

WORK-LIFE BALANCE

A Guide for Working (From Home) Parents

by [Avni Patel Thompson](#)

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Amir and Ria are working professionals living in Seattle: he works at Amazon and she's the CEO of an early-stage start-up. They have two kids, Amara and Aryan, who are 6 and 2 years old. They're used to managing the usual challenges of dual working parents — coordinating childcare with schools and activities, managing meals and household chores, and spending quality time together on the weekends.

Things all became more complicated with the outbreak of the coronavirus in Seattle and its suburbs a couple of weeks ago. First Amazon asked all employees to start working from home, and then a week later Amara's school announced they would be closing for four weeks, with potential for more. Ria's office and Aryan's daycare closed soon after. Since then, Amir and Ria have been trying to juggle full-time childcare for both kids and working from home while trying to preserve as much productivity as possible.

For the first week, they approached the situation like a vacation, with little structure around schedule or duties. This quickly turned into a frustrating situation for everyone. They weren't getting work done, they were worried about how much they were relying on a tablet to keep Amara entertained, and regular things like meals and cleaning seemed to be just piling up. That they were all stuck together in a closed space just made it all worse.

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As a company building software to help working parents collaboratively run their families, we routinely gather the best practices of busy parents and in the past days have been polling families in Seattle, San Francisco, and New York City that have already been experiencing this new normal.

Their experiences have taught us that the key is to invent new ways to preserve old routines. Maintaining a sense of familiarity and consistency is both comforting and therapeutic in times of upheaval — but it's also practical. When you're going to be fighting for every inch of productivity, you want each day to feel like an established habit, no wasted time on wondering what's for lunch or when we're going outside to play.

Here are three steps to bring your old plan into your new normal:

1. Maintain routines.

The first step is to keep the structure of the day the same as it has typically been. Beyond the benefits of familiarity, maintaining a regular schedule will give you firm guideposts for building your work and childcare schedules.

For one family we work with, their daily routine used to include breakfast at 8:15am for the kids and then a day of activities with the nanny once the parents left for work: an hour of free-play time, an outdoor adventure, lunch at home, and then a mix of educational and craft activities before one more outdoor time. They ate dinner at 5pm before the parents came home at 6pm. In the evening they read books and played before bedtime at 7:30 or 8pm.

I'd advise this family to keep their routine. Whether or not they still have the nanny, they should try to keep the meals, blocks of activity, and outdoor time. (I've personally used this approach when traveling with the family for extended periods.) You'll be creating the actual schedules in the next step but the key first is identifying the foundation based on what you already know.

2. Create modified schedules.

Next, build a schedule for each week that incorporates these routines at a high level but is modified to account for your work blocks and other new responsibilities meals, chores, childcare.

We've modified the "Sunday Check-in" planning rundown we created for busy working parents specifically in these chaotic times when planning out the week is even more important.

In your planning make sure you've covered:

- What is your kids' schedule?
- What will you have for each meal?
- When will you do chores? (laundry, dishes, tidying, cleaning)

- When are your key work meetings or times it's critical you have someone to cover your work while you handle a household task?

Take this info and put it into a calendar and start assigning shifts and duties to specific family members. Our family has a Google Calendar and we've created a simple example for families to use to create their kids' schedules and add shifts on top.

Finally, create work blocks. Depending on your childcare, community, and quarantine situation, here are three ways to make this work:

A partner swap: 4-hour shifts in which one partner works and the other cares for kids.

Short shifts: 30-minute to 2-hour shifts that rotate among some number of adults.

Video shifts: While you'll still need to be paying some attention, it's possible, especially with older kids, to organize virtual playdates (more on this below) or calls with grandparents that will keep them entertained while you're getting in a phone call or doing some heads-down work.

It will feel like you need to squeeze every ounce of productivity out of every minute in the day. It's a reality that many of us will have to find time to work early in the morning or after the kids are in bed. But be sure to schedule in breaks and unstructured times to unwind and connect with your partner and kids. This is going to be a marathon and it's important we find ways not to burn out.

3. Swap in new ways to do old things.

Finally, if your kids are used to having playdates or weekly activities, find ways to keep those events on the calendar, just in a new form. Everyone will appreciate the social time and, as a bonus, it also can buy you 30 minutes of uninterrupted work time. Some options to consider:

Virtual playdates: Choose Google Hangouts (or Zoom if you prefer) and then send invites to your kids' friends' parents. For the playdate itself, have a station set up in your house with a tablet, laptop, or Alexa Show/Facebook Portal ready to go. During the playdate, it can be as simple as the kids catching up and coloring together or one of the parents leading an activity or reading books.

Creative athletic activities for the kids. Register your kids for free online classes like Cosmic Yoga, Art Hub for Kids, or Go Noodle. Schedule these during the times they might otherwise be doing after-school activities. They should get some exercise every day — this could even be just going into the backyard and do some soccer drills or play catch.

Parent pods: Find a group of 3-4 other families you're close with and create a shared pool of resources, whether it's meal plans, activity schedules, or lesson plans.

Book club or sports viewing nights for you. Staying social, active, and connected is just as important for the adults. If you don't already have one, create a book club or a sport/TV show viewing club. Get it into people's calendars and set up a video call so everyone can watch together. Make sure to still get your workouts in with a run outside, an indoor circuit, or using online options. Even a family walk around the block will do wonders.

We need to lean on our village now, more than ever. The nature of this crisis requires that we find safe and responsible ways to help each other out while upholding our responsibilities at work and at home. Lean on your village — the other parents in your community — to share responsibility, looking out especially for those that might need extra help, such as healthcare or hourly workers left without childcare. Accept that things are not going to run completely smoothly and we aren't going to all be our 100% productive selves. But with tempered expectations, a flexible approach and resourcefulness, you'll be amazed at how we can all adapt. With any luck, we'll emerge from this crisis even stronger and more collaborative: a modern take on an age-old approach to parenting.


Avni Patel Thompson is the founder and CEO of Modern Village. She is a third-time founder building technology solutions for today's parents. Her previous company, Poppy (YC W16), helped connect parents to vetted caregivers when they had gaps in childcare. Prior to taking the entrepreneurial plunge, she spent over a decade building big consumer businesses at P&G, adidas and Starbucks. She has an MBA from Harvard Business School and a BSc Chemistry from the University of British Columbia. She lives in Vancouver, Canada, with her husband and two little girls.

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