



WORKING PARENT GUIDE

Version 1 / Current at 7 April 2020



TRANSITION TO HOME: WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW ABOUT WORKING FROM HOME WITH KIDS AND PARTNERS THROUGH COVID-19?

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to a major shift in how many Australians work for the foreseeable future. The Government has asked employees to work from home where possible, and for many organisations this is entirely new.

Not long ago, only one in three Australians regularly worked from home. (Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016)

As we navigate this 'new normal', it is important to recognise that for many this also means adapting to working from home with others in the household. The additional pressures of education demands, i.e. home learning, social distancing and state restrictions can also hamper the strategies we normally use to manage our work-family wellbeing.

In this resource sheet we discuss the nature of transitioning in COVID-19 and five practical strategies for working from home with others. We also provide resources for managing the mental health and wellbeing of yourself and your loved ones during this period of uncertainty.



As we navigate these uncharted waters together, one of the significant transitions is the increase in those working from home. While this transition brings both challenges and opportunities, it is important to acknowledge that many working parents now also find themselves unexpectedly adjusting to the change alongside children, partners and pets!

DR SARAH COTTON / CO-DIRECTOR, ORGANISATIONAL PSYCHOLOGIST / TRANSITIONING WELL





To read more about the psychology of transition, we recommend Nancy Schlossberg’s book: [“Overwhelmed: Coping with Life’s Ups and Downs”](#).

The Nature of Transition

In navigating the transition to working from home with kids and/or partners, it’s useful to first consider the difference between transition and change in line with Schlossberg’s Transition Model.

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN CHANGE AND TRANSITION?

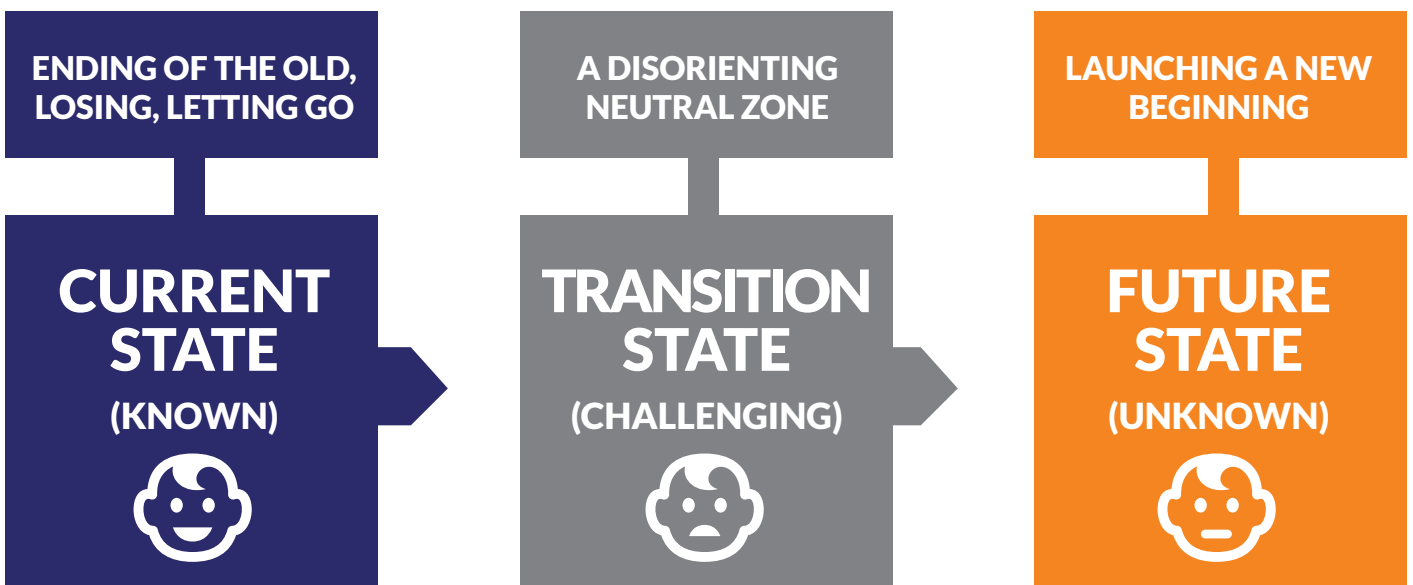
Change is what happens to us, i.e. the coronavirus, work changes, kids home from school during the day. As a result of the changes, we might have:

1. Different roles, e.g. home education.
2. Different routines, e.g. no more commute.
3. Different relationships, e.g. being 24/7 partners and ‘co-workers’.
4. Different assumptions, e.g. what we expected for 2020.

