

Ask a Specialist: Tips for Finding Work/Life Balance

In a growing number of families, all adults in the household are employed outside the home. Balancing demands of work, family and the rest of life can be a challenge and can create stress. This can be especially true when trying to take advantage of summer activities. Additionally, too little sleep, lack of exercise and infrequent personal time can add to the stress.

When stress is not managed well, individuals can become overwhelmed and experience emotional exhaustion, burnout or other negative feelings. Fortunately, there are ways to cope with work-life stress and aim toward a more healthy balance. Consider the following tips to find balance and enjoy the summer



months:

1. **Discover values and current priorities.** Oprah Winfrey once said, "You CAN have it all. Just not all at once." While most people generally know what they value, depending on the current situation, priorities may change. For example, for some people finding balance might mean dividing time equally between paid work, family, school and volunteer opportunities. Others might choose to devote their non-work time to one specific area such as school or family. There is no "right way" to prioritize, but rather each individual and family must determine a balance that is comfortable for them.
2. **Set realistic goals and expectations.** Many individuals have high expectations for themselves to perform all their roles well, to be everything to everyone or be perfect. These unrealistic expectations can create conflict and stress. It is possible to change attitudes and expectations that no longer support current priorities. For example, this may mean that the kids get to school on time, but the dishes don't get done in the morning.

Set goals based on current priorities and focus on outcomes in these areas. If married or in a relationship, be sure to include your partner in this process and discuss the roles each will take. Revise plans and goals that don't work—achieving balance is an ongoing process.

3. **Manage time well.** Setting priorities and goals will help in deciding how to best spend time each day. Keep a weekly or monthly planner, and schedule the most important things that reflect priorities first, such as birthdays, a family vacation or a date with a significant other before scheduling other events. Be sure to also include at least a small amount of personal time to recharge. Discuss goals and schedules with family members and significant others often so everyone is invested.
4. **Let go of control and share the load.** Many people try to reduce stress by maintaining control and doing everything themselves; however, this can sometimes keep them from reaching their most important goals. Besides, it is impossible to control everything. Remember, delegating is a sign of strength, not weakness. Hold a family meeting and discuss what each person can do to help. If appropriate, ask co-workers to help with projects or ask other people to help in other aspects of your life.
5. **Take care of yourself.** While it can be challenging to eat healthy foods, find time for exercise, get adequate sleep or squeeze in a few minutes of down time to enjoy a hobby, a small investment in these areas can yield big dividends. For example, just a few minutes of exercise can increase alertness and provide a boost of energy to accomplish other goals. Even on a hectic day, most people can find 10-15 minutes to read a book, take a brisk walk around the building or look at Pinterest to recharge their batteries.
6. **Keep a sense of humor.** Humor can help manage stress when things don't work out as planned. Consider, "How will I think about this situation a year from now?" And as William Arthur Ward once said, "A well-developed sense of humor is the pole that adds balance to your steps as you walk the tightrope of life."

While there are many approaches to creating balance, what works for one individual may not work for another, and life challenges and possible solutions may change with time. Creating and maintaining a balance in life is an ongoing process; if the current approach isn't working, try something else. The balance may not always be perfect, but small efforts toward balance can still have a tremendous impact on life satisfaction.

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