

Dr. Karl-Maria de Molina, Editor

The Renaissance of the Family

A practical guide for families

This book is published as part of the Family Valued project
(www.FamilyValued.org)

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Table of Contents

1	Preface	VI
2	Introduction	VIII
3	Family and Society	7
	The family between change and increase in value <i>Dr. Ana Hoffmeister</i>	7
	The Renaissance of the Family <i>Prof. Ulrich Reinhardt</i>	11
	Rediscovering the Value of Motherhood <i>Madeleine Wallin</i>	15
	Marriage Matters More Than Ever <i>Prof. Brad Wilcox</i>	19
	The traditional family is the model for the future <i>Hermann Binkert</i>	25
	The Forgotten Potential of the Family <i>Susanne Hartfiel</i>	29
	The reason for government family policy <i>Prof. Matteo Rizzolli</i>	39
	Families are decisive for Germany's long-term economic success - Family as a location factor <i>Dr. Wido Geis-Thöne</i>	45

Family – the original solution to loneliness <i>Hartmut Steeb</i>	49
4 Family-Career Balance	53
The Future of Work: A World Where Family Matters <i>Birgit Wintermann and Dorothee Kubitza</i>	53
Employees – not recipients but active shapers of family-work-balance <i>Dagmar Weßler-Poßberg</i>	59
Entrepreneurial couple – An underestimated life and work model <i>Elke Sieber and Daniel Wensauer-Sieber</i>	65
kiwifalter – the hub for pioneering family-work balance <i>Katja Kaltenbach and Stephanie Maus</i>	71
Partnership, kids, career – Our Path as an equal entrepreneurial couple <i>Angelika and Hannes Beierlein</i>	75
Reconciling family and career – a win-win-win situation <i>Kiki Radicke</i>	81
Flexible job models for parents in management positions <i>Nadine Quosdorf</i>	85

5	Couple Relationship	89
	Letting partnerships succeed <i>Prof. Guy Bodenmann</i>	89
	How one's own marriage shapes the understanding of family for the next generations <i>Angela Zeidler-Frész</i>	93
	The provider role and why it matters <i>Belinda Brown</i>	97
	The challenge: to live as a couple <i>Peter Bartning</i>	103
	Under new auspices – What being a father looks like today <i>Julia Strobel</i>	107
	How family works, what helps and what doesn't <i>Prof. Raphael Bonelli</i> (Excerpt from a lecture)	111
6	Parenting	119
	GenZ – Implications for Families <i>Susanne Nickel</i>	119
	TRUST, NOT FEAR! What makes our children strong <i>Viola Patricia Herrmann</i>	123

Questions about gender in children and adolescents - What can be done? <i>Claire de Gatellier</i>	127
Does the family have a future? The Greatest Challenges for today's family politics <i>Hedwig von Beverfoerde</i>	135
„Tell the children about love“ - How to protect children from ideologies <i>Leni Kesselstatt</i>	139
Raising children in a woke environment <i>Esther Bockwyt</i>	143
„I'm turning off the route on the count of three“ – How can “Digital Natives” Learn media literacy? <i>Pia Brand</i>	147
Parents need skills for raising children <i>Dr. Karl-Maria de Molina</i>	151
Some suggestions to teach children the beauty of reading <i>Luis Daniel González</i>	155
7 Care and Inclusion	159
Why do they stare like that, Mom? <i>Anna Mendel</i>	159
Balancing care and work: Make it as effective and easy as possible! <i>Julia Kahle</i>	163

	The new role of fathers: challenges and opportunities	167
	<i>Heiner Fischer</i>	
	„The place on my right...remains empty“ –	171
	When a relative dies and leaves a gap	
	<i>Sibylle Patriarca</i>	
8	Practical tips for families	175
	How to be happy with 1, 2, 3...children?	175
	<i>Rosa Pich</i>	
	Family years – how our life with children succeeds	181
	<i>Prof. Michael Schulte-Markwort</i>	
	„Have you started living yet or are you still optimizing? -	185
	Mastering the interplay of family and career with ease	
	<i>Felicitas Richter</i>	
	The everyday life of a large family	189
	<i>Caroline and Carlos Aponte</i>	
	Celebrating in a Meaningful Way – On the Cultural-Forming	195
	Power of Community in Family and Society	
	<i>Janina and Mathias Kürschner</i>	
	Strong women – strong families	201
	<i>Doreen Amlung</i>	
	Parents-, sons- and daughters-in-law –	205
	6 tips for better relations	
	<i>Simone Rüssel</i>	

1 Preface

Family — the concept we once took for granted has now become a deliberate choice. Today, the decision to start a family is more complex than ever. Those who choose to embark on this journey face numerous challenges and decisions that simply didn't exist in the same way just a few decades ago.

