

HOW TO BALANCE WORK AND IN-HOME CARE

CARING FOR YOUR PARENTS: EDUCATION FOR THE FAMILY CAREGIVER.®



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It seems like over the past decade or so, the topic of work-life balance has been discussed more and more in magazines, newspapers, and on TV. The advent of dual-career families and technology that keep us on call 24/7 means that there are more obligations and interruptions in each aspect of our lives which then, in turn, create stress.

For those of you who are serving as family caregivers on top of work and your family obligations, it's really easy to see how your work-life balance can get totally turned upside down.

Caring for a loved one, especially for a spouse or older parent, often presents needs that conflict with the ability to work resulting in the

caregiver needing to take time off, sometimes without pay, adding to the stress level of the family caregiver. And as a caregiver, if you don't manage your stress well, you're likely to get sick yourself resulting in additional time off work – which increases the stress level even more.

Believe it or not, balancing work and family caregiving responsibilities is common. In this workshop we'll go into depth about what work-life balance is, and what factors can tip it out of balance. Then, we'll give you tools and strategies that can help with your family caregiving duties, balancing those responsibilities at work, and give you some ways to take care of yourself.



Did you know...?

When the need for caregiving presents itself, finances become an increasing concern, as well as **balancing** caregiving and work to avoid reductions in pay or loss of possible advancement.

Source The Institute for Aging at the University of Pittsburgh

WORK-LIFE BALANCE

Work-life balance doesn't mean spending an equal amount of time at either activity. Life and work love to throw us curveballs so we need to have flexibility built into our schedules in order to manage both life's challenges and joys.

For most people your work-life balance can and will vary over time. For example, a new job or a new baby can swing your priorities in one direction, and that's not necessarily a bad thing.

Work-life balance gets out of whack when there are prolonged stresses on one or both sides – such as a demanding work schedule or caring for an aging parent. The added duties can prevent you from not doing most of what you need to, or not doing it well. Unfortunately the end result is increased stress.

How did life and work change so much that we sometimes yearn for simpler times? Some of the factors that have shifted this balance are:

- the increasingly global marketplace,
- the Internet and other communication technologies (e.g. cell phones), and
- the tough economy.

If you're trying to keep up at work as well as provide child care, meet social and community obligations, and care for an elderly parent, you're likely to experience some of the stresses of having little or no work-life balance.

Watch for the following symptoms of an out-of-balance life:

- **Being overtired or fatigued.** Your ability to think and your eye-hand coordination decrease when you're tired. This means you may be less productive and may make more mistakes. These mistakes can lead to injury or rework and negatively impact your professional reputation.
- **Missing out on important events.** Missing your child's milestones, important birthdays or family gatherings may harm relationships with your loved ones.
- **Difficulty nurturing friendships.** Trusted friends are a key part of your support system – but stress can negatively affect these friendships. If you're spending time at the office or caring for mom or dad instead of with your friends, you'll find it difficult to nurture those relationships.
- **Regularly working extra hours.** Sometimes they say the reward for good work is more work. If you often work long hours, you may be given even more responsibilities. This could create a never-ending cycle of additional work, causing more concerns and challenges both at work and at home.

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CREATING A “CARE TEAM”

There are ways to get support for your caregiving activities to bring more balance to your life. To avoid burnout and stress, create a “care team” by enlisting the help of other family members and friends, or consider hiring a professional in-home caregiver.

Asking for help is sometimes difficult, but there are a number of ways to enlist support and find more balance:

- **Give each person a responsibility.** For example, if your parent lives with you and you're responsible for groceries and meals, have another family member be responsible for the medical aspects of care. Even if a sibling lives 1,000 miles away, make it his or her responsibility to visit for a week or two each year to allow you to take your own family on vacation.
- **Communicate with other family members regularly.** Share the impact of your elderly relative's health issues or amount of time you are spending caring for them. The more you keep the other family members up-to-date, the more likely you are to enlist their help.
- **Remember to be flexible.** If family and friends are helping out with caregiving duties, realize that there is more than one way to care for someone and everyone has a different approach. It may not be the same as yours, but sometimes it is important to let go of the little things.

Did you know...?

According to a national survey conducted by the Home Instead Senior Care network, 72% of adults who are currently providing care for an aging loved one, do it without *any* outside help.

- **Don't sweat the small stuff.** One way to find more balance is to rethink some of your standards. For example, an unmade bed or sink of dirty dishes won't impact the quality of your life. Do what needs to be done and let the rest go.
- **Track everything you do for one week.** Include work-related and non-work-related activities. Decide what's necessary and what satisfies you the most and then cut or delegate activities you don't enjoy and don't have time for.
- **Take a break by arranging for respite care.** Respite care is short-term, temporary care provided to someone who needs assistance so that a family caregiver can take a break from the daily routine and challenges of caregiving. Respite services may sometimes involve overnight care for an extended period of time, or just a few hours per day. Respite is often referred to as the gift of time.
- **Arrange for some in-home care services.** Professional caregivers are trained in serving the needs of the senior population and can give family caregivers a much needed break. Some of the services they provide include: personal care services, house cleaning, meal preparation, transportation and errands or shopping, as well as companionship for your loved one.

