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The Top 10 Cities for Working Parents in 2019

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In about 62% of two-parent households, both parents work, according to 2017 data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics. That's up about 1% from the previous year. Not only are more parents working, but Census data also shows that men and women across the country worked more in 2017 than in 2016. It's also not much of a surprise that more parents are working. Housing costs, childcare and the overall cost of living continue to rise while incomes have seen less growth. So if you want to make ends meet now while also achieving big goals like buying a home and socking away money in a savings account, you'll need to work more. Considering multiple factors, we created this list of the best cities in the U.S. for working parents.

In order to find the best cities in the country for working parents, we considered data on nine metrics. We looked at data on the unemployment rate, median household incomes, median annual housing costs, the percentage of the workforce working more than 49 weeks per year, average commute times, crime rates, graduation rates, state family leave policies and the costs of childcare.

This is SmartAsset's fourth annual look at the best cities for working parents. You can see the best cities for working parents in 2018 here.
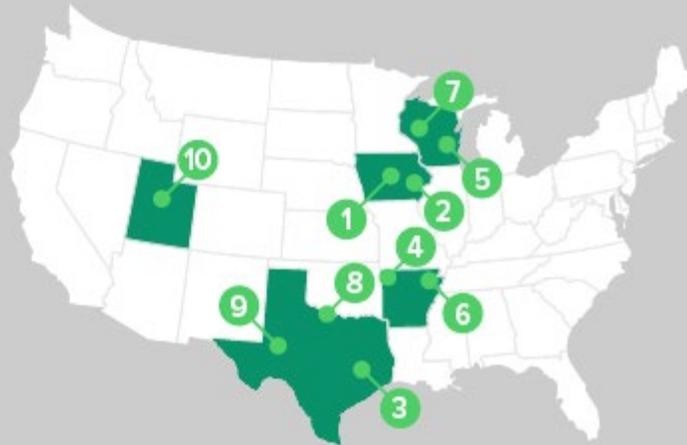
Key Findings

- **The middle of the country scores big.** None of the cities in our top 10 are along the coasts. Instead, cities closer to the center of the country do well. California has one city in the top 20, and the first city from the Northeast is Cambridge, Massachusetts, at 60. A big part of why the coasts do poorly is the high cost of living in many coastal states.

- **Four states stand out.** Nine of the top 10 cities are in Arkansas, Iowa, Texas or Wisconsin. That's even more than last year, when those four states accounted for six of the top 10 cities. It isn't just one metric that helps these cities and states do well. They tend to do well across all metrics. The notable exception is that median incomes tend to be low in these places relative to the other cities in the study. That may not necessarily be a problem, though, since housing costs (which often constitute a significant portion of household expenses) also tend to be relatively low.

1. Ames, IA

Ames, Iowa tops our ranking of the best cities for working parents for the second year in a row. One big reason for this top ranking is that over the final three months of 2018, Ames saw the lowest average unemployment rate in our study at just 1.30%. That low unemployment is part of why the city also tops our 2018 list of the best cities for career opportunities.

While Ames ranks about average in terms of median incomes, those incomes are enough to cover housing costs. Annual housing costs make up just 22.65% of the median annual income. Getting to work is also manageable. The average commute time for residents is less than 18 minutes and ranks in the top 10% of the study. And since schools are a major concern for many parents, you may be happy to hear that Ames has the 29th-highest high school graduation rate in the study, at 92.30%.

2. Iowa City, IA

Moving up one spot from last year is Iowa City, Iowa. In most metrics, Iowa City isn't far behind the No. 1 spot. The unemployment rate is 1.60%. That's second-lowest out of the 524 cities we considered. Annual

housing costs are affordable at less than 25% of the median income, and the low violent crime rate ranks among the best 25% of cities. The city also ranks in the top 10% for its high school graduation rate of 90.70%.

If you're considering buying your first home in Iowa City, make sure to check out some of the first-time homebuyer programs available in Iowa.

3. College Station, TX

After missing out on last year's top 10, College Station, Texas once again ranks as a great place for working parents. For one, unemployment in the city is relatively low at 2.70%. Getting to work is also easy, given an average commute time of about 16 minutes. That's the 20th-shortest commute time in the study. College Station ranks among the safest in the study with a violent crime rate that ranks in the top 25% of all cities. Childcare costs are low and rank in the top 12% of cities.

