



SUPPORTING YOUR CHEF FROM LINE COOK TO CORPORATE CHEF

By: Jennifer Small



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Let's Start from the Beginning

Are you somehow connected to a chef . . . a husband or wife, boyfriend or girlfriend . . . or maybe even a chef yourself? It's a crazy life we live with them, isn't it?

There are so many misconceptions about what our life is like as the spouse or significant other of a chef. . . . the 5 course meals we supposedly eat every night; the fabulous holiday parties we throw every December; the large paychecks they bring home every month . . . the list could go on and on. I know you've heard them all.

In reality, it's not an easy life that we live. Along with the great food we occasionally enjoy and the luxury of having someone be able to answer all our cooking questions, comes loneliness and struggles as we try to find time to spend together as a couple.

But this book is not about us. It's not about our struggles and frustrations, our hopes and our joys. It's about our chefs, and how we can support them from home, in this life long career they have chosen.

Being a cook or a chef is a passion. You have to really enjoy it to put up with the harsh environment and long hours that come with it. Our chefs love food and every day, they get to do what they love, cook!

So how is it that we here at home can best support them in this career they have chosen? What can we do to help them move ahead in their career?

Before I get into that, I should probably start off by telling you a little about my chef/husband and I and our journey as a chef couple.

My chef/husband and I met when I was 4 and he was 5. Obviously, he wasn't a chef then, but he's always loved cooking, even at a young age. (His Mom tells stories of him using a Holly Hobbie Baking Oven when he was little. Oops, did I just write that?)

We met at church where our parents were friends. I have to be honest, I was a bit scared of him in Junior High. I have memories of carpooling to youth group activities with his family and hating it.

Fast forward a few years and we started dating when I was 15 and he was 16. Yes, we were high school sweethearts. We got married while in college and about 8 months after we were married my husband took his first position as a line cook in a restaurant. After college, I taught elementary school, leaving us working totally opposite schedules. Me as a teacher and my husband as a line cook.

Let the craziness begin!

As I think about the past 19 years, there's been a lot of transition in my husband's career as a chef. As he moved up the ladder in the kitchen, often changing restaurants to do so, I struggled with how to best support him in his career. During the past 19 years, I've learned so many things, not only about the culinary world, but also about him, our marriage and myself.

Looking back, I wish I had known a little more about what to expect with each change in kitchen position. Nineteen years ago, I was just starting to use dial up internet, our very slow desktop computer cost a fortune and if there were blogs around, there definitely were not any written to the families and spouses of chefs. I felt very alone.

Each position in the kitchen was so different and there was no one I knew that could offer advice on this. As a young chef wife, I was on my own to figure out how to best support my line cook/husband from afar (aka home.) My husband, while around other cooks and chefs in the kitchen, had no one to talk to who also saw marriage and family as a priority. We were on our own as a couple to figure out how to combine restaurant and family life. (Well, not totally alone. We had [and still have] very supportive family and friends, who were very understanding of this crazy life we were living. We just couldn't ask them for advice because none of them were chefs.)

Please don't think I have it all figured it out and am a perfect wife. HA! Far from it! It's easy to write about how to support a line cook once you've been through it

and done a bunch of things wrong. That's how you learn. I just hope that some of the things I've learned will help someone else!

I would encourage you to read through the entire book, even if your chef is already at the corporate level. Some of the things at the beginning will make you smile and think, "I remember that." Maybe you'll even find some things you forgot about and want to start doing again. (I know I did just writing it.)

Every chef's journey is different and because of that, supporting them will be different as well. This book reflects our journey. One that has unfolded over the past 19 years. It includes things I learned along the way and things I wish I had known (especially about how each position was different from the last one). I hope you will find it helpful in some way.

Warning (in case you missed the subtle hint above): *This book is very one-sided. While it's written for a spouse or significant other of a chef, it's not about how your chef's career choice is making your life difficult. I know being married to or dating a chef is hard!! I'm living it. If you are struggling with the ups and downs of a relationship with a chef, [head on over to my blog](#). (There are some hyperlinks throughout the book that link to specific posts which might be helpful.) This book is all about your chef's career and how you can support them along the way.*

Why I Support my Husband as a Chef

Supporting my husband in his career as a chef is always something I have strived to do. I will admit that there have been ups and downs in this journey and sometimes I have done a much better job of it than others. (And while I'm speaking from a marriage perspective since my husband didn't start working in a professional kitchen until after we were married, I believe a lot of what I'm describing could be transferred over to a dating relationship as well.)

