

Parenting during a Pandemic

As a result of the coronavirus stay-at-home orders across the country and around the world, workers have been switched to telecommuting at rates that were unthinkable even a few months ago. Many of us have children and grandchildren to supervise and sometimes it can be challenging to keep them safe and engaged in fun and meaningful activities – all while balancing the demands of ongoing work responsibilities and your own self-care. We understand that parenting while juggling conference calls, emails, and your own well-being can be challenging. Here are some helpful tips on how you can support your children and balance your own self-care during these unprecedented times.

Supporting your Children

If you're anxious about how to protect and nurture your kids all while juggling work obligations at the same time, you're in good (virtual) company. With the end of school year quickly approaching, your role as a parent may shift from "homeschool teacher" to "camp counselor." Many children were likely set to go to day camps or sitters in the summer months. With most camps still closed, you may be simply shifting your attention from teaching to the fun committee coordinator. It may seem overwhelming to sustain for longer than we all anticipated but it doesn't have to be.

Here are some tips to keep your children engaged and entertained while you work:

- Set aside a few cool toys that your kids can play with, arrange playdates (if possible) or special movie viewings only during "Mom/Dad's work time."
- Have an activity your children have something to look forward to during your next meeting, so they'll be less likely to interrupt you.
- Set 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.

Keep in mind that children may be unsure or confused as to what is going on in the world. Kids tend to feed off of their parents' behavior so it is important to be mindful of how you manage your own stress and anxiety. For those moments when you do catch yourself feeling anxious, try to avoid talking about your concerns within earshot of your children. If you're feeling overwhelmed, step away and take a break. That could look like going outside or into another room and taking a few deep breaths. It is important to keep routines as close to normal as possible. Remember, your children also went from a day of structure to doing their "work" at home as well. Your children may not understand why dining rooms were converted to offices and classrooms.

Self-Care – Making Time for Yourself

When you're a parent, self-care often slips to the bottom of the list. Looking back, we may not have realized that our personal routines, the commute to the office, a trip to the store alone, or even social time with friends was important time we had to ourselves. Your commute was quiet time in the car to think, listen to a podcast, or sing to some of your favorite songs. Time with friends is now done virtually, sometimes on Zoom calls and Facetime as well.

With many of us spending the majority of the time in our homes with family, the time you previously had to yourself is a distant memory. The added stress and lack of structure we're all experiencing right now can make it easy to slip into habits that feel good in the moment but can be detrimental in the long term. A healthy breakfast is now a quick bowl of sugary cereal – because it's all you have time for. The walk you took on your break at work is now replaced with having to make lunch for your kids. If you're falling into some bad habits, don't put the extra pressure on yourself to go overboard with changing your habits. Just because we're at home all the time it doesn't mean pressuring yourself to get into tip-top shape, not eating ice cream, or binging your favorite shows. It does mean being thoughtful and intentional about how you're treating yourself emotionally and physically.

It's a time to set realistic expectations, both around work and being a parent. There's no playbook for this. Remember you're doing your best during a very difficult time. It's ok to cut yourself some slack – even enjoy that extra scoop of ice cream or one more episode of your favorite show.

Finally, remember, being kind to yourself will not only help you stay calm during this difficult time. It will help ensure that you have the bandwidth you need to take care of your family. When you're running on fumes, caring for others can tax your already depleted resources to breaking point. When you prioritize your needs, you're "filling the tank," emotionally and physically, and that means you'll be in a position to offer comfort and care to others when they need it most while also being successful at work.

Below is a list of some helpful resources and links if you're looking for additional support.

[Carebridge – Employee Assistance Provider \(EAP\)](#)

[Cigna – Life Assistance Provider \(LAP\)](#)

[American Psychological Association – Parenting Advice](#)

[CDC Resources – Daily Life, Stress and Coping](#)

[World Health Organization – Healthy Parenting Resources](#)

In addition to the [New Jersey COVID-19 Information Hub](#), resources are available through a Family Helpline. If you're feeling overwhelmed, call 1-800-THE-KIDS to speak with a trained volunteer of Parents Anonymous who can provide support and refer you to resources in your community – 24/7.

Don't forget to revisit some previous [tips](#) that were shared that can help you be successful while working from home.