

ACAAI Women in Allergy Committee Resource Guide: Child Care

Women in Medicine are “Super Mamas!”

Women in Medicine have superpowers, yet often face unique challenges when it comes to their motherly privileges due to the demands of their profession and predefined gender roles. Not only do we work long hours caring for patients, but our work often continues until our heads hit our pillows. We know it “takes a village” to raise our children and takes a great deal of careful planning. Specific issues that women in medicine who have children (or are planning to have children) may face include:

- Difficulty balancing work demands and parental responsibilities (assisting with school-related requests and extracurricular activities) to avoid feelings of guilt and stress.
- Lack of quality child care options compatible with demanding schedules.
- Discrimination or stereotypes based on their gender (e.g., RVUs, publications/grants, on-call coverage) making career advancement more difficult.
- Finding role models or mentors advising on work-life balance and in turn, modeling excellence.

What are some strategies women in medicine can employ to seek support and help navigate these challenges with child related activities/school?

- Communicate respectfully, openly, and honestly about your availability. Remember other mothers may also have time or financial restraints and you can be a model for this.
- Determine which obligations are most important to you, be selective, and prioritize your commitments.
- Offer alternative ways to contribute.
 - Donate money.
 - Shop online for supplies that can be delivered directly to school or the organizing staff.
- Review your child’s schedule early and frequently.
 - Request days off (e.g., vacations, teacher workdays, school events) so they don’t sneak up on you.
 - Talk to the teacher at the beginning of the year if dates are not publicized.
 - Don't be afraid to delegate tasks or ask for help. This could include enlisting the support of your partner or joining together with other parents to divide a larger task. You're a boss, so put those skills to use!

It is important to remember that you are doing your best given the demands on your time. It is not always possible to meet every expectation or request, and it is okay – and necessary – to set boundaries and prioritize your own well-being and the needs of your family. It is okay to say no!

Finding and investing in child care is obviously a priority. What are some tips on working through child care challenges?

- Start looking even during family planning as many child care options may have long wait lists.
- Check with your health system for child care options for onsite daycare and emergency child care services when your child is sick or when the normal child care is not an option.
- Check the local college student social media child care services sites.
- Consider all options: nanny, daycare, family/friend/neighbors assistance, pre-school, before and after school programs.

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- Consider splitting maternity leave/paternity leave with your partner (you take the first six-weeks, they take the second).
- Have a back-up plan for snow days, sick days, and those days school is out, or daycare is closed.
- Have a back-up plan if your children are sent home from daycare/school sick.
- Navigate with your partner to split the days off when able/needed.
- Consider paying someone to be “on call” for you during days when you may not be able to miss work, although this may not be financially feasible for all.
- Plan your call schedule around school holidays, teacher workdays, late drop off, and early release.
- Control what you can and have a plan if your child must come to work with you.
- Discuss your needs with your team/office.
- Alter your work schedule based on your child care needs. Consider coming in later after drop-off, working through lunch, and/or leaving early for pick-up.
- Make sure all of your village is on the updated verified school pick-up list.

Although these challenges can be tough, having a back-up to the back-up plan can save you a lot of grief in those difficult unplanned times and continue your reputation of reliability.

What can we do to avoid discrimination based on stereotypes affecting women in medicine, creating bias and difficulty investing in career advancement?

- When interviewing for jobs, assess the leadership team for mentoring opportunities that promote advancement of women.
- Assess each position for educational opportunities for the entire faculty on diversity, inclusion, and equity to help alleviate bias and bring awareness.
- Bring child care with you when attending educational meetings. Solicit information on breast-feeding options at meetings and activities where family members are welcome.
- Consider hosting open forum discussions with your group about wellness and work-life balance goals. Do not forget about others who may not have children or whose children are grown.
- Work on everything together, dividing up the work to accomplish a greater goal.

There are so many successful Women in Medicine mamas who have paved the way. They are a wealth of information and are ready to share that knowledge.

With increasing number of women in medicine in our field, what can we do to support each other?

- Find role models both within and outside of your work environment who have demanding occupations. Become a role model yourself!
- Consider job-share opportunities if seeking part-time employment.
- Check on your co-workers often.

Understand that no two women have the same home demands, including those without children. Talk to your coworkers to set expectations and develop a culture of understanding and support.