

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. However, it is important to remember that life isn't just about meeting responsibilities - it should also be enjoyable and rewarding as well as challenging. 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. The reality is that you can't be with your children every moment of the day. However, when you are with them, try to relax and ensure that you really focus on your children/family, without distractions. 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. Remember that nurturing is one of the most important aspects of parenting. 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. This will help ensure you really are the best you can be in all of your roles (parent, worker and partner).
- **Choose care providers you trust.** Once you find a caring, thoughtful and responsible caregiver for your children, you can relax and stop expending energy in worrying.

Build and use support systems:

People with strong support systems tend to be healthier, happier and better able to cope with stress. Friends, spouses, co-workers 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:

- **Neighbourhood friends/peers:** Get to know other parents at your school or in your neighbourhood. 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. Sometimes grandparents are reluctant to get too involved because they don't want to add extra pressure to your already busy schedule. Consider making suggestions about visits or outings that grandparents can make with your children to give you some time alone and fun for the children and grandparents as well.
- **Career support network:** Co-workers and supervisors can provide another support network. If pressure or problems at work are causing an imbalance in your work-home routine, talk to a co-worker or supervisor. Taking time during a busy workday to have lunch with co-workers or just share a laugh can also help keep you "balanced."

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 jogging or going to the gym, try to regularly walk to the park or the beach or walk instead of taking the car when doing errands. At work, take a break to stretch or take a walk at lunchtime.
- **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 fruits, fresh 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; 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? 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 of 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 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.
- Simplify your life: Buy low-maintenance clothing for yourself and your family. Create a weekly menu of simple dinners and lunches to save time on food preparation.