

To the Working Mom: Wear the Pants

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As I write, drinking my coffee in the quiet of my home while the older kids are still sleeping soundly upstairs, my five-month-old chatters cheerfully beside me. She didn't sleep at all last night, which I'm blaming on teething—or maybe she just hates me (I'm kidding). I've got at least another 30 minutes, and I'm racing the keyboard before the trampling footsteps of rowdy children come barreling down the stairs, demanding breakfast. Which, of course, will be followed by a day full of arguments and discussions related to e-learning, screen time, naps, snacks, a crying baby, a whiny four-year-old and a six-year-old with a 16-year-old's attitude. This, in the midst of my finding a few sporadic minutes here and there of my own, trying to bill some hours and maintain some semblance of sanity—both for myself and for clients also dealing with the most terrifying and personally challenging global pandemic of our lifetime. Sound familiar to anyone?

I, like I'm sure many of you also have read and been advised, consider the advice of wiser women than me: rise early each morning, get a shower, brush your teeth, do your hair, wear makeup, dress your best, just like you were going into work (etc., etc., etc.)! Ladies (and gentlemen), as I sit here in the calm before the storm that I call home, in my pajamas and my hair piled on top of my head (without makeup, I might add), my advice is as follows: if you want to wear the yoga pants, wear the yoga pants. We're in survival mode. And I think you should wear the pants.

- **Find a routine.** Of course, much to my own chagrin, I'm sure we all can agree that there's a lot of value in actually showering and getting ready for a full day's work each morning. But then, there are some days when we're only able to survive with the help of dry shampoo and yoga pants—am I right?! Still, some other routines for kids that I've found immensely helpful as of late include: (1) starting school first thing in the morning; (2) reserving “non-academic” screen time for after lunch, as much as possible; and (3) implementing scheduled time for rest each afternoon. These three basic routines each day allow me time to tend to client emergencies and emails at a few designated times throughout the day (well, sort of). I also find that, at least for my kids, if we delay school assignments, it drags out into a long, drawn-out battle that we could all do without.
- **Planning helps.** A few years ago, I ordered from Amazon a large dry erase, magnetic refrigerator chalkboard, which included a weekly calendar for meal planning, space for a running grocery list, and a “notes” section for random thoughts and reminders throughout the

week. I've never used it more than I have the past few weeks, when grocery store trips are no longer a daily occurrence, but rather a strategic solo outing, planned days in advance. I use the notes section to outline a general daily plan for my daughter's day, which I've found hugely helpful for keeping her e-learning on track.

- On another note, reviewing the next day's e-learning assignment the night before also is hugely helpful. You know that moment in court when you're surprised by some tidbit of information a client has neglected to share in advance and before you know it, every plan you had for that trial is suddenly spiraling down a long wind tunnel, with no hope of return? I've felt that more than once with e-learning. Last week, my daughter had a STEM assignment that required us to explore the concepts of "push" and "pull" while playing a makeshift game of golf with a yard stick. What should have been a fun, family activity quickly morphed into a World War III argument concerning who lost the tape (which was supposed to outline our golf course), the correct positioning of the plastic cups (for catching the balls—where were the golf balls, by the way?), and whether I was reading the directions correctly (apparently, I was not). As I'm studying instructions and reasoning with the six- (again, going on 16-) year old, the four-year-old is swinging the yard stick at his baby sister ("she likes it!") and launching golf balls near the living room window. Tears soon followed (theirs, not mine) at which point I eventually and not-so-judicially declared "we're done!" Alas, there was no golf that day (insert heavy sigh here). A little planning would have helped.
- **Recess does, too.** Being married to a first responder, with young children at home and a career, I admit that I have days when my nerves get the best of me. I'm convinced that in these uncertain times, the occasional sunshine is our hope and reminder to be thankful. Many of us are very blessed to be able to work from home and receive an income during these uncertain times, with healthy and happy children, when there are so many others who do not have that luxury. A few days ago, my son was so excited to see the sunshine that it was all I could do to remind him that he needed socks and shoes. So excited was he, in fact, that he forgot his pants—running through our backyard with his red, little boy boxer briefs, high socks and tennis shoes. I didn't even stop him. I hope that you're finding little reminders to have hope and be thankful, too.
- **Take advantage of the resources.** For your sake, I also hope you've been able to take advantage of some of the resources available to families with kids confined to home. My kids (and many others, so I've heard) have enjoyed [Mo Willems' Lunch Doodles](#) each afternoon. We're taking full advantage of our access to [ABCmouse.com](#), the [PBSkids.org](#) activities and

games, the [Scholastic Learn at Home](#) website, as well as the many museums and zoos which are offering free, online tours and events. I am sure there are many, many more.

- **You're a rock star, Momma.** More than one of you has been on a Zoom call with me recently where I've had a baby on my lap, or a kid bolting in and out of the background behind me. Or there's been a sudden but urgent wail of "I'm hungry!" or "I have to potty!" in the middle of an intense discussion on emergency parenting time and the implications of the executive orders and various directives in effect. Thank goodness for the mute option. I was on a conference call yesterday with a judicial officer who joked about a video conference she had recently with attorneys, and it did not occur to her until afterwards that she was sitting in a closet with an array of shoeboxes strategically positioned behind her. I'm sure we've all had to give a second thought to what lies behind us, whether we can control it or not! You can be confident that, the next time we're on a conference call together, there absolutely will be no judgment passed from me for whatever may be lurking in your background, or whatever background "noise" I may hear.

Kudos to us all for persevering. You're a rock star, Momma. Above all else though, I hope that in the midst of all this madness, you're finding a little time for yourself—to binge-watch a Netflix show, to call a friend, or to remind someone else how great a job she or he is doing. I really think it is true that someday, we'll look back on these weeks and reminisce about the creative methods we discovered to be social with one another, to balance career and home life, and to hold close those extra little opportunities we had to spend time with our families. We surely deserve it.