

Family Structure

DEFINITION

Family Structure is the percentage of children under age 18 who live in different family structures.

SIGNIFICANCE

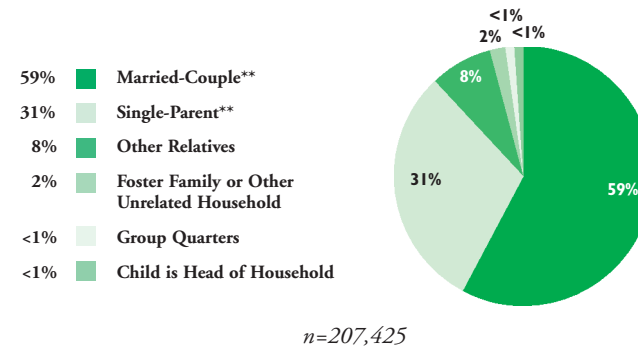
American families are more diverse today than they were several decades ago.¹ In the United States, one in four parents living with a child is unmarried (25%). This marks a dramatic change from 50 years ago, when fewer than one in 10 parents living with their children were unmarried (7%). The profile of unmarried parents has also shifted, and now 35% of all unmarried parents are living with a partner.² However, after increasing for several decades, birth rates for unmarried women in the U.S. decreased to 36 per 1,000 women in 2023, a 30% decline compared to its peak of 52 per 1,000 women between 2007 and 2008.³ Babies born to cohabiting couples make up 25% of all births and 60% of nonmarital births in the U.S.⁴

Children in the U.S. now live in a variety of family structures. Among those who live with at least one of their biological parents, 59% live in families with only biological parent(s) and full sibling(s), and 41% live in families with single parents, stepparents, stepsiblings, and/or half siblings.⁴

In addition, in the U.S. families are now four times more likely to live in multigenerational households than they were 50 years ago. Multigenerational households now account for 18% of the population.⁵

The financial hardship and associated stress of single parenthood can contribute to differences in the socioeconomic well-being of children in single-parent households, compared to those in two-parent households.⁶ The growth in multigenerational households is likely due to many interconnected factors, including economic, cultural, and caregiving needs and the increasing cost of housing. Multigenerational households can also help promote close family bonds, improve mental and physical health, and provide the opportunity for parents to pursue further education or job training, all of which can improve the well-being of children.⁷


**Rhode Island Children Under Age 18
by Family Structure, 2020-2024**



**Only includes children who are related to the head of household by birth or adoption.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2020-2024. Tables B09001, B09002, and B09018.

◆ **In Rhode Island, 59% of children live in married-couple households, making them almost twice as likely to live in such households compared to single-parent households (31%). Additionally, 8% of children live with a grandparent or another relative.^{8,9}**



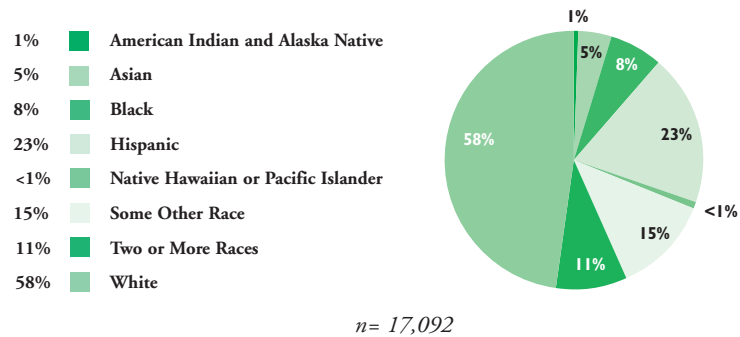
Single-Parent Families			
	2004	2014	2024
RI	39%	39%	38%
US	31%	35%	34%
National Rank*			44th
New England Rank**			6th

*1st is best; 50th is highest

**1st is best; 6th is highest

The Annie E. Casey Foundation, KIDS COUNT Data Center, datacenter.kidscount.org. Single-parent families may include cohabiting couples and do not include children living with married stepparents.

Multigenerational Households in Rhode Island, by Race & Ethnicity, 2020



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Decennial Census 2020, PCT14, PCT14B, PCT14C, PCT14D, PCT14E, PCT14F, PCT14H, PCT14I

- ◆ Between 2020 and 2024, 4% of Rhode Island families lived in multigenerational households, compared to 3% of households between 2010 and 2014.^{10,11}
- ◆ According to the 2020 Census, 7% of Hispanic families, 7% of Asian families, and 6% of Black families live in multigenerational households in Rhode Island, compared to 3% of white families.¹²⁻¹⁵ Among major racial and ethnic groups, multigenerational families are less likely to live in poverty.⁵
- ◆ Twenty-four percent of U.S. households say child care is a factor in their living arrangements, with 9% of upper income adults considering it a factor, compared to 32% of lower-income adults.⁵ The lack of affordable housing can make it necessary to combine resources to attain homeownership or to afford the average cost of rent.¹⁶ In Rhode Island, the housing wage is almost double the hourly wage of the average renter.¹⁷

References

¹ Aragao, C. Parker, K Greenwood, S. Baronavski, C. Carlo Mandapat, J. (2023). *The modern American family*. Pew Research Center.

