

Five Tips for Working While Caring for Small Children

Working while caring for young children is a reality of life for many Americans. Over [one-third](#) of America's workforce does freelance, and companies are becoming more open-minded about telecommuting. These arrangements offer a great deal of freedom, but they also present significant challenges for parents of young children. Yes, daycare and babysitters are expensive, but how can you get any work done with little ones underfoot?

I've been navigating these choppy waters since I became a mother five years ago. Today, I have three children. Other parents regularly ask how I manage to get my freelance work done. Here's a few things I've learned on this journey:

1. Reframe Your Approach to Work

Before my eldest was born, I could work all day. As a mom, I think four hours is the longest uninterrupted stretch I've ever had. More often it's only one hour. Parents who work from home have to embrace this change. You need to be ready to pounce on free time and do your work whenever opportunities arise. Adjusting to your new reality is critical.

The good news is that you will quickly learn to increase your productivity. I blush to remember how inefficiently I used my time before I became a mother. These days I can finish a whole project in the same amount of time it used to take me just to get started.

2. Use a Notebook

I do a lot of my work in a notebook that I keep at hand. There will be occasions when parents only have a few minutes of free

time. That is not enough time to break out the laptop. But it is enough time to grab your notebook and develop some ideas or write a to-do list. That way, when you get a longer stretch to do some work, you can just open the notebook and start cranking it out. You won't spend as much of that valuable time in planning stages.

3. Implement Afternoon Quiet Time

My two younger children still take naps. My eldest does not, but I make her stay in her room about an hour each afternoon. She looks at books or plays quietly, and the benefits to her are similar to a nap in that it gives her time to rest and recharge. The benefits to me are even greater. Afternoon quiet time is a lifesaver. I couldn't do my work without it.

4. Rethink Your Availability

Parents who want to work from home should take a hard look at their weekly schedule. Is there a time slot you consider off limits that could actually be used for work?

A few years ago, I read a blog post by a mom who said she always went to a café on Saturday mornings to work. At the time, that seemed impossible for me. I believed our family should be together on Saturday mornings. But then I had a deadline and had to go to a café on Saturday morning. Since then, it's become a regular occurrence.

5. Don't Work and Watch Your Kids at the Same Time

This may be a question of personal preference, but I try to never work and mind my kids at the same time. I only work when they're asleep or in the care of another adult. Occasionally I have a deadline and I have no choice. But in my experience,

this is largely counterproductive. I get very little accomplished and I snap at my kids for interrupting me. Everyone loses.

These are the biggest lessons I've gleaned from five years of balancing motherhood with freelance work. Though I certainly still have room to grow, these lessons have helped my work-life balance immensely, and hopefully will help yours as well.

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