



# Working from Home with Kids? How to Manage the Impossible

By Eve Glicksman  
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Kelsey Adkisson, a communications professional and mother of children ages 5 and 2, started telecommuting this week like many parents across the country. On Monday, genius struck. She said goodbye to the kids; went out the front door of her Tri-Cities, Wash., home; walked to the back of the house ... and climbed back in through her home office window.

"[My kids] have no idea I'm home," she said. "I have a very supportive husband who helps me hide when I need to work."

This ruse won't work for everyone, but devising clever strategies to get your work done while one kid is hanging on your arm and another is wailing in the next room is the new normal in the age of COVID-19.

"Even for people used to working at home, there may not be a playbook," said Daisy Wademan Dowling, founder and CEO of Workparent in New York City. Before the pandemic, schools were open, and maybe a baby sitter or grandparent could watch the kids if a parent needed to work from home. That may not be possible now, she noted.

Lyz Lenz, an author and a columnist for *The Gazette* in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, anticipates friction between spouses and partners who are both working from home now.

Calls for help have been unprecedented, said Liz Gulliver, co-founder of Kunik, a company based in Miami that supports working parents and the employers who manage them. Confusion and uncertainty are compounding what is already a challenge, she said.

"It's a mistake to pressure yourself to make everything work as normal. There is going to be an adjustment period."

Here's their advice for parents who are embarking on new work-at-home lives for the next few weeks.

## Set Up a Workstation

Find a sunny room with a door you can shut, if possible. Even a table in a bedroom is preferable to working at a kitchen table, Gulliver advised. Otherwise, clear a shelf or dining room table to create a dedicated workspace. Parents with babies and toddlers may choose to set up shop in a child's bedroom or play area to keep an eye on them. Getting a headset with a noise-canceling microphone and mute button is helpful to block out testy children and dogs during calls.

## Divvy Up Child Care

Are there two adults working at home now? Or an older child who can look after young ones for a few hours? If so, alternate shifts, said Dowling, who said it's unrealistic to think you can operate on a regular eight-hour day. Parents can discuss their work schedule as a team the night before to determine who is more available at different times of the day, she suggested. Also consider swapping baby-sitting time with neighbors in the same situation. You watch their kids in the morning, and they watch yours in the afternoon.

## Establish Ground Rules

Develop a routine so you don't get caught in a free-for-all. "Set your alarm for the same time every day," Gulliver said. Schedule lunch and create structure for the children. Assign them a YouTube workout or dance party to burn energy. "This lets your kids know it's not just Saturday, when everyone is lounging around."

More importantly, explain to children that you have work that must get done, and they can help by giving you quiet time. Post a sign at your workstation that you can flip to read "open" or "closed" when trying to meet deadlines or during meetings.

## Let Them Be

"Leave your kids alone!" Lenz said. Help them cultivate freedom and independence by learning how to entertain themselves with books, crafts, seeding a garden or backyard play, she advised. "You don't have to monitor and do every activity with them."

Fill a snack basket so they can help themselves and not rely on you for everything. Lenz arranges a bottom refrigerator shelf where her kids, ages 9 and 6, can grab drinks and cheese sticks or other finger food.

## Work in Bursts

Multitasking decreases efficiency, so try to separate work and family time. Lenz sets a timer for about 90 minutes to keep herself and her kids on track. They know she can't be disturbed until the timer goes off. To sweeten the pot, she promises to play checkers or do something fun with them afterward.

## Communicate, Communicate, Communicate

"What tends to get squeezed out [when telecommuting] is communication and relationships with colleagues," Dowling said. People still need to call each other to stay connected and reduce isolation. Ask your employer for guidance on communication tools to "maximize your touch points," she said. Using multiple communication channels to stay in touch—video, Slack, instant messaging, Yammer—can help avoid misunderstandings, Gulliver added. "Body language and tone get lost in e-mail."

## Do It Your Way

As long as your work gets done, you can work in the early morning, at night or while the kids nap. "Take a few hours midday to take a walk with the kids," Lenz suggested. She takes "sanity time" during the day to exercise in her basement. Other parents cop to hiding out in the bathroom to answer e-mail or make calls.

## Lighten Up

"This is an unprecedented time," said Dowling, herself the parent of two young ones. "Parents need to cut themselves slack. No criticizing or beating yourself up over the kids' [extra] screen time. This is temporary, and it's OK to shift the rules."

*Eve Glicksman is a freelance writer based in Silver Spring, Md.*