

WE, THE FAMILY

How Gen Z is Rewriting The Rules of Parenting

TOP 11 INSIGHTS

VIRTUE **VICE** media
group

Introducing Gen Z Parenthood

YES. GEN Z ARE PARENTS.

If you're thinking to yourself 'Gen Z *are* kids, how do they *have* kids?', then you'll no doubt be surprised to learn that nearly 1 in 5 of US women who've given birth in the last year are under the age of 25. While older Millennials are rounding their 40's and planning their last pregnancies, Gen Z are having their firsts. It's a bit of a mind-f*ck, but it's happening: in just a couple years, nearly half of all new parents will be Gen Zers. And with this realization began our deep dive into the world of Gen Z parents, culminating in this first-of-its-kind global study on the future of parenting.



In Gen Z's world, kids are not a badge to unlock or a ball to juggle. For the new generation, parenthood is their #1 source of meaning, purpose and motivation. It's their "we" mindset — a hallmark of their generation — manifesting in a more personal sphere. And this uncanny sense of shared responsibility impacts all aspects of their lives, from identity to values to aspirations.

So say goodbye smash cakes and gender reveal parties. To #sharenting, sleep training books, and 'mommy juice'. To pastels and neutrals and parental perfection. And to those little baby earmuffs for concerts. Gen Z Parenthood is here, and the world of parenting will never look the same for any of us.

HOW WE APPROACHED THIS RESEARCH



We conducted a robust three-part research study. The research, conducted in June through December 2020, focused on Gen Z parents, defined as 20-24 years-old.

Phase 1: Mobile Ethnographies

We met Gen Z parents "face-to-face" virtually. Over the course of one week, we engaged a diverse group of 45 Gen Z parents in the United States through a series of mobile diaries and tasks. This approach allowed us to interact with Gen Z parents in their own environment and understand who they are as parents day to day, bringing to life their attitudes, preferences and lifestyles.

Phase 2: In-Depth Interviews

To dive deeper into the learnings from our initial phase, we followed up with 20 select participants and conducted 1-hour in-depth interviews with each of them. This allowed us to probe and investigate key areas that surfaced in the previous phase, leading to a rich and detailed conversation.

Phase 3: Online Survey

We conducted a global online survey to validate and quantify the trends and tensions identified in Phases 1 and 2. This survey was conducted among 7,518 young parents, including Gen Z parents and a sample of Gen Y parents to identify generational shifts in attitudes and behaviors.

WE, THE FAMILY

A comprehensive report on Gen Z Parenthood in 6 chapters

THE “WE” MINDSET
Self-perception & identity

DETERMINED TO BE DIFFERENT
Approach to parenting

COOPARENTING
Connection & Community

INTUITION-APPROVED
Trust & Decisions

MANY PATHS TO FREEDOM
Education & Career

THE JUDGEMENT-FREE ZONE
Bias & Assumptions

What you'll see today

TOP 11 INSIGHTS FROM THE “WE, THE FAMILY” REPORT

- I. Parenthood is a complement not a compromise to their identities
- II. Embracing the unexpected
- III. Their parents are “reverse” role models
- IV. Preparing, not pampering or punishing
- V. Evolving tradition
- VI. The family cooperative
- VII. Guided by an internal compass
- VIII. Children are the tailwinds of success
- IX. Education is options, not credentials
- X. Career is purpose, not passion
- XI. Tuning out the noise

1.

Parenthood is a compliment - not a compromise - to their identity

Gen Z views parenthood as a new layer of identity, one that enhances their existing personality and is additive to their former lives. They try to integrate their children into everything they do.

Unlike Millennials of the so-called “Me” generation, Gen Z from around the world have championed collective prosperity over individual success. They have a sense of shared responsibility, which informs much of their decision making. For Gen Z parents, this “we” mindset carries over into family life and dynamics, informing their dreams, their worries, even their own hobbies. Their kids do not impede their lives, they find ways to involve them in their daily duties and routines.

“

[My baby] is my pride and joy and everything. I feel like that's become a big part of my identity, being her mom. I don't feel like I lost any part of my identity, all my good traits and who I am has been enhanced by the lessons and responsibilities that I've had to learn by being a mom to this cute little baby."

