

Ask an Expert: How to Juggle Parenting and Working from Home – Seven Tips

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As we continue to find ourselves in new territory with COVID-19, we face major changes to our routines – including parents having children at home while they work. While many parents have worked from home when their child was sick or out of school, the current situation may require us to accept this arrangement for weeks (or months) to come. If you are still trying to figure out how to make this work in your home, consider the following tips to help you get your work done and also meet your children's needs.

1. It can be difficult for younger children to see you as anything but their parent. They may not understand that even though you are at home, you aren't going to be available to them all the time. Talk to them about your job and explain why it is important.

2. Create a home office or designated workspace so children understand that when they see you there, it means you are working.

3. Give children some uninterrupted time at various points throughout the day. Set up a daily schedule that includes breaks for snacks, brief physical activity and lunch. Go over the schedule for the day during breakfast and make sure children who can read can see the schedule. For younger children, set a timer so they know exactly when their next break and time with you will be.

4. Give younger children a "job." Give them tasks to complete while you work and tell them that you are both "going to work." Set up a desk for them and give them work supplies such as markers or crayons, paper and a glue stick. Try giving them assignments, such as drawing pictures or writing stories for you and make sure to have activity books and reading books available. Take time during breaks to let them share what they have created or read.

5. Allow older children to have designated time for screen-based activities, but make sure their schedule also includes activities such as playing outside, doing chores or tasks around the house, reading a book or spending time on hobbies. If they don't have hobbies, this is a great time to help them explore some. Hobby and activity ideas can be found through Discover 4-H at <https://utah4h.org/discover/>. Take time during your scheduled breaks to ask about what they have been doing. This shows you are interested and ensures they are following the set schedule.

6. When you need to have a meeting without interruptions, put a sign on your office door or desk that says, "In a meeting." Explain that the sign means not to disturb you unless there is an emergency. The visual cue will help remind them that you are at work.

7. Finally, if your work allows it and your productivity won't be negatively affected, shift your work hours to earlier in the morning or later in the evening when kids are in bed or when another adult can help with childcare. If this isn't possible, consider scheduling work tasks that require quiet and focused concentration when you know your kids will be involved in an engaging activity, like during screen time.

Remember that being an engaged parent and a productive employee while working at home is not an easy feat. Try not to get frustrated or discouraged if it takes a while to figure out what works best for your family. Once everyone gets used to the new normal, it should make the juggling act a little easier for all of you.

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