

HUMAN8



# Inside the Gen Z Parental Mind

# Inside the Gen Z parental mind

Generation Z, aka the post-Millennial generation, is increasingly shaping the parenting landscape. While today only a minority has entered parenthood, by 2027 – less than three years from now – they are expected to account for over half of all births, surpassing Millennials and Gen X. This makes them an important audience for brands.

But parenthood isn't set in stone for Gen Z. Many are deeply concerned about global issues like sustainability, economic instability, war and extremism. Some simply don't like the idea of parenting or aren't willing to sacrifice their freedom and lifestyle. Unlike previous generations, Gen Z is pushing back on societal pressures to have children, viewing it as a conscious, personal choice rather than an expectation. With their progressive and inclusive mindset, they're also far less judgmental about others choosing a child-free life. And those who do embrace parenthood approach it in their own unique way.

**This report, which is the result of a collaboration with Philips, explores what parenthood means for Gen Z, how their approach differs from that of previous generations and what they expect from brands.**





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# Methodology

We explored Gen Z's lifestyle, the context they live in and the evolving landscape of parenting through different perspectives.

## One-on-one interviews

We connected with **Gen Z non-parents** to gain a deeper understanding of their individual experiences, beliefs and motivations.

## Online community

4 weeks  
115 Gen Y & Gen Z (future) parents  
+ 2.000 interactions  
+ 1.700 videos and pictures

## Quant survey

In 2022, we conducted an online (mobile-first) survey across 16 markets with Gen Z, Millennials, Gen X and Baby Boomers to **understand these generations and what sets them apart**



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In this report, we use the following age definitions for generations:

**Gen Z:** born between 1997 and 2012

**Gen Y:** born between 1980 and 1996

**Gen X:** born between 1965 and 1979

**Baby Boomers:** born between 1946 and 1964

## Expert interviews

Interviews with experts, including Joeri Van den Bergh – a renowned specialist in marketing and branding with a focus on engaging younger generations – helped illuminate the dynamic Gen Z parental style with **real-world applications**.

# Gen Z, who?

Gen Z, born between 1997 and 2012, is reshaping the world as we know it. Growing up amid economic instability and global crises, these digital natives have transformed challenges into their superpowers. With 1 in 4 identifying mental health as a top concern, they've become outspoken advocates for mental well-being, unafraid to raise their voices.

Gen Z also champion inclusivity and social change. In fact, 56% agree there are still too many gender stereotypes, and 59% believe racial diversity enriches society. Their fluid identities reflect a playful, authentic spirit that celebrates self-expression.

These values also influence their expectations of brands. 71% believe companies should help people live better lives, and 59% want brands to engage in conversations about societal change.

Now comprising 25% of the global population, Gen Z isn't just the future. As their spending power grows faster than that of other generations, they are a must-consider for any brand.



## Context

**Digital natives**  
**Pandemic generation**  
**Turbulent, uncertain world**  
**Economic instability**

## Values

**Fluid identity explorers**  
**Social changemakers**  
**Inclusivity champions**  
**Mental wellbeing advocates**  
**Playful mavericks**  
**Pragmatic**

Gen Z born 1997 – 2012



# New parents on the block

For previous generations, parenthood was often a given – an expected life milestone. But for Gen Z, it's a conscious, personal choice. Many are choosing to delay parenthood to prioritise financial stability and personal freedom, while others are opting out entirely.

20% of Gen Z don't plan to have children because it's too expensive, 16% feel it's too time-intensive, and another 9% are concerned about climate change. This shift reflects Gen Z's more accepting attitude toward child-free lifestyles and the broader conversations happening around life choices.

While these trends are contributing to declining birth rates, Gen Z is still expected to lead the way in parenthood in the coming years, projected to account for over 50% of all births.

By 2027 **Gen Z** will account  
for **over 50% of all births**



# Parents as (reverse) role models

Gen Z's approach to parenting isn't just shaped by their unique generational traits, but also by the parenting style they experienced growing up.