When I became a mother, I was very young. At that time, none of my peers had children, and my husband and I often felt adrift, searching for role models to guide us. Reflecting back now, I realize that no one ever told us how enriching and fulfilling it could be to have a large family. We weren't prepared for the immense joy and the wonderful experiences that would come from raising our children. Nor were we fully supported as we navigated the many challenges of family life and partnership. Yet, looking back, I can say that my seven children are my greatest blessing. I often worried that raising a family would hold back my career. But now, I see how invaluable the skills I gained through motherhood—such as stress management, conflict resolution, task coordination, leadership, and visionary thinking—have been both in my professional and personal life.

Today's society is increasingly focused on the individual. In the Western world, we have more choices than ever before about how we live our lives. Yet, the flip side of this abundance of choice is a growing sense of isolation. We see this every day: loneliness is on the rise, intergenerational contact is dwindling, older adults often live alone in anonymous care facilities, the number of single households is increasing, and dating has become less committed in the age of social media.

At the same time, the traditional image of the family is fading. But what does "traditional" mean today? Is it merely the classic model of mother, father, and child, or is it about creating a strong, intergenerational bond? What does a modern family look like in today's world? In a society that places such a high value on individuality, family life has become a complex endeavour, requiring a balance between each member's unique qualities and the shared values that are the foundation of family.

In recent decades, the concept of family has been undervalued, and it's time for a renaissance. This revival should make space for individual growth while also reaffirming the immense value of a strong family structure for parents, children, and society

as a whole. Without the family, which has been the cornerstone of social structure for centuries, it's hard to imagine a future that is truly worth living.

It's time to bring the family back into focus! The following chapters explore the family from various perspectives and consider how its future can be shaped. It's a task for all of us to undertake!

Prof. Julia Finkeissen

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2 Introduction

Why have 44 authors decided to address such a plain old topic as The Family? What is new about this book? In view of how much has already been written on the subject, do we need it at all?

Notwithstanding their different perspectives on the family, one thing unites all these authors, and that is their deep appreciation for it. Our joint mission is to put the spotlight on "a rediscovery of the family and its importance for society".

Although most of the authors and readers come from the German-speaking regions of Europe, we have included contributions from other countries, in order to broaden the perspective and so enrich the collection.

This book is part of the international project, "**Family Valued**" — an ecosystem consisting of a book, a homepage and a social media platform, all interlinked. The ecosystem approach makes the book interactive, so to speak, by expanding it to online content: author profiles, texts, videos, podcasts and others. Its multidimensionality gives the book a unique dynamic, improving the reader's "customer journey" and rendering the articles livelier and more immediate. Due to its international audience, the book is in both German and English. And later 2025 in Spanish.

The "**Family Valued**" project aims to "strengthen the self-confidence of families", hence our motto: "Making families stronger". In our opinion, this is necessary because the family is under attack from different sides and ideologies.

The book is a mosaic in that we look at different aspects of the family, and from different perspectives. First, we discuss its importance, indeed its necessity, for society. Then, since the book addresses families of working people, the compatibility of family and career comes second; and because the couple's relationship forms the backbone of the family, that topic is placed here, too. This is followed by children and their upbringing. As our Western society is ageing, caring for sick and disabled relatives is an important part of our lives. We have therefore dedicated a chapter to it. Finally, we share advice from families in the form of "best practices".

All the above topics could all be labelled "challenges for families". Therefore, the format of the articles is to describe those challenges and then point out practical countermeasures. Hence the book can be considered a self-help guide for families.

As stated above, the book is only one part of the overall "**Family Valued**" project. Over the next 5 years we aim to publish a lot more articles and encouraging news on the homepage, then link them to the authors' social media channels so that an active and lively community can develop.

