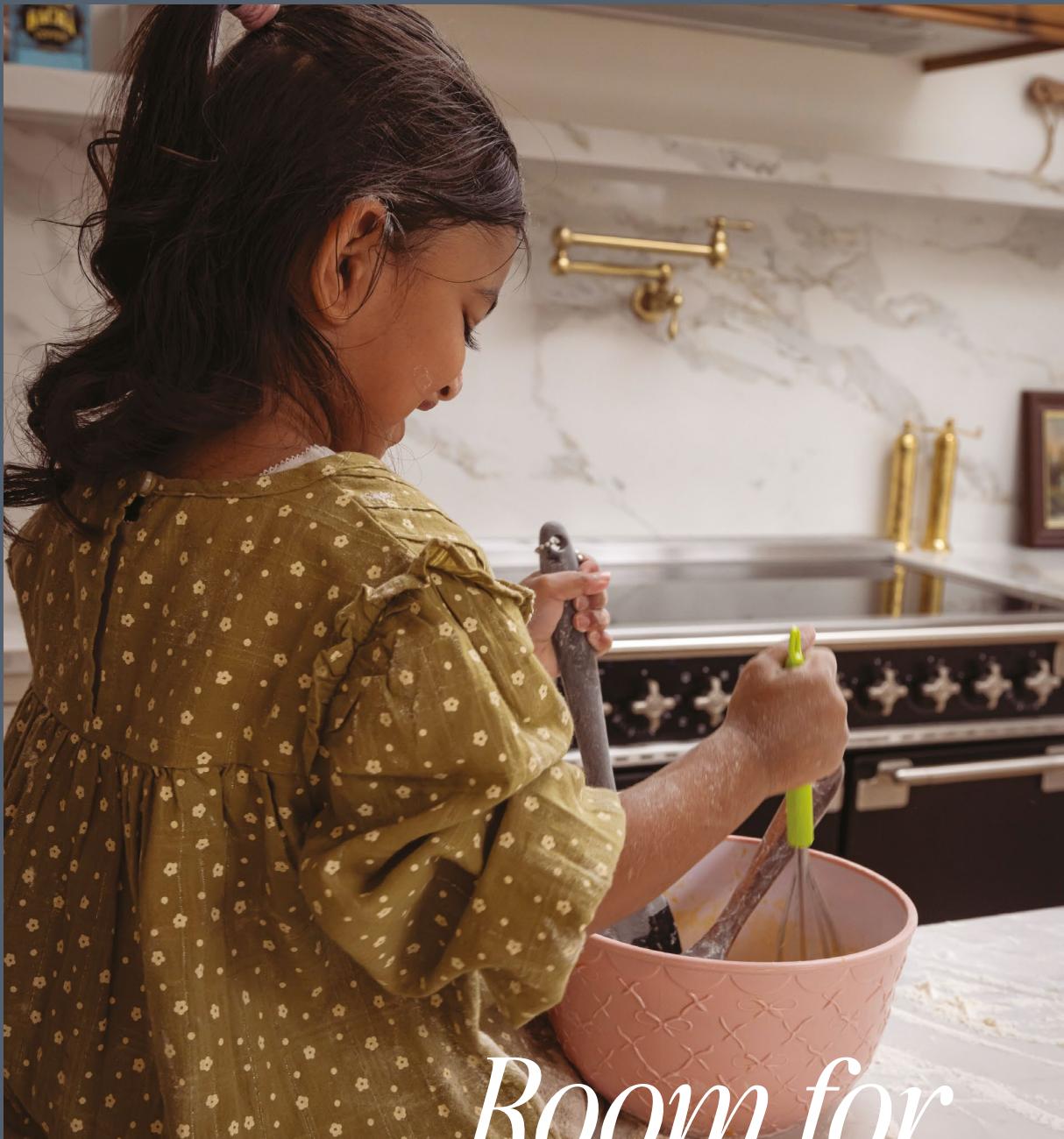


RANGEMASTER®



*Room for  
more mess*

REPORT 2025



# METHODOLOGY

## Research Approach

The aim of this research is to explore the role mess plays in family life, including parents' current perceptions towards mess and the emotional impact it has on them. The report also aims to uncover the role of mess in a child's development and long-term growth, drawing on insights from child psychologist Dr. Amanda Gunner.