- Female, 21, US

73%

say that becoming a parent enhances who you already are as a person

Only

35%

say you lose part of your personal identity when you become a parent

2.

Embracing the unexpected

Most Gen Z pregnancies today were unplanned. While a majority of Gen Z (78%) planned to become parents some point in their lives, only 40% were actively trying to get pregnant. However unplanned many of those pregnancies might be, they embrace this unexpected turn and choose to see its advantages, rather than any disadvantages.

For Gen Z, the top benefits of being a younger parent are child first — all revolving around the ability to be a better parent to their child — rather than how it may impact the plans they have for their own lives. It's not about the personal benefits for themselves.

“

The way I express myself is all centered around children, my kids, the things I would do for them. If I didn't have my kids, I don't know who I would be in a sense anymore. I can't really see myself before I had kids.”

- Male, 23, US



BENEFITS OF BEING A YOUNG PARENT

Child First

1

More energy to engage with them

2

Better relate to children

3

Be alive to experiences a greater portion of child's life

Parent First

4

Parents still around to help take care of children

5

Still in your prime when children leave home

6

Focus on career path with pregnancy out of the way early

3.

Their parents are “reverse” role models

Gen Z parents are determined to learn from the experiences of their own childhoods in order to cultivate a different relationship with their own children.

While they have great respect for their parents’ grit and efforts, fewer than half of Gen Z parents (47%) named their own parents as the number one parenting style they emulate. Rather, their parents seem to model behaviors they now know to avoid, inadvertently guiding them on “what not to do”.

8 in 10

Have a different approach to parenting compared to their own parent(s)

“

If I had to pick [a role model], I guess my mom. She’s made many mistakes but she does try. She is a big reason why I’m always affectionate and show love to my daughter because she never really did that.”

- Female, 24, US

“

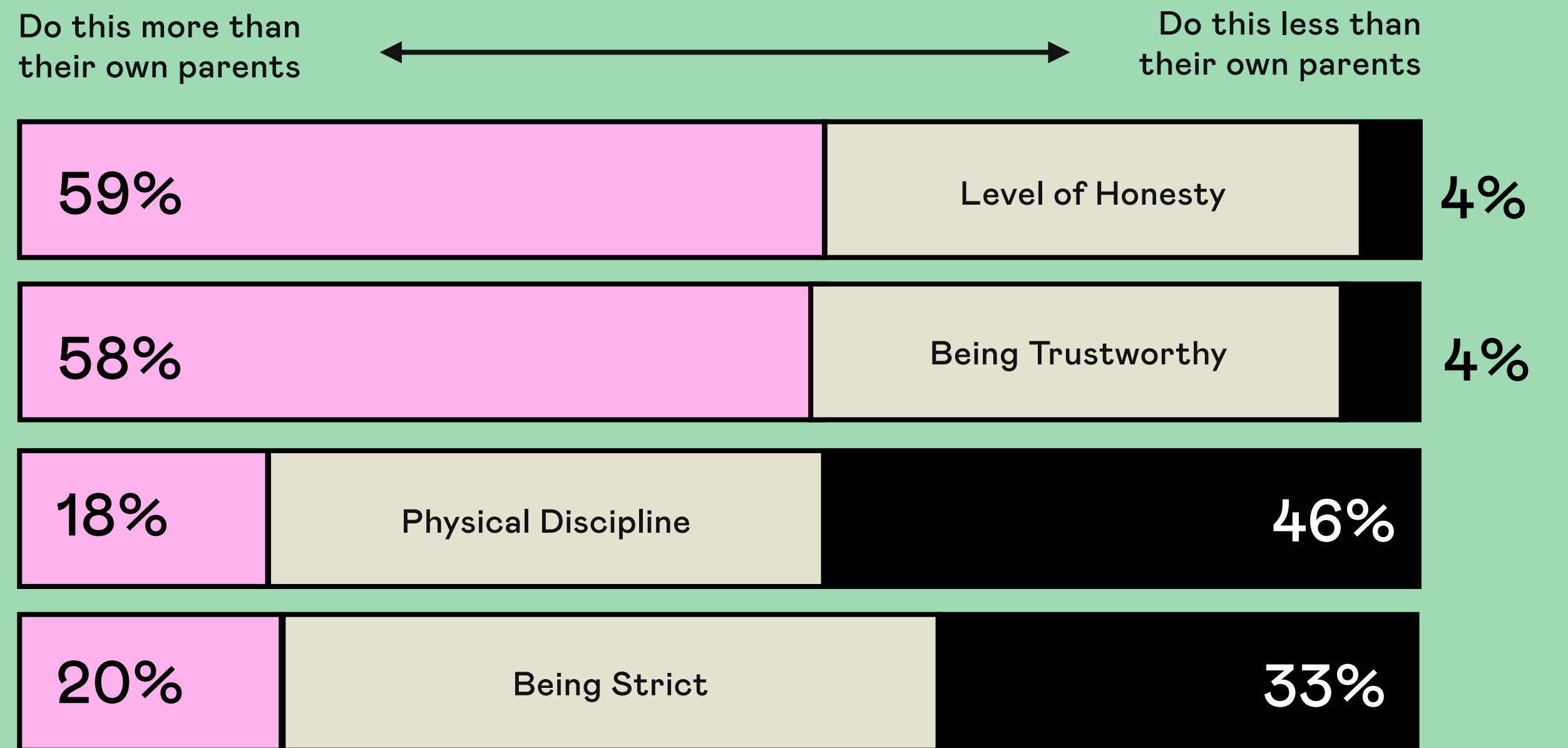
I honestly had a tough upbringing as a child. Everything I do is from the heart and is based off of how people, who I considered loved ones, have treated me in the past. I am my only role model when it comes to parenting because I know that my child deserves everything I never received.”

