



EAP EMPLOYEE ENHANCEMENT NEWSLETTER

March 2024



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BALANCING CAREGIVING, WORK, AND FAMILY

Just as having a child can shift the balance between work and home life, the responsibility of caring for an older or infirm family member can force adjustments to schedules and priorities. How do you handle work responsibilities and maintain your career while also doing what's right for your older relative, attending to your relationship with your spouse or partner, giving your children the love and attention they need, and taking care of yourself? It's not easy. In fact, it might be one of the biggest challenges you will ever face. But it can usually be done, and you may have more options than you realize. Here are some ideas that may help you find a balance that works for you.

Balancing Work and Caregiving

- **Step up your organizing skills.** Manage your calendar so you can easily see both work and family obligations. Create a calendar with key care-related events, such as your older relative's doctor's appointments, in a form that can be shared with siblings, friends, and others who might be able to help. Look for efficiencies in how you spend your time, such as shopping for groceries once a week or using a home-delivery service.
- **Plan ahead—and make backup plans.** Perhaps more than ever before, you'll need to plan ahead, both at work and with your family and caregiving responsibilities. You'll also need to be prepared for the unexpected by having backup plans. Who will check in on your older relative if the person who usually does that gets sick? Who might step in for you at work if you're called away for an urgent family need?
- **Take a hard look at your priorities.** As a caregiver, new priorities are being added to your life. What are you spending time on that you might do in a different way, put off, or stop doing altogether?
- **Get help.** Think about who might be able to help with specific caregiving tasks. Talk to family members, friends, and neighbors about ways they might be able to play a helpful role, even a small one, to free you to focus on other important priorities. Explore options for paid help and free or low-cost community services.
- **Talk with your employer.** Read your employee handbook to find out about support available to you, such as information and counseling through your employee assistance program (EAP) or provisions for temporary leave, flexible work hours, or working from home. Think about what sorts of support or flexibility would enable you to continue to do your job well and be there for your family. Have an honest conversation with your manager or human resources (HR) representative (whichever feels safest to you) about what's going on in your life and what adjustments would help you contribute to the best of your ability at work. Show that you've thought your proposal through from your employer's perspective.
- **Cross-train and delegate.** If you're in a position to do this at work, cross-train with team members so you can handle each other's work when you or someone else has an unplanned absence. If you're a manager, use the opportunity to train and delegate, so your constant presence isn't as critical. This can give team members a chance to learn new skills and stretch their capabilities.



- **Set limits.** Establish boundaries around what you can or are willing to do and what you can't or aren't willing to do. Be realistic about what you can handle. Say no to requests that might push you beyond your limits.
- **Take care of yourself.** With all the expectations put on you, it can be easy to lose sight of your own needs. Don't let that happen. Make time to exercise, get outdoors for a walk, talk with a friend, meditate, read a book, or do other activities that help you stay calm and healthy. Keep your own needs on your list of important priorities.

Caregiving and Your Marriage or Partner Relationship

Caring for an older or infirm family member can cut into the quality time you spend with your spouse or partner. It can also create new tensions—about money, for example, or from the social dynamic in the household if your older relative has moved in with you. It may just be your new reality that you have less time for your relationship, but it's important to make time for communication and connection:

- **Involve your spouse or partner in important decisions** about your relative's care and in planning for what might come next.
- **Discuss and clarify responsibilities.** Are you responsible for the care of your parents and is your partner responsible for their parents? If you're sharing those responsibilities, who is responsible for which tasks, or for care at different times of the day and week?
- **Be clear when you ask your partner for help.** Don't assume they know when you're at your limit or that they can tell what you want or need. Be open and honest about your needs. Explain, with specifics, how your partner can be most helpful to you.
- **Make time to enjoy each other.** Go out to dinner together, or even just take a break to go for a walk or sit together on a park bench. If your children or older relative need constant supervision, use your network of helpers to free your time.
- **Show your appreciation.** Say thank you. Tell your partner you appreciate them, and why.

Source: Morgan, H. (2023, December 14). *Balancing caregiving, work, and family* (B. Schuette & E. Morton, Eds.). Raleigh, NC: Workplace Options (WPO).



Caregiving and Your Children

In the squeeze on your time and the competition for your attention, don't let the needs of your children sink to the bottom of the priority list:

- **Make time for your children.** Plan times for just you and your child to do things together that your child would like to do. If you have more than one child, spend time with them together and with each of them separately in one-on-one outings. Take turns with your spouse or partner or draw on your network of helpers to make this happen.
- **Listen.** Ask questions to find out what's going on in their lives and how they are doing. Then listen to what they tell you. Find out what they think and how they feel about what's happening with your older relative. Don't dismiss your child's worries or emotions as unreasonable. Acknowledge them, take them seriously, and help your child find ways to deal with them.
- **Let your child help,** in appropriate ways, with your older relative's care. It can help your child feel valued and important and could help create opportunities for cross-generation connections. Let your child say no to helping, too. Don't force it if your child is uncomfortable or unwilling.

