

Parenting during a pandemic



As we enter a new month of COVID-19 protocols, the indirect and evolving implications of the pandemic are establishing new norms and roles within our family units for parents, guardians and those tasked with childcare responsibilities.

For employees of essential service organizations, and as non-essential entities ponder re-opening strategies and requirements, employees with children face numerous challenges including extended school closures, childcare facility shortages and the increasing necessity to provide adequate and sometimes constant care with educational support. These demands paired with the new realities of remote work environments and the professional obligations of day to day work have amplified the need for employee support measures and workplace flexibility.

Here are a few suggestions on how to manage the enormous task of taking care of children while remaining productive and performing your day to day obligations.¹

1. Be upfront about expectations.

Proactively communicate with your employer. Inform them that your children are at home and note you cannot guarantee your work or work calls will be interruption-free. This applies to your children as well. Explain that working from home means you have responsibilities that require your attention.

2. Split the work.

Where possible and permissible, if you have a partner or spouse you may consider taking shifts. For instance, one person watches the kids in the morning while the other works, and vice versa in the afternoon.

3. Prioritize your schedule.

Arrange the most engaging and reliable activities for the kids during a time when they can be on their own and when you need to be most productive.

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4. Take mini breaks.

Consider temporary changes to your work style. Instead of dedicating three consecutive hours to a project, break up the day, allowing you to give your children the attention they need. Recognize their attention spans are short and the potential need to continue working after hours or earlier in the morning.

5. Be creative with your office space.

Try to find a space with a door that can be closed. Creating physical boundaries can help reinforce the message that you need to be working and to ensure calls are uninterrupted.

6. Set up virtual babysitters.

Reach out to relatives, friends, babysitters, and teachers. Where possible, arrange and schedule virtual playdates. They can talk, read, play games, sing, and engage in other online activities.

7. Stress less about screen time.

Under normal conditions, many parents limit screen time. Consider increasing their daily screen time allotment. Remember to explain that it is a temporary adjustment.

8. Reward good behaviour.

Working from home with kids means maintaining harmony where possible. Consider a reward system for good behaviour and completion of work and chores where applicable.

It goes without saying however, having a good plan, creating structure, and allowing for creativity and flexibility can help you to create an environment that meets the needs of everyone in the household. There is no secret or defined formula, each family unit is unique and diverse in terms of composition and personalities. Here are a few considerations:²

• Communicate a family plan

It's important to be realistic about your working situation and the willpower needed to remain successful. Take time to explain what's happening. Be transparent about schedules and when you're off limits. Scheduling is vital. However, don't try to mimic a typical workday in the

office. Create a daily plan for the family that includes work and school schedules, and make it visible to everyone. For households with younger children, consider early morning shifts before scheduled 'school hours' begin.

• Swap in and out with your spouse or partner

Many of us are navigating our first attempt at home-schooling while monitoring the latest developments and fitting in how to keep the household functional and fed. Create a window for productivity. As the saying goes, divide and conquer, break the day into blocks of time that allow one parent space and time away from the children. Set realistic goals for both the home and work parts of your life, and don't be afraid to let things of less importance slide. If you need to be available for your children throughout the day, focus on your most important tasks first and don't overload your schedule.

• Remember, enjoy your kids

Making the best of the situation, rather than dwelling on its challenges, may also make you more productive. Multiple studies have shown links between happiness and productivity. Through physical distancing and stay at home protocols, that may result in finding time to share experiences, increase play and sneak in a few extra hugs throughout the day.

Where possible, adopt flexible working hours that afford you the opportunity to meet or follow your children's schedule. Communicate virtually with your peers as needed, you'll find you share similar experiences and challenges. Don't pre-occupy yourself with children being present. The reality is we are gaining insights into the private lives and homes of our colleagues through virtual meetings and minor distractions during conversations. Remember not to judge yourself. We are all adjusting to new norms and the challenge to remain productive.

Resources

- <https://www.cnbc.com/2020/03/17/working-at-home-with-kids-during-covid-19-crisis-with-kids-underfoot.html>
- <https://www.bbc.com/worklife/article/20200401-how-to-work-from-home-with-your-kids-during-coronavirus>

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