

Work-life balance: what it is and why it matters

Work-life balance is the relationship between your work and the other important things in your life, like your family, sport and social life, household chores, volunteer commitments and so on. If you feel like you have enough time for all of these things in your life, you probably have a good work-life balance.

And when you have a good work-life balance, you're more likely to have the mental and emotional energy to give your children the loving attention they need to develop, learn and thrive.

A well-balanced family life can also help you enjoy life, manage stress and prevent burnout at work.

Your children need regular quality time with you. Quality time can happen in a quick and unplanned way most days – it's about making sure that even short interactions with your children are focused and loving. Quality time can also be longer and planned. For example, you might set aside an afternoon together with your children each weekend.

Changing your home and family arrangements to improve work-life balance

You might be able to improve your work-life balance by changing the way you organise things in your home and family.

For example, here are some things you could look at:

- Things you need and want to do – this might be caring for children, doing housework, going to work and earning a salary, caring for elderly parents, volunteering, exercising, socialising, relaxing and so on.
- Time you spend on things – working out how much time you spend on each of the things above can give you a picture of what your work-life balance looks like at the moment.
- Money needs – drawing up a [family budget](#) can help you work out the limits of what you can change.
- Options for change – if you're not happy with the balance and you have some flexibility with time and money, where can you make changes?

If you have a partner, and you're not happy with your current work-life balance, you and your partner could work through the issues above together. You might be able to work out some short-term and long-term plans for change, so that you both have your needs met over time.

If you're [co-parenting your children](#) with a former partner, you might be able to change:

- your financial arrangements, so you can work less and spend more time with the children
- your contact schedule, so you can spend more time with your children, or so your time with your children fits better with your work hours or other commitments.

If you're single, it might help to look at [practical or financial support for single parents](#). You could also look at [child care options](#) that give you more time for your work, self-care or other commitments. Or you could talk to your employer about work arrangements that work better for you and your family.

For some parents, a heavy workload, travel or shift work can mean getting home after your family is in bed, leaving before they wake up, or needing to sleep while everyone else is awake. You might not be able to control the hours you work or how busy your work is. But you can build [strong family relationships](#) by making time for each other when you can, appreciating each other and communicating about how things are going.

Negotiating family-friendly work arrangements to support work-life balance

Family-friendly work arrangements can help you improve your work-life balance. Family-friendly options might include arrangements for:

- working from home
- working flexible hours
- working part-time hours
- job-sharing, which is sharing your job with another part-time employee
- [working while pregnant](#)
- taking **parental leave** and carers leave
- using the [Australian Government's Parental Leave Pay](#) and [Dad and Partner Pay](#) schemes.

If you decide you want to negotiate a family-friendly arrangement at work, try working through these steps:

1. Look at your workplace agreement or contract. Find out what your options for family-friendly work are.
2. Contact your union, if you belong to one. It might have suggestions for you.

3. Think about what you want, and put your request in writing to your manager or employer. Ask for a little more than you want. Leave yourself space to negotiate.
4. In your written request, explain why your request is good for the business as well as for you. You could also refer to government and workplace policies about supporting parents.
5. Follow up your letter with a discussion with your employer, manager or human resources department about what might suit you and them.

When you discuss your request with your employer or manager, these ideas can help things go well:

- Try to approach negotiations calmly.
- Consider any problems your employer or manager might have with your idea, and try to think of solutions.
- Suggest how you'll be accountable for your work if you're working offsite or different hours. Suggest a review of arrangements in a few months.
- Talk to your workmates about their family-friendly arrangements. If their arrangements are working well, you could use them as examples in support of your request.

If you can't find a solution you're happy with, consider another role with your current employer, a different job with a new employer or even a career change. You could talk to a careers counsellor about your options.

All parents with children of school age or younger have the right to request a [flexible working arrangement](#) from their employer.

Changing work habits to support work-life balance

It's not always possible to spend less time on or at work, but small changes in the way you organise and think about work can help you feel more satisfied with your work-life balance.

Organising your work

- Arrange your work so you take on the most challenging tasks at the beginning of the day, instead of at the end.
- Set boundaries around how much work you do outside hours, including limits on checking and responding to emails or phone calls or attending out-of-hours meetings.

- Let coworkers and clients know your work hours – for example, by including work hours or days in your email signature.
- If you work from home, have clear start and finish times or block out parts of the day for work, rather than constantly checking in with work.
- If you work from home, try to keep your work area separate from family areas.

Leaving work behind at the end of the day

- Review the workday in your mind before you leave or finish work. This can help you shift gradually to thinking about home and family.
- Call your partner, your child's carer or your child on the way home. This can take your mind off work and give you a chance to catch up on your family's day. It can also help you work out who or what needs your attention when you get home.
- Have a [ritual](#) or [routine](#) to mark the physical, mental and emotional move from work to home, from worker to parent. It can be as simple as changing out of your work clothes. If you work from home, try going for a walk around the block or doing a five-minute workout.

Changing your perspective on work

- Take a moment in your workday to think about your children. This could be just looking at a photo or thinking about a special thing you've done together recently. This can help you remember the reason you're trying to achieve a work-life balance.
- Take your child or family to work social occasions. This can be fun for you and your child. And meeting your child might make it easier for your colleagues to be understanding – for example, if you have to take carers leave because your child is sick.

Raising children is an important job, and parents often need support to do the job well. If you need help to manage [stress](#), [anxiety](#) or [anger](#), your [GP](#) is a good place to start. You can also call your [state or territory parenting helpline](#), [Lifeline](#) on 131 114, or [Beyond Blue](#) on 1300 224 636.