If the significance of a transition can be measured by the extent of change in the four areas listed above—it’s no wonder that many of us may be feeling a bit disoriented.

Transition is the process we each go through, as an individual, to adapt to the changes—in other words, moving from what is known (‘old normal’), to what is unknown (‘new normal’).

Be reassured that it’s common to feel unsettled and uneasy as you navigate the changes occurring in the world, and in your home. We all need to go through a transition period to find our ‘new normal’, and this is often uncomfortable and challenging.



Source: Adapted from Bridges (2003) and Change Management Learning Centre (2012)

WHAT ARE THE UNIQUE CHALLENGES OF THIS TRANSITION?

While we may all be undergoing some form of transition, none of our situations are the same. We all have different strengths and experiences, so our personal transition will be unique.

However, the COVID-19 pandemic presents a number of additional challenges to the transition process, including:

- **Multiple transitions**—For most, there have been a lot of life changes in a short space of time, and working from home is just one part of this. The more change, the more disruption.
- **Forced upon us**—Transition can be easier when we feel we have some choice and control, or if the change is in a preferred direction. We didn't choose all of this. And for some, working from home (particularly with others) is not ideal.
- **High levels of uncertainty**—The environment is rapidly evolving with no clear end in sight. The bridge between our 'old normal' and 'new normal' is going to take an uncertain amount of time, and we're not sure what's on the other side.
- **Reduced support systems**—Our usual support people may not be physically available due to social distancing, or less emotionally available because they are going through it too.



Be aware that you may not land on one solution for your family. You may need to land on a few and decide which one suits best on any given day. It's very important to remain flexible so that you can respond to changing needs.

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HOW CAN THIS TRANSITION BE MANAGED WELL?

By taking the time to think strategically about how we will work at home with others, we can set ourselves up for success.

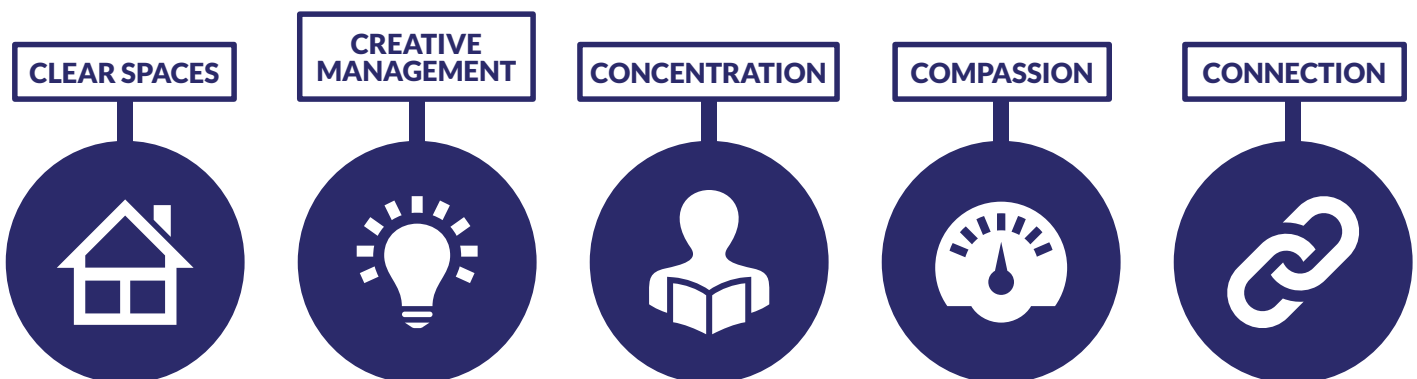
One of our biggest strengths is each other—our family unit.

How we communicate and plan across the five areas identified below is vital, including how we review and renegotiate as needed. You may need to try out several different approaches before you decide on a few that could work for you and your family.

There is no magic solution, because your family unit is unique. So rather than a list of 'should-dos', this resource sheet provides a series of ideas for discussion in your family about how you might successfully work from home together.

We also note that this is a unique time in history, and for some it can be an opportunity to reflect, review, and intentionally shape their family lives to have a positive impact for years to come.

