



Tips for Effectively Working From Home





Technology enables us to work closely together, even when we're not physically in the office. Working from home also presents more opportunity for a crossover between work life and personal life. However, it is important to keep some mental separation. Here are a few tips to keep in mind to help you stay on track while working from home.

Create a Schedule

Just like going into an office, you should plan a daily start time when you will be logged on to your computer, ready to work. If you normally drink coffee and listen to a podcast on the way to work, schedule 20 minutes in the morning before opening your computer to have the same mental prep routine that you would otherwise.

It's equally as important to schedule an end time too. If you would normally leave the office at 5:30pm, make sure you shut down your computer at 5:30pm. Don't forget to schedule coffee and lunch breaks throughout the day. It's easy to get caught up in your screen and forget to move or take a mental break.

Reduce Distractions

There are a lot more distractions at home than in an office setting—pets, kids, roommates, laundry, TV, personal phone calls. It's important to save your chores or to-do lists for before or after your scheduled work time. If you know you get distracted when there's any mess around, make sure to clean the night before so that you're ready to start the day without distractions.

Create a Designated Workspace

If you can, set up a designated workspace in a separate room. If you don't have a separate room, find an area with minimum traffic flow or a corner of a room off from the main area. Go to the same designated place everyday so you can focus and maintain your productivity. This also helps signal to those around you, who may be inclined to distract you, that you're in "work mode."

Be cognizant of the workspace that suits you best; some people may need a quiet space, while some prefer music. Create an environment that is most conducive to productivity.

Set Ground Rules With the People in Your Space

Set ground rules with the people in your home. Just as they would not show up at your office asking for favors, set boundaries so they do not do it while you're working at home. Communicate your work hours and let them know that you won't be available outside of your scheduled breaks. Also, share your meeting schedule ahead of time to ensure that you have a quiet space when on video calls. Lastly, ask them to respect the designated workspace you've established and not use it for other purposes.



Ask for What You Need

It's important that you're able to perform your job even while not in the office. What documents, databases, and systems do you use in the office? Be sure you have access to them even while working at home. Request the equipment you need as soon as you realize you need it. This may be anything from the right monitor, keyboard, mouse, camera, printer, software, and so forth. Requests will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis.

Properly Maintain Confidential Data

Be clear about the type of files that you can and cannot take home with you. If you're not sure, ask your manager or director. Treat any confidential data, client information, or personally identifiable information that you have with care while working from home. Lock your laptop, put files away in designated drawers, and do not to leave documents out for those in your home to find. Use a paper shredder to properly dispose of confidential documents.

Collaborate Virtually

When you have meetings, try to incorporate video whenever possible. Seek out presenting opportunities for your work. If you would normally bounce ideas off your teammates while in the office, leverage technology to have virtual brainstorming sessions. Use your team's messaging platforms to check in with teammates, even just to hear about how their day is going or what they're working on.

Ask for Feedback

Similar to the insights you'd seek after an in-person meeting or presentation, ask your coworkers or manager for feedback on your virtual presence and engagement. Are you delivering your message effectively? Are you getting enough visibility? Are your teammates and managers getting what they need from you?



Protocol for Video Conference Tools

SERCAP uses video conference tools, such as GoToMeeting, to host virtual meetings with staff and external partners. This document provides guidance on how to prepare for and effectively use video conference tools, especially while working from home.

Dress Appropriately – Be aware of SERCAP’s dress code. Even while working from home, wear similar attire that you would wear to the office in order to continue to present a professional appearance.

Find Good Lighting – Framing yourself with proper lighting will help you look your best and improve video quality. Although you’re not communicating face-to-face, people still want to see your facial expressions. If you can, sit by the window to have the light on your face.

Frame the Camera Correctly – When you're on video, make sure you frame your camera in a way that feels natural and allows you to look at the camera. Sit at eye level to the lens and try to position yourself so that it shows midsection up. Looking into the camera lens is the equivalent of looking into the person's eyes, so practice doing so until you're comfortable with it.

Clear the Background – Inventory your environment before starting a video conference. Just as it’s important to dress appropriately for video conferences, your background should not present any distractions either. If you don’t have a home office, consider sitting in front of a blank wall, at a dining room table, or a low traffic area. Let those in your home know when you’re joining a video conference so they do not walk into the camera frame.

