

How She / He Does It!

Tips Sheet

Student Parents share their best tips, strategies and insights on being student parents at U of T.

Time Management

"I don't have the luxury of procrastinating." Paula

- Identify your priorities and make them come first.
- Use routines.
- Plan, use an agenda and be realistic.

"I have no expectations of getting anything (academic) done at home with two small children." Paula

- Compartmentalize your time: home, school work, family.
- Maximize your time – Edith listens to recordings of her lectures on the subway. Zeke works on the subway.
- Add structure to your time.

"Allow yourself buffer time for mistakes and road bumps." Zeke

- Work backwards from deadlines.
- Reliable childcare is key!

Acceptance

"I have what I have – the day care hours – so I have 10:00-4:00 to work." Paula

- Anna discovered she didn't have to be a perfectionist.

"I thought if I got a C I would die. But if a C represents your best effort then it is a respectable grade. I got a C. I hadn't put forth my best effort. But it's not the end of the

world. It isn't a reason to die. I was very grateful. It helped me not having to be perfectionistic." Anna

"I'll be almost 40 entering the workforce. It is what it is. I am what I am." Anna

"My better days are when I get 80% of my to-do list done." Paula

"Be forgiving with yourself." Erik

Writing, Working and Work Space

These students found that they needed to create a work space that was free from the distractions and demands of home life. Most found using on campus space effective.

They recommended:

- Use a library study room. Leave your cell phone off. (Anna)
- Put a sign on your bedroom door when you are working. (Alice)
- Write for 15 minutes a day. (Erik)

- *"What works best comes down to you." Zeke*

Find your best times. Erik found working at home with the children there didn't work but going in to campus after a morning play with the children did work.

- *"I didn't know how to write an essay but there are all these supports like the ASC." Anna*

• **Family Routines and Meals**

- Paula found that involving the family in meal planning and grocery shopping transformed it from a dreaded chore into meaningful family time.
- Alice has organized home routines so the children pack their own lunches and do daily chores such as pet care or dishes.

"If they can do it they should do it." Alice.

Motivation

"I only do things I am highly motivated to do." Paula

The excitement and gratitude of being in university, and the perspective children gave them, made our participants motivated to do their work and do it well. They also felt that modelling pursuing their goals was an important asset to their parenting. That said, they still faced the challenges of skills gaps, work load, time management, isolation and domestic load. Some marvelled at being so engaged especially if it was a second chance at undergrad. Here are their tips on Motivation:

"I like university because there is a space for this kind of questioning to be happening. Lateral thinking is encouraged. You are allowed to engage with the material in your own way. I think that is why I am staying on this kind of path." Anna

- Anna described a day her daughter came to a tutorial and then raised her hand and gave her thoughts. Anna realized the impact of her own studies on her daughter's development, and how much this meant to her.
- Reframing: realize that each task you do, whether it is one you enjoy or not, is part of a bigger picture and larger goal. (Paula)

Study Strategies

"Make your own best answer. Look inward." Zeke

- Try different things and find what works.
- Edith tried reading when the children were in bed, on the subway or in the morning.

"When I was 7 my mom told me about an "A" university student's strategy and I used that and it helps me." Anna

Anna's best strategy:

- Look over the week's notes.
- Summarize them on index cards: one issue per card.
- Over the subsequent weeks look through the index cards from the previous weeks.
- Review them every week.
- Cards can be fun. Add colour, decorate them.

The Truth About Grad School

"The flexibility makes it a great time for having children. But you need to find your best ways of working." Erik

- Structure your own time.

"Create your own goals." Erik

- If you want community you need to create it.

"Community doesn't happen. It gets built." Erik

Support

These student parents used their Registrar's Office, the Family Care Office, the Academic Success Centre, their college Writing Centre and on campus workshops and brown bag lunches as part of their support system.

"Get help, even if you don't need it. Go to workshops. It is reassuring." Zeke

"I feel like the university takes really good care of me." Anna

"The writing centre eviscerates my papers and from the ashes they transcend." Anna

- Form peer study groups. Edith and classmates share notes on Facebook. Anna found that some Equity classes offer childcare for student study groups.

Balance and Self-Care

All our interviewees emphasized the importance of making time for yourself and self-care.

"I envisioned that 'me time' had to be spa-like and involve bubbles – but it doesn't!" Paula

- Paula discovered "me time" could be study time or quiet work or a personal project. But it needed to be made as important as groceries or school work. And it needed to be meaningful.
- Prioritize sleep. If you have young children, try going to bed when they do.

"I like yoga. But you have to find your own yoga." Zeke

- Edith exercises at home on a stationary bike before the kids are up.
- Alice takes turns babysitting with another family.

"Sunday – that's my day off." Edith

"Keep life enjoyable." Zeke

* The names Paula and Anna have been used for students who contributed to this project but who did not want their actual names to be used or to be part of the video component.

- Paula has two preschoolers and is studying a second undergraduate degree. She gratefully marvels at how exciting and interesting she is finding it.
- Anna has a young teen daughter and is in university for the first time, modelling engagement and study as her daughter grows alongside her.

Learn more from Student Parents in videos on the How She/He Does It pages of the Academic Success Centre or Family Care Office websites:

www.asc.utoronto.ca
www.familycare.utoronto.ca



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