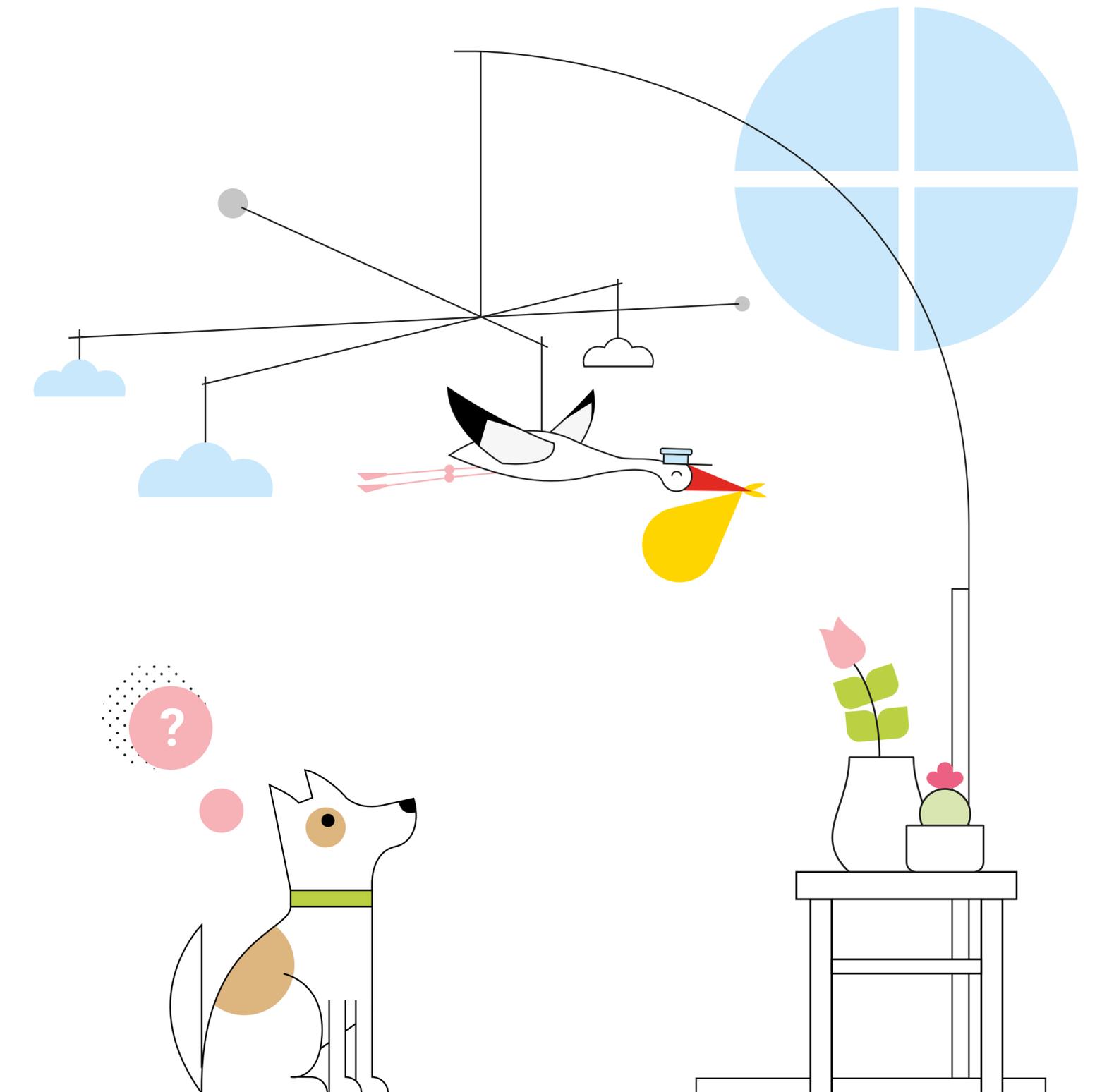


Putting off parenthood

Has the pandemic caused a **baby boom** or **baby blip**?

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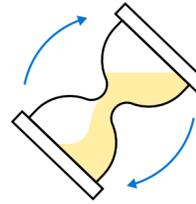


Starting a family is one of life's greatest adventures

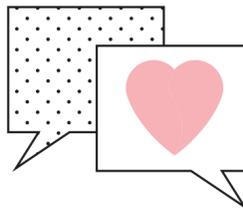
It's a time of joy, discovery and no shortage of nappy changes. But choosing to have a child is a hugely consequential decision, perhaps no more so than during a pandemic, when millions face uncertainty about their livelihoods and location.

So has the COVID-19 era led to a 'baby blip' or 'baby bust?' We wanted to find out if people really are putting off parenthood, and if so, for what reasons.

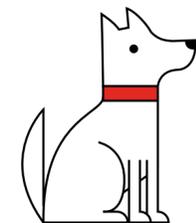
We spoke to 1,001 adults who were considering starting a family or having more babies, to find out more. Here is a snapshot of what we found:



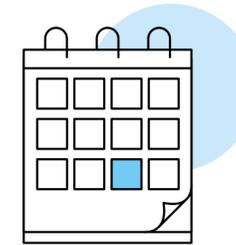
72% of adults without children have **decided to delay (or considered delaying) having a child** since the first lockdown in March 2020.