In the coming pages we outline five key strategies:





Strategy 1: Clear Spaces

Given the high level of uncertainty and interruptions of working at home with others, it is important to establish both a physical and mental workspace.

Creating a physical workspace can provide a place to work that helps draw a line between roles, e.g. I'm 'at work' at that desk, I'm 'at home' when away from the desk.

Likewise establishing a mental workspace can create needed space in busy homes that allows us to 'show up' when our minds are overloaded and at full capacity. In setting up these clear spaces, it is also helpful to think about our daily routines and boundaries.

If not provided by your workplace, find an ergonomic checklist and take active steps to ensure your workspace is set up well to reduce physical strain or injury.

See Worksafe Victoria's Working from Home Guide here: <https://www.worksafe.vic.gov.au/minimising-spread-coronavirus-covid-19-working-home>

To read more about the importance of routines, we recommend this article: "How to Establish a New Routine in a Time of Social Distancing, According to an Organisational Psychologist", written by Rachael Palmer: <https://www.smartcompany.com.au/coronavirus/new-routine-social-distancing-covid-19/>

ROUTINES

Clear (and flexible) routines preserve our sense of normality and help us feel calm and in control of our lives. Particularly for children, routine can create a sense of predictability and reliability in an unsettling time. It's important to recognise how our routines have changed and take steps to create new routines and good habits and structure to our day.

- **Take a look at your daily routines and habits:**
 - > Keep some, e.g. dinner time, bedtime.
 - > Add some, e.g. taking lunch break with the kids, virtual playdates.
 - > Relax some, e.g. screen time.
 - > Replace some, e.g. where and when you exercise.
 - > Avoid some, e.g. increased alcohol consumption.
- **Revisit expectations.** Think about whether you are needlessly operating in 'old normal' expectations of the day. If your work doesn't dictate certain hours, there may be other, more productive ways to structure the time in your day, e.g. work in short bursts, spread work across the day, evenings or weekends.
- **Create a distinction between weekdays and weekends.** Think about where recovery time fits into your new routine.
- **Review how your new routines are working.** Set aside time each day or week to reflect on how things are working, and discuss with your partner if applicable

BOUNDARIES

Clearly established boundaries help us to take care of our ourselves and our relationships, particularly in times of transition. Having healthy boundaries also helps us to be clear about what's most important (especially when our energy is limited).

Physical: make the boundaries visible

- > Use physical indicators to communicate when you are free and when you need quiet. For closed spaces, this could be a shut door, or a 'do not disturb' sign. For open spaces use a traffic light system (red = do not disturb, green = available), or wear a hat to indicate you are not free.
- > Draw a visual line between 'work' time and 'home' time, e.g. throwing a sheet over your workspace, switching off your work phone, closing the laptop or switching off the computer.

Mental: draw a mental line between 'work' time and 'home' time

- > Know your style—are you a 'separator' who likes to have clear boundaries between work and home, an 'integrator' who can easily mix work and personal time during the day, or a cyler whose work fluctuates throughout the year? Where you can, work to your strengths (refer to **Resource: Creative Management Ideas from Other Families**, page 11) and incorporate your preferences into whatever plan you create for yourself (Source: *Managing Work life in the Digital Age*, 2016).
- > Transition-in, e.g. walk around the block, play a song on the loudspeaker .
- > Transition-out, e.g. spend 2-3 minutes taking stock of work and preparing for the next day, intentionally transition back into family time such as serving everyone a cool drink (or dinner) and chat about the day, go for a walk, play a different song on the loudspeaker.



Strategy 2: Creative Management

This 'new normal' is going to require a lot of creative problem solving. However, our minds can come up with the same old solutions which may not be as effective as they once were.

Now is the time to get creative about how you're going to manage working at home with kids and/or your partner. Below are some ideas to get you started. For specific ideas, refer to **Resource: Creative Management Ideas from Other Families** on page 11.

WITH PARTNERS

Be creative about your workspaces

- > Find a way to set up individual workspaces, or agree how to share the space effectively.

Be creative about how you, as a couple, will manage this transition

- > Discuss your priorities and values for this time. Understand what you and your partner need from each other, and be prepared to negotiate regularly on routines and priorities.
- > To help you navigate this time with your partner, we have created a simple one-page template to guide your conversation. Refer to **Resource: Planning to Thrive at Work and at Home Through the Coronavirus** on page 10.

