

Dr. Kai Schmidt (*1975) is a theoretical physicist and head of a junior research group. He lives in Dortmund with his wife and two daughters Chiara (*2008) and Juno (*2012).



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The multitype

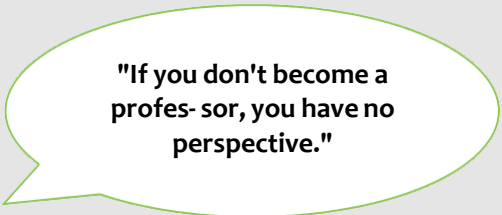
What does the office of a theoretical physicist look like? Dr. Kai Schmidt's is located in the large physics building on the North Campus. When I enter, two things immediately catch my eye: a blackboard full of equations and a colorful picture of a Hello Kitty figure. The equation was written by Mr. Schmidt, the cat was colored by one of his daughters. This is how the physicist and father tries to reconcile two worlds.

He can never switch off completely

Kai Schmidt is a workhorse. The passionate physicist can only rarely switch off completely. "His cheerful laugh only hints at the stress he is under. He explains: "I'm typically in the office between 9 a.m. and 6 p.m., but that doesn't mean I don't answer e-mails afterwards. One advantage of his job is a certain flexibility, he adds brightly. "In principle, I am my own boss and very flexible. There are relatively few fixed appointments. Of course, the courses, but otherwise I can arrange things for myself. If something happens I'm often the more flexible one. That's where I can take over."

This also enabled him to stay at home for a few weeks after the birth of his eldest daughter. At that time, the newly-born father had just come to Dortmund from a post-doctoral position in Switzerland and started to build up a junior research group here, which he also heads today. The option of taking parental leave was therefore unfortunately discarded, something Kai Schmidt still finds somewhat regrettable. "If the position had been permanent, I would have been happy to do it. But since the position is still temporary, that's always a bit difficult." Ultimately, the sense of responsibility also quickly drew him back into the profession, he admits. "When our daughter was born, I stayed at home for a few weeks, but that ended in the end.

my job means that you can never completely switch off. After all, you have people in the group and are responsible for them.



"If you don't become a professor, you have no perspective."

"I was always at the university for half a day," he says. As a result, his wife initially stayed with their daughter for the first year, after which a childminder took over. With the second child, his wife finally decided to stay at home for two years, the 38-year-old explains.

A little bit of everything

It is difficult for Kai Schmidt to find a clear definition of his father. He thinks about it for a long time and finally gives an apologetic pause. the face. "I don't like that with the drawers. It's never that clear-cut." He sees himself more as a healthy mix of different types, he says firmly. "A little bit of everything," he says. "Somewhere breadwinner fits because I make the most money, but I like the cuddly father thing, too. Adventurer could be a little more, but that can come." Of course, he also raises his daughters, but he honestly admits that this is where his active

role in everyday life is often proportionately less because his wife spends most of her time with the children. Since he currently works "clearly enough" during the week, as he says with a laugh, she takes over most of the activities with the two daughters. The parents' plan, however, is that his wife will also return to her job as a teacher after the summer vacations.

"The younger one also already has a kindergarten place for this summer," Kai Schmidt is pleased to say.

"It's not so easy these days, big sister, Chiara, helped."

Realize yourself

He does not deny that career is important to him.

"When you have a university career, of course you want to have the security at some point, that one has arrived. That is one aspect. That means that you can make a career

must. That's the German system." Slightly betre-

He continues: "If you don't become a professor, you have no prospects. "That's why you have to have a career in that sense." It is important to him that he enjoys what he does. Much more cheerfully, he emphasizes, "The positive side is that when you think about realizing yourself, for example, when you realize that you enjoy leading a work group, then you'd prefer not to go back." His beaming face proves that he is very satisfied with this.

However, a career in science was not directly planned, even if he says with a twinkle in his eye that this was already clear to him in kindergarten. "Let's put it this way: there's the romantic answer that in high school you already know what you enjoy, in my case physics and math. The idea of then studying these subjects was clear relatively early on. But that this would be coupled with 'making a career' - that was perhaps a vision, but after that it was more step by step. It was clearly not clear from the beginning." On the contrary, the diploma period was relatively difficult.

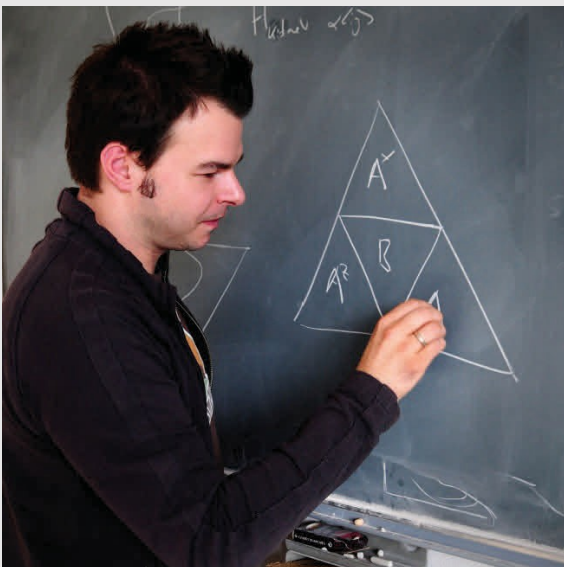
"But then my doctorate was very successful and also a lot of fun. That enabled you to take the next steps. From then on, every step went quite well." the physicist recalls nostalgically.

Children are always a cut

Nevertheless, children were also firmly planned. "I always had the desire to become a father somewhere, even without knowing what that meant," he says meekly. When the time came, he says, it was initially already a "massive cut," the 38-year-old notes. "But not in a clear direction." He cradles his head from side to side and considers. "There are two aspects." he says appraisingly. "One is that you have a lot more responsibility. Accountability becomes a much more important component than for-

The new job is a lot more than the old one, because there's so much more to it when you have to take care of a family. And then, of course, there's the massive time constraint that you didn't have before. It runs a bit counter to that." As a result, his own freedoms have suffered a bit, and finding the right balance is not always easy.

"Life changes a lot when you have children," says Kai Schmidt honestly. But what you make of it "depends on you. The father explains that peers play an important and reassuring role in this situation. Fortunately, Kai Schmidt and his wife quickly got to know people through childbirth preparation courses with whom they could share their experiences.



Source:
Private

were able to exchange ideas. "You could also say cynically: it's good that you know some other fathers, otherwise you can't stand it." The father laughs in amusement, but immediately takes the seriousness out of his statement. "No, that was cynical now. But it's reassuring to hear that it's at least as bad for others."

Kai Schmidt is not yet able to say what will happen in the future. The leap into a professorship would be nice, because that would offer more security for the time being. "And if it doesn't work out, then you have to think differently or tackle other options anyway." Until then, he remains optimistic.

The interview was conducted by Debora Rahma in spring 2013.

Can never quite switch off:
Dr. Kai Schmidt at work.