puppy eyes.

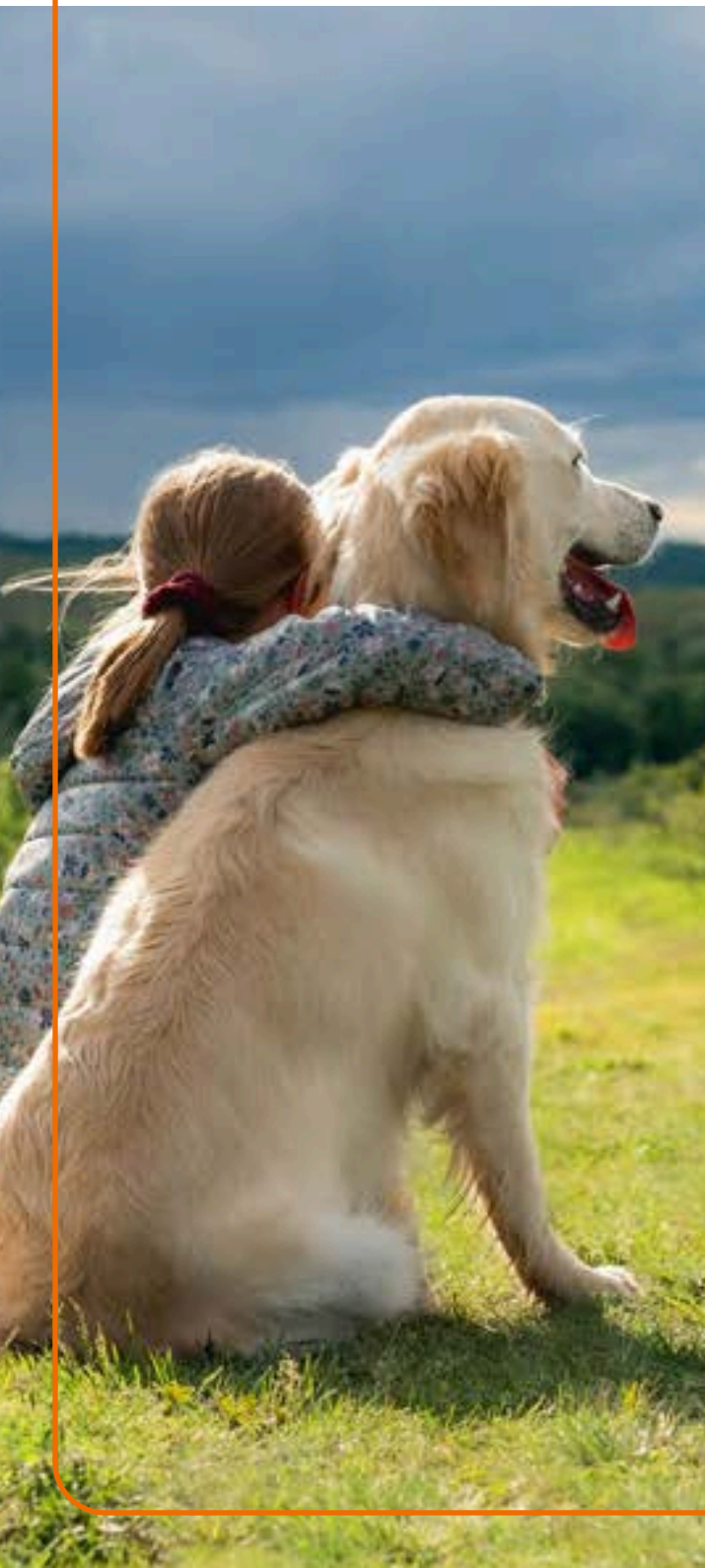
Family structures are constantly evolving, and owning pets has many overlaps with having a child. While some parents may recoil at the idea of someone referring to their pet as a baby, they can't deny that there are some similarities. Baby (or puppy) proofing the house? Yep. Finding an outlet for boundless energy? Yep. Toilet training? Yep, that's needed for both.


