

Tips for Balancing Work and Family

Avoid the Morning Rush

Are you frazzled when you finally arrive at work? Is your attitude at work and work performance affected by the a.m. chaos that occurs at home trying to get you and/or your family out the door to face another challenging day? If you feel you need some help with managing those crucial morning hours, why not look over these suggestions that provide advice for a morning without rushing?

Ten Bright Ideas for a Happier Morning

1. Start Going to Bed Earlier

It may take your body a few weeks to adapt to retiring earlier, but in the long run, it will be easier for you to rise at an earlier time.

2. Place All Items You Carry to Work in One Place

It's a good idea to place near the door your keys, briefcase, purse, school supplies, important papers and letters to be mailed. Keep a petty cash fund handy for all those times that a quarter, 80 cents or \$1.55 is needed for school or a parking meter, work, etc.

3. Choose Clothing for the Next Day

Laying clothes out the night before or thinking about what you plan to wear is made easier by stocking your closet with clean matching separates. Morning dressing becomes hassle free.

4. Pull Yourself from Your Pillow at Least 1-1/2 Hours Prior to Leaving for Work

A few minutes added to your morning preparation time can prevent frantic dressing, no breakfast, and forgotten tasks that need to be done before leaving.

5. Rise First and Dress before Waking Others

Time alone in the morning, without bumping into others or being interrupted, can be just what you need to get yourself together.

6. Have Children Make Their Lunches

If mature enough, have children prepare their lunches to save you time and get them involved in food preparation.

7. Encourage Partner to Share in Morning Tasks

Have your partner share morning tasks so that you don't bear all the responsibility.

8. Take Time for Breakfast

Set the breakfast table the night before - a good task for a younger child. Sit down for 15 minutes and eat a light, wholesome breakfast. Or if you're on the run, eat while commuting.

9. Set Your Clocks Ahead

It may be psychological, but having your clocks and watches set 5 to 10 minutes ahead can keep you on schedule.

10. Reward Yourself for Arriving at Work on Time

you'll be surprised how good you'll feel when you arrive at work, on time and relaxed! Sometime during the day, treat yourself to something you would not normally do: a leisurely bath, lunch with friends, or a new novel.

The Little Picture: Taking Charge of Daily "Flash Points":

Try small changes in the most stressful times of the day. Capture the "flash points" for tension and conflict that tend to occur at the same time each day:

Wake-up Time:

- Get to bed and get up earlier
- Rise early, avoid pressure to leave
- Get ready before waking others
- Have children make their own lunches
- Encourage spouse to share tasks
- Take time for breakfast
- Set clocks ahead
- Reward yourself for arriving at work on time

Pick-up/Dinner Time:

- Prepare nutritious snacks
- Arrange time after to listen about a child's day
- Transition with change of clothes
- Share household chores
- Allow child to choose and help prepare meal
- Coordinate meal preparation and homework time
- Bring and hear everyone at the table
- Share cleanup of dishes and house
- Leave time for emergencies
- Make next day's lunches

Clean-up/Bedtime:

- Stick with an agreed TV cutoff time
- Schedule routine tasks (homework, clean-up)
- Do a few maintenance chores daily (bills, dusting)
- Arrange items "to go" in familiar place
- Plan what to wear tomorrow
- Develop (self-managed) routines for bedtime
- Practice rest-time if children can't sleep

The Big Picture: Taking Charge of Life

Plan Ahead:

- Prioritize Activities
- Schedule Time
- Maintain Nutrition/Exercise/Sleep
- Budget Money

Work Together:

- Encourage Cooperation
- Promote Self-reliance
- Communicate
- Forgive and Forget

Enjoy Time Together:

- Relax, Allow for Humor
- Engage Brain before Operating Mouth
- Plan Fun Times to Liven Routine
- Celebrate Special Occasions

Managing time helps balance work and family time. How did you spend the last 24 hours? How could you have used your time more effectively?

THE 4 D'S OF TIME MANAGEMENT help you improve your use of time

Do It:

- Make a "to do" list.
- Rank the things that need to be done first.
- Break big tasks into smaller ones.
- Do big tasks when you have the most energy.

Dovetail It:

- Do two simple things at once, such as folding laundry while watching TV.

Delegate It:

- Unimportant or easier tasks can be given to other people (such as children, spouse, or co-workers).
- Don't expect everything to be done perfectly.

Delay It:

- If it's not important, hold off doing it.

