

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

Work-Life Balance: Making It Work for You

You fulfill the role of parent, spouse, friend and caregiver while holding down a job and juggling life's day-to-day activities. You're committed to your job and family, but too often one or the other suffers because you run out of time, energy or patience.

Though you can't always change your current circumstances, you can make routine tasks easier, reduce stress levels and fight burnout with a little planning and family cooperation.

To begin, take some time to determine what stresses you during your day and then make a list. When you are finished doing this, make another list of what is most important to you in your life. Now, consider a few easy-to-implement actions for each of the lists that can reduce daily stressors and promote enjoyment in the responsibilities that you choose to take on. This is a simple way to start a stress-reducing work-life balance plan.

Your list may look something like this:

Stressors in my day:

The morning rush with kids. Enlist your child's participation in planning the night before. Allow your child to have choices so that they feel involved in—and accountable for—getting to school ready and on time. They can: choose the clothes they want to wear and lay them out; put together what's to go in their backpack or bag; check on the weather; and/or plan the breakfast menu. These are all real morning time-savers, especially when things can be hectic and emotions may be heightened.

Being late for work. Adjust your family's bedtime schedule forward so you can go to bed earlier and get out earlier. This way, traffic or other unexpected delays won't impact your morning schedule as much. Also consider alternative transportation—can you car pool, ride a bike to work, walk or take the train?

Dinner chaos. This family challenge has lots of solutions including pre-cooked meals for fast re-heating, shopping every weekend for the coming week, using grocery delivery services to save time and reduce stress, and rotating cooking responsibilities. Also, consider pre-made healthy snacks for kids and adults to raise blood sugar levels and reduce physical or emotional responses to after-school/work hunger.

What matters to me most:

Reconnecting with the family. Learn new things about life and each other during the time you already spend together: Engage family members in conversation while you are driving to and from various activities, around the dinner table or while getting ready for bed. You can let family members initiate a topic or offer one of your own. Encourage questions, thoughts and opinions, and petition for everyone's input.

Intimacy with spouse. Take time each day to recognize one another and give attention to that part of your life: A phone call or e-mail to say 'I'm thinking of you'; a special dinner for no particular reason; or an evening walk. Restrict your conversations to anything but household responsibilities. This can go a long way to rebuilding connections while at the same time allowing you to pursue mutual interests and grow in your relationship.

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Regardless of the number of people in your personal life or the workplace responsibilities you take on, by making a few simple lifestyle changes and beginning a work-life balance plan, you can eventually discover a more relaxed and satisfying life and improve the quality of time spent with family and at work.