- Male, 23, US

4. Preparing, not pampering or punishing

Like every parent, Gen Z parents worry about the best way to equip their kids for an uncertain future. They don't want to shelter their kids from the tough realities of the world, they want to help them be ready for it. And that means moving away from coddling and intimidation strategies, and instead carefully tailoring how they deliver their messages based on what they know their child is able to handle.

Gen Z parents want to use less physical discipline and be less strict than their parents were with them. This generation overwhelmingly agrees that trust is the strategy that is most effective in protecting their kids from the perils of the outside world, rather than discipline.



ff

I talk to him like a little adult. My parents made me feel like I had no control in my life. They never asked me or talked to me about anything, and so I talk to him all the time about everything. Telling him why we can't do stuff. I want him to feel secure in any decision he makes and be able to think about things."

- Female, 24, US

76%

Say trust (vs. discipline) is the most effective parenting strategy to protect their children from the perils of the outside world

5.

Evolving Tradition

Globally, about 1 in 4 Gen Z parents were raised in single parent households. Experiencing this family formation firsthand allows them more freedom to refuse to settle for a relationship if it doesn't work for them or their kids. Less than half of Gen Z parents today are married.

Those with partners buck the traditional gender roles of family. Instead, this generation takes on family responsibilities in a deliberately equitable way, based on what makes the most sense for them.



Only

1 in 3

believe it's a mother's responsibility to handle most household and parenting duties

1 in 2

Of those with partners split career and household responsibilities evenly between each other.

“ I'm currently not pursuing anyone or dating because it doesn't interest me. I got out of a two year relationship a couple months ago and I found that I excel in life when I don't have romantic distractions.”

- Female, 20, US

“ I'd like to see a more open-minded father. I'm a more vulnerable dad [...] I can talk like this with anybody. I don't mind being vulnerable. I don't mind telling people what I really think and how I feel. I don't think it's wrong.”

