

## **Mom In Hiding: Minimizing Family Interruptions When You Work at Home**

Other parents often tell me I'm lucky to work at home, and they're right. The commute is awesome, every day is casual Friday, and I have lots of time with my kids. Of course, that means every day is also Take Your Child to Work Day, and sometimes it's difficult to balance family and deadlines.

Luckily, I have a few tips for maintaining a home-based career despite children who aren't yet old enough to be in school all day. (These might also help if your children *are* school-aged but have a rotating schedule of holiday breaks, teacher inservice days, snow days, early-release days, sick days, etc.)

1. **Work while they sleep.** When my kids were pre-schoolers, I spent their nap times writing. This meant sacrificing hours I could've spent cleaning the house, but I was willing to pay that heavy price. If your kids are young enough to go to bed 8-9 p.m., maybe working a few nights a week is a possibility. There are nights I don't open my manuscript file until almost eleven. On the plus side, this minimizes *all* interruptions. No one is mowing the neighbor's lawn or trying to sell me cookies while I work.

The major downside is that if you sacrifice too much sleep, it will take a toll on your health. Trust me. I've field-tested this approach. If you need a late night write-a-thon, try to schedule it ahead of time and plan accordingly.

2. **Reward good behavior.** Ignoring your kids all day is bad parenting, but asking for an hour or two is reasonable. Give them a goal. Set a timer and let them know that if no one bothers you before it goes off, you'll all play a board game, have an ice cream break, or go to a matinee. This may also work with a spouse who's feeling neglected. Plan out specific writing time and make a point of scheduling something afterward, even if it's just watching a favorite TV show or sharing a

candlelight dessert. These breaks are not only good for your relationships but recharging yourself.

3. **Reward bad behavior.** “Mommy is going to hide now. The first one to find me wins all the Brussels Sprouts at dinner!”
4. **Have laptop, will travel.** Sometimes, kids are unruliest when they’re bored. If they’re getting stir-crazy, consider hitting the road. Can you work at a park? At a shaded table poolside? Obviously, don’t let a toddler run around unsupervised, but if your kids are old enough and you can find a contained location where you can keep an eye on the progeny between projects, go for it. (I once blocked out shrieking kids and the electronic din of countless games long enough to write a chapter at a pizzeria/arcade. This is an advanced technique that requires significant aspirin.) If having your family underfoot during the weekend is challenging, consider packing up your earbuds and laptop and fleeing to the nearest coffee house or library.
5. **Wear the little suckers out first.** Start the day with something active, then pop in a DVD afterwards while you steal an hour or so to work. If you walk the zoo, go for a long bike ride, etc. you get the benefits of quality time *and* exercise. Many writers are far too sedentary. Plus, you might be surprised at how much story-work your subconscious achieves away from the computer.
6. **Keep props by your laptop.** When the kids interrupt you, rather than remind them for the umpteenth time that you’re trying to work, cheerfully greet them with, “I’m glad you’re here! I need you to take this envelope to the mailbox for me.” Or “Can you take my empty cup to the kitchen? Go ahead and unload the dishwasher while you’re there.” (Or make them bring you a prop. “Can you bring me the phone? I should really schedule your next dentist appointment.”) After several of these requests, I no longer have to hide from the kids. They hide from me.

7. **Invite even MORE kids over.** This sounds extreme, but it can work, especially if you have an only child who interrupts out of a need for interaction. My two kids have raised bickering to performance art, so half of my interruptions are referee duty. But if I let them each have a friend over, they happily retreat to their separate corners. (Arranging a play-date for only *one* of them, however, just creates third-wheel, feeling-left-out disruptions.) If you're lucky enough to know someone with the same number of kids in similar age ranges, plan to swap off host duties, which gives you both a few free hours during the week.
  
8. **Get them involved.** In my parenting experience, my picky eaters are more likely to try an "undesirable" food if they helped cook it. In the same vein, they seem to respect my work process more if they feel connected to it. My kids have helped me pick out names for my characters. My middle school son earned three dollars typing one of my Dear Reader letters, dictated by me while I packed for a conference. Finding ways to share your job with them makes them feel important and gives them a reason to support your work.

Whatever methods of carving out time work best for you, know that you're setting a valuable example. By demonstrating perseverance and a strong work ethic, you're giving your kids tools that will help them succeed at home, in an office, and throughout life.