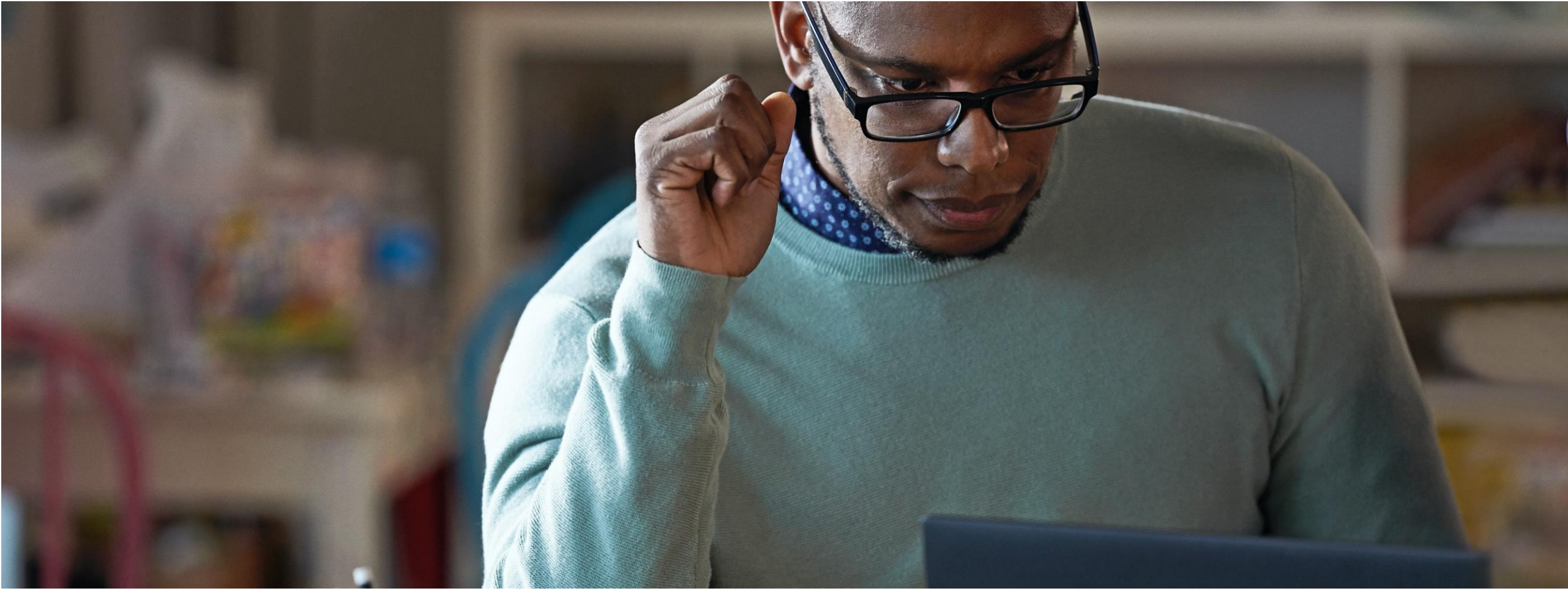
Working from home with children

Balancing work and childcare

With schools and daycares closed due to COVID-19, many of you are finding yourself at home trying to balance work and childcare.

Working from home with children brings its own set of challenges that can cause increased stress on parents. To help you, we've collected shared practices from parents on how to balance work and childcare.

We acknowledge that every family and situation is different, but we hope you'll find the tips helpful.



General tips for working from home with children

Put your family and health first

We encourage you to find the right balance in these challenging circumstances.

Put family and health first

Be gentle on yourself and don't stress over whether you are being perfect during this time. It's a difficult and new situation for all of us, and it's important to put your health and family first.

Communicate with your manager

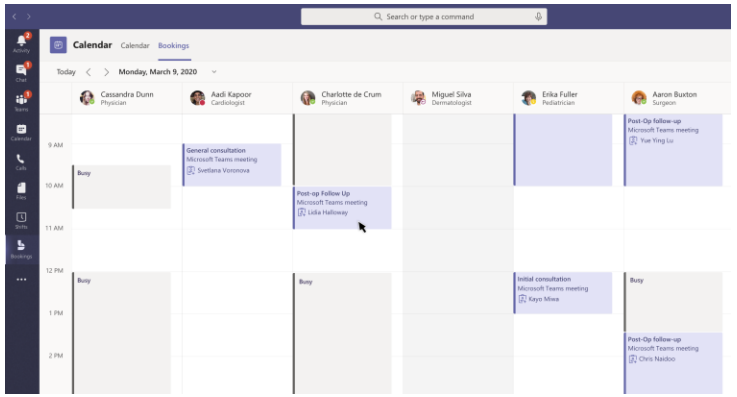
While you should do your best to perform regular work from home, managers should understand that you may not be able to accomplish everything you had expected to. Talk to them about your workload and agree on expectations or changes in priorities.

Make a plan with your entire family

Discuss as a family how best to manage schedules.

Share the load

If there are more than one responsible adult, parent, or caregiver in the house, consider dividing the day into shifts. That way, each of you will get a block of time to yourself or to focus on work.



Communicate as a family

Share your calendar with your partner or other family members so you are aware of when there are previously planned meetings or activities. Include time for set aside for household needs, family time, and me time.