My husband says that he could have advanced, done his job well and kept up with things at home, if he was single. But the support that I provide at home allows him to not only do his job, but then come home and be part of a family. Without this support, he would have to come home and take care of the day to day things needing to be done (laundry, cleaning, grocery shopping, etc.) Part of his rapid advance in his career is because of the support and infrastructure I provide at home.

Wow! **Those were his words, not mine.** I played a part in his career as a chef, FROM HOME. He feels that the support that I have provided from home has helped him advance in his career. I guess I already knew that, but to have him say that to me really meant a lot.

My husband's career as a chef is for both of us (and for our children.) Advancing to different levels as a cook or chef benefits all of us. There are a lot of risks and rewards with this type of job, especially as you try to advance to the next level. Sometimes you take a job, not knowing how it will work out. Sometimes you need to take a risk knowing there is a greater possibility of reward. Supporting your chef during these risks is never easy, but it is so important!

The support I give him and the home environment that I create for him to come home to (whether working full time, part time or staying home full time) has played a big part in his career. At times our home has been a place of refuge and support. But I know that it hasn't always been easy for him to come home. He says that our "world" here at home sometimes seems foreign to him if he's been gone a lot. I know in the past he's felt like he doesn't fit in here at home . . . we have our own routines and sometimes he's just not sure how to be a part of

them. That's not the kind of support he needs or that I'm trying to give, but I will admit, it's been a struggle for us over the years. I want him to be comfortable at home, even if he's not home much. I don't want it to feel like a foreign place. I want it to feel like "home," a place to relax and recharge!

While our marriage is a complex relationship, I have found over the years that sometimes it's the simple things that mean the most (helping with the day to day things like laundry, cleaning, cooking, etc.) It's easy to say, "I love and care about you," but if there are no actions that show I care, my husband might be left wondering if I really mean it.

Supporting your chef isn't easy. Sometimes it takes sacrifice on your part. It requires you to put your chef before yourself. But as you see your relationship and their career grow and develop, it's worth it!

Supporting your Line Cook

WHAT TO EXPECT IN THE KITCHEN:

For many cooks, this is their entry level position into a professional kitchen. The environment is very hot and fast paced. They are on their feet for the entire shift, often taking their required break at the beginning or end of their shift because there is no way they can take it in the middle of the dinner rush. They are going to be physically exhausted all the time, especially at first as they are getting used to the job.

If they did not go to culinary school, they will probably need some basic kitchen tools for work. Don't freak out when they tell you how much they just spent on a chef knife. Once you use it, you'll probably end up wanting one too.

There's a lot to learn, especially in the beginning. When they have one station mastered, be prepared for the switch to another station and a new time of learning. The first couple seasonal menu changes might be a challenge, but they will get the hang of it quickly.

At this level, there is not much flexibility in their work hours. They might be able to request specific days off each week, but if the chef says to work, they work. Overtime will depend on the restaurant. Some restaurants discourage it as it kills their labor budgets. Others find a way to work it in (or just go over budget).

The hours, while set on the schedule, fluctuate a little based on the guest count for the night. They might be sent home early if the restaurant is really slow. However, once they prove themselves reliable and able to work any station, they probably won't be the one sent home early.

COMMUNICATION WHILE AT WORK:

None.

OK. That's maybe a bit dramatic, but really, if it's the dinner rush, it's going to have to be a HUGE emergency to talk to them.

When my husband was a line cook, we did not have cell phones. (I'm 40 and he's 41. We are old.) If I wanted to get a hold of him, I had to call the restaurant. So I rarely did.

Fast forward to modern times. I could send a text, but he would never answer it when working on the line. Might as well just wait until you know there's a chance they can respond.

For us, if we really have to get a hold of each other, we call 2 times in a row. My husband knows if his phone vibrates from 2 calls in a row from me, something is wrong and I have to talk to him. He doesn't always answer right that second, but will call back ASAP. That rarely happens, but has worked for us in the past.

I also could just call the restaurant and they would get him (again - only for a real emergency).

