

Tips for Work-Life Balance as an Ob-Gyn at UCSF

By Faculty, Fellows and Residents 4/23/2010

Reflections

- Many people at the end of their lives wished that they had spent more time with their kids. One study showed that moms who worked outside of the home spent more time with their kids in direct contact than did stay-at-home moms. Quality time often needs to be planned, e.g. doing shared activities, painting pictures together, or playing games.
- Infertility is a difficult and sensitive time, especially if you have put off childbearing for a while.
- It's hard to remember life without kids.
- When you wait a while to have children, your parents might be too old to function as active grandparents; in fact, you may be taking care of them too which is hard on you. And your children may not have as much time with them as you had envisioned in terms of their relationship with them.
- There are options such as 80% flexible time, or stopping the clock for promotions if you find that childbearing or parenting is interfering with your academic productivity.
- Dual career partners need to work together to sort out options: who will take care of a sick child is one issue that is often a hot-spot when both need to be at a critical day in the workplace. Mass General has the option of bringing your sick child to the hospital to a place at which you can visit during that day and provides professional care for your child. Also, they have a program to replace a sick child care person. This idea will be forwarded to the Chancellor's Committee on the Advancement of Women for consideration at UCSF, as having these options in place for our dept/institution would relieve a lot of parental stress and anxiety.
- Often long commutes to work at UCSF are necessary due to the cost of living in SF, and the commutes can be tough when you are a parent. On the other side, living outside the City can be relaxing in its own way.
- If there are two parents, one way to split the child care responsibilities is for one parent to go in early to work while the other gets the child's breakfast, does drop off for school, and then that parent stays late at work and the other parent picks up the child and fixes dinner and starts the bedtime routine.
- It is an unrealistic expectation to be able to be all of your children's events, but try to plan in your schedule for most of them. There is an advantage of your child not depending on your presence for every performance, in that they develop a sense of independence.
- Adoption can provide a parenting option for you.
- Kids can benefit from having professional parents. Teach them about things you know and experience. Bring them with you sometimes to work (or if they are young, have another adult bring them to the workplace for a small amount of time) or to the place where you volunteer time, so your child has a sense of why you do what you do professionally. Sometimes kids can be too much at the center of activities: they need to see their parents work and contribute.
- It is hard finding networks as a working parent, but these networks are critical to develop. You know you don't have a supportive enough network when there is a blank on the childcare form as to whom to call in an emergency if you or your partner is not available ("the list"). It takes time and effort to develop a network, but it is crucial. Nurture your network so that you and those in your network feel bonded and are available in a crunch.

- Au pairs are great most of the time. They are young and energetic and often get together with other au pairs so that your child has built-in play dates. Although you may question if your child will prefer/love the au pair more than you as the parent since the au pair spends so much time with your child, this is rarely or never an issue – you are there for the child’s entire life, and au pairs come and go.
- It is very expensive having kids.
- Having kids is much harder when you don’t have family around.
- It is normal to feel guilty that you do not give enough to work, home and family. You can get too caught up in this feeling: just remember life goes on.
- You become very efficient when juggling work and family.
- There are many options for childcare until preschool: take the child to day care, have someone come into the home, have a live-in nanny, share a nanny with someone else. Craig’s list is a good source for child care option. Especially if you have clinical responsibilities like being in the OR with a late case, it is easier to have a nanny who can stay late, rather than have to rush to a child care center by 6 PM to pick up the child.
- Pregnancy and mothering are hard during residency.

Advice

- Until the kids go to kindergarten, keep them up late (long naps during day if possible) so that you can spend more time with them when you get home from work.
- Develop a friendship with a stay-at-home Mom, so that she helps you keep abreast of different classes (eg swimming, soccer) available in the community for both of the kids, and helps you keep on track with registration deadlines, etc., and can sometimes serve as a safety net.
- Take charge of scheduling carpool, so you can work with it with your schedule.
- If possible, volunteer at your child’s school when you can. Not only will your child be proud of you, but you can get to know their teacher and friends.
- Once you become a parent, start moving some things off your plate to work more standard hours during the day, and keep looking at ways to make time for yourself and for your family
- One way to keep up with your friends is by calling them while you are driving, so you are multi-tasking (with a non-handheld technology).
- Try to have dinner prepared in advance, rather than have to prepare it once you get home after a day at work. Consider cooking big meals on the weekends and use some of those dishes during the week. There are meal delivery services that use healthy ingredients and often these meals lasts for two nights in a row. Or pick up food from a place near work and take it home for dinner. When you are desperate, cereal can be dinner! Try scrubhub.com for home meal delivery options.
- Figure out your limits. If you don’t have time to do grocery shopping, order on-line and have the groceries delivered. If your partner doesn’t like it, he/she may decide to do all of the grocery shopping themselves!
- When you are driving with kids especially young ones, have an active relationship in the car through music, books on tape, and try to not let them sleep as it is better for you that they sleep once home so you can have that time for yourself or to get things done that are hard to do when you have to watch them too!

- Everyday, just do the best you can. Keep the vision. Know that everyone is not able to keep to their vision all the time. There is a concept of the “good enough” mother. Even though you are a superstar academically to be a resident, fellow, or faculty at UCSF, it does not mean that you are automatically or need to be super-mom.
- Try to select one day a week that you work at home.
- Do not take things so seriously. Have fun as a parent! These are some of the best years of your life so enjoy them!
- Develop a network of baby-sitters so that you can spend some adult time to nourish relationships. Having a mother’s helper in the home (eg a young teen) while you are home can be very helpful to free you up for tasks, as well as train a future baby-sitter.
- Pay people to do things so your life is a little easier.
- Selecting a good partner is very important.
- There are low sodium chicken nuggets!
- Develop relationships with other parents at your kids’ school.
- Support each other as parents in the workplace, other faculty, other fellows, other residents.
- Consider a weekend at Esalen in Big Sur: they have family retreats that include workshops including one on mindfulness for kids and parents. Hot springs are another fun thing to share with kids including mud baths!
- Check the CTSI web page on work-life balance.
- There are teachable moments with children, so use them as education is 24/7.
- Do not neglect your relationship with your partner.
- Get up before your child gets up in the AM to prepare for the day.
- When your baby/toddler naps, you should nap especially if you are getting up during the night. Stop worrying about getting that manuscript done during their nap: you need to stay healthy also.

Red Flags

- When you are on vacation and instead of playing in the pool with your child, you are on the computer trying to get an IRB in on time.
- When your teacher calls your back office line to report that your child is the only one who doesn’t have the parent permission form for the field trip for tomorrow and can you FAX it to her now.
- When you receive a call from the preschool that your child is sick and needs to be picked up immediately and you find yourself in a fierce phone call with your spouse over whose work is less important as neither of you feels you have the option to go pick up your child.

Remember to use your resources and common sense with work-life balance with children. The Faculty and Staff Assistance program at UCSF is free and confidential: 476-8279. Therapy is now considered medical treatment and should have the same co-pay as a medical condition. Classes in mindfulness and stress reduction are available at the Osher Center at UCSF. The Chancellor’s lecture series on Faculty Life for stress reduction are very helpful. Talk with other faculty/your mentors, your pediatrician, your physician/NP if you are having unusual stress. Most of all, enjoy your children because they grow up so very fast!