

Working from Home with Children: Resource

Overview

Due to COVID-19 measures, an increased percentage of the UK workforce find themselves working from home, and with the closure of schools and childcare provisions, many are experiencing the sudden and heightened challenge of balancing workload and productivity with caring responsibilities. This resource aims to share ideas and potential working practices for you and your organisation to explore in order to ensure that those with caring responsibilities feel supported through this difficult period. We have also included personal reflections from members of the PiPA Team: Anna (PiPA Co-founder), Deborah (Operations Manager) and Jo (Administrator).

Tips: Space and Time

- Create a **workstation that is the best space for working from home**. Preferably a room that is removed from the main activity of the home. This can help to create routine for you to establish a work-life balance even from home, and create boundaries for your children, in order to help them understand when you are/are not at work. This is not always possible, so think of other alternatives (many are using the kitchen table, with the door closed), but also consider areas to avoid, such as hallways or thoroughfares, and aspects which will support your daily wellbeing, such as natural light.

“I have recently moved into my son’s room to work from his desk. Although that means working amongst Lego towns and Pokemon collections (and a rather disruptive cat), I appreciate having a dedicated room away from the buzz of the living room and kitchen with a door I can shut and a window I can open. After breakfast I actually say goodbye to the kids telling them I’m off to work, to mark the start of my official work time.” Anna

“We have set up our back room as an office. The children are not allowed to come in, and they know not to disturb. It’s quiet, and we can focus. We made sure we bought a decent chair and table so we were comfortable and the atmosphere was conducive to being able to maximise work time.” Deborah

- **Get dressed for work**. This can help focus the mind and establish working/non-working boundaries (especially communicating this to family). This will also assist in you feeling prepared for the increased number of conferencing calls that are taking place. Also being

dressed for work, means you are more likely to feel able to leave the house, thus prompting you to take a break and get some fresh air and space.

- **Establish a routine as best as you can.** Forbes [recently reported](#) that the UK workforce are working longer days after COVID-19 measures (an increase of two hours per day on average), due to working from home as well as starting earlier (because of the commute being removed) and still finishing at their usual time, or later. It is important to acknowledge this to avoid 'burnout', especially when factoring in child care responsibilities on top of this.

“Scheduling has been key for my husband and me. Knowing who is working when and who is in charge of the kid means we can plan our respective working days as well as some activities for our son (somehow I’ve ended up with all the messy ones!). It also helps colleagues to know when you’re available to be able to talk or expect responses.”

Jo

- **Consider how you can use technology to communicate routine.** Keeping an up-to-date shared calendar, including when you are and are not available, as well as updating your availability status on your online systems, means you can take some control over your workday, avoiding colleagues scheduling in meetings or tasks that you can't make, and without feeling the need to apologise.

“PiPA has a shared calendar with all team members. As everyone works part time and flexibly, it helps seeing when people are available - or not. Some even mark their unavailable time scheduled for online exercise classes in the morning”

Anna

- **Feel confident with conference calling.** Familiarise yourself with the features of the conference calling platform you are using: many can blur or change the background to something neutral, video can be turned on and off and the microphone can be muted if there is background noise. With this comes a collective, supportive approach to conference calling; with more people under one roof during working hours, there is going to be the inevitable interruptions and background noise from partners, children and even pets.

“My kids have gatecrashed video calls, needing immediate answers to burning questions, seeking access to long lost toys or requiring peace negotiations during their sudden sibling wars. I have also enjoyed the background sound of my colleague’s kids singing show tunes or their pets having guest appearances on our screens. We are all in it together!”

Anna

Tips: Managing Family

- **This current setup is not the norm.** Allow for an adjustment period and for this to be communicated to all involved. Routine is important, but it needs to work for all involved and doesn't have to look like what other families are doing. If you require further time and support with this time of adjustment, consider the parental and caring related policies which may be available, such as **Time off for Dependents**, **Adjustment Leave**, the use of **Annual Leave**. Additionally, following the government's [update on the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme](#) for employees, those with caring responsibilities can **request to be furloughed** if they are unable to work due to childcare commitments.

"Writing this paragraph I moved rooms twice to find a quiet working spot, negotiating space with lego and teddies, whilst being hunted down numerous times by my five year old daughter trying to discuss why dad isn't allowing more sweets, and if we could buy a scooter with a unicorn attached. Finding our new routine will take time." Anna (on day one of kids not going to school)

- **Split shifts.** If there are two or more adults within the home who are working and sharing caring responsibilities, think of how this time can be shared most effectively (e.g. whilst one parent is working the other can care for the children). This also supports the effective sharing of the household internet bandwidth (two different conference calls happening in the same household can become unreliable).

