

artists raising kids



a crowdsourced, opinionated, realistic, positive compendium by and for artist parents

Artists Raising Kids is a collection of thoughts and tactics from artist parents. I surveyed 200 artist parents nationally, interviewed a group of parents in-depth, and hosted gatherings in Philadelphia and Baltimore. This is not a comprehensive, data-driven study; it's more like a zine, the booklet that, as an artist parent with two kids and an artist spouse, I needed.

3 Artists Raising Kids, by Andrew Simonet

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drawings by Christa Donner christadonner.com

Artists U is an artist-run incubator for helping artists build sustainable lives. We have ongoing programs in Philadelphia, Baltimore, and South Carolina, and we do workshops nationally. All Artists U programs and resources are free and open-source.

community + clarity = power

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Our challenge, and an obvious caveat

Our culture is not good at supporting artists.

Our culture is not good at supporting parents.

Artist parents live and work in this double challenge.

But. Making impossible things happen in an artist superpower. When we use the resourcefulness and creativity of our art practice on all aspects of our lives, we thrive. I tell artist parents what I tell all artists: Let's be realistic about the challenges and acknowledge that our skills are more than up to the task.

This conversation is part of my broader advocacy around sustainability. Artists who raise kids challenge a lot of unsustainable assumptions in our field about money, time, and living as an artist. Those assumptions are bad for all artists, not just the ones with kids. I don't advocate for the special needs of artist parents over the needs of others. I advocate for artistic lives that are balanced, productive, and sustainable, and supporting artist parents is part of that.

Obvious caveat: Every artist is different, and so is every family, every kid, and even the same kid at different ages. Choreographers and painters have different journeys. Single parents face different challenges than couples. Some kids love travel and adventure, others love home and routine. Kids with special needs can radically shift the demands of parenting. The ideas and thoughts in this booklet are possibilities, here to inspire and provoke. You, of course, are the expert on your own practice and family. Take what's useful and leave the rest.

Time and money (but mostly time)

This surprised me. Artist parents talked much more about time than money. Ten times more, at least. Questions of time management and balance dominated our survey responses and interviews. There were more comments about letting your kids use your art supplies than there were about money.

But artists considering having children asked about time and money equally. From a distance, time and money look similarly daunting. In practice, many artist parents find that time is an ongoing and thorny challenge, with money a distant second.

Time and money are the big challenges for all artists, parents and non-parents. Artists who cannot make their time-money equations work stop making art. The positive way of saying that is: If you manage your time and money, you can keep making your work. **If you have a realistic budget and schedule that include time and money for art, you can make your art. Forever.**

That may seem obvious—if I have time and money, I can make art—but I think it's important to distill the seemingly infinite, mysterious difficulties of living as an artist. Other challenges are real—artistic challenges, career setbacks, building an audience—but the things that prevent us from making art are time and money.

And raising kids puts new pressures on time and money, sometimes enormous pressures. As one artist Mom said: “It’s just time and money. Everything else is personal and mostly beautiful.”

The broader Artists U thought here is: Make a plan. Artists with written plans get to their goals. Raising kids makes planning more essential because parenting involves endless interruptions, adjustments, and demands on your time. A concrete, doable plan can sustain your artistic practice through that chaos. I recommend the artist planning exercise in *MAKING Your Life as an Artist*, our free downloadable book.

Why was time consistently described by parents as harder? Here’s what I saw:

- + Time is finite, money isn’t. We can increase our earnings, but not the hours in the day.
- + As parents, it’s easier to scrimp on money than time. Our kids may not need that fancy toy or new outfit, but they always need parenting.
- + Most artistic work demands more time than money.
- + Many of us understand our finances better than our schedules.

Budget your time and money to surplus (especially time).

Artist parent schedules need a margin of error. Changes and emergencies will arise. Many artist parents reported switching from an open-ended, less structured schedule to a more regimented one. Many said they worked out new ways of creating: in short bursts of time,

jotting down ideas to do later, finding a dedicated day in the week to work, or going on an artist retreat. As one artist put it, “I learned to work with or without momentum.”

Prospective artist parents asked, “How much does it cost to raise a child?” There is no single answer, of course. Artists live on radically different amounts of money with and without kids. I recommend finding one or two artist parents who are living the way you want to. Ask about their income and expenses, especially housing, health care, childcare, and education. Ask if they have family members who help out or family money that supports them. Other parents can help you prepare for the direct expenses of raising a kid.

There is an indirect expense many artist parents mentioned: They no longer feel comfortable living hand-to-mouth or paycheck to paycheck. They want more security, more of a cushion, and they are less able to cut back to zero when things get tight. I think this can be a very good thing for artists.

My friend Esther Robinson talks about the Three S’s:

Solvency: I can pay my bills.

Stability: I can pay my bills, and I have 3-6 months of living expenses in savings.

Security: I have 3-6 months of living expenses in savings, and I am building other long-term assets: home ownership, retirement, saving for a child’s education.

Too many artists strive only for Solvency. Raising kids, thankfully, pushes many of us to imagine Stability and Security, opening up new possibilities in our financial lives. Our ability to get low, to live cheaply and flexibly, is a great asset. But so is the ability to build security, to budget for surplus. When you have several months of expenses in the bank, all kinds of things are possible for you as a parent and as an artist.

At first, especially for breastfeeding moms, don’t expect to get much done.

The first weeks and months are intense, sometimes overwhelming. Many of us, myself included, have moments of despair when it seems we will never get back to being the artists we were. This will change. Many artists moms said this one heartening thing: It comes back. Be patient.

Figure out ways to get art time.

