

The National Benchmark of U.S. Mothers

Wave 1 core instrument

Wave	Wave 1
Field period	Survey open May 7, 2026. Survey close May 27, 2026.
Mode	Online, self-administered
Version	Wave 1 fielded version. Fixed core locked prior to fielding.
Screen	Mothers and primary female caregivers of at least one child under 21 living in the household, as screened at item S1.
Methodology	Sample sourcing, weighting, index construction, panel integrity protocols, and margin of error are documented at countonmothers.org/methodology .

About this document

This document publishes the questions asked in Wave 1 of the National Benchmark of U.S. Mothers. Question wording is reproduced verbatim. Every response option that was fielded is reproduced, including options that recorded no selections, because the answer space a respondent could see shapes the distribution. Routing, response scales, randomization, and on-screen instructions are noted at the items they apply to.

We publish the instrument because a finding is only as defensible as the question behind it. Anyone citing the Benchmark should be able to see exactly what mothers were asked.

The fixed core is Q1 through Q43 plus the open response item Q46, totalling 44 questions held constant wave over wave. Q44 and Q45 are the Wave 1 rotating module. Rotating module items change from wave to wave and are published with the wave in which they were fielded.

Sub-item randomization. Sub-item order was randomized independently for each respondent, in both arms, on the trust grids Q17, Q18, and Q19 and on the concern grids Q25 and Q26. Grids whose rows are ordinal, meaning the age-band grids S2, S3, and Q24, were presented in fixed ascending order. Response scale points were never randomized. Where randomization applied, the sub-item order printed here is the canonical reference order used in analysis and reporting, not the order any single respondent saw.

Sample sourcing, weighting, precision, and index scores are documented on the methodology page and in the Wave 1 report. This document covers the instrument.

Section A. Introduction and consent

The following text was presented to respondents before the survey began. It is reproduced verbatim.

Welcome

You’re taking part in the National Benchmark of U.S. Mothers — the first semiannual, nationally representative research tracking what mothers across the country are experiencing, and how the systems that affect families

are performing.

This research is produced by Count on Mothers, an independent research organization that studies the experiences of mothers across the United States.

The survey takes about 12 minutes. Most questions are multiple choice. You'll also have the opportunity to share freely in your own words — your voice becomes part of the record we keep on what's happening for mothers right now.

Thank you for taking part.

Before you begin

Your participation is voluntary. You may stop at any time without penalty. No relationship with Count on Mothers is contingent on completing the survey.

Your responses are confidential. All findings are reported in aggregate. Individual responses are never published or shared with third parties in identifiable form.

Your data is protected. Personally identifiable data is accessed only by Count on Mothers research team members and is stored on secured systems with restricted access.

Questions? You can reach us at research@countonmothers.org.

By clicking Next, you confirm that you are 18 or older, that you have read the above, and that you agree to participate in this research.

Section B. Screening and household composition

Items in this section were required. A respondent answering No to S1 was screened out of the survey.

S1 | Single select, required, screening item

Are you currently the mother or primary female caregiver of at least one child under 21 living in your household?

- Yes
- No

S2 | Grid

Please indicate if you have a child in the age ranges below, by gender. If you have a female child and a male child in the same age range, please select "Female and Male" column for that age range. Leave blank if none.

	Female	Male	Female and Male
0-3			
4-7			
8-12			
13-15			
16-17			
18-21			

Required.

S3 | Grid

What type of school does your child(ren) primarily attend (by age range)?

	Traditional public school	Private school (non-religious)	Private religious or parochial school	Public charter school	Homeschool	Other
0-3						
4-7						
8-12						
13-15						
16-17						
18-21						

Required.

Section C. Core instrument

Questions are numbered and presented in the order respondents saw them within this section. Response scale points are listed in the order shown. Grid sub-items are listed in canonical reference order and were randomized where noted at the item. Slider items recorded a continuous value between the two endpoints given.

Routing. Q8 was asked only of respondents answering Yes to Q7. Q37 was asked only of respondents answering Yes to Q36. Every other item in this section was shown to all respondents who reached it.

The following note appeared on screen at the start of this section and applied to every subsequent question about children.