While Gen Z were typically raised by Gen X parents, Gen Y mostly grew up with Baby Boomers. This has led to Gen Z and Gen Y experiencing very different parenting styles. Gen X parents highly value independence, aiming to raise self-reliant children capable of managing their own lives. Baby Boomer parents emphasised education, work ethic and family loyalty.

These differing approaches to parenting have significantly impacted Gen Z and Gen Y as and when they become parents themselves.

Gen Y often views their parents as role models and aims to replicate a protective and nurturing environment for their children, embracing a more holistic approach to personal development. Gen Z, on the other hand, while respecting their parents' efforts, tends to see them as reverse role models or examples of what they wish to avoid. While they appreciate the independence they were given, Gen Z aspires to a more supportive parenting style.

“

One thing I would like to do **differently** is **perhaps be more relaxed about rules and expectations.**

DE, Gen Z, first time dad

”





# Unpacking Gen Z's parental style

Child-led exploration

Fearless foundations

Emotional anchoring

Shared adventures







# Child-led exploration

Gen Z parents view their children as independent individuals with unique personalities, as opposed to extensions of themselves.

They encourage their children to explore at their own pace, acting as supportive companions rather than authoritative figures. This applies across all areas of life, from allowing children to choose extracurricular activities to responding to emotional outbursts. For example, instead of controlling tantrums, Gen Z parents focus on understanding and validating their child's emotions, offering comfort and guidance without imposing strict directives.

Their goal is to be present, to listen and to empower their children to grow into self-assured individuals, discovering life on their terms. By embracing this approach, Gen Z parents seek to nurture independence while fostering emotional growth.

“

*I will respect their personality and interests, encourage them to pursue their hobbies and interests, and provide them with appropriate resources and support.*

DE, Gen Z, first time dad

”

## Generational differences

This shift from director to cheerleader sets Gen Z apart. Boomers and Gen X typically led the way, expecting their children to follow their lead. In contrast, Gen Y opened the door to collaboration. They allowed for more input while still guiding and curating their children's interests.



# Fearless foundations

Gen Z believes in preparing children for life's inevitable challenges rather than overprotecting them. They understand that struggles are a natural part of growing up and facing them head-on builds confidence and resilience. Instead of clearing obstacles, they encourage their children to take risks, make mistakes and learn from them, all within a supportive environment.

They also ensure their kids are aware of the world's realities, openly discussing tough topics like discrimination and mental health. This empowers children to tackle challenges with strength and self-reliance, equipping them for adulthood while still offering emotional and mental support along the way.

Having grown up with more distant parental relationships, Gen Z learned many of life's hard lessons on their own. This experience fuels their desire to build fearless foundations.

“

*I'd make sure to **communicate properly and teach them about the cruelty of the world** and teach them to have boundaries.*

US, Gen Z, mom-to-be

”

## Generational differences

In contrast to Gen Z, Gen Y parents often create protective “bubbles” for their kids, leading to “helicopter” or “snowplough” parenting. They focus on shielding their children from challenges, while Gen Z parents embrace emotional transparency, striving to be more open and connected in comparison to their own upbringing.





# Emotional anchoring

Gen Z parents aim to be emotional anchors for their children, focusing on creating strong emotional bonds. Having grown up in environments where emotional support was sometimes lacking, they are committed to encouraging openness and psychological well-being.

For them, parenting goes beyond simply being present; it's about being approachable and engaging in regular, meaningful dialogue. They emphasise emotional transparency, ensuring that their children feel secure and understood. By embracing vulnerability, Gen Z parents create a safe space for their kids to express their feelings freely, thereby building deep trust.

By serving as an emotional anchor, they help their kids develop resilience and emotional intelligence, ensuring they are prepared for the world both mentally and emotionally.

“

*“I know how it feels to be unheard as a kid especially by adults, and I think it's extremely important we treat children as capable, intelligent people who deserve a space. A huge thing I tell others is to not do something to him that you wouldn't do or say to an adult. Like, don't say he has nothing to cry about, and that his emotions aren't real, because it's never okay to invalidate feelings and we wouldn't say that to an adult sharing their feelings.”*

US, Gen Z, mum

”

## Generational differences

While Gen Y parents also value emotional bonds, their approach can sometimes be more reserved. They focus more on providing opportunities for their children and being role models, rather than being emotionally transparent.