² Livingston, G. (2018). *The changing profile of unmarried parents*. Pew Research Center.

³ Osterman, M., Hamilton, B., Joyce, M., Driscoll, A., & Valenzuela, C. (2025). *Births: Final data for 2023*. National Center for Health Statistics (U.S.). <https://doi.org/10.15620/cdc/175204>

(continued on page 172)

Relative Caregiving and Kinship Care

- ◆ In the United States, 2.5 million children are in families where grandparents or other relatives or a close family friend serve as the primary caregiver. Children of Color are more likely to be cared for by grandparents than other groups.¹⁸
- ◆ A grandparent caregiver reduces the trauma of separation when a child cannot remain with their parents and provides better outcomes for children than those who are placed with non-relatives. Children may be in a grandparent's care because of child neglect or abuse, unemployment, parental substance use, or incarceration.^{19,20}
- ◆ Many grandparents have informal custody arrangements and are not involved with child welfare agencies, often receiving fewer services than traditional foster parents.²⁰ Nearly one in five grandparent caregivers lives in poverty, with 40% of grandmother-only caregivers living below the poverty line, 76% of which receive public assistance.^{19,21} Children in informal kinship care are more likely to live in poverty, less likely to be covered by health insurance, and more likely to have physical and mental disabilities.²²
- ◆ Nearly all children in kinship care are eligible for cash assistance through Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) regardless of their household's income level, yet children in informal custody arrangements are much less likely to receive these payments.^{19,21}
- ◆ Children in kinship foster care have better physical and mental health outcomes, more stability, and are more likely to have a permanent home than children in foster care with non-relatives.²⁰ Rhode Island regulations state that the Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF) must give priority to relatives when placing a child in out-of-home care.²³ On December 31, 2025, children in kinship foster care made up 30% of all children in out-of-home placements in Rhode Island.²⁴
- ◆ The federal *Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008* helps keep families together and improve outcomes by allowing federal dollars to support children exiting foster care to permanent homes with relative guardians.²⁵ Rhode Island is one of 42 states with a Guardianship Assistance Program that provides financial assistance payments to grandparents and other relative caregivers who assume legal guardianship.²⁶

Methodology and References



Family Income Levels Based on the Federal Poverty Measures

The poverty *thresholds* are the original version of the federal poverty measure.

They are updated each year by the Census Bureau. The thresholds are used mainly for statistical purposes — for instance, estimating the number of children in Rhode Island living in poor families. The poverty threshold is adjusted upward based on family size and whether household members are children, adults, or 65 years of age and over. In 2025, the federal poverty threshold was \$25,938 for a family of three with two children and \$32,649 for a family of four with two children. The *poverty guidelines* are the other version of the federal poverty measure. They are issued each year in the Federal Register by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

Family Income Levels Based on the 2026 Federal Poverty Guidelines

FEDERAL POVERTY GUIDELINES	ANNUAL INCOME FAMILY OF THREE	ANNUAL INCOME FAMILY OF FOUR
50% FPL	\$13,660.00	\$16,500.00
100% FPL	\$27,320.00	\$33,000.00
130% FPL	\$35,516.00	\$42,900.00
150% FPL	\$40,980.00	\$49,500.00
180% FPL	\$49,176.00	\$59,400.00
185% FPL	\$50,542.00	\$61,050.00
200% FPL	\$54,640.00	\$66,000.00
225% FPL	\$61,470.00	\$74,250.00
250% FPL	\$68,300.00	\$82,500.00

(continued from page 9)

References for Child Population

¹⁴ U.S. Census Bureau. (2022). *Census bureau releases estimates of undercount and overcount in the 2020 census*.
¹⁵ O'Hare, W. P. (2022). *New Census bureau data show young children have a high net undercount in the 2020 Census*. <https://countallkids.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/CAK-Report-on-Release-of-PES-and-DA-data-March-10-2022-FINAL-3-10-2022.pdf>

(continued from page 11)

References for Babies

⁷ Right from the Start Campaign. (2025). *Right from the Start FY 2026 state budget priorities for kids & families*. <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/inbrief-adversity-1.pdf>

⁸ Office of the Surgeon General. (2024). *Parents under pressure: The U.S. Surgeon General's advisory on the mental health & well-being of parents*. <https://www.hhs.gov/surgeongeneral/reports-and-publications/parents/index.html>

⁹ Zero to Three. (2023). *State of babies yearbook: 2023*.

