

Working from Home with Kids

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For those of us who are working parents, the office closures that have forced us to work from home since March have had an added wrinkle: Our children's schools and daycares closed their doors as well. We've been thrown into a crazy mix where we are expected to be good employees, good caregivers, and good substitute teachers every day...during the same hours of the day.

Have you been late to your 9 am stand-up meeting every day because you're logging your kindergartener into their 9 am Zoom with their class? Is your toddler video-bombing your one-on-one meetings with your boss? Have you been able to get even half your normal workload done while working far more hours in the day?

You're not alone. And you're not just working from home. You're at home, during a crisis, trying to work and parent your kids at the same time. So if you've gotten this far, you deserve all the socially-distanced pats on the back we can give you. Here are a few tips and techniques that we hope will restore a little sanity to your life (and help you get a bit of work done, too).

Let your kids lead the way.

After a few months at home you've probably already gotten into a certain daily rhythm with your kids, even if it's far from ideal. If you have school-aged children, their remote-schooling curriculum added a bit of structure to their days, even if you had to help them through it. But guess what? Now it's summer, camps are closed, and they have nothing to do at all! In the same way you'd iterate on a constantly-shifting problem at work, you're going to have to keep finding ways to adapt to whatever new curveballs your family situation throws at you. Encourage your kids to brainstorm activities with you—if they come up with them, they're more likely to stick to them.

Keep an open dialogue with your colleagues

and managers.

It's OK to continue to ask for flexibility and ever-shifting hours as your situation evolves. Summer break is obviously a big change, but others can include new break times depending on your children's needs (maybe your toddler is no longer taking that morning nap that you used to count on for morning meetings). If you are a manager, be proactive about checking in on your reports to make sure they're doing OK. There is probably a lot they're not telling you, and they'll be relieved to hear that you're understanding about their situation.

Split your schedule.

If you are co-parenting with someone else in your household, think creatively about ways you can divide up your workdays so that you can each get chunks of solid work time. If you're both working 9-5 schedules, small increments of two hours may work best; if one of you has a more flexible schedule that person may take more daytime hours, while the other one takes more evening or alternate hours. And the schedule shouldn't be set in stone, but ebb and flow to accommodate major deadlines and projects that may require one person to work a bit more than the other.

Set up your home office.

Now couldn't be a more important time to have a [dedicated space to work](#). Ideally you'll have an actual room of your house, but if you don't have space for that, add a desk to your bedroom or other room where the kids don't hang out and you can shut the door. However you arrange your workspace, it's important that your kids understand that this space means you are not available to drop everything and fetch them a string cheese from the fridge. Add a "Busy Working / Knock First" sign to the door, or a "Shh!" sign if you are on a call, to reinforce the message.

Get help in whatever ways you can.

No, you do not need to be a homesteader like everyone else and teach your children to bake bread or plant a vegetable garden in your very little spare time. (Unless you like doing those things!) If you need to get dinner delivered three times a week to save your sanity, do it. If you serve that dinner on paper plates so that you don't have to do the dishes, go for it. If there's a pickup/dropoff

laundry service in your area, sign up without guilt. If you have faraway friends or family members who are willing to entertain your kid on Zoom for as long as their attention span allows, give it a shot.

Find time to focus (even if it's brief)

Everything we've outlined above are ways to help you out with the most important thing you do as you work: finding your flow. By this we mean that zen-like period of uninterrupted focus where you can think clearly and be extremely productive. It might be early in the morning or late at night. It might be in your back yard where you can't hear your kids' YouTube videos buzzing in the background. You might find [noise-canceling headphones](#) help. Do what you can to get in the right headspace once a day, because your time is precious, and two hours of quality worktime are more valuable than long, semi-focused stretches of time you can't spare.

Make peace with an ever-changing situation.

If your house is a mess, find the grace to forgive yourself, and remember that everyone's house is a mess right now. (That's why we all have [cool Zoom backgrounds](#) on our calls, right?)

If you're working at home, a laptop just isn't enough. Set up the perfect home office with an [HP monitor](#), [keyboard](#) and [mouse](#) that fits your needs.