## Data Collection

The research was conducted by Censuswide, among a sample of 1,000 UK parents. The data was collected between 22.09.2025 - 26.09.2025. Censuswide abides by and employs members of the Market Research Society and follows the MRS code of conduct and ESOMAR principles. Censuswide is also a member of the British Polling Council.

## Data Analysis

We analysed the data using statistical methods which were then summarised in percentages to highlight the most common responses for each question. The responses were then grouped into key themes to provide a detailed understanding of the role mess has on family life.

# A MESSAGE FROM RANGEMASTER

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For generations, Rangemaster range cookers have brought people together in the kitchen. Every day, our range cookers help make the meals that bring people together, turning kitchens into spaces for conversation, comfort and for family life to unfold.

But with busy modern lives, mess in the home, especially in the kitchen, is often inevitable. Pots and pans pile up, toys make their way onto countertops, and flour rarely stays in the bowl when little hands are helping to bake. Yet despite how common this is, mess is frequently tied to negative emotions. Cultural expectations, gendered household roles and the relentless influence of social media have created unrealistic standards for how homes “should” look.

Today, nearly half of adults (44%) associate mess with stress, with women particularly affected (48%). Social media adds another layer: two in three parents (67%) agree it sets unrealistic standards for family homes, contributing to feelings of guilt and inadequacy and leaving many parents feeling judged when their homes don’t reflect an idealised image.

At the same time, mess plays a crucial role in family connection and child development. Messy play encourages creativity, exploration and learning. For parents, some of the most meaningful shared moments happen in the middle of everyday chaos - over half (54%) of parents have a treasured family memory that involves mess, whether it’s baking with children, cooking together or simply spending time in a busy kitchen. Despite this, fewer than one in five parents (18%) associate mess with creativity, showing just how deeply ingrained the negative narrative around mess has become.

Our hope with this report is to help parents reframe the way they view mess. Rather than something to feel ashamed of, we want it to be seen as a by-product of joyful, creative family life - a sign of togetherness, not failure. We want to ease some of the emotional burden that parents carry when striving for spotless perfection, and instead celebrate the beautiful, playful chaos that makes family life meaningful.

As a brand that has been at the centre of family kitchens since 1830, Rangemaster is proud to champion this conversation. Because behind every busy kitchen, every shared meal, and every sticky countertop lies something far more important than perfection: connection.



**50%**

of parents feel  
that a tidy home  
is a signal of good  
parenting

# CHAPTER ONE: MESS AND ITS MEANINGS

For many parents, mess is far more than a matter of misplaced toys or unwashed dishes. The state of their home is more than just a practical concern - it's a powerful reflection of how they see themselves and how they believe others perceive their parenting.

The presence of mess has become deeply entwined with social pressure and attached negative perceptions, such as failure or guilt, adding a surprising emotional weight to the everyday clutter we all deal with.

*Many parents have internalised the idea that a tidy home equals good parenting, but this belief can create unnecessary guilt and pressure.*

*The truth is that family homes are meant to be lived in - children learn through exploration, which is often messy by nature. A spotless kitchen might signal control, but a flour-dusted worktop tells a richer story of connection and curiosity. Helping parents see the value in the chaos can lift the emotional weight of perfection and make home life more relaxed and authentic.*

Dr. Amanda Gummer

## Daily Rituals and Gendered Expectations

Keeping the home clean is a daily activity for most adults. Around two thirds (65%) clean their kitchen at least once a day, with women significantly more likely than men to take on this task (71% vs 58%). The kitchen, often considered the heart of the home, becomes a key focus of this routine.

While these figures highlight the ongoing gender divide in domestic responsibilities, they also reveal how deeply cleanliness is woven into daily rhythms.

The act of cleaning, especially in shared spaces like kitchens, is rarely neutral. It often carries emotional undertones: a way to create a sense of order amidst the unpredictability of family life, or to signal to others that one's home - and by extension, one's parenting - is well managed.