I know many wives worry about this, especially with a newborn. Having a little baby and trying to figure out what to do with that new little one is hard enough. There's no need to worry about not being able to get in contact with your line cook or chef. As long as they are not one of those cooks who has an "emergency" every couple days, a good Sous Chef or Executive Chef will cover for them in an emergency. As a Sous Chef or Executive Chef, my husband has stepped on the line in cases like that, just like his crew has done for him. You have enough to think about with a little baby. Don't worry about that!

CHEF CLOTHES:

Chef coats tend to get pretty dirty, even with an apron on. No matter how clean they try to cook, if the coats are white, you'll see the stains immediately. Many restaurants require their cooks and chefs to clean their own coats (I would guess to save money).

If you are helping with the laundry, [figure out the best way to clean them](#) and stay on top of it. The sooner you clean them, the easier the stains will be to get out.

The chef coats, pants, shoes and socks will stink after work. BEWARE!! You'll want to have a place for them outside of your bedroom or you might not be able

to sleep from the smell, especially if they are working the sauté or broiler station. If they are in the pantry, it won't be as bad.

If they don't have the right shoes, their feet will be KILLING THEM by the end of their shift. Don't be surprised when your chef says they really need to buy some good shoes. They do!

WHAT TO EXPECT AT HOME:

Any time that you would want to be out doing something with them, they will be working.

Even though it's crazy when they are at work, and they think and talk food all the time at home, there shouldn't be too much stress at this level. My husband was always reading cookbooks and magazines and trying to learn as much as he could. But as a line cook, it was just for fun and personal growth. He was able to leave the stress of work at work most of the time.

They will use your [cute dish towels](#) to wipe up everything at home because that's what they do at work. Save yourself money and buy cheap white ones that you can bleach. If you really want to use cute ones, hide them when they are home. :-) But beware! Before long you (and your kids) will also use the dish towels to wipe up everything as well.

Home life is very different than life in the kitchen. The kitchen is hot, stressful and fast paced. It's not easy for them to leave all of that at work and sometimes this environment comes home with them. (You'll need to learn key words when cooking with them in the kitchen - corner, behind, knife on your right, etc.)

SUPPORTING YOUR LINE COOK AT HOME:

Learn about food with them. Show an interest in what they are learning. Not only does it show that you care about them, but it can be a way for you to feel like part of their life in the kitchen and help you not feel like you are [living separate lives](#). I did not do this as much as I wish I would have. :-{

Be ready to go out to eat and try foods you never thought you would. Ask lots of questions so you can learn too. Line cooks don't make much money, so it might

not happen often, but enjoy it when you can. (And if it's really expensive and you're worried about the money, keep your mouth shut and don't let it ruin the evening [speaking from experience here]).

Encourage them to learn all they can from their Sous and Executive Chef (even if it means staying after work or coming in early without pay). I remember my husband telling me he asked the Executive Chef to teach him as much as he could. If he was cutting fish, he wanted to learn. If he was trying a new technique, he wanted to be there to learn. He asked questions about menu design, food costing, different cuts of meat, etc. He wanted to learn it all! My husband learned so much in his first few years on the job. His brain was like a sponge, soaking it all in. They need to learn all they can so they can stand out and move up.

Keep your first aid kit stocked. You're going to need it. Sure they know how to cut things. But cutting a large quantity of something in a very short period of time . . . well, sometimes they miss. Just be ready. You should probably read up on burns too. There will be a lot of those. Look at the forearms of an older chef sometime.

Help them stay hydrated. I remember many nights my husband would come home feeling miserable because he was so dehydrated from working and not drinking enough water. Have water, Gatorade or decaf iced tea ready for them, a gallon at a time. If you make any less, one of you will just have to make it again in a few hours.

STRENGTHENING YOUR RELATIONSHIP:

At some point you are both going to feel like you are living separate lives - yours at work and home (and with the kids) and your chef in the restaurant. If you are working full time, or even part time, your hours will probably not be the same. Both of you will have to make your relationship a priority. While you will want to do things with friends, make sure to put your marriage or relationship first. You are going to have to protect the limited time you have together and might have to make some tough choices about what you schedule on their days off.

Supporting your Sous Chef

WHAT TO EXPECT IN THE KITCHEN:

At this level, there might be a jump from hourly to salary pay. If they are salary, be ready for longer hours. I remember this being the time my husband started working 12+ hour days. The hours do not lessen as they move up, so try to not get your hopes up. :-) It will make it easier later.

Some Sous Chefs are responsible for writing the schedule, but that doesn't mean they'll be able to take off whatever days they want.