Our results show that pets play a very important role in family dynamics and provide a warm and fuzzy outlet for unconditional love and companionship. The bond you feel with your pet is like no other – well, except maybe between you and your child.

It goes without saying that there are some obvious differences between raising a child and owning a furry companion. But that's not to say that scientists haven't drawn connections.

Oxytocin (the love hormone) is the chemical associated with baby-parent bonding<sup>3</sup>. Findings from a 2015 study supported the existence of an interspecies oxytocin loop – between dogs and humans. It's believed that human-like forms of communication, like the mutual gaze, may have been acquired by dogs during domestication<sup>4</sup>. It's possible that the gooey feeling you get when you stare into your puppy's eyes may be similar to a parent-baby connection.

So, does that mean that having a fur baby is a good comparison to raising a child? Let's dive into the similarities and comparisons between raising a child and a puppy.





# Parenting styles

## Parenting practices

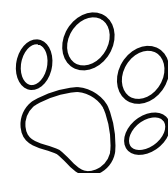
Our Paws and Playtime survey revealed that gentle parenting is the most common approach – for both parents and paw-rents. Nearly one third of child parents (34%) and dog parents (31%) choose to parent with empathy, understanding and responsiveness. After all, who can say no to puppy eyes?



Another popular parenting style among both groups is permissive parenting – 15% of puppy parents and 12% of child parents selected this style. Permissive parenting is characterised by setting a few rules but prioritising being a friend to their child or puppy<sup>5</sup>. This is a typically warm and nurturing parenting style, allowing them to navigate situations with a bit more independence.



**Sit. Stay. Paw.**



Only 14% of paw-rents chose authoritative parenting compared to 23% of parents, balancing high expectations with clear communication and warmth. This suggests that parents implement stricter boundaries than paw-rents and find it easier to discipline their children. This could be due to easier communication with a child than a puppy – who's wagging their tail no matter what you've just told them off for.

# Parenting priorities

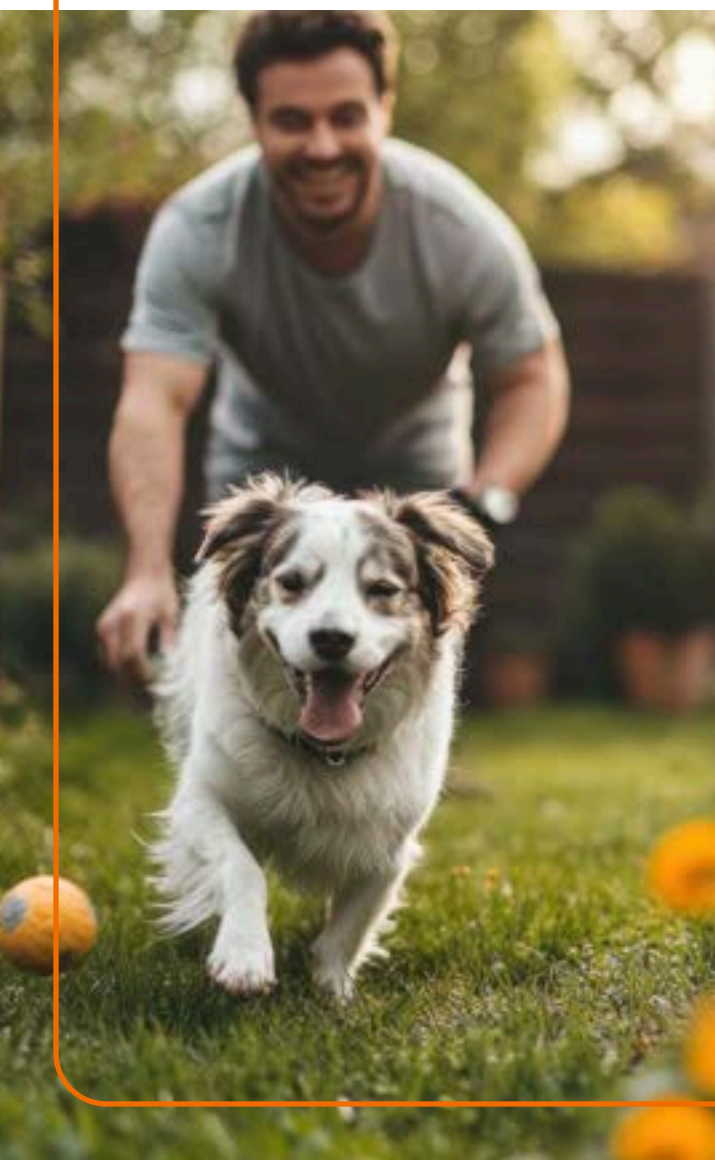
Our Paws and Playtime report identified that both parents and paw-rents prioritise the same top four areas when caring for their child or pup:

## 1. Health and wellbeing

Parents and paw-rents rated health and wellbeing as one of the most important considerations when raising a child or puppy. 57% of paw-rents believe that this is the most important factor, compared to 38% of parents.

Keeping your pup in tip top shape helps them to live a happy and healthy life, ensuring their tails continue wagging for many years to come. [Sainsbury's Bank Dog Insurance, provided by Pinnacle Insurance plc](#), can help you to provide the best care for your dog, covering the cost of vet bills or treatments they may need along the way.

While all dogs need the same level of basic care, each breed has unique needs and temperament. New dog paw-rents can take a look at our [breed guides](#) for specific advice, from providing for your [Poodle](#) to caring for your [Cavapoo](#).



## 2. A safe and secure environment

Everyone – human or otherwise – deserves a good home, and a safe and loving environment. Over half (53%) of paw-rents and nearly half (47%) of parents rated this as one of the most important area to focus on.

## 3. Spending time together

Almost half (47%) of human parents believe that spending quality time with their child is important, followed by 40% of paw-rents.

According to the American Kennel Club, spending time with dogs isn't just great for them<sup>6</sup> – it does wonders for your wellbeing too. Unconditional love, emotional support and constant cuddles are just some of the brilliant benefits of spending time with your pooch. Sign us up!



## 4. Building a strong bond

Around one third of paw-rents (37%) and parents (31%) feel that developing a strong bond is one of the most important areas of parenting.

Sometimes becoming a ‘man’s best friend’ takes some time – and a whole lot of paw power. The Kennel Club explains that bonding with a puppy is both fun and important<sup>7</sup>. You’ll need to be fully engaged and tuned into their needs. Introduce and reinforce a routine, and in time you’ll be able to understand their body language.



### Differences in parenting priorities: playtime vs future planning

Enjoying fun times with your furry companion is one of the best parts about being a paw-rent – and a quarter (25%) of our participants agreed. From wanders in the woods to splashing in the sea, snuggling up on the sofa or playing tug of war in the garden – sharing experiences with your pooch is priceless.

But life’s not always a walk in the park and bringing a child into the world is a big responsibility. This may be the reason why nearly a third of parents (31%) valued teaching life skills over having fun. Parents of children need to put more thought into future planning to ensure their child is equipped to handle the world around them. Preparing a fur baby for independence isn’t something a paw-rent needs to worry about.



# Survival tips for new parents and dog owners

Becoming a parent or paw-rent for the first time can be overwhelming. That's why we asked parents and paw-rents for their survival tips to help you navigate caring for your new baby (or fur baby):

## Top 10 tips for new parents:



1. Trust your instincts.
2. You know your child better than anyone else, so go with your gut.
3. Your journey is unique – don't compare yourself to others.
4. No one is born a parent – it's okay to make mistakes!
5. Children grow up fast – make sure you enjoy every moment.
6. Be patient – parenting is hard!
7. Remind yourself you're doing an amazing job.
8. Focus on quality time with your child – you're their first teacher.
9. You can't spoil a baby – cuddles and contact are important.
10. It's okay not to have all the answers – as a parent you're constantly learning too.