Be creative about finding couple time

- > Create a ritual for when you and your partner finish for the day.
- > Share your day—what went well, what didn't? What could we try tomorrow to make each other more effective?
- > Continue to plan 'date nights' at home.

WITH KIDS

Be creative about managing kids' time alongside your work needs

- > Split work tasks into those that require full concentration, and those that can be done with company.
- > Build a list of activities the kids can do to stay occupied while you work.

Be creative about options for childminding

- > Set up remote childminding by asking grandparents or other friends and relatives to host story time / sing-a-long times / tutoring over video conference, and be prepared to reciprocate if possible.
- > Enlist teens to babysit, where possible.
- > If suitable for your family, find out if you are eligible for free childcare introduced by the Federal Government (effective 6 April 2020).

Be creative about home learning

- > Make sure you use the resources and supports available through your child's school to support this transition.
- > Familiarise yourself with websites available for online learning. Ask your kids (particularly teenagers) for additional ideas on remote and online options.
- > Consider remote tutoring, even for short pockets of time.
- > Try using the Pomodoro Technique, a time management approach that uses a timer to work in 25-minute bursts to do a specific activity, followed by a short break. You take a longer break for every four 25-minute blocks. Kids may find it easier to work quietly if they know you'll have a short break with them when the timer goes off. For more information on the Pomodoro Technique, see: <https://francescocirillo.com/pages/pomodoro-technique>

Be creative about how your household runs

- > Consider different ways to split the working week between you and your partner so that you each get your work done while sharing the childcare load.
- > Review expectations about who does what, particularly if one partner is working more than the other. For example, discuss who 'usually' cooks/cleans/shops etc. What needs to change, and what can the kids become more involved in?

Be creative about finding some recovery time

- > Consider your existing rules around screen time – can you make some adjustments? Note that older kids can do a lot of socialising online, and primary school kids may also enjoy socialising with school friends on video calls.
- > Consider allowing teens to sleep in, giving them freedom to be up later at night.

Be creative in using time for more than one purpose

- > Build in your physical exercise by being active with the kids, e.g. a game of soccer in the garden during a work break.
- > Use recovery time to boost wellbeing, e.g. family exercise circuit/obstacle course at 8am, 6pm walk around the garden/block.



Strategy 3: Concentration

Working with others at home will likely test your concentration like never before.

When you're unable to focus on a task your productivity and decision-making is likely to suffer. Apart from the more obvious issue of having others in the home who demand your attention, there are other factors that can reduce your concentration.

These include lack of sleep, hunger, anxiety and excess stress. Below are some suggestions for increasing your ability to concentrate.

Make time for distractions as part of your day

- > Do your most challenging work at the time where you perform your best, freeing you up to better manage distractions throughout the rest of the day. For example, if you are a morning person, get up before everyone else and tackle your most difficult work then. The opposite might work well if you're a night owl.
- > Schedule 'time in' for the others in your house. For example, plan to spend your lunch hour with your family, check in frequently with younger kids (little and often may work better than longer and less frequent).
- > Proactively manage competing demands on your attention. Refer to **Resource: Creative Management Ideas from Other Families**, page 11.

Get clear on priorities for the day, then focus

- > Decide on your biggest priority for the day, and keep coming back to that every time your attention is drawn elsewhere.
- > Email is a well-known source of distraction. If possible, turn off email notifications for a block of time to make solid progress.
- > Consider using the Pomodoro Method. This time management technique involves the use of a timer to work in 25-minute bursts, followed by a short break. Take a longer break for every four blocks of work. Refer to **Resource: Creative Management Ideas from Other Families**, page 11.

Use music or noise cancelling headphones

- > Invest in good quality earphones or noise cancelling headphones.
- > Use a playlist that works for you. Music streaming services have 'Working from home' playlists, or you can build your own.

Filter incoming information

- > It's easy to become overloaded with news about the pandemic, in addition to the usual inflow of information.
- > Minimise watching, reading or listening to news about COVID-19 that causes you to feel anxious or distressed. Use trusted sources and only seek information at one or two specific times during the day.
- > Give yourself permission not to follow up on every non-critical email or phone message.

Move!