- Male, 23, US

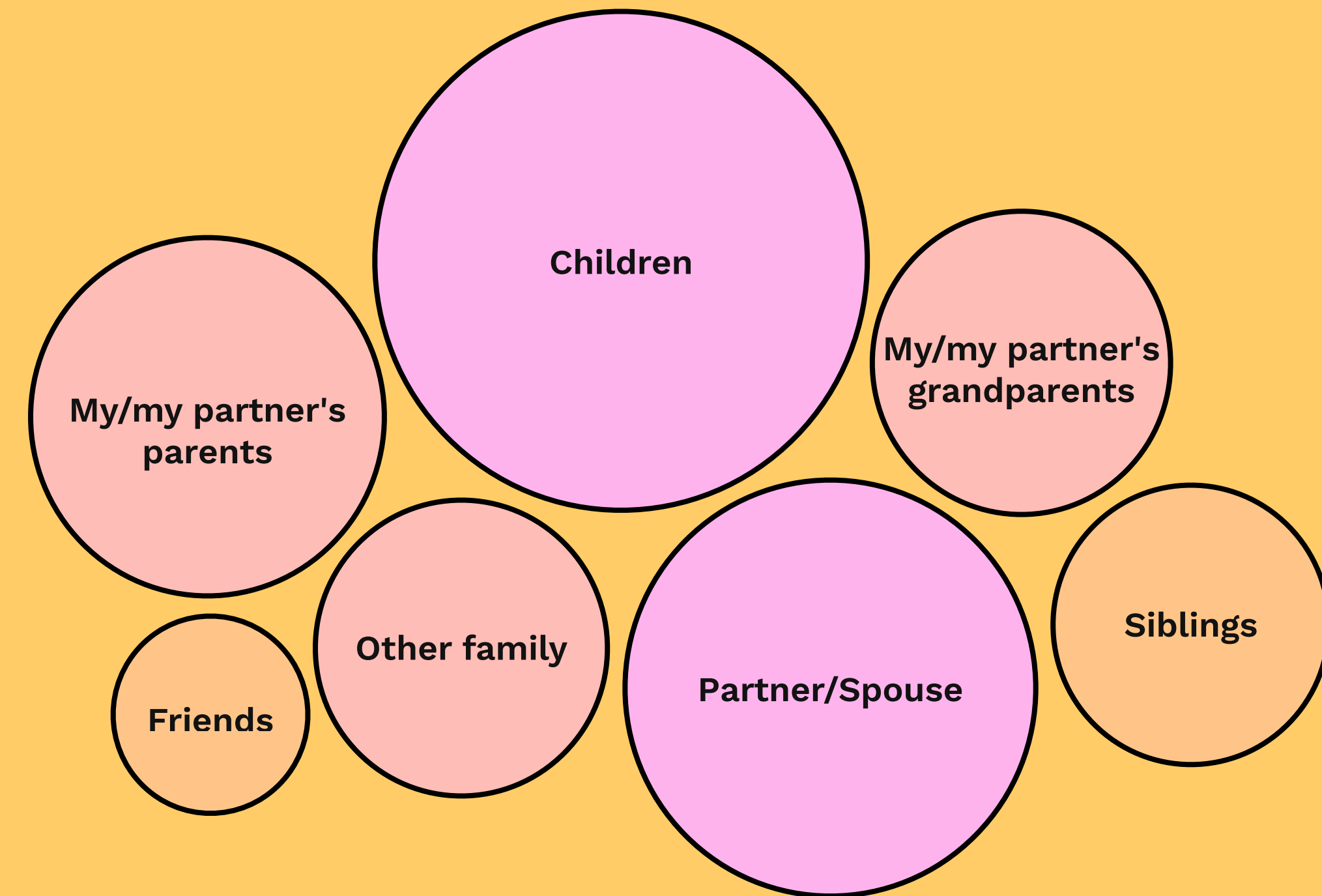
GEN Z HOUSEHOLD MAKEUP

Light pink denotes significant increase from Gen Y households.

6.

The family cooperative

Gen Z parents are more likely to live with other family members than Gen Y parents. Though this might in part be due to their young age and the extra support they might need, being raised themselves by single parents or other family members may well have carved the path to forming less “cookie-cutter” family configurations as adults. They are so invested in a family support network that they are willing to uproot and relocate to wherever their families live.



“

We ended up **struggling** for a little bit in the first few months. Having to ask everybody around us for **more help than** I was comfortable asking for. Which is why I ended up moving from the city of Chicago to Charleston with my sister. They’ve been helping me set up a foundation for myself.

- Male, 23, US

7.

Guided by their internal compass

Gen Z parents are more attune to trusting their own instincts when it comes to the actions they take that influence their children's growth and development. Ultimately, they do what they think is best based on what feels right for their own children's individual circumstances, even if that conflicts with advice from their family or doctor.