## Top 10 tips for new paw-rents:

1. Be patient and consistent.
2. Train your puppy early and keep it up with regular sessions.
3. Adopting a dog isn't a decision to take lightly – you must be happy to commit to the long-term responsibility.
4. Understand your **breed** and their specific needs.
5. Provide lots of love and attention.
6. Create a routine and stick to it.
7. Factor in veterinary care when planning your monthly family budget.
8. Socialise your puppy early, to help them grow up well-adjusted and confident.
9. Show leadership and set boundaries.
10. Make time to exercise them and provide mental stimulation.







# **Rewards and challenges of being a parent**

## Joys of parent and pawhood

Caring for a baby or a puppy brings joy and fulfilment and fosters a deep emotional connection. 62% of paw-rents and 58% of parents find their caring roles very rewarding, but paw-rents rate their experience slightly more favourably:

 60% of paw-rents said that their dog's unconditional love is a constant source of comfort through difficult times.

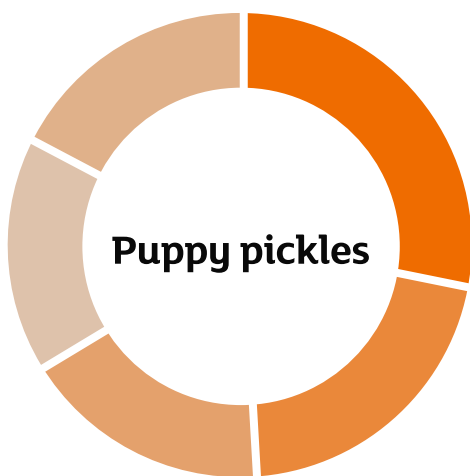


 56% of paw-rents revealed they get outside and exercise more regularly because of their furry friend.



## Challenges of parent and pawhood

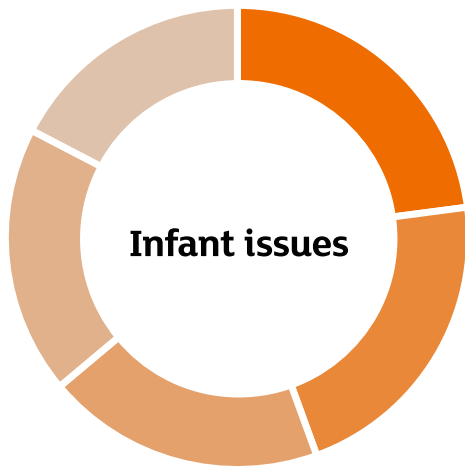
While parenthood can bring a plethora of positive experiences, it can bring some difficult times too. Our Paws and Playtime study looked at the top challenges facing paw-rents and parents:



-  Health and wellbeing (**31%**)
-  Cost of pet insurance (**23%**)
-  Nutrition and healthy eating (**19%**)
-  Cost-of-living crisis (**18%**)
-  Safety and security (**19%**)

Dog parents rank health and wellbeing as their main challenge (31%), with nutrition and healthy eating (19%) not far behind. This suggests that paw-rents aren't confident on the right foods to be feeding their dog. From tasty titbits to nutritious meals, if you're unsure on the best food for your dog, speak to your vet.





- Cost-of-living crisis (33%)
- Balancing work and parenting (31%)
- Safety and security (28%)
- Discipline and behaviour (27%)
- Technology use and screen time (25%)

Parents rated the cost-of-living crisis as their number one challenge, and one third (33%) of respondents rated it as more of a concern than balancing work (31%), safety and security (28%) and discipline and behaviour (27%).

But that's not to say that paw-rents aren't feeling the pinch too, with the cost of dog insurance revealed as the second highest worry for nearly a quarter (23%) of respondents. Although it can feel like a significant expense, [pet insurance](#) can help save you money on expensive vet bills, or medical treatments if your dog gets poorly in the future.

It seems that paw-rents are most concerned with issues relating directly to their dog, like health and financial worries. Whereas parents are also weighed down by broader societal issues and juggling responsibilities.