# Shared adventures

Since having children is a conscious choice for Gen Z, those who do enter parenthood don't view it as something that compromises their identity or lifestyle.

They see parenthood as a shared adventure rather than a sacrifice of identity. For Gen Z, parenting is not just about giving; they believe it should also be enjoyable. They feel that activities and time spent together should be fun for both parents and children, reflecting the idea that parenthood enhances their own experiences rather than detracts from them.

As a result, Gen Z parents strive to integrate fun into their daily routines - whether during leisure time or chores – to ensure that both they and their children find joy in their interactions.

“

*My best purchase in the past year would probably be a ride on car for kids. It was my daughter's first outside toy. It meant we could go outside and have fun together with more than just bubbles. We were able to go on a lot more 'walks'. Although, I was usually the only one walking LOL.*

US, Gen Z, mum

”

## Generational differences

Gen Z's playful approach differs from Gen Y parents, who often blend fun with educational outcomes, sometimes sacrificing their own enjoyment for their children's development. While Gen Y seeks "me time" to recharge, Gen Z focuses on "we time," finding fulfilment in shared experiences.



# Jellyfish parents

Gen Y parents tend to adopt and diligently stick to a specific parenting philosophy. In contrast, Gen Z parents follow a more flexible, situation-based strategy known as "mix-and-match" parenting. They combine elements from various parenting philosophies to suit each unique situation, continuously adapting their strategies based on their children's needs and circumstances. This flexibility reflects their belief that no single method holds all the answers, and that adaptability is key to effective parenting.

Gen Z parents often face misconceptions due to their child-centric approach and fluidity in parenting style. Older generations sometimes label them as "jellyfish parents", implying a lack of structure and boundaries. However, Gen Z parents reject this characterisation. They see themselves as intentional and informed, making conscious choices to support their children's growth.

For Gen Z, parenthood is about creating a responsive and evolving framework that meets their child's unique needs.



# Brand expectations

Both Gen Z and Gen Y parents have high expectations of brands, but their priorities differ significantly.

Gen Y parents primarily seek safety and reliability in products. These are their only non-negotiables, and they are generally more lenient and adaptable regarding other brand expectations, such as innovation and sustainability.

In contrast, Gen Z parents bring a no-compromise mindset to their brand expectations. For them it's not enough for a brand to excel in just one area; they demand that brands perform well across multiple fronts. **They look for a brand that cares.**



**C** Credible on ESG and DEI policies

**A** Affordable

**R** Right & good for me

**E** Enhances connection

**S** Sparks joy



# Credible on ESG and DEI

Gen Z parents expect brands to take societal action beyond environmental sustainability. They want companies to lead on ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) and DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion), prioritising community impact over profit. In fact, 56% find it important that brands give back to society while another 49% believe brands should challenge societal issues.

Inclusivity isn't optional for this generation, with 60% of Gen Z finding it important when purchasing brands. As a result, Gen Z parents look for brands that reflect diverse family dynamics (such as single parents and same-sex families) in their messaging. Gen Z's critical eye enables them to quickly spot superficial efforts, holding brands accountable on social media when promises fall short. Transparency is key: they expect detailed updates on how companies are making real progress.



## Brand take-aways

Brands that genuinely embrace social justice and equality can earn the loyalty of the passionate Gen Z generation.

# Affordable

Gen Z parents approach finances pragmatically, prioritising stability and smart spending in today's uncertain economy. They enjoy discovering “financial hacks” and value-for-money products. For them, affordability is about value, sustainability, and long-term benefits.

## **Short-term affordability:**

They seek quality products at reasonable prices, look for promotions, prefer refillable options and embrace cost-saving strategies.

## **Long-term affordability:**

Gen Z parents value longevity, favouring items with extended lifecycles. They're also drawn to circular economy principles, resale value, and consider affordability in terms of “price per use” rather than just upfront cost.

