

# Why Do Moms Tend to Manage the Household Scheduling?

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Sonya Bonczek wanted to make sure she was inviting all of her son's favorite kids to his fourth birthday party, which is in August. But she quickly realized she didn't have all of their parents' email addresses, and her son's preschool doesn't give them out. When she saw one of these parents at pickup, she flagged him down and asked for his contact info for an Evite. "Let me give you my wife's," he said.

"I didn't even think about it," Bonczek told me. Until the next day, when the same thing happened again. She saw a dad at the local pool in their Chapel Hill, N.C., neighborhood, and asked for his email — he gave out his wife's instead. When this happened a third time in a single week, Bonczek, who works at the University of North Carolina Press, took to Twitter:

The tweet went viral, and the replies to it are like answers to a wild Rorschach test, revealing all kinds of intimate and specific interactions among parents. Some dads responded that their wives are just better at scheduling kid activities, and many people pushed back that moms are better at it because dads aren't really trying and women have been socialized to manage their children's schedules. Others responded that they wouldn't feel comfortable giving a "strange" woman their email, because they'd be concerned it was inappropriate. Dads in families without moms expressed that they're often left out of kid socializing because it takes place in female social circles.

And lots of people responded with a reference to Season 2, Episode 1 of "Girls5eva," in which one of the main characters deals with a similar scenario: Trying to record a comeback album with her girl group, she keeps getting emails about her son's karate classes. When she tries to include her husband on the email thread, one of the other moms just creates a new thread that deliberately leaves him off.

This plot point was inspired by the real-life experiences of Meredith Scardino, the creator and showrunner of "Girls5eva." She told me that her son started a new preschool in October 2020, just as she was in the middle of production for the show's first season.

Even though Scardino's partner, Andrew, was the one at drop-off every morning, she found that she was getting the calls from the school nurse if, say, her son fell during gym class.

"Same with after-school activities," Scardino said. If a parent was planning something, it was always a mom, and she'd only email other moms. "I found the assumption so interesting that it went to me, because I was like: How did they even get my email? How did they know who I am? No one's even met me or seen me! It's sort of the assumed idea that the mother is the one who knows everything and schedules everything."

What these varying responses tell me is that, despite all of the progress American dads have made in the past several decades in terms of active involvement with their children, scheduling remains one of the frustratingly difficult aspects to equalize in heterosexual couples. Even in couples where both parents work full time, 54 percent of parents say the mother does more managing of children's schedules and activities, [according to a 2015 Pew Research survey](#).

Interestingly, Pew notes that mothers are more likely to say they do more of every activity, while fathers are more likely to say that many activities are shared equally. "For example, 64 percent of mothers in two-parent households say that they do more than their spouse or partner when it comes to managing their children's schedule and activities. And while many fathers (53 percent) concede that the mom in their household does more of this than they do, dads are much more likely than moms to say this responsibility is shared equally (41 percent versus 31 percent of moms)." This reminds me of an epic Claire Cain Miller headline from early in the pandemic: "[Nearly Half of Men Say They Do Most of the Home Schooling. 3 Percent of Women Agree.](#)"

Part of this disconnect between the perceptions of moms and dads might be that modern fathers are comparing themselves to earlier generations of dads, and by that measure they are doing a lot. (Since the 1960s, American fathers have more than doubled the amount of housework and nearly tripled the amount of child care they do, [according to a 2013 Pew report](#).)

Keith Gessen, a friend of mine and the author of "Raising Raffi: The First Five Years," said, "In defense of the dads, they are wherever it is that she's seeing them, at drop-off or pickup. And dads of a previous generation would have been at the office. In that sense, this is the transitional generation. You do the drop-off, but you can't make plans." For the record, Gessen said that he would absolutely give his email to a mom in the original interaction, but that his wife, my friend Emily, runs the scheduling for the family. "I'm bad at scheduling," he said. "But I'm willing to concede that could be a learned helplessness situation."

While some families don't mind dividing labor in this normative way, with moms controlling the scheduling, other hetero couples would prefer to make scheduling more egalitarian. So I called Allison Daminger, an assistant professor of sociology at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, who studies how couples divide labor, to see if she had any thoughts about how to divide this work.

Daminger said that kid scheduling tends to be particularly difficult to equalize in heterosexual couples, as parent social networks tend to be very gender-segregated, and it can be awkward for dads to break in. (She's currently working on a research project with queer couples and says they tend to find dividing this labor to be a bit less fraught.) She also said that even when parents try to encourage outside parties or entities, such as schools and doctors' offices, to call the dad first, there may be good reason they are hesitant. Anecdotally, Daminger said she has heard from office workers that they'll call the dad and then the dad will say he has to ask the mom, and it's just wildly inefficient and frustrating for the people trying to do the scheduling. In those cases: Get it together, dads!

Those caveats aside, Daminger suggested two potential ways to help divide scheduling. One is a shared family email address or calendar. The latter is a tool my husband and I use — he's more proactive than a lot of dads, and has organized many a playdate, but I still do more than half of the scheduling. The other is dividing tasks by area. For example: "Partner A does the school stuff and Partner B does extracurriculars," Daminger suggested. Or Partner A does the dentist appointments and Partner B does the pediatricians' appointments. It might help to specialize because then you can build relationships and learn all the peripheral information you may need, Daminger said — you'll know how long the dentist appointments take and how your kid responds to them, and you're the one who always interacts with the staff.

In the particular case of Sonya Bonczek and the party emails, Daminger wondered if the situation would have turned out differently had Bonczek's husband asked the other dads for their information — perhaps they would have felt more comfortable sharing it with another bro, though it's still possible they would have just forwarded the email to their wives anyway.

For her part, Bonczek is glad she started a conversation. "It's just good to stop and think about this," she said. It has caused her to reflect on the division of household labor in her own family, which is pretty much all any of us can do day to day, as we muddle through our overbooked routines and try our best to fit it all in without having yet another tiff about [who didn't clean the kitchen after breakfast](#).

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