- > Movement is crucial for wellbeing. Working from home probably means less walking across the office, no visits to customers and no need to get up to join meetings.
- > Schedule breaks into your day to get up and move, or start and end your day with a brisk walk.
- > Get up and go for a walk during conference calls, i.e. walking meetings.
- > Place things you use frequently in different spots to force you to walk a bit further throughout the day, e.g. put your wireless printer in another room.
- > Buy a step-counter, e.g. Fitbit, Garmin, to count the steps you're doing in a day and set activity goals.

Manage your overall health and wellbeing

- > Pay attention to any lifestyle changes that might be impacting your concentration, e.g. staying up later than usual, drinking more alcohol, eating more or less.
- > Keep an eye on your anxiety levels, and that of your partner. If needed, reach out for support from your manager, your HR team and/or your Employee Assistance Program provider (EAP).



Strategy 4: Compassion

Compassion is concern for the suffering of others, but it starts with self-compassion.

We're not going to be in this transition state forever, but we'll be here for a while. Now, more than ever, our mental and physical health and wellbeing is essential.

Here are some suggestions for keeping the fuel in your tank topped up:

SELF-COMPASSION

Be well

- > Look after yourself every day—shower and get dressed, eat well, sleep well.
- > Find the type of exercise that works for you and incorporate into your routine.
- > Create a list of 'go to' wellbeing activities that includes both short and long activities, indoor, outdoor, alone/with others.

Be aware

- > If you're having a hard time, reach out for support from your family and friends, and from your workplace. Talk to your manager, your HR team, call your organisation's Employee Assistance Program (EAP) for free, confidential phone counselling. Some EAPs are also available for your family members—check with your HR team.
- > For a list of trusted mental health and wellbeing resources (including helplines) to help you during this time, refer to <https://pwwp.org.au/resource/covid-19/>

Be mindful

- > Think about the expectations you are putting on yourself—are they reasonable? Are you assuming you'll be able to do exactly what you did before? If so, is that realistic?
- > Notice what you're saying to yourself, debrief with others, and try to avoid media or people who stir up negative thinking. Thoughts like 'I can't stand this', 'I hate this' can stir up distress.

Be safe

- > Set yourself up properly at home—don't soldier on with an unmanageable workstation that could potentially cause injury or strain. Talk to your employer about getting the equipment you need, and be proactive about observing ergonomic guidelines.

COMPASSION FOR OTHERS

In addition to self-compassion we also want to have compassion for others—we're all in this together. But when we're struggling, or when we're feeling threatened (loss of income, loss of certainty) sometimes we can become more self-focused.

Help others be well

- > Help kids find the exercise they enjoy—there are lots of exercise classes/clips online for kids to follow, e.g. PE Joe, Cosmic Kids Yoga, Just Dance. If you have a partner, consider doing boot camp together, or join a gym offering online workouts.
- > Prepare healthy snacks early in the day so it's easier for everyone to choose wisely (leave them within reach of your kids so they can help themselves).
- > Keep your kids' sleep routines as close to normal as possible.

Help others be aware

- > Notice your expectations of others right now—kids, partner, clients, co-workers. Observe how you are responding to them (remember, everyone is trying their best).
- > Try to show up with empathy—we're all experiencing challenges. Can you take a moment to pause before you communicate with others, to reset yourself and proactively set the right emotional tone for interactions? Mindfulness exercises can help you slow down your automatic reactions, giving you the space to 'choose' your response.

Help others be mindful

- > Accept that there will be distraction, but encourage others to understand what you need. Explain to kids why you need quiet time, and acknowledge that it can be difficult for them not to interrupt you.
- > You may also need to gently encourage your co-workers to respect your boundaries.

Help others be safe

- > Be aware of the wellbeing of colleagues—if you notice signs that they aren't coping, reach out ask if they're ok, or link back with your manager/HR, encourage them to make use of EAP services.
- > Look out for your family members. If they need support, check if your employer EAP covers family. You can also refer to our website for a current list of mental health and wellbeing resources, including helplines: <https://pwwp.org.au/resource/covid-19/>
- > Whatever solution you land on for keeping your kids occupied, make sure they are safe (including cyber-safety for their online activities. Refer to our website for resources relating to kids: <https://pwwp.org.au/resource/covid-19/>



Strategy 5: Connection

We are social animals, and our need for human interaction has never been more apparent.

Social connection is protective for our physical and mental health. We may have to socially distance or isolate, but that doesn't mean we have to disconnect. It's the 21st century—there are so many ways to stay connected. We also want to ensure we keep communicating our needs and expectations—always **ask, don't assume**.