A note on questions about your children. Some questions ask about a specific child rather than your children as a group. Unless a question says otherwise, please answer about your oldest child living at home. If a question specifies a different child, answer about that child instead.

Q1 | Single select

In the past 30 days, how often have you felt overwhelmed by your responsibilities as a mother?

- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Often
- Almost Always

Q2 | Single select

In the past 30 days, how often did you get enough sleep to feel rested?

- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Often
- Almost Always

Q3 | Single select

To what extent do you agree with the following statement: I often feel rushed or pressed for time managing family responsibilities.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Q4 | Slider

Thinking about the next 30–60 days, how confident are you that your family’s situation is stable enough to handle unexpected challenges?

Endpoints. Not at all confident to Completely confident. Range 0 to 100.

Q5 | Single select

In the past 30 days, approximately how much time per week have you spent managing paperwork, phone calls, or administrative tasks related to your family’s health, childcare, or school needs?

- None
- Less than 1 hour
- 1-3 hours
- 3-5 hours
- More than 5 hours

Q6 | Single select

To what extent do you agree with the following statement: When I need help with parenting, there are people in my life I can count on.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Q7 | Single select

In the past 30 days, have you had a difficult time taking care of your own mental health?

- Yes
- No

Q8 | Single select, routed

What is the biggest obstacle to caring for your own mental health?

- Time
- Cost
- Not knowing where to get help
- Problem with health insurance coverage (denied, limited, unavailable, or lack of insurance)
- Transportation
- Lack of access
- Other

Asked only of respondents answering Yes to Q7. No no obstacle option was offered because the item was never shown to respondents reporting no difficulty.

Q9 | Slider

Overall, how worried are you about your child(ren)'s mental health right now?

Endpoints. Not at all worried to Extremely worried. Range 0 to 10.

Q10 | Single select

How difficult is it for your household to cover basic monthly expenses right now?

- Not at all difficult
- A little difficult
- Somewhat difficult
- Very difficult
- Extremely difficult

Q11 | Slider

If your household faced an unexpected expense of \$500 tomorrow, how confident are you that you could cover it without going into debt?

Endpoints. Not at all confident to Completely confident. Range 0 to 10.

Q12 | Single select

Overall, how difficult is it to manage the cost of housing (rent or mortgage) for your family?

- Not at all difficult
- A little difficult
- Somewhat difficult
- Very difficult
- Extremely difficult

Q13 | Single select

How much financial strain does the cost of childcare or childcare alternatives place on your household?

- No strain
- A little strain
- Moderate strain
- Significant strain
- Extreme strain
- N/A — not applicable

Q14 | Single select

Overall, how difficult is it to manage the cost of health insurance for your family?

- Not at all difficult
- A little difficult
- Somewhat difficult
- Very difficult
- Extremely difficult

Q15 | Single select

In the past 12 months, were there times when the food you purchased ran out and you did not have the money to buy more?

- Often true
- Sometimes true
- Never true
- Prefer not to say

Q16 | Single select

In the past 12 months, have you delayed or avoided getting health or mental health care because of cost?

- Yes — for myself
- Yes — for my child or children
- Yes - both myself and my children
- No
- Prefer not to say

Punctuation in the third option is reproduced as fielded.

Q17 | Grid

How much do you trust each of the following to act in the best interests of children and families?

	No trust at all	Little trust	Some trust	Moderate trust	Complete trust
The public school system					
News sources					
Federal government					
State government					

Sub-item order randomized independently for each respondent in both arms. Scale points fixed.

Three further rows covering the healthcare system, health insurance companies, and food and drug manufacturers appeared in the survey definition for this item and recorded no responses. Those institutions were asked and answered at Q18.

Q18 | Grid

How much do you trust each of the following to act in the best interests of children and families?

	No trust at all	Little trust	Some trust	Moderate trust	Complete trust
The healthcare system					
Health insurance companies					
Food and beverage companies					
Pharmaceutical and drug manufacturers					

Sub-item order randomized independently for each respondent in both arms. Scale points fixed.

Q19 | Grid

How much do you trust each of the following to act in the best interests of children and families?

	No trust at all	Little trust	Some trust	Moderate trust	Complete trust
Technology companies (overall)					
Social media platforms					
AI companies and AI-powered products					

Sub-item order randomized independently for each respondent in both arms. Scale points fixed.

