



How to Master Working From Home While Under Quarantine with Children



The spread of the coronavirus is forcing working parents into telecommute situations across the country. If you're struggling to stay productive while working from home, these tips from full-time work-from-home moms may help.



If the thought of working from home with your child seems frightening, you aren't alone. Kids demand around-the-clock attention—and parenting while juggling conference calls, never-ending emails, and tight deadlines is no joke.



Unfortunately, the spread of the coronavirus (COVID-19)—the respiratory illness that originated in Wuhan, China—will make this situation a reality for many parents nationwide. Employers are encouraging workers to telecommute in high-risk areas across the country. Some school systems have suspended classes indefinitely, and thousands of people with potential coronavirus exposure have been asked to self-quarantine for 14 days.



That means your family might be stuck at home for at least two weeks, with minimal exposure to the outside world, while you're attempting to keep up with your workload. But don't panic just yet! We spoke with moms and experts who have learned the best ways to navigate life at the intersection of working at home and Mom-ing. Here are their tips for staying productive while working from home.



Create a Schedule

It's important to line up your day carefully, with set "office" hours. How many hours do you hope to work that day? When will you return calls? What can you accomplish while your son or daughter is coloring in the next room? You'll get more done if you work smarter, not harder, says Christine Durst, a mom of two in Woodstock, Connecticut, and cofounder of ratracerbellion.com, a site that helps people find work-at-home jobs. That said, one of the best benefits of working at home is flexibility, especially if you are your own boss. If your son or daughter is fussing during your office hours and it's a beautiful day, it's okay to push assignments aside and play outside. You can catch up on work later when your cutie has settled down.

If you have an employer, just be sure to have an agreement for how many hours per day you should log while telecommuting. Given the reason for working at home (the spread of coronavirus), some employers may understand the need for non-traditional schedules.

Capitalize On Naptime

Take advantage of naptime for staying productive while working from home. Whether your kid sleeps for one hour or three, use this time to finish assignments that require your complete focus and concentration, says Erin O'Donnell, a mom of two and freelance writer and editor in Milwaukee, who often schedules work-related phone calls during her 20-month-old Jonas's naps. If for some reason he isn't tired, they have quiet time instead: O'Donnell puts him in his crib with books and closes the door. "I can usually get in 20 minutes of work before he grows restless," she says. If Jonas wakes up while she's on a work call and begins crying, O'Donnell has trained herself to resist hanging up and rushing right in to check on him. "It hurts a little bit to listen to him," she says. "But it won't kill me —or him." Plus, she believes it's important for him to learn how to soothe himself.

Separate Mom and Business Roles

If you don't learn to keep your roles as mom and businesswoman separate, giving each your full concentration for a set amount of time, you'll never feel like you're doing either well. To separate mentally from the rest of the house, set up an office area, recommends Lauren Kohl, an attorney and mom of two in Newton, Massachusetts. She works out of a converted closet, a kid-free zone that helps her to detach from the rest of her house. If she can't see the dirty rompers in the hamper, she's less inclined to leave her desk to launder them, she says. Plus, it helps you disengage from your job if you have a door to close. If you don't have an office, try making a list of everything you're going to do the next day, leave it in your work space, and walk away. "You're doing something to turn work off," says Durst, which helps with staying productive while working from home.

Keep Kids Entertained

Renee Belbeck, a work at home mom (WAHM) from Columbus, Ohio, and C.E.O. and founder of the National Association of W.O.M.E.N. (Women, Owners, Moms, Entrepreneurs, and Networkers), discovered a simple rule when her children were toddlers: "If I gave them a little quality time, I'd get two hours to work." She says the rule still holds true, even though her children are now 10 and 6. Her other kid-centric tips: Set aside a few cool toys that your kids can play with, or arrange playdates or special movie viewings only during "Mommy's work time." If your children have something to look forward to, they'll be less likely to interrupt you. You can also try setting up an activity center in your home office so kids feel as if they have their own designated place to do projects while you catch up on e-mails.

