Family-Focused Retail

How Families Balance Spending, Value and Experience Across Retail Destinations

Online survey of 1,004 qualified U.S. parents or guardians conducted June 9–14, 2026.

Executive Summary

Family-focused retail combines routine household needs with occasional treats. Affordability and practical ease are considered foundational elements, while a broad mix of stores and age-appropriate experiences are advantageous. **Averages hide how widely spending varies.** Survey respondents report mean monthly spending of $466 on family-focused retail and experiences, excluding essentials, versus a $250 median. The gap suggests that a small number of high spenders pull the average up, so the median gives a better picture of what a typical parent spends.

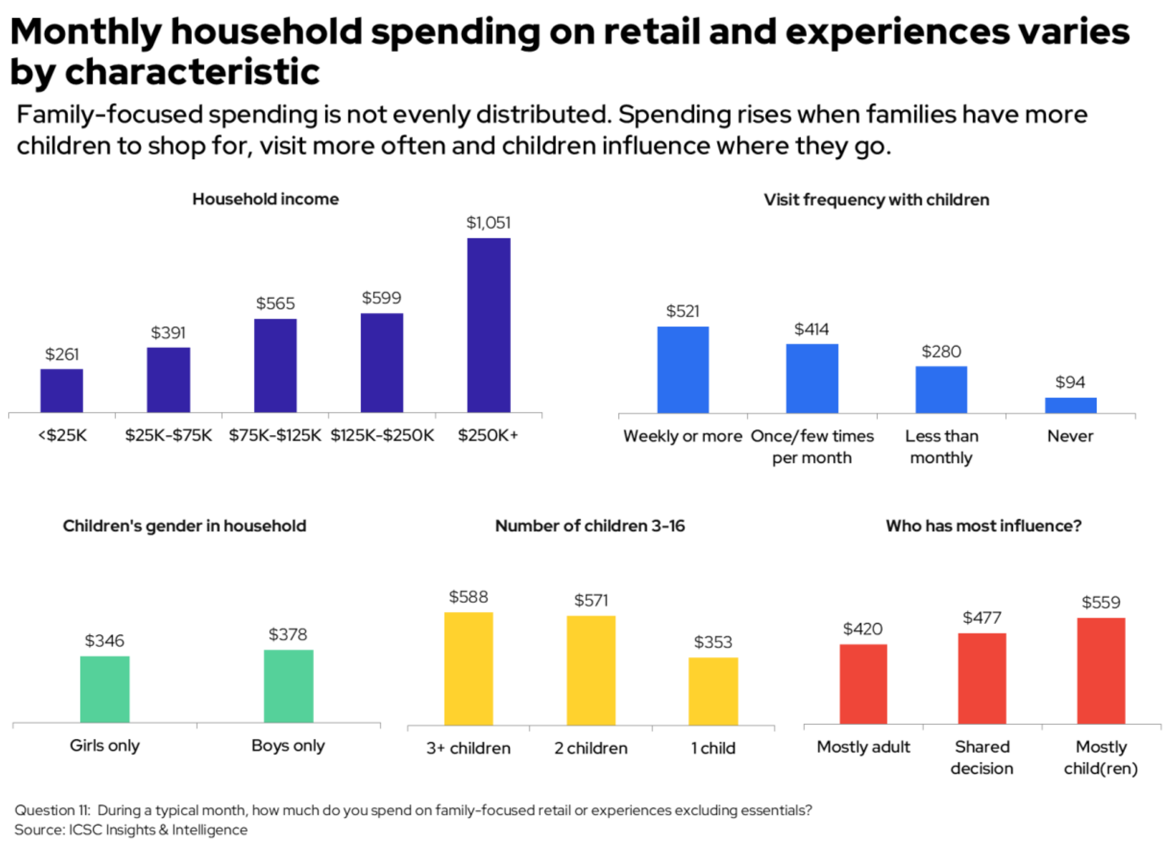


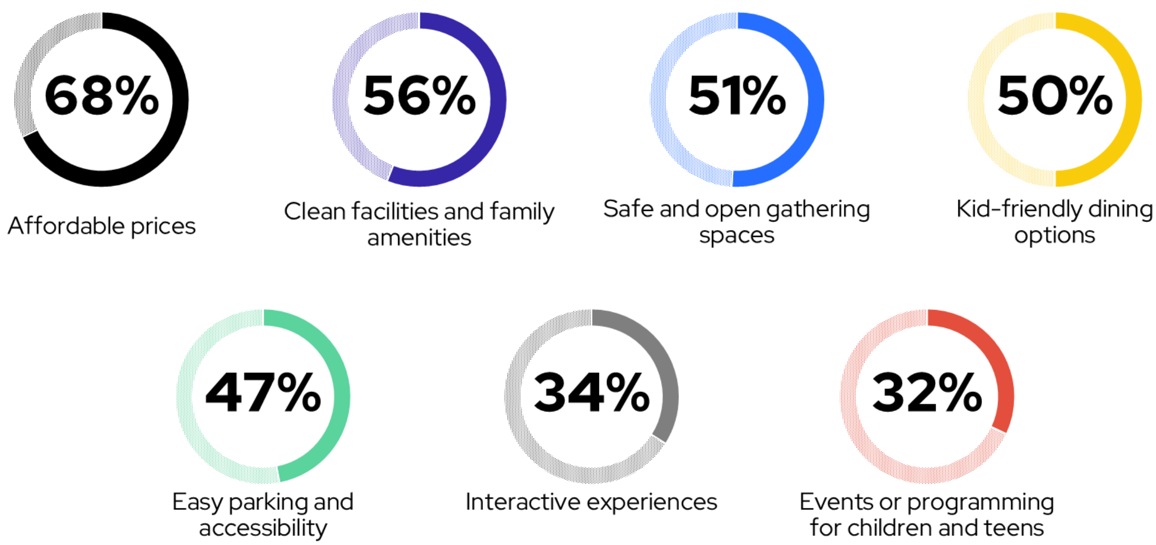
Figure 1: Mean reported monthly spending on family-focused retail or experiences, excluding essentials, by selected household and visit characteristics.

Value and ease come first; experiences build on them. Affordable prices are the most selected destination feature, at 68%; 79% say regular family-focused events or activities would make them more likely to visit. The pattern has two parts: affordability and ease appear to come first, with experiences suited to the audience and occasion adding to that base.

Parents want value, comfort and convenience first

Parents care about the full visit, not just the stores. Destinations that feel easy, comfortable and worth the cost are more likely to win family trips.

KEY FEATURES THAT MAKE CENTERS MORE APPEALING



Question 13: Which features make a shopping center more appealing for family visits?
Source: ICSC Insights & Intelligence.

Figure 2: Features surveyed parents say make a shopping center more appealing for family visits.

Why this matters

The economics of the trip are the foundation. Affordability is the floor, not one option among several. Affordable prices are the single most-selected feature (68%), and looking for value runs through the whole sample: 94% of parents report using at least one way to save money. Clean facilities, safe gathering space, suitable dining and accessible parking are widely selected alongside price. In short, parents weigh the full cost of the visit in both time and money, not only the price of an event or product, so this is the precondition the rest of the offer builds on. The remaining patterns follow, in roughly this order of current support:

First, the destination reflects the range of reasons families visit, so a mix of stores serves several of those reasons in one trip. Parents already use a variety of destinations and expect to spend across retail, dining and entertainment, so this idea rests on what they already do. That variety suggests, but does not prove, that coordinated hours, easy-to-follow signage and a balanced mix of stores make visits smoother and encourage spending across categories.

Second, regular, relevant experiences serve as focused, testable additions. Stated interest is high: 86% say family-friendly experiences influence where they shop and 79% say regular events would make them more likely to visit. But these are opinions about an offer that does not yet exist, not guaranteed visits, which is why they rank behind the mix of stores. Their effect is easier to read when each event's audience, value and frequency are set out, and when attendance, extra visits, purchases, repeat visits and cost per household reached are measured against a realistic baseline.

Third, families differ from one another, so tailoring to children's ages and each household's needs matters. Children's ages and who makes decisions shape different needs and interests, which points towards flexible experiences and prices, practical details that are clear to adults, and age-appropriate things for children to explore. This is more a way to focus the first two ideas than a program on its own, and the numbers for some groups are small, so it ranks last.

Methodology

ICSC's Family-Focused Retail study was conducted online June 9–14, 2026, among 1,004 qualified U.S. parents or guardians of children ages 3–16. The total base is 1,004. Findings in this report about visiting formats, visit reasons, destination influence, child requests, unplanned spending and spending categories use the 997 respondents who reported ever visiting shopping centers or retail districts with their children. Other findings use the total base unless noted. Question wording and response structure vary; multiple-response results can sum to more than 100%. Displayed percentages may not total 100% because of rounding.

Source: ICSC Insights & Intelligence, Family-Focused Retail survey, June 2026.