And let us not forget that everything costs money. Therefore, the community of authors and readers has joined forces with donors. Donations are collected by the Familienglueck.de Foundation. We would also like to thank the Heimer family for including the project in their foundation.

The "**Family Valued**" team would like to thank all authors, who submitted and revised their contributions in careful, painstaking work.

And as editor, I would also like to thank everyone in the team who made this project possible, and especially Peter Brittain for the English editing, Andrea Kinzelmann for correcting the texts and Raúl Sánchez for suggestions and the mediation of contacts with authors.

I would like to conclude this introduction with a quote from the book "Future Family" by our author Ana Hoffmeister: "*The diverse personal insights in this book are embedded in the overarching question of how we will shape family, work and life in the future. How we can live together, who is part of our family life, how the status of family in our society can change and what it takes to do so.*"

Dr. Karl-Maria de Molina, Editor

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3 Family and Society

Dr. Ana Hoffmeister

Consultant and author
Germany



The Family between change and increase in value

Abstract

Whether it's a kindergarten strike, a school failure or a "daycare-tastrophe": families can rely decreasingly on institutional support. They are increasingly at the end of your tether in everyday life between work, care and private life, and feel abandoned by the state. Nevertheless, families are indispensable for a sustainable society. In the search for alternative support systems and work models, new life plans are emerging, and the image of the family is changing.

Article

For most Germans, family is life's most valued possession – even above work, friends and hobbies. And not only for parents with underage children, but also for the young generation, which sees the family as a source of meaning and orientation.

Family has been at the core of our social life for centuries and has always been more than just the connection between mother, father and child. Family connects generations into a common story. It gives insights into our past and our common future. Family is the place where elementary questions about our origins, identity and belonging are shaped and answered. What we experience in our families is formative for all other relationships in life – whether in a professional context or in



voluntary work, whether in our friendships, our partnership or in the family we start ourselves.

"In the next few years, families worldwide will shrink by 35%".

In view of the current crises in politics, the economy, society and the climate, we have in recent years experienced a profound loss of public confidence in the effectiveness of political action. In the course of these developments, families are gaining importance as a stabilizing force and are an important social safety net that is taking considerable additional strain. Whether it's the daycare crisis, wretched schooling or our ailing care system, families are increasingly absorbing the state's deficiencies and are increasingly reaching their limits. The number of parents suffering from burnout continues to rise even after the pandemic, and mental illnesses among children and adolescents also continue to increase. The pressing question is therefore whether our current family structures are strong enough to be able to offer this essential social and emotional support in the future.

"The way we live as a family today inevitably shapes future generations".

In the next few years, families worldwide will shrink by 35 %. We will have fewer relatives overall than our ancestors. This will further increase the pressure on institutional support systems. This is because relatives – whether grandparents, aunts and uncles – already absorb a large proportion of childcare and private care and are therefore an important pillar in the compatibility of family and career. Our society is getting older and with it the age range of generations continues to grow. Grandchildren will probably have more living grandparents in the future – but the question will be whether these will still be fit enough to take care of their grandchildren. While Germany is struggling with falling birth rates and politics that are often perceived as child-unfriendly, the family as a concept is being put to the test. The traditional image of the nuclear family, consisting of parents and children, is expanding. New family forms and cohabitations are emerging that replace, complement or replicate classic extended family structures.

The way we live as a family today inevitably shapes future generations. In an increasingly individualized world, intergenerational relationships are invaluable. Today, young and old often live spatially and emotionally separated from each other in everyday life. This not only shapes our individual courses of life but has an impact on the professional world and society. If there are no intergenerational relationships in the family, generational conflicts in the professional context and society are inevitable. Togetherness must be organized much more consciously and promoted at an early stage because that will be an important key in the future to be able to overcome crises together.

Against this background, the question is no less than how we want to live together as a society in the future. The answer to this is fundamental to formulating political programs that truly understand and support the needs of families. It is not only about reliable state services but about shaping a culture that promotes and values coexistence across generations. The question of the future of the family thus revolves not only around its role as a social safety net but also about shaping the coexistence of the generations. How we as a society shape these relationships, what support we offer to families, and how we harness the potential of all generations will not only influence the well-being of individuals but also determine how resilient and viable our society as a whole will be.