Q20 | Grid

How confident are you in your ability to navigate each of the following to get what your family needs?

	Not at all confident	A little confident	Somewhat confident	Moderately confident	Completely confident	N/A — I have not needed to navigate this
Your child's school or school district						
Healthcare providers (doctors, clinics, hospitals)						
Health insurance companies						
Government benefits or services (e.g., SNAP, Medicaid, childcare subsidies)						

Q21 | Single select

Overall, how safe do you feel your child's school environment is — physically and socially? (If you have more than one child in school, please answer about your oldest school-aged child.)

- 1 = Not at all safe
- 2 = A little safe
- 3 = Somewhat safe
- 4 = Very safe
- 5 = Extremely safe
- N/A — child is not currently in school

Numbered scale labels are reproduced as respondents saw them.

Q22 | Grid

Thinking about children growing up today, do you believe technology has made children's lives better or worse in each of the following ways?

	Much worse	Somewhat worse	About the same	Somewhat better	Much better	Not sure
Their ability to learn and do well in school						
Their friendships and social lives						
Their emotional wellbeing and mental health						
Other (please specify)						

The final row appeared in the survey definition and recorded no responses.

Q23 | Single select

To what extent do you agree with the following statement about your child: Overall, my child has a healthy balance between screen time and other activities. (Please answer about your oldest child age 4 or older.)

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree
- Prefer not to answer
- N/A — child is too young for screen time

Q24 | Grid

In a typical week, does your child use AI products or AI-powered platforms for any of the following (by age range)?

	Schoolwork or homework help	Thinking through decisions or organizing thoughts	Advice, comfort, or emotional support	Entertainment or creative play	Does not use AI products	I am not sure
0-3						
4-7						
8-12						
13-15						
16-17						
18-21						

Arm variant. In The Count arm the fifth option read "Does not use AI tools". All other wording was identical.

Q25 | Grid

How concerned are you about the following aspects of your child(ren)'s online activity — specifically, how platforms behave toward your child(ren)?

	Not at all concerned	A little concerned	Somewhat concerned	Very concerned	Extremely concerned	Not sure	Prefer not to say
Companies collecting information about what your child does online							
Your child sharing personal information with people who may not be appropriate or safe							
Your child being bullied or cyberbullied							
Your child's reputation being negatively affected							
Your child's time on platforms with addictive features (social media, gaming)							
N/A — child does not have access to online activities							

Sub-item order randomized independently for each respondent in both arms. Scale points fixed.

Q26 | Grid

How concerned are you about the following — specifically, content your child(ren) might see online?

	Not at all concerned	A little concerned	Somewhat concerned	Very concerned	Extremely concerned	Not sure	Prefer not to say
Content that encourages self-harm							
Content that promotes eating disorders or unhealthy body image							
Sexual content inappropriate for your child's age							
Violent content (beyond age-appropriate news)							
Influence by extreme views (political, ideological, or social)							
N/A — child does not have access to online activities							

Sub-item order randomized independently for each respondent in both arms. Scale points fixed.

Q27 | Slider

How confident are you that the technology companies your child(ren) interacts with are designed with their wellbeing in mind?

Endpoints. Not at all confident to Completely confident. Range 0 to 10 in the national panel arm. A fielding fault caused this item to record on a narrower range in The Count arm.

Q28 | Single select

To what extent do you agree with the following statement: The way most parents in my community are raising their children is meaningfully different from how I was raised.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Q29 | Grid

To what extent do you agree with each of the following statements:

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
Using AI may make it harder for my child to learn important thinking skills on their own — like writing, solving problems, or coming up with new ideas					
Using AI may make it harder for my child to learn important social skills on their own — like making friends, working through disagreements, or talking with others					
Using AI may make it harder for my child to learn how to handle their feelings on their own — like calming down when upset or sitting with hard emotions					
I find it difficult to manage my child's use of AI					

Q30 | Single select

How safe do you feel letting your child play or spend time outside in your neighborhood?

- Not at all safe
- A little safe
- Somewhat safe
- Mostly safe
- Completely safe
- N/A — child is too young

Q31 | Slider

How confident are you that your child has meaningful access to outdoor activity, green space, or physical play?

