

# Working from Home: A Realistic Guide for Telecommuting Mothers



It sounds like an ideal set up for any working mother: the freedom to work at home full-time, while keeping close tabs on your children. No rush hour madness. No scrambling to get the kids ready for school. Most mothers would kill for the flexibility an opportunity like this offers – and according to the U.S. Census Bureau, it's starting to become more of a reality for workers across the country. In fact, 4.2 million Americans work

from home three or more days a week – a nearly 25 percent increase from 1990 to 2000.

Telecommuting has been around in some form for decades, but it wasn't until now that companies

***The terms telecommuting and telework were coined by American Jack Nilles in 1973.***



Source: Wikipedia

have had feasible and cost effective ways to ensure quick, secure remote access for workers no matter where they are. Add technology like laptops, iPhones, and Windows Mobile applications to the mix and the possibilities continue to grow. Extensive research suggests professional

women with children are more adept at juggling career and family issues when able to work within a flexible telecommuting program. An IBM study found that telecommuters reported a greater work/life balance than traditional workers – with no evidence of any negative impact on the company. But that doesn't mean telecommuting is without its challenges.

## The Challenge



### **Bunny Slipper Syndrome**

For some bosses and co-workers



**Americans spend more than 100 hours commuting to work each year.**

Source: American Community Survey (ACS) data/U.S. Census Bureau.

the term “telecommuting mother” conjures up images of women in their bathrobes and bunny slippers, hair awry – baby in one hand – phone in the other – one eye on the laptop – the other on a soap opera. Not a pretty sight. Other telecommuting women fear the old “out of sight, out of mind” syndrome. It is for challenges like these, and all the others that come with working at home, that the following tips were created.

## Telecommuting 101

### What Other Telecommuters Won't Tell You

#### *Look Presentable*

While many a telecommuter has, on more than one occasion, conducted high-level meetings in their underwear, don't make a habit of it. It may seem trivial, but taking a shower, putting on a little makeup and looking presentable not only makes you feel more professional, it does wonders for your self esteem. (Besides it's important to fight that "bunny slipper" stereotype.)

#### *New Rules*

Even before you agree on a telecommuting, you should agree upon new ways of measuring performance. Since attendance



and the number of hours you work are now out the window, it's best that you base your successes on output, quality of work, and performance. In other words, switch the focus to productivity. This way, you'll be measured by your work, not by your absence.



### *See and Be Seen*

You know the old saying, “Out of sight, out of mind.” Many workers fear they’ll be overlooked for promotions or will be “the first to go” if the company has layoffs. A remedy for this would be going into the office at least a few times a month and attending social events whenever possible. You may even want to meet up with coworkers and supervisors for lunch every few weeks. Check in daily with work via e-mail, instant messenger or phone. In short, keep the lines of communication open.

### *Establish Limits*

Because a telecommuter’s home is also their office, it’s easy to blur the boundaries. Establish working hours for yourself and try to stick to them. It’s tempting to spread out work over seven days each week – but know when to say when.

### *Remember Ergonomics*

Repeat after me, “my couch is not my office.” It’s important to have a clearly defined office space set up in your home. Not only does it provide privacy and keep you organized, it could also prevent eye strain, carpal tunnel syndrome, back issues and an array of ailments that go hand in hand with being “ergonomically incorrect.”

### *Just Say No*

Family and friends need to understand that just because

you're "home all day" doesn't mean you're not busy working. People often expect you to run errands, baby sit, pick them up, clean, cook, etc. while you're working. Obviously, they wouldn't expect you to do those things while at the office, so it should not be expected at home. Draw the line and be very clear about what you will NOT be doing during work hours.

### *Fight Loneliness*

While telecommuting has its benefits, it's certainly not for everyone. Without in-person communication, some telecommuters start to feel hidden away from the rest of the world. One solution would be to take your laptop to a coffee shop or any public place with Wi-Fi and work outside the home a few days a week. Another idea would be to meet up with other telecommuters to socialize. Many people opt to go into the office a few days a week to combat the isolation. To do this, you would need to share a space with another telecommuter and alternate which days you go in.

### ***Battling the At-Home Blues - Quick Tips:***

- ***Work in a public Wi-Fi zone.***
- ***Go into the office a few days a week.***
- ***Network socially with other telecommuters.***



### *Beware of the Green-Eyed Monster*

Minda Zetlin, the author of *Telecommuting for Dummies*, suggests you post a picture of yourself at your office desk with a note that says, "I really am working from home. Call me!" so people don't forget you. However, you risk returning to a cardboard cutout that would not survive the barrage of darts it would surely invite. The reality is, many co-workers envy those who are able to telecommute. Here are some tips on how to deal with this situation:

1. **Don't rub it in.** The best rule of thumb is to just not to bring it up around these types of people.

2. **Explain When Necessary.** If they ask why you are able to telecommute and they are not, you may reply by saying that your job description lends itself to telecommuting better than most (not having to deal with clients often, etc.)

3. **Make Them Feel More Important.** Saying something like, "Lisa, without you around the office Mr. Wallace wouldn't know what to do," is a great way to deflect and complement jealous co-workers simultaneously.

**A survey of 1,400 CFOs indicated that 13% consider telework the best recruiting incentive today for accounting professionals.**



Source: 2008 Robert Half International Financial Hiring Index

## In Conclusion...

While telecommuting offers an increased sense of work-family balance for many busy mothers, it is not for the faint of heart. Following these few simple suggestions, maintaining a very good sense of humor, and coming up with creative ideas of your own -- can mean the difference between a disastrous and a successful working situation.

## Telecommuting Resources

### Books:

- Organizing Relationships: Traditional and Emerging Perspectives on Workplace Relationships by Patricia M. Sias (2008)
- Telecommuting for Dummies by Minda Zetlin (2001)
- Managing Telework: Strategies for Managing the Virtual Workforce by Jack M. Nilles (1998)
- Implementing and Managing Telework: A Guide for Those Who Make It Happen by Bill Fenson and Sharon Hill (2003)
- 101 Tips for Telecommuters by Debra A. Dinocenzo (1999)
- Work-At-Home Directory by Barbara Becker (2007)
- Mompreneurs (R) Online: Using the Internet for Work at Home Success by Patricia Cobe and Ellen H. Parlapiano (2001)
- Telecommuting and Virtual Offices : Issues and Opportunities by Nancy J. Johnson (2001)



### Websites:

- Undress 4 Success: Work from Home
- American Telecommuting Association
- About.com: Mobile Office Technology
- Work at Home Mom's Network
- Cyberworkers
- Working Mom's Refuge: Telecommuter's Hotline
- Telework Arizona

### Magazines:

- Telecommuting Times
- Working Mother
- Home Business Magazine