

## Time Management around Kids, by Melinda Brennan

Time management around kids... I can hear every mother who reads that laughing hysterically. When you're a mother you know that time management and kids are two things that don't work well together.

Every time you think you've got your time well planned, the kids manage to throw a spanner in the works and upset all your carefully made plans. And since I posted recently about how [time can't be managed](#), we're going to look at how to use the time you have available around your kids.

In "Time Can't Be Managed", I mentioned a few ways to plan your work so you were spending your available time on the highest priority tasks, however that post is based on the assumption that you have undisturbed time in which to work. Baby's asleep, kids at school or pre-school, they're in bed at night, etc.

What do you do when you've got kids at home all day though? And by the time your kids are in bed, you're a physical and mental wreck from dealing with them all day? That's when you start doing your housework, yes?

I'm fortunate in that my daughter is at school all day, so I have nearly nine full hours of peaceful bliss, alone at home, able to work relatively undisturbed all day. Lest you think that I have no idea what it's like for other mums though, let me tell you that I didn't always have it this easy.

When I started my first business – bookkeeping – I was working three days a week outside the home, running a business from home, studying AND a single mum to a three year old. When I was at home, so also was my daughter. Working around her taught me a lot, which I'm about to share with you.

**1. Prioritise your work** so you know what to work on first. As I mentioned in the previous post on [Time Can't be Managed](#), the most effective action you can take is to work on tasks of high importance.

**2. There's a sewing book that is titled "Five, Ten, Fifteen Minutes to Sew"** and the premise is that you divide your sewing into tasks that will take that long to do. When you have five minutes, grab something from the five minute list and so on. This technique is brilliant for work at home mums.

For those moments when you don't have enough time to work on your high priority tasks, know what you need to do that will take only a few minutes. Or can be picked up for a few minutes and then put back down. Filing, writing lists, planning blog posts, all can be done in short spurts of time.

**3. Plan your work around your child's schedule.** There's no point attempting to work your kids around your business schedule. You'll drive yourself crazy and end up with cranky kids.

Know when your kids are most active, and when they'll quiet down. Know what tasks you can do while they're in the room – not high concentration tasks – so you can keep an eye on them while you work. If they're crawlers, put them in a playpen with some special toys that don't get used too often. Plan your work around their sleep and waking schedules, but keep it flexible – we all know kids keep their own schedule.

**4. Plan the time that you spend with your kids.** Make the face-to-face time that you have with them valuable. If you absolutely have to go with Quality over Quantity then be sure it's high quality time. Also, when you're with your kids BE WITH THEM! Don't spend your time with them distracted, thinking of work, or only half there. They deserve your time and full attention more than your business does.

Kids need both quality and quantity time, but there are some days when we're facing concrete deadlines and have to settle for quality. Be aware of how often you do this, if it's becoming regular then you need to revise your workload.

**5. Older kids can be involved in what you're doing.** Running a business from home is a great way to develop the entrepreneurial mindset in kids. Set them jobs and pay them for it. Shredding, simple filing, tidying, stuffing envelopes, kids from about age eight (depending on the child) are quite capable of simple tasks. Melissa from Business Mums Network has produced a AUD\$5 report on **Job Lists For Kids** if you want to read more about this and get more great ideas.

**6. Know your own natural rhythms.** Night owl or early bird? Knowing when you do your best work is invaluable. Take a look at yourself over the next few days, when do you find it easiest to do the hard thinking work? When do you work best on tasks that require physical work like packing products? When do you need to do something that requires movement but not thinking such as filing? I know for myself, that hour between 6.00 and 7.00am is my best writing time. I get more done then, and better quality, than at any other time of the day.

**7. Include school holidays in your business calendar.** Know in advance if you're going to send them to holiday care, have them home, or at a friends house. Schedule your own work around that, and do as much in advance as you can. Alternatively, I know a couple of work at home moms who simply take the school holidays off work. If you can afford it then this can be a great solution. I cut down my work days during the holidays, so I work less days and shorter days. Find a balance that works for you.

**8. Recognise that there are going to be days that just go totally cattaumpus.** The kids are sick, the washing machine floods the laundry (and hallway and bedroom – yes, really, this happened last week), your husband has a day off unexpectedly and wants to spend it with

you, one of the pets has to go to the vet (happened here yesterday and ruined my entire day).

There are going to be days when life just smacks you upside the head and you're seeing stars. If you had an office job you'd take the day off and forget about work. Just because we work at home, for some reason we try and keep on with business as usual. Give yourself permission to take the day off when you need to.

**9. Turn your answering machine on to pick up calls when the kids are around.** You're a professional business person; it's just that your office is located at home. When the little darlings are crying, playing or talking to you, you can't hear nor concentrate to talk to a client on the phone.

And we all know how as soon as we're on the phone the kids get louder and try to get our attention. Save your sanity and look professional at the same time. Turn on your answering machine and return calls when you're alone.

**10. Be realistic about how much time you have to work with.** I've said it before and I have no doubt I'll say it again many times over. Know how much time you really have to fill with work. If you don't have enough time then something has to change.

Generally work at home mums tend to give up sleeping first, or give up time with their partners. Both of these have very bad consequences. Sleep attrition makes everyday life so much harder to handle, and divorce is a horrible thing to go through. Your family has to come first, know how much time you have to work with and keep it in sensible perspective to your family.



**Mel Brennan** is an international Business Coach who specialises in Work at Home Mums (or Moms, if you're in the US) and at-home businesses. You can check out her website at [SuperWAHM](http://superwahm.com) – don't we all want to be SuperWAHMs? Connect with her on [Twitter](#) and say Hi, or read the blog at <http://superwahm.com/articles>