

FINDING BALANCE BETWEEN HOME AND WORK



The need for work-life balance is growing as Americans are working harder and trying to do more than ever before. We need to balance both work and home, without sacrificing one for the other. Once you find balance, you will feel better about yourself and be more productive on the job and at home with family and friends.

Changing jobs is always stressful, but sometimes necessary. You may need to look for a job that has flexible hours for times when you must be with your children. When your employer understands that you may need to leave to care for a sick child or meet with a teacher, you will have less work-related stress.

Here are some tips to help you find balance between your spouse, children, work and your personal commitments.

Spouse

- 1. Make time for just the two of you.** Easier said than done? Not with the help of your friends with children of their own. Designate a date night for each couple and swap babysitting services. This will work out for mom and dad and keep the kids happy playing with their friends for a night. Also, consider one day during the week where you and your spouse have a lunch date at the park, a bookstore or even at home.
- 2. Use each other for support.** Share domestic duties and caring for the children so that tasks don't fall on one person. While one person is cleaning up after dinner, have the other bathe kids and get them ready for bed. Switch duties around to avoid burn out.
- 3. Show appreciation for each other.** Although it is understood, going out of your way to thank your spouse for something they did is a great way to boost confidence and happiness. Compliment each other on how great of a parent and partner they are. Make an unexpected phone call or email just to say thanks and I love you.

Children

- 1. Assign chores on a weekly or monthly basis.** Chores teach children responsibility and give them a sense of belonging. While young children are limited in what they can do on their own, every little bit helps. Even toddlers can learn to pick up their toys before snack time. Older children may like playing their favorite music while they complete their chores. Always remember to praise children for completing their chores.
- 2. Encourage a structured daily routine.** This helps to keep the family feeling organized. Inconsistent routines are likely to leave you feeling overwhelmed. Setting a bedtime for children is a way for you to know that you have an hour or two a night to spend as you need.
- 3. Limit media interaction.** Today many young children are absorbed in television, video games and computer use. Unfortunately, much of what is in the media is not appropriate for healthy child development. Be aware of what your kids watch and how much time they spend watching. Too much exposure to technology can increase your child's stress level and affect their temper, which will affect you as the parent.
- 4. Plan family activities for the weekend.** This gives the children and you something to look forward to while at school and work during the week. Plan an activity at home such as gardening, crafts or cooking. You can also go to parks or check online or in your newspaper for local events to keep costs to a minimum.

Work

- 1. Keep ONE calendar for all work and home events.** This way you can plan for the office staff meeting and also your child's soccer game or ballet recital. A single calendar will help you keep up with your whole schedule, help you prioritize your day and reduce confusion and stress.
- 2. Negotiate flexible hours.** Flexibility allows employees to integrate their work and home responsibilities and perform better at both. Traditional flextime is available to 44 percent of employed parents, meaning they are allowed to select starting and quitting hours but must stick to them. *Daily flextime* allows for the employee to change starting and quitting times whenever they choose as long as a required number of hours is met each week. Currently, 29 percent of full time or salary workers have this option, but many are not taking advantage of it.
- 3. Advocate for family-friendly workplace policies.** Often seen as a privilege, on-site childcare is becoming more common. Depending on the number of employees who will use the service and whether it fits the budget, suggest on-site childcare and explain how it will be beneficial to the organization as a whole, not just the parent employees. Other family-friendly policies include telecommuting, educational opportunities, and a variety of paid and unpaid leave options.

Self

- 1. Prioritize.** Determine what tasks you need to complete, and then rank them in order of importance. Consider your own needs, as well as those of loved ones. If you must work on a Saturday, for example, you might plan a recreational activity with your family or friends for Sunday.
- 2. Incorporate exercise into your life.** It can seem like a hassle but the benefits definitely outweigh the costs. Being physically healthy is important not only for yourself, but also your spouse, children and employer. Today, many companies offer gyms on their premises or include gym memberships in employee benefits. Staying active improves health, which keeps you productive and motivated at work and energized to keep up with your kids.
- 3. Nurture yourself.** Providing for your family is a given, but don't forget to give yourself a break. Try yoga, meditation or other relaxation techniques. Enjoy a quiet afternoon with a good book, spend some time with friends or schedule a day of rest. In order to nurture your family, you must first nurture yourself.



HERE'S HELP

Use the **Family Resources** on **pages 91–95** to learn about a variety of family support services available in your community.