"The first thing we set up was a timetable. We felt it was important to have this so the children had a routine and got used to when mummy or daddy were available. It has been a saviour! It's only a simple shift pattern but it takes the pressure off. If you're looking after the kids, you can't work. If you're working you can't look after the kids. The kids know what to expect and don't question it." Deborah

- **If you are a single parent**, advice from PiPA Board member Vick Bain is to 'remember within the limits of the lockdown you are still allowed to take your children to their other parent, as these are deemed essential trips. So, if you have shared custody, when the children are out of the house, you could use this opportunity to focus on your work'. There are also organisations specifically tailored to the needs of single parents, such as [Gingerbread](#), who offer support and advice through this pandemic.
- **Be realistic and allow for flexibility within your day.** Usual working hours, taking place at home, with full time childcare responsibilities, for many are impossible. A move from time based to task based work is highly recommended. An open conversation between an employee and a line manager can empower both to understand how this new flexibility can work. Many parents find it easier to catch up with work early in the morning or even in the evening when their children are in bed which allows them to spend some family time during the day.

- Access the growing number of **online resources for children**. As previously shared in one of our [recent articles](#), many performing arts organisations are creating online resources and migrating their current work to digital platforms. As well as online education and entertainment, there are a number of [resources available to support children to understand the COVID-19 pandemic](#), as well as reassuring them during this uncertainty.

Tips: Priorities and Productivity

- Explore the adoption of a **useful structure or technique to improve productivity** and reduce stress, such as [The Eisenhower Matrix](#) or the [Pomodoro Technique](#). This will support you in structuring your day, providing focus for workload and ringfence time/energy for work and time for family.
- Explore **moving away from fulfilling contracted hours to completing tasks** instead. This will support line managers to still drive productivity remotely, whilst also enabling more flexibility for working from home.
- **Agree priorities and share achievements within the team**. Ross Robinson who manages a team of freelancers at his Ignata Consulting firm says it's important to not "overcompensate" because you're anxious about working from home, "Many people tend to over-communicate when working from home - either wanting to 'be seen', or overcompensating to ensure people know what they are up to. That's fine - but don't go over the top. You know if you're on task and being productive - keep yourself in check." Many in this situation feel a sense of guilt that they are not being the best employee or parent that they could be, so to tackle this, it is important to foster a sense of teamwork and collective achievement, to boost the moral of employees working from home.

"Don't try to maintain the exact same standards you had before – the house will be a lot messier, more meals might get eaten in front of the tv and it's ok if the kids have ice-cream for breakfast every now and again. This is about survival." Jo

Tips: Finding You

- **Protect your time**. Use elements like your email signature to communicate working hours, as well as actively diarising and setting reminders for breaks and family time.

"My husband and I have made a point to schedule other activities both individually and together to avoid cabin fever setting in. I've been doing yoga, the husband has been playing PS4 and we've done a couple of online live quizzes. Important to try and have time for yourself outside of work and childcare, if at all possible." Jo

“We allow each other ‘time off’. Every day one of us goes for some ‘me time’, a walk/ run/ cycle. We are very fortunate to have a garden that we are using endlessly with the children, but we recognise the need to escape. Personally, I haven’t had this sort of time to myself since having children and have been envious of my husband’s cycling to work, lunch breaks etc. Now he isn’t commuting, we gain two hours of his travel time and an hour of his lunch break!” Deborah

- **Team self care is so important during this difficult time.** Factor in ‘water cooler moments’ virtually, work socials and catch ups. Many of the PiPA Charter Partners are arranging online social interactions, including online company coffee breaks, team lunches and online Quiz nights are being embraced by many to support staff’s wellbeing during isolation.

Helpful and Interesting Resources

- PiPA Director, Vick Bain’s reflections and advice on [Working from Home with Children](#).
- Work+Family’s recorded [webinar or Remote Working](#).
- Working Families’ [COVID-19 Advice for Parents and Carers](#) and [Weathering the Storm: the COVID-19 pandemic and working parents](#)
- BBC’s articles on [Working From Home](#) and [Coronavirus: Five ways to work well from home](#).
- Gingerbread [Coronavirus information for single parents](#)
- [PiPA Home Working Guidance](#)
- [PiPA Reduced Working Guidance](#)