Many Sous Chefs work when the Executive Chef doesn't want to. It's pretty much a guarantee they will work all holidays the restaurant is open.

While they know all the stations on the line, they are now in management and are in charge of the back of house when the Executive Chef is not there. They will be working on ordering and keeping inventory. It's a lot to take in at once. Along with learning all this for themselves, they might be partially responsible for training the cooks on the line. They'll be figuring out the best way to do this.

There will be many nights they close the restaurant at 1 or 2 and then need to be back the next morning to open at 6 am.

Chances are they won't be thinking about how hard this job is, they will just do what they need to do to get it done.

They are learning to lead and are now concerned with things that don't start and end with their shift. They are figuring out how to manage things both on paper and in the restaurant.

Their skill set as a leader is not always good enough to do the job they now have. So things might take longer to do until they figure them out.

COMMUNICATION WHILE AT WORK:

During the lunch and dinner rush - none. They are running the line and can't stop easily to pick up their phone or answer a text. Plus, they tell their line cooks not to do this, so they shouldn't either.

They might have an email address at this point, but will probably only use it for work related emails. They will rarely be sitting at a desk or have much time to look at their phone.

Texting is probably the best bet at this point, as they can respond when they have a free second.

CHEF CLOTHES:

Expect new chef coats with their name and title on them! Woohoo!! With my husband, they were higher quality, but not any easier to wash.

It might be time for new chef pants. Definitely no black and white checked any more. Toss those! (Maybe those were even tossed after prep. cook. It just depends on the restaurant.) The brand of chef pants might matter at this point as well, depending on your chef.

The chef clothes still stink at the end of a 12+ hour day. Sorry. :-{

WHAT TO EXPECT AT HOME:

At this level, it's not quite as easy to leave work at work. But since there is still a chef above them, hopefully they will not have their phone, text messages or email going crazy when they are off.

Their schedule can change in an instant. (It never gets easier, but you get used to it [kind of].) When you plan to do things with others, you might have to reschedule because of this.

From now on, when your chef is home, you will no longer have any clean spoons. You should probably buy some extra ones. They use so many spoons at work to go up and down the line to taste things, they will do this at home now too.

Afternoon naps will probably start at this level, if they haven't started already! They are so tired! They can sleep through almost anything and can fall asleep as soon as their head hits the pillow.

SUPPORTING YOUR SOUS CHEF AT HOME:

Make sure to communicate with them as much as possible. While you want to hear about their day, make sure to take time to tell them about yours. You will always be fighting against living separate lives with the different hours you work. If you never [find time to talk](#), your marriage or relationship will suffer. Your relationship can't survive on text messages alone. It's not always easy to find the best time for this. I've actually asked my husband when would be the best time to talk to him about important things. When they are tired and about to fall asleep is not the time!

As you think about what you want to do together as a couple, keep in mind that they are exhausted from work. They might want to go on a hike on their day off, but might also enjoy relaxing around the house with you and taking a nap. (And even if you don't need to take a nap, maybe think about laying next to them and cuddling until they are asleep. You won't have a lot of time together so make the most of every moment.)

Be there to listen as they tell you what they are learning and struggling with. Chances are their brain will be going 24/7 with new ideas and things they want to try.

At some point, they'll come home from work frustrated by their Executive Chef, Manager or some other employee. Just listen, even if you've never worked in a restaurant and don't understand the dynamics of it. Sometimes they just need to vent. It's better for them to vent to you than to another employee.

Don't freak out at the continued obsession with cookbooks and culinary magazines (but maybe try and encourage e-books as they don't take up space in your home).

Be ready to try lots of new recipes. If they are not doing so already, meals at home will now be plated. The only time you will ever see a meal served "family style" is at someone else's home.

Be honest and kind with your feedback as they try new things. While some Sous Chefs help with menu development at work, many just experiment and learn at home at this level.

STRENGTHENING YOUR RELATIONSHIP:

As your chef's hours in the kitchen increase, you probably won't have a lot of time together, so make sure it's quality time. Be protective of their days off and don't schedule both of you with so many activities that you don't have time to just be a couple (or family). It was at this point in my husband's career that naps on his day off were a given.

Plan regular date nights (either for home or out of the house). This responsibility might fall on you if you work less hours than your chef. But no matter who plans it, just make sure to have a plan or it might not ever happen.

