



October 2021

Student Wellness

Juggling Parenting and School Responsibilities

If you are a CNM student and a parent, you are likely less of a minority than you may think. According to the Institute for Women's Policy Research, 3.8 million students, **one in five** of all college students, is a parent. Further, most parents attending college are caring for children under the age of 6.

Balancing academics and a family along with potential work responsibilities can be overwhelming—but it can be done. Here are some ideas to sustain and guide you through this worthy endeavor:

1. Remember Your Purpose

Education can enhance your sense of purpose and meaning, improve your marketability and income potential, and provide a strong model for your children. Whatever your reasons for going to school while parenting, it's valuable to keep that purpose in mind throughout your academic career. Understanding your "why" will direct you when competing priorities present themselves, help you maintain motivation when you're fatigued, and sharpen your focus to persevere.

2. Build Your Support System and Use It

Pursuing a program of study is a challenging task that is difficult to accomplish without support, particularly with the added demands of caregiving. It is valuable to consider the relatives, friends and neighbors you can include in your support network. Perhaps you find it difficult to ask for help. Reframe this period as a unique

season in your and your family's life, and don't stop yourself from reaching out for support. Communicate your needs, and know that support can come in many forms—practical (babysitting, transportation, meals, proofreading, errands) and emotional (patience, understanding, a listening ear) - to name just a few. Reevaluate the family chore chart. Perhaps its time for children to take on some first or expanded responsibilities at home as well.

3. Orient Your Family to CNM

Create an orientation to CNM for your loved ones. Show them your textbooks, your class schedule and your online portals. If you have in-person courses, take a family field trip and drive by to show your kids the building(s) you're in while you're on campus. Share your story on what going to college will help you accomplish. This intentional introduction will enhance their feelings of security while you're away and begin to create an understanding of the importance of the time and attention you're putting toward your academic goals.

4. Manage Your Time

Parenting naturally demands your time. Your studies will place demands on your time. You may also have a job that demands your time. It can often feel as though time is completely beyond your control. Time Management will be crucial to your success. Plan your time, communicate your schedule and commitments with your loved ones, and then protect it. Also set some special time daily as family time and guard and respect it as you do your work hours and course schedule.

Combine family and school time with a family study hall. Work on assignments together and quiz each other in preparation for your respective tests or quizzes.



Often it's also difficult to say no to the needs of extended family members, or to step back from volunteer commitments. Continuing to do all the other things you may have done before you added school to the mix may stretch you too thin. It is okay to say no. You need to realistically position yourself to successfully care for your family and accomplish your academic goals.

7. Be Intentional About Self-Care

As a parent, you are likely used to caring for everyone else before yourself. Finding time for yourself amidst school schedules and deadlines becomes more complicated, but even more crucial. Sleeping well, eating well and exercising will help you more effectively manage your responsibilities, relieve stress and maintain your overall health.

8. Celebrate Your Studies

Your college career should ideally be something you enjoy. Don't wait for graduation to celebrate. Celebrate the big things—like doing well on a research paper, project or test, but also the little things—understanding a challenging concept or completing a project under the deadline. Display your papers on the fridge with your kids' and include your children in celebrating milestones along the way. It will help your family and you feel that it is all worthwhile.

Next Month — Living Through the Grief Process

Learn about grief and ways to help yourself and others through the very human and difficult process of grieving.

Webinar

October 25—3:30-4:30 PM

Support Group

October 28—3:30-4:30 PM

Literally every moment will count as you endeavor to juggle your responsibilities. Learn how to use smaller time periods that present themselves for assignments, study and self-care. The popularized *Pomodoro Technique* espouses setting 25-minute time increments committed to immersing yourself fully in an assignment or project, followed by rewarding yourself with a break. Another approach is to segment your assignments or review into achievable chunks to take advantage of smaller blocks of time in your busy schedule, which can also build momentum. As a bonus, breaking up study time has been shown to be more effective and less stressful than cramming.

5. Leave Some Margin

Just as you set your page margins for a paper, readjust the margins in your life. Leave more space for contingencies—traffic, an unexpected flat tire, a child's snuffle, a computer crash or an internet outage. When the unexpected occurs that could cause you or an assignment to be tardy, take a deep breath, then reach out to your instructor as soon as you can. Further, if you anticipate that you may have a family issue that could impact your studies during a semester, let your teachers or advisors know in advance so it's even less of a surprise and they are all the more prepared to work with you.

6. Relax Your Expectations

There are only 24 hours in a day. While there are some things that must be done and done to a certain standard, there are some things that can wait. Perhaps you've always kept your car waxed, always had home-cooked meals or always made your famous recipe cupcakes for the school bake sale. It may be a time to relax those standards. Give yourself a break if you didn't get things dusted or the car doesn't shine. Learn to prioritize so that your most important responsibilities get completed.

RESOURCES:

Agora Crisis Center: 1-866-HELP-1-NM (435-7166) - www.agoracares.org
New Mexico Crisis and Access Line: 1-855-NMCRISIS (1-855-662-7474) or 1-855-227-5485 TTY
National Suicide Prevention LifeLine 24 hours: 1-800-273-8255 - <https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/>
Coronavirus Hotline: 1-855-600-3453 (toll free) and 1-505-827-0006
NewMexicoKids: 1-800-691-9067
<http://www.newmexicokids.org>