



## Lowenstein Sandler's Women's Initiative Network Podcast: Real Talk

### Episode 15 Will the Parents Ever Be Alright?

By [Megan Monson](#), [Nicole Fulfree](#), [Rachel Moseson Dikovics](#), [Jennifer Delgado](#)

OCTOBER 2022

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- Amanda Cipriano:** Welcome to the Lowenstein Sandler Podcast Series: The Women's Initiative Network, Real Talk. I'm Amanda Cipriano, an associate attorney and member of the Women's Initiative Network at Lowenstein Sandler. Before we begin, please take a moment to subscribe to our podcast series at [lowenstein.com/podcasts](https://lowenstein.com/podcasts), or find us on iTunes, Spotify, Pandora, Google Podcasts, and SoundCloud. Now let's take a listen.
- Rachel Dikovics:** Welcome to the Women's Initiative Network Real Talk. I'm Rachel Dikovics, an associate in Lowenstein's White Collar Criminal Defense Practice Group.
- Megan Monson:** And I'm Megan Monson, partner in Lowenstein Sandler's Employee Benefits and Executive Compensation Practice Group.
- Nicole Fulfree:** I'm Nicole Fulfree, and I'm counsel in Lowenstein's Bankruptcy and Restructuring Department.
- Rachel Dikovics:** Today, we're joined by another one of our partners, Jen Delgado. Jen, I'll let you introduce yourself.
- Jennifer Delgado:** Hello. Thank you for having me. I'm Jen Delgado, and I'm a partner in the Litigation Department at Lowenstein Sandler.
- Rachel Dikovics:** So on today's episode, we're going to talk about what the pandemic did to working parents and how they're recalibrating as the world is decidedly over the pandemic. During the darkest depths of the pandemic article after article was written on the same subject and many even had the same title, The Parents are Not All Right. The articles were warning shots fired by parents everywhere who were at the end of their rope.
- Jennifer Delgado:** At the beginning of the pandemic when adults without small children at home discussed the potential benefits of sheltering in place for a short period of time, catching up on Netflix, family meals, recapturing the commuting time, and focusing on exercise, we parents were losing our minds. We worked with kids screaming in the background and interrupting our Zoom meetings. But then something potentially worse for the parental psyche happened. The world began to move on without us, without reliable childcare, school closures, and of course the continued danger of the virus. We were stuck in

the same place as before, except this time everyone expected us to have figured it out, and we hadn't. Then came the next wave of the parents are not all right articles.

**Rachel Dikovics:** We want to talk today about working parents in September 2022. Are they all right now? Will they ever be all right, Let's level set. How are working parents feeling today in fall 2022? Are things better than they were in March 2020?

**Jennifer Delgado:** So it's hard to deny that, at least in terms of pandemic parenting life in the fall of 2022 is far better than March 2020. My kids are five and two. So when the pandemic began, my oldest was just about to turn three, which is a really hard age, and my son was a newborn. He was about two months old. It was hands down the most difficult few months of my life. While this is not every woman's experience when I had both of my children, I found great comfort in having my family around, especially my mom. And it truly takes a village, and I couldn't be with my village. So that was really hard for me.

So self-isolating and no one being able to come over and relieve me of the stress of having a tantruming three-year-old and a newborn that wouldn't sleep was really, really difficult. But I'm starting to feel optimistic about the experience of young parents going forward. I think some of that has to do with the push to get everyone back in the office because I think for me at least, it's a psychologically healthy thing for me to not be at home all of the time. But I think probably more so it has a lot to do with reliable childcare because going back to the office, of course, is only okay for people if they have reliable childcare.

**Nicole Fulfree:** So as much as I definitely love the flexibility to stay at home for three out of the five days of the work week, as a working mom, and my daughter's only 18 months old, I find myself struggling a little bit with the push and pull of not paying attention to my work, but also trying to sneak over and spend time with my daughter or feeling like I want to feed her lunch if I hear her nanny feeding her lunch or putting her to bed. And I kind of feel the pull of wanting to do those things. So, as much as I find a benefit in some of the aftermath of the pandemic, I do find it hard to be at home. And so Jen and Megan wondering if you guys have had a similar experience?

**Megan Monson:** Yeah, I certainly feel the same way, Nicole. I think there's benefits to having the flexibility in being at home, but I certainly feel the same pulls as you do. And as a result, inevitably I think my workday just tends to be longer because of there's other periodic interruptions.