Supporting your Executive Chef

WHAT TO EXPECT IN THE KITCHEN:

Everyone will call them "Chef." They've earned it.

When you walk in the restaurant, be ready to meet many employees and finally have faces to put with the names you keep hearing at home.

They will be working less in the kitchen and doing more administrative things (menu development, communicating with vendors, meetings with the manager, corporate chef or restaurant owner, etc.)

Even though they are not working the line any more, they still have to be able to jump on at any time and do it better than everyone else.

Some nights they will come home even more exhausted than normal because the dishwasher broke and they had to step in and help for a few hours.

They are now watching the line a lot more and making sure everything that goes out is to standard.

For many, this will be the first time the kitchen is producing their food (recipes they wrote). 😊

There will be more emails and texts from managers, vendors and the corporate chef or restaurant owner.

While they are still learning, they are now responsible for the on-going development of their crew. They will be constantly training and teaching so they have qualified cooks to move up when they need them to.

They will live at the restaurant for the month of December. Buy them a good sleeping bag and air mattress so they can sleep in their office. (OK, just kidding. But December is really hard. I'm sure you already know that though!)

They can tell you the exact price of every item on the menu and the restaurant's cost for each ingredient in it. Really. Quiz them. It's pretty impressive. But don't ask them the cost of the milk at the grocery store. They probably won't be able to tell you (or they'll tell you that it's so much more than they pay at the restaurant - lol)!

COMMUNICATION WHILE AT WORK:

Text messaging works well for things you need a quick answer for. (Be prepared for random pictures to show up in a text too!)

Email is great if you just need them to know about an event so they can put it on their calendar.

You might have a chance of reaching them on the phone, but they are always talking to someone or working on something. It's still probably best to send a text and ask them to call when they have a second. If you do call and they don't answer, don't bother leaving a message. Just send a text. It will be faster for them to check.

CHEF CLOTHES:

You can expect new chef coats again with their name and new title! They need to be even cleaner than before (good luck with that) as they now set the standard for the restaurant. They will not be cooking on the line as much, so they will be a little easier to clean.

They might want to move to a more professional style of chef pants at this level.

Because they are not cooking on the line as often, their chef clothes don't smell quite as bad!

WHAT TO EXPECT AT HOME:

Because of the large amounts of texts and emails from managers and owners, it's not easy at this point to leave work at work. It will be constantly on their mind and they might have trouble switching to "home" mode.

Things will go wrong on their days off and they will have to go in to work. They are in charge and often there's not an option to hand off the problem or situation to someone else.

If they are doing menu development, be ready for some money to come in and out of your bank account as they buy small quantities of things at the grocery store for menu development and then wait for reimbursement from the restaurant.

If you are looking on their phone for a picture they took on your last date night, you'll have to scroll through hundreds of food photos first. They might also want a better camera to use for taking food photos in the restaurant.

Even though they are not working on the line anymore, they still come home exhausted, both physically and mentally. Naps on their days off will continue and when they are home in the evening, they will probably fall asleep on the sofa next to you.

SUPPORTING YOUR EXECUTIVE CHEF AT HOME:

The biggest change I noticed at this level was the use of technology to communicate. Be as supportive as you can with them as they check email and texts at home. Even if they are off, they will probably still get texts and emails from the restaurant and vendors. Many of them can wait until they get back to work, but some can't. My husband leaves his phone on silent and then checks it every couple hours and responds to things if he needs to. It's much easier for him to relax and not think about work if the notifications on his phone aren't going off all the time! I know many chef wives and significant others who really struggle with this and hate it when a text or call interrupts a conversation they are trying to have with their chef. Just an idea . . .

[If your chef is an introvert](#), they are going to need some time at home to recharge. I noticed my husband being more sensitive to lots of noise at home at this level. I believe (and this is just my take on it) it's because it's hard to relax when he has so much on his mind and there's constant noise of 3 kids. If you have kids, of course there's going to be noise. I can tune it out because I'm used to it. But he's not. Kid noise is very different than the noise of a kitchen. So if that's the case in your home as well, be sensitive to the noise level and try to help

with that if possible. (And when you have that figured out, send me an [email](#) letting me know how you did it please!!)

Help them try to stay on top of yearly physicals and dental appointments, even if that means you have to make the appointments for them. (But make sure to know the cancellation policy when you book appointments, since there's a good chance you'll have to reschedule at least once.) They are so busy working, they probably won't think about it. Working so many years on the line and in the kitchen takes a toll on their body!

