

## The Value of a Parent Staying Home with Kids, and Tips on How to Do It

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Last week, I dropped my 3-year-old son Seth Isaiah and my 1-year-old daughter Noelle Cayce to daycare for the first time ever.

It broke my heart to leave them there.



Despite my fears and broken heart, both babies did very well their first day, didn't cry, and actually seemed to enjoy the daycare.

But after 3+ years of my wife staying home with the babies, it is a strange phenomenon to leave them with people I barely know. My wife Eva just returned to work as a teacher, allowing her to finally get out of the house and back to her career, but also breaking her heart as well, as she is so used to being with the babies all day.

When my wife became pregnant with Seth, almost four years ago, we decided that it would be great for the baby if she could stay home and take care of him. It was something we both really wanted, so we looked at how we could accomplish it (more on that below). It wasn't easy, as our finances were already tight, with four kids already in school, but we managed it.

And it was great. She stayed home not only with Seth but also with Noelle, and we have cherished that luxury of having a parent in the home with our babies.

### **The Value of a Parent Staying Home with Kids**

Why was it so important to us that Eva be able to stay home with the kids, and why were we so willing to make the sacrifices required to make that happen? It's simple: there's no one better to raise our kids, care for them, and teach them than their parents.

Eva was the obvious choice to stay home with them, although I would have loved to do so myself, because she was breast-feeding them and because it would be easier for me to make the extra income required once she quit her job, as I can freelance on the side.

Here are a few of the reasons we decided that it would be valuable for Eva to stay home with the babies:

- **Breastfeeding.** Again, Eva wanted to breastfeed the babies, as it is so much healthier for them. It's definitely possible to breastfeed and go to work at the same time (requiring the working mother to pump milk), and many people do this, but it's much easier if the mom is at home.
- **Loving care.** I know that daycares actually do a good job at caring for babies, but there's no substitute for a

parent's loving care. We felt that our babies would be so much better off with that care from their mother, that they would be happier and better-adjusted for it.

- **Bonding.** By staying home, Eva was able to create a special bond with her babies. It's possible, of course, to create such a bond even if you go to work, and I tried to do that myself by spending as much time with my babies as possible when I wasn't working, but it's obviously easier to create that bond if you're with them all the time.
- **Teaching.** Babies begin learning from their parents at a very early age, and as such parents are usually their first and most important teachers. We felt it would be valuable for them to learn from Eva rather than a daycare teacher, and I think we had very positive experiences with this learning process.
- **Learning about the babies.** In the same way that the babies learned from Eva, she also learned about them. Being with them all the time allowed her to know, in an intuitive way, what they need, what they like and don't like, how they react to things, what their developing personality is like, and what stage of development they're in at the moment.

Am I saying that parents who don't stay home are worse parents, or that they are doing a disservice to their babies? Not at all, and please don't take this article as an attack on parents who go to work. We did this with most of our other kids, so I understand the realities of parenting today. I just wanted to share our experience, and our reasons, and give parents some things to consider when making the very tough decision of whether to work or stay home.

### How We Made It Happen

So the obvious question, of course, is how we survived on just my income so that Eva could take a long break from her job and stay home with the babies. Let me say that it wasn't easy — with Eva going back to work, our finances should be much better — and it required a lot of sacrifices.

But again, it was fully worth all of the sacrifices, and we have loved that Eva was able to stay home with our babies.

So how did we do it? I increased my income and we drastically cut back on our spending. The tips below won't work for everyone, but I thought I'd share some tips from our experience:

1. **Freelancing.** When Eva decided to quit her job, I knew we couldn't live on my income alone. So I changed jobs, making it a term of my employment that I be able to do freelance writing in addition to my regular work, even doing the freelance work at my day job if I got all my work done. I then started freelancing for newspapers and magazines, as much as I could, even working evenings and weekends (from home) when I could. This gave us the extra income we needed to survive.
2. **Cut cable.** Even with a little extra income, we needed to cut back on expenses. One of the first to go was cable TV, as we knew it was a luxury. We easily got by without cable TV, watching DVDs and reading and finding other entertainment.
3. **Eat out less.** This is a major one. We love to eat out. However, we made a conscious effort to eat out much less, and to cook at home more often. It was a major reduction in expenses.
4. **Cheap entertainment.** Similarly, we also like to go to the movies. We used to go practically every weekend. Now, we go once every month or two. Instead, we find stuff to do with the kids that's fun, but doesn't cost a lot of money.
5. **Stick to a budget.** We were a bit of a free-spending couple before the big decision to live on my income alone. But once we made that decision, we had to learn to make a budget and stick to it. This has been a difficult learning process for us, as we used to break our budget often, and we've refined our process so that it now works fairly well for us.
6. **Don't get into debt.** We made the mistake, early on, of falling behind on our bills because of expenses that came up. We didn't have an emergency fund at the time, which we learned was a major mistake. We got into debt. We're still paying it off. We've learned how to avoid debt, and to slowly eliminate it. But if your budget is tight, then any debt you have to repay each month makes it even tighter.
7. **One car.** We made the decision to live with one car. I'll write about that in a future post, because it can be complicated with such a large family. Basically, we had to learn to cut back on the number of trips we made, and Eva had to do some extra driving to pick me up from work on the days she needed the car. Still, having one car was a major savings.

8. **Cheap rent.** This was a bit of luck, actually, so it's not really a tip. But we were lucky enough to find a house that is big enough for our entire family, with lots and lots of yard for the kids to play in, and get it for very cheap (maybe 1/2 to 1/3 of what most people might pay for something this large). Part of that is because it's in a kind of rural area, not downtown, but it's still only 15 minutes from downtown. Another reason is that I agreed to take care of all maintenance, which has meant extra work.
  9. **No credit cards.** We cut up our credit cards. We're still paying one off (almost done!), but we realized that credit cards make it too tempting to buy stuff when we can't afford it. Especially online. So now, we wait until we have the money, then buy it. Revolutionary! :)
  10. **Cut back on shopping.** We also used to go to the mall and walk around and buy stuff. Apparently it's all the rage. Not anymore. We'll still go to the mall (rarely), but we don't go there to buy stuff. We might go there for a movie, or to get a treat, but those are rare occasions and mostly we only go to a store when we really need something.
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