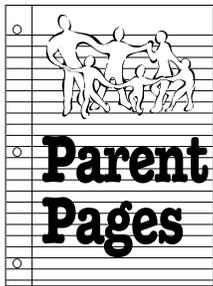


# Balancing Work and Family



## Changing roles, changing responsibilities

Dad used to bring home the bacon and Mom would cook it.

Now, Mom is just as likely to be working late at the office while Dad fixes supper. We live in a fluid time of multiple roles. Usually men and women add to their roles, rather than change them completely. In a large percentage of families, mothers and fathers share wage-earning and family-maintaining roles. And that can lead to role conflict, role overload and/or role ambiguity.

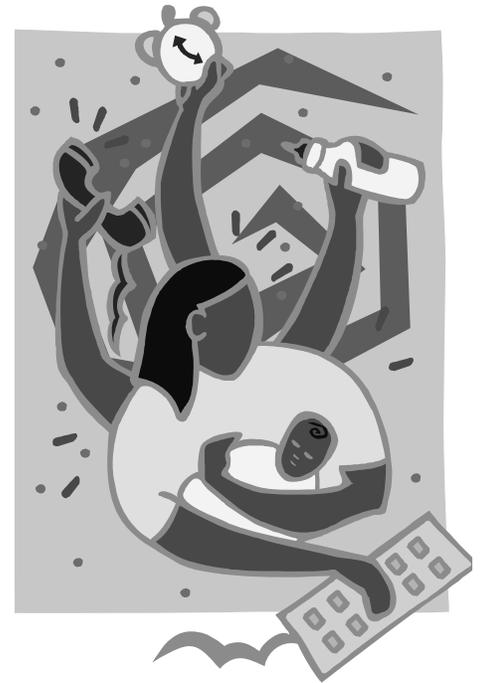
Role conflict comes from trying to do two or more jobs well. Role overload comes from trying to be too many things to too many people. Role ambiguity occurs when adults get mixed messages on how they are expected to act. For example, a man may prefer to stay at home with the children, but feels he is expected instead to be the main income earner. Or, a wife may want to have a job, yet feel guilty if others take over some of her home duties.

These coping strategies can reduce the stress and confusion of role conflict, overload or ambiguity:

- ◆ Avoid gender stereotypes when making decisions about family employment, child-rearing, financial

management and household chores. Decisions should be based on interests, skills and an equitable distribution of responsibility.

- ◆ Share household responsibilities equally. Keep records of how much time each member of the household spends in schoolwork, paid work, housework, child care, travel, and leisure for one week and see how chores can be more fairly shared.
- ◆ Take turns playing different roles. Family problems often arise because people think they need to keep the same routines year after year. Instead, family members can take turns filling time-consuming, energy-demanding roles.
- ◆ Handle balance-of-power issues as they arise. When roles change, so do the power interactions within the family. A husband may feel threatened by his wife's job and refuse to do his share of housework. Children may become messier when it's dad's turn to take charge of home cleaning. Talk about power problems as they come up.
- ◆ Spend time with friends and relatives. Filling several roles can make time a scarce commodity, so go out of your way to maintain the relationships you enjoy most.
- ◆ When possible, negotiate for changes in the workplace. Does your employer offer flextime or a day care subsidy? Many don't, but

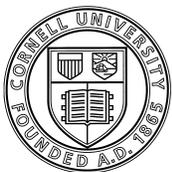


more do each year. Consider discussing policies that would make it easier to balance work and family life with co-workers, other parents in your community, and your employer.

## Coping with the stress of balancing work and family

The worlds of work and home are not separate; in fact, research shows they have a profound impact on each other. Success or a problem at work can affect home life, and vice versa. The trick is not to ignore work stresses at home or home stresses at work. Rather, it is important to learn to cope with the stresses that occur in both situations.

~Continued~



Cornell University  
Cooperative Extension  
Orange County

Community Campus  
18 Seward Avenue, Suite 300  
Middletown, NY 10940-1919  
845-344-1234  
[www.cce.cornell.edu/orange](http://www.cce.cornell.edu/orange)  
Printed 8/2008

Becoming aware of the sources of your stress is the first step. Make a list of those stressful things that are on your mind. Then, on that list, next to each problem, indicate how much control you have over that problem. Does morning rush-hour traffic wear you to a frazzle? Perhaps you could try leaving a few minutes earlier to avoid it, or negotiating an earlier or later arrival time with your employer. Is a relative or friend extremely ill? You can't change that, but you can adjust your response to the situation. Instead of worrying, think of ways to best use the time you have for that relative or friend.

Life will never be stress free. We must cope with stress, not eliminate it. To do that, find supports that can help: networks of family and friends can help reduce some of those daily stresses.

Determine how you and individual members of your family respond to stress. Overeating, smoking, withdrawing, over-drinking and quarreling are negative stress-strategies. Taking time to appreciate the beauty of your life and to have fun with your family is more relaxing. Direct communication between family members can also reduce stress. A statement like, "I don't like coming home to a messy house" can get better results than an angry, "You are so messy."

Have a brainstorming session with your family, discussing the stresses each one feels, and possible ways of coping with them. Don't be afraid to ask for what you need, and don't expect other family members to be "mind-readers."

Meanwhile, while you and your family are learning to identify, talk about and cope better with stress, try these other tactics to help reduce problems and keep them in perspective.

- ◆ Try to keep a balance between personal, couple, family, community and career goals. Don't let any one goal overpower the others.
- ◆ Don't smoke cigarettes, overeat or drink too much alcohol. Keep caffeine consumption to a minimum.
- ◆ Exercise at least three times a week.
- ◆ Keep your weight in balance with your height.
- ◆ Schedule some time every day just for yourself.
- ◆ Find time to see friends on a regular basis.
- ◆ Be affectionate with your family and friends.
- ◆ Laugh at yourself and with others, and stay flexible.

*Source: Christiann Dean, Department of Human Development and Family Studies, New York State College of Human Ecology, Cornell University. Parent Pages was developed by Cornell Cooperative Extension of Suffolk County.*