STRENGTHENING YOUR RELATIONSHIP:

I think that the Executive Chef position might be the most stressful of all of the positions in the kitchen. (Of course, we are still only a few years into the Corporate level . . . maybe my thoughts on that will change in the days and months to come.) Chances are, a lot of that stress from work will be coming home with them. Finding time to focus on your marriage or relationship is going to be even more important than it was before, or you will be living totally separate lives. Don't neglect date nights, even it's just a nice meal you prepared after the kids go to bed. Candles on the table at home can be just as romantic as candles on the table at a restaurant. (And if your chef is the one cooking, the food will probably be better than if you went out anyways!)

Continue to be protective of your time together. Chances are you will have to be the "bad guy" and say no to people (even family) when they ask to do things on the chef's day off. Say yes to some things, but make sure to leave time for just the two of you (and of course for a nap).

Supporting your Corporate Chef

In my chef/husband's career, he has been a Corporate Chef for a small local restaurant group and currently works as a Corporate Culinary Director for a large restaurant group. As a Culinary Director he oversees one of the company's brands. He also does menu development for multiple brands within the group. This is the level we are currently living at and where I'm learning as we go. I feel like everything I've ever known as a chef's wife is changing every day!

WHAT TO EXPECT IN THE KITCHEN:

There will be traveling, either by car or plane, depending on how far away the restaurants are that they are responsible for. If they are traveling by plane, you'll both be getting used to sleeping apart, which might take a while.

You will have no idea where they are most of the time. Yes, they will have a desk at the corporate office, but they'll be out and about at the restaurants a lot.

Their scope of influence is now much greater. In the past they might have had 35 cooks under them. They now could have hundreds. This might add stress to their job, depending on the competency of those under them.

There is a definite level of maturity that you see at this level. The knowledge they have from all the years they have worked in the kitchen is evident.

The decisions they make now impact the entire company. For example, saving 7 cents on a burger patty could save the company \$600,000 a year.

They will have a lot of meetings and conference calls if the restaurants are spread out.

Their hours will still be long, but most likely will start earlier and end earlier. My husband is rarely out past 10 pm and even occasionally makes it home before the girls go to bed.

Menu development is on their mind constantly. They are thinking about their spring menu when there is snow on the ground and are hunting down seasonal ingredients early (if possible) to try new recipes and take pictures of them.

They know when the cost of beef is scheduled to go up and what their plan is, company wide, to manage it. Apply this to all the food groups - meat, dairy, produce, etc. They are constantly working with numbers and figuring out how to keep their food costs down without sacrificing quality.

COMMUNICATION WHILE AT WORK:

Email and texting work well during the day. They are in front of their phone and computer a lot.

Talking on the phone might be an option, but just like previous roles, you never know when they are in a meeting or working with a chef. Sending a text and asking them to call is still a better option (at least according to my husband).

Video chatting is wonderful, especially when they are traveling. If you have kids, they can see Mom or Dad and show them their homework or award from school. Our kids still get crazy and hyper and all want to talk at once when we try this, but we'll keep working on it!

CHEF CLOTHES:

There will be new chef coats again! Woohoo! They will be cooking much less, so sometimes you even get to throw one in the wash without having to spot clean it! (Don't fall out of your chair. It's true. Seriously, I just threw 3 coats in the wash with some other laundry. NICE!!!!)

You might actually get to help them shop for clothes somewhere besides the Chefwear catalog. There might be days they go into work in "normal" clothes. (Although, most of the time my husband is still in chef clothes because there's at least a part of the day he's in the kitchen.)

WHAT TO EXPECT AT HOME:

You might actually have dinner together occasionally, but you might not know it until 30 minutes before. Make sure you are cooking enough food, even if that means you have leftovers because they are not home.

Since they will be moving from restaurant to restaurant, they might eat more at home after work. If their restaurants do a family meal at the end of the shift, they will probably not be there for it.

Chances are they will come home and tell you about food recalls and price increases that are coming soon. (This can be really helpful when planning meals at home.)

They might want to cook more at home (when they are home) since they are not cooking as much at work now.

You'll eat REALLY WELL when they do cook. (I guess that would apply at every level though.)

