

WORKING FROM HOME – IT'S CHILD'S PLAY

By Donna-Marie Coggins

So, you want to work from home. No boss, no travel to and from work, more time with the kids. It sounds great in theory, but in practise, it can be challenging finding that balance between work and family.

One of the first steps needed is to define your work and home time. Structure your working times around what best suits your children's routine. If you have school-aged children, work from nine to three, take the afternoon off to spend time with them, and then settle back down to work after they have gone to bed.

Map out what you need to do to achieve your goals in each area. Use a weekly planner to set out times for each area of your life. Work out how many hours you need to work uninterrupted and find the time. This may be when the children are in child-care, napping or being bathed and read to by your spouse, if you have one. Just remember that you are working, not catching up on housework.

Discuss your decision to work from home with your children,
including:

- Why you'll be working at home
- Why you may be unavailable to them from time to time
- What this will mean to them (for example child-care)
- How things around the house might change
- What rules to expect

The most common rules to set include:

- Don't let children answer the office phone. If you have only one telephone line, teach them not to use it during business hours. In some cases where the children are older, teach them to answer the telephone correctly and to take messages. They should always answer using your business name, if you have one. Make sure there is *always* a working pen and paper / message pad near the telephone.
- Let them know when they can approach you (for example *not* when you are on the telephone).
- Let them know what areas are out of bounds and what items they can /cannot touch.

- Explain that they need to be quiet when you are on the telephone or have clients in.
- Be consistent — stick to the rules.

Now, how do you occupy the children while you work? You could arrange suitable child-care for a couple of days each week. It's good for children to spend some time socialising with other children and this gives you valuable time to concentrate on work. In addition to regular care, you need a back-up network you can rely on in an emergency. There may be occasions when a child is too ill to go to school / child-care and you have a deadline to meet or function to attend. This back up could avoid a major dilemma.

You can do numerous things while your children are around. Try to involve your children in your business wherever possible. Even younger children will enjoy helping you, even if it is only by attaching stamps to envelopes or helping you to unpack stock.

You do not need to wait until your children are older to help in your office. You can set up a mini desk in or near your workspace. Make sure you also provide coloured pencils and paper, an assortment of other stationery items, a calculator and a toy telephone. This will keep children

happy for hours and you can work while still involved with their activities. When you need to run errands make sure you go when your children are not tired or hungry. Depending on the type of work you do, you may be able to take them with you to deliver products or run errands.

Then there are the benefits for work-at-home-parents and their children. The benefits for your family may include not having to organise child-care during holidays or if the children are sick, being able to attend events at school, and being home with your children of an afternoon.

With a little organisation (okay, a lot of organisation!) and patience, it *is* possible to work from home with your children. All the people I have spoken to agree that the benefits far outweigh the negatives, for you and your family.