

Parenting in lockdown and working from home

The closure of schools may cause added stress to parents trying to use their home as a workplace. It might be especially difficult to juggle work responsibilities, take care of/entertain children, as well as ensuring everyone stays protected at the same time. Balancing children and a full workload can be beyond difficult. In this tipsheet, our parenting expert, Anita Fletcher shares some tips to help you create and maintain a positive work life balance when working from home with children.

1. Talk to your child about the importance of working from home.

Explain to your children how important it is that you are able to do your work from home, with as few interruptions as possible. Allow them to be part of the team! Their role being, to help Mum and Dad to be productive (children are more likely to be cooperative when they feel involved and understand the reasons behind the actions). Set your children their own daily routine so they know exactly what is expected of them (children thrive on routine & boundaries).

2. Set up your designated workplace.

If you haven't already, set up your space! This will make you more productive & remind children that you're working and not available to them when you're in that space. You don't want to be completely isolated from children if no one else is around to mind them, but the kitchen table probably won't serve as the optimal work space, either. Search for a well-lit area in your home, where you can stay on task, and minimise interruptions. As children interrupt, gently remind them that you are in your workspace and encourage them to go back to their activity, telling them you'll go to them when you're finished the piece of work. If you don't learn to keep your roles as parent and employee separate, you'll never feel like you're doing either well. Plus, it helps you disengage from your job if you can walk away from your workspace.





3. Set up a children's work/play space & set a daily routine.

Having their own workspace (just like Mum or Dad) empowers a child and again reminds them that when they're in that space, they are working.

Make a plan for education and entertainment. Set aside a few cool toys that your children can play with or arrange a special movie viewing only during "Mummy & Daddy's work time." If your children have something to look forward to, they'll be less likely to interrupt you. Giving you time to catch up on e-mails.

Plan their day with them (just like you have to plan your own work day). Schedule in brain training activities (puzzles, reading, lego, colouring etc) or school activities in 20-40 minute blocks. Schedule in breaks, exercise, stretch, play etc. Explain that you need them to stick to the plan/schedule/routine (whatever you prefer to call it) while you are working. Some children will entertain themselves once they have the means to do so. Setting up an activity station with games, crafts, puzzles, books and other activities will help their creative juices flow. Rotate activities & encourage children to explore options. If it's coming to the end of your day, ask your child to join you at your desk to read a book or write a poem. That should buy you 30 minutes to wrap up your work for the day.

4. Minimise stress triggers.

We all know our own family better than anyone! Pick your Battles! When you know your stress triggers you can talk about them. First up, talk to your partner about the main stress triggers & the course of action you want to take to avoid them. Once you have that decided, you can talk to your child & get their buy in. List what is expected from children (remember, children thrive on routine and boundaries).

There's nothing more stressful for a Mum or Dad working from home, than a sudden tantrum or outburst from their children during a call. To minimise this risk, run through a series of scenarios to prepare children. Preparation is key!

Examples;

- If the phone rings and Mum/Dad moves to their workspace, do you A. Run after them screaming or B. Quietly have a seat and wait for the call to be finished?
- If you come into a room and see Mum/Dad on the phone, how do you react?
- If Mum/Dad is at the computer when you come into the room, do you A. Scream your demands or B. Politely request attention?

In time, with consistency from the adults, children will learn what is expected of them and will happily stay within their boundaries.

5. Use positive reinforcements.

Catch your children being good! When you see your children putting in the effort to follow the new routine, tell them you've noticed. Tell them how helpful they are being. This will reinforce the good behaviour and in turn, the likelihood of it happening again is higher! Remember, a child will take negative attention over no attention, every time! Get there with the positive attention first.

6. Know when to give your child a piece of your time.

If you become overwhelmed with constant interruptions because the children are desperately seeking your attention, take a break! Take them on a bike ride, or a walk, watch a movie, bake scones. Regardless of the activity you choose, the children are more likely to stay out of your way when work resumes.

Refer to the HSE website for up to date information and give age appropriate explanations to your children. Very young children need brief, simple information and reassurance, older children may need help to separate reality from rumour and fantasy (Social Media/Fake News).

Reinforce hand washing and social/physical distance.

looking after you always