



Live Well, Work Well

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BALANCING WORK AND KIDS GOING BACK TO SCHOOL

The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic makes it a school year like no other. Parents have had to make difficult decisions about whether to send their children back to school in person, enroll in virtual learning or opt for a combination of the two. Whether students are learning in a classroom or virtually, parents may find themselves having to balance work responsibilities with virtual learning or child care responsibilities at the same time.

Parents face a unique set of challenges as they attempt to balance the needs of their children—especially schooling—with their own concerns about work, finances and health. This article explores how to navigate pandemic stress and uncertainty, and how to build resilience throughout the school year.

Checking In With Your Children

Children may be experiencing stress and uncertainty this school year due to the pandemic, and parents should monitor their children for signs of anxiety or distress. Be on the lookout for changes in your child's behavior and mood, or physical symptoms, such as:

- Increased defiance or irritability
- Disturbances in sleep
- Loss of appetite
- Lack of concentration
- Less energy
- Sadness or crying
- Nausea, muscle tension or dizziness

- Refusal to go to school or engage in virtual schoolwork

If your child or others in the home are showing any of these signs, they may have anxiety about their schooling situation or COVID-19 in general. Children are resilient, but it's still important to pay attention to signs of anxiety during this time—and seek professional support if any warning signs persist.

You can be a positive role model for your child by practicing self-care. Be sure to get plenty of sleep, exercise and eat well to be fully charged to take on the day. If your children are doing any virtual or at-home learning, it's also important to stay socially connected with others and stay physically active.

Coping With Stress and Uncertainty

Everyone's situation is different. If you've chosen virtual learning or a hybrid model, you will likely take on the role of teacher at some point. And even if your kids are going to their school every day, there may be times when your child will have to be at home. For example, if a student or teacher tests positive for COVID-19, the entire class may be quarantined and pushed to virtual learning.



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At one point or another, every working parent's schedule will be impacted by schooling changes or responsibilities brought on by COVID-19, which can understandably cause stress.

As the pandemic continues and school is back in session, here are healthy ways for working parents to cope with stress and make it more manageable to balance both work and personal responsibilities:

- **Lower your expectations.** First and foremost, set realistic expectations about what you think you can accomplish each day or week. This is an unprecedented school year, so don't be hard on yourself. Cut yourself some slack and focus on completing high-impact items.
- **Develop a schedule.** It's important to create a routine that works around your schedule and family needs. Try to schedule meetings for times when at-home schooling won't interfere. That way, everyone has dedicated time to get their own work done with likely fewer interruptions. Additionally, consider consolidating certain activities such as housework, chores or extracurricular activities to one day to help everyone stay focused.
- **Be ready to compromise.** You don't have to toss away all of your parenting principles, but consider what can make things a little easier. Try letting your child play a game or do an activity they enjoy in exchange for some quiet time—during which you can work uninterrupted.
- **Make good use of weekends.** When planning schedules, consider whether any at-home learning can happen on the weekends or other days you are not on the clock. On the other hand, if school and work are both happening on weekdays, be sure to use the weekends to recharge, reduce stress and have fun as a family. If you prefer alone time, then make that a priority. Whether they've been focused on work or school, everyone needs a break from responsibilities.
- **Ask for help.** Lean on your networks for support if you need help getting through the workdays. It's critical to be honest and communicative with your family and co-workers if the current

situation isn't working out well.

It's also important to recognize your unhealthy coping methods and find alternatives such as meditating, exercising or talking with a friend.

Don't expect to be able to do everything perfectly when juggling different tasks. Working from home with kids isn't easy, especially when parents may have to help their children navigate their school days and the new normal. Every situation will be different, so be flexible and figure out what works best for you.

If you're feeling stressed or experiencing burnout as a result of balancing work and kids going back to school, talk to your manager about your schedule and personal situation.