

LEARNING AT HOME WITH FAMILY

Being a student and a caregiver can be a balancing act that includes setting expectations, managing elements of home life and of school, and making use of available resources. You and your family will likely have to make conscious efforts to distribute work equitably in the adjustment to working from home. The following suggestions are a good place to start.

Use all of your resources

- The U of T My Student Support Program (MySSP) provides University of Toronto students with free, immediate, confidential, 24-hour support for any school, health or general life concern. Call or chat with a counsellor directly from your phone wherever you are for a range of concerns. Students who use MySSP still have access to existing campus and community mental health services. Visit studentlife.utoronto.ca/service/myssp or call 1-844-451-9700; outside of North America, call 001-416-380-6578.
- Talk to the Family Care Office and your registrar/academic advisor, especially if you're considering dropping or withdrawing from a course or program due to family responsibilities. The Family Care Office provides confidential guidance, resources, information, referrals, educational programming and advocacy on family issues. Please visit their website at familycare.utoronto.ca or email them at family.care@utoronto.ca.
- The Centre for Learning Strategy Support offers workshops, themed discussions and appointments to support you, no matter your situation. Try out some of the following suggestions and be in touch to determine what might work best for you.

Set clear expectations with instructors

- Be specific when communicating with instructors about your ability to learn and perform academic work. You don't need to share personal details, but you can offer clear suggestions.

Set clear expectations with family

- Ask for your family's support by being specific about how they can help you by giving you time to do your work. For example, if you can get support from someone to watch a child, ask for it. Conversely, share when you'll be available to engage with them.
- Talk to your family about how to manage conflicts, commitments and needs. You might need to rethink how you will relate and communicate while you're working from home. Set a regular family meeting to determine routines that help everyone and make time for meaningful connections. Even small changes like regular family meal times can reduce stress and conflict significantly.

Set clear expectations with peers for group work

- Ask group members to share their needs and expectations. All of us work best when we feel that our needs are being met.
- Agree on a process for meeting your deadlines. Setting benchmarks for your team's progress can make sure you stay on track to complete the project on time. Take into account that things can go wrong or take longer than expected. Set deadlines a few days before things are actually due, so you have time to respond to surprises.
- Set a schedule for meetings and discuss the best ways of communicating when your timings don't align. This will help you organize your time with any childcare supports you have at home.
- In meetings, have a clear agenda or objective. Everyone will be grateful for a productive meeting that has a clear finish time and/or outcome!

Set clear expectations with yourself

- Be gentle with yourself when doing the best you can. It's ok to be frustrated, overwhelmed or upset. Be aware that your emotional state can affect your ability to focus and engage with your productivity and relationships. Self-awareness and self-care practices like journaling and meditation can help you find calm. Arrange time with your family for you to do these things, even if for only 10 minutes of alone time.
- Practice being compassionate with yourself when you don't meet your goals.

Manage chores and other family obligations

- Set up your desk and materials the night before, so you can get started immediately. If you don't have a designated work space, keep all your items together in a basket or backpack so you can easily access them.
- Prepare toys, activities or materials to occupy little ones, so you can carve out time for you to work while they're engaged.
- If possible, wake up slightly before your family so you can have a moment to yourself. You can meditate, exercise or enjoy a quiet cup of tea to take care of yourself. **Note:** this does not apply to parents of children who wake you in the night. In that case, sleep as much as you can.
- Have a weekly meal plan so you don't have to decide what's for breakfast, lunch and dinner—and see if you can make food in large batches. Leftovers can help you with multiple meals as needed
- Break up chores and household work across the week and create a schedule so you can complete them little by little. Assign jobs to family members who can help.

Make a flexible plan with your family

- Include caretaking in your schedule or use family routines to your benefit. If lunchtime has everyone seated and eating, or if children are occupied with independent activities, this might be a chance to get some work done.
- If you can, trade off duties between family members so that no one is responsible for the entire day. Staggering work hours between adults or scheduling “quiet work time” for each caregiver can help everyone work and care for their family.
- Ask family or friends to entertain your older children with virtual stories, activities and play dates. Consistency with a little freedom is key: a daily routine with independent activities can let you execute your own plans.
- The U of T Family Care blog offers many great resources, including suggested activities, for students who need to care for children while working from home. Browse the blog at: <https://blogs.studentlife.utoronto.ca/intersections>

Want to know more?

The Centre for Learning Strategy Support has resources, workshops, events and appointments to support you.

→ look us up online at learningstrategy.utoronto.ca

→ register for appointments and events at folio.utoronto.ca

→ or email us at clss@utoronto.ca