

Working from home with children during COVID-19

As we continue to make changes to minimise the spread of COVID-19, many parents are entering uncharted territory – faced with effectively managing their work and educating their children from home. Parents may understandably begin to feel anxious and worried about how to support their children and navigate coming months.

Juggling usual work responsibilities with educating your child is equal to managing several full-time jobs at once. Be kind to yourself and set realistic expectations for the day ahead. It won't always be picture perfect but there are some strategies and steps you can take to make this new situation a little easier on you and your family.

Focus on your own self-care

As a parent, it is often the instinct to push aside your own self-care and mental health as you concentrate on supporting your family through a difficult situation. It is important to make a conscious effort to practice self-care.

Ensure that each parent has time to themselves each day. Working while also managing to care for a child will mean that you are continually switched on. Without a break, over a time this will can a toll on patience, energy and wellbeing.

Be open and honest about COVID-19

Managing a child's disrupted routine can be an intimidating task for any parent. Due to the many changes to usual routines, even very young children may pick up that something is wrong. Avoid brushing over the situation, children will cope better if they have a good understanding of the current circumstances.

Be open and honest with kids and offer them accurate and age appropriate information.

- **Highlight the positives.** Discuss what is in our control and how we can help our community. Staying at home, social distancing, maintaining good hygiene, spending more time together as a family, checking in on elderly neighbours or family members.
- **Avoid emphasising the negatives.** Try not to concentrate on distressing facts such as mortality rates, overrun hospitals and being stuck inside.
- **Be a role model.** Children will look up to you and mimic your behaviour. Be mindful to stay calm and kind to those around you. Utilise this time to teach children importance of empathy and compassion.

Set expectations early on

For the time being, no one can be certain on how long we will be required to self-isolate. It may be a good idea to sit down as a family and discuss how your household will work together in the coming months.

- Explain to your kids how their days will look and what will be expected of them – maintaining schoolwork, usual chores, not interrupting parents during certain work times.
- If age appropriate, work with your kids and use their input in setting household expectations and boundaries.
- Set some goals or activities that each person would like to try during this time.

Regularly check in

Due to the ongoing nature of the situation, it is important to continually check in with how your child is coping. Keep an eye out for unusual behaviours that could be a sign of anxiety or stress – changes in mood, being clingy, disrupted sleep, decreased appetite or bed wetting.

Children can feel worried or like they are in trouble when you pull them aside for a chat. Checking in can be done casually in everyday conversation – e.g. over cooking dinner,

a bedtime story or while playing. Calmly talk through any issues or things they may have seen in the news. Remind them that they can come to you for anything that is on their mind.

- Encourage healthy habits in your child's routine.
- Make time in the day for uninterrupted play time with each child.
- Give them extra affection and attention – let them know that you think they are doing a good job coping with change, with chores, schoolwork and achievements.

Maintain a routine

While there will be major disruptions to a child's normal routine that are unavoidable, attempt to maintain as much of a normal routine as possible. Children will better adapt to change when there is a sense of familiarity to their previous routine. Consistency during self-isolation will mean that children will know what to expect each day and increase their feeling of security.

Don't feel pressured to plan every day down to the last minute. Consider trying to mimic a school day, waking up at the same time, eating breakfast and getting ready as if going to school. Establish and maintain bedtimes, eating times, chores, play activities, outdoor time and school times. Having a routine will maximise everyone's time and allow for dedicated family time as well as quiet time for parents to complete work and daily tasks.

Everyone's situations will be different. Do what works for your family.

Plan for interruptions

Every parent will require time to do certain tasks in total peace whether that be work related, household tasks or just a well-deserved time out. Plan and minimise the potential for interruptions.

Remember that disruptions are sometimes unavoidable. If a work meeting is interrupted, try not to let it overwhelm you. Resolve the issue and carry on as usual.

Though you may prefer to work behind a closed

door, children often cope better when they can see you. Consider working somewhere in their field of vision. This will minimise their desire to seek connection with you and calling out, knocking on the door or complaining.

If living in a two-parent household, perhaps designate one person to be the 'on duty' parent in the morning and another in the afternoon. This will allow each parent to have half a day of mostly uninterrupted work.

Prior to an activity that requires minimal distractions, such as a work call:

- Arrange craft activities or print out activity sheets to keep kids occupied.
- Inform kids where they can find food/water – having morning/afternoon snack prepared.
- If possible, schedule naps or screen time around essential work commitments.
- For school aged children, explain to them that you will need to be left alone for a period of time. Encourage them to use visual cues, e.g. write a note and pass it to you if there is an emergency.

Openly communicate with colleagues

Chances are that many of your colleagues will be in the same boat. We are all in this situation together and need to be understanding of each other's circumstances.

Be honest with your colleagues and explain the situation to them. Some days you may be working at a reduced capacity but assure them that you will be trying your best to meet requirements.

- Consider speaking with your manager to discuss different working hours to. Make your days more manageable. Be genuine about any areas you are struggling in.
- If you're about to start a video call, let people know that there may be unavoidable noises or interruptions in the background.
- Let your colleagues know that there may be periods throughout the day that you will not be contactable but that you will get back to them as soon as possible.

Managing family conflict

Given the unusual and stressful circumstances, it is possible that children will act out or family conflict will increase. Demonstrate patience and empathy for family members while in such close proximity. Make an effort to address conflict quickly and be mindful not to hold grudges.

You may experience an increase of disagreements between you and your child. While easier said than done, try to pick your battles and save it for essential things like eating well, sleep times, schoolwork and exercise. Consider whether it is worth the fight before engaging.

Stay connected to friends and family

Maintaining our social connections with family and friends is fundamental to mental health and wellbeing. While we are currently limited to being in physical proximity to loved ones, it can be helpful to connect with family and friends via phone or online.

Remember that your child will also be missing their friends and family. If old enough, arrange playdates via video chat to stay in contact with loved ones or assist them in sending videos and photos.

If your child does not have access to technology, look at some creative ways to feel connected to others, for example writing and sending letters or postcards!

If for any reason you are feeling overwhelmed, please reach out to us on 1300 130 130.

To arrange an appointment today please call us on

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