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Cities

## America's Best Places To Raise A Family

Francesca Levy, 06.07.10, 9:00 AM ET

When Amelia Hamilton-Morris and her husband William were starting a family, they had to choose between living in Iowa, where his family had settled three generations earlier, or in her native Houston. They eventually decided to raise their children in Iowa's capital city, Des Moines, because it boasted good schools, affordable housing and a strong sense of community. Two children and 17 years later, Hamilton-Morris is still enthusiastic about their decision.

"You feel safe all the time, and people are extremely friendly," says Hamilton-Morris, a spokeswoman for the city of [Des Moines, Iowa](#). "The commute is not long; even if you live at the far end of the city, you're only talking about 12 to 15 minutes to downtown."

The perks that attracted Hamilton-Morris' family to Des Moines are among the reasons it tops our list of the best cities to raise a family. Its young population is more likely to graduate high school than in other cities, and life for most families is safe and affordable. Short average commute times save working parents precious minutes to spend with their families.

[Full List: America's Best Places To Raise A Family](#)

[Video: Best Places For Families](#)

The top 10 cities for families aren't flashy. Most don't draw throngs of tourists or boast enviable night life. But then that's not what most families are looking for. Instead, our list has metros like [Ogden, Utah](#); [Syracuse, N.Y.](#); and [Knoxville, Tenn.](#)--places where crime is low, educational prospects are solid and most people can readily afford the daily essentials.

### Behind the Numbers

To find the cities where families fare best, we ranked America's 100 largest [Metropolitan Statistical Areas](#) in seven categories. Using numbers from the U.S. Census Bureau, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Sperling's Best Places and Moody's [Economy.com](#), we looked at the cost of living, prevalence of home ownership, median household income, housing costs, commute time, crime and the percentage of young adults that graduate high school.

### Lots of East Coast Options for Families

The Northeast fares well on our list, claiming six of the top 10 spots. In densely packed [Rochester, N.Y.](#), commutes are short; a scant 3% of commuters spend an hour or more in traffic on their way to work. [Syracuse](#) offers significant educational benefits: 89% of young adults have high school degrees. And some former manufacturing hubs, like [Pittsburgh Pa.](#), are having a renaissance of sorts. Once a fallen steel giant, the city has diversified its economy and boasts low crime and high educational attainment. Pittsburgh also has the highest home ownership rate in our 10.

"People know that Pittsburgh is a really great place for families because of safety, schools and the arts," says Wendy Hermann, director of student services for master's programs at [Carnegie Mellon University](#). "I see students wanting that whether they're married or not. They see staying in Pittsburgh as way to say that's the kind of lifestyle they're looking forward to."

### Family-Friendly and Fun

But a city being family-friendly doesn't automatically make it staid. [Buffalo, N.Y.](#), makes our list in part thanks to short commutes and affordability, but there's also plenty to do there--its spectacular Niagara Falls is a huge tourist draw. [Provo, Utah](#), is a bustling college town, home to [Brigham Young University](#), but it's not just a great place for students. Families flock there for its safety and schools: It has the highest percentage of high-school graduates on our list and one of the lowest crime rates.

For families, offering their children a safe place to play and the best chance to learn takes precedence over the number of bars and restaurants. In places like Des Moines, that often means young people leave to explore the country when they reach college age, but eventually head back home, says Hamilton-Morris.

"When they're ready to raise children, we see a lot of young people come back for that family circle of support."

[Full List: America's Best Places To Raise A Family](#)

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