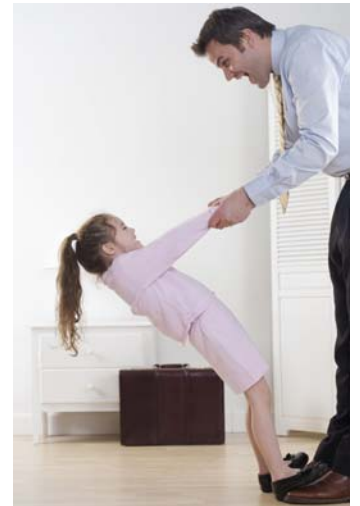


## Balancing Work and Family

Balancing work and family has rapidly become an issue for almost every family. Our workforce has evolved on many levels over the past two decades and this has had a direct impact on both family and personal lives. At a time when companies are streamlining and down-sizing, fewer people are working longer hours. Many dual income families need two incomes simply to stay above the poverty line. People are working contract jobs and part-time jobs that are low paying and without employee benefits. Single-parent families and women of all ages are a big part of today's workforce. More men are directly responsible for family care.

With all these changes in the workforce, it has become increasingly difficult for employees to cope with the demands of career, family life and home management. Yet, there are some strategies that can help employees and families cope.



### Set priorities.

With so many demands on our time, it's hard to be everything to everyone. You may be juggling a number of roles and goals in your life. You want to be successful at work, enjoy a healthy couple relationship, be an involved parent. You may have goals of furthering your education, maintaining a home that could be featured in "Home and Gardens," contributing to your community, keeping to a fitness regimen, saving for early retirement. Further, you may be juggling extended family issues, like caring for aging parents or dealing with an illness in the family. All of these things take your time and energy and often run into conflict with each other. As there are only 24 hours in a day, you may have to think about your values and set some priorities based on those values. For example, if "being an involved parent" is a priority for you – setting aside time each night to play with your children might take priority over working those over-time hours in order to finance a bigger home.

### Plan and do things in advance.

Work weeks are when most of us tend to be the busiest. By preparing for Monday's arrival, you can ease the stress of the week ahead. Keep a family calendar posted on the fridge. On Sunday, look at what's on tap for the week and plan how you are going to manage the week. Where you can, make meals on the weekend and put them in the refrigerator or freezer for a quick reheat on a busy evening. This can be an activity where you can involve and enlist your older children's help. Before shopping for groceries, get your cookbooks out and make a list of several meals for the following week and make your grocery list from your menu list. After work stress is often more in deciding what to make for supper than in actually making it. If you go home for lunch, do some initial meal preparation then so that it cuts down on your after-work meal prep time.

### Negotiate flex hours or part-time hours if possible.

Flexibility in your work life can bring an incredible stress release to a household. If it's financially feasible, consider the option of part-time work. It may mean less financial freedom, but it may bring greater daily rewards and quality of life. Again, you need to consider your values and set your priorities. If possible, negotiate with your employer for flex hours or job-sharing that would be more conducive to your family life.

### Find a number two and a number three person.

In the workplace and at home, you need to build tremendous supports. With the increased mobility of society, not all families have extended family support. If you don't have family available in town, seek out the help of co-workers, friends and neighbours. Line up a couple of co-workers that your children can call to deal with their questions or situations when you are unavailable.

### **Share with other families.**

Share your issues with your neighbours and friends who are facing the same work/home balancing act. You will not only benefit from the mutual support, but can also share ideas on how you manage your busy schedules. Look to share responsibilities with other parents. Take turns walking the children to school, driving the kids to their outside activities, babysitting each other's children.

### **Limit after-work and after-school involvements.**

While parents have good intentions and want to provide their children with a variety of skill sets, parents can get ensnarled in the unlimited opportunities available for children and can thereby create very busy schedules for both their children and themselves. Limit the number of outside activities your children participate in to one activity at a time. Instead, do things together as a family like skating or going for a bike ride.

In addition, limit your own after-work activities. You don't need to sit on the church committee, coach your child's soccer team and volunteer for your favourite charity. It is wonderful and rewarding to contribute to your community, but you may not be able to do it all given your circumstances. Again, look to your values and set your priorities. Consider what you can manage now and what you may be able to do at a future stage in your life. Learn to say "no" and let go of the guilt.

### **Build rituals into your life.**

Schedule time to ensure that family time happens. Establish a family movie or games night. Make meal time sacred family time when you sit down together for dinner and take turns sharing the day's events.

### **Take time for yourself.**

Taking time for yourself has to be a priority. It's something you should do no matter how tired you are. Drag yourself out the door to your fitness class, afterwards you will be in better humour and happy that you did something for yourself. Have your one favourite show a week and protect that time. After you tuck the kids in bed, make that bowl of popcorn and sit down and watch your weekly drama. Get out of the office over lunch, go for a walk and feel the sun on your face. If you take care of yourself you will be better able to take care of those you love and deal with the stress that a busy schedule brings.

### **Make room for couple time.**

In the work/home whirlwind, it is easy for two people, while living in the same household, to drift apart. Just as it is important to spend time interacting with your children, it's important to spend time interacting with your partner. Set aside time for one another. On Friday nights, book a baby-sitter whether you have plans or not. Even if it's just for an hour when you can get away and go for a walk together.

### **Share your work experience with your children.**

Through your words and actions, your children should know that they are a priority in your life, but it is also helpful to let them know that your work is important to you too. Talk to your children about what you do at work and take them with you to see where you work. Children are more likely to be responsive to your work demands when you share that part of your life with them.



### **Find time for fun.**

Keep in mind that work is only one part of you. We only go around once, so it's important to enjoy your life and make time for fun. Look for opportunities to enjoy life both at home and at work. Find the humour in things. Laugh.

### **Be there for the moments.**

There will be special moments in your children's lives that may happen before 5:00 p.m. – a football game, a school concert, a speech. Most employers, managers, clients have families too and understand these family situations. Talk to your boss, explain your need to be there, have a plan in place as to how they can deal with your absence or you can get the job done in another way or at another time. Perhaps you can work with a colleague and spell each other off for those important family occurrences.