TELEWORKING WITH CHILDREN

Many colleagues shared how difficult it is to telework while taking care of their young children, supervising the home schooling of older children, mediating quarrels between siblings, keeping children entertained and taking care of the household at the same time!

These guidelines aim to help you and your family to face these challenges in times of uncertainty, fear and increased stress and anxiety.

The situation we are currently experiencing is completely new and confusing for all of us, but even more for our children. We suddenly find ourselves having different roles in one common environment[1]. Apart from being a parent, we also are our children's teacher and at the same time an employee working from home. Children are exposed to the potentially high stress and anxiety levels in the adults around them and also, depending on their age, to large amounts of information on the COVID 19 crisis around the world.

General considerations

In order to soften the confusion of roles and bring the child some predictability and reassurance, it is important first, to communicate on this new situation[2] and to maintain as much as possible the previous structure of your working day and of their school day.

What do you do WHEN? It is important that the child understands the sequence of the day. For example: After breakfast, going for a walk or do physical activities in house, then doing the homework, followed by having lunch together, etc. In order to help your child getting used to this new schedule it is advisable to stick to the same routine during the whole working week.

What do you do WHERE? Define where the different activities will take place. For example: homework in the bedroom, teleworking in the dining room, playing in the garden, reading on the sofa, etc. For smaller children you might work with corners like in kindergarten: corner to play with dolls, corner to paint, corner to construct houses, etc.

What do you do TOGETHER/ALONE? It is important to switch between time alone and time together. The children need to understand that mom/dad need to work undisturbed and that there will be quality time all together also. Therefore, it is important to think through what the children can do alone, so that they can keep themselves busy. For small children it is important to offer clear choices, not just "go play with your toys" but "are you going to draw?" or "are you going to play with the dolls?".
You can also demonstrate visually that time alone really means alone, for example by sticking a paper with a red or green light at your door or desk to show clearly when they should not disturb you.

To be most efficient while teleworking with children, you have to **define what works best in your specific situation**. This will depend on the age of your children, the amount of supervision and care they need, your specific biorhythm, the space available, if your partner is also teleworking and whether you can get additional external support.

Some of you can feel guilty because they will not be able to take care of their children as they would like to. You need to realise and **accept that you can't be as good a parent as you want to be. You can also not deliver as well and as much as in the Office**. Agree with your **Head of Unit what your priorities are** and which tasks are most urgent and important. You should also agree on a daily or weekly basis on which tasks and responsibilities you will focus.

The vademecum for managers on the **applicable measures during COVID-19**[3] provides useful information on the **teleworking modalities while caring for young children/home schooling**, about special leave for staff members with a dependent child with a disability, on part time and parental leave procedures during this specific period.

[1] "Thuis werken met kinderen: hoe pak je dat aan?" from Sylvia Mommaerts, professor in pedagogy at the Expertise Centre 'Education & Development' at UCLL -
[2] Protecting the psychological health of children through effective communication about COVID -19 – The Lancet – https://doi.org/10.1016/S2352-4642(20)30097-3

[3] https://myintracomm.ec.europa.eu/coronavirus/Documents/Vademecum-for-Managers-v2.pdf

Seven important tips

1. Make a **daily time schedule** and stick to it: agree with your children when it is play or study time for them and working time for you. **Plan breaks together**. Allocate each family member their **specific place** (mum's working desk/ kid's play corner)

2. Try to **arrange shifts with your partner** where one of you takes care of the children while the other can focus on work.

3. If this does not work for you, **consider other possibilities at your disposal**: agree with your manager on working half a day and taking half a day annual leave, agree on different core hours, use part time working formula or parental leave. If you need it, take some days off to "recharge batteries".

4. If your children have to study, **telework and homework can be done at the same time** if they can work independently. It might be easier for everyone if you work in different rooms or use noise control headphones. Agree with them when you will be available for questions or support.

5 **Work when it suits you best:** for some of us, brain works best in the mornings and for others later in the day. Becoming an early riser is an option if your children sleep well. But if that's not the case, you could choose to have some work done later in the evening, when young children are in bed for example; with the agreement of your manager in case of working outside core time.

6. **Share quality moments with your children**: when it is the children's time, you have to engage completely with them. Close the computer, put your phone on silent, it's their time!

   In order to gain time, you can prepare the meals together. They will have fun, be proud to help you, learn new things while spending time with you. You can then share the mealtime with the whole family together. You could also ask your teenagers preparing the lunch while you are teleworking…Who prepares the meal is allowed to decide what's for dinner!

7. **Go for a walk with them: exercise is good for all of you and they will be calmer…** Going for long walks is a way to wear them out while charging up your batteries at the same time! If not authorised due to the quarantine limitations, do some physical exercise at home. You will find many funny ideas on the Internet!

What support can you get?

Teleworking with children can be particularly difficult depending on your specific situation.

The **Psychosocial Sector** (psychiatrists, psychologists, social assistants, budget counsellor) in Unit HR D3 are there to support you individually in this challenging situation. You can contact us by phone 02/29 88000 or by email HR BXL EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE

Help for exhausted parents: phone support line for parents - UCL psychologists – Tel 0471/414 313.

SOS PARENTS – 0471/414.333 – from 8 am to 20 pm - 7 days/7

SOS ENFANTS 02/542.14.10

HELP LINE 02/477 20 30 – Psychologists – from 9 am to 5 pm – 7 days/7