



Balancing your work commitments and family life is now harder for dads than ever before. Research shows that most men continue to work just as many hours after they have kids. Yet on top of that, studies also reveal that fathers now do three times as much childcare and twice as much housework as dads did back in the 1960s.

In order to survive and thrive, you need to find a way to manage these competing responsibilities. Use these tactics to make life easier and regain control.

1. LEARN TO SWITCH GEARS

Blame it on the precarious job market or that looming deadline, but it's often hard not to bring work stress home with you. The problem is that anxiety can prove contagious as you transmit the tension onto your family.

In order to park your stress at the end of the working day, it can help to find a personal routine to shift your headspace into dad mode. "You need to have a transition ritual between work and home," says Dr Sarah Robuck, Gidget Foundation Australia Clinical Psychologist.

Your switch-off routine could involve listening to a podcast on your commute, stopping off at the gym or simply getting out of your work clothes and having a shower when you return home. Your chosen ritual is entirely up to you, but doing it regularly will train your brain that you're mentally clocking off from work.

2. LEARN TO LOG OFF

The avalanche of work emails never stops. But while logging on after hours might keep your boss happy, it's bad news for your personal wellbeing. A recent study from Virginia Tech found that workers who responded to emails after hours had higher levels of anxiety and dissatisfaction <https://vtnews.vt.edu/articles/2018/08/pamplin-employer-emailexpectations.html>

It's up to you to set your boundaries and protect your downtime. Make a rule that you won't check your emails after a certain time each night. "Turn off your email notifications and set up an automatic response to any emails sent after 6pm saying that you'll respond to them as soon as possible the next day," Dr Robuck advises.

Establishing these parameters can help you to become more "present" and less distracted when you're spending time with your kids.

3. TALK IT OVER

A recent report from the Australian Institute of Family Studies shows that only one in three dads works flexible

hours. But if you don't talk to your employer about what's on offer and keep them informed of your family situation then you might be missing a trick.

Speak to your boss or HR manager to find out about your organisation's parental leave and flexible work policies. Maybe you can work from home one day a week or tweak your shifts to get away earlier? You'll never know until you ask. The government also has a range of resources (link to <https://supportingworkingparents.humanrights.gov.au/>) designed to support you at this tricky stage of life.

"You need to create these open communication pathways with your employer to be able to discuss what you actually need," Dr Robuck says.

4. ORGANISE REINFORCEMENTS

Sadly, work doesn't slow down just because you've had a baby. Whether it's the deadline for a big project or you're trying to win a vital deal, there'll inevitably be times when your job's intensity cranks up. That's unavoidable but you can take active steps to limit the fallout with your family. "If you know you've got a heavy period of work ahead, take the initiative to organise some extra help for your partner," Dr Robuck says.

Perhaps you could line up a food delivery service for that week? Or call upon your family or friends to step in as an extra pair of hands? "It's okay to outsource," Dr Robuck says. "You're not expected to do everything yourself. Rope other people in."

5. ANTICIPATE THE CHAOS

Early fatherhood is incredibly demanding in terms of both your time and energy. Face the facts: you're likely to be physically and mentally stretched so, if possible, don't overload yourself with extra responsibilities that'll pile on even greater pressure.

"It's worth asking yourself: 'Is it this really a good time to, say, start my own business or take on additional clients?'" Dr Robuck says. "Keep in mind that this is just a temporary stage."

Stay realistic about the challenges of this specific phase of life and try not to exacerbate that strain. Fatherhood is a marathon not a sprint – pace yourself accordingly. ●

