

# **How to juggle your responsibilities as a parent at home**

Another lockdown is upon us, which means that most children will remain at home, and many of us will continue to juggle home-schooling with a number of different roles - often simultaneously and in the same physical space. We've been a parent one minute, a teacher the next, an employee a moment later. It's not surprising that we've been feeling the pressure.

At the same time, we have lost some of the social connections which would usually help us when the going gets tough. So how can we learn to live comfortably with these roles, in a way which protects both our physical health and also our mental wellbeing?

## **1. Be realistic about how you manage your day**

Accept that you can't do more than one job successfully at any one time. However good you are at multi-tasking, you can't be a fully committed parent supporting your child while also simultaneously being a high-performing employee. If you try, it will simply leave you feeling demoralised, distracted and guilty. You may even lose sight of what you're good at, and miss the moments you could enjoy as a family.

Instead, be realistic about how to manage your day and strike a balance between the competing demands on your time. Perhaps you and your partner can organise things so that, while one of you plays more of a childcare or home-schooling role, the other works - and then you swap. If you are parenting on your own, share ideas with friends in a similar situation to you. If your children are at home and old enough to help younger siblings or prepare occasional meals, this might relieve some of the pressure. They may even learn some useful life skills along the way!

## **2. Provide structure for your family**

Routine and structure have real value for children. So, if your child is currently without the familiar routine of school, or that routine has been disrupted by the continuing restrictions, think about how to replace this. It may feel daunting (and on some days, unrealistic), but it also presents an opportunity to design your own structure - including perhaps having the flexibility to shape the day more around a teenager's needs or those of a toddler.

Think of your day's plan in terms of manageable chunks. Check it each morning, which will give your children a sense of certainty about the day ahead (which is important when the world outside is feeling pretty uncertain). What you aim to do shouldn't feel over-ambitious, and there will be times when it fails. If so, don't be too hard on yourself - and if it makes you feel disheartened as a parent, accept that as normal and wait for it to pass. Just pick your routine up again as soon as you can.

### **3. Make adjustments**

For parents who are also working from home, often for the foreseeable future, the demands to deliver can weigh heavy. Many employers have supported their staff to make changes to their roles during these lockdown periods – due to the requirements of the work itself, or because they are aware of the pressures upon parents with children at home. But if you feel that you have simply been expected to switch to home-working and perform at the same level, it could be making you feel stressed and anxious.

If you recognise these feelings, talk to those you trust about the competing pressures on you. Think about beginning to identify the priorities within your job, which aspects are time-dependant, and where you could make adjustments. Would it help to change your working hours slightly, or to request notes of meetings rather than always attending them? If you can, start to have this conversation with your manager and perhaps encourage a wider conversation if workload is a common issue in your workplace. It's one of the openly acknowledged challenges of lockdown, so you are not alone in finding this difficult.

### **4. Reach out to others**

When you're under pressure, it's easy to imagine you're the only one in this situation. Keeping this to yourself can make things feel worse. In the early days of the first lockdown, many people spoke of throwing themselves into new activities and discovering hidden talents, but let's be realistic - each of us has had our moments of highs and lows. Even the most motivated will occasionally feel overwhelmed. That's perfectly normal.

Connect with family, friends, colleagues and other parents. The supportive relationships in our lives are super-important right now. Exchanging 'war stories' with other parents can remind us of our common experience. Share parenting tips, online resources, and strategies for juggling family and work life. Try new approaches, like suggesting virtual playdates supervised by another parent, which may free up some of your time. Keep finding ways to reach out to your support networks, albeit virtually.

### **5. Be kind to yourself**

Be realistic about what you can achieve and allow yourself to let some things go. Acknowledge that this changing situation puts us all under strain, so be clear about what emotional capacity you have - both to support others and to look after yourself. Use it wisely. Encourage a culture of kindness at home - kindness to each other but also to ourselves. Think about what an act of kindness to yourself would look like, and why not add it your list of things to do each day? Nurture others, but also yourself.

This situation won't go on for ever. In years to come, it won't matter if your house was sparkling clean during lockdown, or that sometimes you stayed in your pyjamas all day. What matters is that your children felt secure, listened to and loved. It's this which will give them the best chance of becoming confident, resilient young adults. And this will happen because you were there to help them.

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For more advice on looking after your mental health during this time, you can visit [Young Minds](#) or [Mind](#). For more advice on supporting your child with anxiety, visit [The Anna Freud Centre](#).

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