

Stay-At-Home-Dads

*The University of Pittsburgh
Office of Child Development*

When he quit his job of 15 years to stay home with his two children, Frank was prepared for life to be different – different, but not turned upside down.

Frank agreed to become a stay-at-home father so that his wife could rebuild a career that was put on hold after the birth of their first child, now eight years old. It was the fair and noble thing to do, he reasoned. Ultimately, it would prove rewarding.

He was correct on all counts. It's just that he didn't anticipate how consuming his new job would be.

During a day at the office, Frank would step out for lunch, take a couple of breaks at the coffee machine, mingle with other adults, engage in adult conversation.

At home, his routine includes getting his third-grader off to school; feeding, playing with, and reading to their two-year-old; dishes, laundry, breakfast, lunch, and supper. No mingling with other adults. No lunches out, no time off.

Adjusting to being a stay-at-home father can be difficult and shouldn't be done with eyes closed.

The work is hard. And there is a lot of it, especially if housework is included. Young children can be very demanding. They need to be fed, changed, played with, read to, comforted, scolded, and never ignored. You are always "on call."

And don't forget the mental strain. Maybe you can handle having to change a diaper in the middle of making lunch. But how about, at the height of chaos, the phone rings and it's the third long-distance service to call that day trying to get you to switch over.

Prepare yourself for distractions. Identify the busiest times of your day and keep those hours manageable. Plan your time loosely enough to accommodate the unexpected.

Time management is especially important if you are juggling caregiving and a home business. A demanding schedule can result in stressful complications when the unexpected arises, such having to take a sick child to the doctor. But the small, frequent interruptions to deal with a child's needs are likely to be the most nagging and frustrating.

Accept both the nature of the task and your new role. You may not be out there conquering the world. But you're raising your children, guiding them, supporting them, giving them a better chance to lead healthy and happy lives. It may well be your most important contribution you'll ever make.

This column is written by Robert B. McCall, Co-Director of the Office of Child Development and Professor of Psychology, and is provided as a public service by the Frank and Theresa Caplan Fund for Early Childhood Development and Parenting Education.