

Handling kids while working from home



In today's technological generation, it's possible for many of us to continue working without having to physically go into the workplace. Remote working – working from home – is proving a popular alternative for many organisations, as the fight to contain the spread of Coronavirus (COVID-19) continues. However, with school shutdowns and the like, working from home with children underfoot poses its own raft of unique challenges.

Many parents and caregivers are used to scheduling time away from the office to make sure the kids are supervised during holiday and vacation periods. Many people would also have experienced working from home to look after the kids on the occasional sick day. The key difference between COVID-19 closures and school holiday periods: they may be at home but it's far from break-time for the kids. Their workload, like yours, is likely to remain consistent.

Although schools can't conduct face-to-face learning, there's still a syllabus that needs to be taught and an academic timetable that educators need to meet. Accordingly, teachers and schools are utilising a variety of online learning resources to communicate lesson plans.

Having your children home from school during this pandemic could be considered breaking new ground. You've got your work to do, the kids have their work to do, and there's a fair degree of anxiety and uncertainty in the air as to when 'all of this' will be over.

So how do you handle this new work-school paradigm?

Parents and caregivers working from home, while also keeping watch on the children, might find the following tips and advice useful.

There is no rulebook

The first thing to keep in mind is that this is a new for almost everyone.

"Working from home with our children for an unknown period of time is uncharted territory for families," [child therapist Elana Benatar told CNN](#). "Anticipate that some of the guidelines/rules you establish might not work. Take note of the things that help everyone shrink their to-do lists, and be flexible enough to try different things if your initial plans and processes come unstuck."

As Benatar concludes, "You're a parent, not a superhero (as much as some of us like to think that we are!) [and the last thing children need at the moment are unnecessarily stressed out parents or caregivers](#). "We're all figuring it out... it might get a little messy."

Be realistic

While we want to get as much work as possible done, it's important to be realistic when it comes to your expectations concerning productivity, both yours and the kids. Be prepared to discover that what you can get done in a day in the workplace is likely to be more than what you can get done when working from home with children.

Maintaining their concentration and keeping students engaged in the learning process is one of the biggest challenges educators face on a day-to-day basis in a classroom setting. You need to be realistic in terms of how the kids will balance out completing their work with succumbing to the distractions of being at home, which might include access to streaming services, social media and gaming devices.

Your kids are also likely to see you as an extension of their 'new' classroom. Expect to be asked questions about their lessons – are they on the right track with their answers? Sometimes, the questions they ask might also require a little thought on your behalf so, inevitably, this will impact on your productivity.

Never stop communicating

From your kids to your employer and everyone in-between, good communication is essential, especially when you're not working side-by-side with your colleagues.

Ensure that your employer or clients know that your kids are home from school. Not only will it be useful for them in planning events – like teleconferences and anticipating your availability – it will give you a negotiating point for setting and meeting deadlines, and managing the expectations of others while you're working from home.

Have an open and honest conversation with your kids to establish some ground rules and expectations around how your new day-to-day routine might look while everyone's home around the clock. This is your opportunity to manage their expectations about your ability to help them with their work, and how they can help give you the space and time to complete what you need to do while they're studying.

Likewise, many recreational pursuits and organised sporting competitions have also been postponed, along with school attendance. This is another massive contributor to the upheaval in your children's everyday routine.

Make sure they understand why their school is closed (the article [Helping kids cope with the COVID-19 epidemic](#) may provide some guidance), and just because they don't have classes doesn't mean they're on holiday. Not only will you and the kids then have an opportunity to agree on what's expected of everyone in the household, you can also deal with any questions or worries they have concerning the Coronavirus.

Additionally, communicating with your partner (if there is one in the picture) about how the competing demands of family and work will be managed is an important action. Share the workload, talk about how things are progressing, and be there for each other.



Get, keep and stay healthy

The demands on your time and energy levels are going to increase as you work from home and manage the kids – that’s inevitable. Do the right thing and maintain – or adopt, if necessary (no judgement!) – healthy eating habits, stay sensibly hydrated and try to get in as much rest as possible. Take regular breaks away from your own work, set aside some ‘me’ time with exercise or experiment with meditation or mindfulness.

Looking after yourself is not a selfish measure – it is the responsible thing to do because it means you can also look after the competing demands of family and work in one of the most challenging times we’ve experienced in recent memory.

[Kourtney Whitehead writing for Forbes](#) says, “Try to remind yourself that your entire family will benefit from being around the healthier, or at least better-rested, version of you. Guard your rest aggressively. It is not selfish to choose sleep over sending emails or finally watching a show with your partner.”

Summary

Be kind to yourself and remember there’s no rulebook for the situation that a lot of us are currently tackling. Trial-and-error is inevitable. Be flexible with the people around you and keep your productivity expectations realistic.

Keeping yourself in good shape mentally, and physically, and respecting the importance of communication are essential in successfully dealing with children while working from home.

But, when it comes down to it, every household situation will be different, so what works for one family might not work in another. Take the time to find the right ‘formula’ for yours.