Schedule your partner, grandparents, friends, and babysitters as care-givers and do your work. Many artists talked about “investing” in their practice by paying for childcare. What

amount of art time will make you feel connected to your practice? And how, specifically, will you get that time?

Do less.

I think most artists, with or without kids, are doing too much. A lot too much. We work on 29 different things at once, thinking it maximizes our chances of success. I've worked with thousands of artists, and I can say categorically: Artists who do a smaller number of things excellently go further. You can say no to work that doesn't sustain you financially or nourish you artistically.

Children distill your priorities.

Many artist parents, including me, feel their priorities shift and clarify. We no longer spend time on things that aren't essential. Many talked about letting go of procrastination and time-wasting. Having kids made my old way of living unmanageable, but it also distilled my priorities and led me to a simpler, more focused working life.

Identity

The second most discussed topic was less concrete but, for many, equally disruptive: maintaining our identities as artists. I have heard these things over and over, and said many of them myself:

I feel like I'm disappearing.

People have forgotten about me.

I'm not on the scene like I used to be.

I'm not showing enough work.

All my career momentum is gone.

I'm not getting myself out there enough.

I'm barely an artist anymore.

I've stopped calling myself an artist because I feel like a fraud.

I hate when people ask me: What are you doing? What are you working on?

You can't have a career unless you do something every [season, 6 months, 12 months, etc.].

People treat me like a parent instead of an artist.

For the record, artists aren't the only parents who experience this identity crisis. But artists' self-invented, self-directed careers exacerbate it.

This issue is real and intense, but I believe much of it is within our control. Kids impact our art practices and careers. But spinning those impacts into a story of "I'm not an artist anymore" is something we do.

There are huge gender differences here, of course. Moms, especially breastfeeding moms, have their lives impacted more than Dads. For those who give birth, it all starts nine months earlier. And we live in a world and an art world full of sexist assumptions and biases. Artist Moms are often burdened with expectations about parenting and career that are asymmetrical, punishing, and dismissive.

I think we can address a large part of this problem by answering this:

What specifically do you need to remain connected to your artistic life?

Is it time in the studio? Going to see work? Making a new piece? A specific, quantitative answer—how many hours in the studio, how often you need to see work—can take away the mystery, the I-just-don't-feel-like-an-artist agony. As you will see in the "Identity" section, many experienced artist parents have hugely reassuring things to say about the (temporary) loss of identity.

After our second child was born, I threw a hissy fit. "I never go to see art. I'm not on the scene. No one knows me. I'm disappearing. Waaaaaaa." My artist wife said: "How about one night a week to see work? Would that do it?" She distilled my amorphous agony to a specific and doable action.

Hang out with artist parents.

You are not alone. Parenting can isolate us in our struggles, convince us there is something wrong with us. Time with other artist parents is the antidote.

You can't imagine how rarely other people are thinking about you.

We think about ourselves all the time, but others don't. No artist disappears just because she or he hasn't premiered a new work in the last six months, or year, or two years. People pay attention when you make something. Then they don't think about you. The next time you make something, however long that takes, they'll pay attention again.

Having kids forces us out of unsustainable patterns.

Too many artistic lives are built for single, childless, workaholic 23-year-olds. That's not sustainable. Raising children forces us to change, and, in the long run, that's good for us and for our field. It's true I could no longer write grants at midnight when I had a kid. But thank goddess I stopped writing grants at midnight.

What we can do

I cannot say it better than one of our survey respondents:

Don't apologize for being a parent, but at the same time don't expect non-parents to know what you need or to change their lives because you decided to have a kid. Identify what would help you and let people know, and they can decide whether or not to accommodate you. Do you need a place to pump? Do you need to end rehearsal by 5:00? Can you meet by phone while your kid is napping? Before having kids, it doesn't occur to some folks to move the nail-studded boards out of the entryway or give a heads up about the loud electronic music. Organizations and people will only learn how to support parents if parents communicate their needs in a non-jerky, non-entitled way.

When we shift our conversations with each other and with stakeholders, we change our field.

As artists, we can:

Point out (in that non-jerky, non-entitled way) opportunities to support artist parents. Can we build childcare into this gig or residency? Is there a room available for my caregiver to be with my kid? Can we adjust the schedule to fit my kid's school calendar? Organizations build support in response to specific, timely requests.

Be a partner in making things parent- and kid-friendly. Don't just ask for resources; help gather those resources.

Build community with artist parents. We are our own best resource, our most important community. There is wisdom, support, and resource in our networks.

And if you run an organization or program:

Tell artists you are interested in supporting artist parents. Ask what they need, and see what you can offer. Little things mean a lot. Put together a contact sheet of babysitters and family-friendly housing options for out-of-town artists, or include a modest budget line for childcare in your annual budget.

The top four

Here are the four most-repeated responses:

1) Children grow up really fast. Trite but true, say a gigantic number of artist parents.

2) You can do this. Your art-making self will survive and thrive.

3) Bring your child into your studio, your art-making practice. But it's worth saying this was contradicted by many artist parents who noted that, depending on your child and your practice, it may not be feasible.

4) Don't do it alone. Get help whenever possible. Extended family, friends, childcare cooperatives, neighbors, counselors, mentors.

BIG PICTURE

Take all advice, even well-meaning advice, with a grain of salt. There is rarely just one right way to do things, and every parent-child relationship is different.

It's not that damn hard. Calm down.

This is going to cause you to reevaluate everything.

It's like walking through a door into a different way of living. If you're ready to encounter whatever's on the other side of that door, go through. In my experience, the value of everything is different on the Other Side of the Door.

Kids make your art stronger, not weaker.

Wait! Explore everything you've ever wanted to as an artist. And then wait! Wait until you can't wait any more.

Have kids earlier. There will never be a perfect time. You'll never feel ready.

