

# MOST FAMILIES ARE WORRIED ABOUT ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES, HAVE EXPERIENCED EXTREME WEATHER

The RAPID survey has asked parents questions over the past year about their experiences with extreme weather, concerns about climate change, and sustainability-related activities that they engage in.

From April through November of 2022, the RAPID household survey included questions designed to help us understand how extreme weather and other effects of climate change are impacting families with young children, as well as to what extent families are engaging in behaviors that promote sustainability and enjoyment of nature. We heard from more than 1,000 parents with children under age six across the US.



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In recent years, communities across the country have confronted impacts of climate change including wildfires, droughts, and unseasonable temperatures. These and other extreme weather events have become a new reality for many

communities and are having profound impacts on families as they disrupt daily routines, create adversity, and contribute to overall concerns about the impact of climate change on children.

## OVER HALF OF FAMILIES HAVE EXPERIENCED AT LEAST ONE EXTREME WEATHER EVENT AT SOME POINT

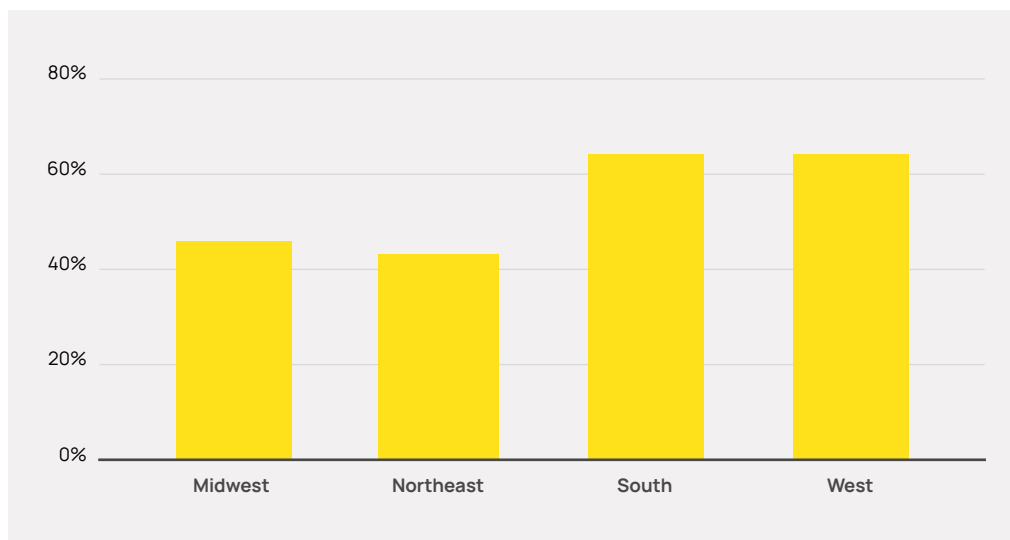
Dealing with extreme weather has always been a reality, particularly during certain seasons and in certain geographies. However, in recent years extreme weather events have become increasing prevalent and concerning to many. These events are projected to increase as climate change accelerates. In the RAPID survey, we define extreme weather events as abnormally warm or cold weather, tornadoes, hurricanes, tropical storms, flooding, drought, and wildfires.

Over half (57%) of RAPID participants reported that their family experienced at least one extreme weather event at some point. The most reported extreme weather events include extreme heat (30%), extreme cold (17%), and drought (13%). The incidence of extreme weather varies slightly geographically, but the data show that at least 40% of families in every region of the United States have experienced extreme weather.

**“Our air quality continues to decline year over year. Wildfire season now has no season. We have an air quality monitor and in the summer cannot go outside for more than a few minutes at a time on most days due to the smoke and pollutants.”**

Parent in Colorado

Percentage of families who have experienced at least one extreme weather event, by region



**“We had to evacuate from our house for 4 days with a newborn. It was difficult to find somewhere safe to go.”**

Parent in California

We asked participants who indicated that they have experienced extreme weather an open-ended question regarding how these events affected their families.