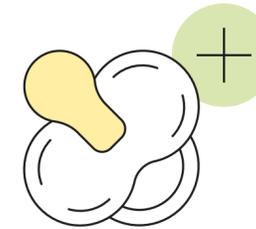
41% of those who've delayed parenthood say **the decision has brought them and their partner closer**, compared to 31% who say it's made them more distant.



40% of those polled **got a dog during lockdown**. Of those, 71% did so instead of having a baby.



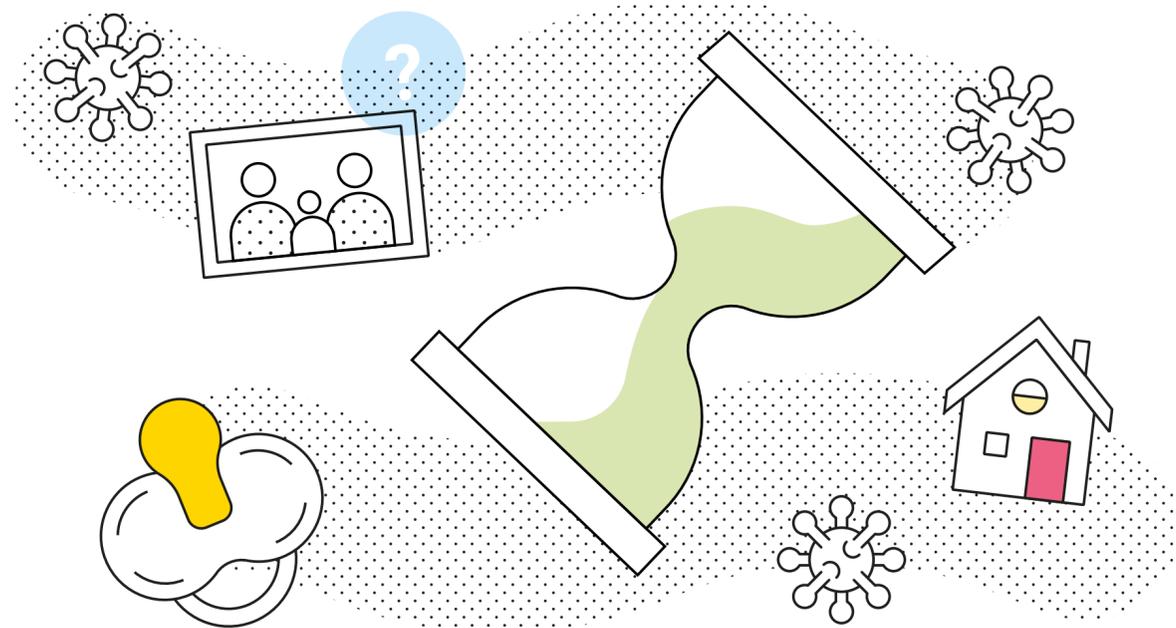
83% of those who've delayed having children say they **still expect to have kids in the future**.



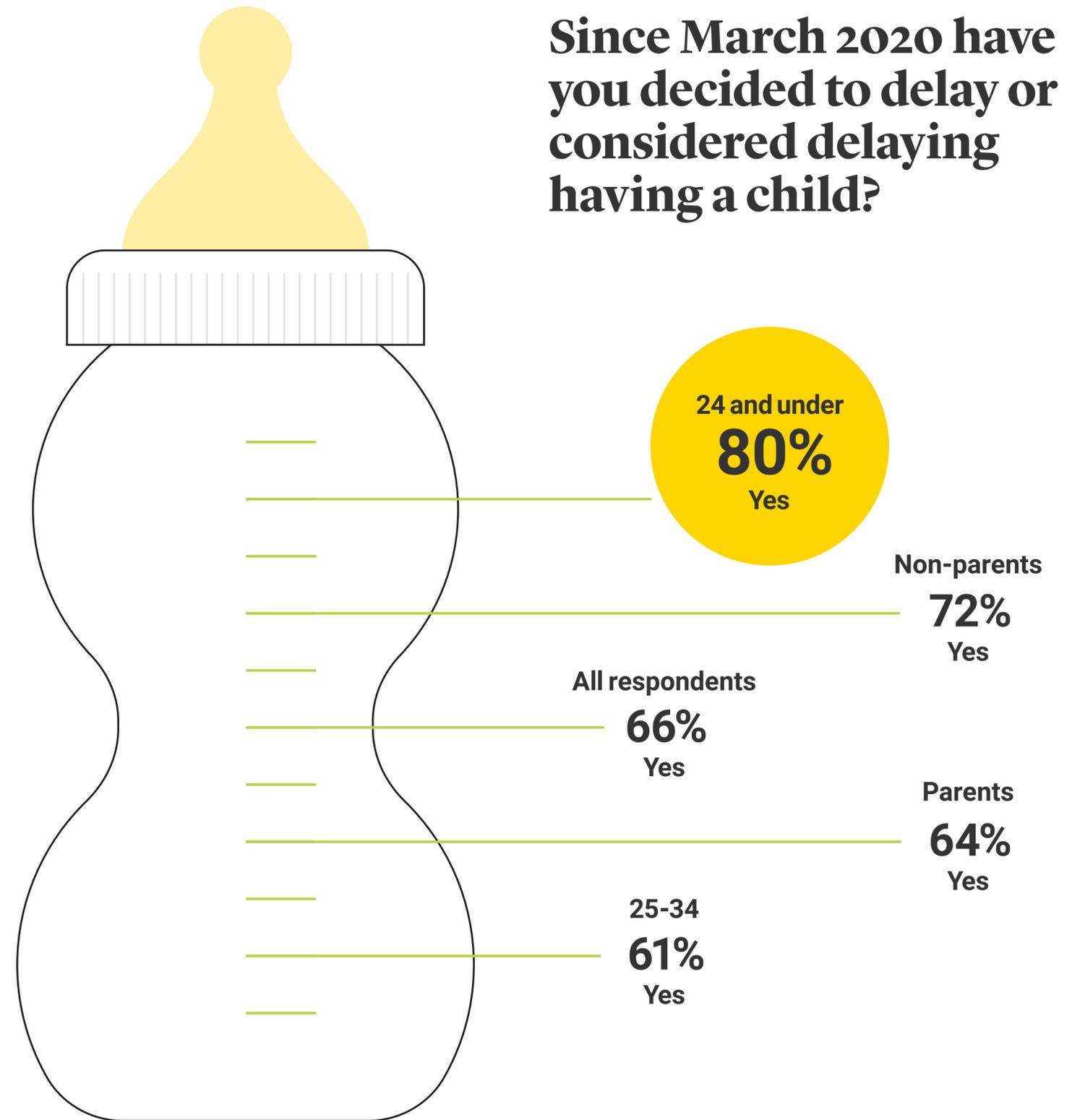
65% of parents said that home-schooling and the amount of time they've spent with their children since April 2020 has **increased their desire to add to their family**.