Don't wait until you think you have enough money, time, etc.

Relax. You know how to do this. Get a dog first.

Kids will make you sacrifice some art you want to make. But not the really important stuff.

The days are long but the years are short.

There's no necessary conflict between kids and work. I think it's a false choice. The way I am with my child should be the way I am with my work – attentive, responsive and sensitive.

I'm really glad I had kids when I did (late 20s early 30s) because I had the energy to run around after them and do my art thing. I'm really glad I had a supportive environment artistically that allowed me to make my own choices about time off, bringing babies to rehearsals or on tour, etc. I'm really glad I have a husband to share the parenting, and that we generally agree about methods. I'm really glad to have a community of artists and friends who help me raise my kids and help me stay sane.

Having kids helped heal my relationships with my own parents. (It also made me even more alarmed by some of their crappy parent behavior.)

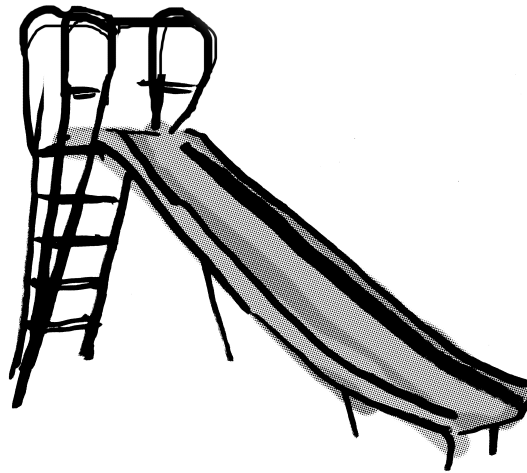
It's a bit of an endurance contest. If you are thinking of how to time it, I'd balance wanting to be emotionally mature enough to really encounter an Other as Another with being young enough to be able to tussle on the floor for extended periods.

It is not easy and is not supposed to be easy.

Don't let anyone tell you that you can't be an artist and have a family. There is no right time and no right way.

They will be themselves. They will not be Little You. They will not extend your brand. Be ready to meet the real future, not the one you might imagine.

Everything will change, and that's okay.



Think hard about having the second one. Do them close in a row if you can.

It won't be like you think it will. Whatever it is you are telling yourself about how you absolutely will be as a parent, start laughing now, cause you will soon be doing the opposite.

You don't have to raise your kids in the same way you were raised.

Raising children is way harder and way more rewarding than can ever be conveyed to a childless person.

Relax. They will forgive you for almost anything.

Having children will inspire you but it will also impact your time and your freedom. Your art will be better in many ways because you are clearer on the sacrifices required. You won't bullshit as much because the costs of being away from your children are too high.

It will distill what you're serious about, light a fire under your ass, and motivate you, but this change will be heavily inflected with panic and despair.

Our decision to have a second kid, like our decision to have the first kid and like our decisions to be artists, did not make sense logistically. It made sense spiritually.

Parenting is hard, but not as hard as what artists already do.

Community is everything. If you don't have close friends with children, try to meet some folks who do and who make art in a vaguely similar way.

Meditate.

I would go back and tell myself not to second guess myself so much.

TIME

Take comfort in knowing that, as artists, we have always had to be creative with time management. Use this skill to your advantage.

Don't expect to do anything for the first 6 weeks. You're number one job is caring for baby—studio and house work have to wait. Don't beat yourself up about what's not done; you just created a human.

If you're a self-employed artist, you will need to block out studio time very intentionally and hire a babysitter or have your spouse or partner watch the children.

Take the first 10 minutes of every baby nap to do something artistic: make a 4 x 6 drawing, brainstorm lists and ideas, take photos, record something. This adds up to something surprisingly quickly, and keeps your head in a creative space even when you're back to taking care of the baby.

Come to peace with the fact that children will demand more of your time than you'll feel is conducive to making your art. They will. You have to come to terms with that. If you don't, everything and everyone will suffer from your frustration.

Before the birth, go over with your partner how you envision the day-to-day details of child care. Write out the schedule of who is home when and include the things you have to do like paid work, and things you want to do like classes, workshops, and time for self. This may totally change in reality, but it will help you and your partner look at your assumptions about child care, work and self-care. I didn't realize how often neither of us was home until one of us always had to be.

You are not a slave to your baby or toddler. You need your sleep, and that may mean "sleep-training," or not co-sleeping, or weaning earlier than some of your friends. As my mother always said: "Your child has to fit into your family's schedule and life, not the other way around."

It's okay to chill out; take more time off when they are born. Don't be worried you can't make things while you are completely sleep-deprived. You are making a person, the "thing making" part of you will come back when the child gets older.

That feeling of desperation when you feel convinced you will never have the time or sleep to make anything ever again is something every parent goes through, and it will eventually pass. Honestly, it will. Be good to yourself for those first several months, and find ways to work incrementally.

For the first two years, the difference between two kids and one kid was similar in scale to the difference between one kid and no kids.

Having kids helped me with procrastination.

Change your expectations of how much you can accomplish.

Don't let other people's agendas—other kids' parents, your kid's coaches or teachers, your relatives—deter you from spending time with your children the way you want to. Do that thing you've wanted to do with them for a long time, even though it may conflict with summer baseball season or swim team.

Just when you think you have it figured out, it will change.

Everything changes every 3 months.

Spend time as a family. It's hard, and it depends on your financial and family situation, but it makes the whole thing worth it.

Time is more important than money.

Not only does your available work time lessen, but there are also constant interruptions. You have to learn to work with or without momentum.

It is relentless and all-consuming, and art may not have the space it used to.