## Mess as a Marker of Parenting Quality

These daily habits are underpinned by wider beliefs about what a clean home represents. Despite mess often being an inevitable consequence of busy family life, half (50%) of parents surveyed feel that a tidy home is a signal of good parenting. While women are often the ones shouldering the practical burden of cleaning, interestingly, men are more likely than women to hold this view (61% vs 42%).

This belief can create guilt or feelings of failure amongst

parents when the inevitable everyday clutter arises - forcing parents to strive for often unachievable levels of cleanliness in order to meet this self-imposed standard of 'good parenting'. When these expectations are internalised, mess is no longer just physical; it becomes symbolic.

## The Judgement Gap: How Mess is Perceived by Others

The emotional weight of mess extends beyond self-perception; many people often worry about what others think of the mess in their homes. Nearly half of parents (46%) say they feel judged for having a messy home, rising to over half (56%) when it comes to the kitchen - often considered the centre of family life.

Interestingly, around 2 in 3 (67%) of those surveyed believe dads are judged less harshly than mums for mess - reinforcing the idea that women are more likely to feel responsible for maintaining household order and increasing the pressure women feel to maintain a tidy home.

Fear of what others think, or being negatively judged by others, again puts pressure on parents to strive for perfection when it comes to cleanliness in their homes. This may lead to parents frantically tidying up after playdates or before having guests over in order to make their homes appear spotless to avoid this perceived judgement from others.

## Pride and the Perceptions of Cleanliness

As mess has become synonymous with 'bad parenting', cleanliness has taken on an emotional dimension, often tied to feelings of pride and personal achievement.

For many, a tidy space is not just aesthetically pleasing - it's evidence of control, care, and competence in the face of everyday chaos.

This sentiment is particularly pronounced among younger parents. Just under a third (31%) of parents aged 16-24 surveyed said they feel a sense of pride when maintaining a tidy kitchen, highlighting how deeply this space is tied to feelings of accomplishment. For this age group, often navigating early adulthood and the first steps into independent family life, the kitchen can symbolise more than just a functional area. A clean, well-kept kitchen represents maturity, self-sufficiency, and the ability to "hold it together" in a way that aligns with broader social expectations.

When tidiness is tied to self-worth, people may feel a stronger drive to keep spaces clean, even when time and energy are limited. For some, the pressure to maintain these standards can lead to feelings of stress or guilt when mess inevitably creeps in.

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# CHAPTER TWO:

# MESS AND STRESS

Over time, mess has gathered a set of negative emotional associations that extend well beyond the practical task of tidying. What might begin as a few toys left out or clothes left on the floor can carry a surprisingly heavy emotional load due to the meaning we've attached to mess. For some parents, mess is more than a visual distraction - it can affect mood, heighten tension, and contribute to a sense of being overwhelmed.





**44%**

Nearly 1 in 2 of parents surveyed reported they associate stress with mess

*The data show a strong link between mess and stress, particularly for women. But it's not the mess itself that causes stress; it's the meaning we attach to it. When parents feel judged or believe a messy kitchen reflects their competence, anxiety rises.*

*Encouraging families to reframe mess as evidence of activity, learning and togetherness can reduce that stress. Shifting from "I need to clean up" to "We've had fun together" helps parents reclaim joy from the clutter.*

**Dr. Amanda Gummer**

## More Mess, More Stress

Stress is the feeling currently most associated with mess across the home. Nearly 1 in 2 (44%) of parents surveyed reported they associate stress with mess, making it the most common emotional response to household disorder.

Women are particularly affected: almost half (49%) of women report feeling stressed by mess, compared to just over 1 in 3 (34%) men.

This gender gap mirrors the disparities seen in cleaning habits, where women are more likely to take responsibility for maintaining household order. When the burden of both noticing and fixing mess falls disproportionately on one group, the emotional weight inevitably follows. For many women, clutter isn't just a visual cue - it's a never-ending to-do list in physical form.

## The Stress Peak: Parents Aged 25–34

Among different age groups, parents aged 25–34 are the most likely to report stress in response to mess (50%). This life stage often coincides with multiple competing pressures: careers in full swing, young children, or the first years of managing a home independently. In these contexts, mess can quickly become symbolic of things slipping through the cracks.