## **Brand take-aways**

To resonate with Gen Z parents, brands should focus on providing genuine value through quality products that emphasise sustainability and longevity.





# Right for me

When buying brands, 68% of Gen Z find it important that brands are transparent about the resources and ingredients they use. Valuing health and safety, Gen Z parents actively choose products free from harmful chemicals and demand transparent labelling on natural, organic, and non-toxic options.

Another important aspect for Gen Z is that brands understand them and what they stand for (56%). They seek items that not only protect their families but also blend seamlessly with their active lifestyles, whether it's stylish baby gear or time-saving gadgets. Since parenthood enhances rather than replaces their identity, they also seek this from brands.

Customisation is also key – Gen Z parents value products that cater to each child's unique needs and believe tailored options are more effective.



## Brand take-aways

Offering personalised solutions that celebrate individuality while supporting specific developmental and health requirements for their children is essential for Gen Z.

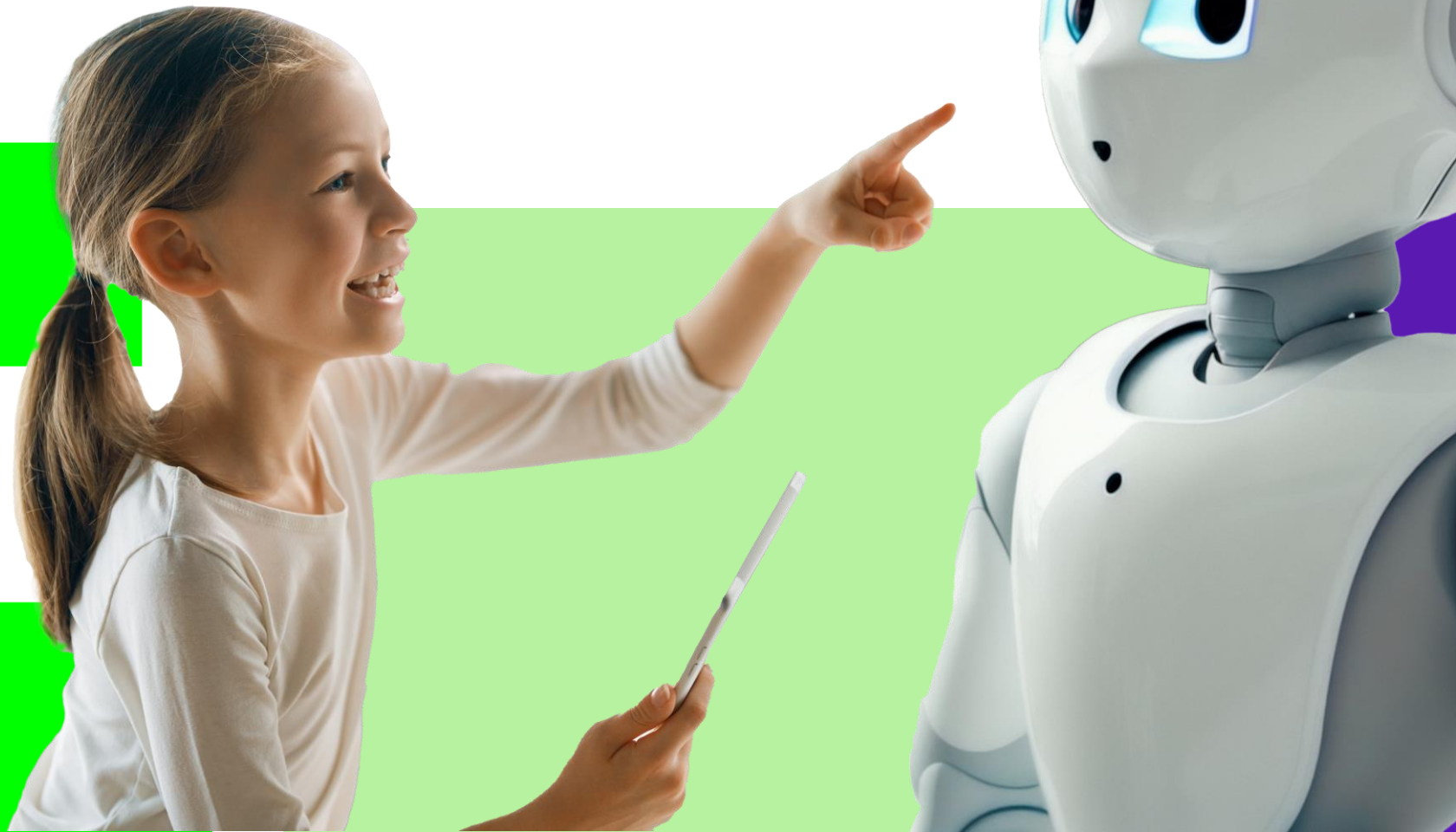
# Enhanced connection

With the goal of helping their children navigate life's challenges, Gen Z parents seek brands who strengthen the relationship and emotional bond with their kids. They value products that enhance their presence, build trust and encourage open conversations, especially on difficult topics. Furthermore, 59% of Gen Z demand brands to join the conversation about what changes are needed in society.

While they are open to technology that supports parenting – such as personalised products and time-saving tools – Gen Z parents are cautious of its impact on their relationships. They want technology, particularly AI, to aid rather than intrude on their connection with their children.