The future of the family is therefore not only a private or a political question, but a cultural challenge that affects us all. How we make decisions today and what priorities we set will have a significant impact on the way we live tomorrow.

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Prof. Dr. Ulrich Reinhardt

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Germany



The Renaissance of the Family

Abstract

Even though the family is the most important thing for German citizens, birth rates remain low. In eight out of ten areas, there is less consensus on reasons against starting a family than there was in 2014! The compatibility of family and career, especially for women, is not considered sufficient. This is partly due to care work being seen mainly as a woman's task. Another factor is the uncertainty about the future. The prognosis is nevertheless positive. The gradual decrease in concerns about having children clearly shows that it is quite possible to actively influence the birth rate.

Article

Family is and remains the most important thing, a large majority of Germans agree with this statement. Due to the lockdowns and restrictions during the Corona pandemic and the resulting forced closeness to the family, more and more Germans actually feel more connected to their families. One in two citizens even says that they have (re)discovered the value of the family. Contrary to widespread opinion, the family is not an obsolete model. On the contrary, a renaissance of the family is being clearly heralded because – especially in uncertain times – one's own family proves to be a reliable anchor and the most important thing in the lives of many citizens.



Nevertheless, the birth rate in Germany is low at 1.46 children per woman, because many couples are currently consciously deciding against having children of their own. The reasons for this are manifold and range from financial burdens to a lack of state support, to the fear of divorce and of single parenting. In a 10-year comparison, however, fears are decreasing. In eight out of ten areas, there is less consensus on reasons against starting a family than there was in 2014!

The two main reasons cited by Germans against starting a family are the high financial burden and the difficulties in reconciling work and family life. Despite efforts by companies to offer more family-friendly structures, the compatibility of family and career remains a challenge for many parents. Implementation is still not easy, especially for women. Only about one in four citizens expects better compatibility between job and family for women over the coming years.

There are various reasons for this rather sceptical attitude. One of the main reasons lies in the still firmly anchored traditional expectations within society, according to which care work is mainly to be done by women. Women themselves tend to exclude themselves from certain professions due to gender stereotypes, and women interrupt their careers for the sake of the family much more often than men. This is due, among other things, to their generally lower income and consequently to concerns about greater financial losses if the father takes paternity leave. In addition, women are more often exposed to the double burden of both professional and family responsibilities without adequate support and working conditions (e.g. guaranteed childcare places or flexible working hours).

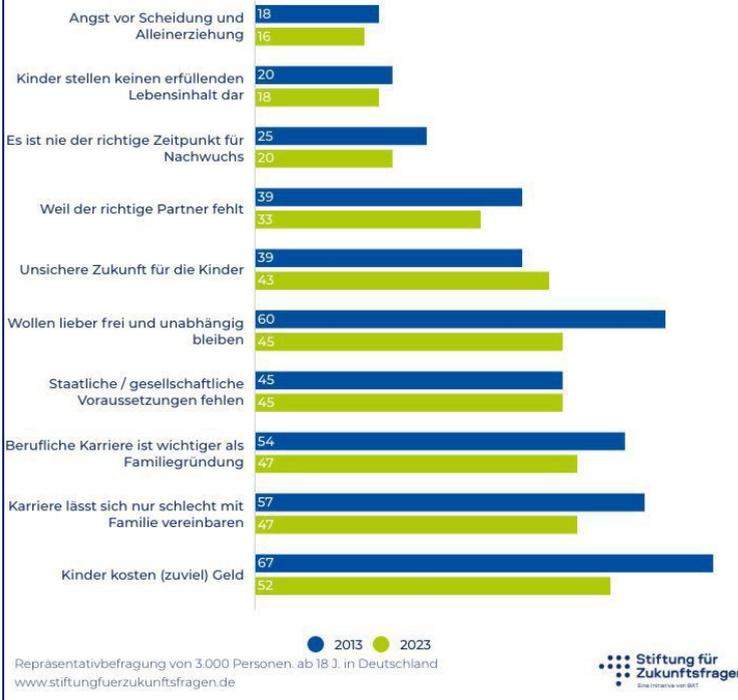
As another central reason against having their own children Germans cite the general uncertainty regarding the future. This is the only area where concern has increased (see below). Almost half of Germans are now worried about future social developments, whether in terms of economic growth, climate change or conflicts. Putting a child into this world therefore seems irresponsible for many couples.