## The Kitchen: A Hotspot for Stress

Not all spaces are equal when it comes to the emotional impact of mess. The kitchen stands out as the single most stressful space in the home, with nearly 1 in 2 parents (47%) reporting that mess here triggers stress. Once again, women are more affected (53%) than men (38%).



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## CHAPTER THREE: MESS AND THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Additional factors, such as social media, have impacted how we view mess and how it makes us feel. Through constant access to images of others' "spotless" family homes and kitchens, social media adds additional pressure for parents and sets unrealistic standards for family homes.

Where once a messy kitchen might have been shrugged off as part of everyday life, today these sights are often measured against carefully staged images of spotless countertops, colour-coordinated pantries and living rooms where cushions never fall out of place. The result is a growing sense of pressure - particularly for parents - to live up to standards that are, for most, unattainable.

## New Standards of Perfection

Social media has shifted the baseline of what a "normal" home looks like. Carefully curated posts, often the result of strategic lighting, professional cleaning, or simply cropping out the clutter, present an idealised version of domestic life.

Over time, they create a new visual norm against which real homes, with their mess, noise and unpredictability, can start to feel inadequate. This creates an unrealistic standard for what family homes and kitchens should look like, adding additional pressure onto parents.

This pressure is widely felt. Around 2 in 3 parents (67%) surveyed agree that social media sets unrealistic standards for how family homes should look.

The gap between real life and the constant highlight reel of spotless homes seen on social media can leave even the most organised households feeling as though they're not quite measuring up.

## Fear of Judgement from Others

Social media doesn't just broadcast idealised images, it invites instant feedback from others in the comment section on posts.

Nearly 1 in 3 parents (31%) said they would feel anxious, embarrassed, or mortified if someone shared a photo of their kitchen "as it is right now." This striking figure reveals the extent to which the fear of public judgement shapes how people see their own homes - and the extent to which parents are feeling this pressure to match up to the 'ideal' homes presented on social media.

## The Impact of the 'Pressure to Appear Perfect'

The pressure to present a spotless, curated version of home life plays out in everyday habits. Around 2 in 3 parents (69%) report tidying their home before taking photos for social media, a behaviour that turns routine mess into something to be hidden rather than accepted. Interestingly, parents aged 25-34 are particularly likely to tidy before posting online, with 40% doing so at least once a day.

*Social media has created unrealistic expectations of "show home" living, where imperfection feels like failure. This pressure is particularly acute for younger parents who grew up online. It's important to remind families that behind every immaculate post is likely a hidden pile of laundry!*

*Celebrating authenticity (e.g. the sticky fingerprints and half-finished crafts) not only normalises real family life but also models healthy values for children, who learn that happiness isn't dependent on appearances.*

**Dr. Amanda Gummer**

**67%**

**2 in 3 parents agree that social media sets unrealistic standards for how family homes should look**

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# CHAPTER FOUR:

# MESS MATTERS FOR CHILDREN

While mess is often seen as something to hide or feel guilty about, it plays a crucial role in children's learning and development. For young children, clutter and chaos aren't simply by-products of play, they're signs of experimentation, exploration and growth. Whether it's finger painting at the kitchen table or building elaborate blanket forts, mess is often where creativity begins.

## Mess as a Natural Part of Play

Many parents recognise this, at least in practice. 40% of parents surveyed say they let their children make a mess at home during play or creative time at least a few times a week, with men slightly more likely to do so than women (48% vs 44%). These 'messy' moments, when flour dusts the counters during baking experiments, or craft supplies spill across the floor, are often the very spaces where children's imagination flourishes.

A tidy, controlled environment may look beautiful, but it doesn't always invite the kind of unstructured play that fosters curiosity and innovation. Allowing mess can mean allowing freedom for children.

## The Role in Child Development

When children are given the space to get their hands dirty, they're doing far more than making a mess. Messy play is a crucial aspect of child development in a number of ways.

Through activities like painting, building, baking, or sensory play, children are able to explore and experiment freely. These experiences enhance sensory exploration, allowing children to engage with different textures, materials and sensations in a hands-on way. They also develop fine motor skills, as children scoop, pour, stack or shape objects with increasing precision.