4. Fayetteville, AR

Cracking the top 10 for the first time is Fayetteville, Arkansas. The biggest reason is that the average annual cost of full-time center-based childcare ranks in the top 10 of the study. About nine out of 10 children also go on to graduate from high school. Additionally, the low housing costs in Fayetteville rank in the top 12% of all cities. Parents looking for work will appreciate that the city's unemployment rate is just 2.40%. That's well below both the national rate and the overall unemployment rate in Arkansas, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Workers should also note that the Fayetteville metro area is one of the best places for creatives.

5. Oshkosh, WI

After ranking seventh, then eighth and then ninth over the past three years, Oshkosh, Wisconsin claims a top-five spot for 2019. As you consider different cities in which to raise your family, be sure to take into account that Oshkosh ranks in the top 30% for both its low crime rate and its high school graduation rate of nearly 90%. The unemployment rate of 2.40% ranks in the top 7% (37th-best overall) and an average commute time of just 17.4 minutes means it's relatively easy to get to work. The median income in Oshkosh is less than $50,000. But housing costs, which include property taxes and homeowners insurance, are also affordable. Annual housing costs only make up about 20% of the median annual income. That's a very low rate.

6. Jonesboro, AR

Jonesboro, Arkansas is similar to Fayetteville in that it can partially thank low childcare costs for its spot in this study's top 10. The city has a top-10 score in that metric. Local schools can take pride in Jonesboro's 90% high school graduation rate. That rate ranks in the top 16% of all 524 cities in this study. Housing in the city is also affordable. In fact, Jonesboro ranks in the top 10% of all cities for this metric.

7. Eau Claire, WI

Rising nine spots from last year is Eau Claire, Wisconsin. The city ranks well in both job- and family-related metrics. The unemployment rate of 2.30% ranks in the top 6% of cities in our study. The annual housing costs are relatively low and rank in the top 20% of our study. And even though median incomes aren't necessarily among the highest in the study, housing costs make up less than 20% of the median income. That's a very low rate relative to the Census Bureau's recommended maximum of 30%. Getting to work takes just 16 minutes on average, the 19th-best rate overall in the study. Eau Claire also ranks in the top 30% for its low violent crime rate.

8. Wichita Falls, TX

A few metrics stand out when looking at Wichita Falls, Texas. For one, the average commute time to work is just 14.40 minutes. That's the lowest in the entire study. In addition to the likely savings on gas that the short commute time brings, annual housing costs in the city are low, at about $8,800. The other standout metric for Wichita Falls is its high school graduation rate. At 94.70%, the city has the second-highest rate of the 524 cities in this study. Coupled with the low childcare costs, which average less than $8,000 per year, parents have a lot to appreciate if considering raising a family here.

9. Midland, TX

The metric that most helps Midland, Texas rank in the top 10 this year is its unemployment rate. At 2.1%, Midland has the 15th-lowest unemployment rate in the study. The median income in the city is also quite high at approximately $75,000. That ranks in the top 25% of all cities in this study. The average commute time of 20 minutes also ranks among the best 25%. Childcare costs are low in Texas overall and the Midland high school graduation rate comes in at 89.20%, which puts it in the top 25% of the study for this metric.

10. Provo, UT

Rounding out this top 10 is Provo, Utah. While it fell eight spots from last year, it's still a great city for

working parents. Unemployment is low at 2.70%. The median annual income, while lower than other cities in the study, still help residents to afford housing. Annual housing costs make up 24.51% of the median income. Getting to work is also relatively quick, with an average commute time of 18.30 minutes for residents. That leaves time for parents to enjoy with their families. Crime rates in Provo are also among the lowest we found, in the top 11% of the study.

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The Best Cities for Working Parents

