

Professional Perspective

# Tips for Working Parents Practicing Law During a Pandemic

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# Tips for Working Parents Practicing Law During a Pandemic

Contributed by [Jacqueline Tio, Fish & Richardson](#)

Practicing law amid a pandemic is more demanding than ever. The traditional boundaries of work and home are arguably gone. Depositions are scheduled and completed with fewer than a couple days' notice, and the perceived availability of an attorney now rises and falls with the internet connection.

To some, the decision to grow a family under these conditions may seem daunting. While many companies and law firms offer generous parental leave policies, the culture and demands of the job may make deciding to raise a child seem difficult, if not impossible at times.

As you return to work, whether that be in the office or your basement, you may be asking: are my career goals as attainable as I once thought they were? Can I return to my former practice without hurting the relationship I have with my kids? Should I be considering a different line of work altogether?

No single journey as a working parent is the same, and there are factors and dynamics to every parent-child relationship beyond the scope of this article that will surely influence your trajectory. When and if you decide to embark on this new adventure, the following are a few tips for balancing parenthood and law practice during a pandemic.

## Tip #1: Embrace the mindset change of becoming a working parent

Many of the pressures you may feel when returning to work for the first time will likely be self-imposed. You are in the best position to understand your limitations, but you may be the most incentivized to ignore them. For example, you may struggle to tell others you are unavailable during times that before parenthood were routinely filled with meetings. You may also be reluctant to reject new requests for fear of being perceived as less available.

You are not as available to your colleagues as you once were, and that's okay. However, the need to set boundaries is now more important than ever, as traditional lines—such as the need to beat rush hour traffic—may have disappeared. When it comes to being a parent, conflicts will always exist, and always did exist, for those who came before you. Accept that there will be permanent changes in your life and schedule. As much as you and your boss may hate to admit it, you are replaceable. However, to your child, you are irreplaceable.

## Tip #2: Shamelessly take your full parental leave and then some

There is a reason why top companies and law firms have some of the best parental leave policies in the U.S. They clearly acknowledge that you—one of many attorneys seeking to grow a family—add value to your firm. They also acknowledge and respect your decision to grow your family, and want to support you in that regard, with the hopeful expectation that you will not leave them soon after you return.

Some law firms offer ramp-down and ramp-up periods, where the weeks directly preceding and following your leave are cushioned with credited hours that allow you to work less while you adjust to your new life's demands. Absolutely take advantage of all of these policies to give more time to yourself and your family.

As the pandemic has made it harder to isolate work life from home life, you may be tempted to flip open your computer to respond to questions that only you may know the answer to. If you can, strive to truly take parental leave with no interruptions. At the conclusion of your leave, you will be back at work and thanking yourself for doing so.

## Tip #3: Have that discussion with your significant other

We all know the old adage that it takes a village to raise a child. For those of us who have a partner or support person available to do just that, you need to be communicating on how to divvy up responsibilities so that you are not left feeling overwhelmed, stressed, or even a bit resentful. This can be one conversation or it can be several conversations. Directly after the birth of a child perhaps the most unsettling change is having to repeat routines every few hours of your day for months or years on end and discovering previously unknown differences in opinions—ranging from the cleanliness of a pacifier to how to soothe your crying baby.

Once you've returned to work, those stresses don't go away, and may very well be at the forefront of your mind—particularly if you are still working from home. Be realistic about the situation you may be facing, the priorities you want to maintain, and the need to talk about those issues.

#### **Tip #4: Accept that your parenting skills are now also work skills**

Perhaps one of the biggest fallacies regarding working parents is thinking that as a new parent, your ability to do work is now bootstrapped—somehow the relationship between being a parent runs counter to your aspirations of being a successful attorney. This is not the case; being a parent necessarily entails meeting new people and developing new relationships, creating a broader support network that may prove to be a boon to growing your practice.

Being a parent also requires honing in on your communication and teaching skills—skills that overlap with being a good communicator in a big law firm. Effectively communicating to a toddler requires you to think critically about how you structure and preface your statements—techniques used often in the legal field. Being a parent causes you to choose your words more wisely and improve communication skills that you may have otherwise taken for granted. In short, there are some parallels to parenting and to managing relationships in your practice, and these skills can prove to be valuable.

#### **Tip #5: Exploit technology to the fullest**

Society has come a long way in making the lives of working parents easier. This all appeared to slip backward when the pandemic hit, requiring many parents to work from the same house as their partners and children. The all-in-one smartphone is a game changer, but beyond even the phone, there are many new technologies and services out there that are designed to make your life easier.

- Apps can manage your baby's feedings, nap times, and sleep schedule
- Wireless breast pumps can be worn while working, and nursing rooms abound at offices and airports around the country
- Calendaring tools can set appointments and block your schedules across family devices
- Food delivery services can drop-off ready-to-eat meals at your door
- You can easily and affordably conduct routine grocery runs without ever needing to enter a store

To the extent you are able, you should fully embrace the convenience of life in the modern world to help you save time.

#### **Tip #6: Educate yourself on the data**

If you find yourself struggling to maintain a full practice while also taking care of your kids, you are not alone. You are also not the only one trying to find a workable solution. During the pandemic, for example, many of us began to discuss and brainstorm solutions to help working parents trying to manage dual roles at home. Some companies offered:

- Expanded back-up in-home care for longer periods of time
- More paid parental leave to their employees
- Introduced more flexibility into taking parental leave throughout the year
- Offered a full, paid week off to recover from COVID-19
- Scheduled overdue retreats for employees to recharge and reconnect

In view of the pandemic, moreover, many companies and firms are also allocating funds for employees to use for their home offices. These are all examples of data points that you should be aware of and freely use or propose when exploring solutions to your own challenges.