



WHO CARES?

Researchers with kids – discussion group

Best Practice Recommendations from the Workshop Series



The series of two-hour workshops "WHO CARES? Researchers with kids – discussion group" has taken place regularly twice a year since October 2016 as a platform for exchange between professors, postdocs and doctoral candidates with children. Discussions center on combining family life with an academic career.

This best practice guide presents and summarizes the outcomes of this series of workshops, offering possible solutions to some of the challenging situations which arise.

You can find a wealth of information, documents and forms on the topic on UZH's family portal at www.families.uzh.ch.

1 Best Practice – Institutional Level

1.1 Maternity leave / unpaid parental leave / reduced working hours

- Let your superiors know in good time that you are to become a parent, and about any unpaid parental leave that you would like to take. You should also discuss all of the relevant aspects of your return to work (see also the following two points).
- If you wish to shorten your working hours at the post-doctoral qualification stage, remember that formally reducing your workload may mean that you earn less, but that you still find yourself working your old hours. Talk to your superior in advance about the hours you plan to work, and about organizing your substitute – then review your plan regularly to see if it is working. Otherwise, ask to speak to your superior again.
- As a safeguard for yourself and your superiors, use the "Memorandum of Conversation on Parenthood" document (see the family portal: www.families.uzh.ch), which sets out all of the relevant agreements in writing and is signed by both parties.

1.2 Basic points about applications: What you need to remember

- Keep your CV ready and update it regularly. Don't wait to update it until you spot a great new opportunity, because then you'll need to act fast – and that's not always feasible with children around.
- Apply for as many as possible of the grants and awards, etc. that are important for you. Then your name will become known, and when you're successful you'll be able to use the grant/award as a reference.
- Keep your website up to date: Manage your list of publications, etc. carefully, and make sure the photo is professional and current. The information on your website is just as important as that you include in your application dossier, because it might be checked out briefly once again just before your interview.
- If you are applying or making a presentation for a professorship, arrive early to check the technical systems, and bring your own laptop and a bottle of water (technology and refreshments may not be planned or provided).
- During your talk or interview, mention your strengths and major grants, etc. again, as the committee or interviewer may have read your dossier some time ago, and may not remember all of the important details.
- Practice your talk or interview in advance with someone else!

1.3 Applications: Should you communicate time out for parenthood / childcare visibly in your CV?

To a limited extent (see final point), for these reasons:

- Parenthood should increasingly be taken for granted in the course of an academic career, and should no longer be seen as negative.
- An interview is supposed to focus exclusively on your academic qualifications. However, if you still get asked about your family background, use your family-related time management skills as a positive argument.
- If you are asked any critical questions about moving in your interviews (as mentioned, this type of question should only come up later in the negotiations!), emphasize that your family is willing to relocate with you. Where female applicants, in particular, are concerned, committees often worry that a partner's unwillingness to move will prevent you accepting any offer. Convince the committee by explaining, for example, that you have already been on the university/city website to find out about pre-schools, schools, and job opportunities for your partner. Show how much you like the area/region, and give specific examples of things that you have already looked into.
- If dual career promotion is addressed, thank the interviewer for their willingness to bring up the topic, and revisit it in any appointment negotiations. The interview is not yet the time to make any particular requests and should focus exclusively on your academic qualifications.
- At some higher education institutions, including some of the faculties at UZH, parental leave is counted towards your academic age.
- Some organizations to which you can apply for a grant assume a certain period of childcare for each child, and deduct this from your academic age. There is certainly room for improvement here, but in most cases these days, time spent caring for children is not discounted.
- All in all, participating professors mostly believe that the current political situation in higher education – at least in Europe – is such that, in some cases, lost time / limited time-outs / part-time employment owing to childbirth and child care can actually work to your advantage, but at least it can no longer publicly be interpreted as a disadvantage.
- That said, there is a lack of empirical evidence where longer (e.g. those lasting several years) part-time arrangements at the post-doc qualification stage are concerned. Caution should therefore be exercised here.

1.4 Appointments / events at UZH / your faculty / division

- Try to remain in contact with those in your division while you are on parental leave. You could stop by with the baby sometime, for example.
- Supported by a broad social network, try to attend important appointments and events within your organization/faculty/division as regularly as possible after your maternity or paternity leave. Make sure that, at some point, you also attend a dinner with invited speakers, so that you are not overlooked.
- Create professional networks for yourself, by staying for post-event drinks, for example, so people know that you are around.
- Don't *always* use the children to excuse your absence from appointments and events. That doesn't mean that you have to attend *every* event, and can *never* say no, but think carefully about the way you give your apologies. In return, UZH will make an effort to offer family-friendly, rotating meeting, and event times.
- Talk to your superior about ways and options that work for both sides that would allow you to take part in such events in association with your chair (e.g. which days and what times you can do). Where necessary, remind them of the options that you have discussed.