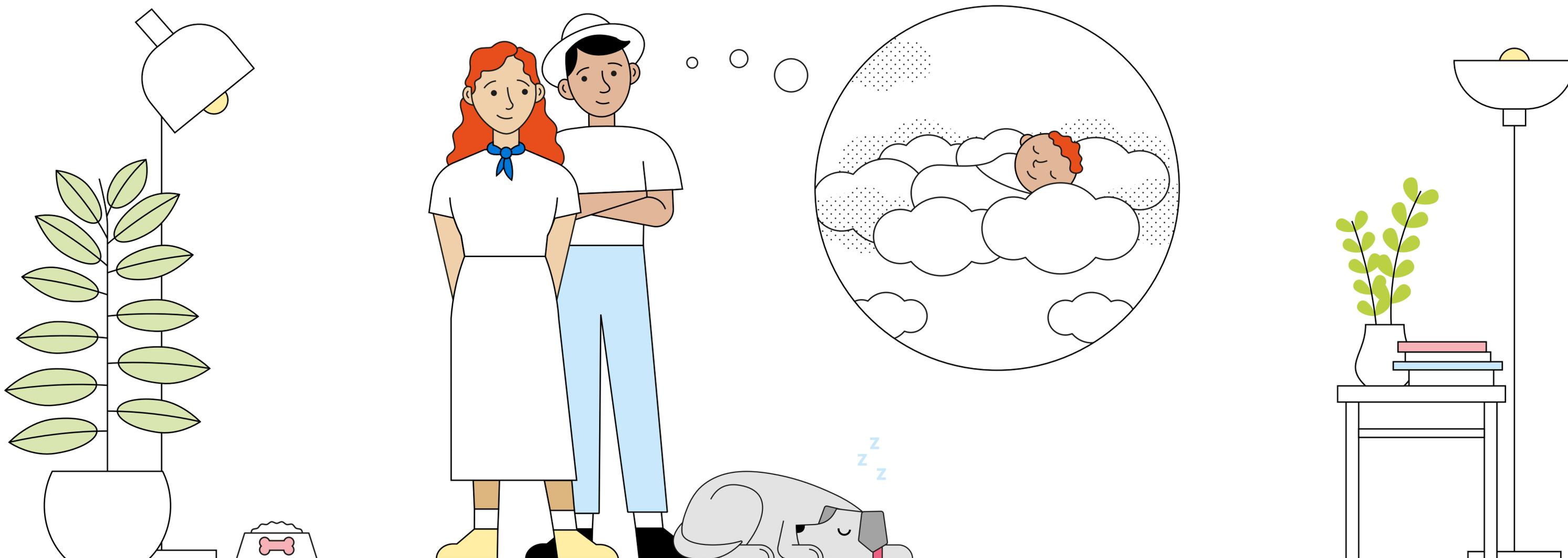
Postponing pregnancy

At the start of the pandemic no one really knew how much our lives were going to change, or for how long we would be facing restrictions, lockdowns and uncertainties about our health and finances. As we take slow and tentative baby steps into a post-lockdown recovery, what does the future hold for those thinking about starting a family?



Since March 2020 have you decided to delay or considered delaying having a child?