Try to pull yourself out of the 'here and now'. Think about your family in a years' time, looking back at what we have all been through ... what do you want your kids to experience? And what are the things that you most want them to remember about the way you were as a family during this time?

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WAYS TO STAY CONNECTED:

- **Connect visually.** Not all connection is the same. A big part of human connection is visual – so where possible opt for video link. We convey so much with tone, body language and expression. It will also ensure you don't go for weeks still in pyjamas.
- **Find shared experiences.** It's easy to video chat with friends and talk endlessly about problems and challenges. But humans connect best through shared experience. Can you play an online game together? Explore [The Louvre](#) together online, or [The Melbourne Zoo](#)? Can your colleagues have a virtual water-cooler catch up?
- **Share achievements.** Create opportunities to share wins with colleagues, as well as with family and friends.
- **Communicate openly with your kids' schools.** Share how you're going with your kids, ask for help or resources if needed, understand their expectations and make sure they align to what is realistic for your family. You are not expected to replace the education system. Do what you can and keep the lines of communication open with your school.
- **Actively stay connected with work.** Be open in your communication—express what you need, communicate the demands you have, and exercise control where you can. Share how you are travelling to get the support you need.
- **Be prepared to communicate and review with your partner and/or kids** about expectations, needs, supports. As a couple or family, communicate expectations, be clear about what matters most, be flexible and recognise that these things may continue changing over time.

There are undoubtedly tough times ahead for many of us. But perhaps, for your family, the COVID-19 pandemic will also be a unique opportunity to slow down and reflect on what is really important in your life, in your family's life, and to make changes—intentionally—that will positively impact your family for years to come.

For some it will be more quality time together. For others it might provide learnings about how work and life can be integrated more flexibly when COVID-19 has passed. It may even be an opportunity to reflect on those you wish to stay more connected to in future.



Not long ago, only one in three Australians regularly worked from home.

SOURCE: AUSTRALIAN BUREAU OF STATISTICS, 2016

Other Considerations

It is important to remember that you are navigating this time as the unique combination of you, your family and your work.

Although beyond the scope of this resource sheet, we also acknowledge that there are other considerations for those working from home with kids and/or partners such as:

- Single parents.
- Shared-custody parents.
- Health-worker or front-line families.
- Those with elderly relatives at home.
- Those experiencing family and domestic violence.
- Concerns relating to financial security, including stand-downs and redundancy.
- And many others...

No matter what your situation or family unit, to help you navigate this time, we encourage you to:

- Speak to your workplace about the support available to you, including EAP access.
- Refer to the PWWP website for a list of trusted resources (including helplines) to support you through this time: <https://pwwp.org.au/resource/COVID-19/>
- See our **Resource Sheet: Supporting the Ongoing Seasons of Working Parenthood**: <https://pwwp.org.au/resource/resource-sheets/>
- Know your legal rights and entitlements. See Fair Work Australia (www.fairwork.gov.au) for information and guidance on employment related matters, and Centrelink (<https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/individuals/centrelink>) for financial assistance.

Resource: Planning to Thrive at Work and at Home Through the Coronavirus

We suggest you write down your responses to the questions below. If you have a partner, write your responses individually, then come together to talk through them.

What matters to you most in this period?

Beyond the health and safety of your loved ones, what are your top three goals? Is there a particular work project you want to see through to completion? A relationship you want to foster? Do you want to use the time at home to map out your next career transition? Is your kids' education top of mind?

If you have a partner, what is the relative priority of your careers over the coming months?

Whose work gets priority and when? Do you have a stable deal in which one of your careers consistently takes priority over the other? Do you try and maintain a 50/50 split? Are there certain weeks/times when one of you will need to have priority over working time?

What are your parenting principles during this period?

Do you need to loosen screen-time agreements? How involved in home learning do you want and need to be? What are the aspects of your children's lives that are most important to you such as outdoor time, reading, sports, study? How will you talk about the crisis and contain your children's anxieties?

What do you need to make this all work? If you have a partner, what do you need from each other?

What does support look like for you, emotional or practical? Do you need to know that you'll have 15 minutes of undivided attention every evening to check in and debrief the day—if so, how can you make this happen? If you have a partner, do you need them to share some of the tasks that you usually take full responsibility for?

What are the things that concern you the most?

