

**Parenting & Writing panel**  
**ASJA Writers Conference, New York**  
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Moderator: Cheryl Alkon, @Lyrehca, calkon@gmail.com

Panelists:

Jennifer Fink, @jlwf and @BuildingBoys, [jenniferlwfink@gmail.com](mailto:jenniferlwfink@gmail.com), BuildingBoys.net, podcast: On Boys: Real Talk About Parenting, Teaching, and Reaching Tomorrow's Men. (Can find it on Apple Podcasts, Stitcher and via the [website.http://www.on-boys-podcast.com/](http://www.on-boys-podcast.com/))

Wendy Helfenbaum, @WendyHelfenbaum

Shannon Shelton Miller, @ShannonSMWrites

Ellen Sheng, @ellensheng

More tips from parents on how they balance making a living with raising kids:

"I have six kids, and I write full time. My best advice after 20 years of parenting (with 20 more to go with kids in the house) is to do what works for YOU. If you feel like writing 6 straight hours, and you can? Do it. If you need a day to blow off work and just cuddle with kids (and no deadlines looming)? Do it. So many experts have made a million dollars telling people how to "have it all" by carefully balancing, scheduling, monitoring, and measuring, but all of that leads to a life not well lived, IMO. (I don't bullet journal, never will.) I get by with a general schedule (what's due and when) and the life fills in those gaps, naturally, on its own. This requires an incredible amount of confidence in your own decision-making and an acceptance or the practice of "going with your gut", but it has not failed me yet. I may never have a clean house, but I have a career and a loving family. I win by filtering out all the very personalized advice from experts and doing what works for MY life, MY dreams, and MY values. "

Linsey Knerl, ASJA

"When I started freelancing 20 years ago (yikes!), I had two kids in high school. Now my wife keeps grandchild #2 at our house on Fridays. So I guess I've seen both ends of the spectrum. My best advice is to work at least a day ahead of deadlines. When you leave things to the last minute, you inevitably end up with a surprise trip to the pediatrician or some other minor crisis. On the plus side, I've found I'm much better at doing a final read-through of something I've written if I'm able to set it aside for a day or two and then come back to it."

Mark Ray, ASJA

"I have been freelancing for 18 years and been a parent 17 of those years. I always try to work ahead of deadlines (not always possible but I try) for the same reasons--that something can and does go wrong or someone gets sick.

On the weekends, I look at my week ahead with all the kids activities and sports (ages 17, 15 and 10) and plan accordingly. For example, this week, I planned for a baseball game, a nighttime school band concert, an all-day field trip on Thurs. and the ASJA conference on Friday week, so I'm killing myself getting all my deadlines done around the events and before I leave for NYC. But it's worth it...I love the flexibility! It's not always easy or feasible though.

As a result, I work until midnight more nights than I like to admit but I have to do it to meet deadlines so that's the reality. I'll try to sleep on the weekend. The flexibility and the ability to see (and experience) my kids doing fun things is what keeps me going. I feel very fortunate I have not had to miss too many of their childhood experiences--sleep deprived or not!"

Christine McLaughlin, ASJA

1. Hire child care. I thought I could write 'in my spare time' when my son was born, but I figured out quickly I needed a sitter. She only came to the house 15-20 hours a week, but I used that time for interviews and to write. Background reporting, research, and lower-intensity stuff I saved for when she wasn't there.

2. Get creative about childcare. At the Y where I work out, you can dump (I mean drop off) your kid for up to two hours to work out. When I was really busy, I'd drop Ryan off and work from there for two hours. That saved me on several deadlines (and bonus, Ryan had a great time, too.) I also had both kids in preschool when they were 2. It was only 2 hours/3 days a week but that was bonus work time!

3. Know your personal rhythms. I'm a morning person. Give me three hours first thing and I can get more done than most people do in ten. But after noon? Forget it. I'm not nearly as productive. Point? I save my heaviest lifting for the morning (and that's when I always had a sitter, too.) Some nights, I would put in another hour or two's worth of work after the kids were in bed, but I try not to do that unless absolutely necessary.

4. Ancillary point to #1/2. Make some mom friends. When your kids are little, you'll often do playdates as moms/kids (because God knows no one can take care of your baby like you!). But as you make friends, and your kids get older, you graduate to...wait for...the drop-off playdate! A. When your kid is somewhere else, again, free childcare. B. When your kid has a friend over, said kid is entertained and you can work. (This is more true as your kids get older. I wouldn't leave two three-year-olds alone, obviously, but when my eight-year-old has a friend over, she's out of my hair for a while.)

5. Take time to reboot yourself. For me, that means getting a run or workout in; vegging at the coffee shop for 30 minutes WITHOUT actually working; connecting with my friends. I know I need to hit my reset button when I'm snapping at my kids or feeling overwhelmed.

6. Appreciate the fact that you can freelance. I'm divorced now and my health insurance is expensive (and not that great). HOWEVER. I can take my kids to school; pick them up; volunteer at their schools; and be more involved in their day-to-day lives than if I were working at a "regular" job. I always try to be grateful for that. My kids are old enough now to understand to be quiet when I'm on the phone, and what being "on deadline" means, and that sometimes whether we can do something activity-wise (like a vacation) hinges on how I'm doing work wise."

Kelly James, ASJA and author of *Six-Figure Freelancing: The Writer's Guide to Making More Money*.

"I'm an empty-nester now, but back in the babies/school years stages, I traded childcare with another mom in the same boat, each of us taking the four kids 2 days a week. We all became like family and care was excellent and flexible.

I'd also advise talking about schedule, support, and expectations with your spouse or SO before you become parents to make sure you're on the same page and understand that working remotely is a REAL job, as is parenting.

Continue the dialogue as clients/workload fluctuates and the demands of parenting change with every phase-baby/toddler/school-age, etc. It seemed like I was reassessing my schedule every 6 mo to a year at least!

Have one or two back-up care options at the ready, especially for times when the kids get sick.

Make time for yourself, because you're only good to your family and your clients if you keep yourself whole. And don't expect to do everything and do it well.

Give yourself plenty of credit and demand respect and acknowledgement of your hard work from others. I think of juggling stay at home mom responsibilities and a home-based business as one of the toughest things I ever did but the rewards for my family were 100% worth it. "

Ann Gibson, ASJA

"I don't 'do it all.' Once I gave up the notion that that was a thing, I became a much happier person. I outsourced where I could, teamed up with neighbors/girlfriends where I could (think: Costco run - 'hey, while you're there, could you pick me up some...'), and crossed things off of my list. It's amazing what you determine isn't really important when you start going through your to-do list with a fine-tooth comb. Also, the crockpot became a vital piece of equipment. Toss stuff in at 8am, hot dinner at 6pm. Leftovers for at least one day. Brilliant."

Kari O'Driscoll

“Figure out how often you can afford to make less than the cost of childcare. You'll have to some weeks. Or allow your house to be filthy.”

Lisa Selin Davis, ASJA

“The time you have for work is only for work. Not time to do the dishes or anything else. Getting help where you can is key too. I'm still figuring it out daily.

Katherine Martinelli, ASJA