

Originally from the West of Ireland, my wife and I have two children aged 3 and 5. My wife works as Director of Nursing in a local Mental Health Service. Therefore, when the first lockdown occurred, her workload rose exponentially and while it did not happen, the prospect of her relocating to HSE accommodation in Dublin loomed large. So, all in all, I spied an opportunity to support her, work from home and have wonderful Daddy, Daughter and Son time with the kids. Initially, despite all the worries about older parents and wider society, we embarked on a grand old time, taking gentle strolls to the local sports pitch and undulating drives down forgotten boreens within the 5km limit. Work though was important and adopting a diligent approach to my duties seemed sensible and necessary. I cut out shaving so as to recoup time. Unfortunately, while I managed to prepare some arguably nutritious meals for the children, I relied on processed food myself. I found early morning was a good time to work, however, the children quickly learned when I was at my most vulnerable – headset on, talking to the usual array of friendly faces on Zoom. It was often then they would launch a co-ordinated sortie to the sweet press and furtively raid an assortment of treats. Unwisely perhaps I tolerated this as I knew it would buy me space to balance out work, cleaning and cooking duties.

Over time, however, the arrangement of 'parenting from work', as my colleague Dr Colman Noctor eloquently puts it, wore thin. I worried that the children might fall from a press or shelving unit and sustain injury. I began to feel like a double failure – I was letting both my work and my family down. My sleep and appetite were affected. I would wake at 4am with the urge to grab the laptop and write emails. I am not sure if I had panic attacks, but I had many symptoms of same and was constantly on edge with heightened emotionality.

Then a colleague suggested that a childminder might be feasible as it might fall within the regulations. On May 18th, the regulations were eased. I arranged for a Leaving Certificate student to attend the house for a few hours each day. In order to facilitate social distancing, the student occupied a tree house and entertained the children from there whilst I also had sight of them. The

good weather was a lucky break in facilitating this. It was such a relief to have this support. Up to then, my son had developed a tendency to partake in 'naked gardening' whilst my daughter soaked him with a hose. I knew a different approach was needed.

Support for all members of our society during lockdowns is important. I was one of the fortunate ones but there are so many members of our society who could not access the supports available to me. Women are disproportionately affected by increased caring responsibilities, but men often are too. We must take steps to ensure that high quality childcare, home care and domiciliary based older person's care is prioritised by our Government and society. We must seek to ensure that this is flexible and affordable so as to safeguard and promote access to work and recreation for people of all genders and socio-economic means. Members of such caring professions such be recognised and remunerated appropriately for the invaluable work they do. Thank you.

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