

Studying with Children Underfoot

It is possible to combine effective study time and quality time with children. The following suggestions come largely from students who are also parents. The specific strategies you use will depend on your schedule and the age of your child.

Plan tasks for your child

Silly Putty, Play Doh, Etch-a-Sketch, blocks, coloring books, and other toys can lead your child to creative play. They can also free up study time for you. Gather the toys your child enjoys and keep them on hand. Consider allowing such activities only while you study. This might make the activity even more attractive to your children.

You can set up a desk for the child, just like yours, and even offer rewards for getting his "assignment" done. While he colors, plays with stickers, or flips through a children's book, you can review your notes.

Childproof a room to study in and fill it with toys

Set aside one room or area in your home for children. Remove from it all objects that are unsafe for children and fill it with your child's favorite toys. The goal is a "childproof" area, one where children can roam freely and play with minimal supervision. Again, consider allowing the child in this room only while you study. Study time then becomes a reward.

Allow for interruptions

See if you can arrange for time to study at school before you come home. If you can arrive at school 15 minutes earlier and stay 15 minutes later, you'll squeeze in an extra half-hour of study time that day. Also look for study times between classes.

Build study time into your school schedule

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Use television creatively

Another option is to use television as a baby-sitter when you can control the programming. Rent a videotape for your child to watch as you study. If you're concerned about your child becoming a "couch potato", select educational programs that keep your child active.

See if your child can use headphones while watching television. That way the house stays quiet while you study.

Make it a game

Studying chemistry with a three year old is not as preposterous as it sounds. The secret is to choose the kind of studying that the child can participate in. For instance, use this time to recite. While studying chemistry, make funny faces as you say the properties of the transition elements in the periodic table. Talk in a weird voice as you repeat Faraday's laws. Draw pictures and make an exciting story about the process of titration.

Use kids as an audience for a speech. If you have invented rhymes, poems, or songs to help you remember formulas or dates, teach them to your children. Be playful. Kids are attracted to energy and enthusiasm.

Sometimes children can even act as private tutors. Ask them to hold flash cards for you. Play "school" with your children as teachers and give them questions to ask you.

Ask for cooperation

Tell the child how important studying is to you and how you appreciate his cooperation. Reward him with attention and praise when he is quiet. When they are included in the process, children are less likely to resent school work as something that takes you away from them. Rather, it becomes something you do together.

When you can't do everything, just do something

One objection to studying with children is, "I just can't concentrate. There's no way I can get it all done while children are around." That's OK. Even if you can't comprehend an entire chapter while the kids are running past your desk, you can skim the chapter. Or you could just read the introduction and summary. When you can't get it all done, just get something done.

Caution: If you always study this way, your education may be compromised. Supplement this strategy with others so you can complete crucial tasks.

Attend to your child first

Keep the books out of sight when you first come home. Take 10 minutes to hug your child before you settle in to study. Ask about the child's day. Then explain that you have some work to do. Your child may reward you with 30 minutes of quiet time.

A short time of full, focused attention from an adult is often more satisfying to children than longer periods of partial attention.

Plan study breaks with children

Another option is to take 10 minutes each hour that you study to be with our children. View this not as an interruption but as a study break.

Or schedule time to be with your children when you've finished studying. Let your children in on the plan: "I'll be done reading at 7:30. That gives us a whole hour to play before you go to bed."

Many children love visible reminders that "their time" is approaching. An oven timer works well for this purpose. Set it for 15 minutes of quiet time. Follow that with five minutes of show and tell, storybooks, or another activity for you child. Then set the timer for another 15 minutes of studying, another break, and so on.

Develop a routine

Many young children are lovers of routine. They often feel more comfortable when they know what to expect. You can use this to your benefit. One option is to develop a regular time for studying: "From 4 p.m. to 5 p.m. each afternoon is time for me to do my homework." Let your child know this schedule, then enforce it.

Bargain with children. Reward them for keeping the schedule. In return for quiet time, give your child an extra allowance or special treat. Children may enjoy gaining "credits" for this purpose. Each time they give you an hour of quiet time for studying, make an entry on a chart, put a star on their bulletin board, or give them a "coupon." Let children know that after they've accumulated a certain number of entries, stars, or coupons, they can cash in for a big reward--a movie or trip to the zoo.

Ask other adults for help

This suggestion for studying with children is one repeated throughout the book: Enlist other people in your success.

This can be as simple as asking your spouse, partner, neighbor, or a fellow student to take care of the children while you study. Offer to trade child care with a neighbor: You will take his kids and yours for two hours on Thursday night if he'll take them for two hours on Saturday morning. Some parents start blockwide baby-sitting co-ops based on the same idea.

Find community activities and services

Ask if your school provides a day care service. In some cases, these services are available to students at a reduced cost. Community agencies such as the YMCA may offer similar programs.

You can also find special events that appeal to children. Storytelling hours at the library are one example. While your child is being entertained or supervised, you can stay close by. Use the time to read a chapter or review class notes.

Find a playmate

Another strategy is to find a regular playmate for your child. Some children can pair off with close friends and safely retreat to their rooms for hours of private play. You can check on them occasionally and still get lots of work done

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