What has helped me is being open to a constantly changing schedule. I had to create strategies for art-making that worked within my new timeframe. Because of the new timeframe, my life and work have come into sharp focus, cutting out all extraneous distractions. I see my friends less and attend fewer openings, but I'm making strong work, so it's all fine with me.

It may change how important art is to you.

Don't be afraid to take a break from your work and focus on your family. Sometimes stepping back from your practice can be just the thing to get you motivated to start working again.

Your children need to see that your work and time are important too. Fulfilling your passion will be a good example for them. Just make sure they get quality time. Have reserved work time and family time, and don't let the two compete.

Time will take on a totally different meaning. It is no longer yours, but you will also spend it more wisely.

Try not to talk about how tired you are. It doesn't help, and I'm convinced it makes you more tired.

Time for yourself becomes about budgeting your time properly. Without a set but flexible schedule, time in the studio becomes less and less.

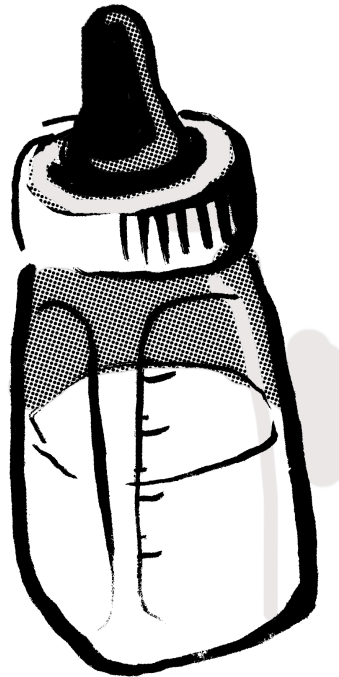
One of the advantages of not being in the corporate world is that you can and should design your own maternity/paternity leave. Take advantage of the flexibility inherent in the artist's life to schedule some real down time.

The really crazy, sleep-deprived delirium stage is temporary. Boy, did I think I would lose it, asking myself what I had gotten myself into, and thinking that there was no way I was going to be able to do this for another 18 years.

Adjust your sleep schedule. Just do it. Accept that you will have to get up early in the morning, and that this means going to bed early on a regular basis. There's a lot to be said for mornings.

It is impossible to realize before having kids how much time they will require, and therefore how much more difficult it will be to carve out time for making art. However, it is also amazing how much you can suddenly get done in a tiny amount of time. Procrastination is a thing of the past.

Always have one day of help via a babysitting trade with a friend, a sitter you budget for, or a shared parenting schedule with your partner. Schedule at least one day or solid afternoon where you do your thing exclusively.



You can get a lot done with an infant.

Write down the ideas, if that's all you have time for. Ideas will still come and you can realize them later.

If you're used to the luxury of working for a few consecutive hours at a time, try to get in the habit of squeezing in a sketch or scribbling down an idea or adding a layer of paint in 15-minute intervals. Also rethink "studio space." Try keeping a canvas by the kitchen table and notepads everywhere.

I am divorced, and I think all parents should deal with time the way divorced people do: make a schedule for the month and (mostly) take turns. It's so much easier for me to make my work now that I'm single because I know how much time I have. When I was married, there was a lot of vague time where both of us felt responsible. And with male-female couples, "we're both here" can often mean the woman takes care of the kid.

It's OK to lean on people you love and trust for help. Most people will be happy to assist, especially anyone who knows what parenting is about.

It really, really helps to live near at least one set of grandparents. Free childcare and parenting support is key.

Kids are little a very short time and the artistic life is long.

Create a routine for your creative time. Have the kids get to know this routine and build their own enjoyed activity around it. For example, every morning, you are at the drawing table for an hour and the kids are reading or resting or drawing.

Slow the Fuck Down. I remember performing at Cherry Hill Mall two weeks after having my first. I remember getting mastitis because I was rehearsing 30 hours a week when our second was 6 weeks old.

Your art production will take a hit, because there is only so much time. You have to be diligent and systematic to work your way back into it. However, things get easier as kids get older and, in the big picture, it's all worth it. You become more well-rounded and more "of this world" and so does your art.

The thing I found challenging is not whether or not to make the work, but the timeline. I have to plan ahead way more now. But with advanced planning, pretty much anything is possible.

I put time and intention into building a network of folks my kid feels comfortable with. That lets me escape for chunks of time, knowing she is safe, happy, and having adventures of her own.

It's OK to be away from them to do your work (i.e. out of town, on tour, residencies). But it's also important to have your work take a back seat periodically so that you can be with them. My kids do fine up for eight days or so then I see the difference if one of us is away.

School will be an inflexible iron rod in your life. Enjoy the flexibility of your little kid while you can!

You will not be able to freely work on your art anytime you need while your little baby peacefully plays by your side.

Pre-children, the structures to support my art-making were somewhat invisible, since many of them evolved organically over time. The arrival of a child shifted them all at once. I had to purposely create structures to support my art. This felt artificial at times, because I was not used to putting so much effort into making sure that everything around me helps me do my art. You may feel like you are being demanding, but your family wants you to continue making art.

Put the kids to bed and WORK. Or at least, get into some kind of routine that allows you to work. Don't give up.

It is more important to have studio time than a clean house.

Have one dry erase calendar for family events and one for art deadlines, professional events, openings, etc.

I changed the way I made my artistic work so that I could rehearse in my kitchen. That made it possible for me to do a major performance when my daughter was 6 months old.

Be organized. You'll save so much time in the long run.

Have a minimum of two sitters and two backup friends/family on "speed dial" who are able to pick up or cover. You will use everyone on this list at some point.

Plan way ahead: 3-4 months for weekend trips.

Kids are early risers. Train yourself to wake up even earlier than they do.