Plan for Interruptions

Every WAHM has a similar horror story: She's on an important call, her toddler wants to watch Elmo or is suddenly starving, and her boss is left listening to a whining child and Mom's apologies instead of her bright ideas. Their advice? Hit the mute button during conference calls to avoid any unexpected yells of "Mommmeeee!" in the background. Give your child a nonverbal "Do not disturb" when you need quiet time. Perhaps you could wear a tiara when you're on the phone to signify that kids are not allowed to make noise or interrupt, unless there's an emergency. If you have an office door, tie a red ribbon on it when you're not to be bothered. This tactic is best for older kids; toddlers won't understand that they can't always have your undivided attention. If your toddler is fussing while you're on the phone, end the call and reschedule if you can.

Seek Extra Help If You Need It

You may think working at home means you can skip child care, but you'll have days when you need help—and that's okay (as long as you aren't under self-quarantine). When Jonas was about 6 months old, O'Donnell hired a responsible high-school student to watch him two or three hours two days a week. The teenager charged half of what an adult sitter or day care would, and it meant O'Donnell could concentrate on answering e-mails and returning phone calls. Another way to get affordable child care: Pool your resources with several other working moms and hire one babysitter to watch all your children at the same time. Even without the sitter, you can get together with other WAHMs and let the kids play while you all work. "I found that if a child has a playdate, he or she is often amused long enough to allow you to do work that doesn't require extreme quiet," says freelance writer Melissa Dutton, of Columbus, Ohio, who also sometimes swapped child care for her two kids with another working mom a few hours a week. "I knew that she worked from home, too, so I offered to take her kid first, and it grew from there."

Your partner can also be a great source of support. When Samuelson's husband, a teacher, arrives home at 3:30 p.m., she relies on him to take over kid duty. He can ferry their two children to the park and get dinner ready, and Samuelson will emerge a few hours later feeling finished with her day's to-do list. If your partner gets home after dinner, ask him to oversee bedtime—you'll fit in at least an hour of work before the kids yell "Mom!" And once they do, you're there for the call, with no rush hour to race through.

How to Work From Home If You Have Kids

1. **Communicate With Your Partner.** If you have a partner, it's essential that you communicate what your day will be like, so you are both on the same page with your needs.
2. **Use Naptime to Your Advantage.** If you have children of naptime age, schedule your important calls during that uninterrupted times
3. **Dedicate a Space for Work.** Don't sit in front of the television. Use a space that your children will understand that it is your work space
4. **Practice With Your Kids.** Go through the rules when you are on a conference call. Give hand signals so they know you need silence.
5. **Invest time in your Children.** Sit down and have breakfast with them. Set the tone for the day and shut down at the end of the day to enjoy time with them.



Managing Isolation at Home

What can you do to combat feeling isolated and alone?

- Reach out to others who may need a level of touch. Connect with them in a way you would like to connect with others.
- Focus your energy outwards to those who may be hurting during this crisis. By helping others, you will feel connected and not alone.
- Do meaningful things. Start a project you have been meaning to work on. Stay engaged.
- Keep your sense of humor. Watch a funny movie. Share a funny meme. The ability to find humor in everything will allow you to ensure that your mental health standpoint to feel its best.
- Be active. Go outside for exercise. As we move to warmer weather that boost of vitamin D from the sun will help your mood tremendously.
- Don't use social media to replace real conversations with people. Commenting on stories, posts, etc. will not take away the feeling of being alone and distant. Communicate via a phone call or video. Real time interaction will give you the emotional connection you need.

Are You Crisis Schooling? Daily Schedule Advice for ADHD Families

A daily schedule comforts and guides children with ADHD through uncertain times like these. Use this expert advice to keep your child happily learning and achieving goals while also social distancing and working from home and banding together as a family.



