About 40 percent of physician trainees plan to have a child during their graduate medical education training, according to a July 2016 study in *Academic Medicine*. Balancing family and clinical commitments can be an almost impossible task. We spoke to residents about the biggest challenges they faced while having a family during residency.

**Getting the timing right**

Whether your child is planned or “a surprise,” the timing is never going to be entirely convenient for your medical training.

Ellia Ciammaichella, DO, is a fourth-year physical medicine and rehabilitation resident at McGovern Medical School in Houston. She had her first child during medical school and her second child as a third-year resident. Both children were born two months early, requiring Dr. Ciammaichella to have a C-section. For her second child, she returned to work after only eight days off while her child was in the NICU, with the goal of having time with the baby when she was discharged home.

“I had to go to work right away to ensure I could spend time with the baby at home and with a preemie getting breast milk to come out is not easy,” Dr. Ciammaichella said. “That makes it stressful to be at work. I was trying to finish work on time while trying to pump every three hours to get home and see the kids.

“There’s never a perfect time to have children. Someone is going to be unhappy about it no matter what. I know people who have delayed having children and have regretted it at times so my advice is to do what is right for your family.”

**Covering child care**
Doctors don’t work banker’s hours and residents don’t make all that much bank. In light of those facts, child care is a unique challenge. Some residents have the fortune of giving the bulk of the responsibility to a spouse or family member, which can save money and allow for schedule flexibility.

Still that kind of year-round support is not always possible. Maj. Scott Dillard, MD, is a resident in the aerospace medicine program at a Dayton, Ohio, hospital. His wife, Julie, is a neonatal intensive care unit fellow at Nationwide Children’s Hospital in Columbus, Ohio.

With two demanding schedules and two children under the age of 5, child care requires creative solutions. During their most intense rotations, they can rely on family members. But on a day-to-day basis, they needed to look elsewhere.

“Day care offers good socialization and there are good day cares near us,” Dr. Dillard said. “But the reason we have had an au pair and after that hired a nanny is because if they have a cold and can’t go to day care, I can’t just call out of work and [his wife] just can’t call out of work. Even if I can call out, I’m an hour away. Having a nanny is more expensive, but she’s very flexible and that’s incredibly helpful.”

Avoiding the homework

With physicians doing hours of work per a week at home, this is a tall task. Cutting out any sort of idle time from your work day can help make the time you spend with your family about them and not your job.

“It can be pretty hard when my rotations are tough. I try to be very focused, so the time that I’m at work, I can get as much as I need to get everything taken care of,” said Eudy Bosley, a MD, a psychiatry resident at the University of Oklahoma at Tulsa who is also a mother of four. “Then when I get home I don’t have many leftover clinical duties. That makes for very busy days and not a lot of interaction or chit-chatting, but when I’m home, I’m able to mom.”

Organizing your life

Getting things done around the house is already cumbersome enough as a medical resident. It becomes considerably more difficult, however, when a parent is taking on child-care responsibilities. One good option, resident-parents say, is scheduling in time for chores well in advance.

“It is more difficult to take time for yourself,” Dr. Dillard said. “It might be to blow off steam or it might be to get the things done that you need to get taken care of around the house, like mow the lawn. You can’t do anything until the kids are asleep. When Julie [his wife] is not home, we just know for that next
30 hours, I'm going to get nothing done. Child care is all I have going. I better have all my projects done ahead of that."