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How to Work Remotely With Your Kids...and Not Lose Your Mind

By Brandon Vogel

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Lawyers that expected to efile cases last week instead used those skills to efile their children’s homework via Google Classroom.

Others improved their oral advocacy skills through the help of their new full-time clients: teenagers.

With schools closed throughout New York State and many law firms working remotely, several lawyers spent last week adjusting to the new normal of meeting with clients virtually while homeschooling their kids.

We spoke to three attorneys with kids at all stages of life to get a sense of what they are experiencing and what strategies are and aren't working, as well as present us with both sides of their cases.

The good, the bad, the new normal

Robert Rosborough of Albany, a partner with Whiteman Osterman & Hanna, is working from home with three children, ages 2, 5 and 8.

His biggest challenge, thus far, is learning how to teach elementary school while keeping up with his caseload.

Rosborough says, "Because all of their work now comes through Google Classroom, my wife and I are the ones to lead instruction and convince the kids to sit down and complete their

daily work rather than focus on their latest Lego build.”

He appreciates that his morning commute from Saratoga to Albany has been temporarily eliminated and that he doesn’t have to race to court on a moment’s notice. He says the best part is “just being home with my kids as they’re growing up and not missing any of the milestones I would have otherwise while I was in the office.”

Evan S. Rosenberg, a special education lawyer in New York City, is home with a 16-month-old son. “The quality time with my son has actually been pretty wonderful, a major oxytocin rush,” said Rosenberg. “Also I get to connect with my clients on a more basic, even therapeutic level; mostly checking in and making myself available to them.”

His primary challenge is negotiating a schedule with his wife as well as defeating his son’s boredom and cabin fever.

Describing her 12-year old son as “not the most organized even during ordinary times,” Gina Calabrese, a professor at St. John’s University School of Law, has experienced her share of challenges such as making sure her son follows his usual morning

routine. For his example, his English teacher noticed his unmade bed during a Google Hangout session and promptly reprimanded him. Her son often finishes assignments before the end of the period. "Online school doesn't happen on auto-pilot," said Calabrese. "Parents need to monitor progress."

She has appreciated being able to help him with school work and having more meals together as a family. There are less logistics involved now with his care and sports practices. And her son now has more time to enjoy his hobbies like cooking.

Pro tips

Calabrese has found that having a schedule and structure has been "good for everyone." She recommends having a hard stop time to step away from work. "There's so much coming at us these days, and always one more urgent email we need to respond to before the end of the work day, etc. That's led to a few very late dinners, even though we are all home," said Calabrese. "You can log back on later or get up a bit earlier in the morning."

She also advised families to have designated areas of the house for each

family member's office or classroom.

"Then, when you must focus or have privacy, boundaries are clear," she explained.

Rosborough says to "be flexible."

"Regimented schedules are fine, but when we're transitioning into this new reality, it's most important to be flexible and patient not only with the kids but also yourself. If you can work remotely, that work can be done at any time," said Rosborough. "Take 30 minutes in the middle of the day to go play basketball with the kids in the driveway or go exercise. Breaking up the day will be very important.

"Let go and accept that things are beyond your control" said Rosenberg, who also emphasized expressing love for your kids and patience. "Also, it helps to simply explain to your clients upfront that you have a responsibility to your family right now."