

# 9 ways parents can work at home with kids — and actually get stuff done

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For parents who aren't accustomed to working from home, balancing work with child care can be a major challenge — whether you just have one baby with a runny nose or a houseful of kids buzzing with the excitement of time off from school. And yet it's a challenge that some parents find themselves navigating every single day.

Samantha Radford, parenthood coach and public health expert, is one of those parents who knows the work-from-home (WFH) hustle well. The full-time work-at-home mom of four also runs [Evidence-Based Mommy](#), a site focused on teaching parents about the intersection of science and wellness. Radford started honing her

WFH skills in her previous job as a university professor, when she often found herself [working remotely unexpectedly](#).

“If my [kids were sick](#), I might have to grade from home or keep up with email correspondence with students,” she says.

Radford’s best advice: Be flexible.

“Working from home while kids are also home is tough,” she says. “Give yourself grace. Ask yourself if all the tasks you planned on doing are really necessary, and if not, let them go. If it’s too hard for your kids to give you space, you might need to get work done after the kids are in bed.”

Looking for more specific strategies for working at home with kids without relying on [excessive screen time](#)? We gathered some helpful tips from Radford and a few other seasoned WFH parents.

## 1. Start off on the right foot

No matter how many tasks are on your to-do list, it’s important to create a schedule that includes time for your kids — ideally prior to hunkering down.

“Give them some undistracted time (no phone in your hand!) before you need to work,” Radford says.

By doing this, you’re giving them the attention they need to feel seen and secure, which should help prepare them to play more independently when you need to focus on work. Eat breakfast together, offer them your undivided attention and then set some clear expectations about the day ahead.

## 2. Adjust your schedule

If your job doesn't require you to be on the clock at specific times, consider adjusting your schedule to work when your children are sleeping or less active. Stratton Lawrence, a Folly Beach, South Carolina-based editor at a digital marketing agency, has built his work schedule around his most personally productive periods.

"I get up before my family wakes up and knock out my most intense writing or editing work before dawn," he says. "Doing your hardest work first is a good strategy for anyone, but in my case, it lets me be more present and feel like I can step away for an hour or so when the kids wake up and make breakfast."

### **3. Set up your workspace**

Even if you don't have a home office, it's important to establish a defined work area at home — and to let your kids know that when you're in work mode, you're not to be disturbed. Ideally, look for a quiet corner of the house where you can set up everything you need to work through your tasks as efficiently as possible.

"Invest in comfortable noise-canceling headphones — I use and recommend the Bose QC 35 IIs — with ambient instrumental music to zone out family noise across the house," Lawrence says. "I listen to a lot of Hammock, Tycho and Ludovico Einaudi while I work."

### **4. Try working in short bursts**

Babies can be especially challenging when working from home because they're so needy and unpredictable. Marissa Moomaw, a writer and mother to an 11-month-old daughter in Richmond, Virginia, discovered that the [Pomodoro Technique](#) has been invaluable in helping her balance time with her child.

"It's a time-management method where you work uninterrupted for 25-minute sessions with five-minute breaks," Moomaw says. "It's amazing how much work you

can get done in 25 minutes when you aren't distracted by your phone or social media."

## 5. Prevent boredom for your kids by mixing things up

Kids of all ages appreciate having something new and different to occupy them, and Radford suggests a toy rotation to keep them immersed in play. Take a few minutes to sort through their toys, organizing them into separate bins, then keeping only a select few out for them to play with. The idea is that having fewer toys encourages deeper play. Radford also recommends a "toy strew" to get your kids excited about their toys. For example, start a puzzle and leave the pieces beside it, or set up a doll and stuffed animal like they're interacting.

"When your child finds the strew, it's an invitation to play that sparks their imagination," she says. "They'll likely play independently much more easily than if you just put a box of blocks in front of them."

## 6. Encourage child-led activities

Guide your kids toward [activities](#) that don't require your assistance or constant supervision, though recognize that if they aren't used to playing solo, there may be an adjustment period. [Christie Megill](#), an author and home-sschooling mom of three who works from home in Brooklyn, New York, leans toward activities "where they can be creative and fall down a rabbit hole into their own little world." Her younger kids favor building toys like Duplos, Magna-Tiles, wooden blocks or anything they can stack. She also keeps cardboard recycling for them to build with, cut up, draw on or decorate with tape.

## 7. Reserve some activities for special occasions

Got an important Skype meeting or rushing toward a deadline?

“Have some back-pocket activities at the ready that your child loves and can occupy them for 10 to 15 minutes,” Lawrence says.

His 3-year-old son relishes the rare opportunity to play with scissors; paired with an old magazine and some light supervision, it’s an activity that’ll keep him quiet for up to an hour.

## 8. Embrace healthy screen time

No one will send you to parent jail for allowing your kids to hop on a tablet for a while — especially if you’re directing them to fun and educational resources. Sites like [GoNoodle](#) encourage physical wellness with an array of free activities, and [PBS Kids](#) has free games that teach math, spelling and music skills. For school-aged kids whose classroom routines have been disrupted, stay on track with resources like [Time for Kids](#), [DK Find Out](#) and [BBC Learning](#). Do your kids have cabin fever? Many [museums offer free virtual tours](#).

## 9. Prioritize your own mental health

Working from home while simultaneously caring for kids can be [incredibly stressful](#) and draining, which is why it’s important to make time for your own [self-care](#).

“I think mothers need to be unapologetic about their needs,” Megill says. “That might mean actually scheduling in time when you’re alone in another room, the same as if you were on a conference call. Or instituting a [family quiet time](#) for an hour, leaving snacks out for the kids and enforcing personal space. This isn’t possible with very young children, but smaller children can be given books or toys in a play area, and that could be a start.”