Beyond the physical benefits, messy play supports cognitive development by encouraging

experimentation, problem-solving and critical thinking. Mess also plays a key role in social and emotional development. It gives children opportunities to communicate, collaborate and express themselves, all within a creative, low-pressure environment where there is room to take risks and make mistakes.

## The Perception Gap

Yet despite this willingness to allow children to engage in messy play, only 19% of parents associate mess with creativity, 1 in 5 parents (20%) associate it with freedom. This striking gap between behaviour and perception reveals an important tension: while parents often allow mess when their children are playing, they don't necessarily value it.

It's often viewed through the lens of chores, inconvenience and disorder rather than creativity and growth. But in doing so, we risk overlooking the deeper role that mess plays in childhood development.

Interestingly, this perspective seems to change with age. Among older parents (55+), around 1 in 3 (31%) associate kitchen mess with creative freedom, suggesting that over time, people become more comfortable seeing mess for what it truly is: a sign of a life well lived

By reframing mess not as a failure to maintain order but as a marker of creativity in action, families can loosen the grip of perfection and embrace the joyful, untidy reality of raising children.

*From a child development perspective, mess is a positive state. It's how children experiment, problem-solve and express creativity. Whether mixing paints, baking cupcakes or building dens, messy play helps develop fine motor skills, imagination and emotional resilience. When we sanitise play, we limit learning. Parents who embrace the chaos give their children permission to explore, make mistakes and discover new things. These are essential foundations for lifelong curiosity and confidence.*

**Dr. Amanda Gummer**



**19%**

Only 19% of parents associate mess with creativity



**54%**

Over half of parents report having a treasured family memory that involves mess

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## CHAPTER FIVE: MESS AND MEMORIES

In many families, the messiest moments are often the ones that matter most. While it's easy to view clutter as something to minimise or avoid, mess frequently sits at the heart of shared experiences - becoming the backdrop to everyday rituals, special occasions, and treasured memories. By reframing mess as a positive, even essential part of family life, it can change not only how we feel about our homes, but also how we connect with one another.

## The Kitchen: The Heart of Family Life

It's no surprise that around 2 in 3 parents (68%) agree that the kitchen is the heart of the home. More than just a functional space, the kitchen is where families gather, talk, and make memories - and often, it's where things get a little messy.

## Messy Activities that Bring Families Together

Often, mess is the by-product of activities that are key to family-bonding and form the basis of many treasured memories.

We asked parents which activities done with their children create the best memories, kitchen mess features in all of the top activities:

Baking with children was the top chosen activity, with more than a third of parents (35%) saying it creates the best memories. Interestingly, enthusiasm peaks among parents aged 25-44 (35% - 38%), reflecting the life stage where family cooking and shared kitchen time are often at their height.

Cooking big family meals also plays an important role in memory-making, chosen by just under 1 in 4 parents (23%)

Everyday family cooking also features prominently, with 18% of parents highlighting it as a key memory-making activity.

While smaller in scale, other activities such as crafting and artwork (8%), homework or projects (6%), and pet care (5%) also contribute to the messy moments that families remember.

It's clear that in these messy moments, family bonds are strengthened and key memories are formed for both parents and children - that last long after the mess is cleaned up.

## Mess as the Backdrop to Treasured Memories

Importantly, 1 in 2 parents (54%) report having a treasured family memory that involves mess. These are the moments that stick - not the perfectly ordered rooms, but the flour in the air, the paint on the table, the slightly chaotic Sunday roast preparations. Mess becomes woven into the fabric of family life, marking moments of connection, creativity and shared joy.

For children, these experiences are formative. They build emotional bonds, create shared traditions, and offer a sense of belonging that lasts well beyond the clean-up. For parents, reframing mess not as a sign of disorder but as evidence of life being lived together can ease pressure and foster a deeper appreciation of everyday family life.

*Some of the happiest childhood memories are built around shared messy moments - things like baking together, cooking Sunday roasts, or helping wash the dog. These activities strengthen family bonds and create emotional anchors that last into adulthood.*

*A bit of mess is a small price to pay for connection, laughter and learning. By focusing on togetherness rather than tidiness, parents can see the kitchen not as a source of stress but as the heart of family life.*

**Dr. Amanda Gummer**

# CHAPTER SIX:

# PRIDE IN PLAYFUL CHAOS

Mess has long been something to manage, contain or apologise for in many families. It's tied up with feelings of stress, guilt, and the weight of expectation - whether from cultural norms, social media, or personal standards.

