

How to Entertain a Child while Working from a Home Office

By Danielle Hollister

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There is no doubt that the benefits of being a work-at-home parent outweigh the drawbacks.

However, some days can prove to be difficult when your two year-old is determined to climb on top of your filing cabinet while you're trying to participate in an important conference call.

Here are seven tips that can help make your life easier, and your little ones happier, while you work at home.

1 - Set up a little desk for your tiny assistant in your home office, close enough for you to keep an eye on him, but far enough away for you to focus on your work.

Tell your child that he is your personal assistant-in-training and emphasize what a big deal it is for him to have this title and his own work area.

2 - Provide your child with some tools similar to those on your desk.

Carefully select only the safest items that are virtually indestructible. Your child's active imagination and natural curiosity can easily lead to disaster if he gets his hands on the wrong gadget.

3 - Assign your new assistant with important job responsibilities.

Young children love to imitate adults, especially their parents. Depending upon what type of business you operate from home, you can dream up duties that mirror what your child watches you do every day.

One duty that may delight your toddler is opening mail. Give your child junk mail, advertisements or anything else you don't want to read. Provide a little trashcan or place for him to pitch the envelope if that's what you usually do.

Another job that may thrill your child and can potentially occupy

him for more than an hour is organizing your out-dated files, old business cards, duplicate copies, rough drafts and any other impertinent papers. The key to this little task is to place files to be organized in a basket or file bin and provide an empty desk drawer or old briefcase for your toddler to transfer the papers to and from - possibly repeatedly.

If you can manage to concentrate on your work and coach your new assistant at the same time, you may stimulate their thinking by beginning to count the papers he or she is moving from the basket into the desk drawer.

4 - A must-have for your new little employee is a notepad or notebook similar to the type you use for taking notes, and crayons (if he or she will accept such a "childish" writing implement.)

Encourage your child to draw a picture for you and make sure you praise the final product. The more compliments he or she hears from you, the more your child will want to keep creating special drawings for you, or Grandma and Aunt Tawl etc.

Either take a brief time out or make it a routine at the end of the day to hang your child's masterpieces in your office. He will feel like he accomplished something that made you proud. Let your child help you tape his work on the side of your desk or up on the wall. You may be surprised by how intrigued your toddler is with tape!

5 - A chalkboard is an easy, inexpensive addition to your home office that you may never need, but your assistant-in-training will probably use it every day.

If you buy the big sidewalk chalk, your toddler will be less likely to decide to taste the bright colored sticks. If he or she does try to take a bite, the chances of choking are reduced with these fat pieces of chalk.

Make a production out of adding this new item to your office. Pretend you need it to use it to record your daily business reminders. Your child will be more eager to get his little hands on something he sees you using.

One little warning: Although this cheap addition to your office may offer a new outlet for your child's creativity, it will usually lead to the need for a quick bath at the close of the business day!

6 - There are a few items that are actually "toys," but may be able to pass for "tools" (similar to the machines you use every day) to be added to your new assistant's desktop.

Various toy companies manufacture mini-versions of adult products, like: little battery operated computers, designed to teach your child the alphabet or animal sounds; play telephones that ring by themselves and talk back to your child; and musical keyboards that perform tunes automatically and also allow your toddler to make his own melodies.

Your toddler may be content to imitate you with toys, like these, that look similar or sound the same as your desktop devices.

7 - Depending upon the location of your office, layout of your house, and your child's level of independence, you may be able to

designate duties that require him to leave your office to go find a phone book for you, or to locate that big envelope that came in the mail the other day.

You can purposely forget to collect all the items you will need to complete your job that day or you can ask your little assistant to seek out objects that you don't really have to have immediately. Toddlers usually like to look for things, especially when they think they are helping mommy or daddy.

Be sure to thank your child and compliment him for being able to find exactly what you wanted!

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