IGNITING THE SPARK OF INDIVIDUALITY IN OTHERS

Encouraging Coworkers to Express Themselves

When encouraging coworkers to open up and express themselves, it is important to be mindful of your biases within the workplace. That is, are you prepared to listen to what some coworkers have to say, but not others? Perhaps you are more ready to listen to coworkers who identify more strongly with your own values, attitudes, and beliefs. Actively seek out those coworkers who differ from you with respect to age, gender, faith, educational background, and culture, and create space to allow expression.

Your active listening skills will help you here. Active listening involves speaking less and listening more. It's not simply waiting your turn, but being present within the conversation, attending to the core themes discussed, and then reflecting these thoughts and feelings. Also, use positive reinforcement to increase the likelihood that your coworkers will continue to express themselves. In other words, reward your coworkers for speaking up. To do this, highlight the value that your coworker's contribution brings to those around them. In creating space, you are modeling for those around you that it is safe to express yourself irrespective of your background.



Encouraging Your Children to Be Themselves

In order to encourage your children to be their authentic selves, attend to their interests rather than areas of disinterest. Show a genuine interest in their passions, demonstrating that their passions are worthwhile to pursue. It's not unusual for children to feel a need to go along with the crowd and jump onto whatever fad might be popular at the time. Children might do this in order to be included within their social circles and not appear as unusual and different. Help children to recognize the benefits and costs associated with following the crowd, allowing them to make informed decisions.

It's also valuable to highlight how individuality has helped you in life, and how fads come and go. It can also be useful to draw the child's attention to those around them, thereby allowing them to identify what they like about their friends, family, and idols, as well as what they dislike. Finally, encourage children to be involved in problem-solving and decision-making. For example, how should family time be used on school vacations? Including children in this decision-making demonstrates that you value their opinions. This will help develop your child's self-esteem, encouraging them to speak up and be more independent.



How to Encourage Yourself to Express Yourself

There could be multiple reasons you choose not to express yourself. Have you expressed yourself in the past, only to have your thoughts and opinions fall on deaf ears? Perhaps you prioritize others' needs before your own, and therefore struggle to speak up about what you want. It could be that you find conflict uncomfortable and opt to stay quiet, thereby managing the uncomfortable thoughts and feelings that accompany conflict.

When encouraging yourself to voice your opinion, know that simply because you have had negative experiences in the past does not mean that all future instances of expression will lead to negative outcomes. In order to express yourself, it is crucial that you recognize that there is value in you expressing yourself. Ask yourself what you have to gain by speaking up. Attending to the potential gains can help motivate you. It is also helpful to build your assertive communication skills. Assertive communication involves being clear and direct about your needs, linking your needs with your thoughts and feelings, acknowledging the perspectives of others, and encouraging problem-solving. Finally, make a conscious effort to speak up about your needs rather than waiting for opportune moments. The more you express yourself and have positive outcomes, the more your confidence will grow. As your confidence grows, the easier it will be to speak up in the future.

Source: Veretis. (2022, June 11). Igniting the spark of individuality in others (B. Schuette & E. Morton, Eds.). Raleigh, NC: Workplace Options (WPO).



RESPONSIBLE PET OWNERSHIP KEEPS YOU AND YOUR PET HEALTHY

Owning a pet can be rewarding and can even benefit your physical and mental health. No wonder nearly 70 percent of U.S. households own a pet! However, pet ownership comes with a lot of responsibility. Below are some dos and don'ts of pet ownership to help your entire family—human, feathered, furry, or scaly—stay healthy and happy.

Do this...

- **Pick the right pet for your family.** Different pets have different needs. Make sure you find a pet that fits your family's lifestyle. Pet reptiles, amphibians, and rodents aren't recommended for families with young kids, older adults, or people with weakened immune systems, because they are more likely to spread germs.

- **Teach kids how to interact with pets safely.** Teaching kids how to properly interact with pets can help prevent bites, scratches, and other injuries to them and the pet.
- **Clean up after your pet.** Pet poop can carry parasites and germs and contaminate the environment. Always pick up after your pet in public spaces and in your own yard or house, especially if you have kids.
- **Take your pet to the veterinarian.** Regular vet visits help keep your pet healthy, but they can also help keep you healthy. Pet vaccinations help prevent some diseases that can spread to people, and prevention for fleas, ticks, and worms keep them away from both you and your pet.

...Not that

- **Don't feed pets raw diets.** Raw pet food can spread germs like Salmonella and Listeria to people and pets.
- **Don't let pets roam freely outside.** Always supervise pets when they're outside (or keep them leashed) to keep your pet and other people safe. Unsupervised pets can also harm wildlife or come in contact with wild animals that can spread diseases.
- **Don't encourage pets to play rough.** Rough play can lead to bites, scratches, and other injuries.
- **Never release an unwanted pet outdoors.** Many pets released outdoors will die, some can become invasive species and disrupt ecosystems, and some can hurt native wildlife. Find a new home, or give your pet to a reputable rescue organization instead.

Source: U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), National Center for Emerging and Zoonotic Infectious Diseases (NCEZID). (Reviewed 2022, March 7). Responsible pet ownership keeps you and your pet healthy. Retrieved May 16, 2023, from <https://www.cdc.gov>