Outlook

Gradually decreasing concerns about having children clearly show that it is quite possible to actively influence the birth rate. The right framework conditions can remove the fears and burdens of potential parents. In the future, politicians will continue to

Warum die Deutschen keine Kinder bekommen Sorgen nehmen ab

Von 100 Befragten meinen, dass viele Bürger aus folgenden Gründen keine eigene Familie gründen:



be called upon to improve these framework conditions for families. The federal government currently cites over 150 different family benefits.

Of these around 48 billion euros are provided annually for child benefit alone. In addition, companies will in future have to better promote the compatibility of family and career – whether through more flexible working time models or a more supportive corporate culture – in order to be attractive to both parents in the long term. Ultimately the decision to have their own family lies with each citizen and will continue to do so in the future. And despite all the fears, compromises and restrictions, people are increasingly recognizing how much children can contribute to increasing the quality of life and personal happiness.



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Rediscovering the Value of Motherhood

Abstract

Mothers are the main protectors of life and deserve the highest recognition for taking this responsibility. Well-being is typically measured in GDP, and everything revolves around economics and growth; whereas reproduction and that which creates, nurtures and protects all living things, is given little or no value. Caring for other people is the very opposite of destruction.

Article

Becoming a mother is transformative, and there is a life before and after. It is a transformation that should be given more space and the starring role it deserves. One goes from being an independent, free individual to a life where you almost consist of two people: first during pregnancy when your body is the child's home, and then as the primary caregiver where someone else's needs must come first. It is challenging and comes naturally to some women, while others feel overwhelmed, perhaps due to previous experience. The "transformation" from woman to mother is a time when women deserve support and recognition.

Women are the vessels, the mothers - those who give life. Not all women become mothers, some because they can't, some because they don't want to. A woman's fertile age usually begins between the ages of 13 and 18 and lasts approximately until the age of 50. Postponing childbearing can create difficulties as she is most



fertile between the ages of 20-25. From the age of 35, it drops quickly until menopause, when the ability to conceive disappears. The woman's biological clock should have a higher status as a clear guide for women and society.

There should be a time in life that is protected and reserved for women to have children without undue stress. The ability to create new life is crucial to humanity. That a human being is formed and lives in a woman's body is amazing - a creation story so fascinating that it is difficult to find anything greater. Why then is reproduction and the care of children still not the most highly valued matter in all humanity?

Caring for other people is the very opposite of destruction. Despite all the negative consequences that wars and environmental destruction bring, they still count as economic factors, whereas looking after and caring for those closest to you does not. Economic value is considered to be created only when someone performs a service for money. To make the care count as an economic factor we outsource unpaid care work and thus force separations between children and mothers. If another mother takes care of my child, it counts in the economy, if I do it myself, it is economically invisible. The question is, do both produce the same outcome?

"Mothers are the main protectors of life and deserve the highest recognition for taking this responsibility"

Well-being is measured in GDP, and everything revolves around economy and growth, whereas reproduction and that which creates, nurtures and protects all living things, is given little or no value.

Care is the very essence of life. Most people intuit this, but for many the realization comes only at the very end. What really counted in my life? Wasn't it my relationships - the love I received and the love I gave?

Motherhood, or mothering, is a cure or antidote to egotism, power and destruction: thus, the importance of care relationships needs to be recognized. The attachment between the child and the primary caregiver, most often the mother, is crucial when brain develops at rapid speed with more than 1 million neural connections every second during the first years. This is the time when the foundations for

future learning, behaviour, and health are formed. For bonding to occur one needs to be present. And I dare to say that the mother is the most important. She can be replaced but, for the child, the natural mother must be the first choice, as they already have the strongest bond from the time when her body was its world. Another reason is that each mother's breast milk is unique and adapted precisely to her child.

Care is the heart of society, and it is time to value and recognize that fact, for instance by using more nuanced metrics than mere GDP. Financial security must be strengthened throughout the life cycle, the rights of unpaid caregivers upheld, and their voices considered in political decision-making. Article 25:2 of the UN Human Rights Act states that "Motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance" and there are strong reasons to take these words seriously.

Mothers are the main protectors of life and deserve the highest recognition for taking this responsibility.

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