Gen Z have long been trained to look critically across all different types sources when it comes to filtering through news and media content, and they're bringing this same approach to parenting resources they trust. Even though their internal compass is strong, they don't rely on a singular source of information when it comes to advice on raising their kids. They take it all in, mixing more traditional sources of knowledge with newer ones.



#1

influence over parenting decisions is 'whatever feels right for my children'

ff

You just stand your ground and stick to your gut. I understand everyone's got different parenting styles but the way some people try to implement their styles on how we raise our kids, it's just not compatible. We really just stick to what we know and what we're confident with."

- Male, 22, US

8.

Children are the tailwind of success

Unlike prevailing Millennial attitudes, Gen Z parents do not see parenthood as a *hindrance* to their life goals. Having kids may alter some of their plans when it comes to their education and careers, but their conception of success is fundamentally a shared one — a measure of how happy and free their family is, rather than a measure of their own individual achievements.

In fact, Gen Z often view parenthood as a tailwind of success, because succeeding for their families is an even greater motivator than succeeding for themselves. Since they do not see parenthood as an obstacle to their life pursuits, they are more flexible with their timelines and less linear about their trajectories.

67%

say that being a parent won't stop them from doing all the things they want in life

“

If I went [to college] now, which is what I'm doing, I have a wife and a kid. I have people who are counting on me. People who I'm doing it for. I have a real ambition and a drive. I'm going to get the maximum amount of potential out of college. You don't realize that when you're 18.”

- Male, 22, US

2 in 5



Had to put their education on hold when they became a parent



2 in 3



Of those parents plan to go back and finish their degree

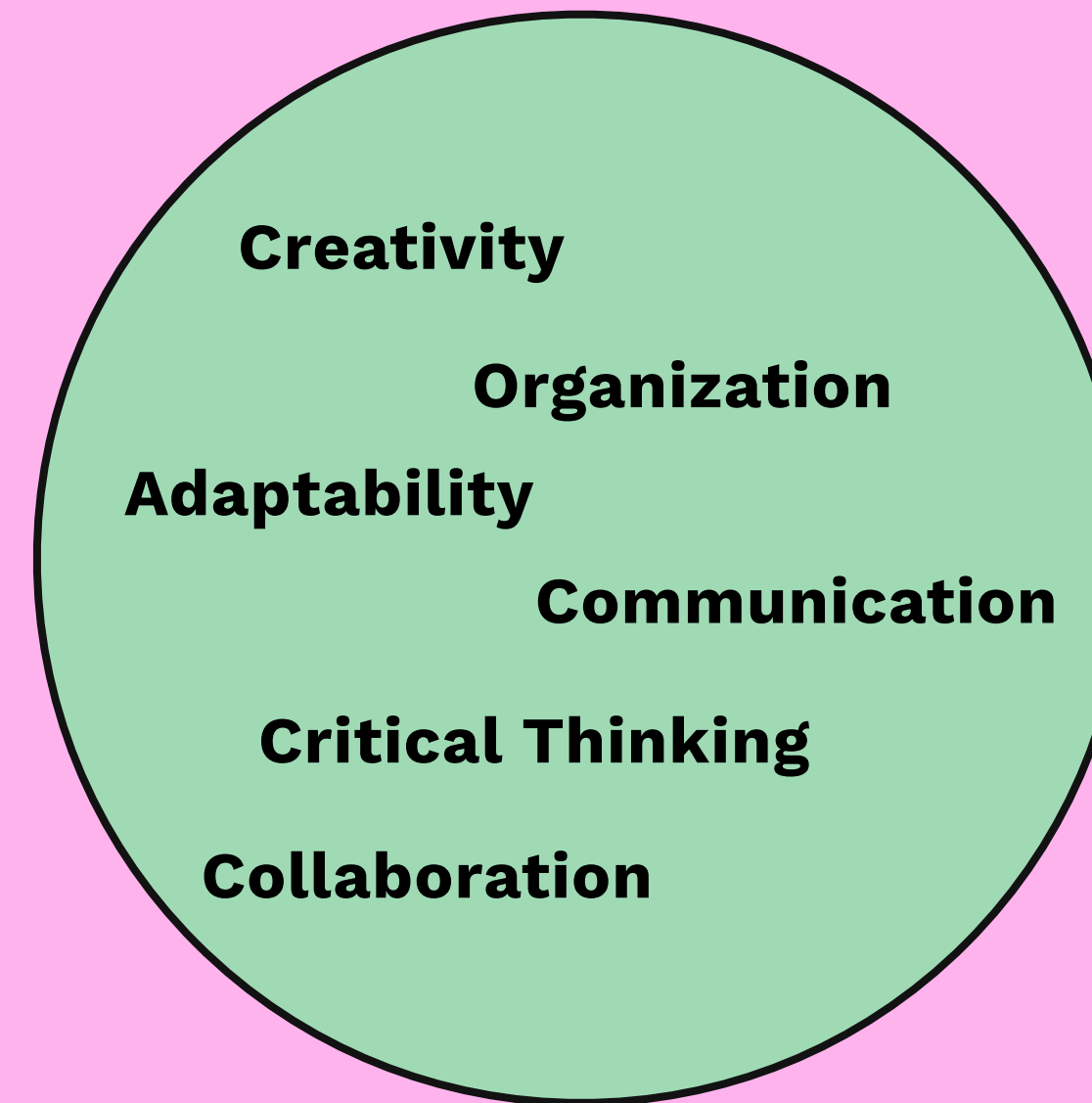
SKILLS MOST IMPORTANT FOR SUCCESS IN LIFE