Our findings confirm that **many people have decided to delay trying for a baby during the pandemic.**

With pre-pandemic birth rates already in decline in many countries, more than a year after the first lockdown restrictions were imposed we found a similar story among UK adults.

It's worth remembering that we surveyed people who were already interested in having children, so the results indicate a shift in attitudes even among those who are positive about parenthood.

The vast majority (72%) of people we asked said they were delaying having a child. This rose to 80% among the youngest age group we surveyed. Could this suggest that we're heading for a significant drop in births?

According to Statista, **the average age for a woman to have her first baby in the UK is 28.9**, while for mothers having their fourth child it's 33.2 years old. Even for this peak parenting age group of 25-to 34-year-olds, our responses show that 61% of people were considering a delay to their plans. Where fertility issues might also start to come into play between ages 35-44, the majority of our respondents remained willing to risk postponing their plans to a later date.

The picture across the country varies, with people in the South West most likely to put off having a child across all age groups (78%), followed by the North East, Yorkshire & Humber and the East Midlands, where only 26% of people were not putting off their plans. Hot spots of Brighton, Bristol and Norwich have over 80% of people holding off on parenthood, compared to Belfast and Newcastle, where just over half (55%) of our respondents have decided to delay.

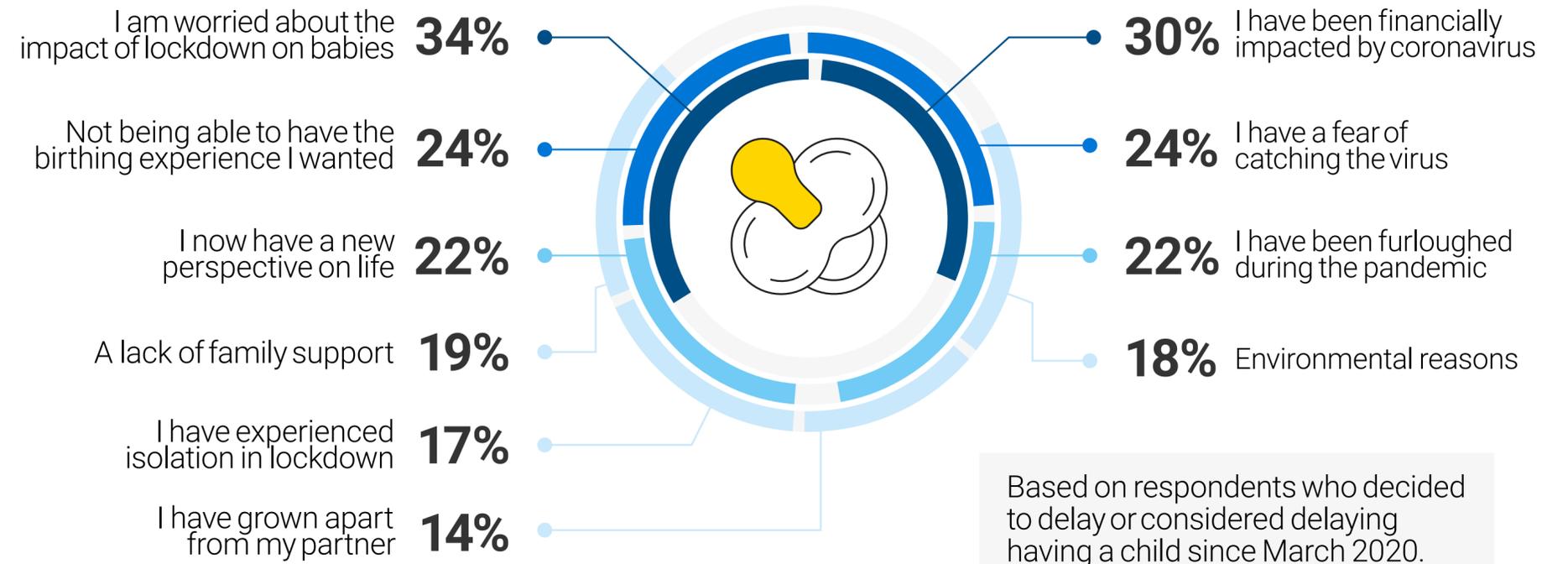
More than just money worries

When PricewaterhouseCoopers predicted that just 569,000 babies would be born in 2021, many people were quick to attribute this 8% drop on the previous year's figures to the economic shock of the pandemic.

Our survey results indicate that the reasons are more complicated and varied than this. Here, we look at the major reasons cited by our respondents in more detail.



Why have you decided to delay having a baby this year?