A petrifying pandemic is changing our lives by the moment, but one constant is true: You're unsure how to manage several weeks of closed schools and social isolation with your children, who happen to have ADHD.

The big questions are: What can you do to set up a family plan that fosters more cooperation and less arguing during these unsettling times? How can you devise a plan that you can actually follow and your kids will buy into? We know that kids with ADHD benefit from structure, but what can you realistically pull off? Here is some helpful advice to get you started.

Carve Out Chunks of Time

Break the day into chunks that include periods for learning, chores, activities, your own work-from-home responsibilities, and personal breaks from each other. Instead of using punishments or threats to force your kids to cooperate, focus on using earned privileges because incentives motivate kids with ADHD best.

Focus on Big Goals and Forget the Small Stuff

Before you start learning at home, think about what you want for each day and what will help you stay as calm as possible. If you are dysregulated, then your kids will be too. Consider what they have to get done for school and chores, what assists them in working on those tasks and how many breaks they'll need.

Don't Fudge Wake Up and Bed Times

Pick specific times for waking up, getting started on studying and going to bed.

Set New Screen Time Limits

Decide how much 'fun' screen time they can have each day as a given and what they can earn through cooperation. It's reasonable to allow your child more time than your usual limits on screens right now, especially if it means they can interact with their friends online. However, make sure to explain to your kids that this is an exception not the new normal.

Collaborate with Your Child

Make a time to talk with your kids about their ideas for organizing their days. Brainstorm together how to co-create a structure that makes sense for everyone. When kids, especially those with ADHD, are included in the process of figuring things out, they are far more likely to cooperate.

Spell Out the Incentives

You'll need to make two lists: one with smaller 'like-to-do' items such as playing with the dog, hearing a story, practicing yoga or movement, or getting a snack and another list of bigger incentives such as extra screen time (surfing the net, gaming or social media); doing a favorite activity with you such as cooking or art projects; playing catch or making music; or even watching a TV show or movie. You'll need to apply these incentives to the 'have-to-do' list that includes tasks like studying, doing chores, and helping out with siblings or household work.

Put the Schedule and Incentives in Writing

Now lay out a sample weekly schedule based on the tips below. Each day should have designated blocks of time geared toward school and learning, household chores, and various fun activities. Once you've got a draft, post it around the house and plan to meet again in 4 days to check in and make necessary adjustments.

Daily Schedule for School and Learning

Plan to scaffold: Set up work periods using incentives that matter to your child or teen, timed breaks with appropriate activities, and earned rewards when the period is over or the task is completed. Plan to work alongside your child in what I call Family Work Time. You'll do some of your stuff while they are doing theirs. Plus you'll be there to help them stay on task or answer any possible questions. This sends a message that everyone is taking this plan seriously and it's time to settle down.



Block out realistic work periods: Ask your son or daughter how long they think they can concentrate before needing a break. Depending on their level of interest and the challenge of the work, this period can last 5 to 20 minutes for elementary school kids. For middle and high school students, it varies between 15 and 45 minutes. Together, decide on the length of their study periods and how many they will need per hour and per day.

Set benchmarks: Choose incentives for reaching benchmarks, expecting that after an hour your child will need a longer break. This is the opportunity for those 'want-to-dos' like YouTube, social media, gaming, reading, listening to music or exercise. Meanwhile, create 5-minute break times between study periods with a clear list of acceptable activities such as movement, bathroom, snacks, petting the dog, etc.

Daily Schedule for Home Chores

Talk about team effort: This is a time when everybody needs to chip in. Talk to your kids about coming together for the collective well-being of the family and the reality of having to do more chores because the house will get dirtier than usual since everybody's around.

Choose chores they can tackle: Keep chores for your kids simple and manageable. If they weren't doing them before, this isn't the time to add something new. Instead, link the completion of their chores to some of the incentives as well. Talk about how many reminders they need and in what form. Prepare to supervise them if necessary and notice when they do what they are asked with positivity.