9.

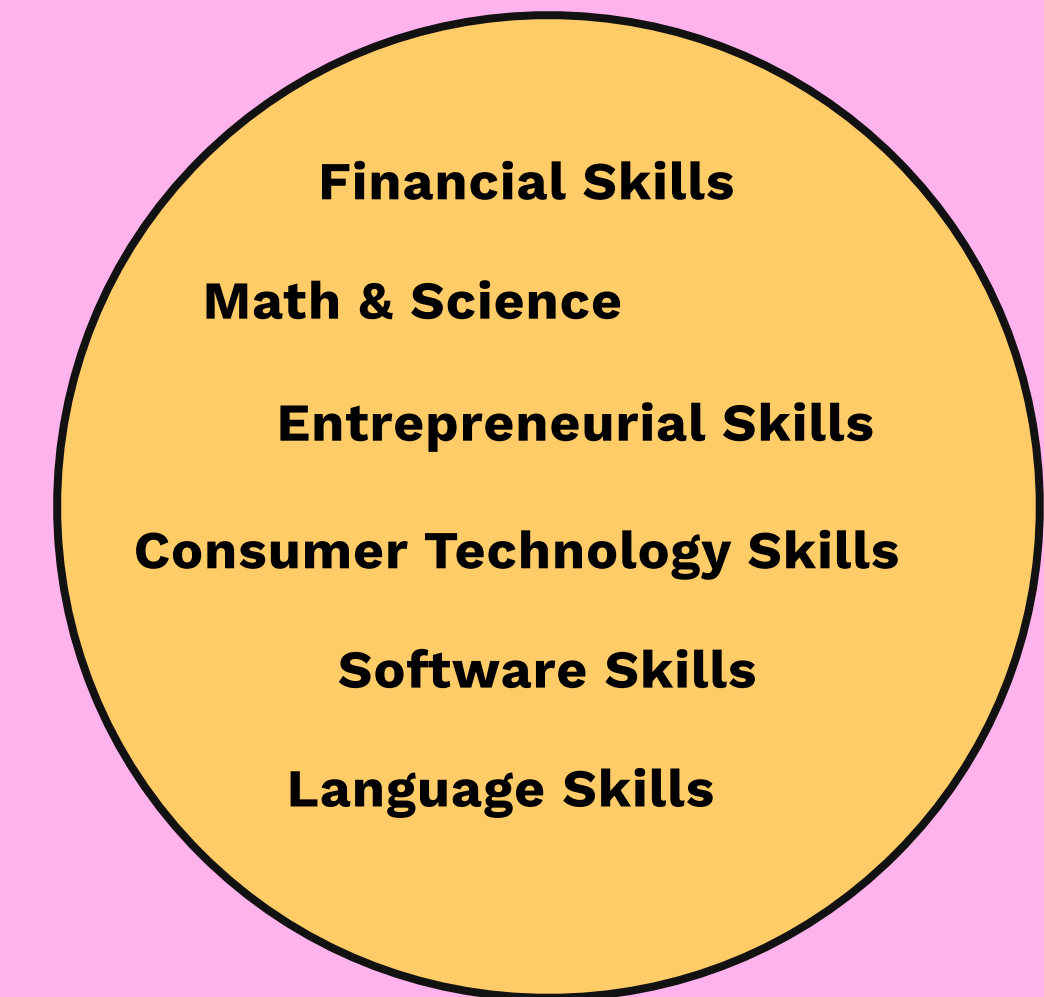
Education is about options, not credentials