Think of your day as a pie chart and prioritize the slices according to what you need to get done that day.

When people you trust offer to help you out, let them help.

Leave the house every day, even if only to the store. Sanity lifesaver.

Schedule structure, schedule structure, schedule structure.

Get up early. Drink really good wine.

Hire artists as your sitters. They get your schedule and money challenges, and they will see time with your child as imaginative development time.

Relax. And ask for help.

The exhaustion of parenting makes digital distraction appealing. I put boundaries around my digital life—hard boundaries—so I don't spend hours scrolling mindlessly when I could be making art.

Your career is not going to wither up and die just because you take a 2-4 year break to be with your kids. Clichés are clichés for a reason: your children really are little only once. You will find time to be creative again, don't rush it, it is there within you.

MONEY

All your kids really need is your love and attention. Where you live, how much money you make, etc. do not really matter. Have kids when the time is right for you and you have the energy for it, not after you've saved up enough money to "afford" a family.

Pay for day care and babysitting. Don't ever think twice about it. Be smart about it, but that is not the place to save money. It's expensive but necessary for you, your partner, and mostly for the child. They need to be around other people and have space from you.

Ask your friends with kids how they do it. Then look at their financial situation: is it the same as yours? Do they have family that helps out? Finding a model based on your family and agreements and income is helpful.

I ended up merging money-making with my life as an artist, even when that meant not making art in the same way. The three-job thing (money job, art making, parenting) worked for a while, but not in the long term.

Having kids does cost money. We did two things: we made more money, and, especially at certain times, we got low, keeping our expenses to a minimum. Most artists are good at living cheaply, which is a huge advantage. But we still found we needed more income, not a gigantic amount, but more.

Money is not everything, but it sure does help create security.

I was no longer comfortable living hand to mouth, paycheck to paycheck. So we built a cushion, earning a little more than we needed and saving it. And to be honest, I wish I'd done that years before.

Make enough money to pay a house cleaner.

There's a lot of cost-benefit analyses when you have a young child. For example: I'm getting a \$2,000 fee to do this trip, which is what it will cost to fly my husband over and pay the extra so we can have our own apartment, but it's worth it because I really want to go. Or, I'm getting paid \$12 an hour to rehearse and I'm paying a babysitter \$10 an hour, but it's worth it because I really want to work with this director. Sometimes I do things that are a wash financially because I want to stay connected to my life as an artist.

Use your talent as currency – I was able to trade art for childcare.

Now that you are becoming a parent, make MORE ART. Take more risks. Don't play it safe and find teaching jobs or money jobs. Quit those jobs and focus on your art. Because it is going to help you figure out who you are, and that person you become is the person your child needs. You will find the money by making more work.

Artists' schedules can be erratic, so childcare needs might be erratic. Give serious thought to how you might solve this problem in terms of cost and your child's sense of security.

Try to be working/making a living from your career before having children. Trying to establish a career with small children is almost impossible.

Do you have a marketable skill other than your art?

View your art as a business. Pay for day care or swap babysitting time with a friend. Have a schedule and stick to it.

Take family trips. Last April we took a trip to LA that we could not afford. We are still paying it off. We had to turn down work to do it. And I would do it again in a heartbeat.

Marry rich.

It's not money that's difficult, but finding the time to spend with your child.

Pay as much attention to planning for your retirement as you do to saving for your child's education.

Search for free things to do in your city. It's fun to get out with kids, and it doesn't have to be expensive.

IDENTITY

Everything is temporary. It will pass and then turn into some new joy or challenge.

It's OK to let opportunities go by because you'd rather be with your family. And it's OK to leave your family behind to embrace opportunities that matter.

You will be an artist your whole life-your kids will only be around a small part of that. It's OK to lighten up a bit on the work. And shut up with all the "I can't make work" whining! Of course you can't! You are sleep deprived and completely focused on this huge job of raising a kid to be a good human in the world! Come on!

Artist retreats are incredible, both formal ones and self-generated ones. Really helped me reconnect with my artistic desires and rhythms.

Don't listen to people who say you can't support kids "just teaching dance."

If your art is very work-intensive, perhaps switch to another style of work for the time being. You can't do anything making one ring, painting, or elaborately carved bowl per month. Use your creative energy to fill your sketchbook, banking your best ideas for the near future.

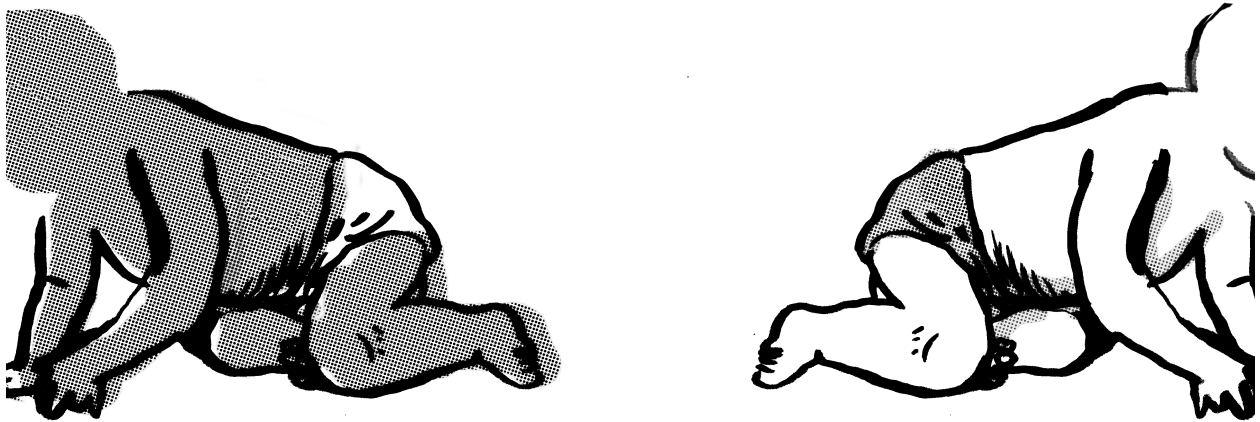
The idea that serious artists choose art over children is a misogynist lie meant to exclude women and make them irrelevant.

