

Moms of Color in Academia

- Introductions
- CDE
 - I have two children; they are now 13 and 10. I had both of them when I was in graduate school. In my program, we had a couple of benchmarks – subject area prelims. I got pregnant with my first right after passing those. My second, I had her when I was in the ABD stage. The first one came earlier than expected, and I had to cancel my defense for my dissertation to go to the hospital and ended up doing that in a bit of a haze 6 weeks after having birth.
- CG
 - I finished my program in 2017 and had started in 2013. I found out I was expecting in 2014, then found out I was having twins. I sought out an advisor who was also a young mom. My kids are now 5 going on 6, twins, a boy and a girl.
- LM
 - When I started, I had a 3-year-old son and a 13 year old daughter. And for a year and a half I also had one of my younger sisters who was around 15 or 16. My children were with me when I started, and now my children are adults – my son is 26 and my daughter is 36 and my son has a 4-year-old grandson.
- AA
 - You all bring different experiences in where you were when you started graduate school. Given that, what were some of the things you had to do in your program to advocate for yourself in terms of making it work for you?
 - When I started this program in the late 80s, early 90s having kids in graduate school was still very discouraged and we have seen changes with that.
- CG
 - One of my things was seeking out an advisor who was also a mom, and other mentors who were also moms in academia. We talked weekly and that was a big source of support for me throughout my program. When I delivered my twins, I was out of commission for about 3 months, so I needed a different kind of support. And my advisor was able to understand my needs. But when I delivered my twins I started full body hemorrhaging and they had to induce a coma, and I was in a coma for 3 days – so during that time I underwent transfusions, surgeries, I wasn't walking for about 3 months after they did ultimately save me. My advisor understood the special conditions that I had, helped me move my studies online. That was huge for me, her understanding my needs and not encouraging me to drop out. I was also very intentional in advocating for myself in that way and letting them know what was going on.
- CDE
 - I think I did a bad job of this – I tried to think I could be the same as everyone else, but I wish I had advocated for more. There were not a lot of people who were going through my situation. And I realized I can't work with my kid next to me, it took me a while to figure out what worked for me and what I needed to advocate for. So that was easier with the second kid. I found myself advocating in other places, like with conferences – asking for a room to bring my kid and husband. And I really appreciate it when places

proactively thought about it and advertised it. There was one conference I went to post-child was an evolution conference and it was because they offered on-site childcare – I took my son, got some help with travel and registration, could attend daycare for no extra cost. I didn't have to advocate for that but it made it more feasible to actually do it.

- LM
 - Similar to Carrie, given the time I was in my program there were not a lot of other mothers in the program. There was one other student who was a mother and we were in different programs but the same department. We didn't get a chance to see each other very much. I was important to have a strong support system outside, and my spouse did a good job of supporting me during my program. I had family members who could help me with care and my young child. I also was fortunate to have conferences who were willing to be accommodating, and when I would go my family would vacation and I would go to the conference. I went to the APA in New York and they advertised heavily about onsite and offsite childcare, which was big. They had babysitters they had vetted that you could hire, they had a list available to you. Looking for those opportunities. Also being honest with your advisor – I had two advisors. One was new and learning what he was doing, so I also worked with the chair.
- AA
 - Was there a resource or tool that was particularly useful to you?
- LM
 - SREB! Without a doubt. The financial support was crucial, I could not have done it otherwise. I still did other part time jobs, adjunct roles. I worked a retail job from Nov-Jan so that I could have some extra money.
- CDE
 - Plus one, SREB support was absolutely what gave me the opportunity to be able to pay for childcare. There was a gap where I had to scramble. I also had great peers – my officemate watched my child once a week while I taught.
 - Two other things – we had a local moms board crop up the same time and it was for my city, and I made great connections with local mothers, one of whom had a husband in grad school.
 - I also signed up for a community health resource where they would send someone to your house and teach you things as a first-time mom, and it was a great program. When I had my second child, I looked for something like that too.
- CG
 - SREB was a huge support in being able to focus on school. My spouse was also helpful. For my childcare support, it was a conglomerate of a lot of things over time. When I got pregnant, folks said they would be on board, but twins are not everyone's favorite to watch. I had to be creative. Our university has an early childhood program that offered financial support for university members. I also used a mom's day out program at a local church as well. I also found a girl at my church who had graduated high school and was in college, she would come stay with me for a few days and watch them. My mother would also come. When they turned 18 months I was in my comprehensive exams, and

after that I had to put them in daycare. And that allowed me to get things done, it was the best decision I made.

