

Dr. Alexander Schnurr (*1979) is a research associate at the Faculty of Mathematics. He lives in Dortmund with his wife and two sons, Julian (*2009) and Constantin (*2011).



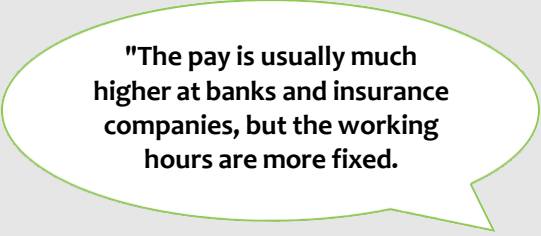
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The father of science

On this snowy day in March, there is a knock at my door right on time: Dr. Alexander Schnurr enters with alert eyes. He discovers a small \ddot{U} egg toy on my desk. We immediately start talking about it and even find common ground in former collecting passions. It's almost a bit of a shame that we have to interrupt our lively conversation to start the actual interview.

Afternoons are family time

Alexander Schnurr prepared himself in a very special way: a week before, he spent a whole day taking a photo of himself or his activity every half hour. That's why, he says vividly, he still knows exactly what a typical day looks like for him. "So most of the time, my wife Maren is still doing the kitchen in the evenings when the kids are asleep. I get up earlier in the morning, wake up the boys and make breakfast. Then my wife gets Julian, the big one, ready for kindergarten, and I take him with me." Conveniently, Julian has been offered a place in a kindergarten near the campus, the father explains happily, so he can take his son there in the morning and then go straight to work.



"The pay is usually much higher at banks and insurance companies, but the working hours are more fixed."

He goes on to describe in detail: "I work until sometime after three. Then I pick up Julian and drive home with him. Constantin, the younger one, is still at home with his mother, my wife. On some days we go shopping together, the four of us, because there's a lot to do.

It's actually quite nice to do this with the whole family. But sometimes Maren has already done the shopping. After that, we go out or play with the kids, depending on whether the weather allows it or not." With the evening meal, the family tries to have at least one meal together each day before the children go to bed. There is a clear division for the parents, reveals Alexander Schnurr: "I usually put Julian to bed and my wife Constantin, because it's more relaxed to do that separately." And the rest of the evening, he says with a twinkle in his eye, he and his wife also like to enjoy as a couple. "Although I'm still working as well, we do make sure we have an hour or so to ourselves."

In this daily routine, it is very convenient for him that he can organize his working hours flexibly, the mathematician emphasizes. He has therefore very consciously chosen the scientific path. "For mathematicians who specialize in probability theory, financial mathematics, etc., this is a great opportunity.

specialize, at some point the question arises as to whether they stay at the university or go into business." He smiles as he explains knowingly:

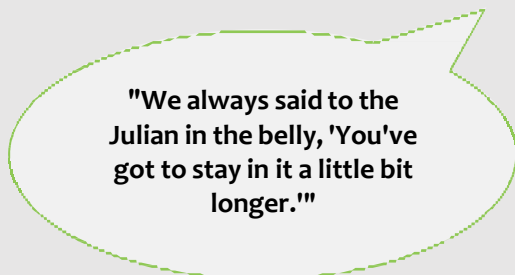
"The pay is usually much higher at banks and insurances, but the hours are more fixed."

Now he also works more than 40 hours a week, but he can essentially divide them up himself, which he finds very pleasant.

Because this situation offers him some freedoms that other fathers can't enjoy, he says elatedly. "I have the opportunity to play with my children from three to five o'clock, at a time when other fathers are still at work." In contrast, he can catch up on work after his sons are asleep.