Your child and family will often come before your work. But that doesn't mean that your work takes on less importance. It ends up taking on more importance.

I wish someone had told me my friends who don't have kids will not understand.

It may change how important art is to you.

You may not feel as intensely connected to the art community, but you will gain a whole new community of friends through school and kid activities. This community is bound to be diverse and add richness to your life.



Having a kid will radically alter your entire view of reality (which most art making hinges upon), so give yourself time to adjust.

You can maintain your identity as an individual and an artist; you don't need to feel guilty about not wanting to be "mom" or "dad" all the time. Go out when you can and have fun doing the things you loved to do before.

When you make a plan, be clear with your friends or collaborators: my kid is (or is not) going to be with me, so they know what to expect and don't always assume you 'come with a kid' (or don't).

In my experience, there is complex stuff between people with kids and people with no kids. Logistically, financially, emotionally. That stuff is real. Still, I think it's good for everybody if people with and without kids hang out sometimes.

CHILDREARING

Most of these advice books are not for you and your kind.
Read them with a VERY critical eye.

I don't compare the way I raise my kids with the way my friends raise theirs. All kids are different, all families are different.

DON'T READ PARENTING BOOKS. You already know what to do.

Three things that seem bad for kids but are actually good for them:

- 1) Frustration
- 2) Boredom
- 3) Hunger

An older actor told me, "I think we have about 25% agency over how our kids turn out." He and his wife raised three sons, with the same kind of parenting, in the same kind of household (stable, comfortable economically, loving), and the boys all responded in completely different ways, depending on their temperaments. So for him, offering consistency, rather than worrying about outcomes, was key.

If a kid moves something onto her I-won't-eat list, she has to move something else off.

An empty room with a soft rug and a lot of balls and boxes and your willingness to do whatever your child desires.

Let them make their own choices in life like the way they dress, how they engage in media, within your philosophical boundaries.

Having a little "nook" or other mellow, time-out area is such a relief for me and for the kids.

Who our babysitters were mattered a lot. Sometimes, I obsessed about how many hours we spend away from our kids. I learned that some of that obsessing was better spent finding magical, brilliant babysitters.

Absolutist, dogmatic parenting philosophies are ultimately impossible for mere mortals. We sleep trained our son and that was great. Did we do it according to the 'simple six step plans' laid out in any number of books? No. We found a sort of amalgam of tricks, rules and what we could stand. It's so obvious that it almost seems not worth mentioning: all these books can be helpful to a degree, but the goal is to bring a human being through childhood, and that is messy and exciting. If the book is making you feel inadequate, maybe the library needs to expand.

Kids watching movies or TV shows is not that bad, within reason. Kids watching advertisements is horrible in a palpable, immediate way. Lose the cable TV.

Don't negotiate. Whatever decisions you make (and it doesn't really matter what you decide), don't let yourself get talked out of them. If you do, you are opening yourself up to a lifetime of endless and surprisingly skilled negotiations.

Surrender to the inevitability of technological saturation. But set limits.

There are no schools that are good enough for the children of curious people. So give it your best shot, but don't blame yourself when it's hard. I don't know of anyone who has successfully solved the Problem of School.

Have the courage to have the discussions your parents were afraid to have with you. "Hey buddy, you know what porn is?"

Don't worry about finding friends for your kids. There's no need to force it. As long as they have opportunities to interact with other kids in unstructured environments, it will happen organically and be totally obvious when they find true friends. No need to befriend certain adults to make sure that your kids have friends.

Structure is really important in our family, and boundaries, and rules. If you're an artist, it's easy to feel that you should be all hippy and free with your kids. But we found that it really important to give our kids structure. Sitting down every day and eating a meal together (instead of feeding them separately and then putting them to bed for adult time), clearing their plates, helping to wash dishes. It seems small but actually it's big.

Babies need to be fed every two, three, or four hours at first. Somehow I didn't know this. The sleep interruption and deprivation can be hideous.

Always be willing to read to your child if it is humanly possible. When they are older, always be willing to drive them places they want to go (if they are willing to talk on the way).

Playground, playground, playground. And as they get more agile you might even be able to make some phone calls from there, or read.

If your kid plays sports, don't make a lot of noise on the sideline. Let your kid kick the ball because she wants to kick it, not because her parents are bellowing at her. Extrapolate from this.

Boys like weapons. It's okay. Just keep them away from other kids' faces.

You can provide stability even if your life doesn't fit the models of stability that everyone understands. We travel with our kid quite a bit. If your life involves touring, residencies, or other like activity, here are things that help us:

- 1) Have talismans of home you bring with you: bubble-bath, wall hangings, a favorite ball, a favorite book. Make a point of anointing each place where you stay with those things.
- 2) Find the rituals of home wherever you are: meals, certain games, bedtime routines, arrangements of shoes by the door.
- 3) Airbnb is a great thing for families on the move. We spend the same on a house for a couple weeks as we would on a hotel, and we can really make it ours.

These three things (plus our son's temperament) have allowed us to make him feel 'at home' in a lot of places – London, Tempe, New York, Illinois, Oslo – which has given him a lot of dimension, curiosity, comfort and confidence.