Endpoints. Not at all confident to Completely confident. Range 0 to 10.

Q32 | Single select

How concerned are you about advertising and marketing pressure aimed at your child?

- Not at all concerned
- A little concerned
- Somewhat concerned
- Very concerned
- Extremely concerned
- Not sure
- Prefer not to say

Q33 | Single select with open follow-up

In the past 12 months, has any of your child(ren) told you about anything they saw online that made them feel scared or upset?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure
- Prefer not to answer
- If yes, please briefly describe: [open text]

Arm variant. In The Count arm the final option read "Yes, and I would like to say more about that." and opened the same free-text field.

Q34 | Multiple select

Have you experienced any of the following harmful or age-inappropriate products being marketed to children?

- Nicotine vapes
- Cannabis
- Online gambling
- Pornography
- Alcohol
- Sugary drinks, energy drinks, or ultra-processed foods marketed to children
- None of the above

Presented on screen as "(Select all that apply)".

Q35 | Single select

How confident are you that your child's school would respond effectively if your child experienced bullying or harassment? (Multi-child households: please answer about your oldest school-aged child.)

- Not at all confident
- A little confident
- Somewhat confident
- Moderately confident
- Completely confident
- N/A — child is not currently in school

Q36 | Single select

In the past 12 months, did you feel any of your children needed support for a mental, emotional, or behavioral health concern?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

Q37 | Single select, routed

Were you able to access that support when you needed it?

- Yes, without significant difficulty
- Yes, but with significant barriers
- Partially
- No

Asked only of respondents answering Yes to Q36.

Q38 | Grid

How difficult is it for your family to access each of the following?

	Not at all difficult	A little difficult	Somewhat difficult	Very difficult	Extremely difficult	N/A
Pediatrician or family doctor						
School counselor or mental health professional						
Private therapist or mental health specialist						
Community health clinic or social services						

A further unlabelled response column appeared in the survey definition for this item and recorded no selections.

Q39 | Single select

How concerned are you about the impact of academic pressure on your child(ren)'s well-being (e.g., stress, anxiety, lack of free time)?

- 1 = Not at all concerned
- 2 = A little concerned
- 3 = Somewhat concerned
- 4 = Very concerned
- 5 = Extremely concerned
- N/A

Numbered scale labels are reproduced as respondents saw them.

Q40 | Multiple select

In the past 12 months, has your ability to access mental, emotional, or behavioral care been impacted by the following actions from your insurance company (including substance use treatment)?

- Denied coverage
- Delayed or blocked care because of prior authorization
- Limited number of covered visits
- Dropped your child's provider or facility from their network
- Denied coverage for medication
- Created paperwork or administrative burdens that slowed access
- Lacked accessible in-network providers
- None of the above
- We did not seek mental, emotional, or behavioral healthcare in the past 12 months
- My child does not have health insurance
- Prefer not to say

Presented on screen as "(Select all that apply)".

Q41 | Single select

How confident are you that your child's school can effectively identify and respond to a student who is struggling emotionally or behaviorally? (Please answer about your oldest school-aged child.)

- Not at all confident
- A little confident
- Somewhat confident
- Moderately confident
- Completely confident
- N/A — child is not currently in school

Q42 | Single select

How confident are you that your child's health insurance provides sufficient access to the mental, emotional, and behavioral health services your family needs?

- Not at all confident
- A little confident
- Somewhat confident
- Moderately confident
- Completely confident
- N/A

Q43 | Single select

Thinking about your child(ren), to what extent do you agree with the following statement: My child has at least one close friendship with a peer they can rely on. (Please answer about your oldest child age 4 or older.)

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither
- Agree
- Strongly agree
- N/A — child is too young for peer friendships

Rotating module, Wave 1

Rotating module questions were positioned after the fixed core. They are reported separately and are labelled Supplemental, Wave 1 Rotating Module in published materials.

Q44 | Single select

Would you support or oppose a law that would require social media platforms and AI companies to take reasonable steps to protect children and teens from harm when designing their products?

- Strongly support
- Somewhat support
- Neither support nor oppose
- Somewhat oppose
- Strongly oppose

Q45 | Single select

Thinking about other parents in your community, how would you describe the approach most of them take to managing their children's technology use?

