

WORKING FROM HOME WITH CHILDREN

Your guide to remote working
with a family



With a great deal of us now having to accept remote working as the new 'normal' and simultaneously cope without childcare, many parents are being thrown into an unprecedented and difficult situation.

School closures and social distancing mean that entire families are now spending all day under one roof and people are facing the unusual challenge of having to look after children and fulfil their day-to-day professional obligations simultaneously.

Maintaining a work-life balance can be difficult under normal circumstances, but in this entirely different situation you might be facing a number of very challenging scenarios and have a lot of questions about how to manage the situation.

HOW WILL I HANDLE THE DISRUPTION TO ROUTINE?

Maintaining a routine is integral to family life, so establishing a new schedule and sticking to it as far as possible will be vital to keeping things as normal as possible, and for the benefit of everyone's general wellbeing.

If there are multiple working adults in the household, you might also want to allocate who will 'own' each chunk of time, thereby helping ensure everyone is able to have some distraction-free time to work.

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The unpredictable nature of the situation we are all facing, however, will mean adapting our working practices around our day-to-day home lives. For example, you might need to join a video conference call with a baby on your lap, or even undergo a job interview with a young child in the next room. The reality is that most people will be accommodating about any changes in circumstances and bringing your manager or recruiter into the loop will help establish a mutual understanding of the challenge and allow you to work out a solution.

3 TIPS FOR VIDEO INTERVIEW SUCCESS WITH YOUNG CHILDREN AROUND

1. Try and settle them with something distracting

If you have strict rules around TV-watching time for your children, now might be the time to relax them. An hour of their favourite show won't hurt, and crucially it may provide you with the uninterrupted time you need to focus and get your head into the zone for a conversation with a prospective employer.

2. Have a chat with your recruiter

If you're worried, put your recruiter in the loop. They'll be able to reassure you and brief the interviewer if necessary so that they're prepared for any potential interruptions.

3. Don't panic if things don't go to plan

If your interview is interrupted by one of your children for any reason, don't allow it to overwhelm you or feel guilty. Everyone understands that this is a unique situation and it won't hurt your chances if you are a strong candidate. At worst it will just be seen as an amusing incident and may even throw in some light relief!

HOW WILL I KEEP MY CHILDREN OCCUPIED?

A healthy mixture of learning and fun should work well. If you can, on Sundays pre-plan some new games for the week ahead – there are plenty of blogs with ideas for games that only require basic household items or toys you already have. Here are a few fun ideas to get you started:

- The 30-day Lego challenge: Download your instructions for a daily way to get kids using their imaginations
- Make 'gratitude' paper chains: On the inside of each link, your kids can write something they are happy about or grateful for. Add a new link each day, to keep the family positive during what can be an anxious and stressful time
- Have them research and create their family tree, maybe with the (carefull!) use of old photo albums
- Create costumes or jewellery (using old clothes, paper and paint) from different eras in history. Have them research these themselves, and maybe give you an educational 'fashion show', where they talk through what they have learned
- Make your own 'Blue Peter' challenge: award your kids 'badges' every time they do something positive, helpful or creative
- Gardening: even if you don't have a garden, buy some pots and (indoor friendly) seeds, and teach your kids to look after them every day. Maybe see who can get their plant to grow the fastest?
- Ask your kids to create and learn an exercise or yoga routine that they can teach back to you, as a way of ensuring they are keeping active – there are plenty of YouTube tutorials showing children how do this safely
- Have a look at DK Find Out, The Artful Parent and Activity Village (all online) for more ideas
- What we are currently experiencing is a defining period in history, so encourage your kids to keep a journal documenting their feelings, thoughts and day-to-day activities, which they can reflect on in years to come

If you have older children, try giving them some extra responsibilities such as making sandwiches for lunch, or taking care of their younger siblings – many will relish the chance to show you how 'grown-up' they can be. Of course, it's important to reward them for this behaviour, so consider pushing their usual bedtime back, increasing their pocket money or whatever other perks you see fit.

Finally, with all this time away from school, it's great to know there are lots of resources at your disposal which you may find helpful if you want your children to keep learning independently.

However, don't worry about sticking to too much of a rigid learning schedule. There will always be time for them to catch up when they return to school, and at the moment their mental health is the main priority, as is yours.

WHERE WILL I WORK?

The office environment is naturally conducive to uninterrupted, collaborative work – and home working can be difficult to adapt to in this case, with both loud noise and children's paraphernalia often taking centre stage. If you can, carve out a space at home that is dedicated to work only – this is, of course, easier advice to follow if you have older children who are able to understand the situation.

Having a separate space will enable you to allocate your time effectively and keep your parenting and working roles as distinct as possible, giving each your full attention and energy when it's necessary.

WHAT IF I'M FEELING OVERWHELMED?

The chances are that balancing family life and working life under normal circumstances has led you to be able to compartmentalise, able to deal with issues pertaining to these two important elements of your life separately.

The sudden change of combining these two separate lifestyles may lead to feelings of burnout, and you may feel as though you're being pulled in several directions at once. Try to remember that this is a completely natural response to a very challenging and unprecedented situation, and many, many other people will be feeling the same way. Difficult as it may be, try to take some time to yourself, even if for only five minutes, to go outside for some fresh air or sit down with a cup of tea.

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HOW CAN I PLAN FOR UNEXPECTED INTERRUPTIONS?

However hard you may try to mitigate interruptions to your plans, the fact is that life – especially now – is full of unexpected surprises. Feeling guilty or anxious about your child barging in on a conference call is essentially unnecessary, the universality of the situation should instil a culture of solidarity and ensure understanding from colleagues and managers.

Whilst this may be a difficult and challenging time for all, it is important to try to find the silver linings where we can and enjoy the unexpected time you may be spending with your family. The chances are that your children are enjoying seeing more of you than usual, so try to see it for the opportunity it is, rather than just a challenge.

To access a host of resources for helping you adapt to the new way of working, visit our remote working hub. As your lifelong career partner we are with you every step of the way and will be updating this site regularly with new guides, blogs and information to support you.

If you are a manager, visit our website for resources specifically designed to help you manage remotely.

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3 TIPS FOR RELIEVING THE PRESSURE IF YOU'RE STRUGGLING

1. Reach out to your networks

Remember that a huge number of people are in the same boat as you. Reaching out to friends, family or even co-workers could be hugely beneficial for emotional support.

2. Be realistic with your employer

If you're finding it really hard to cope with juggling everything then do speak to your employer – being honest about your problems will take a weight off your mind and the transparency should make it easier for them to offer you support and find a solution that works for both of you.

3. Take care of yourself

There has never been a more important time to prioritise your physical health. You are having a lot of demands placed on you and getting plenty of sleep and eating well is key. Resist the temptation to binge watch the news if it's causing you anxiety and think about making use of stress management practices such as meditation.