# **Perspective changes and social impact**

## Perspective changes and social impact

From unconditional love to appreciating the simple things in life, a lot changes when you welcome a baby or a puppy home. Let's delve into the lifestyle changes new parents and paw-rents experience when they welcome a new family member.

Becoming a parent is a lifetime of adventure, with ups and downs, rewarding and ruff times – no matter if you're raising a puppy or a baby.

Our Paws and Playtime survey discovered:

# 44%

of paw-rents now have a greater appreciation of the simple things in life.

# 63%

of parents reported a stronger sense of purpose and responsibility.

# 36%

of paw-rents reported that having a dog has made them more understanding.

### Does parenthood support or sacrifice a social life?

Puppies and children have been found to expand social networks. Both paw-rents (35%) and parents (41%) have found their offspring (furry or otherwise) to be an aid in meeting new people through related groups and events. The rumours are true – both paw-rents and parents have found their dog (42%) or child (29%) to be a conversation starter.

Almost one third (30%) of paw-rents have learned to appreciate the company of other people who love dogs, and almost a third (27%) of parents have become more aware of the importance of community and support.

Despite this, child parents are hit the hardest in terms of social changes. Almost half (49%) of parents have socialised less due to their child compared to only 29% of paw-rents.

Parents also find their social circles changed, with 43% being more selective of who they spend their time with since having a child – compared to just 16% of paw-rents. 21% of parents and 16% of paw-rents also reported going on less holidays since entering the world of parenthood.





## Mental health impacts

There's no denying that those oh so cute puppy eyes and baby smiles are an instant mood booster. But how does this differ between parents and paw-rents?

Our Paws and Playtime survey discovered that both paw-rents and parents experienced mental health benefits from parenthood.



# 34%

of paw-rents reported improvement in their mental health

# 49%

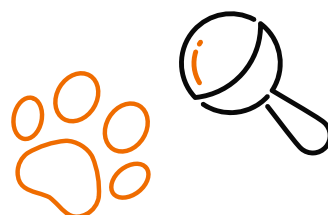
of parents reported improvement in their mental health

## Parenthood and responsibility

Having a child or adopting a puppy needs to be a well-thought-out decision. Raising another living thing is a lot of responsibility – whether they're human or canine!

We popped our noses into how our respondents' sense of responsibility changed when they took the plunge into parenthood:

- 🐾 Both parents and paw-rents have learnt to prioritise their child or dog's needs over their own. 61% of parents adapted to put their child's needs first, as have 45% of puppy paw-rents.
- 🐾 Both paw-rents (45%) and parents (55%) reported that parenthood has made them more accountable and responsible for another living being.



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# **Work and family life**

## Work and family life

There's no denying that being a parent is time-consuming. From preparing, planning and thinking about your new arrival to caring for them when they're home, there's a lot to adjust and consider when expanding your family.

Your new puppy may have stolen your heart, but how much extra time do they take up each week?

Paws and Playtime caught up with parents and paw-rents to see how they're navigating life in their new pack:



# 10 hours

roughly spent on activities just for their child or dog.