Consider a routine

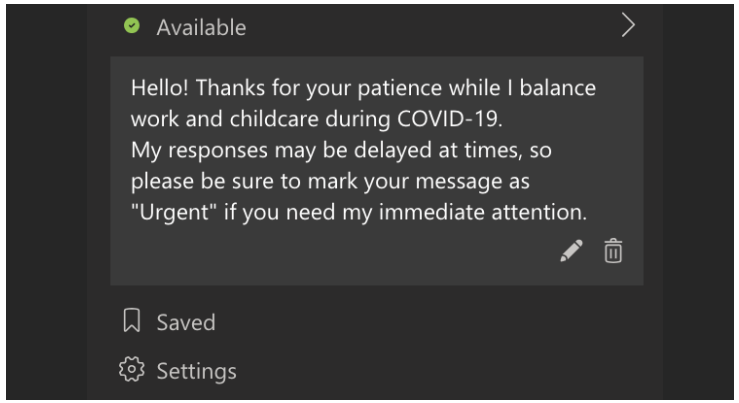
It can help to establish a routine (with room for changes) to set expectations with children and other adults. Don't forget to carve out breaks to spend time with your entire family, including times for outdoor activities, breaks for meals, and more.

Share your Outlook calendar with other people

Use shared family calendars in Outlook.com to share the schedule with the entire family.

Communicate with your stakeholders

Set expectations with your team and stakeholders on your availability. Don't feel you need to apologize for your modified hours, this is a unique situation and we're all doing our best.



Communicate your availability

Communicate availability through i.e. a status message in Microsoft Teams, an OOF message in Outlook, or by blocking offline hours on your calendar. If your schedule changes frequently, let people know that your responses might be delayed and how to reach you with anything urgent or who to contact instead.

Share updates regularly

Communicate any changes to your stakeholders and regularly provide updates on your deliverables so that they can plan work on their side accordingly. Be sure to share only with those who need to know to make it easy for others to prioritize.

Make meetings count

To prioritize your time, ask for a meeting agenda ahead of time, and determine if you are a required or optional attendee. Schedule meetings to conclude five minutes before the end of the hour or half hour to avoid uninterrupted back-to-backs.

Set a status message in Teams and update your calendar to indicate if you are free or busy.

Start using Planner in Teams to organize and prioritize action items across a group of people.

Tips for working from home with newborns and toddlers

Newborns and toddlers

Be flexible about your workspace and explore options to be productive without always having to be in front of your laptop.

Go wireless

Consider wireless headphones so you can join a call hands-free while tending to your baby when needed. This is a great option when you have meetings that don't require you to be in front of your laptop.

Walking meetings

Try taking a call while going on a stroller walk with your little one. Not only is this a great way for you and your child to get some fresh air, but you also get some physical activity.

Have a baby monitor?

During nap time, leverage a baby monitor to keep track of your children while taking care of some work or other tasks at home.

Please note: These are practices shared by parents at Microsoft. We understand that every family and situation is different and not all may be applicable to you. Please do what works best for your family.

Try Teams Meetings on mobile to conduct check-ins and get outside.

Tips for working from home with elementary-age children and teenagers

Elementary-age children, pre-teens, and teenagers

Engage your children in fun-filled activities and adjust your environment to create focus time.

Communicate with your children

Let your children know that you will be working during certain hours and set boundaries. Develop a signal for them to understand that right now is not a good time and practice it with them.

Try new games and activities

Engage your children in autonomous arts and crafts projects (puzzles, sticky mosaics, Legos) to keep them entertained; set a timer and let them know you'll discuss what they've created once time is up.

Block out background noise

If you are able to trade off childcare with another person, try using noise cancelling headphones, a white noise app/ playlist, etc. to maximize concentration and avoid unintended distraction.

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In Teams Meetings, try out the background blur option.

Elementary-age children, pre-teens, and teenagers

Encourage autonomous learning and activities, and consider new ways to engage your older children, while checking in often.

Find the right balance

Strike a balance between "screen-off" and "screen-on" time periods. Encourage going outside, reading, or journaling, but realize there is great content to be consumed across devices.

Explore popular virtual experiences

Offer new digital learning experiences, such as virtual museum tours, farms, or the solar system.

Get them moving!

Encourage kids and teenagers to be active by committing to exercise breaks together (i.e., yoga, meditation, moderate circuit training exercises).

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Schedule breaks in your calendar to check in with your children.

Get to know the Office 365 distance learning tools made to support learners of all ages and abilities, and see how your child's core subjects and class discussions can happen virtually with support from Microsoft Education.

Resources

Resources for all ages

- LinkedIn Live Q&A—working from home with children
- Microsoft Family Learning Center—collection of free learning experiences for ages 3 to 12
- Microsoft family fun activities—puzzles, drawing challenges, doodling, and more
- Activities for all ages (long)—a compilation of various activities across math, reading, history, and more
- Free worksheets—printable worksheets for a variety of subjects
- Khan Academy—online learning platform with engaging topics for all ages
- 75 indoor activities—activities for learning, imagining, and exploring with children
- Virtual field trips—virtual explorations of zoos, museums, monuments, and more
- Online small group classes—over 10,000 online classes ranging from tech to writing
- Home management and childcare tips—guidance on managing your home, and resources for additional assistance

Resources for elementary-age children

- Learn at home: Pre–K-K, grades 1–2, grades 3–5, grades 6+—educational materials from Scholastic that cover an array of subjects
- Arts and crafts and activities for indoor and outdoor entertainment—fun, creative projects that pique new interests
- Art projects brought to you by Arts for Kids Hub—fun art activities that engage the artistic side of the brain

Resources for pre-teens and teens

- Journaling or guided mediation—Practices to promote self-care and awareness
- Virtual museum tours, virtual park tours—tours of museums or national parks right from the living room
- Radiolab, Forever Ago, or Science Friday—educational and storytelling podcasts
- Kid-friendly documentaries—Science, nature, and history documentaries that you can stream on Netflix

Please note: the resources listed include external links, Microsoft does not own or control the content.

Learn more

Find general tips in the Working From Home Guide