

Beyond the Bustle – World and National Current Events

Tips for Busy People and Families Who Want Relevant News

S of Beyond the Sippy Cup

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The truth is busy people don't have time to filter through commentary, advertising, gossip, non-news, and bias to get the few headlines that matter. The evening TV news is a poor option for many families because the content is too unpredictable for kids (and we're too tired to stay up for the late night broadcast).

I had a vague awareness it would be harder to keep up with current events when I became a mother. My best friend (a stay-at-home-mom of three) often jokes about how oblivious she feels about the state of the nation and world. She knows it's important to be an informed citizen but is just too darned busy. I started to empathize when my son became a toddler and started to climb through, jump on, stick fingers in, or swallow everything in sight.

I hope one of these tools helps you can the news you want with time left to focus on your real priorities. I am a spreadsheet geek so for those of you who want comparisons of specific sites I've started one on my website (see the reference block). I will continue to update it regularly as I find new sources. Any of these solutions should keep you informed almost as well as before your time and brain were monopolized by your children, hobby, or job.

Independent News Sites

I admit, there's no such thing as zero bias. The best you can hope for in a news site is one you can tailor or that already matches your interests. Look for front pages that have detailed headlines rather than long articles, are easy to read, and display well on your mobile device(s). The goal is to find something you can check at a glance and get the major

headlines in about a minute. A good place to start is the Associated Press (AP) site as this not-for-profit is one of the most trusted sources of independent news worldwide.

RSS (Really Simple Syndication)

Many folks use a specific RSS viewer, but your desktop e-mail software or internet browser may already have the function. It's a convenient option because you can subscribe to as many as you like, filter and sort to your heart's content, and read them all in one place. Be careful not to over-subscribe or you will inevitably have overlap. Many sites that charge for their regular newsletter or print subscriptions offer this for free. I like those I can customize both by content and frequency, have short articles, few pictures, and are relatively unbiased.

Add it to Your Home Page

When you open your internet browser, the home page is what automatically opens. Typically it's a search engine or your e-mail client but you can make it whatever you choose. If you find an independent news site that fits your needs, try setting it as your home page. Another option is to use one of the customizable front pages popular webmail providers have. You can load this up with news (by topic), stock quotes, and more. I have found this to be the most convenient and effective ways to stay informed without getting bombarded with information I don't care about.

There's an App for That...

There are tons of smartphone and tablet applications that provide news feeds. As with the previous suggestions, the ability to customize is key. One I really like right now is "Flipbook". This application

creates a personalized digital magazine for you, the articles are short, and you see only the topics you select. The application is simple, visually pleasing, and great for quick scrolling through the top headlines.

Follow Something...or Someone

This is a great option but might take a little more research on your part. Twitter is great because it's concise by nature. A drawback is it's difficult to customize so you have to be selective in who (or what) you follow. I recommend starting with an independent news site or the nightly news program you liked when you had time to watch television.

Newsletter

I was sorely disappointed with what I found for print solutions. I love the idea of a monthly or weekly newsletter with descriptive, relevant headlines I can read in less than 5-minutes after I sort it out of my mail. Unfortunately, it seems I'll have to settle for e-mail until I create it myself. Most news sites have an option to subscribe to a newsletter with links to their stories. The upside is they come to you. The downside is almost all come daily. I recommend you hold off until you find a news site you trust with a weekly or monthly option or you will eventually just unsubscribe.

Listen vs. Watch

Radio is not dead! I think you will be pleasantly surprised at how crisp hourly radio news updates are. Another listening option is that many media agencies make their reporting available in podcast format. If you have a Bluetooth headset you can listen through a compatible device while tackling your ever-present piles of laundry, dishes, or paperwork.

Socialize

One of the simplest ways to find out what's going on is to ask someone who keeps up with current events. Don't avoid the topic for fear of public embarrassment! Confide in them that you feel out-of-the-loop then *let them talk*. For stay-at-home parents, you may enlist a close friend or family member to call, text, message, or e-mail you when they hear a relevant report. My best friend has begun discussing current events with her retired neighbors (who have time to watch the news). It's become a great way of reaching out and she gets the updates while keeping an eye on her kids.

But I really like the TV News!

There are a few good ways you can still get the full audio visual stimulation of watching the news on the tube. Try watching just videos online to get a shorter version of each story. You can always record it then watch somewhere your kids won't see or hear. For example, use the TV in your room while you get ready or watch it in the kitchen using a wall-mounted holder for your tablet or smartphone.

Hopefully this has given you a few new ideas to try to get back in-the-loop with national and world events. If so, be sure to share what worked for you with the other busy people in your life!

This article is part of a series designed to help families with small children (and other busy people) get to those activities that never seem to fit on the calendar. Head to the blog site <http://www.beyondthesippycup.com> for more on this topic and to share your own time-saving ideas with the community there.