Working with Family Members

Families with good communication skills work well together. Do family members help with work in your home? How do you explain to them what to do?

- _____ Tell or show them
- _____ Work with them
- _____ Make a list

Do family members understand your directions? Do you let them make some of the decisions? Do you praise them when they do a good job?

Get Organized!

Find a regular place for:

- keys
- glasses
- dirty laundry
- clean laundry
- household bills
- pencil and paper for phone messages
- messages
- a calendar for scheduling activities, appointments, etc.

Develop a routine for regular jobs. Do you have certain times during the day or week that you do routine jobs? Do you have a general idea of what to prepare for meals? Develop a pattern of work that fits you. Put time management into action to help balance work and family!

Planning and Scheduling

Put up a family calendar and message board in your home. Each family member can write down activities or things that need to be done on the family calendar, as soon as they know about it. You can plan around these activities.

Put notes, reminders, and messages for family members in one central place, like on your message board. Help everyone get in the habit of checking it often. Put the family calendar and message board in a place where everyone will see it, such as in the kitchen or near the telephone.

List emergency phone numbers and other numbers that are used often on the message board.

Make a plan for emergency situations.

For example, create a plan for who will take care of your child while you work if your child is sick, so you won't have to arrange childcare at the last minute. Consider who can take the child to the place for sick-child care as well.

Sharing Work & Responsibilities

Delegation does not eliminate work; it changes it.

Successful delegation helps all members of a group or family become involved and accomplishes goals and activities.

Relationships with Family and Friends

Having positive relationships with your family and friends can help make your transitions from home to school or work much easier. Here are a few things to keep in mind.

Think about who can give you personal support. Expand this support group. It's important to have at least one person you can talk to about your concerns, decisions, or when you are just having a bad day.

If there is no one available for you to talk to, look in your community for people who give counseling (in places like churches or mental health agencies) and take advantage of it. You'd be surprised how much easier it is to handle a problem when you tell someone about it.

Work on getting along with family members. Be open and honest when talking to other family members. Tell each other exactly how you feel.

Listen carefully when others are talking to you; give them your full attention. Make sure you know what they mean by asking them questions or repeating what they said. For example: "Are you saying that...?" or "Do you mean....?"

If a family member does something that upsets you, tell him or her how that behavior made you feel, instead of insulting the person.

For example: If your teenager comes home very late, you can say, "It scares me when you come home so late, because I get worried that something happened to you," instead of saying, "You have no sense of time; what's wrong with you?" (When things are calm, talk to them about what you expect next time!)

Have family meetings. Schedule a regular time for the family to sit down and talk about everyone's concerns and feelings about how things are going at home. You might want to have a meeting every week. Allow each person to share his or her problems and ideas for solutions.

A scheduled time to talk together helps you deal with any problems before they cause a lot of stress for the family. Family members will also be happier when they feel like their concerns are being listened to and considered.

Give children a few minutes of attention after work. Even though you will probably feel exhausted when you get home from work, try to spend a short time with your children right when you get home. For older children, it may only need to be a quick hug and a few minutes of talking or playing games. This will help your children to feel safer and content, and it may keep them from getting irritable and upset that evening. (It may save you more time later!)

Family Reading Time

Have quality family time. Make it happen. It may not be leisurely, but it's something. It may be as simple as reading one book together. Parents who work all day may wonder how they can fit reading time into the few hours they have together with their children.

A few suggestions:

Read and ride. Working families often spend extra time in the car as children ride to and from school and childcare. Use road time to read vanity license plates, find plates from different states, and read billboards and interesting road signs. Also, keep a few favorite books or books-on-tape in a book bag for reading on the road.

Better than TV. Read a good action story to replace an evening television program. Start an exciting chapter book with your family and they'll be eager to hear what comes next. If you're too tired for reading aloud, ask an older child in the family to do the reading, or use a story tape.

Pack a book. When you're going someplace with your child where there might be a long wait – such as the doctor's office– bring along a book bag of favorite books.

Phone home. Work the night shift or can't get away from the office? Keep a few children's books at work. Instead of a coffee break, call home and take time to read to your child.

Distance parenting. Parents who are separated from their children can also play a role. Try reading a book to your child over the phone, or cut out favorite cartoons and funny articles to send. Make story tapes in your own voice to send. Ask your children to send favorite stories, cartoons and jokes to you. Make reading a family activity when the children are with you.