While the hours have always been long, traveling is different. I always thought that it wouldn't feel that different if my husband traveled. After all, there are many days he's just home to sleep. But it's different! Sure, he could jump on a plane and come home in an emergency, but it's not the same as getting in the car and driving an hour. That seems to always be in the back of my head when he's gone.

SUPPORTING YOUR CORPORATE CHEF AT HOME:

At this level, traveling has been the biggest adjustment for us. I'm working on supporting him when last minute business trips come up. Since I take care of the laundry here at home, this means I have to be careful to stay up on it so if he calls and says he's going out of town tomorrow, I'm not trying to wash dark chef pants and aprons, white chef coats and undergarments all in a few hours.

Just as other levels of management, if they need to vent their frustration, be there to listen, even if you don't understand all of it. Again, it's better for them to talk to you than another employee.

Think of sneaking in a love note in their suitcase for a business trip. Just a fun little surprise for them when they get to the hotel or for when they are missing you. One from the kids would be fun too.

If they haven't already done so, encourage them to enroll in frequent flyer and hotel programs so you can earn some rewards to use as a family. (I love this perk!)

My husband jokes that he feels like he lives out of his car because he's moving around so much. He tends to eat a lot of fast food (and of course [Top Ramen](#)) if I don't have other choices for him here at home. If you do the grocery shopping, support them by having some fast and healthy options that they like at home. A [Trader Joe's](#) recently opened up near us, and that has really helped. They have some great options which are still fast to grab, but are much healthier (and cheaper) than fast food. (Or just plan ahead and make enough dinner. [I'm still getting used to doing that!])

STRENGTHENING YOUR RELATIONSHIP:

If they are traveling, take advantage of that and try to add a day on to a business trip and meet them there if you can. It's always nice to get away from home and have time together! (This is tough if you have kids, but I'm determined to make it happen one time!)

In the midst of all the traveling, menu development and training, don't forget about your relationship. Things will continue to be crazy busy. Try to connect with each other during the day if possible, or at least once at night before you both go to bed. I love to video chat with my husband when he's out of town. It makes me feel like he's not so far away.

Supporting your Chef when you have Kids

Even though each position in the kitchen is different, many of the ways we support them are the same. As I was thinking about the past 19 years, and the ups and down of both my husband's career and our marriage, I realized that supporting him became much more difficult when we had children. It wasn't the kids that were difficult (at least most of the time), it was everything that went along with the kids - less sleep, more responsibilities, messier house, divided attention, etc.

As I began to think about our home and marriage since we've had children (10 years), I was suddenly overwhelmed! Being married to a chef is hard enough on its own, but adding children into the mix makes it even harder. Fortunately, the kids came one at a time, so we could grow into being a family of 5. But through the years there have been many ups and down in our family and marriage.

So how do you manage to have kids and still support your chef in the same way as you did before?

I definitely don't have all the answers, but have been fortunate to receive some very wise counsel over the years that has helped. Below are a few of the things I've learned from the past 10 years of being the wife of a chef and a mother at the same time.

Take care of yourself! If you are worn out and exhausted all the time, you can't support or take care of anyone else!

Your chef needs to come before your kids. If you let your kids come before your chef, your marriage will suffer and your chef will feel neglected. It can happen without you realizing it and in my case, took a very difficult conversation between my husband and I for me to realize I had done this. Learn from my mistakes. Put him first! One day your kids will leave the home, but your spouse will still be there. Don't neglect your marriage. Make it a priority. Marriage is not easy, and you have to work at it. Don't let your kids stop you from doing that.

As you are at home with the kids, frustrated and needing a break, remember your chef would rather be at home relaxing with the family instead of at work. (If that's not the case, you need to do everything you possibly can to make your home a place he wants to come home to. Fight for your marriage and your family with everything you have in you!) I know it's not easy for my husband to work so many hours and miss so many things at home. It's so easy to focus on myself and how hard things are at home that I often forget that it's just as hard for him, if not harder.

Without his job, we wouldn't be able to pay our bills and we would be sleeping in a tent in his parent's backyard. While my kids would probably love that for a few weeks, I like having a home and being able to pay our bills. So while we wish he could be home more, he works hard to provide for us. Never forget that and let them know regularly how much you respect them for their hard work and devotion to your family.