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- Ask the person who is organizing an event in association with your chair to choose a venue with good transport connections.

2 Best Practice – Private/Personal Level

2.1 How can I organize my workload so that I can get all of my work done effectively?

- When are you able to work well? Some people are more productive in the morning, others in the evening. Arrange your working hours accordingly. Handle major, important tasks during your most productive periods.
- Think and act in terms of jigsaw pieces (if you can), and don't try to get lots of things out of the way so that you can have a large block of several hours. Make the most of every free half hour. Get down to work as soon as the children are asleep, rather than doing the housework first, for example.
- Don't expect to take care of your children and get work done in parallel when you're looking after your children.
- Once you have used up a window of time and are finished, update the current status of your work for yourself in a type of journal, in which you summarize how things stand and list the next jobs that you have to do, including reminders of where you can find information and materials. That way, next time you have a window, you won't have to backtrack and will know exactly what point you reached last time, and where you have to pick your work up again now. With this in mind, your journal entry would not simply read "Continue writing article", but would be broken down into "Open mail from XY and extract literature references; produce chart; sketch stored in Z folder". Although this approach means spending a little more time on documenting progress before you stop work at the end of a phase, it does mean that you can get back into the subject faster the next time, and you are less likely to put off major tasks.
- Within your relationship, sit down for regular coordination sessions and look at what is coming up over the next week and next month, etc. Do this once a week or at intervals which suit you.
- Agree in advance what you will do if important appointments clash with those of your partner. One option here might be the "first come, first served" approach, meaning that whoever made the earlier entry in the (Google) calendar will go to her/ his appointment, while the other parent takes a back seat.
- Get support with the tasks that you don't like, and delegate. For example, you could invest in a cleaner. They wouldn't even have to come every week, but maybe every two, and depending on what you want might only do the big jobs such as the kitchen, bathroom, or the ironing, etc.
- Discuss with your partner whether structured family time might work for your family (or if you would prefer to keep things spontaneous). For example, you might decide that you will attend just *one* evening event per week, which you would then choose carefully, or that you will attend only *one* international conference per month/quarter/half-year, which would also be selected carefully. Alternatively, you might make each Saturday or Sunday a family day, on which you all go out and do something together. Fixed schedules help to simplify other organizational tasks and create clarity.
- If you are under pressure to publish, think about your particular talents, and join forces with other people – such as other postdocs from your broader field who also need to publish – whose skills complement your own. With this kind of approach, another person might take on the role of lead author, with the other(s) being co-author(s), but all benefit. These individuals might be drawn from your local working group, but at conferences you might meet other people whose papers you have already read.
- Look for mentors who can support you. It is perfectly OK to have more than one, as one person might be able to advise you well in their particular area, whereas someone else will be better at

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answering general questions. The most important thing here is to have the right chemistry between you.

2.2 How can I make sure that I still manage to relax?

- Think about what you need to feel well.
- Deliberately make time for it in your schedule, by making a date with yourself. You don't have to tell anyone else what it is. Just say that you have an appointment and aren't otherwise available!
- Approach this in the context of your relationship, as your partner is naturally entitled to his/her own downtime.
- Lack of sleep can be a problem, because the children wake up frequently during the night, won't settle, or have been sick for a while. In this case, agree with your partner to split the tasks that need to be done in a way that works for you both. You will never catch up on sleep entirely, but you can avoid having to shoulder the heavy burden of childcare on your own.
- Be careful to avoid "gate-keeping". This means acting as though you know better than your partner how different aspects of childcare should be done, and taking them back upon yourself as a result – thereby increasing the burden again. Accept that your co-parent does things differently, and let them get on with it.
- Plan couple-time just as regularly as you plan childcare and downtime for yourself.
- Fixed bedtimes for the children, and thus a clearly structured daily routine, will help the children – and you.
- Within a relationship, at-home childcare tasks should be divided clearly and fairly.
- Be clear with yourself that you cannot do everything *in the same time and to the same standard* as someone who does not have children. Look at the situation and ask yourself what you can do *at that moment*. Then take care of it.
- Accept the situation as it is.

2.3 How shall I deal with negative comments?

- If possible, don't respond to criticism. Constantly defending your way of life costs too much energy. You're better off investing this energy in your career, family or elsewhere.

