

A photograph of a woman and a young girl pushing a shopping cart in a grocery store. The woman is standing behind the girl, and they are both holding the handle of the cart. The cart contains several plastic bags. The image has a green overlay.

Hunger Matters for Kids

June 2026

The Survey

Childhood hunger is a rampant issue across the United States, affecting 1 in 5 households. For many, this issue is exacerbated during school breaks, when the meal programs that millions of children rely on are harder to obtain.

HelloFresh commissioned the *Hunger Matters for Kids* report, a nationally representative survey for parents, to better understand the current state of hunger ahead of summer.

The research covers:

- How economic strains is leaving over half of families struggling to afford basic groceries
- The widespread anxiety, stress, and "parental failure" parents are feeling as it pertains to providing for their children
- The painful trade-offs parents make to feed kids, from skipping meals to cutting back on utilities
- How families are relying on food banks and friends to keep food on the table
- The barriers parents face trying to secure additional aid



Key Finding #1: As economic stress deepens, parents face difficulty feeding their kids this summer.

- Hunger and the ability to afford food are major concerns for 80% of parents.
- In 2026, 67% of parents say that they are more worried now than this time last year about putting food on the table – as compared to 44% in 2024.
- Over half (51%) of parents report that they or their household had difficulty affording essential food in the past 12 months.
 - Gen Z parents are more likely to report household difficulty affording food, and many also report seeing close friends or relatives struggle.
- Nearly nine in 10 parents are concerned about the rising cost of living (90%), gas/energy prices (89%), and inflation (88%).
- More than eight in 10 agree that the economy (87%) is making it harder for families to afford enough food.
- 3 in 4 parents say the rising prices of gas and energy is making feeding their families harder.
- One-quarter (26%) say their household ran out of food before they had money to buy more.
- Only one in five parents (21%) says their family has enough to eat.



Key Finding #2: The daily struggle to put food on the table has evolved into a quiet mental health crisis for families.

- Almost two-thirds of parents (65%) express increased emotional impact, stress, and concern over food affordability.
- About seven in 10 say the cost of food causes daily stress or anxiety (71%).
- Three-quarters (75%) feel a sense of “parental failure” when they cannot provide enough food for their household.
- Roughly two in three say their concern about having enough food for their family has increased over the past year (61%), along with increased stress/anxiety about affording food (62%).
- Over six in 10 are worried high grocery prices will prevent them from feeding their children this summer (63%).
- About one-third report their mental health has been negatively impacted by the stress of providing food for their children (32%).
- More Gen Z parents express negative effects on their mental health from the stress of providing food for their children. Additionally, this age group is more likely to skip a meal or eat less so that their children can eat compared to older generations.



Key Finding #3: From skipping meals to cutting utilities, parents are making difficult sacrifices to keep their kids fed this summer.

- More than one in three parents skipped meals or ate less so their children would have enough to eat (36%).
- During the summer, parents most commonly cut back on vacations (52%), summer camps (35%), and cooling/AC usage (33%) to ensure children have enough food.
- In the past 90 days, parents have prioritized essentials like gas (33%), rent/mortgage (32%), and utilities (32%) over food.
 - More Gen Z have had to prioritize rent/mortgage (56%) and gas (45%) over food/groceries, compared to older parents.
- To offset grocery costs, many are purchasing items on sale (47%), cooking at home more often (46%), and shopping at different grocery stores (38%).
- Nearly three in 10 are purchasing less healthy but cheaper food alternatives (29%).
- Four in 10 are budgeting more carefully (40%) or cutting back on other expenses (40%) to prioritize food for their children.



Key Finding #4: Kids are feeling the pinch but also learning how to be a part of the solution.

- 71% of parents say their children are educated on what it means to be food insecure.
- More than half (61%) of parents say their children are aware and feel the effects when their family is lacking meals.
- 66% of parents say their children have participated in food drives and/or other volunteer opportunities that helped feed other kids in our community.



Key Finding #5: Parents are turning to their personal networks and food assistance resources to survive.

- Nine in 10 have used some resource to access food, with over half (52%) relying on family/friends, and another 48% using local food banks.
- The most commonly used food support resource is help from family/friends (52%).
- Nearly half have used local food banks (48%) or neighborhood food pantries (43%) in the past year.
- Of those who have experienced difficulty affording essential food, more than one-third have used SNAP/WIC benefits (37%) to help their household access food.
 - SNAP/WIC is a more utilized resource by Gen Z than by older generations.
- Among those not accessing resources, the leading barriers are lack of awareness of available resources (34%), lack of access (22%), and stigma/shame (21%).
- There is a need for education, as one-third (34%) of those who have not accessed resources express it is due to lack of awareness.
- Almost half (48%) of parents say government programs would be helpful in addressing concerns around adequate food during school breaks.

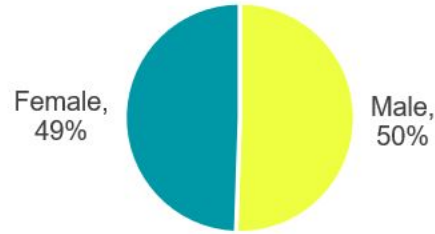


Methodology

An online survey was conducted among 2,000 U.S. parents with children ages 5-18 between April 28 and May 5, 2026.

The survey is nationally representative of U.S. parents. The sample was representative of gender and region.

Gender Identity



Region