It's really hard to do permanent damage. And honestly, all you have to be is just a little better than your parents were.

Everything is precedent-setting, at least after you do it twice. If your mother takes your 14-month old to get ice cream, he'll want to go in there every time you pass by. It's better not to start with things you don't want to fight over later. (P.S. This is impossible to implement.)

Teach them that loving your labor is more important than loving the fruits of your labor.

You are going to make mistakes.

Let the kid lead the way on what they are interested in, steer gently when confronted by princesses or guns.

If your kids are embarrassing you, they are doing their job.
Meaning: get over yourself.

Any traditions are hugely noticed and appreciated by our kids.
Doesn't matter how small or random or goofy.

More messy creativity and fun, and less housework.

It's harder to stop breast-feeding after age one. So if you're feeling like you want to be done with it, and your kid shows no sign of stopping at 11 months, you might want to start a weaning plan.

Do not ask toddlers (and up) open-ended questions, instead give choices. "Would you like A or B?" not "What would you like?"

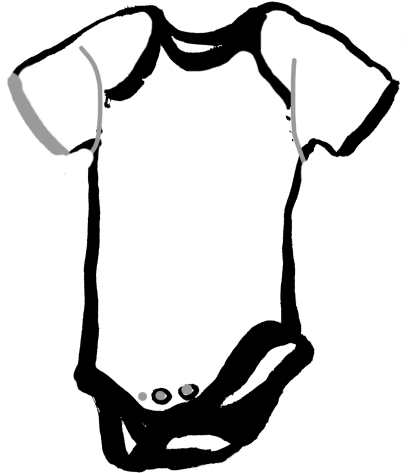
The word "want" is a little dangerous. And if I need my kid to do something, I don't ask, "Could you..." I say, "You may..." Bizarrely huge difference in the reactions I get.

Remove all TVs from premises.

Breastfeeding is wonderful and amazing, but can also be much, much more complicated than anyone told you. If you can't do it, the kid will still be healthy and fine. Also, bottles mean more chances for Dad bonding and shared parenting early on.

Get your kid to be a good sleeper – whatever it takes.

Your kid will turn out just fine if you let it cry like hell every once in a while. If you need a shower, make sure your baby is in a safe spot or hand it over to someone else and go get your damn shower!



Put more vegetables on the table and they will eat more vegetables. Same is true for other good things you want them to have, eat, or be exposed to.

Get them out of your bed ASAP. Sleep training will save your sanity.

Having a second (or third) will seem like a bad idea for the first 6 years, then it will seem like a brilliant idea. Art can wait. Children can't.

Even toddlers can learn responsibility and be expected to help with taking care of the house—putting away toys, setting the table, etc.

Puree things. Sometimes texture is more a problem for our kids than flavor.

No matter where you are going or what you are doing, get yourself ready first and then get the kid(s) ready.

Don't ask your kids to do stuff you are really telling them to do. "Want to get your shoes on now?" just gives them to opportunity to say "NO." Give them actual options, "Which shoe do you want to put on first?" It sounds weird but it works.

Each child is completely different, what works for one might not work for another. Do not be disappointed if your child does not take to anything creative.

Challenges of having our second kid: really exhausting for the first two years, not getting a lot of one-on-one time with each kid because our parenting schedules are tight, babysitting was more expensive, endless squabbling between our kids. Amazing things about having our second kid: they are SO different (we realized our first child is a child, not the genetic map of all our faults and gifts), the two kids have a magical love for each other, family went from thing-to-get-out-of-the-way to center-of-our-lives, our kids are never lonely.

1. Playing with water in the sink is awesome.
2. A good playground is a gift from the universe.
3. Bribing, if done selectively, is fine.

Don't be too good of a parent, or your kids will never have to do anything for themselves.

Fix things with your kids.

If you can vacuum it up, it's a choking hazard. In other words, everything you work with is a choking hazard. Baskets are helpful. Baskets in high places.

Having an only child, for me, was a very good thing. I got to be both a mother and continue a rewarding career in visual art. A second child might have tipped the balance.

Think about homeschooling—we did unschooling for most of our childrearing lives. It gives you time without agendas to figure yourself and your kids out.

Children's birthday parties are a nightmare.

Let them use real tools.

Teach your kid the concept of waiting.

Reach out to other parents and talk frankly about your struggles. You are not alone.

PARTNER

Don't blame your partner for the fact that it's hard. It's just hard, and it's really not their fault.

Reaching consensus on a level of cleanliness and organization helped. We agree to keep it at a certain level; if I want something beyond that, it's up to me.

We give each other occasional 24-hour vacations. One of us takes the kids away for a day, or one of us goes for an overnight, or we can even all stay home but one parent has zero responsibility for kids and house for 24 hours.

It's okay to trade off with your partner. For a couple of months, it's all about my husband finishing his projects, and I'm picking up the slack. Come January, he'll do more with childcare and household chores, and it'll be my turn to focus on my writing. The important thing is setting boundaries so that neither person feels his or her projects are eternally on hold.

We made a list of all the responsibilities of our household (not the daily stuff like dishes, but the other stuff: laundry, bills, car, doctor's appointments, home repairs, etc.). As much as possible, we divide them up, so one parent has complete responsibility for each category. S/he can get help from the other parent, but s/he is responsible for seeing that it gets done.

If you're a breastfeeding mom, then it's only fair that your partner changes the majority of the diapers.

Be calm when your partner cannot be.

Wine, tequila, marijuana. Our down time was short, so we often took a substance-based shortcut to relaxing.

Get some good therapy.

My partner and I split the days into two shifts. This means we each have a substantial amount of time to work in our studios, while we both still get to spend quality time with our child.