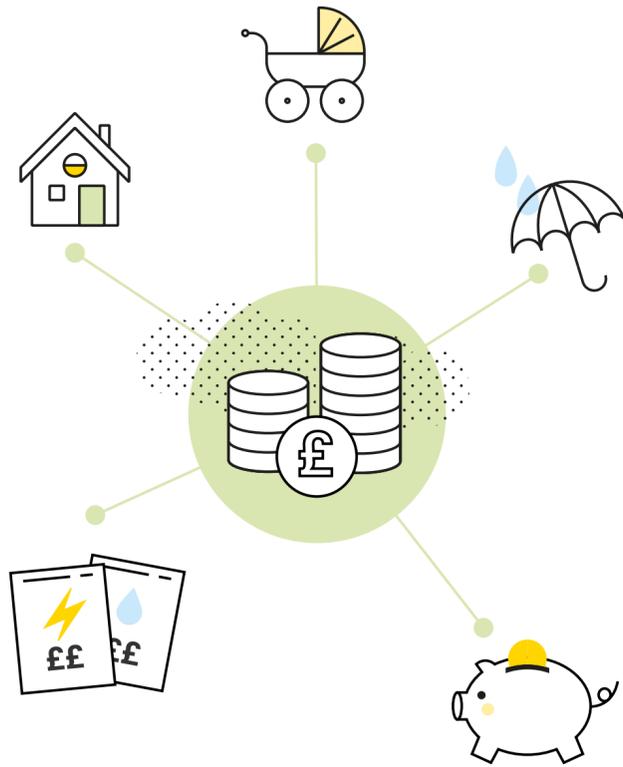
Parenting in a pandemic

The biggest reason our respondents gave was a concern about the impact of lockdown on babies, and by extension on their families. **People expressed a worry about the long-term effects they might see in babies born in restricted times;** there are fewer opportunities to socialise with family, friends and other babies, and this may negatively affect the speed of babies' development.

One recent study from the University of East London found that many babies they examined during lockdown appeared 'shyer' than those visited before the pandemic, as they were unused to seeing and interacting with unfamiliar adults.

There has also been much concern for the health of pregnant women, as the impact of coronavirus on women during and after pregnancy remains unknown. Advice to pregnant women from the NHS says as this is a new virus and the effects aren't fully known, it's safer to include pregnant women in the moderate risk group.

With higher-perceived risks in visiting hospitals for multiple maternity appointments and delivery, **24% of our respondents cited a fear of catching the virus** – something which may have contributed to a desire to delay having a child.



Money still matters

We saw respondents cite financial worries in different ways in our results – they raised concerns about furlough (22%) and the general financial impact (30%). Debt, housing, unemployment and general financial worries create an atmosphere of uncertainty and have driven anxieties during the last 18 months.

Financial support from the government may not have been available or enough, and particularly in low-income families these concerns have a wide-ranging impact, including the decision not to extend or start a family amid fears it will take longer than predicted to fully recover.



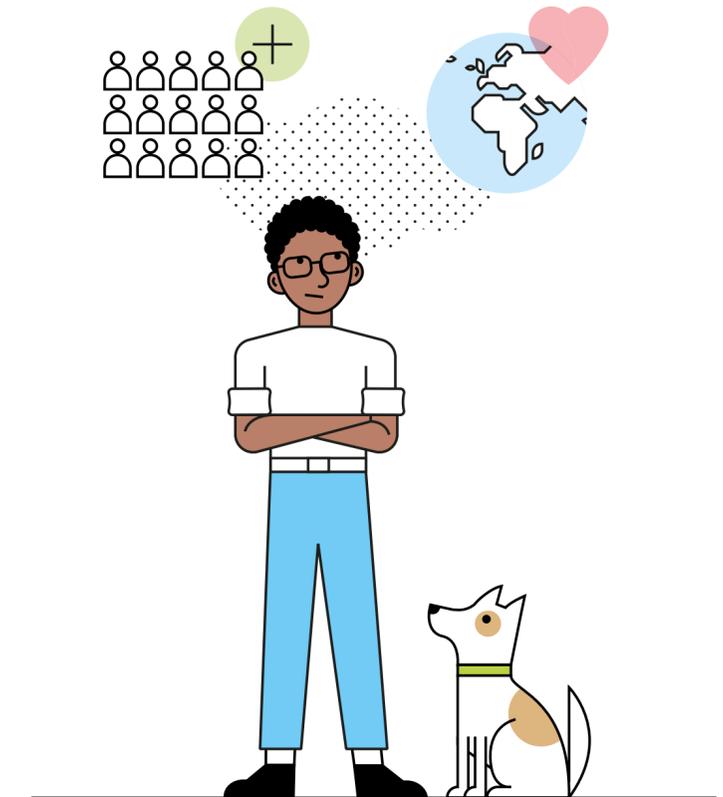
The impact on women

Women have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic, from their jobs being more at risk to them shouldering the burden of childcare and home schooling, often without the help of the usual mix of formal and informal support networks that mothers rely on.

Women make up the majority of employees in some of the hardest-hit sectors, and according to government data, 46% of mothers that have been made redundant during the pandemic cited lack of adequate childcare as the cause, leading to fears of negative treatment from an employer because of childcare responsibilities.

Women have been asked to give birth alone, with limited partner support and often having to wear a face mask during labour. More than a quarter (26%) of women responding to this question said that not being able to have the birthing experience they wanted was a key factor behind delaying or considering delaying having a baby.

A lack of family support, not wanting to put grandparents at greater risk of infection through contact, and the closure of childcare facilities and schools, put a disproportionate strain on women in the home.



Have perspectives changed?