A set of themes emerged from these responses, including significant negative impacts to homes, family finances, health, access to child care, and daily routines. The following quotes illuminate the impacts that extreme weather events are having on families around the country:

**“Our house flooded twice in 14 months. The first time we were displaced for a month. The second we were displaced for 4 months. Our house was gutted both times and we lost many items. Flood and home insurance give money but don’t compensate for the inconvenience.”** Parent in Louisiana

**“It was so hot last summer with limited AC, that my child’s daycare closed for one day. They were not able to keep the classroom temp under 82°F with the window AC. Licensing requires them to keep the temp under 82°F. I sent my own child to stay with family that had AC because we don’t have AC in our apartment.”** Parent in Washington

**“The air quality here becomes terrible when we have wildfires. It’s not unusual for the young ones and I to have breathing issues due to asthma and allergies.”** Parent in Colorado

**“Flooding from Tropical Storm Henri forced us to stay in a hotel while we had our house inspected and repaired. Extreme heat is a major concern because I have an infant.”** Parent in New York

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**“High wildfire risk made our insurance go up 600% in 3 years.”**

Parent in California

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## THE MAJORITY OF PARENTS ARE WORRIED ABOUT THE IMPACT OF CLIMATE CHANGE AND, IN ADDITION, CHANGES TO THE ENVIRONMENT AROUND THEIR HOMES ON THEIR CHILDREN

We asked parents about climate change and the impact it may have on their children. The majority (78%) expressed worry.

We didn’t see significant variation across race/ethnicity or income level. Over half (56%) of parents also worry about the environment around their home (i.e., air quality, proximity to parks, etc.) and the impact it may be having on their children.

More Black, Latinx, and other families of color reported concerns about their local environment as compared to white families.

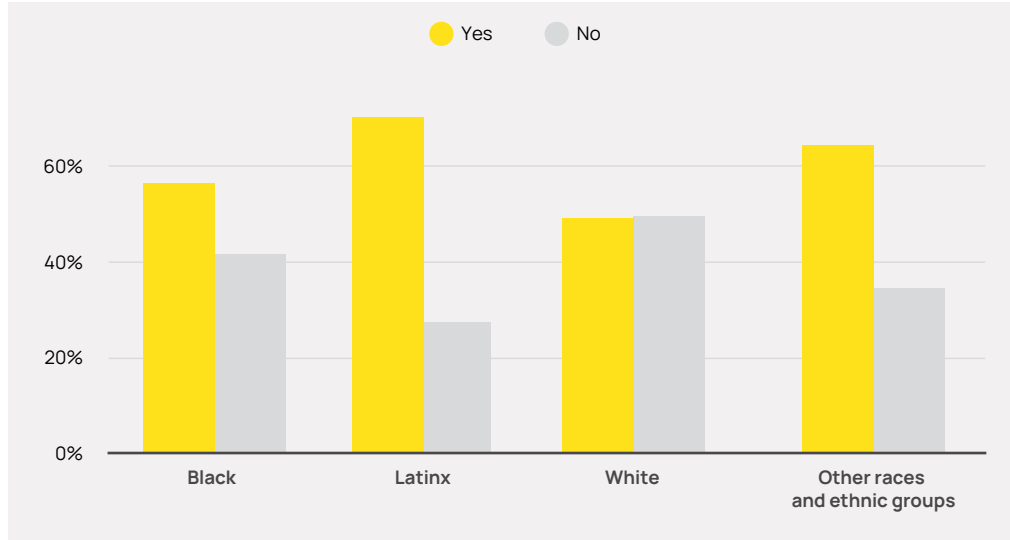
More families who live below 200% of the federal poverty level reported environmental concerns than families with higher incomes.