Gen Z parents place great value on education, seeing it as an in-road to more career opportunities and ultimately greater family security and stability. But they also believe that a good education is all about getting the knowledge and qualifications necessary to to accomplish their goals, which can be achieved without the badges and accreditations of a traditional college education.

They see how quickly the work landscape is changing, and understand that flexibility will allow them to change along with it. They're looking to develop the kinds of skills that will be useful across a wider range of professions. "Soft" skills— like creativity and communication — can be learned through life experience and are more transferable than the "hard" skills traditionally taught in schools like math and science, technology and finance.



Soft Skills



Hard Skills

74%

say a good education can come from places besides college (vocational school, apprenticeships, online videos, etc.)

“

Learning is also lifelong and you learn every single day and every instance even if it's not in a classroom. I thought a good education was obtaining a bachelor's degree from UCLA or whatever. But now I'm like however you get it, you're going to get it.”

- Female, 24, US

10.

Career is about purpose not passion

Gen Z parents are planning their careers around their families rather than their personal aspirations. Their job is only as important as it is valuable to their families, and it's in that value that they find fulfillment and meaning.

Many Gen Z parents wonder if the living they earn outweighs the benefits of being with their kids at home. For those parents, work can be a source of guilt as well as a source of meaning. Though they may not always realize it in the moment, work can offer parents an unanticipated benefit: a moment of respite from the day-to-day responsibilities of parenthood.

Work is an important part of my identity

57%

Global Gen Z Parents

68%

Global Gen Y Parents

FF

I was looking forward to being able to provide more. It's this feeling of gratification when you finish a long paper, or you do a hard job. You pat yourself on the back. It was that feeling of providing as a father. I'm a working dad now. I have a job, I come home, I see my family. I was excited to get into that motion."

- Male, 24 US

1 in 2

Feel guilty leaving my child(ren) to go to work

11.

Tuning out the noise

Gen Z parents are aware of how they're being misperceived by older generations. But they also know those older generations are aging out of the parenting conversation. So try not to take any judgement personally. At the end of the day, they'd rather focus their energies on their kids than worry about what other people think.

No matter what anyone says, they know how much thought and consideration they've put into their day-to-day parenting, and they trust their instincts to make the best choices for their families. They're proud of their efforts, even when their intentions are misunderstood.

55%

say it doesn't affect them when other people judge their parenting style

6 in 10

View their parenting behaviors as common

“

Something people assume about me is that I give up too easily on anything I try to take on. I wish they knew how hard I try to become a better person and learn everything that life has to offer. I spend countless hours reading websites in order to inform myself about all kind of things that are going on in life whether it is parenthood or just being a successful adult.”

- Male, 22, US

We, The Family

Implications For the future

Younger
parents

How can we make “youth”
environments like education
more child-friendly?

Enabling shared
experiences

How can we create experiences
that both children and parents
find value in?

Bucking
societal norms

How can we help normalize
non-traditional family
configurations and roles?

Rise of the
unlikely
influencer

Which new voices will be most
relevant to parents for whom
knowledge is credibility?

A new picture
of success

How can we replace success
narratives about excellence
with ones about freedom?

Focus on
soft skills

How can we help develop and
reward soft skills when it comes
to education?

Career
fluidity

How can we accommodate
and encourage less linear
career paths?

Beyond Millennial
perfection

How can we move beyond
misleading representations of
parenthood?

Access not
judgement

How can we shift the focus away
from parenting “shame” and towards
better support structures?

THANK YOU

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