

WAHM-IT!, The Masters Course

Get Organized to Work at Home

*Tips and tricks on getting you,
your family and your space organized.*

Are you working at home already? Or are you wondering if it's the right way to go in the near future?

Take this important tip from us...

Based on our experiences of working at home for years, juggling childcare, domestic stuff, kids' schedules, our partners' needs and our own, we all agree that in order to do it successfully, without cracking up, you need just one thing... **organization.**

Get organized, and you can conquer the world, or at least stay happily on top of your own little corner of it.

Are you still not sure how it would work for you? We brainstormed some ideas with other WAHMs and pulled together these additional tips to inspire you...

Tip # 1 [Set up your work space at home.](#)

Tip # 2 [Make work time.](#)

Tip # 3 [Secure support from those close to you.](#)

Tip # 4 [Manage childcare while working.](#)

Tip # 5 [Take domestic shortcuts to free up valuable time.](#)

Ready to get organized? Start here...

Tip #1 Set Up Your Work Space At Home

First, you need **space**. Thankfully, working from home means you can be creative and flexible. If your home doesn't have a dedicated office or study, then think about where else could you find space? Are there a few square feet to spare in any of these?

- Attic
- Basement
- Breakfast nook
- Walk-in closet
- Corner of living room or bedroom (use privacy screen if necessary)
- Foyer or lobby
- Hall or landing
- Garage
- Garden shed
- Laundry room, utility room
- Or....?

Once you've decided where your home office will be, you need the right equipment to get the job done.

Essentials include:

- Desk (or any flat surface where you can work)
- Computer – desktop or laptop/notebook with Internet access
- Printer
- Phone (using a cell phone gives flexibility and frees up your home phone)
- Answering machine
- Filing system (cabinet, crate, box, concertina folder)
- Comfortable chair
- Good lighting
- Basic office supplies (pens, highlighters, folders, stapler etc.)

But (and this is a very important “but”)... don't blow your budget. Start with what you have, add what you absolutely need, and shop to your heart's content only when your business begins turning a profit and you can afford the extras.

As you create your workspace and purchase essentials, keep in mind the need to be **flexible and efficient**.

Your **computer** is crucial. Make sure your operating system is current, your software up-to-date, and you've installed adequate anti-virus and firewall protection. **Create regular backups** of your data. Your data is your business's lifeline... protect it above all costs.

Using a notebook computer and wireless Internet means you can **work anywhere in your home**, even outside on the patio! If you have small children, who can't be left unsupervised, a wireless laptop is ideal. You can work wherever your kids are.

A notebook with wireless also lets you **work outside your home** wherever there's wireless Internet... in local restaurants, coffee shops, a public library, even in shopping malls. Having the option to “go out and work” can make a tremendous difference to your productivity.

Another great way to maximize your budget, space and time is to **combine functionality**. If you need a printer, look for a model that includes a printer, copier, scanner and fax machine... all-in-one.

No matter how small your work space, enjoy creating one that is just for you. We love our work spaces. They're places where we find another side to ourselves, beyond “just mom”.

Tip # 2 Make Work Time

Are you envisioning your work space? Great! Next question is... how will you squeeze work time into your already busy day?

Start by figuring how much time you can afford to give to your business, and create a work schedule.

First, set some ground rules with yourself, family and friends. If you work at home, whatever you do, then you're a **working mother**, even if your office is "home". Use your answering machine consistently to screen calls and prevent interruptions. Learn how to say: "Sorry, I have to work!"... because you do.

Next, **set office hours**. You could decide on regular days and times or, if your life is more unpredictable, identify the times when you will be able to do some work, even if these are different every day.

This bit is vital... When work time comes around, **turn your back on other demands**.

Don't start mopping the kitchen floor or changing the bedding. Go to your work space and work. You may find it helpful to set a timer, so that you carry on working for an allotted time span. When the bell goes drrrrring, then – and only then – do you go back to being "mom"!

Factor in the following as you create your work schedule:

- times of day you're naturally most productive
- times when there are least amount of distractions
- other priorities, like time with partner and kids,
- and remember...allow yourself time for adequate rest and relaxation.

Finally, **be realistic**. If you only have three hours a week to work on your business, then that's what you schedule. Just make the most of that time.

Can't find any free time? Answer this question honestly to yourself: Which is more important to me - earning an income from home, or all the "other stuff"?

If you want work time, you'll have to **spend less time** doing some things, or completely **eliminate** activities from your schedule. We've faced the same dilemma, and cut down on:

- TV-time – aren't there shows you could live without?
- E-mail and Internet surfing – are they all are related to your business?

- Kids' activities – ditch any which eat into your time, and which kids no longer enjoy.
- Shopping – do it one swoop, or order online and have it delivered.
- Cleaning – delegate chores, hire help, create a system.

Here are some other terrific ways to free up more time – and even 15 minutes a day can make a big difference:

- Practice saying “no” more often.
- Plan menus, prepare food ahead of time and max out your freezer!
- Create a regular “Daddy Night”, when the kids get quality time with Dad, while Mom gets to work uninterrupted.
- Use a daily/weekly/monthly planner that works for you and your personality (paper, electronic, scraps of paper...just make sure it helps you stay organized).
- Schedule regular “work retreats”...go to a relative's home, or hotel, and work for one or more days without interruption.

