



10 Best Towns for Families

By Michael J. Weiss From: FamilyCircle

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Family Circle set out to find communities across the country that combine big-city opportunities with suburban charm, locations that offer an ideal blend of affordable houses, good jobs, top-rated schools, wide-open spaces, and a lot less stress. Here are the results of *Family Circle's* extensive research:

Perfect places to call home

When Americans choose an area to live in, most of us yearn for the same things: fewer crowds; less concrete and hassles; more serenity, nature and neighbors we can count on. *Family Circle* singled out these small cities, where living costs, commute times and crime rates are low, and the educational and cultural scenes are way above average. In all of them, moms and dads are stepping up to help their children thrive; they volunteer in schools, coach sports teams and keep bike trails clean. As the people in these top towns will tell you, life is good.

Franklin, Massachusetts

Population: 29,642 Median Income: \$81,065 Median Home Value: \$355,000 Households with Children: 48% Student/Teacher Ratio: 14:1

When Benjamin Franklin learned that colonial settlers named this town after him in 1778, he sent 116 of his own books to become the core of the community library -- the first such public collection in the nation. •History is instilled in our kids: says Kathy Sirignano, 45, a stay-at-home mom to Jillian, 9, Kyle, 16, and Michael, 18. gives

them a real sense of belonging. Not to mention pride. After Jillian and her classmates at Jefferson Elementary School performed a song last year to celebrate the 300th anniversary of Franklin's birth, the third graders were tickled when local officials promptly proclaimed the tune the town's official theme. Dad Andrew, 46, a real estate broker, raves about Franklin's affordable houses (half the cost of those in suburbs closer to Boston and Providence, Rhode Island) and low property taxes. But what he and Kathy appreciate most are good neighbors all around. "You can always count on them to take care of your kids if you have to work late or to help you out in an emergency" Kathy says. There's that feeling of togetherness that makes living here special.

Family-friendly perk: Locals still gather on the 4-acre common for holidays like the Fourth of July, a six day spectacular that includes nightly concerts, a carnival, and an eye-popping parade with floats.

Study Methodology:

Family Circle partnered with On Board, a New York City research firm providing real estate and demographic data to assemble a list of 1,850 places with populations between 15,000 and 150,000 and a high concentration of households with an average income of \$65,000. From that, 800 localities were selected based on family-friendly criteria, including cost of living, jobs, schools, health care, air quality, green space and crime rate. *Family Circle* assessed which towns best met those standards and ranked them according to state. The winners were selected from the highest-rated towns in the top 10 states nationwide.