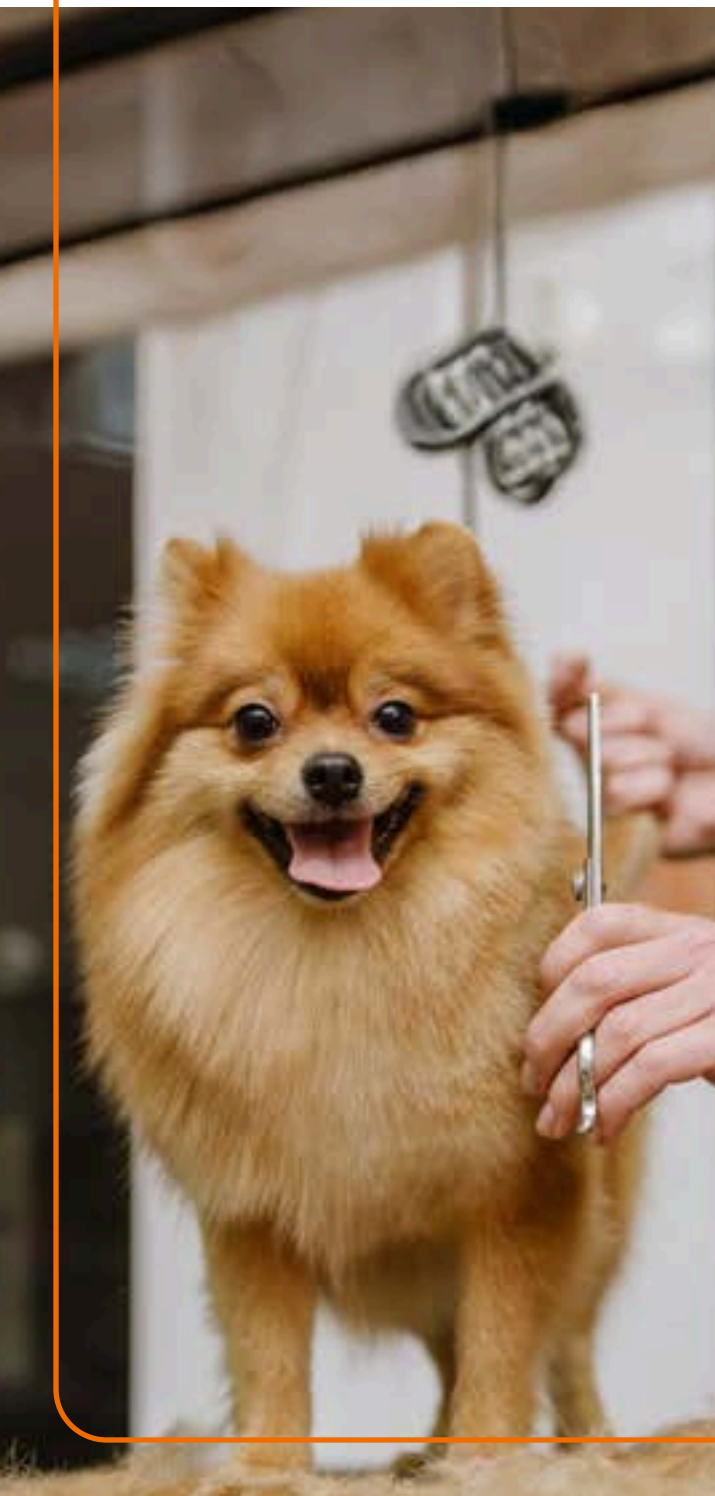
For parents this could be homework, playdates or extracurricular activities. Or for puppy parents think grooming, playtime, walks or vet visits.

The importance of a work life balance is apparent to both sets of parents.

31% of paw rents and 44% of child parents are conscious of



upholding a work-life balance since becoming parents. 23% of pet parents and 31% of child parents recognised that they had to become more disciplined in managing their time now they've taken on care-giving roles.

