

TIP SHEET

WORK LIFE BALANCE

In our demanding lives many people struggle to balance work and the responsibilities of caring for children, family members with a disability or elderly parents. Many people find it difficult to find time outside work for study, volunteering, taking care of their own health or participating in sport and recreation. There is no ideal work life balance; everyone is different and the 'right' balance may alter over time as families grow older and personal commitments change.

When work is taking over

Finding a balance between work and person life is difficult for many people. It can be particularly difficult when

- someone is adjusting to their first full-time job
- you are a parent, especially a single parent, or a parent without family or close friends to help you
- you are a carer for a family member who has a disability, is ill or elderly
- work is very demanding and you are expected to work long hours
- the kind of work you do is very stressful
- family and personal life is particularly demanding and worrying perhaps because there are relationship problems, or your child is ill, or you are worried about your child's behaviour or you have numerous medical or other appointments
- you have commitments to sport and training or community volunteering
- you are studying part-time
- your health is not good
- you have a long commute each day
- you don't actually like your job very much, or it is not stretching you enough to keep you interested, or when the morale in your workplace is poor.

Most of the time things just coast along at home and work, with ups and downs. But everyone has times when work is almost overwhelming for any number of reasons, or when their personal life is stressful. When the two coincide, it can be a struggle to keep your head above water.

Life is full of stresses, some of them avoidable, but many of them unavoidable. Often the best people can do is manage them; trying to minimise stress is vital. If work is taking over your life you might

- feel grumpy, frustrated or anxious
- be tired and lacking in energy
- find yourself being negative
- work hard, but find it hard to be motivated or not seem to be getting anywhere
- not be taking pleasure in your family, friends and interests
- be unable to get a good night's sleep
- be drinking too much or eating badly or you may become reliant on recreational drugs or prescription medication.

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Things to consider

Most people feel better if they have some way to deal with the problem they are facing. If work is taking over your life there are a number of things you can do. You could:

- Consider doing some work from home in the evening or start earlier in the morning if you were allowed to leave early enough to manage the night-time routine with children, or get to your netball or football training punctually.
- Re-arrange your shifts or get better notice of your shifts.
- Could you be given a schedule of work ahead of time so you could plan better?
- Consider a transfer to another work area.
- Talk to your boss about it; or if he/she isn't open to talking, to your HR manager.
- If it seems that you are not the only one affected, ask for a team meeting to discuss the problems
- Think about a change of jobs if you have tried to make changes but aren't getting anywhere: this requires careful consideration and should never be done when you are feeling down and overwhelmed.

Regaining the balance.

- Try to do more things that will energise you – a run, walk or bike-ride or some gardening every day
- Take your lunch breaks and get away from your workplace if you can
- Eat well
- Think about how important the time with your family, pet and friends is, and really enjoy the time you spend together
- Read to your children or play games with them, talk to your partner (who might be feeling a bit anxious about you) and try to spend time together; make contact with your friends
- Go to the movies or spend time on a hobby or interest
- Avoid working from home in the evening, or taking work calls if possible
- Try to do something that you enjoy every day, even if it is just listening to some music for a short time.

If you can't tip the work-life balance scales so that there is a reasonable balance, you may be in danger of burnout, so try to do something before it's too late.