**Jennifer Delgado:** I'll jump in here. I think for me, and I've thought about this a lot lately because I was totally on team, working from home is great for working parents as long as you have childcare involved in that. Of course, it's not good if you don't have a childcare provider, but if you do, I was very much of the mind that this is great. I have all of these opportunities that I wouldn't normally have throughout the day to be involved in my kids' lives. And it included things like last year, I would often pick up my daughter from school and I live in a walkable city where doing that really only takes 20 minutes out of the day. And it was something I really enjoyed. But I agree that it definitely creates a

longer workday because it wasn't just the 20 minutes. My daughter would say, "Hey, will you bring me to the park?"

And then it either was a little bit of a back and forth between my daughter about why we couldn't do that today or she would get me to do it for 10 minutes. And now that's been 30 minutes that I've been away from my desk. So I've been thinking about it lately. And I do think that having some office days are really beneficial because what I've been trying to do is separate those times out and schedule them a little bit better. So today is Friday. I'm working from home. I don't have as many meetings scheduled. So this morning I played with my son for a little bit before I got to work.

If I had meetings all day or all morning and then I had to get a brief out today, that obviously wouldn't be ideal. And maybe I would actually choose to be in the office even though it's a Friday and it's not a required workday, because it would probably give me a bit more focus and it wouldn't be so tempting to be home. So I think we're just still working it out, honestly. It's going to take a little time to figure out what works for us, and I think it's personal.

**Rachel Dikovics:** So a lot of what you've been talking about that you experienced during the pandemic sounds a little bit like burnout. We recently did a podcast episode about burnout, and I'm wondering if you think there's some connection between parental burnout and burnout that is work induced.

**Jennifer Delgado:** I totally agree with that, Rachel. And I'll just say I think that I may have given too rosy of an outlook of what the fall of 2022 looks like for working parents. We're exhausted. I think many of us feel like we went through a traumatic experience that we're still not quite recovered from. We're all at different various stages of our recovery process, and things are much better. And I think part of that is because of reliable childcare being more prevalent now than it was in the last two and a half years. But we were pushed to the brink and we're still working through it. But I did listen to your podcast and I saw a lot of connection between what I'm thinking about in terms of my own personal experience and burnout that happens as a result of your professional life. I think the lines are very blurred.

You've been super sled at work, but it's not as if our home lives disappear during those times. Your kids still have daily physical and emotional needs that need tending to, and there are only so many hours in the day. I remember late last year I was working on an emerging client matter, and it involved lots of late nights and work over holidays and weekends. It was just crazy. And my son was sick with a basic virus, not COVID, and his fever spiked. And he had his first fever seizure, which I learned is actually not super common, but normal in terms of small toddlers who spike fevers quickly. It wasn't his last unfortunately. But it was so stressful because it happened when I was swamped at work, and I remember sending an email to the team of lawyers I was working with. Nicole was one of them, and everyone of course, understood, but sometimes it's not the pressure that others are putting on us, but the pressure that we put on ourselves that could be the most daunting and it could add to your burnout.

The kind of pressure that you put on yourself when you're being pulled in all directions is just crazy Sometimes. The situation for me got worse because my son had a major sleep regression around the same time, so I wasn't sleeping well at all, so it felt like I was being tortured. But, of course, when you're a professional, work just doesn't go away because you're up all night with your kids. So there's lots of stuff happening when you're experiencing burnout. You may be really busy at work. There's also the mental load that comes with kids, kids' activities, school permission slips, doctors appointments, birthday parties. My son's feet grow at a rate that I can't keep up with. I'm constantly buying new shoes and I'm always the one who figures it out. And it's always when we're trying to get out the door, the list is truly endless. So it leaves really no time sometimes for the parent in the equation, which absolutely leads to burnout.

**Nicole Fulfree:**

Yeah, I think one of the most difficult things about being a parent is that there's not that many people who can substitute for you, coupled with the fact that it's so unpredictable when things like your son's seizure happened. And so you can be having the craziest work week, and someone without kids, obviously there's other obligations that you have. But I know for myself personally, before I had my daughter, I could do a pretty good job of predicting when my work week was going to get crazy and trying to close off my schedule to most other things. That's not doable when you're a parent. And so as much as you try to close off your schedule to any other interferences when you know you're going to have a crazy work week, then like Jen said, your son or your daughter could have a sleep regression, or you could need a hospital trip in the middle of the night when you have a brief due the next day.