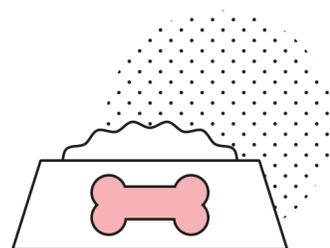
Many of us have had time to stop and think during the pandemic, and this might have led to a reordering of priorities and things we hold most important – 22% of respondents cited this as a reason. Perspectives have shifted, and may affect everything from the job you do, the people you want to spend time with, and the places you want to go.

A striking response is that 18% of respondents cited ‘environmental reasons’ as to why they are putting off having kids. Harry and Meghan reportedly said they would have a maximum of two kids to help the planet, and it seems other people are following suit.

Have pooches replaced parenthood?

According to the Pet Food Manufacturers Association (PFMA), **3.2 million UK households have acquired a pet since the start of the pandemic.** Of the 34 million pets in the UK, about 12 million are dogs, with more than half of new pet owners aged 16 to 34.

We took a look at dog ownership during lockdown, and whether this trend has anything to do with people having fewer babies.



71% of those who got a dog during lockdown said they decided to get a dog instead of having a baby.

Among those aged 24 and under, our group with the highest likelihood of delaying having a baby, the figure was 75%.

74% of our respondents without children who acquired a pooch said it was instead of having a baby.

When we asked if getting a dog made our respondents more likely or less likely to delay parenthood or extending their family, a considerable 71% said they were either somewhat or much more likely to do so.

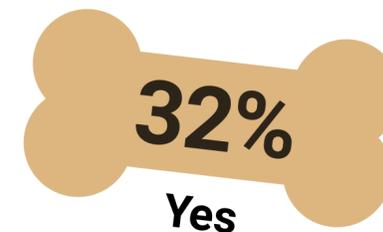
And more than a quarter (27%) said that having a dog means they no longer want a family at all. It would appear that **for some people, lockdown has led them to reappraise what they want from life**, and the simplicity of pet ownership compared to parenthood may hold a certain appeal.

Did you get a dog during lockdown?

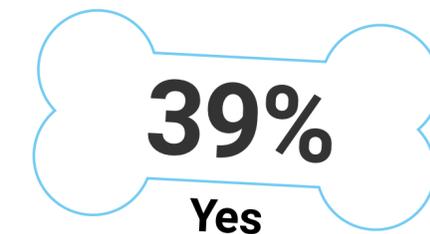
Aged 16-24



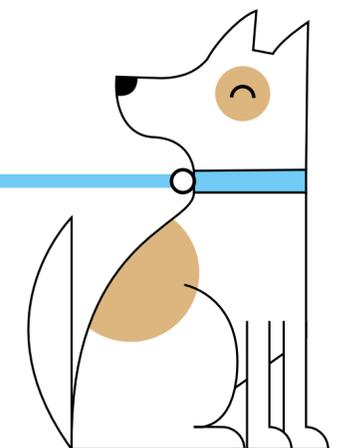
Aged 25-34



Aged 35-44



Regional



No place like home:

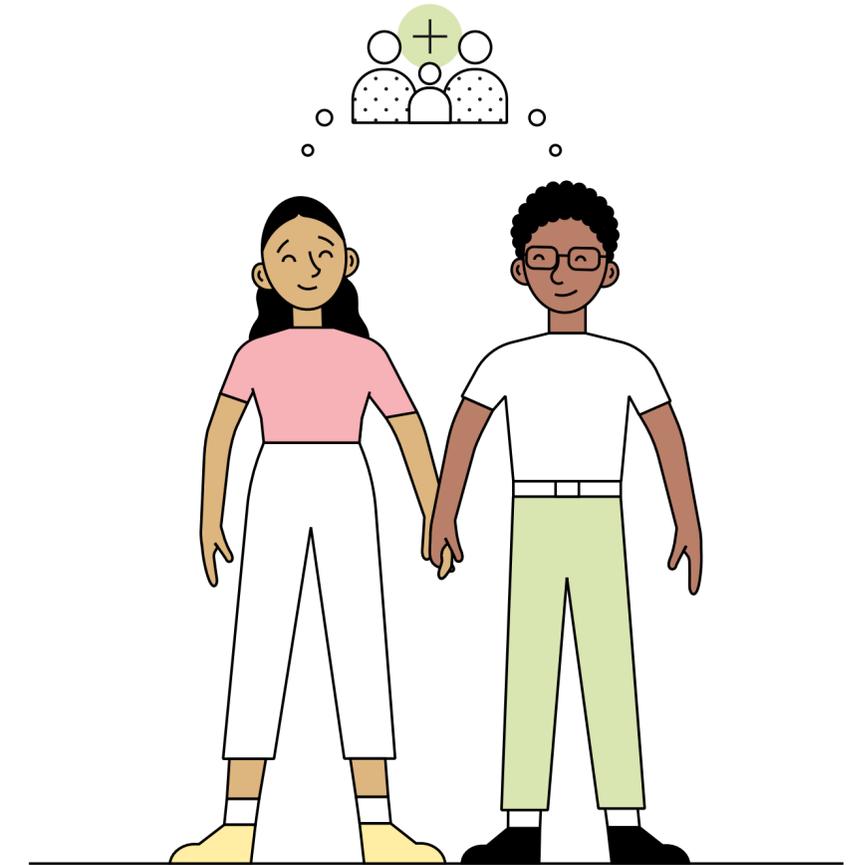
Has delaying parenthood strengthened relationships?

