

## I Wish I Would Have Put My Kids In Daycare Sooner

"I felt bad complaining about how hard it was, and I honestly felt like I would be a failure if I had to pawn off my kid to a daycare center."

by Judy Koutsky Jul 14, 2016



As a freelance writer, I had this idea of how easily my career would adjust to parenthood once my son was born. I'd continue to work, scheduling my writing and interviews around their nap schedules, then spend quality time with him when I wasn't working.

Yay, right?

Here's the thing about babies: They don't adhere to schedules. My son napped at odd hours, making it impossible to schedule phone interviews, then he was up all night, wanting to feed every 40 minutes. That plus all the other struggles of being a new mother added up to make me feel so utterly, dead-woman-walking exhausted that it was impossible to get any quality work done.

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But I didn't want to put my kids in daycare. I waited until my late thirties to have kids, so by the time my baby came along, I had established a career and lifestyle I really loved. And while I was so grateful and happy to have my son, I felt that if I wasn't with him every minute, it would make me a bad mom.

There was a good dose of societal pressure I felt, too. Of course a full-time working mom could justify (and afford) daycare; but why would a woman who works from home (earning a part-time income) need someone

else to care for her child? It didn't help that other moms would tell me how "lucky" I was to be freelance, because I had such a flexible schedule and could be with my son all the time. My husband and I never even discussed daycare; it was assumed that since I had a flexible schedule, it would fall to me.

I felt bad complaining about how hard it was, and I honestly felt like I would be a failure if I had to pawn off my kid to a daycare center.



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So I sucked it up. I tried to do both, juggling a work-from-home career with 24/7 parenting. I held a puking child in my arms while I wrote articles on traveling. I tried to do a phone interview with a doctor on the topic of dental hygiene for kids while my own teething son screamed from his crib in the background. I took Mommy and Me walks in Central Park with the stroller crew, trying to keep the rising panic of my deadlines at bay. I tried not to focus on the all-consuming pain in my breasts from mastitis and thrush while my son decided to go on marathon nursing session the day before a big project was due.

In time, I realized I was doing a terrible job at both. I didn't allow myself time for work or motherhood. When I was with my son, I was so busy multi-tasking, it was hard to take in those fleeting Kodak moments, like when he giggled so hard he fell over or the first time he gave me a kiss. And while I never missed a deadline, I definitely wasn't turning in my best work either.



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But I never cut myself enough slack, and I didn't ask for help because I felt guilty admitting how much I loved and missed work without a crying baby around.

After 18 months, well past the time I needed it, I put my son into three-day-a-week care. It was, for me, the happiest time of his young childhood. Why? Because I could suddenly organize my time. It's not that I didn't love my baby — I did, unconditionally — but it's next to impossible to get meaningful work done with a little one at home. Now I could schedule phone interviews with experts in the morning without worrying about a baby crying in the background. I could really think about a story before working on a second edit, since I had the luxury of extra time. And I could enjoy all the little moments when I was actually with my son, instead of keeping one eye on him and one on my email.

When you only have a limited amount of time with something, you maximize that time to its fullest potential. I wish I had put my son in daycare earlier, because it wasn't until I put him into a safe, nurturing (and, yes, expensive) environment that I was able to take care of me, which made me a better mother to him. If only I had realized that sooner!

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