And that's an absolute disaster on both ends of the spectrum. And so like Jen said, I've had similar experiences with emergencies with my daughter, and everyone at work has been super understanding and has done their best to cover for me. But still from my perspective, it's been super stressful for me to not only be going through a stressful situation with my daughter medically, but then also worrying that I feel like, even though other people don't make me feel like, I feel like I'm slacking at work or other people are having to pick up my slack. And that in itself is also very stressful. And so I think part of it is the unpredictability of just never knowing when something's going to happen and there's no real substitute, especially for a mom.

**Megan Monson:**

And Jen, you touched on the mental load, which is something we've talked about on prior episodes of our podcast, but that really resonates with me. Because as a working mother, in addition to our professional responsibilities and in addition to our normal home responsibilities, we just take on as women so much more of the childcare responsibilities. And even though my husband is the primary caregiver for my daughter, there's just all of those other things, making sure she has diapers, making sure her food's ready, all those other things that inevitably fall on me. And it's trying to balance all of that other stuff and still being a fully dedicated professional and trying to figure out how to navigate through all of that.

**Rachel Dikovics:**

Do you all feel like the issues that you're describing are elevated because of the pandemic, or do you think it's something that you would experience

anyway? And I know for Megan and Nicole, you both became parents during the pandemic, so it might be hard to say, but what do you think?

**Jennifer Delgado:** I think this is a really interesting question, and I've done a lot of thinking about this lately. Because I had my second child right before the pandemic, I have associated many parenting related stressors that I currently feel with the pandemic, and the further away we are from March 2020, it becomes really hard to keep blaming the pandemic for everything. So I think the parental burnout is real, and it was real before the pandemic, and it remains real today. I do think though, that the pandemic shined a light on a lot of things that were going on and were perhaps not as evident before. I think having reliable childcare for me anyway, is sort of one way that I begin to overcome the parental burnout that we're talking about. Because if I have childcare in place, and sometimes it means that I may need to have extra childcare in place, so we have childcare that we have throughout the day, we know we need to hire a nanny, or we have our children in daycare or school during the workday.

But the reality is, as a professional, we sometimes need help outside of those hours. So, if I have the ability to call on someone who can fill in those gaps, whether it be my mom who graciously may take my kids or my mother-in-law or a babysitter that I'm paying, I think that that really helps. But childcare is not that accessible for people. So I recognize that I'm very fortunate that I have a lot of these options and the means to pay for those options. But the pandemic shined a light, I think, on major blind spots in childcare that we have as working professionals. And I think the uneven distribution of work in the household as it relates to the household and children between opposite sex couples, I think that was happening before it persists today. And the pandemic really did shine a light on it.

**Nicole Fulfree:** Jen, I love the point that you're making, and I'm not sure if this is exactly what you mean, but let me know, but this is what I'm pulling from what you just said. Some of the things that we were just talking about were not all necessarily particular to the pandemic, but they shed a light on some issues for which there's a ton of overlap between the pandemic and everyday life, especially for working moms. And I think one of the main points there is that during the pandemic, if your family came down with COVID, most people weren't able to have their nannies come, or you weren't able to send your children to daycare for an extended period of time, and that leaves everything on the parents.

And so I think where I find a major area of overlap for that is in the concept that I was just talking about, as in there's no real substitute for our mom. And so, yes, while it really came to light in the pandemic when everyone understood that only the parents could take care of a kid if there was a COVID exposure and you know had to take off to care for your children, that truth carries through to a lot of situations that happened, pandemic or not. And I think hopefully made people more aware of the issue.

**Megan Monson:** One other thing I want to mention that I think got highlighted as a result of the pandemic is for parents of young children, the experience was pretty isolating. And I know for me, having a young daughter, I was less inclined to

be around family and friends, because I was concerned about my daughter getting sick or me getting sick. And so that I feel like adds to the parental burnout because you're not having your support network to leverage and you're also not getting that really needed me downtime. And kind of you add that then when you start going back to work, it's really hard to find the time to focus on you because you've been so used to being running on all cylinders. And I think that just continues to add to the burnout problem.

**Rachel Dikovics:** Yeah, totally agree, Megan. So with all these issues in mind, what advice do you have for working parents who are feeling like they're running on fumes, maybe more today than ever?

**Jennifer Delgado:** I want to recommend a podcast that I listen to recently. It's called Good Inside with Dr. Becky. Dr. Becky is a psychotherapist and a parent coach, and she has the best parenting advice.