Things work out with me and my partner if we both feel like we're doing 60% of the work. There's always more work than we think, so when we're both doing more than our share, it all gets done. (We men may need to feel like we're doing 70% to get to equal.)

My spouse and I agree our relationship is the primary relationship in our lives and in our family. It's the fulcrum of the family. Our kids come second.

Go on lots of dates with your spouse.

Try to not think about who is doing more. Your partner is most likely doing everything in their power, and there will always be too much to do. Always.

Make sure your partner does half the work.

Go on as many dates as possible before the baby comes. If one parent is working outside the home disproportionately, or

traveling a lot for work, make time to change places. I travel a lot. It has been important for everyone that my partner can go away, or I can take our son on a trip, at least once a year. That way, I appreciate the rigors and delights of single parenting, and my partner gets both the liberated feeling and the surreal and desperate disconnect of being on her own.

We split up the day or the week by switching off whose needs and desires get priority, so everything is not just a compromise landing somewhere between what each of us wants. One night I go out to a show, the next day we might spend hours doing puzzles all together, then my partner has band practice, etc. Taking turns who is "in the lead" helps us each feel like whole people and shows our kid that she is part—an important part, but still just part—of what makes our lives full and interesting.

Insist that the non-nursing parent put the child(ren) to sleep.

My partner and I learned that sometimes, when we're losing patience with our kid, there's something unresolved between us. The more we check in with each other, the better parents we are.

If you're lucky enough to be in a happy marriage, it's the best thing in the world.

If either partner wants to have sex, we have sex. (This rule doubled the amount of sex we had.)

Set meetings with your partner about money, childcare, etc, during the day, not late at night when you are both tired.

IN THE STUDIO

See your kids as an inspiration to make work, like a residency or an incubator program. Involve them in what you do. Otherwise, you will find them to be a detriment or a hassle, which is totally avoidable.

Let them make art with you, even with your most precious art supplies.

Don't feel terrible if you don't have a child you can take to meetings or rehearsals. Just because you see other artists doing it doesn't mean it's easy or will work for your child's personality. I thought it would work for me, and I spent a lot of energy pretending it did (and felt guilty when it didn't).

Set up a space for your kids to work alongside you and teach them how to respect the space.

I set up a workspace in my studio for my son. It's messy, and he does stuff that creates sawdust and general messiness. While that gets under my skin, it's a small price to pay to keep him engaged in creating things.

Always keep any works-in-progress out of a child's reach. I learned this lesson the hard way!

Children are natural born artists. They are a financial strain. They are a good reason to have your studio away from home.

I've been taking my daughter to the dance studio with me from the time she was 2 1/2. It was difficult at first, but over the years she has learned to sit through long rehearsals and entertain herself.

You may be lucky and be able to bring the baby to the studio, but it is not always the case.

Don't assume or plan to be able to bring the kids to rehearsal. You might be able to, but you might not.

Especially if you live in a small space, and it's cold out, rent a rehearsal room for a couple hours on a Sunday, invite a friend or two and their kids, and go wild together. Especially nice if there's a drum set, or a giant exercise ball. Your kids' ability to use an empty room in an interesting way will make them a great playmate, and an inspiring creative partner.

GEAR

Buy little brooms and little dustpans.

The slow cooker is a very good thing.

Things to splurge on: stroller (Maclaren), - frozen food (Amy's Organic), candles (for the barf smell), massages (you'll need them if you can afford them). Things not to splurge on: crib (just do Ikea), clothing (they'll wear any outfit, and probably barf all over it).

Good rain gear and cold weather gear for you and your kid.

Audio books are wonderful. In the car, on a rainy day. They are nothing like movies or video games.

Memberships to the zoo and art museum. Outings are crucial.

Go minimalist on baby gear. Most of it you don't need or your baby will decide she doesn't like anyway.

Frozen food saved our ass. I made my peace with it.

Magic School Bus, both the books and the videos. Happiest Baby on the Block, both the book and the video.

Don't spend your money on toys; infants and toddlers are more fascinated by discovering the world around them and creating a world of their own.

The Ergo baby carrier is amazing and saved my life. Get housework done with the babe on the back, so you can use your childcare time for working in the studio instead of housework.

SNACKS. At all times, bring and share.

My Ergo baby carrier makes going ANYwhere with my daughter really easy. She is almost four, and I am still using it.

Buy gently used kid coats, boots, and clothes from ebay.

Download the PixAide widget, a picture-assisted literacy tool. You type in a word and it shoots out a clear, simple clip art. I cut and pasted these to make lists for my kids before they were strong readers like: what to do in the bathroom before bed or what to pack in your bag before we leave the house in the morning. I stopped shouting orders and instead serenely point to the list.

I keep the Klutz face painting kit in my car wherever we go. Most things can be sorted out with a few tiger stripes or butterfly painted mask.

Get a good stroller that is lightweight.

Keep wipes everywhere.

Get them an iPad.

Airplanes: I have a zipper pencil case that I fill with color copy paper cut in half, washable markers, pencils, glue stick, masking tape (fancy Japanese stuff if you can swing it), and stickers. Then you take the inflight magazine and, with the kid, tear out all the interesting pictures and make crazy mashup collages, drawings, and tape them all over.

Read *The Birth Partner* and Ina May Gaskin's books.

Get a great sling and dump that stroller ASAP! You will be much more flexible, especially when on the road. (The Ergo lasted us the longest.)

Get a very good coffee maker.

Rain boots (LOVE our rain outings) and sidewalk chalk - chalk on trees, sides of building, stoops.

Technology is your friend! Skype chats while traveling, iCal synced with sitter and spouse, Bank App to pay my sitter while working/traveling/in bed.

Washer-dryer, dishwasher, robot vacuum.