Working from home parents: Tips and Trick


It may difficult to transition from a regular work-life routine to juggling work and full-time childcare. Coming up with new strategies to get your work done while one kid is hanging on your arm and another is wailing in the next room is the new normal in the age of COVID-19. Before the pandemic, schools were open, and maybe a baby sitter or grandparent could watch your children if you needed to work from home, but with this new reality, those options may not be possible anymore.

It’s a mistake to pressure yourself to make everything work as it did before COVID-19. Allow yourself a period of adjustment where you will not be as productive. You cannot be a perfect parent and a perfect employee! It will be important to be flexible and invent new ways to preserve old routines. Maintaining a sense of familiarity and consistency is both comforting and therapeutic in times of upheaval – but it’s also practical (Thompson, 2020).

Here are some tips to help you embark on a new work at home life:

1) Set up a Workstation
Find a sunny room with a door you can shut, if possible. Maybe try to clear your dining room table and dedicate this area as a workstation. Parents with babies and toddlers may choose to setup ship in a child’s bedroom or play area to keep on eye on them. For proper ergonomic setup, click here and for tips on sitting at your workstation, click here.

For children doing schoolwork, try setting up different areas for work and school.

2) Divvy Up Child Care
Are there two adults working at home now? Do you have an older child who can look after young ones for a few hours? If so, try alternating shifts. As parents, discuss the work schedule as a team the night before to determine who is more available at different times of the day.

3) Establishing Routines and Activity Blocks
Develop a routine so you are not caught in a free-for-all. Have a routine for yourself and your children; dress up for the day, plan meals and snack times, etc. In the evening, when the children are in bed, prepare a list for activities the next day. Thompson (2020), author from A Guide for Working (From Home) Parents, suggests to schedule a block of activities for each day of the week and include your kids’ schedule of activities, meal menus, house chores and all other activities that are part of weekly routine. Discuss with your spouse: your schedule, which meetings you cannot be disturbed, who does what during the day. It will also help to orient your children who to go see when something is needed. More importantly, explain to your kids that you have work that must be done, and they can help by giving you quiet time. Have your kids create a sign to post at your workstation that you can flip to read "open" or "closed" when trying to meet deadlines or during meetings.

Finally, schedule some alone/private time.
4) Children and school work
As a parent, it is worrisome that all school directed learning has stopped. Tell yourself that this is a situation that all children are going through. Kids are resilient and will be able to catch up. As a learning routine, have your children read everyday even if it’s just 15 minutes. Review certain basics which are age appropriate for your child such as vocabulary or multiplication table.

5) Talking to your kids about the current situation
It’s important to bear in mind what your children are going through during these difficult times. Talk to your children about what’s going on and ensure what you are sharing is age appropriate. Be on the lookout for changes in behaviours, somatization, regression, etc. Keep in mind that you have access to our Employee and Family Assistance Program for short-term counselling and for information, here is a video from Shepell ‘Talking to your child about COVID-19’

6) Let Them Be
Help them cultivate freedom and independence by learning how to entertain themselves with books, crafts, seeding a garden or backyard play. You don’t have to do every activity with them.

Fill a basket with nutritious snacks so they can help themselves and not rely on you for everything. Try arranging your bottom refrigerator shelf where your kids can grab drinks and cheese sticks or other finger food.

7) Do It your way
As long as your work gets done, you can work in the early morning, at night or while the kids nap. Make sure to speak to your supervisor if you are expected to work during certain hours during the workday. For example, take some time midday to take a walk with the kids or take some "sanity time" during the day to exercise.

8) Lighten Up
These are unprecedented time. Parents need to cut themselves some slack. No criticizing or beating yourself up over the kids' extra screen time. This is temporary, and it’s OK to shift the rules. Be sure to take care of yourself. Don’t focus on what your can’t control but what you can control. For example, keep in touch regularly with family and friends. Try a virtual hangout with friends.

9) Swap in new ways to do old things.
If your children are used to having playdates or weekly activities, find ways to keep those events on the calendar, just in a new format! Everyone will appreciate the social time and, as a bonus, it can also buy you 30 minutes of uninterrupted work time. Some options to consider (Thompson, 2020):

   o Virtual playdates: Connecting with family and friends with Google Hangouts (or Zoom if you prefer). For the playdate itself, have a station set up in your house with a tablet, laptop, or Alexa Show/Facebook Portal ready to go. During the playdate, it can be as simple as the kids catching up and coloring together or one of the parents leading an activity or reading books.
Creative athletic activities for the kids: Register your kids for free online classes like Cosmic Yoga, Art Hub for Kids, or Go Noodle. Schedule these during the times they might otherwise be doing after-school activities. They should get some exercise every day — this could even be just going into the backyard and do some soccer drills or play catch.

10) Have concerns, speak to your supervisor

If work and looking after your children gets to be too much, speak to your supervisor. Your supervisor may be able to reduce your work hours and assignments or inform you of the leaves that you may be entitled to, should you be unable to continue working.