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**“I live in a rural area. I wish there were sidewalks to make walking/biking with kids safer. During the summer, air quality can be severely impacted by forest fires.”**

Parent in Washington

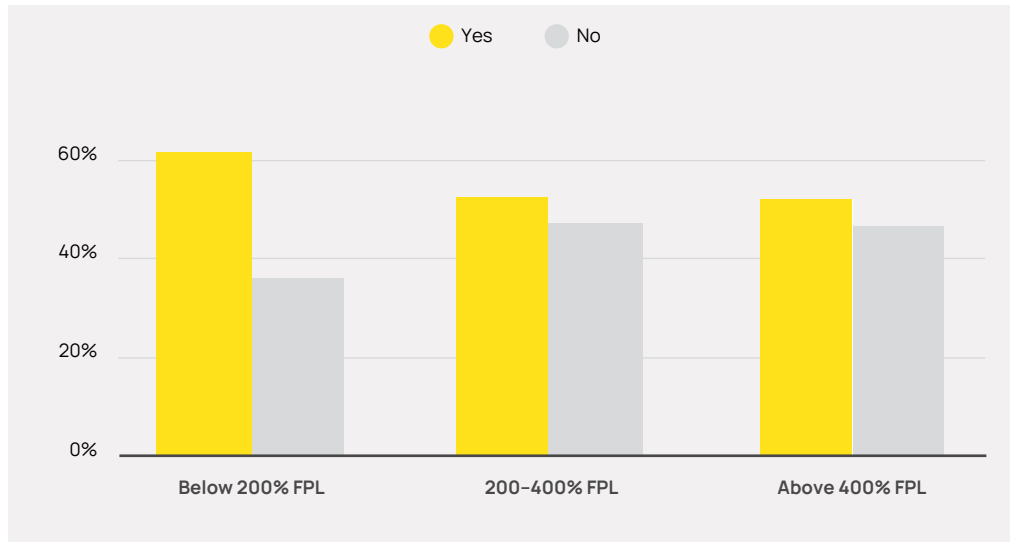
Concerns about the environment around the home and impact it may have on children, by race/ethnicity



**“We can smell the nearby steel plants and we know it is bad for health.”**

Parent in Pennsylvania

Concerns about the environment around the home and impact it may have on children, by income levels



## WE ASKED PARENTS ABOUT ANY SUSTAINABILITY PRACTICES THEY ENGAGE THEIR CHILDREN IN AND IF THEY GO OUT INTO NATURE

**“We don’t use the tap water for drinking.”**

Parent in South Carolina

Involving children in activities that support environmental sustainability from a young age can help raise awareness about

environmental issues and create lifelong habits that increase quality of life and preserve natural resources for future

generations. Such activities include talking about resource use and waste, and finding alternatives to commuting by car. RAPID data show that 28% of parents involve their children in such activities very often or always, 44% sometimes do, and 28% rarely or never do.

The most prevalent sustainable practices that parents reported engaging in often or always included reusing containers (71%), recycling (69%), limiting water usage (60%), and using reusable shopping bags (51%).

**“I feel responsible to recycle and reduce use of single-use plastics and other items. But I wish I could do more. I just don’t know where to start and it feels like whatever else I could do would be so small in comparison to what needs to be done.”** Parent in Massachusetts

**“Making small decisions every day to minimize our carbon footprint and teaching them about the importance of taking care and nurturing our planet.”**  
Parent in Georgia

We invited parents to reflect on what they see their role and responsibility being in regard to parenting their children amidst climate change in an open-response question. Many parents shared that they hope to teach their children why it’s important to take care of our planet and how small actions can help minimize their individual impact, and they also emphasized government and corporate responsibility in meeting the challenge of global climate change.

