

Baker's Dozen –

13 Top Tips to help you balance working and parenting under the same roof

Being organised, but ready to change direction at any given point in a plan can be trickier than you expect. Working and parenting under the same roof (and achieving some semblance of success and also be trickier than you expect). Here is a quick set of tips to give you the heads up.

One

Use a “to-do” list. At least then you can see in front of you what you need. When you start writing a list, it tends to remind you of other tasks that require attention.

Two

Make a timetable – allocate times for all of the items on the to-do list. Keep the lines between work time and family time as firm as possible.

Three

Be flexible!! If kids are involved your timetable will no doubt need to be changed- I can guarantee it. This doesn't mean it won't work, but if you stick to the schedule 99% of the time, the risk of something being missed or not giving enough time to a certain area (i.e. the children) is greatly reduced.

Four

Give your full attention to the children's timeslots. Really be in the moment with them and make those times special. This will fulfil their need for your attention. Provide extra stimulation and really make those times valuable. This will make them more able to give you “your” time.

Five

Schedule a time for the children that is not flexible. It cannot be changed – this is then extra special and shows them this. You can multitask here, it may be your takeout night, but they know this is their special treat and it doesn't matter if the rest of the world is falling apart – you are dedicated to them and this is their appointment.

Six

Don't forget you or your partner. Even if you're not working at home and just dealing with children you and your partner tend to get neglected. When you can just sneak off to the office – it is even more of a risk. Parenting can make you lose sight of who you were before – reminisce, send your children to friend's homes or to your parents for a night once a month and get some champagne!

Seven

Don't let people undermine the importance of your work because you work at home with the children. Believe me, the extra canteen duties, sports pickups, music practice etc. will all fall in your lap if you are not very clear. Other people will not appreciate that your job is no different than theirs, you just chose to do it from home (in fact you don't get paid for taking time off, and they just might!).

Eight

Motivate yourself. Set goals. Reward yourself when you reach them. There is no boss to check up on you if you're slacking off or distracted. Set little goals – not just big ones. If I get the next 10 pages of this proposal done by 12.00, I'll take the kids out for icecream in the park. It keeps things fresh and you on track.

Nine

Learn to live with a little mess. Nobody wants to live in an untidy or unclean home. However, children at home make mess. If you are focussing on tidying up after the children all day rather than your work, you will never get anything done or keep a good steady flow of concentration. Have rules for the children about how many things they can pull out at a time. Have a 5 minute blitz before meal times to quickly get the excess toys away. Make a rule for yourself – if you tidy up in the morning, that's it until the evening or the next morning (whatever you can comfortably deal with).

Ten

Be conscious of spoiling your children. If you and your children are always in each other's company, normal social skills can suffer. If you aren't balancing your work and family well, you may find yourself giving "rewards" to compensate for spending more time on work than family, or giving rewards for peace and quiet. Children are clever and will soon take advantage if they know you will give them toys or treats. They can also expect these things rather than appreciate them as special treats.

Eleven

Find creative ways to occupy children while you are working. Obviously, it must be ways that are age appropriate and safe under minimal supervision. Have pens, paper, puzzles or craft items available. Give them challenges i.e. a blanket, box, some bits and pieces and get them to build a cubby – the more indepth the activity the longer it will keep them busy. Encourage imagination and free thought. There are many little “jobs” you can create so that they can “help” you. This really makes them feel important and included. A movie can be a great way to get at least an hour to yourself – but I do warn against using the television as a regular babysitter.

Twelve

Prepare for the next day the night before. Have your to-do list ready, this lets you get your head around what is on the next day. Know what you will need and have it ready i.e. lunch money, forms for school excursions, sports uniform or dry-cleaning. Mentally see yourself completing all of your tasks on this list – you’d be surprised how much more smoothly your day will go with this simple exercise.

Thirteen

Ask for help if you need it. I know – I hate to do this, but sometimes just letting a neighbour sit with your kids for an hour if they really aren’t playing by your rules can take the pressure off and let you get back to it. Workplaces are very simple places to work. They are a relatively strict environment, you can control your interruptions and the majority of things that go on within your day. Working at home with children is an entirely different kettle of fish. It is a wonderful thing to be able to do, but if things get out of hand, get a cleaner in, an ironing lady, or a local teenager to mow the lawn – even as a once off occurrence. It just gives you a leg up once in a while and lets you get back into the swing of things.

If you found this helpful, or would like to learn about these topics in more depth, please visit my website www.workathomeandparent.com or feel free to contact me for more information. Take advantage of a free 20 minute consult.

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