

Working from home while trying to parent? Feel like you're failing at both? You're not alone ^[1]

'I'm doing 50% parenting, 50% of my work': Lack of child care leaves working parents feeling guilty

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EXCERPTS

With regulated child care scarce during the COVID-19 pandemic, the difficulty of working from home while trying to keep children occupied is leaving many parents feeling like they're not doing a great job of either.

Tanya Power of Logy Bay-Middle Cove-Outer Cove says she "kind of [feels] like a failure."

"I feel like I'm doing 50 per cent parenting, 50 per cent of my work," said Power. "I want to be able to focus on my job and focus on my work. But I also want to be focused on parenting," said Power.

Power says her 10-year-old son James is constantly on his iPad or Xbox, which makes her feel like she's not properly taking care of him.

"I could be really busy with emails and things and duties I have to do, where I'm just constantly working, hardly able to lift my head up," she said.

Sometimes at lunchtime, she says, she'll take James for a walk or a bike ride to get out of the house and get some exercise.

You feel guilty as a parent that you can't spend quality time with your child.- Steven Hearn

But Power says her son is an only child who misses his friends, activities and sports. Opening camps and sports would help, she said, but it doesn't seem to be happening soon.

"I don't know if that's realistic right now at this point."

Steven Hearn, a single father raising a five-year-old while working from home, describes the situation as difficult at best.

"You're trying to put in your eight hours a day," he said. "I'm sat at the kitchen table with my laptop all day, and my daughter's here — she's my only child — she's pretty much glued to her iPad all day playing video games or whatnot, or watching videos," he told the St. John's Morning Show Wednesday.

"You feel guilty as a parent that you can't spend quality time with your child."

'Not enough of me to go around'

Patricia Kirby, a lawyer, has two children with special needs who are excited to have their mom at home.

"My son in particular doesn't understand that when Mommy is home she has to work," said Kirby. "So it's been a bit of a challenge balancing work commitments with parenting commitments and we won't even talk about the housework."

On a normal day, Kirby said, she starts checking email between six and seven in the morning, and then the day ramps up.

"I will have conference calls, court calls, paperwork applications to draft, meals to cook," she said.

"If I'm working I'm feeling like a bad parent, if I'm parenting I feel like a bad worker. So I always feel like there's not enough of me to go around."

Kirby says her employer, the courts, and clients have been accommodating and understanding, but the last three months haven't been without hiccups.

"My son started bursting into song one day in the middle of a bail hearing," she said. "I'm not sure if they were entertained, but they seemed to enjoy it."

'Survival mode'

Nadaira Walsh's son Max McGrath is just shy of two years old. She says it's virtually impossible for her to work and parent at the same time because her son is so young.

"You fail at one," she said.

"It's just not really possible to work during the day. So everything has to be done at night."

Walsh says her employer has been understanding.

"It's very much minding to him whenever he's awake, and then trying to work if he takes a nap, which today he didn't." said Walsh. "And so basically from the moment you wake up until you're gone to bed you're on 24/7."

Walsh said the situation is starting to affect her family's mental health.

"Right now it's just kind of a survival mode," she said. "I just want people to be aware of how much people are struggling."

Premier: parents have 'full day' to get work done

The province has extended a child-care program for essential workers until June 26, but other parents working from home can't avail of that child care.

At Monday's COVID-19 briefing, Premier Dwight Ball said people who are working from home have the full day to complete their work, so they can still take care of their kids.

"Most people that do work at home, they have the full day to be able to put that work in place, therefore services could be provided for the second parent," he said.

Power doesn't agree.

On Monday, Ball said the province could review its programs. Walsh said she'd like child care to be an option for parents working from home.

"I might actually be able to get some work done."

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