

4 best places to raise a family

By [Catey Hill](#)

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You may find work-life balance in these locales



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Parents, if you live in a near-perpetual state of work/life imbalance, it may be time to move.

Fully 56% of working parents say balancing the responsibilities of a career and family is difficult, [according to a survey released in November by the Pew Research Center](#) — and that's gotten worse for many. Nearly one-third of full-time U.S. employees with kids

say that, in the past five years, it has become more difficult to balance work and family responsibilities, [according to a survey by professional services company EY](#). While some of this has to do with factors like long hours and inflexible work arrangements, a lot of it can be blamed on where you live. Expensive cities with workaholic cultures and long commute times make balancing work and family life even harder. And that's especially true in those cities where you have to spend a high percentage of your income to live in a good public school district (or else shell out plenty of dough for private schools).

The methodology

So MarketWatch has identified four cities where it's easier to achieve work/life balance. To compile this list, we first looked at cities with affordable homes in good school districts. (We did this because most lists about where to raise a family simply look at the city's overall school ranking, which misses the mark, because the good schools may only be in unaffordable areas.)

This was [based on data from real estate research firm RealtyTrac](#) that examined areas in which the average wage earner in the city could spend less than 30% of his income for an average home in a good school district (a good district is one that has an elementary, middle and high school, all of which have at least average test scores). That narrowed our list considerably, as only about 13% of zip codes in America meet this criteria.

From that list, we then looked at the cities in which parents could find jobs (with unemployment rates below 6%), where the cost of living was no more than 10% higher than the national average and average commute times were less than 30 minutes each way. We also looked for cities that did not have crime scores above 70 out of 100 on a scale of 1 (lowest crime) to 100 (highest crime); we went a bit above average crime rates because we were selecting cities for this list, which tend to have a bit higher crime rates than rural areas. (The average crime rates in the US are slightly over 40 out of 100 for both property and violent crime.)

Finally, we factored in lifestyle criteria like weather, culture, arts, entertainment and parks, as well as childcare costs. (We did not include cities in states that were among the 10 most expensive states for center-based infant care, according to data from Child Care Aware, a nonprofit group in Arlington, Va. that works with state and local agencies.)

Here are the four best places to move if you're hoping to achieve work/life balance.

You may find work-life balance in these locales



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Greenville, S.C.

For nearly a decade, commercial developer Bridget Dwyer-Crowley dreamed of leaving Fort Myers, but it took her husband's near-fatal snowboarding accident a few years back to make it happen: "It made us reevaluate what was important to us: the kids," she says. "We wanted a better place for the kids," she explains.

So two years ago, the family set out in an RV — visiting more than 20 states and countless cities over the course of 60 days — searching for a community-focused city with plenty of outdoor and other recreation that would "take the kids away from the X-Box." Last year, they settled on Greenville, thanks to its "tight-knit" community that values volunteering and offers plethora of activities, she explains.

"I left 12 brothers and sisters in Ft. Meyers," she says. "That is how impressive this place is."

It wasn't always so. In the 1960s, when much of the textile industry — then the town's largest employer — cleared out of Greenville, few residents imagined that the town would rise from the scraps. But thanks to a decades-long revitalization, the walkable

downtown is now lined with restaurants (more than 100 of them just along Main Street, most locally owned, and some of which are among the best in South, critics contend), art galleries and shops, as well as the 30-plus-acre Falls Park, dotted with quirky public art projects.

The town of roughly 60,000 residents has quality schools in affordable neighborhoods, and plenty of jobs: Michelin and BMW have a large presence in the city; Dwyer-Crowley thinks that this has made residents here quite used to outsiders, and thus quick to embrace them. The health system here employs more than 10,000 people. There's also an 80,000-square-foot children's museum, planetarium, zoo, free outdoor concerts downtown on Thursday and Friday nights in the summer and a family-filled farmer's market on Main Street with about 75 vendors on Saturdays from May to October.

"It surprises people how much there is to do especially for a town of our size," says public relations professional Taryn Scher, who moved here from New York with her husband in 2007 and now has a seven-month old.

What's more, Greenville sits at the foot of the Blue Ridge Mountains and has nearly 20 miles of hiking and biking trails just though its beloved GHS Swamp Rabbit Trail, a green space along the Reedy River. And thanks to an average commute that's under 20 minutes, you may even have time to take that bike ride with your kids on a weeknight.

That said, there are downsides, including hot and humid summers and an elevated crime rate (though, residents contend, there are plenty of safe neighborhoods and people feel comfortable walking around downtown alone at night).

Cost of living	6.8%, lower than average
Unemployment rate	5.1%
Median home price	\$122,400
Crime rate , out of 100 (violent/property)	69.6 / 64.6
Average commute time	17.49 minutes
Annual health insurance premium paid for a family	\$4,110

Sources for this and all following charts: Bureau of Labor Statistics for unemployment; Kaiser Family Foundation for health insurance (data reflects employees' contribution for employer-based health insurance in 2014); Sperling's Best Places for remaining data