

Working from home in the age of coronavirus

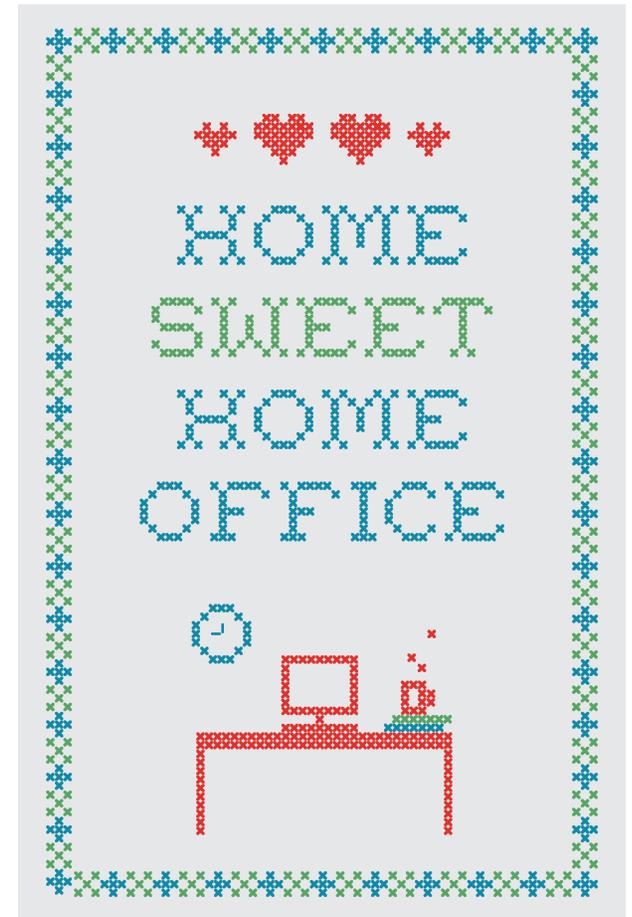
Many people find themselves working from home for the first time — at the same time their kids are home from school. Here's how to make it all work.



All of a sudden, working from home isn't the nirvana it once seemed like it could be.

For one thing, it's no longer a choice for many of us. Instead of having the luxury to work from home when we need to, we're forced to work from home as we all try to stop the spread of the coronavirus. For many of us, it's the first time we've had to work remotely, which is a challenge in and of itself.

But, like any good reality TV show, there's a twist: Now the kids are home too! And you're not just trying to get your job done, you're suddenly parenting and home-schooling, too.



As if you're not already stressed enough, now you're expected to be a teacher in addition to being a parent and productive employee.

If you find yourself working from home under these challenging circumstances, these tips may help.



Communicate clearly

This is virgin territory for everyone. Being honest and clear with everyone — colleagues and family — is important.

- Communicate. Let your family know when you need blocks of time uninterrupted. And let your colleagues and manager know when you'll be away from your keyboard. Set expectations with everyone.
- Make sure you and your manager agree on your priorities so you're working on the right things. Set clear goals so you know what you need to accomplish.
- Create a schedule and try to stick to it. This will be helpful for you and the kids.
- Plan for your kids to do their most engaging activities — and the ones that don't need supervision — when you need time to focus on work.

- Carve out separate spaces, if you can — one for your "office" (preferably with a door you can close when you need to) and one for "school" for the kids. This can help set boundaries and establish discipline for everyone.

Work effectively

You still want to feel focused and productive, and you want your colleagues to see you as engaged and professional. To that end:

- Upgrade your internet connection, especially if you have video calls. A good connection looks more professional and causes less stress. This might be more expensive, but you can always go back to a slower connection when you get back to the office.
- Close down large software and competing virtual meeting programs while on video calls to minimize glitches.
- Be aware of your surroundings. If you're on video, check to see what your background looks like, and try to keep it uncluttered. If you're working in the bedroom, angle your desk so the bed doesn't show up on video — especially if it's unmade.

- Know your audience. We've all seen that video where the toddler wanders into the room while dad is on a high-stakes video call. There are times when it's perfectly fine for a child or pet to make an appearance (in fact, at times this can help build important personal relationships with close team members). But for all those other times, be sure to keep your office door closed — and securely latched. And keep in mind, the mute button is your friend



Maintain social connections

Having close friends at work is important to your emotional health and overall wellbeing. Building and maintaining those relationships can be harder at a distance, so:

- Get personal. This might be one time when having the kids and pets running around behind you on a video call is a good thing — it's a great ice-breaker and can help build those personal connections with your colleagues.
- Consider taking walk-and-talk meetings or scheduling virtual coffee or lunch over video.
- Create a virtual watercooler. When you're at home, you miss out on those casual, drive-by encounters where you chat about work, TV shows, or something cool you're reading. These days, you can create a virtual watercooler through common persistent chat software like Slack or Microsoft Teams. Start a watercooler channel where you share links, observations, and personal stories.



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Stay healthy

When it comes to health, you'll want to lean into the good things about remote work — the flexibility to take more time for yourself, get some exercise, and eat healthy.

- Set boundaries between your work and life. One of the bad raps working at home gets is that your workday bleeds into the rest of your life. It certainly can do that, but working from home doesn't mean you have to work all the time when you're at home.
- Get up and move. Without a commute to get you moving in the morning and the evening, it's too easy to be sedentary all day. Use what would have been your commute time to get some exercise, or go out and walk for 30 minutes at lunchtime.
- Don't work too close to the fridge. You want to get up from your desk regularly throughout the day...but not to walk to the kitchen every time. This is a case in which "out of sight, out of mind" is probably a good thing.
- Give yourself a break. Remember, you're new to a lot of this. You can't expect yourself to do any of this perfectly. When you do get stressed, look for ways to cope with that, too.