Lockdown has impacted all of our lives, including how we interact with our nearest and dearest. Could a change in relationship dynamics have affected how people view the prospect of parenthood?

We found that in many cases, **the decision to delay parenthood has strengthened relationships rather than challenged them.**

While delaying parenthood has been a major issue for couples and singles to resolve, 41% of our respondents said **the decision to delay has brought them closer**; a lower percentage (31%) said the decision made them feel more distant from their partner. The results suggest the pandemic has presented opportunities for people to reflect on their status quo, and be honest about what they want from their lives and relationships in the future.

For those of our respondents who already have children, 65% of parents said that home-schooling and the amount of time they've spent with their children since April 2020 has increased their desire to add to their family.



In what ways has the decision to delay having a child impacted your relationship with your partner?



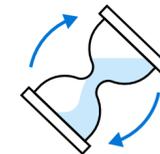
41%

It has made us closer



17%

It has made us argue less



14%

It has not impacted our relationship



31%

It has made us more distant



32%

It has made us argue more

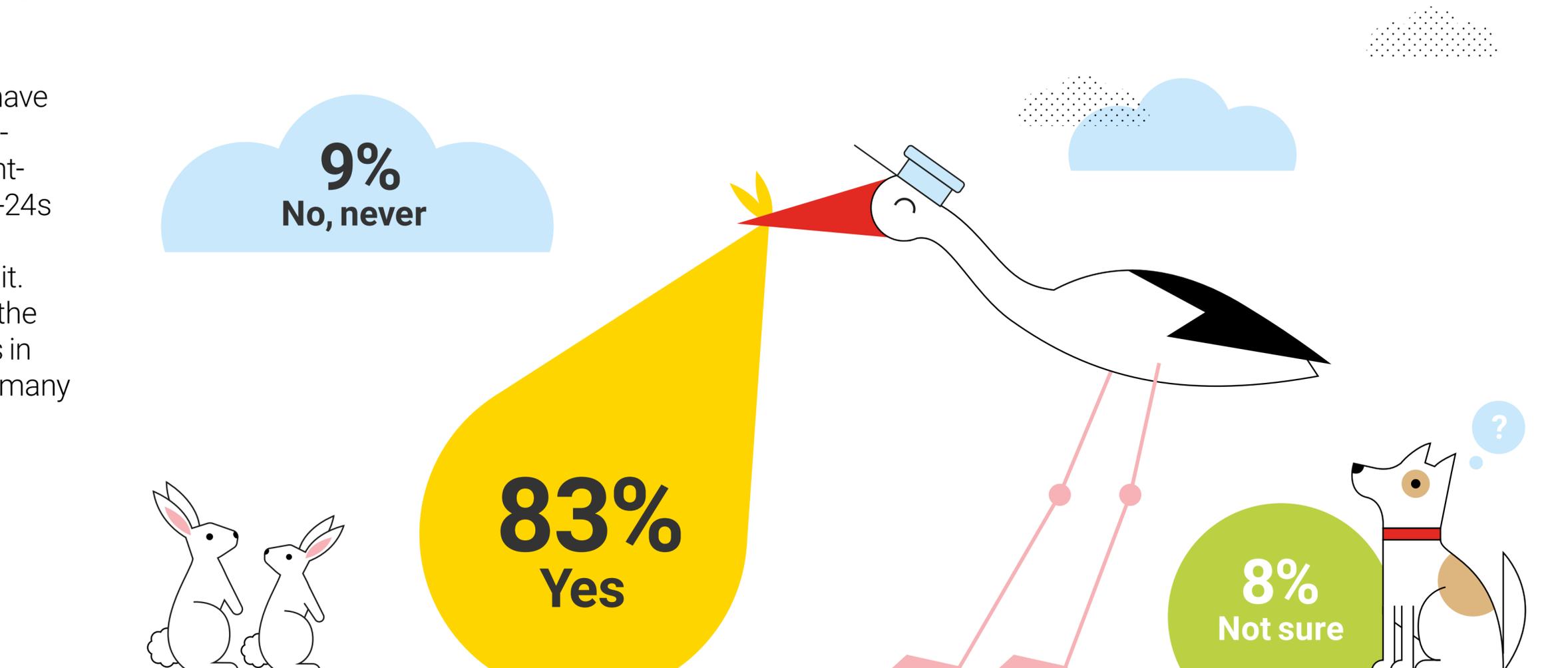
Bust or blip?

Assessing the future of family life

Even if many parents have delayed parenthood, in the long-term, many people still plan to have a family or have changed their outlook during lockdown.

The question becomes not if they will have more children, but when? 40% of our respondents have decided to delay parenthood by 1 to 2 years, with 43% of under-24s choosing 1 to 2 years as the optimum amount of time they are prepared to wait. This may be just long enough to finish the puppy training, but despite the changes in outlook there is still a strong desire for many people to have children eventually.

