



## Easing Transitions: Balancing Work & Family

If you have a job and other responsibilities (like taking care of a family), you might feel like:

- There is too much to be done.
- You don't ever have enough time.
- Your life is stressful.

Ways to avoid these feelings that are covered in this fact sheet include:

- Organizing your time,
- Budgeting your money, and
- Getting along with family and friends.

### Organize Your Time

#### Completing tasks

- *Decide what is really important in your life.* List the five most important parts of your life.

For example, you might list: children, home, work, friends, and self.

- *Make taking care of yourself a priority.* You will be better able to take care of your other responsibilities if you first take care of your needs, such as: eating well, getting enough rest, and taking time for yourself.
- *Decide what really needs to be done each day.* Say "No" to activities that don't fit in with the most important parts of your life.

For example, if "children" are on your list, but "shopping" is not, then you might choose to help your child with homework instead of going shopping one night.

- *Make "to do" lists every day.* Put the most important things at the top of the list. Start with the "musts" (things that have to be done), then list your "wants" (things you'd like to do, but that aren't necessary).
- *Accept that you can't do everything.* Try to do the most important things, and don't worry or feel guilty about not doing everything on your list. Be sure to tell people who expect you to do something if you decide not to do it.
- *Pick the best times to do chores.* Everyone has natural times of the day when they feel most energetic. It could be morning, evening, or any other time. Do really hard tasks during the times when you have the most energy, and do easier tasks at other times.
- *Find a calm time to do chores.* This might be early in the morning, before your children wake up.
- *Break down big jobs into smaller parts.* Instead of doing everything all at once, do one small piece at a time.

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For example, instead of cleaning your whole house at once, you could do one room each evening or early morning.

- *Try to think about just one thing at a time.*
- *Do what you can, a little at a time.* In order to get more important things done, you might have to let other things be less than perfect. That's okay!
- *Even though some chores need to be done, they could be done less often*—maybe once a month rather than once a week.
- *Let others do some tasks.* Most school-aged children can be taught to make their own lunches and snacks, get their clothes and backpacks ready the night before school, wash dishes, pick up or put things away, and make their beds. If you take the time to teach them these things, it will save you much more time later!
- *Divide chores among family members.* Think about what your children are able to do and what they are good at before deciding on their chores. Remember, it's okay if the chore is not done perfectly; the important thing is that it gets done! It's a learning process!
- *Ask for help from—or trade chores with—neighbors, relatives, or friends.*

For example, you could help your neighbor with something you are good at (such as sewing), and your neighbor could do you a favor in return (like getting your children off the school bus).

### ***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 child care at the last minute. Consider who can take the child to the place for sick-child care as well.

- *Avoid rushing to get ready for work.* Set your alarm clock early enough so that you won't have to rush. Decide on work clothes ahead of time, make sure they are clean, and lay them out.
- *Keep the things you need for work in one place.*
- *Plan on having a happy morning with your children.* Some children are more active in the morning and some are still half asleep! A smooth morning can set the pace for your day and theirs.
- *Try to do several errands in the same trip*, to save time and money. You may want to buy more groceries during a trip to the grocery store, if you can, so you won't have to make as many trips. Big packages of food (in bulk) sometimes cost less per serving, last longer, and save you time.
- *Plan the errands you will run and make a shopping list of what you will buy before you leave the house.*

### **Budgeting**

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You may earn more money when you start a new job, but you may also have to pay for new things.

For example, you might need to spend money on:

- Transportation (such as gas for a car or bus fare) to get to work,
- Child care, and
- New clothes to wear for work.

These new expenses may be very hard to deal with at first. But if you are ready for them, you can keep yourself from feeling too stressed about how to pay your bills.

- *Be prepared (before you start work).* Make a list of all the new things you will have to pay for when you start working. Think about whether they really have to be “new” and where you can get the best buy.
- *Think about what you spend money on now.* What you could cut back on in order to handle new work expenses?
- *Create a budget (a plan for how to spend your money).* If you need it, get help in learning how to budget. Many community agencies can help, such as the Cooperative Extension Service.

### **Basic Steps to Budgeting:**

1. Figure out about how much income you expect to have in the next month. Ask your employer what your take home pay will be.
  2. Create a spending plan, based on everything you think you will need to pay for in a month. Decide how much you expect to spend on different areas, such as food, clothing, rent or housing, electric or gas bills, transportation, child care, medical care, and savings. Make sure the total spending isn't more than your total income.
  3. Try to follow your spending plan for a month, and keep track of how much you really spend in the different areas. You can do this by writing down everything you spend in a notebook, or by keeping all your receipts in a special place (a box, envelope or drawer).
  4. After a month, compare your actual income and expenses to your spending plan. You can do this by writing down everything you spend in a notebook, or by keeping all your receipts in a special place (a box, envelope, or drawer).
- Did you follow your spending plan?
  - Did you spend more money than the income you received?
  - Do you need to change your spending plan, the way you shop, or both?

After a few months of working and trying out different spending plans, you will probably be able to make a spending plan that helps you spend less and save more.

## **Relationships With Family and Friends**

Having positive relationships with your family and friends can help make your transition into work much easier. Here are a few things to keep in mind.

- *Think about who can give you personal support.* Expand this support group. Get to know your neighbors, and keep strong ties with friends and relatives. 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.

- *Expect an adjustment period for your family and friends.* Starting work not only changes your life, it affects the people around you, too! Because you may have a different schedule, new responsibilities, and less time to be with the people close to you, be prepared for them to have a difficult time at first – especially your children!

It may take a little time for your family and friends to adjust, so try to be patient. Soon they should become used to your new lifestyle.

- *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 more safe and content, and it may keep them from getting irritable and upset that evening. (It may save you *more* time later!)

### Summary

Although these actions will not solve all your work and family balance issues, they may help some in your transition. By organizing your time, developing a budget, and planning family time, you are on your way to great success!

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The titles for the series *Workfront-Homefront* were selected based on telephone interviews with Work First participants. Titles include:

*Easing Transitions: Balancing Work and Family*, FCS-479-1

*Parenting for the Busy Parent of a Preschooler*, FCS-479-2

*Adjusting to Work: Getting Along with Others*, FCS-479-3

*Decision Making: It's a Skill*, FCS-479-4

*Locating and Selecting Child Care*, FCS-479-5

*Personal Wellness for Top Performance*, FCS-479-6

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