

Balancing Work and Family

As the demographics of the work place continue to change, it is increasingly challenging to balance work and family responsibilities. With more dual income households today than ever before and changing family structures, the demands on an individual's time have increased the potential for stress both at work and at home.

While a majority of people appear to cope with the demands of work and family life, information gathered by the Health Enhancement Research Organization indicates over one in ten report experiencing excess worry, nerves, or stress due to the difficulty of balancing home and work responsibilities. Women are twice as likely as men to experience difficulty balancing the demands of work and home because they still frequently attend to the bulk of responsibilities at home. Employees whose jobs demand long work hours are also likely to experience greater trouble maintaining a balance between work and family. NASA can help employees to reduce sources of stress by building flexibility into work schedules, implementing family-responsive policies and providing an environment that supports good health practices. Good physical and mental health are vital to keeping life in balance, feeling energetic and productive. Maintaining physical and mental health requires exercising regularly, eating healthy meals, getting adequate rest and simply taking care of yourself.

By providing support to employees struggling with the challenges of work and family life we can increase productivity, decrease health care expenditures, and decrease lost workdays and disabilities. While these are work goals, the most important goals are good health and safety. Make time for you, your family, and your health.

NASA Actions

Principal Center

- Provide Web site information on nutrition, stress, work and family issues--Ongoing

NASA Centers

- Provide Employee Assistance Program
 - Employee counseling
 - Employee referrals to healthcare resources
 - Education on balancing work and family, stress management
- Ensure availability of health fitness centers
 - Facilitate flexible schedules to take advantage of fitness centers
 - Exercise programs
 - Health education programs
- Ensure accessibility to health education and screenings
 - Screenings for early detection of disease
 - Nutrition awareness and education
- Provide health evaluations and counseling

Background

The concept of family has changed significantly over the past two decades. Up until the 1980s the so-called traditional family was a home with one mother, one father and one or more children. Only 11 percent of households today have a family where the wife doesn't work outside the home. Today's family is more varied in structure. As a result of this shift, many workers are experiencing stress from the competing demands of work and family. Added to the demands are new facets of family life including childcare, elder care and illness of family members.

Research has shown that a stable family life has a positive effect on individual longevity. This may be related to the companionship, closeness and comfort you can receive from long term stable relationships. Healthy relationships also provide an opportunity for you to express your feelings and reduce the burden of carrying your frustrations, worries or anger alone. The inability to relieve the stress can cause harmful physical responses that can include headaches, fatigue, anxiety, depression, ulcers and heart disease.

Finding a balance between work and family responsibilities is key in reversing the adverse physical and emotional health effects associated with stress. By providing assistance to employees at work we may help them achieve that balance and help attract and keep employees. Research has shown workplaces that address these issues have lower rates of turnover, lower recruitment and training costs, lower error rates, lower rates of customer turnover, good customer service and higher sales and profits.

It can be tough to balance the demands of a full-time job and a full-time personal life, and a variety of problems in everyday life can distract employees reducing their productivity and motivation. That's why the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is so important. It offers a range of services, including short-term counseling and referral for both work-related and

personal issues. EAP also provides employees with the tools to develop the skills helpful in reducing the stress in their lives (for example, learning time management skills to help prioritize tasks and scheduling time for them).

NASA's success in the 21st century will depend largely upon the health, productivity and versatility of its workforce. Programs sensitive to the changing workforce create a culture that supports a healthy balance between work and family responsibilities. This will enable employees to work smarter, be more efficient, focused, and productive and reduce the risk of accidents associated with fatigue and stress. Reaching this goal will help NASA achieve lower healthcare costs, lower absenteeism, improved quality and safety, lower turnover and improved morale.