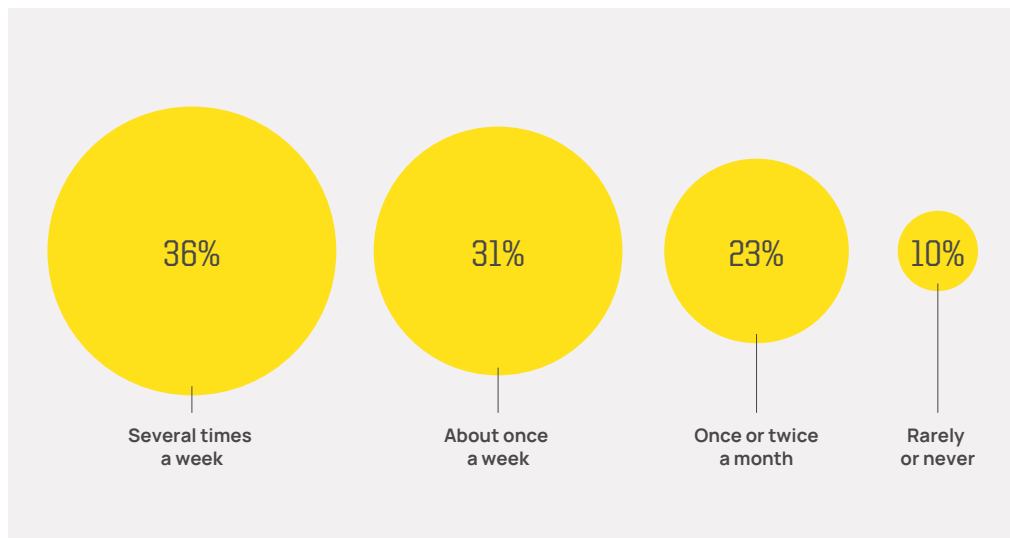
**“Teaching them their actions have consequences that impact others; human greed and disregard for other humans and nature have led to climate change.”** Parent in Maine

We also asked parents about how often they spend time in nature with their children doing things like going to a park, camping, hiking, or visiting a beach. Spending time outside and in nature can have a host of benefits for both adults’ and children’s physical and mental health. However, it’s easier for some families than others to access nature due to differences

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**“I talk to my children about it so we can practice more environmentally conscious behaviors at home and so that they are prepared to vote in ways that will promote climate/ environmental policies that are helpful once they are grown.”**  
Parent in Tennessee

Frequency of families and children spending time in nature




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**“I’m trying to teach my toddler about recycling and water conservation, but beyond that, it’s up to governments to really make the changes we need.”**  
Parent in Washington

between neighborhoods in the availability of outdoor activities and transportation, work schedules, or financial barriers associated with some outdoor activities.

Over a third of families (36%) in our sample spend time in nature with their children several times a week, while slightly under a third (31%) spend time in nature about once a week, 23% once or twice a month, and 10% rarely or never do.

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## CONCLUSION

- These data reveal the concerns that parents with young children have about climate change and how the environments in which they live could be impacting their children.
- With extreme weather events on the rise and environmental concerns impacting families nationwide, there is an urgent need to act on parents' concerns and take immediate steps to improve environmental conditions in support of a healthier planet, and healthier and happier families and communities now and in the future.
- Dedicating resources to sustainability-related educational efforts that involve parents, educators, and young children could go a long way. Such efforts should be available and geared toward children and the important adults in their lives from all backgrounds, races/ethnicities, and income levels.
- In future surveys, we will ask additional questions to explore barriers that parents face in engaging their children in sustainability activities and getting outside into nature. More data would help in designing and executing effective and inclusive environmental education efforts.

# ABOUT THE RAPID PROJECT

RAPID is under the direction of Philip Fisher, PhD, Director of the Center on Early Childhood at Stanford University

Data presented in this fact sheet are based on RAPID household surveys. Analyses are based on responses collected from 1,040 parents of young children between April and November 2022. These caregivers represent a range of voices: 12% are Black/African American, 20% are Latinx, and 33% live at or below 200% of the federal poverty level. Analyses are not weighted.

The RAPID project includes a survey of caregivers with children under age 6 and a survey of child care providers and other adults who care for children under age 6.

These surveys are designed to gather essential information continuously regarding the needs, health-promoting behaviors, and well-being of children and their families and important adults in their lives.

RAPID collects data monthly from caregivers and child care providers in all 50 states. The surveys are national in scope, though not technically nationally representative. RAPID collects snapshots of data across time and can also assess trends longitudinally.

For more information about RAPID study design and methods, [see here](#).

## It's our anniversary!

**RAPID launched in April 2020 to understand and address the experiences and challenges that caregivers of young children were facing during the COVID-19 pandemic.**

Read our [special report here](#).

3,200+

Providers

16,000+

Households

50

US States