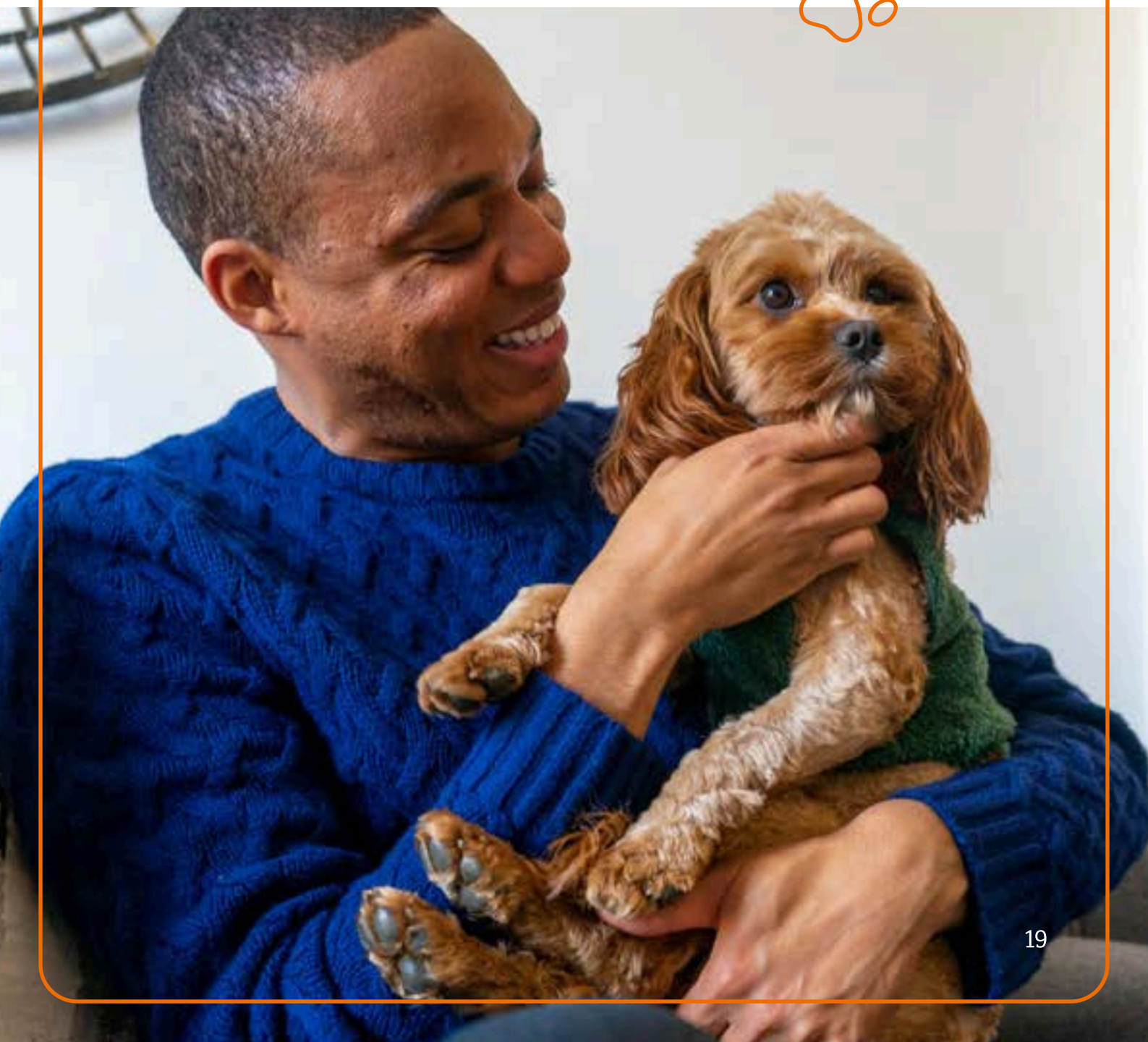


## Juggling childcare concerns, pet playtime and work worries



16% of dog owners have had to adjust their working patterns to be there to look after their precious pooch, with 13% opting to work from home more regularly to avoid leaving their dog alone for extended periods of time.

However, adjusting working patterns was much more common for parents. Over one third of parents (39%) have changed their work schedule to accommodate their child's needs, and 29% have sought help from family or childcare services to share the load.





# **Money matters**

# Money matters

The cost-of-living crisis has everyone in a pinch. Having an extra mouth to feed can make a big difference to your budget – and cause a lot of unexpected expenses.

Dog care costs are nothing to wag your tail about. From nutrition and diet to toys and enrichment, there's lots to think about. That's before you even take into account doggy day care for your [Dalmatian](#) or a pet sitter costs for your [Shih Tzu](#).