2.4 My partner isn't keeping their side of the bargain – what should I do?

- Equal opportunity parenting functions only when you work as a team, pull together, and you both believe strongly in being reliable. So:
- Before you even start a family, find the right partner by discussing your values and attitudes at an early stage, in addition to how you believe parenting should work in practice, and how your careers might progress. Often, couples only discover after their child has been born that they have conflicting attitudes, leading both parents to fall back into traditional roles. It is clearly impossible to plan and consider every detail in advance, but you should discuss and agree on a general outline.
- Remember, however, that while you can do a great deal of advance planning, once the child has been born the situation may be different to the way you had imagined. For example, you might be looking forward to being at home with your child, but find after a few weeks or months that you feel trapped and frustrated. As a backup, develop a plan B with your partner in advance, and revise both your opinions regularly in the light of real-life experiences and feelings – even if that means reworking your original agreements and plans.
- If your relationship has become stuck because of your differences, get independent, professional help via parental support services (often offered through your local family/community center), coaching, or counseling, with the *Fachstelle UND* organization, for example.

2.5 My / our family lives abroad / I'm a single parent. We have / I have no family support with childcare. How can we / can I solve the childcare problem?

- Get out and meet good people at an early stage, so that you can expand your social network to include reliable neighbors or friends, for example.
- Ideally, you will meet people who are also able to help *during the day*, if a child is ill, for example, so that you will still be able to keep important appointments (see the "Useful Links" section at the end of this document).
- If both parents live locally, you should divide childcare fairly if your child is ill. This may involve several days or even weeks, especially in the first few years of pre-school and school. One way of organizing yourself may be to mark extremely important dates (such as key presentations) in your calendar, and agreeing that your co-parent is not allowed to enter an equally important appointment at the same time. Then, if a child has to stay at home, it is easier to decide who will stay with them.
- The kihz Foundation for Childcare in the Zurich University Area offers a variety of its own daycare and vacation care solutions (see the "Useful Links" section at the end of this document), as well as advice on other options, such as nannies.
- In individual cases, regional networks enable you to get in touch with seniors wishing to take on the role of substitute grandparent (see the "Useful Links" section at the end of this document).
- Keep a look-out for other babysitting services, which are often provided by neighborhood organizations, or churches.

- Set up a shared household or baby roommate arrangement with other parents or parents-to-be, so that you can support each other with childcare.
- Depending on the character and age of your children, they may not be willing to stay with a relative stranger when you really need them to, which will increase your own stress levels. You may therefore need to have several of your planned "emergency" carers look after the children regularly, without any particular reason. If this results in costs, incurred by babysitters, for example, it can still be an important and worthwhile investment.
- Take advantage of the Parents@UZH network: www.families.uzh.ch/en/netzwerke

2.6 My partner has been offered a job in a different city / country. There doesn't seem to be anything for me there at the moment. What should we do?

- An academic career necessarily involves changes of job. Be clear from the beginning that this may mean also living apart from your partner and your child/children for a certain period. This, too, is something that should be discussed early on in your relationship.
- Draw up an A scenario for the best possible case (e.g. one parent goes to the new city (with or without the children) for one year, while the second parent looks for a job in the same city and follows on – or one parent goes to the new city/abroad alone for what is determined in advance to be a limited period, and then returns to their old home), and a B scenario in case the A scenario doesn't work out. Think too about the maximum length of time you are prepared to wait to get the result you want.
- Ask around all of the competent UZH offices for postdocs and doctoral candidates (see the "Useful Links" section at the end of this document), and with the SNSF, about possible grants which encourage and support periods spent abroad.
- Talk to your partner about taking turns with your career moves, meaning that it is parent 1's turn to take the current new job opportunity, but the next career move belongs to parent 2, while the other parent takes second place, etc.

2.7 I've been offered a job opportunity abroad. Should I follow my heart or go for the safe option and stay here?

- Every person has different priorities in life.
- Do whatever you think is good for you, since only you are responsible for your well-being.
- Weigh up the pros and cons carefully (e.g. working in the US is tougher, less work-life balance)

Useful Links:

Family Portal: www.families.uzh.ch

Parenthood fact sheet and Memorandum of Conversation on Parenthood

https://www.families.uzh.ch/en/kind/nachwuchs/nachwuchs_mitarbeitende.html

Childcare – kihz Foundation

<http://www.kihz.uzh.ch>

Working in a lab – checklists and information sheets – safety, security and environment

<http://www.su.uzh.ch/activities/arbeitsmedizin/doku.html>

Dr. Christine Guckenberger, phone: +41 44 63 54117; christine.guckenberger@su.uzh.ch

Dr. Christoph Weber, Head of Occupational Safety Office, phone: +41 44 63 54150;

christoph.weber@su.uzh.ch

Shared parenting checklists

<http://www.gemeinsam-regie-fuehren.ch>

Zurich family centers

<http://www.gz-zh.ch>

Substitute grandparents

<https://www.betreut.ch/leihoma>

Fachstelle UND

<https://www.fachstelle-und.ch/privatpersonen/uebersicht/>