Balance School with Family

How to Mix Parenting with College

Your children may well be the most important concerns in your life, but your studies are important too. How can you give your attention to one without neglecting the other, or pay attention to both without losing your precious sanity?

Believe it or not, there are many strategies you can employ that will make studying when you have children manageable, effective, and even enjoyable!

Pleasure before Business

*Satisfying your child’s needs for warmth, attention and acceptance when you first come home* may mean your child will be less needy later, and will feel secure enough to let you get some uninterrupted work done. Keep the books in your book bag when you first come home. Hug your children, play with them, ask them about their days and tell them about yours. It will be a nice, satisfying break for you too. Then explain that now it is time for you to do some work, and ask for a specific amount of uninterrupted time. Your child, satisfied with a short period of your full attention, may be more apt to reward you with the quiet time you need.

Also, *plan breaks in your study schedule to spend fully focused time with your children*. Take, say, 10-15 minutes every hour to spend with your kids. These short bursts of concentrated quality time are more satisfying than longer periods of scattered attention.

*Children also work well with consistent routines*: set a timer that the children can watch so they know when their times with you will be; establish certain times of the day for quiet work time and one-on-one time. Let children know your schedule, or involve them in the process of creating it, then stick to it and enforce it: consistency builds security and habit. Reward your children when they stick to the schedule, whether with some quality time or with something more tangible like stickers on a chart, small treats, or special activities, like helping you bake a cake.

Make Studying a Reward

Special activities, certain toys, educational videos or television, etc. can all be used as rewards for your children, incentives for them to give you uninterrupted study time. Once your children begin to associate your study with the reward, your study time may come to be seen as a pleasant experience rather than an activity that takes you away from them. Try one or more of the following ideas, and think about doing them or allowing them **only** when you study:

*Make your study space child safe and fill it with special toys*. Then the children can play near you with a minimum of supervision. Alternately, have a similar space separate from
your study area where your child or children can play safely and you can check in on them periodically.

*Have movies for your children that you only allow them to watch when you study.* If you are worried about TV turning your child’s mind to mush, record educational programs (e.g. Sesame Street, Street Cents) and allow your child to watch them only when you are studying. Alternately, schedule your study sessions around the times when there are educational programs on television.

**Plan Your Learning Activities So That You Do the Less Demanding Tasks When Children Are Around**

*Build your study time into your school schedule, when your children are in care.* Arriving at and leaving college 15 minutes earlier and 15 minutes later can add up to 2.5 extra hours of uninterrupted study time per week! Use breaks between classes to go to the library, study texts, write, or any other activity that requires sustained concentration.

*Plan to do learning activities that can be interrupted when you are with your kids.* Write out or study flash cards, re-write lecture notes or make note summaries, write out your title page or bibliography, etc.

*Just do something.* You can’t always focus as well as you would like when children are around; that can be frustrating, but don’t let your frustration stop you from doing something. If you can’t concentrate enough to read a chapter, skim it, or just read the introduction or conclusion. Read your lecture notes out loud. Do a really rough draft of the first paragraph for your essay. See these less complex tasks as valuable accomplishments that will save you time later.

**Use the Resources Around You**

*Ask other adults for help.* A spouse, a partner, a neighbour, a grandparent or a fellow student may be happy to watch your kids while you study; they want you to succeed. Consider trading child care with other students or neighbours.

*Make use of community activities and services.* Libraries, community centres, schools, etc. often have free supervised activities for children. This can free up time for you to study and can be an enjoyable experience for your child. Check your local community calendar, or call the local public library for information on supervised activities for children.

*Find a playmate for your child.* Children can often entertain each other for hours, with sporadic supervision. You can check on them from time to time and still get lots of work done.
Get Creative; Be Outrageous!

*Make studying a game*
Read your notes aloud to your child while making funny faces and using weird voices. Draw pictures and diagrams of cell structures or molecules, and have your child colour them. Invent rhymes or songs to remember, dates, formulas, lists, etc. and sing them with your child.

*Do something really weird*
Tell your children that they are cops and you are a robber, and you have to spend 2 hours in solitary confinement and are not allowed to talk to anyone. After 2 hours, you must go on trial and be able to explain what you learned. If the kids are not satisfied they can choose to lock you in your study cell for another 2 hour.

*Reverse roles*
Tell your children they get to make you do your homework, and no treats or TV until you are done. I have heard of one parent who sits inside the playpen and studies, while his son is outside playing with toys, tickled by the role reversal.

In conclusion, children do not have to be a barrier to your scholastic success. See them as sources of motivation to succeed, and as partners in your learning. This is your chance to model good study and learning habits for your children, and a chance to have your children share in your learning and success. And always remember: long after your studies are over, your children will still be there. With some effort, love, and creativity you can make your time in college a time you and your children will remember with a smile and with pride.

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