Daily Schedule for Activities

Prioritize social time: The advice is clear: stay home and avoid playdates. But kids aren't used to being alone and you may feel that complete avoidance is not possible. If your child is really struggling with social isolation, arrange for FaceTime sessions or interactive gaming sessions with friends. Focus on being outdoors as a family and making the most of this time without outside obligations.

Create a menu of non-screen choices: I suggest board games, puzzles, cooking, fun art or science projects, scrapbooking, cards, creating movies, music or books, caring for pets, walking, hiking, yoga, Wii, or biking. Create a garden or make some planters, redecorate a bedroom, or organize your playroom.

Game-ify mundane things: Let each child pick a family movie for two nights a week and pretend you are going to the movie theatre. Make popcorn or other treats. Set it up like an event. Make lunch as a picnic in your living room instead of at the kitchen table. Have breakfast for dinner. Play dance music while doing the dishes.

Nurture their interests: This is a great opportunity to cultivate those non-school activities that no one ever seems to have enough time to pursue.

Know that down time is healthy: Everybody needs and wants time to do whatever they want. Save some screen time allocations for this and let folks chill.

Daily Schedule for Managing Your Own Work

Budget quiet into the schedule: If you are working from home, decide when you want privacy and allow your kids to have some of their screen time then. This keeps them occupied when you need to work.

Take shifts, if possible: If you have a partner or a family member who lives with you, try to tag team your work and child coverage. Plan on relieving each other and make arrangements to check in with each other when your kids are asleep.

Whatever routines you create during this unusual time will need tweaking as you go, but that doesn't mean the plan isn't working. If your son or daughter isn't cooperating, work with their desire to avoid conflict and see their struggles as part of their frustration about how life has changed. Expect inevitable meltdowns and make an arrangement for structured time apart to cool off before pivoting to another activity.

Remember that kids are struggling right now and may neither fully understand the severity of the situation nor be able to articulate how they feel. Share relevant facts without scaring them and be careful of what you are saying on the phone to friends and family that's within earshot of your youngster.



Tips For Working Mothers Managing Adult ADHD At Home During The Pandemic



Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) diagnoses among adults are growing four times faster than are ADHD diagnoses among children in the United States. ADHD is reported to occur in about 4.4% of the adult population. Still, most scientists believe adult ADHD remains underdiagnosed, partly because adults with ADHD often have other disorders that may mask the symptoms of ADHD.

Overall, ADHD is more prevalent in young boys. However, last month, the largest (and most unprecedented) surge in ADHD diagnoses was reported among girls and adult women — moms, to be exact. About 45% of women diagnosed with ADHD also meet the criteria for another disorder. Women are also more likely to have multiple psychiatric disorders during their lifetime than men. For example, women with ADHD are at higher risk — by 2.5 times — for major depression compared to women without ADHD. Women with ADHD that were not diagnosed until adulthood are also more likely to have a history of anxiety than are those without ADHD.

The COVID-19 pandemic has mothers struggling to juggle their responsibilities as house managers, employees, global citizen, and now child educator. It's become an unexpected and (in some instances) debilitating life event that triggers their anxiety. 22-year-old Cameryn Vonbargen is a Kansas blogger, full-time nursing student and mother. Before her nursing program switched to 100% virtual learning, Vonbargen was positively focused on school. Now, she describes her experience coping with ADHD during the pandemic and is unsure if she'll be able to remain interested:

“People with ADHD typically hyperfocus on something that interests them or challenges them. That is why many people hear that individuals with ADHD don't thrive in school. I do find that being locked up inside of the house has impacted my mental health a bit. I get a little stir crazy, which progresses into me not being able to focus on anything! Or rather, having the motivation to do so!”

Vonbargen is trying to make sure her obligations are arranged in such a way that she will be motivated to complete them. "For example, I always took an outrageous amount of credit hours in school to keep myself busy," she adds.