But mess can also tell another story. It can be a sign of creativity, connection and real family life. Reframing the way we think about mess can ease pressure on parents while creating richer, more joyful spaces for children to grow.

## A Shift in Mindset

Encouragingly, many parents are ready for this shift. Almost half of parents (42%) surveyed said they would feel more comfortable letting go of mess if others did too. This reveals how much of the pressure surrounding mess is socially shaped - a shared, silent standard rather than an individual belief. When one family chooses to embrace the reality of lived-in spaces, it can give others permission to do the same, slowly reshaping collective expectations.

Similarly, nearly half (44%) of parents surveyed said they would feel prouder if mess was seen as a sign of creativity and joy, rather than disorder.

This suggests that reframing mess isn't about changing people's homes; it's about changing the lens through which those homes are viewed. When mess is recognised as evidence of creativity, learning and family connection, pride can replace guilt, and moments once hidden away can be celebrated instead.

## From Perfection to Playful Chaos

This reframing doesn't mean abandoning cleanliness altogether. Instead, it's about finding balance between order and the natural messiness of real family life. A tidy kitchen can still signal

care and structure, but flour on the counter after baking with children can signal something equally meaningful: creativity, togetherness and joy.

By shifting perspectives in this way, families can free themselves from unrealistic ideals and focus on what truly matters. Mess stops being a sign of failure and becomes a marker of life being lived - fully, creatively, and together.

*Parents clearly want permission to let go, and reframing mess as a badge of love, creativity and togetherness does exactly that. A messy home isn't a failure; it's evidence of a thriving family. Brands like Rangemaster can play a powerful role in this cultural shift by celebrating the beauty of imperfection, showing that a kitchen full of flour, laughter and imagination is a home full of life.*

Dr. Amanda Gummer



**42%**

Almost half of parents said they would feel more comfortable letting go of mess if others did too

# CONCLUSION

Across this white paper, one message has come through clearly: mess is far more than a matter of household organisation. It is shaped by cultural expectations, social pressures, and emotional load. While mess is often associated with stress and guilt, it is also deeply entwined with creativity, connection and the everyday moments that make family life meaningful.

The findings reveal the duality at the heart of how families experience mess. On one hand, stress remains the dominant emotion, driven by persistent cultural ideals and amplified by social media's curated perfection. Parents, particularly women and those in the 25–34 age group, often carry the emotional weight of keeping up with unrealistic standards, with the kitchen emerging as a focal point for both pride and pressure. It is, after all, the heart of the home - and also the space where mess is most visible, most judged, and often most emotionally charged.

On the other hand, mess plays a crucial and positive role. It is a key ingredient in childhood development, supporting creativity, sensory exploration and social-emotional growth. It underpins shared family activities, from baking and cooking to everyday play, and sits at the centre of many treasured memories. Yet, this positive perspective is still under-recognised: relatively few parents instinctively link mess with creativity or joy, even though many are open to reframing it.

There is, however, a clear appetite for change. A significant number of parents say they would feel prouder if mess were seen as a sign of creativity, and more comfortable letting go if

others did too. This suggests that a cultural shift is both needed and possible - one that moves away from spotless perfection and towards a more authentic, forgiving understanding of family life.

For Rangemaster, this conversation sits at the very heart of what we stand for. As a brand that has been part of family kitchens for generations, we understand that real kitchens are not always immaculate - they are busy, warm, and full of life. By encouraging families to reframe kitchen mess as a reflection of creativity, connection and shared experience, we hope to ease unnecessary pressures on parents and celebrate the lived reality of family life.

Reframing mess is not about abandoning structure or cleanliness. It's about striking a balance between order and the natural, often joyful, chaos of everyday living. By changing the way we view mess, especially in the spaces where family life happens most such as the kitchen, we can reduce unnecessary pressures on parents, support children's development, and celebrate the reality of family life - flour on the countertops and all.

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