- Much more restrictive than my approach
- Somewhat more restrictive
- About the same as my approach
- Somewhat more permissive
- Much more permissive than my approach
- I don't know enough about what other parents do

Open response

Q46 | Open text

In your own words, what is your biggest concern about your family's wellbeing right now?

Fixed core item. No character limit.

Section D. Demographics

Items marked required were mandatory. Wave 1 was fielded in two arms running the same instrument on two platforms. In the national panel arm, which carried the large majority of respondents, these demographic items were administered immediately after the screening item S1 and before S2, S3, and the core instrument. In The Count arm they were administered at the end, in the position shown here.

D1 | Single select, required

What is your state of residence?

Presented as a dropdown list of all 50 states and the District of Columbia.

D2 | Open text, optional

What is your ZIP code?

D3 | Single select, required

Which of the following best describes your current work situation?

- Employed full-time, primarily outside the home
- Employed part-time, primarily outside the home
- Work from home (employed, self-employed, or freelance)
- Not currently in paid employment
- Other

Presented on screen as "(Select one)".

D4 | Open numeric, required

What is your age?

D5 | Multiple select, required

What type of health insurance do your children have?

- Private — through an employer or union
- Private — self-purchased
- Medicaid or CHIP
- TRICARE or VA
- No health insurance
- Don't know

Presented on screen as "(Select all that apply)".

D6 | Multiple select, optional

Do any of the following conditions or difficulties affect or limit your child's daily activities?

- Hearing difficulty
- Vision difficulty (even with glasses)
- Mobility difficulty
- Difficulty using hands or fingers
- Breathing or respiratory difficulty
- Learning or cognitive difficulty
- Speech or communication difficulty
- Developmental or behavioral condition (e.g., autism spectrum, ADHD)
- Mental health condition (e.g., anxiety, depression, trauma-related conditions)
- Other health condition or disability (please specify)
- None
- Don't know
- Prefer not to answer

Presented on screen as "(Select all that apply)".

D7 | Single select, required

What is the highest level of education you have completed?

- Less than high school
- High school diploma or GED
- Some college but no degree
- Associate degree (2 year degree)
- Bachelor's degree (4 year degree)
- Graduate or professional degree

D8 | Single select, required

Generally, I identify as

- Very Liberal
- Liberal
- Moderate
- Conservative
- Very Conservative
- Other (please specify)

D9 | Single select, required

Are you of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin?

- Yes
- No

D10 | Single select, required

What is your race?

- White
- Black or African American
- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian
- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- Two or more races

D11 | Single select, required

What was your total household income before taxes in the past 12 months?

- Less than \$25,000
- \$25,000–\$49,999
- \$50,000–\$74,999
- \$75,000–\$99,999
- \$100,000–\$149,999
- \$150,000–\$199,999
- \$200,000 or more

D12 | Single select, required

How many children do you have living at home?

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5 or more

Closing screen

Thank you for completing the survey! Your voice and firsthand experiences are critical. All answers are anonymous. Count on Mothers is an independent research firm representing the voices of U.S. mothers, delivering critical insights to help policymakers and industry leaders make better decisions for families.

Instrument stability

Fixed core questions do not change across waves without a documented rationale, formal review by the research team and the Methodology Advisory Board, and an overlap procedure running both old and new wording in the transition wave on split samples to establish trend continuity before any item is retired. Response scales are held constant within subdomains.

Instrument authorship

Jennifer Brailsford, PhD, Director of Research. Instrument architecture, question development, index construction, and methodology documentation.

Melissa Lawrence, MPH, MS, Director of Data Science. Fielding specification, statistical weighting, data cleaning, raking procedures, and longitudinal dataset architecture.

Academic research partner, University College London, Methodology Advisory Board. Kaitlyn Regehr, PhD, Photini Vrikki, PhD, and Katharine Smales, PhD collaborate on instrument design, question framing, and review of preliminary findings.

Questions about the instrument can be directed to research@countonmothers.org.

How to cite

Count on Mothers. 2026. National Benchmark of U.S. Mothers, Wave 1, core instrument. Fielded May 2026. countonmothers.org