



ARC

ACADEMIC RESOURCE CENTER
at Harvard University

LEARNING ONLINE

working around family



Social distancing measures are closing schools and workplaces. We recognize that students will have to share space with parents and siblings and may be called on to provide childcare.

Here are some ideas for managing these challenges.

- First, **tell your instructors about the challenges you're facing at home** and any concerns you have about how they might impact your coursework. They may have tips for how to engage with their courses; at the very least, they will be aware of your situation.
- **Create a family schedule at breakfast each day.** Try to establish necessary "quiet times" for each family member and have a different person responsible for each meal. Even young children can help with this.
- You may be responsible for caring for siblings. If so, **try a sibling meet up!** Call a friend who also has siblings on FaceTime or Google Hangouts, and let your siblings talk to each other while you both work.
- **Try developing a block schedule** with your family. It may make sense to stagger work times: if your parents or other members of your household have an easier time getting up in the morning, ask if they can start their work early, while you do childcare half asleep. Then they can do childcare in the evening, allowing you to work at night.
- Children won't react well if everything is about work. **Have some fun time blocks**, and let your siblings plan them. Does your family enjoy puzzles? Have you all seen Frozen II? Participate in these to the extent you can, but if they are running well, sibling fun time may be a chance for you to sneak away and get a break.



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- Younger kids love imaginative play and challenges. Try to **come up with activities that will keep siblings occupied for short blocks of time**. For instance, you might tell your siblings that their toys are in danger and that they are superheroes who have to keep them safe by hiding them in storage bins. Turning mundane activities into games can keep kids engaged.
- **Schedule screen time into your day intentionally**. This is usually a time when everyone in the house can get work done, so try to help everyone benefit from it. Download educational games, so that you can increase sibling screen time as needed. If you don't need your phone to Zoom into class, put the games on it for your siblings. Bonus - you won't be tempted to check your phone during your work since a sibling will be using it!
- **Use rewards to incentivize kids to follow instructions**. Putting screen time at the end of the day, or having a stash of special snacks that kids earn for good behavior, can help stir-crazy kids have something to look forward to.
- **Reassess frequently**. Conditions are changing rapidly, and what works one week might not work the next. Communication is key with family *and* instructors.
- Try to schedule time away from everyone each day, even a 15-minute walk outdoors will help. If that isn't possible, try doing **a daily "peaceful time" with everyone in the house**. Set up siblings in their beds with books, play meditation music from YouTube, and set a timer for 30 minutes.
- Be gentle with yourself and **find opportunities for self care**. Recognize that working from home is stressful and that current conditions are putting a strain on everyone. Make sure you have a time you plan to quit work each day and stick to it. Then, do something relaxing.

Remind yourself - this won't last forever. That doesn't mean it isn't incredibly hard. If you're struggling to find strategies that work for you, **reach out to the Academic Resource Center** and book an appointment with an Academic Coach. Coaches can help you create solutions for your unique situation and can troubleshoot how to talk to faculty about the challenges you're facing. You aren't alone!