Rank	City	Unem-ployment Rate[1]	Median Annual Housing Costs	Violent Crime Rate[2]	Avg. High School Graduation Rate	Avg. Annual Childcare Cost[3]	Index[4]
1	Ames, IA	1.3%	$ 11,748	184	92%	$ 9,280	100.00
2	Iowa City, IA	1.6%	$ 12,372	207	91%	$ 9,280	92.17
3	College Station, TX	2.7%	$ 12,060	199	87%	$ 7,998	87.74
4	Fayetteville, AR	2.4%	$ 9,780	602	89%	$ 6,037	86.93
5	Oshkosh, WI	2.4%	$ 10,116	236	89%	$ 11,111	85.50
6	Jonesboro, AR	2.7%	$ 9,396	525	90%	$ 6,037	84.33
7	Eau Claire, WI	2.3%	$ 10,284	236	88%	$ 11,111	84.13
8	Wichita Falls, TX	3.3%	$ 8,856	357	95%	$ 7,998	83.77
9	Midland, TX	2.1%	$ 13,548	271	89%	$ 7,998	82.76
10	Provo, UT	2.7%	$ 10,572	126	89%	$ 8,586	82.76
11	Abilene, TX	3.1%	$ 9,408	446	91%	$ 7,998	82.66
12	Orem, UT	2.7%	$ 13,020	70	89%	$ 8,586	81.13
13	St. Cloud, MN	2.2%	$ 9,276	377	93%	$ 13,832	80.77
14	San Angelo, TX	3.1%	$ 9,780	277	92%	$ 7,998	80.72
15	Appleton, WI	2.4%	$ 10,896	272	92%	$ 11,111	80.47
16	Mission, TX	5.8%	$ 7,992	116	90%	$ 7,998	79.35
17	Laredo, TX	3.6%	$ 9,864	322	93%	$ 7,998	78.79
18	Davis, CA	3.5%	$ 19,656	137	90%	$ 13,872	77.77

18	Davis, CA						
19	Round Rock, TX	2.9%	$ 16,944	136	93%	$ 7,998	77.62
20	Columbia, MO	1.8%	$ 10,920	498	90%	$ 8,325	76.91
21	Santa Clara, CA	2.5%	$ 27,792	168	88%	$ 13,872	76.75
22	Cary, NC	2.8%	$ 15,996	90	89%	$ 8,587	75.69
23	Denton, TX	3.0%	$ 12,852	304	92%	$ 7,998	75.53
24	Bryan, TX	2.7%	$ 10,320	430	87%	$ 7,998	75.23
25	Shawnee, KS	2.6%	$ 13,800	178	89%	$ 9,772	74.92

1. The unemployment rate is the three-month average from October 2018 to December 2018.
2. This is the annual number of violent crimes per 100,000 residents.
3. Average childcare cost is an annual figure calculated at the state level.
4. Our final analysis also included median income, average commute time, the percentage of workers who work 50-52 weeks per year and the state family leave policy rating from the National Partnership for Women & Families, which are not displayed in this table.

Data and Methodology

SmartAsset created this list of the best cities for working parents by looking at data for 524 cities. Specifically, we compared the cities across the following nine metrics:

- **Unemployment rate.** This is the average unemployment rate for the three months of October, November and December of 2018. Data comes from the Bureau of Labor Statistics and is measured at the county level.

- **Median household income.** This is the annual income for the median household. Data comes from the Census Bureau's 2017 1-year American Community Survey.

- **Median annual housing costs.** This looks at the annual housing costs for the median home. Data comes from the Census Bureau's 1-year 2017 American Community Survey.

- **Percentage of workforce working more than 49 weeks per year.** This is the percentage of workers who work 50 or more weeks per year. Data comes from the Census Bureau's 2017 1-year American Community Survey.

- **Average commute time.** This is the average number of minutes is takes to get to work. Data

comes from the Census Bureau's 2017 1-year American Community Survey.

- **Violent crime rate per 100,000 residents.** This is the number of violent crimes per 100,000 residents. Data comes from the FBI Uniform Crime Reporting Program and is for 2017. We used 2016 data where 2017 data was unavailable.

- **Graduation rate.** This is the average high school graduation rate. Data comes from the U.S. Department of Education and is for the 2016-2017 school year. Where the most recent data was unavailable, we used data from the 2015-2016 school year.

- **State policy rating.** This metric is a score created by the National Partnership for Women & Families. It rates states based on the level of support that they offer working parents. A higher score indicates a state has laws and policies (like paid family leave) that are friendlier to working parents.

- **Annual childcare costs.** This is the average annual cost of full-time center-based childcare. We took the average cost of care for children between infancy and 4 years old. Data comes from Childcare Aware of America.

To create our list of the top cities, we first ranked each city in each metric. Then we found each city's average ranking, giving all metrics equal weight. We used this average ranking to create our final score. The city with the best average ranking received a score of 100, while the city with the worst average ranking received a score of 0.