



Care first

Juggling Work and Family

Balancing work and family life can be a constant challenge. Many parents are choosing and/or being forced (for financial or logistical reasons) to adopt a shared responsibility for things like childcare. For many households the traditional roles of 'working father' and 'stay at home mother' are no longer valid.

Research suggests fathers are more involved with childcare than ever before and over 60% of mothers are now working. This allows women to pursue careers, have an identity beyond being a mother and achieve greater financial freedom, while men enjoy stronger connections with their children.

Yet in a fast paced world it is challenging to balance the roles of parent and worker. Being effective at work takes dedication, time and energy but children still need to be taken to school, the house doesn't tidy itself and, if left alone for too long, friends and family feel neglected. The ability to check emails and messages around the clock means we have never before had so many options for flexible working, but it can also blur the boundaries between work and home. With only 24 hours in the day to play with, doing a good job at work whilst being a committed, nurturing parent and running a home is a tall order.

With so many pieces to the jigsaw puzzle how do we put it all together in a way that enhances our lives without becoming overwhelmed? By pausing to think about what we want out of life we can identify how we want to live it and make changes that bring us closer to our ideal.

It is possible to find a balance that feels right for you although maintaining it is an ongoing process. This helpsheet offers some suggestions on how to create better harmony between your family and working life. If you'd like to discuss any of the issues raised in this helpsheet, Care first is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year for practical and emotional support.

Below are some suggestions for achieving a balance between work and family:

- Regularly evaluate your priorities and set goals. Make sure that the things you care most about are given sufficient space in your life.
- Take action early before things become too out of balance.
Recognise the warning signs:
 - Poor concentration
 - Sleep disruption
 - Inability to switch off
 - Feeling like life is passing you by
 - Irritability, tearfulness, feeling like you can't cope
 - Change in appetite
 - Increased intake of alcohol or other substances
 - Build in time to relax. When things are busy often the first thing that goes is time to relax. Relaxation is so vital to our wellbeing, especially during stressful times. It can help to lower blood pressure, ease muscle tension, promote better sleep and aid concentration. Block out time in your diary to relax, even as little as 10 minutes can make a difference.
- Recognise when you are being overly influenced by others. If something does not feel quite right ask yourself who are you trying to please. Well meaning friends and relatives may advise you to do things a certain way but ultimately you need to do what feels right for you.
- Share the household chores. Discuss how you share the household chores with other family members to ensure that they are not all falling to one person. Research suggests that even in families with two working parents women still continue to manage the majority of the housework. Enlist the help of the children, even those as young as 4 can take on simple responsibilities such as setting and clearing the table, or tidying up toys.
- Don't demand perfection. As a parent and a worker you have a never ending 'to do' list. Trying to finish it and stay on top of everything will not leave much time to relax and enjoy things. Keep your standards realistic, your happiness depends on more than having a spotless house and completing your entire to do list every day.
- Compare and despair. Many of us have an ideal vision of how our lives should be and then beat ourselves up for failing to live up to it, or we compare ourselves with others who seem to be doing better than ourselves. There will always be somebody who seems to be doing better than ourselves. Focus on what your family needs and appreciate what makes them unique.
- Adopt a healthy lifestyle. Take regular exercise and eat a balanced diet.