

Work-at-Home Survival Tips | Part 2 working with kids

9 Tips for Parental Sanity While Working at Home with Kids

Are you balancing both work and kids under lockdown? For the past six years, OPC's own Graphics Specialist, Leanna Matthews, has been working remotely while raising twins as a working-stay-at-home mom.

While the new COVID-19 pandemic stay-at-home order adds a level of difficulty (even to a long-time remote worker like Leanna), she has provided some tips to help deal with the challenges parents around the world are suddenly facing.

Tip 1. Forgive Yourself. You have a packed day, a team call in the morning, coordinate with a subcontractor on a critical deliverable, a client meeting at 3, and a deadline that must be met by the end of the day. Your kids wander off from their assignments and watch a movie instead. Please relax your screen-time fears; that movie is not going to set them back two years in school! You have enough stress as it is than to add that to your worries. It will be wise at times to ease up on what you expect - not only of them but of you. Sometimes the television, computer, and phone can step in to fill their time when needed. Remember that as challenging as this period is, the whole world is going through the same thing.

Tip 2. Reasonable Expectations on Productivity. Wouldn't it be nice if we could assign our kids things to do for 8-9 hours in sync with our own work schedule? Wouldn't it be perfect if they waited for us to finish our workday to show us what they did all day? And, of course, they would be showing you that they finished an essay, a chapter in their math book, and a science project? And cleaned up after themselves? While we're at it, why not also wish that there were no pandemic in the first place? Reality dictates here, high expectations put extra pressure on everyone.

How we picture isolation:



Isolation with kids:



Tip 3. Plan Ahead and Schedule Your Workday. You have probably already found this to be true, but your kids are not going to want to wait for you to finish your meeting to demand your attention. Plan your upcoming work activities the night before to block off your absolute do not disturb times. Use your Outlook calendar to block off when you can and can't be bothered. Likewise, plan their day ahead of time as well. As noted previously, do not expect for things to go as you plan them, particularly not with homework assignments. Handy print outs, worksheets, educational games, craft supplies, books, documentaries, and lots of accessible toys will help to keep the younger kids occupied when things get off track.

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Tip 4. Hide and (Don't) Seek. Seriously, have a defined place you can hide for a few minutes, ideally a place that still has good Wi-Fi and cell reception, maybe even an outlet (Leanna's hiding place is a walk-in closet that she calls the "safe room"). There will be a few emergency times when you have to go in your safe room, unless you have a partner at home who can help divert your children. Make it clear to the family, when you are in there, it's no interruptions time. Have it stocked and ready with things that you may need for your time in there, like a pad of paper and pen for important calls.

Tip 5. Clear Lines of Communication. While you try to focus on your job, things may come up with your kids that need your attention. If you need to stop what you're doing to parent, that is understood, and clear lines of communication with your work team can mitigate any potential concerns your team may have. For times when you are on a call or in a conference meeting, it is helpful to have a pre-appointed "signal". For Leanna's family, her kids put their hand on her wrist. This is a silent signal that says, "*Mom, I need your attention when you are done*" without distracting Leanna from the adults that she is talking to.

Tip 6. Set and Follow Routines. You as an adult know how it feels to be on edge, but just imagine what is going on with your little ones. Young kids particularly thrive on routine and schedule. But now, their entire routine is turned upside down. To boot, they've got their parents at home but can't have all of their time. This doesn't present as much of a problem with the older kids, but the young ones will not get it. With younger children, following a routine gives them the needed sense of structure.

Tip 7. Inspire, Don't Entertain. For teens and older children, this time is probably leaving them feeling bored, and potentially glued to their phones. Handling testy teens with summertime blues can be distracting in a different way than little ones attached to mommy or daddy. For older kids acting listless, take

time each day after work to talk openly with them. Ask them what they would like to do with their lives and inspire them to take this time to work on those goals. This is a great time for interest-based learning. Maybe it's improving their drawing skills, learning a new instrument, starting a podcast, or getting in shape for next season's tryouts. In this day and age, the access to get going on nearly anything is at their fingertips. Even if they can't get their hands on the equipment they need now, they can learn as much as possible online. So remind your young adults at home that "boredom" is a good thing. Boredom encourages imagination and creativity and helps develop problem-solving skills.

Tip 8. Minimize Munch-Time Distractions. Keep healthy snacks available that your kids can prepare for themselves always stocked and keep them in an easy-to-reach location. At the Matthews' home, they have a shelf with snacks that Leanna's daughters can have without asking. Obvious to state, mind the sugar, since kids bouncing around indoors while you try to work is probably not desirable.

Tip 9. Uphold Household Harmony. To make it through this time in a more cramped-and-cranky household, everyone will need to pull together. If it isn't your style, it may be necessary to lay down clear rules for music volume, gaming time, phone calls, and so on. Everyone may have to sacrifice something to accommodate the harmony for the working family member. As your work is important - maybe imperative - to the household, help your family understand how their good behavior helps all of you. This may be a great time for your pre-teens to sharpen their cooking skills or college kids to get a good dose of corporate expectations. Remember to show your family how their effort helps the whole team.

Want some other tips on how to improve home office efficiency?

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Be sure to share these tips with your coworkers with kids!



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