**Nicole Fulfree:** I love Dr. Becky.

**Jennifer Delgado:** She's truly the best and a lifesaver. The episode I'm calling about is called Mom Rage with Anna Mather, who's also a psychotherapist. And I want to just, for irony's sake, tell you that I was listening to this podcast while I was getting my teeth cleaned on a Friday afternoon, and I was so pleased with myself for making this appointment. I felt like it was true self care, and the podcast was all about how there's a thing called mom rage. When you want to just, or you do scream at the top of your lungs because you've been pushed to your absolute limit. And how that's really a sign of unmet needs. And there's this whole thing about being a selfless parent that we sometimes glamorize.

We're a selfless parent because we put everyone above ourselves, but that actually doesn't serve our families at all. And so of course the irony was that I was thinking of getting my teeth cleaned as self care when I was listening to it, but it has really good advice about how to stop yourself from getting to the point of screaming into the world and just losing your composure completely. We need to check in on ourselves and we need to ask ourselves, what do I need right now and how do I feel? The idea is that if we're more in tune with how we're feeling and what our unmet needs are, we're far less likely to get to that breaking point. And I've also actually added a third question to my own mantra, which is, what do I want?

So here's the key. You have to be able to tell others what you need, how you feel, and what you want. And this applies to your career. So just one straightforward example is setting boundaries. If you are constantly doing things that people are asking you to do without any limitation and you have no boundaries at all, you're headed to burnout. And that's just a fact. And I know that because you guys talked about it for 30 minutes in a very interesting podcast about this very thing. And it's just so much easier to have a productive conversation with a colleague, whether it's a boss or a peer, about setting a boundary before you've gotten to the point of no return in terms of your mental exhaustion.

**Megan Monson:** And I think as we've talked about on our prior episode about burnout, I mean, I think for working parents, you should also leverage your support network, leverage the other working parents, try to learn from what's worked for them, making sure that you're scheduling time for you. Because as Jen mentioned, you're not going to be the best mom and the best professional if you're not taking care of yourself.

**Nicole Fulfree:** Yeah, I was talking about this issue with my girlfriends the other day, and we were kind of trying to figure out why it took so long for us to make plans. And I think the conclusion that we came to was that it's really hard for moms, especially when you have young kids to take the initiative to make plans that don't involve your kids. When I know every time I have a free minute on the weekend, I'm thinking like, Can I bring Savannah to the zoo? Or what fun activity can we do? And the first thing that comes to my mind is not set aside time to finish a work project that will make me feel better and less stressed or to set aside time to go for a nanny petty with my girlfriends. But at least for me, I'm not going to say all men. My husband has no problem saying, I'm going to golf on Saturday.

**Megan Monson:** Same with me here.

**Nicole Fulfree:** And he doesn't think twice about it. And then I found myself getting in this cycle where I would be annoyed and frustrated because my husband wasn't saying, "Hey, why don't you go out with your girlfriends today?" But then when I found that, I just told him and I said, "No, I'm going to go out with my girlfriends today. We're going for an overnight trip to a spa." He would say, "Oh, that's great. I'm so happy for you. You need to do more things like that." A lot of my girlfriends reported a similar experience that when they actually just took the initiative and said, this is what I'm going to do with my time, everyone around them had no problem with it, and the world didn't collapse, and everything moved forward.

Maybe your kids weren't wearing matching outfits for 24 hours and went to bed with food in their hair or something, but the world didn't end. And it really gives you the personal time to get what you need and start fresh the next day with a much better perspective. And I think those concepts apply to whether you need to take time to yourself to finish a work project or to do something on a personal level that makes you feel less stressed.

**Rachel Dikovics:** These are all fantastic tips, and I think it's really useful for women who don't yet have kids, not just in our workplace, but in any workplace, to hear their colleagues talking about these issues openly and honestly. And I think it makes that transition a lot easier, and it helps women know that they have colleagues who they can go to talk to about these issues. So thank you all again for taking the time to talk about your thoughts on parental burnout during COVID today. And thanks to all of our listeners for joining us for another episode of the Women's Initiative Network, Real Talk. We hope you'll join us for future episodes as we continue to real talk.

**Amanda Cipriano:** Thank you for listening to today's episode. Please subscribe to our podcast series at [lowenstein.com/podcasts](https://lowenstein.com/podcasts) or find us on iTunes, Spotify, Pandora, Google Podcasts, and SoundCloud. Lowenstein Sandler podcast series is

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