Job security? Managing boundaries between work and kids? Getting quality couple time in? Cabin fever setting in? What will you do if you (or your partner) becomes seriously ill?

This template has been adapted from an article by Jennifer Petriglieri:

<https://hbr.org/2020/03/how-dual-career-couples-can-work-through-the-coronavirus-crisis> or <https://pwwp.org.au/resource/covid-19/>

Resource: Creative Management Ideas From Other Families

With all the best suggestions in the world, this isn't going to be perfect.

Pick the things that you think might work. Try them. Review them. Try something else. You'll find a way, but it may not be plain sailing right from the get-go.

Expect some false starts and embrace them as part of the process of finding your 'new normal'.

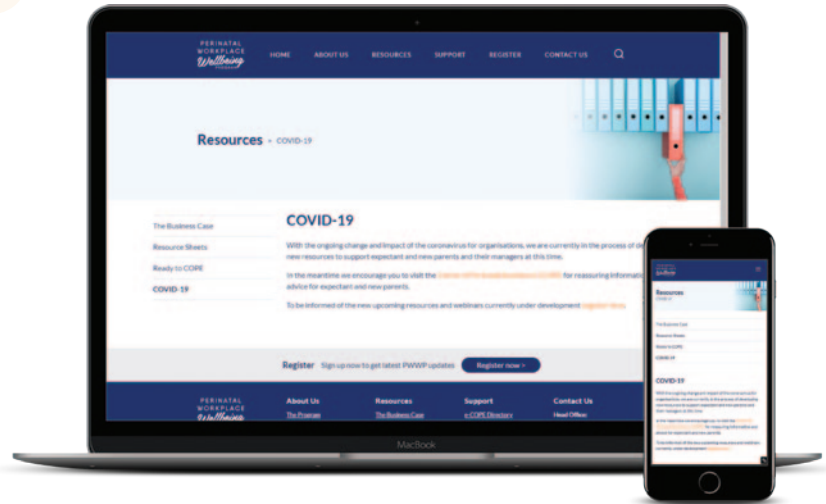
- **Different work schedules:**
 - > Temporarily reduce work hours to balance work and family, or use leave entitlements to shorten the working week.
 - > Create a 6 or 7 day week to spread the work out across the week, or between both parents if possible (but not at the expense of wellbeing and connection).
 - > Use the Pomodoro Method to work alongside your primary school kids. This time management technique involves the use of a timer to work in 25-minute bursts, followed by a short break. Take a longer break for every four blocks of work. Short bursts of schoolwork (while you engage in your own specific task) may be a more effective way to make progress during the day.
 - > If you have a partner, try taking turns: two hour blocks of work, followed by two hours of minding the kids. If you're a single parent, work in short bursts depending on what your kids can handle (see the Pomodoro method).
 - > Morning person or night owl? Do the most challenging work when kids are asleep.
- **Pack a lunchbox at the start of the day** to avoid constant interruptions for food (for school aged kids, get them to pack their own lunchboxes).
- **Lunch story-time:** using audiobooks to keep kids captivated—and screen-free!
- **Daily 'quiet time' in their room** with a special toy or book.
- **Have small rewards in the moment** for younger children (stickers), or work toward something bigger for an older child, e.g. fitness tracker.
- **Fun Jar**—write down activities on strips of paper, and place them in a jar. Ask kids for ideas too. When needed, the kids draw an idea from the jar. Examples include scavenger hunts (indoor and outdoor), bowling alley set up in the hallway, obstacle course in the garden, cubby house, board games, jigsaw puzzle, card games, build a _____ (with lego, magnetic tiles, things from the garden), play battleships with someone over the phone.
- **Set up a tent in the backyard / living room** and let the kids bring in cushions, blankets, toys and games.
- **Download free printables and images**, e.g. mazes, dot-to-dot, Pokémon cards, battleships template.
- **Get hold of a fitness tracker for each child** (basic trackers are inexpensive and available online, more advanced models allow tasks/chores to be set up too). Set daily targets for a certain number of steps to keep them active. They might enjoy comparing with their siblings, cousins, neighbours' kids, or you.

Resource: Useful Resources Relating to the COVID-19 Pandemic

As the situation with COVID-19 is rapidly changing, we have created a dedicated page of resources to support you during this time.

This page is being regularly updated.

Please visit <https://pwwp.org.au/resource/covid-19/> for further information.



For more information about the PWWP

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