

## *Family Tapestries* Strengthening Family Bonds



### Fact Sheet

## Working Parents: Finding the Balance

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The National Study of the Changing Workforce, conducted by the Families and Work Institute in 1997 found that jobs have changed over the past twenty years. They consume more energy, are more unpredictable, and require longer hours. In fact, compared to the 1960s, the average worker now spends about six extra 40-hour weeks per year on the job. These increased demands have made managing work and family more difficult for all, including working parents. Work and family balance used to be considered primarily a woman's issue, but men are just as likely to have difficulty managing work and family demands.

Research has shown there are many issues affecting work and family balance for working parents. Key issues include paid work hours, household chores, flextime, flexplace and child/elder care. Many people think they are working more hours than they actually are, which also adds stress to the challenge of balancing multiple roles.

### Paid Work Hours

There is a strong relationship between the number of paid hours and work-family conflict, especially for those with preschool children. Longer work hours by husbands have been shown to result in greater marital conflict. Here are some strategies related to paid work hours to help working parents balance:

- Set aside specific time with each child.
- Make family events a priority.
- Check with spouse/partner when scheduling travel or commitments beyond the normal work schedule.
- Communicate with your family.

### Household Chores

The number of hours spent on the job has been shown to impact the degree to which spouses participate in family work. Compared to the past, men are now doing more household chores and child care. But, when both spouses work, men do an average of six hours less per week of household chores than women do. Here are some strategies related to household chores to help working parents balance:

- Prioritize chores to be done.
- Establish a plan for completing chores; include children in the planning.
- Use chores as an opportunity for quality time with a child.
- Have someone watch the children so you and your partner can run errands together.

### Flextime

Many companies allow random flextime, but only 25% allow changes on a consistent daily basis.

Working parents with flextime show more job satisfaction, better job retention, and increased initiative. The relationship of flextime to the family structure is not clear, however, and needs further research. Here are some strategies related to flextime to help working parents balance:

- Decide if flextime is important to you and pursue a formal plan with your employer if so.
- Use flexible time for errands, personal health appointments, children's school events.
- Use flextime as a time to reenergize yourself.

## Flexplace

Flexplace is allowing employees control over where their work is done. Even with telecommuting options, fewer companies offer flexplace compared to flextime. Because of the decreasing cost of technology, forecasts indicate that flexplace will increase in future years. Research has also shown that home-based work allows employees to spend more time on domestic work than those employed at the company location. Here are some strategies related to flexplace to help working parents balance:

- Work at the location that allows you to be the most productive.
- Keep accurate account of time spent working at flexplace.
- Focus on work tasks if you are working somewhere that might distract you.

## Child/Elder Care

Child and elder care is perceived to be more challenging for working parents. Employees with flextime or flexplace report fewer challenges in backup plans for care. Women are considered the primary caregiver, although the man's role is increasing. Here are some strategies related to child/elder care to help working parents balance:

- Research alternative care options in your community.
- Review each partner's work policy for flextime and flexplace, then have a plan of action.
- Decide which partner can best provide care. This may change as the care situation changes, so try to be flexible.

Working parents will always face challenges managing the many responsibilities they have. By establishing personal priorities and communicating about their roles, working parents can achieve balance in their lives.

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