

Finding that Elusive Balance: Juggling Working From Home with Your Children At Home



Is this the image of parenting you imagined or see online?



Does real life look more like this?



But you really need a bit of this?



As a working mom, I know that feeling of loving your kids but also having a passion outside of your home too. My kids are older now, but looking back, I remember that struggle of finding that elusive balance between work & home and trying to find time for myself and my own sanity too! The lesson I learned (or more accurately- still learning!) was to offer myself grace and so that is what I am praying for all of you too! This work/life balance was a challenge before COVID19 reared its ugly head, and now this new situation is something none of us have ever had to deal with before! Work/life balance? Are you kidding?! It is all blending together, and I can only imagine the unique challenges we all are facing through this. I expect that some of you have the time to spend with your children because things at work have paused for a bit, while for others, this situation has added more stress & different work; that now has to be done at the same time and in the same space where your children are also vying for your attention! We talk about uninterrupted Free Play time, and you are probably thinking- is that going to happen? Maybe your children are not wanting to give up your attention or seem to need to be

'entertained'. Maybe you're just needing some time to also just take care of your own wellbeing? Whatever the case, I just want to pause for a moment and encourage you: it can happen! For children that don't often play alone, it will take time (and possibly a few meltdowns) and that is OK! It's normal & this is not a punishment- it is just a new routine that over time will get a bit smoother if you keep practicing it together.

"Breathe... Your kids need you. Not perfect. But you. With your worries, and your laughs and your fails, and your try agains. Your love, Your showing up. That's what matters. Breathe." ~Finding Joy.net

A few things to consider:

1. **This is uncertain for the children too!** They don't fully understand what is happening & why their typical schedule can't just happen. Take time to have simple conversations with them & share your plan (as you know it) so they can feel a bit "in control". Use simple visuals or break down your day into simple routines: First play, then lunch, then nap, & mom/dad works... so on.
2. **Children use their experiences to make sense of their world.** If you never have worked from home before, this is something new & will take time to understand. Again, talk to them & explain what you can. Be firm but fair and set times for when you can play together, and when it's work time and you are not available to play. This is not only OK, it helps them to understand boundaries & helps them understand respect goes both ways. Your needs as a parent are also important!
3. **When it's time to play be fully present.** Observe & pay attention to what your child is trying to explore &/or show you. Wait for them to engage you (you don't have to entertain & it's best if you don't) but put your phone & other distractions away to fully be present with them. It is about the quality of these moments together not just the time. 5-10 min of undivided attention is worth more than hours of distracted attention. Giving this attention when you have it will make it more likely that they will play independently later.
4. **Create a "YES" space for playtime.** Choose a space that's safe and you do not need to worry about saying 'No' for unsupervised play. Remove hazards & items you don't want them to explore then all you need to do is periodically check in. Tell them "here is where you can play now while I work" & follow through on that directive. Tell them you will return when you're done working.
5. **Choose Open Ended Play materials.** Items that have many possibilities will engage children for longer periods of time. It is also ok for a child to momentarily seem "bored". They probably aren't, they just need time to process and put their creativity & imagination to use!
6. **This takes time!** Try & Try Again! Expect that if your child hasn't often played on their own they may struggle with this. That's perfectly normal. Offering them time to use their imagination & own creativity and problem solve is a valuable life lesson. For the first few times, it may only last for a few minutes or they may just be upset when you go. Acknowledge their feelings, tell them you will be back in a few minutes, assure them that there are a lot of things they can do. Don't tell them it's ok. It might not feel ok, but let them know you trust in their ability to find something fun to do. "I hear you are upset I have to go work. There are a lot of toys you can play with. I can give you a hug but then I am going to go. When you are ready, you can play with all these toys." Follow through & be confident.

For more information or to continue this conversation, contact me and I'd love to chat more!