- LM
 - Charity made a great point – I did in-home daycare for my son, with my daughter I had family who could help. My son, I didn't want him to go to daycare, but I hired two students to come and serve as in-home care. That's another resource to consider using.
- AA
 - Were there other ways you deal with childcare?
- CDE
 - I don't know if this was true or perceived, but I felt like there was a lot of pressure to be a stay-at-home mom and do everything. I had a peer who would wake up at 4AM and write and do it all and I could not imagine doing it that way. It was bucking the trend to think about doing daycare. And when I was only able to get my child in 2 days a week, that almost helped with the transition. Infant care can also be very expensive, and we found an in-home care for our second child.
 - Initially with COVID I was doing it on my own, but then I decided I needed to invest in me to help take care of my kids on the days they're not in school and that's been huge. Understanding how you work best and what your priorities are is key.
- AA
 - Yep, it's so important to know about yourself how you work best and what you need.
 - This whole issue of work-life balance is tough – how are you managing that, even today?
- LM
 - When I was in graduate school, I probably didn't do it as well as I should have. Immediately after I graduated, my marriage ended. I think part of it was that I did not pay close enough attention to my spouse's needs during the program. I would suggest that you include your partner and carve out time for them as well. I was very dedicated to my children, tried to take care of myself, but not my partner's need as much as maybe I thought. Be sure to check in with your spouse as well as yourself and make sure you know what you do need. I partnered with another student and carved out time for physical exercise, and that was my time where I did not have to think about being in charge or doing anything, and that was invaluable to me.
- CG
 - I'm very detail oriented, I love schedules. That's probably why I couldn't keep a babysitter, but it helped me maintain balance. That's something my advisor helped me with, because I would feel guilty for engaging in so much work and missing moments. One thing she told me is that they're not going to remember any of this, and make the time you do have very intentional.
 - I also had another mentor who would call in sick to work and tell her family she was going to work, and then go to the movies or work – I always wanted to try it but I was nervous. But that was advice that I thought was helpful.
- LM
 - Similar to you, I'm too much of a rule follower, but I respect that. But I would have felt guilty.
- CDE

- I would do like a half day hooky day. I think what everyone said was pretty right on – understanding your priorities. For me, having clear work/life separation is important but that's gotten harder during the pandemic. As I get further along I travel more, and that adds some logistical challenges.
- I think it's good to consistently reflect on your priorities and how you're doing. A big thing I've done is make hard boundaries about when I'm done working
- AA
 - Yep, and it's important to know that as they age kids give you different clues.
 - Working in the COVID environment – how has parenting changed for you in this environment?
- CG
 - I would say it hasn't been that bad. My husband was furloughed, so he's focused on childcare while I work from home, and then we switch at a certain point. Keeping a daily routine, making sure to get out of the house is important. It hasn't been so terrible, just important to maintain that balance. It's made me have a lot of perspective and intentional about what actually matters. I took on extra loads because of budget cuts and it has been a lot. I have to take a step back and maintain my perspective – and sometimes that means I'm not doing anything today.
- AA
 - What's the one piece of advice you would give folks tuning in?
- CDE
 - I think tuning in to priorities is crucial. I also think many of us felt like we had to choose between family and career, and maybe didn't get the space to think about how having children enhanced our professional selves as well. Me spending more time with my kids helped me understand how to teach in the pandemic. It's made me a more compassionate educator too. It's been hard right now and I'm going to cut people some slack. My son has dyslexia, ADHD, anxiety and that has impacted the way I interact with students who come to me, and how I handle accommodations. I would say fight the narrative that it's one or the other, it doesn't have to be either/or.
- CG
 - Don't be so hard on yourself. It's okay if you can't get everything done. Have perspective, be intentional with your time, and do the best that you can.
- LM
 - Ditto what Charity said – be kind to yourself. Your children will not remember a lot of the things you fret over. You don't have to be perfect, you just have to be the best mom they need at that time.

Q&A

- How to navigate a relocation and building a base in a new place?
 - LM - I did that for my program and after. I had to do a lot of seeking out of resources. I also made the decision to connect with a religious community that really helped me navigate and take me where I needed to go, give me advice. I also connected with the local Chamber of Commerce – they can have relocation welcome materials. A listing of utilities was really helpful. Now, you can probably just use the Internet.

DSP Webinar – *Transitioning to a Faculty Role - Advice from DSP Alumni*

- What do you do if you have an advisor or professor who is inflexible or non-accommodating?
 - CG – I did switch advisors in my program. I researched and found the person I thought would be the most supportive. I also reached out to different mentors, even outside my university and people were very willing to respond.
 - LM – You can also have a secondary advisor.
- What do you advise during COVID on managing classes, with a partner who is faculty?
 - CDE – My husband also just started an academic role. I think the key has been really consistent communication – who is taking kids to the bus, who is making dinner. Pre-planning and expectation setting is key, with compassion for what each other is working through. Ask what you need and be willing to rebalance as needed to support each other.