For us, finding time to work – and sticking to it – is about the most challenging aspect of working from home. It's an ongoing task, but take heart. It does get easier as the family – and you – get used to your new regime.

And remember, in the end, **you** are the only one who can create your success. Roll up your sleeves and **just do it!**

Tip # 3 Secure Support From Those Close To You

You might be thinking, “Organizing time and space is all very well, but the first thing I need is the backing of my partner and family.”

We understand. Let's face it... working from home isn't “traditional” (although it's definitely a fast-growing trend). But just like anything else, it's easier to succeed if you have the support of key individuals.

We've found that the best way to *get support* is to *be supportive*. Make sure you involve those you love as you prioritize, set goals and start your new online business. If spouse or partner, children, parents, siblings and friends know they're important enough to be consulted when it comes to planning your new business, it's much more likely they will feel a sense of “ownership” when it comes to helping you succeed.

It may help if your loved ones know and understand what it is you're doing. In Part 4 of the WAHM-IT Guide ("Is This For Me?" Helpful Resources), there is a list of links to places which will help you show them what theme-based websites are, how they're built, how they earn income, and what it all costs.

As you start to build your business, take some specific steps to enlist the support of your spouse, partner, older children or friends and relatives:

- Set your priorities. Will you be less available to spend extra time with your partner for the next six months? Discuss with your loved ones.
- Build a simple plan to achieve your aims. Show your family and friends how they fit into the plan. Be specific: "I can do this if you're willing to cook dinner and handle bedtime routine two nights a week."
- Be sensitive and flexible, but firm when it comes to non-negotiable goals and boundaries.
- Celebrate your results, and share the rewards. If someone you love has gone out of their way to help you succeed, make sure they know it!

I'm nearing the "other side" where there is money coming in and he's begun to believe. I've seen the glimmer in his eye when a cheque arrives in the mail... he'll clutch it in his hands, grinning at me. Michelle

Also keep in mind that it's difficult for *anyone else* to take your business seriously, unless *you* do. Set office hours and let family and friends know that you're unavailable to take phone calls or socialize. Hand out business cards. Create firm, non-negotiable boundaries when it comes to distractions.

It's hard to not use the time to mop the floor and wash the dog, but I've made my website my "job" and ask my family to respect that. So far, so good! Jennifer

We all know we can't please everyone, all the time. Try hard to enlist the support of those you love. Make sure you regularly check with them not just how your site is progressing, but how well the way you are working suits them. Listen to what they say, and try to find compromises when there are problems.

Be flexible, but stay true to your priorities, your goals and your action plan. Share the journey, with all its highs and lows. And if you don't immediately have the total backing of those close to you, keep going anyway. Because, when you succeed, you may find that your loudest critics become your strongest supporters.

Tip #4 Manage Childcare While Working

Are your kids at school during the day, and old enough to take care of themselves when they're at home?

You're in with a head start, because you have built-in work time.

If you have younger children, it's a different story. At those times when you want to work while your kids are home (and awake), try these ideas:

- Set up a no-mess craft area.
- Rotate toys, so you always have some "new" ones to offer.
- Provide challenging puzzles.
- Designate a quiet time (with reward...time with you!).
- Let kids watch educational (or just plain fun) videos and DVDs.
- Allow video game time.

If you want to spend more time working, you may decide to arrange some childcare. We've tried all of these at different stages:

- Have older siblings watch younger ones.
- Hire a mother's helper (a teenager who comes in to cook, clean and babysit).
- Swap sitting with a friend/neighbor.
- Occasionally, ask a relative to sit.
- Various paid childcare options.

These solutions can work well day-to-day, but what about holiday or seasonal breaks? Fortunately, building websites is highly flexible work, so you can anticipate those long breaks and down-shift your schedule for a while. It's easy to give yourself time off to enjoy holiday times with your kids.

Over vacation times, you could also try these:

- Sign up for summer camps or other organized activities for kids.
- Create a babysitting co-op with other WAHMs, with a schedule that allows each of you a full workday each week.

Give ample time and thought to your childcare decision. Done right, you'll be more productive – and your kids will be just fine.

Tip #5 Take Domestic Shortcuts To Free Up Valuable Time

You know that managing a household is a time-consuming job, but there are loads of ways to cut corners, and we're wise to 'em all! Try these:

- Use phone time for “no-think” chores like sorting laundry, dusting, wiping counters, ironing. Purchase an inexpensive headset or a cordless phone, and presto... you're hands-free to do chores while you talk.
- Create a routine, and do certain chores – and no others – on the same day every week.
- Agree with your partner specific chores that he will do, now that you are working.
- Enlist help from kids – set a timer for 15 minutes, and then everybody cleans until the timer goes off.
- Teach older kids how to do chores. You may need to offer small rewards.
- Be ruthless with clutter. Sling out stuff you haven't used in six months, shred out-dated paperwork, take old clothes to charity shops, etc. Clear space, in your home and in your mind.

We hope we've inspired you to see that building a content-rich website at home can be a very viable option for moms. And all it takes to get started is... **a little organization!**