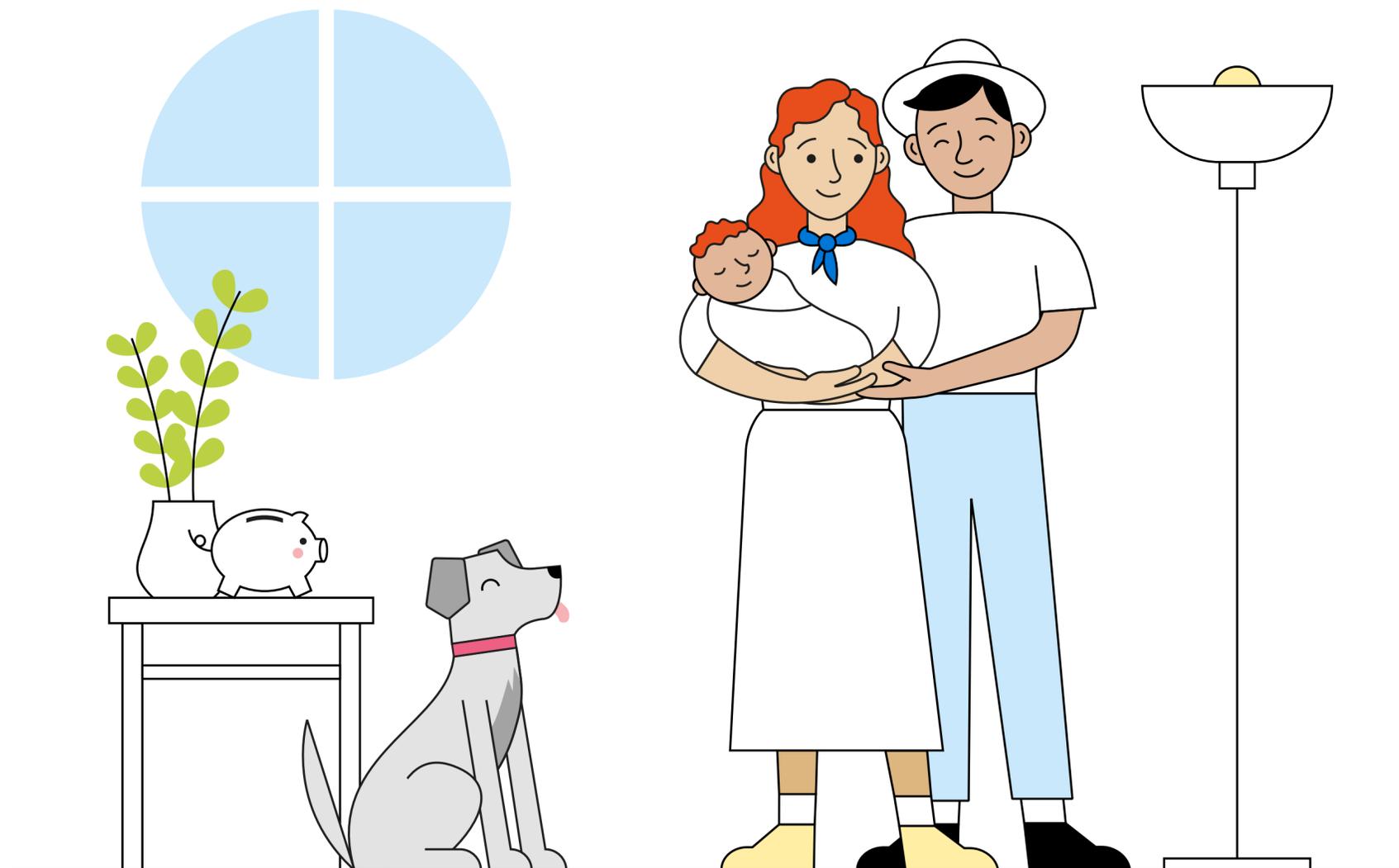
If you've delayed having a child, do you still expect to have children in the future?



What happens next?

Throughout history, the aftermath of major or traumatic events has led to baby booms, whether that's the Spanish flu pandemic of 1918, or the years after the Second World War. While the Covid-19 pandemic might not follow the usual pattern, as its impacts are ongoing and wide-ranging, we may end up living in a very different society than the one we expected. While no one has a crystal ball, we would expect that in most cases, parenthood is being delayed – not cancelled entirely.

Our research shows that **the majority of people who were planning to have children will do so at some point in the future.** And who's to say you can't get a pooch and become a parent? When the dust settles and we rebuild our lives based on new priorities, there will be plenty of room for families filled with bawling babies, barking dogs and lots of love.



Methodology

We surveyed 1,001 people who, at the beginning of 2020 (prior to pandemic), had planned to start/add to a family. We asked them about their current families, their family pets and whether and when they planned to expand or start their families and the reasons behind this.

Why families feel safer with life insurance

The pandemic has given people pause to think about what's most important to them and their families, with uncertainties about jobs, housing and finances being top-of-mind during an extremely disruptive period. Families need to feel secure in order to thrive, and one way to protect those closest to you against life's uncertainties is to provide [life insurance](#) as a financial back up if you're no longer around.