¹⁰ Harvard University Center on the Developing Child. (n.d.). *The impact of early adversity on children's development*. <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/inbrief-adversity-1.pdf>

¹¹ Harvard University Center on the Developing Child. (2018). *What are ACEs and how do they relate to toxic stress?* <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/infographics/aces-and-toxic-stress-frequently-asked-questions/>

¹² Rhode Island Department of Health. (n.d.). *Vital Records, Rivers Database 2004-2025*.

¹³ Rhode Island Department of Health. (2025). *KIDSNET Database*.

¹⁴ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Maternal and Child Health Bureau. (2025). *III.E.2.c. state action plan – perinatal/infant health – annual report – Rhode Island - 2025*. <https://mchb.tvisdata.hrsa.gov/Narratives/AnnualReport/2/a9e6648f-c775-41be-816f-9fd5d995b5c>

(continued from page 13)

References for Family Structure

⁴ VanOrman, A. G., & Scommenga, P. (2016). Understanding the dynamics of family change in the United States. *Population Bulletin*, 7(1).

⁵ Cohn, D., Horowitz, J., Minkin, R., Fry, R., & Hurst, K. (2022). *Financial issues top the list of reasons U.S. adults live in multigenerational homes*. Pew Research Center.

⁶ The Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2023). *Child Well-Being in Single-Parent Families*. <https://www.aecf.org/blog/child-well-being-in-single-parent-families>

⁷ Generation United. (2021). *Family matters: Multigenerational living is on the rise and here to stay*. <https://www.gu.org/resources/multigenerational-families>

⁸ U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey. (2020-2024). *Table B09002*.

⁹ U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey. (2020-2024). *Table B09018*.

¹⁰ U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey. (2020-2024). *Table B11017*.

¹¹ U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey. (2010-2014). *Table B11017*.

¹² U.S. Census Bureau, Census. (2020). *PCT14H*.

¹³ U.S. Census Bureau, Census. (2020). *PCT14D*.

¹⁴ U.S. Census Bureau, Census. (2020). *PCT14B*.

¹⁵ U.S. Census Bureau, Census. (2020). *PCT14I*.

¹⁶ Rose, J. (2024). *Policies for housing with heart*. Stanford Social Innovation Review.

¹⁷ The Economic Progress Institute. (2024). *The 2024 Rhode Island standard of need*.

¹⁸ Generation United. (2022). *Together at the table: Supporting the nutrition, health and well-being of grandfamilies*.

¹⁹ Lent, J. P., & Otto, A. (2018). Grandparents, grandchildren, and caregiving: The impacts of America's substance use crisis. *Generations*, 42(3), 15–22.

²⁰ Generations United. (2017). *In loving arms: The protective role of grandparents and other relatives in raising children exposed to trauma*. <https://www.gu.org/resources/the-state-of-grandfamilies-in-america-2017/>

²¹ Peterson, T. L. (2018). Grandparents raising grandchildren in the African American community. *Generations*, 42(3), 30–36.

²² Advisory Council to Support Grandparents Raising Grandchildren. (2021). *Supporting Grandparents Raising Grandchildren (SGRG) Act: Initial report to Congress*. https://acl.gov/sites/default/files/RAISE_SGRG/SGRG-InitialReportToCongress_2021-11-16.pdf

²³ *Child Support Program Rules and Regulations*, 218-RICR-30-00-1 (2021). sos.ri.gov

²⁴ Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families. (2024). *RICHIST*.

²⁵ Children's Defense Fund. (2015). *The Title IV-E Guardianship Assistance Program (GAP): An update on implementation and moving GAP forward*. <https://www.grandfamilies.org/Portals/0/Documents/Fostering%20Connections/Title%20IV-E%20GAP%20Update.pdf>

²⁶ Children's Bureau. (2023). *Title IV-E guardianship assistance*. <https://acf.gov/cb/grant-funding/title-iv-e-guardianship-assistance>

(continued from page 15)

References for Mother's Education Level

⁶ National Center for Education Statistics. (2024). *Characteristics of Children's Families. Condition of Education*. U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences. https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/pdf/2024/ccc_508c.pdf

⁷ U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey. (2020-2024). *Table B20004*.

⁸ The Annie E. Casey Foundation. (n.d.). *KIDS COUNT Data Center*. datacenter.kidscount.org

⁹ U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey. (2020-2024). *Table S1702*.