



Working from home with kids underfoot during the COVID 19 pandemic.



In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, many companies are sending their employees home to work, schools across a number of countries, including the UK are closing their doors. That's nearly 9.4 million school aged children across England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland. While the government has made provisions for those children of key workers the vast majority of parents with the flexibility to work at home will have a challenging time ahead. Globally the figure is closer to 290 million students; and some countries and some parents won't have any flexibility about working from home. If, however you are lucky to be able to continue working, albeit remotely, we'd like to share our knowledge.

With a little research we have located some helpful hints and tips for parents working at home with children during emergencies.

1. Be upfront and honest about expectations. It is important to proactively communicate with your employer and advise them that your children are at home, this will mean they are aware that you cannot guarantee your work or work calls will be interruption-free. Try to explain this to your children too: Explain to them that working from home means you really are trying to do work. Children need to understand this isn't a holiday or weekend. We are in unprecedented times, and we need to adapt as best we can.

2. Use an online "babysitter". Reach out to friends, aunts, uncles, grandparents. These can be a fantastic resource, because you can use them to arrange virtual playdates for your children. They can talk, read, play games, sing, do dances and much more, all through online channels.

3. Plan activities that don't need supervision. Try to pick something that is personalised to the needs and wants of your children, work within your schedule and the age of your children. Some babies may give you a break during nap times, you can rely on swings and bouncy chairs or put on music. Create activity boxes that contain games and puzzles that require minimal adult supervision for toddlers and primary school aged children. Have a backup activity jar ready to go for when these activities become boring. Many schools are sending out "learning packs" for their children for all ages to work through. Older kids will most likely be busy with online schooling. There are also an increasing number of online resources which are supporting families in these times of crisis; schooling websites, groups on social media, apps and live-streaming options with zoo's / aquariums.

4. Prioritise your schedule. Planning is KEY! Try to schedule your most engaging/reliable activities for the kids to be on their own during the time you need to be most productive. **Establish a routine early, and stick with it** look into home school schedules and sharing lists of online activities that are temporarily waiving subscription fees. Try and start with a "care plan," like getting dressed, having breakfast, getting outside for a bit. Then they do their "work plan" for the day, which includes school work as well as supplemental activities

5. Share the load. If you have a partner, and if your work allows, 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. This can better guarantee at least some hours where your focus is purely on work.

6. Positive Reinforcement – with Rewards. Working from home with kids in an emergency means maintaining harmony however possible, and this includes setting up a reward system for them when they follow directions.

7. Break up the day. Consider temporarily adapting your style of working. Instead of tackling a project for three hours, break up the day more to give your children the attention they need. Respect the fact that their attention spans are short, so your work will likely need to be done in chunks. You may need to continue working after they've gone to bed or wake up earlier in the morning to get more uninterrupted hours in. Speak to your boss about the flexibility of hours.

8. Stress less about screen time. Under normal conditions, many parents limit screen time. It is worth considering adding to their daily screen time allotment to buy you more work time. Just explain to your children, though, that it is a temporary adjustment.

9. Get creative with 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. Any place in the house with internet access can act as an office during an emergency, especially for when you must ensure calls are uninterrupted

10. Know your options. During these times of crisis, it may be worth considering whether it would be advisable to take some parental leave, or paid annual leave. This could be to break up the weeks or the days. Every company should have a policy on dependant leave and how this can be taken.