## Brand take-aways

To win over Gen Z, tech should be positioned as a supportive tool that enhances emotional bonding, not something that disrupts or detracts from it.





# Spark joy

Gen Z parents want brands that go beyond functionality to create moments of joy and connection. Unlike previous generations, they seek brands that stimulate family togetherness, offering playful experiences that transform everyday tasks into bonding moments.

Gen Z appreciates products with unique designs, sensorial elements and innovative features that make parenting more enjoyable. Humour plays a big role in this; Gen Z parents love brands that embrace the chaotic, imperfect reality of parenthood with a light-hearted touch.

48% of Gen Z are even willing to spend more on brands that have a sense of humour and playfulness.

## Brand take-aways

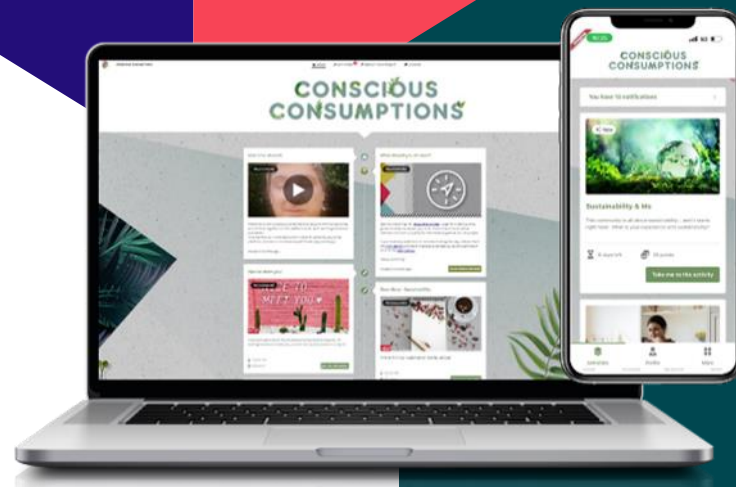
By incorporating humour and authenticity, brands can build meaningful connections with Gen Z parents, making them feel understood and helping create a more joyful family experience.



# Connecting to the people that matter to your brand

For this report, we immersed ourselves in the lives of Gen Y and Gen Z (future) parents for four weeks, using our mobile-first online community.

Through a blend of individual and group activities, mobile ethnography, storytelling exercises, and mission-based tasks, we explored the many facets of the parenting experience. This resulted in over 2,000 interactions and more than 1,700 videos and pictures, offering a vivid glimpse into the world of these (future) parents and uncovering differences, nuances and evolutions compared to previous generations.



Insight communities are the driving force behind our mission to make consumer-centric decision-making a reality.

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