

Parenting during a pandemic



As we enter a new month and school year, COVID-19 protocols and the evolving implications of the pandemic are establishing new norms and roles within family units for parents, guardian, and teachers along with others 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 new schooling policies and potential 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 of your child's situation and schooling requirements. It's important to communicate and note you may be unable to guarantee your work will be interruption-free. Check with your leaders and other professional resources where applicable.

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 children when they can be on their own and when you need to be most productive and at work.

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4. 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.

5. Set up virtual babysitters.

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

6. Reward good behaviour.

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. Create a daily plan for the family that includes work and school schedules, and make it visible to everyone.

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. Remember not to judge yourself. We are all adjusting to new norms and the challenge to remain productive.

Resources

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