Minimize Background Noise – Move to a quiet space, put pets away, and ask those around you to go into another room if possible. Minimizing background noise will help you hear and focus on the call.

Mute Your Phone – When you’re not speaking, mute your phone. Most microphones can pick up minor background noises, like coughs, sneezes, or typing. These sounds can easily distract others. This is especially important if you’re not in a dedicated home office and are sharing space with others in your home.

Check Your Technology – Log in a few minutes early to address any technical issues prior to the start of the meeting. If you have technical issues and will be late, let the other meeting attendees know.

Be On Time – Even if you’re sitting at your computer, make sure you don’t get caught up working and forget to dial into the video conference. Set meeting reminders so you’re able to join on time.

Fully Engage – Eliminate distractions by not multi-tasking. Distractions may include working on other projects, talking to those in your home, tackling home chores, etc. Even though you’re not in the same room, people can still see you and can tell if you’re not engaged. Remain focused so you’re able to respond to questions and contribute to the conversation when necessary.



Working from Home with Kids



SERCAP's leadership team recognizes the unique challenges facing those who are working at home with children. It's important to plan ahead for how you'll keep children engaged. Although children may be home, all employees are still expected to attend video conferences, complete project tasks according to schedule, and work a complete day unless leave is approved. Below are a few tips for working at home with children.

Create a School Schedule

In addition to setting your own work schedule, set a schedule for your child. Keep it as close to their normal school schedule as possible. If your child is not yet in school, create blocks of time during the day for certain types of activities. Depending on the age of the child, let them help create the schedule, talk through it with them, and make it available so everyone knows what's happening and when.

Communicate with Your Manager About Your Schedule

Be up front with your manager and team about your schedule if you need to manage your day a little differently than you typically do. Review your calendar to see if you need to schedule any breaks so you can set up new activities for your child, give them lunch, go outside, etc. Any work schedule changes should be approved in advance by your manager.

Take Leave When Necessary

You are still entitled to take leave when you are unable to work. Being at home is not a substitute for taking sick, vacation or annual leave. The entire workday cannot be dedicated to watching children. When circumstances arise that require you to devote all, or the majority, of your attention to a child, request leave. Let your manager know as soon as possible that you need to be off and ensure that your request is approved.

Designate Work Areas and Play Areas

Create an engaging environment to keep your child's attention by setting up a dedicated area for your child to play or do activities. This will also help establish boundaries between your work area and the area they are allowed to play in.

Manage Expectations Around Video Conferences

Children should not be in the camera frame during video conferences. Set expectations in advance that you will be unavailable unless something important comes up. For older kids and partners, you can also establish a non-verbal "do not disturb" signal like putting a sign or specific toy on your desk that means they have to wait to talk to you. As a reminder, minimize the impact of any surprise noises in the background by keeping your audio settings on mute unless you're talking.



Plan Independent Activities

Plan activities that your child can do on their own based on their age. This will provide you with time to work or take video calls while they're engaged. Consider some of these independent activities:

Babies:

- Naps, swings, bouncy chairs
- Shows or videos such as Baby Einstein
- Listen to musical songs

Toddlers through elementary:

- Favorite shows and/or related online games
- Puzzles, educational games and apps

Older children:

- Reading, writing stories
- Educational, positive, or inspirational shows or movies
- School platforms and assignments
- Minecraft or activities that allows them to socialize online with friends

Prioritize Your Schedule

Look at what you have to do and identify the most important tasks or meetings that cannot be interrupted. Aim to schedule your most engaging and reliable activities for your child to be on their own during those time. If your child is still at the age of taking naps, try to use that time to schedule meetings or work on key projects.

Split the Work

If you have a partner, and if your work allows, you may consider taking shifts. Take time each evening to review your calendars for the next day. Determine when you'll need to be fully engaged to complete a project or take a video conference. Identify who will work on school assignments or help with lunch while the other is working. Check in with one another throughout the day to stay on top of any schedule changes.

Set Up Virtual Babysitters

Reach out to friends, aunts, uncles, grandparents, babysitters, or teachers to arrange virtual playdates for your child. They can talk, read, play games, and much more, all online. This will also allow you time to work on important work tasks, even when your child isn't engaged in independent activities.