## Unexpected financial expenses for both dog and child parents:

Paw-rents	Parents
1 Medical bills (37%)	1 Essentials (food, clothing and etc) (51%)
2 Insurance cost (29%)	2 Costs for extracurricular activities (43%)
3 Essentials (food, toys and etc) (21%)	3 Increased childcare costs (39%)
4 Dog-care costs (21%)	4 Costs for parties or special events (38%)
5 Payment for dental work (13%)	5 "Child-proofing" costs (17%)





## Care costs – for both children and puppies

Whether you're organising a child-minder for your kid or doggy day care for your Doberman, there are costs to consider. According to Statista, depending on where in the UK you live, it can cost between £250.44 and £428.26 for a full week of nursery school for a child under two<sup>8</sup>. In comparison, the Blue Cross reveals that doggy day care can cost between £20 and £45 for up to nine hours a day<sup>9</sup>. Prices can vary, and costs in London could be significantly higher.

We asked our survey respondents to tally up their weekly child or puppy expenses:

Over half (59%) of paw-rents spend less than £100 on their pooch per week.

A third (33%) of parents spend an average £100-200 weekly on their child. However, some respondents were parents of school-age children, meaning their childcare costs will likely be a lot less than those paying for regular daycare services.

### Average weekly spend for both paw-rents and parents:



**£157**  
for paw-rents



**£171**  
for parents

Parents of children were more likely to keep tabs on their spending, with only 9% of respondents answering “not sure” when asked how much they spend, compared to 15% of dog parents.



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# **Preparing for paw-rent and parenthood**



## Preparing for paw-rent and parenthood

As we've discovered, it's not always walkies and tail-wags (although a lot of the time it is). It's still a huge responsibility to welcome another family member – whether that's your first-born child or your puppy.

Our Paws and Playtime respondents shared how they prepared for expanding their pack:

Both sets of parents did some planning before welcoming their new child or puppy, but child parents tend to do more in terms of research and buying. 61% of child parents purchased essential supplies and over a third prepared by reading about caring for children (36%) or researched about having children (35%).

In comparison, just under half (45%) of puppy paw-rents purchased essential supplies and 37% prepared their home to be dog friendly. Paw-rents prioritised creating an area in the home for their pup to feel comfortable (35%) over researching the best dog breed for their lifestyle preferences (31%). Take a look at our [preparing for a puppy guide](#) for more help getting your home ready for your new best friend.



### Summary

Bringing up a life is a wonderfully wild ride – no matter who you're raising. Caring for children and puppies brings so much tail-wagging joy. Parenthood can leave you barking mad, but it also opens your heart to unconditional love, purpose and a newfound sense of responsibility.

Our Paws and Playtime survey has revealed that the roles of parents and paw-rents certainly share similarities. Both types of parents experience similar levels of emotional reward, social impact and time restraints, showing the substantial dedication required to look after a child and puppy is comparable.

But parenting a child typically involves higher financial costs, a broader scale of work-life balance concerns and a greater sense of responsibility compared to owning a dog. While a parent's goal is to make sure a child grows into an independent adult, a dog will always be man's best friend.

# References

- 1 <https://www.statista.com/statistics/308235/estimated-pet-ownership-in-the-united-kingdom-uk/>
- 2 <https://www.statista.com/statistics/308201/leading-ten-pets-ranked-by-population-size-in-the-united-kingdom/>
- 3 <https://www.kinship.co.uk/dog-lifestyle/oxytocin-chemistry-between-people-and-dogs-real>
- 4 <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/25883356/>
- 5 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK568743/#:~:text=Permissive%20Parenting,children%20to%20navigate%20situations%20independently.>
- 6 <https://www.akc.org/expert-advice/lifestyle/10-science-based-benefits-dog/#>
- 7 <https://www.akc.org/expert-advice/puppy-information/bond-with-puppy/>
- 8 <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1275908/cost-of-full-time-nursery-childcare-britain-by-region/>
- 9 <https://www.bluecross.org.uk/advice/dog/wellbeing-and-care/doggy-day-care#:~:text=How%20much%20is%20doggy%20day,London%20usually%20being%20more%20expensive>