

Tips on Balancing Work and Family

Life is hectic for working parents as they balance their home and work responsibilities. It is like a juggling act, with constant pressure to ensure none of the precious balls are dropped. To stay healthy, working parents need to make time for themselves and for leisure activities as well. While there are no easy solutions, here are a few tips to help you balance your work and home lives:



Things to Keep in Mind

- **"Super Parent" doesn't exist.** If you are trying to model yourself after this mythical character, you are placing unrealistic demands on yourself and your family. Try to forget perfectionism and don't let guilt weigh you down. Studies of children with working parents indicate that children don't necessarily want more of their parent's time, but they do want parents to really concentrate on them when they are together.
- **Keep your life in perspective.** You can't do it all, so you need to continually re-evaluate your priorities against your personal values. Providing love, guidance, support, and constructive direction is far more important than attending every school event or making homemade cookies. Use your time and energy wisely on those things that really make a difference (e.g., helping with homework, cuddling, discussing the day's events, reading stories, or offering encouragement at the start of the school day).
- **Live in the moment.** Try to enjoy what you are doing—whether you are at work, at home, or spending leisure time alone. This means focusing on "the now," not worrying about work when with your family or worrying about your family too much while at work.

Build and Use Support Systems

People with strong support systems tend to be healthier, happier, and better able to cope with stress. Friends, spouses, colleagues, and family can provide enormous emotional and practical support if you let them. Here are some examples of how a support network can help relieve some of the stress of balancing work and family:

- **Neighborhood friends/peers.** Get to know other parents at your school or in your neighborhood. Not only can you share experiences and trade ideas, but you can also provide support for one another in picking up children, sharing rides to after-school or weekend activities, pitching in during emergency situations, etc.
- **Extended family.** If possible, keep in touch with parents, siblings, and other family members. It can be therapeutic to share and support one another and to offer each other practical help, such as babysitting, shared outings, family dinners, etc.

Stay Healthy

If you are healthy, you'll have more energy to devote to your family, your job, and your own interests.

- **Exercise.** It's one of the most effective stress remedies of all. If you can't make time for going to the gym, try to take regular walks at home and do things such as parking the car farther away from your destination when out and about. At work, take frequent stretch and stroll breaks.
- **Eat a healthy diet.** Try to cut down on caffeine, tobacco, sweets, and alcohol consumption. Stay away from fatty foods and instead try to eat more fresh fruits, vegetables, and grains.
- **Get enough rest and sleep.** If your stressful lifestyle is preventing you from a good night's sleep, try increasing your exercise routine, or taking a warm shower or bath before bed.

Set Priorities

Real balance isn't just about time management. It's about continually assessing how your life is and how you want it to be.

Each week, create a list of everything you need to do. Next, prioritize everything on this list using the ABC method:

A = "Must do items," B = "Should do items," and C = "Nice to do items."

Once this is done, ask yourself the following questions: 1.) Why am I doing this? 2.) How urgent is this task? and 3.) Can anyone else do this?

Get Organized

Although working parents are forced to juggle many activities and responsibilities, there is often a sinking feeling that we aren't really doing a great job in any of our roles (parent, worker, or partner). Getting and staying well organized will help you gain control of your time so you can plan and complete all the tasks needed to achieve your goals at work and at home.

At Work

- Make daily "to-do" lists.
- Do one job at a time and complete the most difficult tasks when your energy is at its peak. Break large jobs into smaller parts.
- Organize your workspace and try to reduce clutter.

At Home

- Learn to say "no" to friends and family members when you need to.
- Consolidate errands and chores.
- Delegate tasks—get your children involved in housework and outside chores. Create a family calendar to schedule and keep track of all activities.

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