Best-selling author and founder of Help A Reporter Out (HARO) Peter Shankman has been diagnosed with ADHD. He is the current host of *Faster than Normal*, a podcast focused on the gifts of having a "faster than normal brain." Shankman believes there is a correlation between those diagnosed with ADHD and those who have experienced imposter syndrome:

"Having lived a good portion of our lives being told that our different ways of thinking, of doing things, of simply living, was wrong, even though those differences helped us achieve, is a hard thing just to let go. So as time passes and we navigate our way through our professional lives, we tend to be unable to accept our wins and successes."

Interestingly enough, as minorities in the workplace, working mothers are more likely to experience imposter syndrome. If mothers can avoid internalizing the effects of the

pandemic, and reframe the current challenge in front of them (from "the pandemic is going to make my work and home life suffer" to "the pandemic is going to make everyone's work and home life suffer"), it will help them remain calm.

41-year-old Jess Harris is a Florida marketing consultant and podcaster diagnosed with ADHD. Harris reassures herself that the things she finds frustrating about her behavior and tendencies are simply due to the differences in how her brain works.

"I'm 'out' - everyone I know will eventually find out I'm ADHD, including and especially my boss and coworkers. This helps them to understand me better and helps me feel less anxious. Understand that your ADHD is a gift in many ways - be out and proud."

A sentiment Shankman shares, as he believes it could be advantageous to explain to managers and colleagues how you're most productive. One can argue that the pandemic has put us all "out" as working parents- now is not the time to be timid about our home and family obligations. In the office, that would look like working with headphones on to limit

distractions and logging in earlier or later, so coworkers don't remove you from a "zone of focus." At home, it will require a customized work environment to keep your "fast brain" at full speed.

Lastly, Shankman recommends if an important project comes up in the next few weeks, women with ADHD should ask for a deadline if they haven't been given one. Harris agrees, recognizing that she needs to be held externally accountable to project deliverables and timelines. "I tell my bosses and those I work with that I need the anchor of dates and deadlines because my brain cannot deal with abstract," she adds.



Harris stresses: "As women, we have to remember, and honor, the fact that ADHD shows up differently for us. We tend to show more anxiety, and get into states of being overwhelmed. Fighting it won't change it; in fact, it makes it worse."

This is an unprecedented time in the fight towards work-life balance for working mothers. Similar to the recommendations made for women battling depression and anxiety, mothers with ADHD would do well to establish boundaries and set expectations with their children, their spouses, and their employers.

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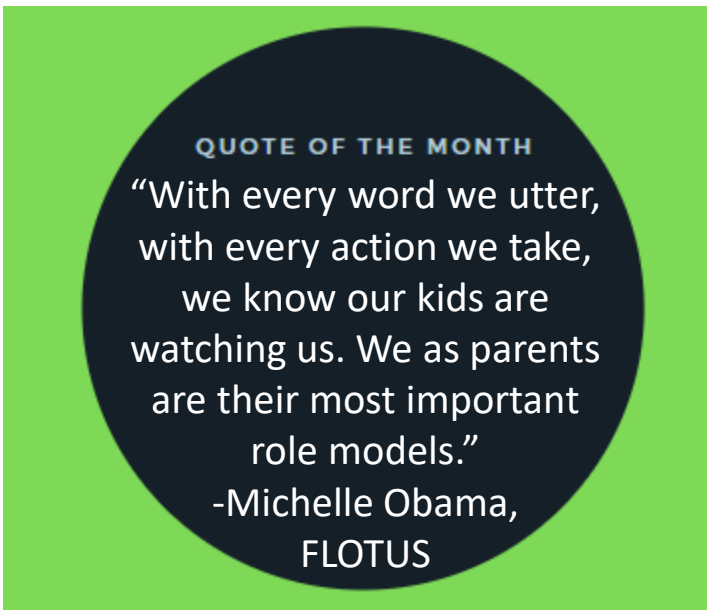


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