Decision for science

However, the decision to pursue a career in science also had its pitfalls. The 33-year-old recalls the birth of his first son with a crinkled brow. "The defense of my doctorate was eight days before Julian was born. So my wife was sitting in the audience heavily pregnant." He laughs briefly:



"Which fortunately worked out well." When Julian was finally born, everyday life changed completely for the newly graduated academic and his wife. But that's what happens with Alexander Schnurr says reassuringly that this is the case for all parents. However, his family's situation was made more difficult by the fact that he first had to settle

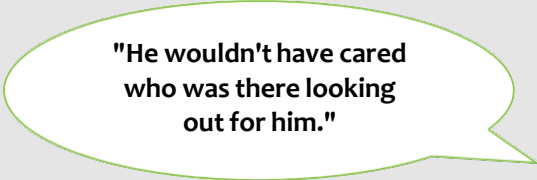
Germany for a new position. "So that was the situation back then in Dresden, not knowing what the next step would be and hoping that you'd eventually get a connection." That cost quite a bit of nerves, the father admits with a groan. Fortunately, he was then offered a three-year post-doc position in Dortmund, where he moved with his small family. Unfortunately, this temporary position as a young scientist, which remained uncertain, did not allow him to take parental leave, even though he would have liked to.

"The pressure to publish that is put on young scientists makes you realize that two months off would be enough to get you too far out," Alexander Schnurr laments, sighing. "It would be difficult to reconnect then. From promotion, the pressure on scientists increases, because you have to achieve a certain number of publications and within a certain time frame." He shrugs. "It's not pretty, but that's just the way it is."

Children not too early in the KiTa

His wife, who is a qualified industrial clerk and already had ten years of professional experience when Julian was born, therefore stayed at home with the children for two years at a time. It was also briefly considered, as Alexander Schnurr reports, that she should return to work when Julian started daycare. But then she became pregnant with Constantin, which put a stop to this plan for the time being.

Vain. "We had good experiences with Julian when he didn't enter the KiTa until he was two. That's why we wanted to do the same with Constantin." It is very important to both parents, the father emphasizes, that the children are at home for the first two years and "spend a lot of time with us before they come to the KiTa.



"He wouldn't have cared who was there looking out for him."

However, care is made more difficult by the fact that grandparents and friends all live further away. Once again, his brow furrows as the father thinks about the birth of his second son. "It was at night, my wife was already in labor, and we had to think 'How do we do this now?' Then, because we hadn't lived in Dortmund that long, we didn't have anyone we could trust enough to give our big child there for a moment. So my wife's parents came, which took two hours. Fortunately, we could estimate that it would still work, so we waited the two hours until her parents were there. They then took care of Julian and he slept through the night, of course. He wouldn't have cared at all who was watching over him." His features relax. "We then went to the

I drove to the hospital and 1 ½ hours later Constantin was already there. That went very quickly."

Some can what you want

When we come to the term career, Alexander Schnurr gets a little more serious. He weighs it up carefully: "So, classic meaning is, I think, for a lot of people, something like money, income. It's always this monetary aspect." It's different for himself, however, he says confidently. "What's always been important to me in terms of career - and still is - is being able to do what I want to do." His gaze is concentrated on the tabletop as he considers again. "It's quite difficult as a mathematician," he says slowly, "because in banks and insurance companies, for the most part, they use the models that are completely outdated."

In the past, the 33-year-old notes, there were also research facilities in companies and banks where "state of the art mathematics," as he calls it, was practiced. "But especially after the financial crisis, this was dismantled again because the banks no longer wanted to afford it. They outsource it, the universities are supposed to train and research it instead, and then the banks get the people back from the university. So that means," he sums up with raised eyebrows, "when I'm in

of mathematics, then I have to stay at the university, and if I want to stay at the university, then I have to have a lifetime job, and those are few and far between." From there, career for him means first and foremost, "To go down that path and say the goal is to get a lifelong perspective at the university, which is then compatible with wanting to have a family and spending time with my kids."

