

A Year-by-Year Guide to the Different Generations

As millennials transitioned into parenthood, becoming known as "parenials", and Gen Z popularized the phrase "OK, Boomer", [the use of generational labels](#) has seemingly increased. But what exactly do all these terms mean?

If a slew of new phrases wasn't already confusing enough to keep up with, the exact timeline of generations isn't that easy to decipher either. While there is *some* consensus among social scientists about the general periods of time associated with each generation, there is no clear-cut line defining when one generation ends and another begins. In other words, a quick Google search may give you a dozen different sets of dates.

Still, knowing the approximate dates and events that characterize each generation can help us all understand a bit more about ourselves, and also why the older generations will forever be scratching their heads about "kids these days"—no matter what year it is. Here's a look at the timeline of American generations since 1900 and how each generation's major events shaped kids and parents.

Defining Generation Names and Dates

A generation is a group of people born at roughly the same time. They're usually grouped by a 20-year time interval, says Deborah Carr, PhD, professor and chair of the sociology department of Boston University and author of *Golden Years? Social Inequalities in Later Life*. "But generations take on special meaning because their members tend to experience [critical life events](#) and transitions at particular historical moments, and these moments define their lives," says Dr. Carr.

Many experts, including Dr. Carr, agree that the most reliable and well-known generation timeline was identified by authors Neil Howe and William Strauss. However, the latest generational designations come from the Pew Research Center, a "nonpartisan fact tank that informs the public about the issues, attitudes, and trends shaping the world."

The Greatest Generation (GI Generation): Born 1901–1927

This generation lived through the Great Depression and then went off to fight in World War II. Notably, they popularized jazz and swing music, but don't be fooled by the wild provocations of the cultural preferences of the times. Due to the current events of this generation, the challenge of [raising a family](#) put a premium on traits like hard work and grit.

The Silent Generation: Born 1928–1945

The silent generation famously got their name for being so conformist that they were silent through the MacCarthy era when the fear of Communism swept the country. During this era, kids were expected to earn their way through life using a strong work ethic.

Baby Boom Generation: Born 1946–1964

Gen Z may think of Baby Boomers as their out-of-touch grandparents (as in "OK, Boomer"), but this generation actually had a wild youth we often don't talk about. Boomers are named for the population "boom" that occurred after WWII, and many young people of this generation defied their parents, protested the Vietnam War, and created the "Summer of Love."

Boomer parents notably redefined parenting by being the first generation to look at their kids' perspective of growing up, and they started the concept of [having family meetings](#).

Generation X: Born 1965–1980

So often dismissed as the slacker generation, Generation X lived through the AIDS epidemic, MTV culture, and a shifting landscape that would give rise to LGBTQ+ rights.

Generation X parents were the first to use [helicopter parenting styles](#). Unlike their Boomer parents, who famously let their kids stay outside until the streetlights came on, Gen X'ers have a tendency to be far more involved with their children's social and educational development.

Millennial Generation or Generation Y: Born 1981–1996

Millennials [lived through 9/11](#), remember when Amazon only sold books, and are also the first generation to know a childhood both with and without the internet, which now plays a significant role in their personal lives.

While Boomers may accuse Millennials of being self-centered and impatient due to their excessive use of technology, this generation has proven to actually be incredibly community-oriented and environmentally conscious, which are traits that are being picked up by their children.

When it comes to parenting, millennials are more likely than prior generations to encourage their children to live as their authentic selves, and are leading the movement in helping [gender non-conforming kids](#) to be happy with who they are, points out Carr. "Some millennial parents, who were 'helicoptered over' in their youth, are taking on a freer approach to parenting, allowing their children to explore and create without constant structure or supervision."

Generation Z or iGen: Born 1997–2010

Generation Z kids are the first to be born into a world where they know nothing else besides being constantly connected to one another, albeit through phones, screens, and tablets. However, like millennials before them, Gen Z'ers are often environmentally conscious, inclusive and accepting of others, and extremely politically aware—despite many of them not yet being of voting age.

Generation Alpha: Born Between 2010-2024

Kids born between 2010 and 2024 are part of . Generation Alpha is the first generation of kids who will never know a time when social media didn't exist, and they are far more tech-savvy than any generation

previously, which is a powerful tool that can change humanity in myriad positive ways.

It may be too soon to peg the Alphas as *this* or *that* based on how little we know about them so far. However, there are a few things we understand: Some Gen Alphas are the first to be born amid the COVID-19 pandemic, they're more diverse than any other generation, and they're more likely to be in a single-parent household.

Like the generations that came before them, every passing year will shape the cultural perception of who they are. In the meantime, parents get the pride and honor to help guide them to making the best choices possible.