

Managing Childcare During the COVID-19 Pandemic

As stay-at-home and quarantine orders continue in some locations, many schools and childcare facilities will be virtual learning only or hybrid for the upcoming academic year. Many parents are also working from home, making it a challenge to care for their children and work simultaneously. How do you stay productive? How do you keep your children entertained and focused on their schoolwork? Other parents are considered essential employees, such as medical professionals, and are continuing to go into work. How do you find alternative care?

Parents Working from Home

Younger children and children with special needs require more supervision and interaction, which can make being productive difficult for parents. Here are some creative tips to help navigate this situation:

- Trade off childcare duties with another parent or older child whenever possible. Create a schedule based on everyone's work and school demands that spreads out the supervision responsibilities.
- Utilize technology to keep children entertained. Under normal circumstances, you may limit your child's time in front of a screen. Now is the time to consider loosening that rule. If you have work that requires focus, put on a cartoon or an iPad game for your little one.
- Speak to your supervisor about your situation. See if there is a creative solution that allows you to manage both childcare and meeting your organization's business needs. Perhaps certain work projects can be completed in the evening, after your child is in bed? Or can non-urgent matters be handled on the weekend when another parent is present?
- Be kind to yourself. This is a unique situation and being able to work at your normal capacity is nearly impossible. Prioritize the most important needs and forgive yourself if the little things don't get accomplished as quick as you'd hoped. If you're feeling frustrated, inadequate, or guilty, talk to your partner or other loved ones for support. You can also reach out to your Employee Assistance Program for 24/7 confidential support.

Older children will be more independent but may still need support and guidance as they adjust to learning again this fall. Below are some pointers for how to help older children during COVID-19:

- Keep separate work and school spaces. If possible, have children complete their online learning in a separate room from where you are working. This will allow each person to better focus on their work.
- Create a daily routine. We know structure is important for children and teenagers. While their school routine has been disrupted, you can develop a new at-home routine with them. Have them keep the same bedtime and wakeup schedule. School hours should be

utilized for online learning, while evening hours can be used for relaxation and entertainment.

- Do regular check-ins. How is their online learning going? Do they need additional help with schoolwork? What are they struggling with – missing friends, not participating in extracurricular activities, etc.? Having an open dialogue during this time will help you to keep a pulse on how they're adjusting.
- Ask for additional assistance with household responsibilities. If you need more time to accomplish your work due to decreased productivity at home, ask older children to take on additional tasks around the home such as helping with younger children or doing more chores.
- Do family activities. While many aspects of the COVID-19 pandemic are an obstacle, the additional time at home with your loved ones can be a great opportunity to deepen your bonds. Play a board game, complete a puzzle, or cook dinner together. Perhaps a new family tradition will grow out of this difficult circumstance.

Parents Working at the Office

Reach out to your community. Childcare workers that have been displaced from their jobs may be willing to offer childcare services to those that still have to show up to work. It is also possible that you have stay-at-home parents or individuals in your local community network that would be more than happy to offer assistance. We understand that asking for help can be awkward and maybe even anxiety-inducing, but crises have the capacity to make a community stronger in unexpected ways. Here are some creative solutions for finding care:

- Post to social media or online parenting groups to see if any friends or those in your local community could care for your child(ren).
- Post to [Next Door](#) to see if anyone in your surrounding neighborhood could care for your child(ren).
- Coordinate with co-workers to watch each other's child(ren).
- Try to work an opposite shift of the secondary parent (if applicable) to cover needed supervision.
- Reach out to family members and friends to see if any are available to assist.
- Ask your supervisor if they could assist in coordinating creative care solutions. If you're a supervisor, help to be as flexible as feasibly possible to accommodate any coordination being attempted by employees in accordance with your business practices.
- See if you can get the information from your school or daycare for teachers or caregivers that may be offering temporary care. These caregivers should already be CPR and First Aid certified and will probably be the best option for any children that have special needs that have to be accommodated.

Workplace Solutions, your employee assistance program, is available 24/7 at 800-327-5071 to provide confidential support and guidance. The EAP web portal, www.wseap.com (access code: *Publicis*), contains additional resources on COVID-19 and will continue to be updated as this situation develops.