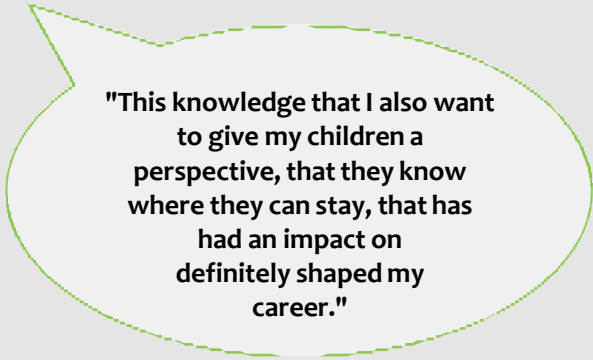
Children as push factors

Alexander Schnurr is convinced that his children never conflicted with his idea of a career in this life model. On the contrary: "That has always given me strength. This knowledge that it just had to go, just like with the doctorate - it had to be done." The children were real push factors, the father explains. This knowledge that I want to give my children a perspective, that they know where they can stay, has definitely shaped my career.

Of course, this additional pressure was not always easy for the 33-year-old, for example during the time when Constantin was in the hospital. He remembers darkly: "That's when I went to Constantin's place.

I sat by the bed and took some thematic stuff with me and continued to work there." Although he won't deny that he could just as easily have imagined going abroad without children, he is not sure that he would have been able to do so.

with his sons, he would no longer have wanted to take the risk. Very specifically, he asks himself the question of medical care. "Does one then really know the technical terminiffe? Can one describe what is wrong with the child? Does one understand what the doctor is saying?"



"This knowledge that I also want to give my children a perspective, that they know where they can stay, that has had an impact on definitely shaped my career."

The father looks uncertain. "With all the risk we're taking now, applying nationwide, that was a risk too much for us."

Social contacts are important

It is very important to the academic to give his children stability and to spend a lot of time with them. But it is just as important to him that his children make social contacts themselves and that their everyday life is varied and lively. His wife took Julian to a toddler group. "For the big one, I also found it very important to do something like this.

to make. So that he had regular contact with other children even before kindergarten. That did a lot for him, too."

It's not for nothing that the father himself takes on an hour of childcare duty at the KiTa every second week, as he enthusiastically recounts. "I find that exciting for me, because then I can get to know the
I can exchange ideas with the parents, but also get to know the other children that I usually only hear about. That's where I can get my own picture of the kids."

"I think it's good for kids to try things out with other kids."

With Constantin, on the other hand, the situation is somewhat different because the family has just moved again and didn't want to have to look for something completely new again. "But we always make sure that our children come into contact with other children at playgrounds or children's play areas in cafés," Alexander Schnurr is quick to add.

He is convinced that social skills are enormously important, and they are developed not least in kindergarten. "There

you make friends and even kids you don't like as much. "I think it's good when kids test themselves with other kids." You can see that particularly well with Julian." The father proudly gushes. "His behavior toward other children he sees in the café, for example, has completely changed in a few weeks. He now approaches other children and says 'Hello, I'm Julian.' That makes me very proud that he's doing such a great job of making contact."

A new exciting phase

Alexander Schnurr has had to cut back on his own hobbies somewhat in recent years. "I did ju-jitsu for nineteen years before my children were born. I've only been able to do it twice in the last four years." A bit of melancholy can't be ignored. But that will probably not change in the near future - in the summer semester of 2013, he will initially take up a substitute professorship at another university in NRW.

At the same time, Constantin will start kindergarten and his wife will try to return to her job. During that time, the math major will commute. "That will definitely be a spanning phase," he says expectantly. Besides, I'll continue to advertise all over Germany, and I hope that I'll have finished my habilitation by next year at the latest, because that will increase my chances of getting a professorship again,

although I already have a large number of publications." He definitely has no lack of enthusiasm for work. He will also be attending a number of conferences this year. The most important thing, however, is that it remains family-friendly: "When I go away, I try not to make it too long for the children. The big one can already say "Dad I'm glad you're back" when I come back from business trips."

The interview was conducted by Debora Rahma in spring 2013.



**Is proud of his children:
Dr. Alexander Schnurr with his sons
Julian and Constantin.**