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Working from home is a productivity 'disaster'

Natasha Boddy *Work & Careers reporter*



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"I was on a leadership meeting presenting and my daughter walked right behind the camera and said 'I just had the scoot of my life' and fell to the ground in a very melodramatic fashion."

If you're a parent who is suddenly having to [work from home with children](#), you can probably sympathise with PayPal senior executive Alison O'Brien.

"It just felt as though overnight, my husband and I went from being parents and full-time workers to also being teachers, so we've had to adapt on the fly," the Sydney mum said.



PayPal Australia executive Alison O'Brien works with her daughter under her desk.

While working from home with kids can have entertaining moments ([remember BBC dad Robert Kelly](#)), it can be a productivity disaster, according to Nicholas Bloom, a professor of economics at Stanford University.

[He told the Stanford News](#) his four-year-old daughter regularly bursts into the room shouting 'doodoo' – her nickname for him – in the middle of conference calls.

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"The other massive distraction for me is my son learning to play the bagpipes (my wife is Scottish)," the married father-of-four told *AFR Weekend*.

"They are incredibly loud – about the same noise level as Concord taking off in your garden – and since he is learning, it's the same song over and over again."

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Professor Bloom, who has studied remote work, warns [working from home](#) is creating a collapse in investment and believes the long-run economic damage is going to be huge.

He said innovation – the main driver of long-run US growth – has stopped, while another engine of growth – trade and immigration – had also taken a huge hit.

"Months of isolation at home is going to be incredibly destructive," he said.

"Beyond the huge economic damage this is going to create a mental health crisis, which will exact its own personal and economic toll."

'It's not forever'

Working parents will be feeling a lot of pressure, but it was important that stress did not take over, said Anne Hollonds, psychologist and director of the Australian Institute of Family Studies.

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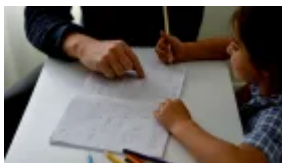
"The children are there, the TV is on, the kids are playing games, it's noisy and difficult, the internet is bad. Some of them are living in shared spaces ... they're frustrated," Ms Folley said.

The key to working at home with kids is structuring your day, according to Stefan Volk, a father-of-two and associate professor at the [University of Sydney Business School](#).

"From my own experience, this is a highly demanding, challenging situation where you have extra stresses and extra things to integrate into your daily work," he said.

"What I've found for myself, and what our research indicates is, it's very important to think about how you structure your day in particular when you have kids at home.

"Most people have a good understanding of when they perform at their best so they should really try to put away 2-3 hours where they have the time to fully focus at work even if that means putting the kids in front of the TV or iPad."



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Planning ahead is key to surviving the months ahead, especially if children will have to [study from home when school returns](#).

"I take half an hour on Sundays, because I've found that once the day gets going, I don't have a lot of time to work out what's the next activity," Ms O'Brien said

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Dr Volk said people should manage their expectations and not place too much pressure on themselves to achieve their normal workload on top of having to entertain and educate their children.

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