Planning Is Critical When Attending School, Especially When Raising Children

Most of you are attending college to better yourselves or to better your children’s lives. While doing so can be overwhelming at times, having a back-up plan for some of life’s difficulties will help you be prepared to adjust and adapt without any major setbacks. It’s always crucial to plan ahead and plan for emergencies, especially when you have children.

Juggling school and children is often a daunting task, and everyone has an opinion on how and when to do it. Two schools of thought on the subject are:

(1) There will always be a college that you can attend, but your children are only small for a short time. You should consider waiting until your children are in school to go to school (Sturges, 2007).

(2) It’s better to attend school while your children are young and their needs are simple. It doesn’t always have to be you filling their needs; it just has to be someone who loves them. Your children will need you more as they get older because they will be involved in more activities and their lives will become more complex (Sturges, 2007). Your children aren’t going to remember who changed their diapers, but they may remember that you didn’t attend a baseball game, dance recital, or school activity.

Obviously, each person has to do what works best for them personally and financially. You can take comfort in the knowledge that if a school activity or sports event is missed, it was missed for the right reasons. Children can understand that mom or daddy value education too, and the benefit to them can be discussed. They can appreciate the sacrifice when they’re older.

Sturges (2007) has complied these lists of things to consider when you have a family or family obligations and you are going to school:

IN GENERAL
- Failing to plan is planning to fail. Have a plan ready in case unexpected events occur.
- Get things done early just in case something comes up that you didn’t plan on. You do not have the luxury of procrastinating.
- Learn to prioritize based on long-term goals.
- Do whatever you have to do to complete your education. Pace yourself and stay focused.
- Utilize your time appropriately. Decide what is really important to get done.
- Try not to overload your schedule with difficult classes or full-time work if at all possible.
- Communicate your goals with your family. Be sure your family understands what you are doing and how important it is to you to continue your education. You need their support to succeed.

http://nursing.byu.edu/about/news/ViewArticles.aspx?id=972

It’s not only children who grow. Parents do too. As much as we watch to see what our children do with their lives, they are watching us to see what we do with ours. I can’t tell my children to reach for the sun. All I can do is reach for it myself.

—Joyce Maynard
Writer

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- Locate a baby-sitter who is reliable, but have a backup plan too. See if you can exchange babysitting with other students or find a drop in daycare that you can use.
- Do your homework when your children do theirs. This sets an example of good study habits.
- Plan some study time away from home and all its distractions.
- Do your best to fit in time for special family activities and one-on-one time with each family member. Children will remember having your complete attention and the fun things you did with them.
- Don’t lose sight of yourself and your own health. You won’t do well at home or in school if you are not feeling well.
- Sleep when the children are asleep; study when the children are playing contentedly or napping.
- Organize your home to accommodate your lifestyle, and remember that you can’t do it all.
- Pick one day during the week to clean up and do laundry.
- Cook easy one-pot meals, and order pizza when need be.
- When possible, take the children with you to the library when reviewing for tests or doing preliminary research.

Another key to success is having back-up plans. They can help keep you calm in stressful times and make you more flexible and adaptable. Back-up plans are important; that’s why we buy insurance. Insurance is a back-up plan in case we get sick, have a car accident, or have a house fire, because our health, car, and home are important to us. If we have a back-up plan for these important things in life, why wouldn’t we have one to make sure we can get to class and work on time every day? School and work should be just as important.

While attending school, there are some important things for which you’ll need to have a back-up plan. Here’s a short list of some of the things you’ll need a Plan B (and maybe even a Plan C) for in case Plan A doesn’t happen.

- **Transportation**—Even if you have reliable transportation, your car may not start one day or it may have a flat tire. Is there someone in your class who lives close by that can pick you up and get you to school? Do you have a family member that can take you or that will loan you their car? Do you have a bus schedule if this is an option? Do you have the number of local cab companies handy?

- **Childcare**—If you have a babysitter who comes to your home to watch your children or to whose home you take them to, you should consider setting up a daycare option in case you are in dire need of child care. You can use it as a last resort, but daycares are always open and available. Your babysitter may not be.

- **Illness of a child or other loved one you are responsible for**—If your child wakes up sick on a morning you have class or have to be at work, what options do you have? Do you have a family member or friend that can take care of your child? Do you know of any daycares that accept children who are sick?

Planning ahead is critical for success in school; if you wait until the last minute, you reduce your options and increase your stress. While juggling all that life throws at you, remember that you are not a superhero and perfection is unattainable. You can do many different things with some success or do one or two things with great success. As Sturges (2007) recommends, “keep in mind that the greatest gift any mother [or father] can give their children is their own happiness. Don’t let your children be your excuse for not making your dreams come true. Let them be your inspiration and be a role model to them of how to make their own dreams come true.” If you do these things, you’ll excel both as a student and as a parent.

Make sure you use all of the resources that are available to you from your college, your family and friends, and your community. If you don’t have a strong support system, develop one with other students in your same situation. Encouragement and solidarity go a long way when you’ve had a bad day. And, if you need help, ask for it. You don’t have to do it alone.

References