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4 Common Situations Working Parents Face—and How to Deal with Each One

By Elizabeth Alterman, The Muse.com



Working moms and dads know juggling parenting and professional responsibilities is a delicate balancing act on the best days. Throw in a few complicated but inevitable family emergencies and it becomes even trickier.

For example, if I had a dime for every time one of my sons came down with a stomach virus while I was working on a tight deadline, I could retire right now. And why do parent-teacher conferences and holiday concerts just happen to be scheduled between 10 AM and 1 PM during the busiest week of the year?

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Of course, you want to do a great job as both a parent and an employee but managing it all can leave you feeling like you're straddling a great divide. And that's why I'm sharing not only my own best advice (learned on the job!), but also top strategies from an expert.

Here's some advice on how to navigate four common situations:

1. Your Child's Sick and You're Not Going to Be in the Office

Whether your child wakes up under the weather or you get that dreaded call from the school nurse midday, you may have no other option but to stay home or leave the office.

Amber Rosenberg—a professional life, career, and executive coach at [Pacific Life Coach](#)—says being transparent is key.

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“State that you understand it's not ideal and you're disappointed that you can't be there for the big meeting or presentation or whatever it is that you're missing,” she advises. And, go to your manager with “solutions, not problems.” Figure out who will step in, how you can still be available and present, and what work needs to be pushed back or delegated.

With the assistance of technology, I've been able to participate in many meetings while fulfilling my mom/nurse duties from home. While it's not the same as being in the office, it's better than missing a crucial update or letting the team down.

2. It's Your Child's Concert/Play/Birthday and You're Going to Miss It

In this situation, accept that you'll feel torn, says Rosenberg—and that's OK.

“You're going to have guilt as a working parent, the key is managing it and keeping [it] in check. Bring it out of the shadows and notice it when it comes up but do something before you go down that spiral,” she says. “Come up with a more empowering thought. Instead of feeling guilty, think about how you're a role model for your kids. Recent research shows real benefits for children of [parents] who work.”



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check.



If you can, find ways to still be involved in the event, even from your office—whether it's having a relative send videos or taking a quick break to give your child a call. Those little doses could be just what you need to keep your spirit up. I recently missed my son's piano recital and it broke my heart. But, I was able to catch the whole performance via FaceTime and congratulate my mini Mozart soon after he took his final bow.

3. You Have a Family Emergency Minutes Before a Presentation

Rosenberg says she often encounters people who are unfamiliar with the hurdles working parents face. So, she suggests, “it's important to educate them proactively.”

“I'm a big believer in transparency from [the] get-go,” she explains. “You can say, ‘During these hours I put my kids to bed or pick up my kids from childcare, but I will make up those hours. And...things are [bound to] happen and there may be times when I have to leave very quickly.’ Engage them on how you should best work on that together.”



The key is for your boss and team to know when and how you're accessible, what you're working on, and what you need help covering.



With any emergency, in-the-moment communication is crucial—where you're going and how long you'll be gone. And if possible, be available or online while you're out.

4. Your Child's Upset or in Trouble But You Can't Leave

Two years ago, I was at my office, a 90-minute commute away from my home, when I received a text from my son: "Do you have a few minutes to talk?" Because this was out of character, I knew it probably wasn't good news. When I called him, he was very upset about an incident involving a teacher and a student in one of his classes.

"What if I'm called to the principal's office as a witness? What if the police get involved?" His list of concerns grew, and while I wanted to comfort him, I knew the clock was ticking back at my desk.

I assured him that we'd figure it all out together, but first I needed to finish my work. The quicker I could do that, the faster I could return home to discuss the whole situation in person. It wasn't a perfect solution, but it allowed us both to move forward until we were together and had more time to talk.

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Whether your child calls you crying or you receive a call from the school principal about an

upsetting incident, it can be hard to focus on work. If leaving isn't an option, it's important and helpful to take a few moments for yourself rather than attempting to bulldoze through it, advises Rosenberg.

"The more you try not to think about it, the more you will, so take some time before going back to work," she says.

She suggests giving yourself a time limit to process your emotions before returning to your desk and taking long, slow breaths to establish a sense of calm.

"Think, 'I'm going to feel this for five minutes,' and then return to your desk. You may find that when you get back into it, your work is a good distraction," she says. Reassure yourself that the problem *will* get solved, even if you can't resolve it in the moment.

Dealing with family emergencies while working isn't fun or easy but having strategies in place can at least minimize the stress—and ensure you're there for your child and your job's taken care of.

Even when I'm immersed in a project, I always have an ear out for a call from one of my kids or the school nurse. In fact, knowing that a crisis can arise, a carpool can collapse, and an illness may strike at any moment inspires me to be as productive and proactive as possible.



When Elizabeth Alterman isn't searching for a full-time job, she's writing about it. The writer, editor, and mom of three also recently completed a memoir chronicling the period she and her husband lost their jobs simultaneously.