Many times it's the little things that make a big difference. By helping with the chef coats, pants and aprons, this frees them up on their days off to spend time with the family. Thinking about them while you are grocery shopping and buying what they enjoy eating after a long day in the kitchen shows that you care and are thinking about them. It might not seem like much, but if you can remember to buy Goldfish for the kids, you can remember to buy things they enjoy having around the house too. (I won't tell you how many times I've neglected to do this over the years. Don't forget about your chef when you are at the grocery store!! This goes along with putting your chef before your kids. I still struggle with this one.)

In a nutshell, just don't forget about them. They need our love and support now that they are a parent and a chef, just as much as they did before. Remember, they are trying to juggle work and home just like we are.

Praying for your Chef

Over the years as my chef/husband has come home and shared things that were going on in the restaurant, I've often been overwhelmed and really unsure what to do with my feelings. I am happy to listen and always want to be there for him. However, I have the type of personality where I want to fix everything. But I can't fix things for him at work. All I can do is listen . . . and pray.

One thing that has really helped me with this over the years has been to pray for him throughout the day as I think about him. I have always struggled with worrying and many days say Philippians 4:6 to myself over and over again. *“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.”* By praying, I'm able to give my concerns about his job over to God and trust that He will be with my chef/husband in whatever situation comes his way that day at work.

As his level of influence has grown over the years, the prayers for his job have changed. As the wife of a Line Cook I prayed for safety and endurance as he did his job. When he was a Sous Chef and Executive Chef, I prayed for wisdom as he designed menus and trained his crew. As the wife of a Culinary Director, I pray for wisdom as he makes decisions that will affect the entire company and for the meetings and interactions he has each day with other chefs, managers and staff.

I know that my husband's job as a chef is very stressful. Most days he does a really good job of managing it and I know it's not easy for him. I'm thankful for the job that God has provided for him and for the chance to pray for him throughout the day.

One Day at a Time . . .

No matter what level your chef is working at, it takes a lot of work to support them from home. It's not easy, and after 19 years, I'm still figuring out the best way to do this.

Moving up in their career as a chef is exciting, but it takes a lot of hard work and long hours along the way. By supporting our chef at home, we can help them succeed and be the best chef they can be. We can celebrate with them every step of the way, knowing we had a part in helping them get to where they are now.

As I close, I don't want you to leave thinking that we have the perfect marriage, that I am a perfect wife and mother or that my chef is the perfect father and husband. That is far from the truth!

Sometimes I get behind on laundry and many nights, have to move piles of clean laundry off the bed so we can go to sleep. I forget to think about my chef when I'm at the grocery store. I don't always plan date nights and time for us as a couple so we can focus on our marriage. Sometimes I choose bad times to bring up important things I need to talk to him about. Occasionally I put my children before my husband and then have to ask for his forgiveness. I am a work in progress!

But no matter how much of a mess I am, I refuse to give up and will continually try to support my chef in whatever way I can, one day at a time. We're in this career together (well, at least until retirement)!

So what are your thoughts on this topic? How do you support your chef? I'm only one chef wife. There are tons of us out there trying to support our chefs in the best ways we know how! [I'd love for you to hop on over to my blog and leave your suggestions and comments for others to read!](#)

About the Author



Hi! I'm Jennifer Small and I'm married to a chef. My chef/husband Tom and I have been married for 19 years. I am blessed to be able to stay home full time with our 3 girls while my husband works as a chef to provide for our family. I enjoy singing, spending time with my family and friends and blogging.

I started the blog EmulsifiedFamily.com in early 2014 to connect with other chef wives and significant others. In the past 19 years there have been so many times I've felt alone and like no one understood what it was like to be married to a chef. Once I started blogging, I found people like you, and I no longer feel alone! There are others who understand my life because they are living it!

If you have found this book helpful in any way, [I'd love for you to share with your fellow chefs, chef wives and significant others, how they can receive this free resource!](#) (Thank you for not forwarding this e-book on to them, but for sending them to my website.)

Thank you . . .

. . . to my sweet chef/husband for putting up with me for the past 19 years and for the great suggestions for this book).

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. . . my fellow chef wife, Alisa, for reading the book and making sure I wasn't crazy.

. . . my fellow chef wife Tiffany, for her suggestions and helpful feedback.

Resources

{This page contains [affiliate links](#).}

BOOKS:

[The Excellent Wife](#) by Martha Peace

[Love and Respect](#) by Emerson Eggerichs

ON -LINE:

[Emulsified Family](#)

[The Huffington Post](#)

[Married to a Chef](#)

[Desperate Chefwives](#)

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