

## Musings of a mother dealing with working remotely with children

I am a mom of two children (a twelve year old son and seven year old daughter). My days and weekends are usually filled with rushing my children to school, activities, dance recitals, tournaments, etc. However, this all came to a standstill with the presence of COVID-19 in Barbados. It initially started with the early closure of schools across the island but gradually escalated to the Prime Minister announcing an island wide lockdown.

Because of the nature my job, I am fortunate enough to work from my home. However, these last few weeks have been challenging. I felt overwhelmed with emotions. These emotions were influenced by concerns relating to the safety of my family, adjusting to this “new norm” of working from home, job losses, pressure on our health care system and whether we would have sufficient food to cover us for an extended period of time. In addition, my role to manage my children’s emotions as they became frustrated since they could no longer go outside to play or even walk around the neighbourhood.

After two weeks of working from home and under lockdown, I am completely exhausted. I still feel overwhelmed and underprepared; a profound sense of failure.

I ask myself - how will I ever get everything done? How are other people managing? How am I expected to balance all these things? How are they able to get this all done?

When I touched base with my circle of friends, I realised I was not alone. They too had certain expectations of what their week would look like and it did not go according to plan. All of them felt the same emotions I felt. They felt scared for what was presently happening and the uncertainty of our future. We felt we had lost all sense of control.

The bigger question is though, what can be done to find a balance in these uncertain times? Unfortunately, I do not have the answers. However, even if these answers did exist, there would be no exact fit, no black or white as everyone’s situation is different.

While I am still learning to adjust, I wish to share some suggestions which I found useful.

### **1. Be kind to yourself...Take the pressure off!**

If things don’t work out the way you had hoped, you need to learn to let things go. By the second week I learnt that it was necessary at times to disconnect from work, spend some time with my family and then reconnect when they were sleeping at night or early in the morning.

### **2. Take mind wandering breaks.**

Sometimes we need to take a stretch, walk up and down the stairs to help clear your head. These are activities that we would normally be doing in the office as we are move around.

### **3. Plan.**

On the weekend, I prepare my weekly planner and highlight what activities are urgent and important. Having that structure helps me to maintain focus. As noted above, find the best time to focus, depending on the task.

4. **Set up a quiet space as your work area.**

This helps maintain the separation as much as possible. If my door is closed my children know that mommy is in a meeting, so they cannot interrupt me during that period.

5. **Faith. Be mindful and grateful.**

Wake up earlier to pray and mediate. Faith is important, now more than ever. Have faith that things will get better. I find comfort in the phrase “this too shall pass”.

6. **Share your schedule.**

I communicate with my husband, so that he knows what to expect and he knows certain times when I cannot be interrupted.

7. **Set up virtual playdates.**

I arranged virtual play dates so my daughter can feel she is playing with her friends. My son uses his video game system to connect with his friends. This connection is important for their mental health.

8. **Do not be paranoid about limiting screen time.**

I found educational applications, audio books and educational games that keep them busy while I work.

Of course, this is not an exhaustive list. The days ahead will bring new challenges, especially with the implementation of online classes. However, we must adapt, be flexible and put new measures in place to be able to cope with a very fluid situation. These challenging times have taught me that it is less about control and more about learning, adapting and being resilient.

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