Creating a care team that includes both family and outside help can go a long way toward maintaining a work-life balance.

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EMPLOYER PROGRAMS

There are several employer-offered programs and alternative work options that might give you more time for your caregiving activities:

- **The Family Medical Leave Act.** This program is managed by the U.S. Department of Labor, and is designed to help employees balance their work and family responsibilities by allowing them to take reasonable unpaid leave for certain family and medical reasons.

If you work for a public agency, any public or private elementary or secondary school, or a company with 50 or more employees, you may be entitled to up to 12 weeks of unpaid, job-protected leave per year, including leave to care for an immediate family member with a serious health condition.

Other stipulations are that you must have worked for your employer at least 12 months and have worked at least 1,250 hours. The Family Medical Leave Act also requires that your group health benefits be maintained during your leave. Check with your employer's human resources office to determine if you are eligible for this program.

- **Employee Assistance Programs (EAP).** EAPs are offered by many employers, typically in conjunction with a health insurance plan or wellness benefit. EAPs are intended to help employees deal with personal

problems, such as caring for aging parents, that might adversely impact their work performance, health, and well-being.

EAP counselors typically provide assessment, support, and if needed, referrals to additional resources. EAP services are usually free and confidential. These services can be very beneficial in finding some help to ease your caregiving stress.

- **Alternative work schedules.** Here are some other ways that you can work with your employer to create more balance between your work and caregiving needs:
 - **Telecommuting** means to work from home or some other remote location. Some employers allow this option instead of requiring employees to be in the office every day. For instance you could set up shop with a laptop and cell phone from your parent’s kitchen and still work while also tending to your caregiving needs.
 - **Job sharing** is when two people share the same position in a company, with each working a part of the week. Job sharing allows two or more individuals to share a single full-time job, creating flexibility and freedom, while still maintaining the benefits and salary on a prorated basis.
 - **Compressed work weeks** are helpful to those who need about one day off a week. In many cases, compressed workweeks have you working 40 hours in fewer than five days. The most widely used schedule is 10-hour days for four days a week. Another arrangement is called 5-4/9. This is a week of five nine-hour days followed by a week of four nine-hour days, and would give you a day off every other week.
 - **Shared leave** is different from alternative work schedules or employer sponsored programs and is starting to grow in popularity especially in the health, government and nonprofit sectors. A shared leave program allows an employee to receive donations of annual leave, sick leave, or personal holiday hours from other employees. This most often happens when an employee will need to take leave without pay for a prolonged period of time resulting in a possible loss of income. A common situation for such a leave includes caring for an elderly parent.

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TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF

Most caregivers struggle to balance caregiving for an aging parent or relative with other major responsibilities, including jobs and caring for young children. This often means that they have little time to care for themselves, which can result in poor health and high levels of stress.

However if you don't take care of yourself, you will never be able to continue taking care of your loved one. This means eating right, getting adequate rest, building exercise into your schedule, and keeping up with your own medical appointments, as described below:

Exercise	Do something you like to do like walking, dancing, biking, running, or swimming, for a minimum of 20 minutes at least three times per week. Consider learning a stress-management exercise such as yoga or tai-chi, which teach inner balance and relaxation.
Meditate	Sit still and breathe deeply with your mind as "quiet" as possible whenever things feel like they are moving too quickly or you are feeling overwhelmed by your responsibilities as a caregiver. Many times you will feel like you don't have a minute to yourself, but it's important to walk away and to take that minute.
Ask for help	To avoid burnout and stress, enlist the help of other family members and friends, or consider hiring a professional caregiver for assistance. Don't feel bad or guilty for reaching out.
Take a break	Make arrangements for family, friends, volunteers or professional caregiving services to provide any necessary fill-in help. Take a single day or even a week's vacation. Just make sure you line up your support system so you can be confident that your loved one is happy and safe. And when you're away, stay away. Talk about different things, read that book you haven't been able to get to – there is no excuse not to.
Eat well	Eat plenty of fresh fruits, vegetables, proteins – including nuts and beans – and whole grains. Indulging in caffeine, fast food and sugar as quick "pick-me-ups" also produce a quick "let-down."
Take care of your health	Just like you make sure your loved one gets to the doctor regularly, make sure you get your annual check-up. Being a caregiver provides many excuses for skipping your necessary check-ups, but don't do it.
Indulge	Treat yourself to a foot massage, manicure, nice dinner out or a concert to take yourself away from the situation and to reward yourself for the wonderful care you are providing to your aging relative. You shouldn't feel guilty about wanting to feel good.
Find support	Find a local caregiver support group that will help you understand that what you are feeling and experiencing is normal for someone in your position. This is a place to get practical advice from people who are in your situation and bounce off those feelings of stress since everyone is likely to be in the same situation and can empathize.

Remember to maintain your sense of humor. It is alright to say “no” to another responsibility, and never feel guilty about needing to take time for yourself. Your health and well-being is of the utmost importance. Taking care of yourself will allow you to be there for your senior loved one and bring more balance to your life.

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