

Your Employee Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Take Control of Your Life

In most cases, a loss of balance in life is due to a loss of control. Symptoms can range from not having the time or energy to do the things truly important to you, to thinking of yourself as a victim. It can make you feel as if life is passing you by, when in fact you are passing by life.

There are a number of reasons for loss of control over our life. Some may feel that so many demands are placed on them by others, it's as if they take total control. Others may feel that there are so many choices to make in life that it's hard to decide what's truly important. Still others try to juggle everything but overlook the most important thing of all—themselves.

Sometimes, taking care of one's self is viewed as selfish. But experts warn, taking care of ourselves is paramount to ensuring both physical and mental balance in our lives. If we forget about ourselves, it can lead to negative stress and eventually burnout.

Regaining Control Over Your Life

Taking control over your life and maintaining time and energy for the things that enrich you is essential for health and peace of mind. Here are some tips to help you face the changes that need to be made:

Accept what you can't control. Face it—there are things in our life you have to do. As the saying goes, "Give us grace to accept with serenity the things that cannot be changed, courage to change the things that should be changed, and the wisdom to distinguish one from the other."

Stop the blame game. It's easy to blame others for a lack of time. In reality, you are the one who has the ultimate decision on how your time is spent.

Let go. Your roles and responsibilities change over the course of your life, and so should your actions. Your sense of responsibility and corresponding actions should be re-evaluated from time to time. Are the children old enough to do more themselves? Have you been promoted but are still holding on to tasks from your previous job?

On the other hand, are you accepting a promotion that you know you will have difficulty handling? Do you really need the expense and bother of two cars if you take the bus to work, and your spouse works from home?

Learn to say "no." People who take on every demand from their family and friends usually fit into one of two categories. Either they don't have a realistic view of how much they can handle, or they are not assertive enough to say "no" when appropriate.

Planning will help the first type determine if they are biting off more than they can chew. The second type has to learn to say a pleasant, but firm, "no" to family and friends making demands on their time. Otherwise, both types end up working on everyone else's priorities instead of their own.

Plan your time. There are only 24 hours in each day. To make the most effective use of that time, plan what you spend your time on. Decide what is most important and what you are willing to trade in order to get it. Your plan should cover all the major areas in your life—home, family, work and leisure.

Schedule time for yourself. Schedule appointments for time spent alone. Doing something just for your

benefit must be treated like any other appointment—as a firm commitment. A 20-minute appointment each day amounts to more than 120 hours spent doing something important for yourself each year.

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Simplify your life. This principle can be applied to almost any area of your life. Simplification and getting rid of excess or unnecessary items and activities can make any task easier and faster to complete.

Recognize the difference between "needs" and "wants." Materialism can be a cause of unbalance in life. Don't sacrifice health, family or work for possessions you may want but not need.

There are situations when you may need to take on greater responsibility. But if there are other situations that you are often too quick to volunteer for, you may consider some professional guidance. Learning to focus on what is important and take control of your life could mean asking for professional assistance. Start being good to yourself, and feel good about it!