# The Importance of Work-Life Balance

## Tutor's Handbook

ON CALL

Lay Community Health Advisors

# Work-Life Balance

## An Introduction

We have a lot of personal, professional, financial and social pressure on us these days. With so many commitments to make all the time, it is easy to feel lost in a sea of work and family duties and we can lose ourselves in the process. That is why it is important that we try our best to maintain a healthy work-life balance, and also that we try and make time just for ourselves, to spend some time each week doing something that we personally enjoy. It is the only way to ensure our happiness and to fortify our mental health in the long run.

Do you ever find yourself back in your house after work and unable to switch off? You are recalling conversations from your workplace, your mind is filled with up-coming tasks, you eat your dinner and you're not really conscious at all of what you are eating or what is being said by family members gathered around you. Another scenario, do you work irregular hours – or are your hours always changing? Do you struggle to have a 'normal' routine? Are your family always in bed when you get up for work or return from work? Do you feel like you're missing out? These scenarios describe examples of very bad, and unhealthy, work-life balance. It is the task of this resource to support you, and members of your local health network, to take control and to improve their work-life balance!

## Why is Work-Life Balance Important?

This section presents some of the main reasons why work-life balance is so important. Read through the following points before sharing this topic with your group:

- It helps to maintain positive mental health:

Effective work-life balance is necessary for positive mental health. As described in the first scenario in this handbook, being pre-occupied with worries and stress is bad for our mental well-being. A very common issue affecting the mental health of employees that you may have heard about is burnout. This occurs when people feel under significant pressure in work and it culminates in what is termed: "chronic stress." That stress could be caused by a variety of things, from high workloads (and no work-life balance), to a lack of support from managers, to simply not feeling valued for the hard work you do. If you can identify any of these feelings in yourself when you think of your work, it may be time to start reviewing your work-life balance.

- It helps to ensure physical health and well-being:

Poor work-life balance can cause stress in your work and personal life, and stress is very bad for your physical health and well-being. Stress can lead to many physical health problems, including, high blood

pressure, hypertension, anxiety, depression, cardiovascular disease, etc. Finding the balance between your work and personal life, and finding time for activities and hobbies you enjoy, is the key to having good physical health and maintaining a sense of well-being.

- It helps to ensure you are productive when you are in work:

When you have deadlines to meet and are falling behind on tasks, the natural reaction is to extend your working day and stay later to catch up on what you are behind on. However, you will often find that spending more time in your workplace does not equate to a better, more productive use of your time or a better-quality output from your work. If you manage your work commitments so that you can enjoy some free time, you will find that when you are in work you are more rested, relaxed and motivated to attend to the tasks at hand.

- It helps to feel well-rounded as a person:

You miss out on a lot of personal development and growth if your main priorities and focus in life revolves around work. As such, it is important to have interests and hobbies outside of work. It is also important to invest in developing skills and interests in other areas so that you are not fully focused on tasks related to your job the whole time. It may sound funny, but potential employers will not only assess how suitable you are to a job that you are applying for, but they will also look at your hobbies and interests when assessing if you are a good fit for their company. So, when you think about it, investing in good work-life balance, is also good for your career and well as your well-being!

## Getting Started

If you or a member of your local health network is struggling with work-life balance, they may feel that it is an impossible task to change a routine and to reset the imbalance between work life and personal life, but it doesn't have to be so. The important thing is to recognise that there is a problem, and to take steps towards resolving the work-life imbalance. It is okay to start small; when you are faced with an unhealthy work culture or poor habits, making small incremental changes will have the most sustainable impact on your life going forward. As such, we would recommend the following steps for getting started with re-addressing work-life imbalances.

- Separate Work and Personal Life:

It is important that you try to make a conscious effort to leave the work at work and not to bring your worries from work home with you. This is not to say that you can't discuss concerns and worries about work with family and friends, but make sure that it doesn't dominate your conversations and moods throughout your personal time. Instead, leave your workplace and focus on enjoying your personal time with family and friends. Try in build in some activities in your routine that help you to 'switch-off'

after you're finished work – exercising or practicing a hobby to help you to de-stress after work.

- Set Priorities:

It is important that you have your priorities straight in your mind. For occasions where personal life and work collide in your calendar, you should be clear about which you have to put first – it could be work that comes first and if you are working to provide for your family, that is not something to feel guilty over. But if you need to prioritise a work task, ensure that you are balancing this commitment by freeing up some personal time in return.

- Set Family and Friend Goals:

People have professional goals that they work hard to achieve – but often we lack goals for our family and personal life. If you find that you are socialising with friends and family less than you would like, or if you are struggling to balance both commitments, try setting a goal for your family – like weekly or monthly family activities – and work towards achieving them. This could include having a family dinner together 2 evenings per week, or meeting with friends one Saturday each month, organising a whole family outing every 3 months – whatever it could be – try and set a goal and then work towards it.

- Organise your Calendar:

One suggestion is to integrate your personal and work calendars so that you are able to plan what needs to be done each week in each sphere, and to make

sure that you don't miss any important events in either calendar – even if plans change.

## How to use this Resource with your Local Health Group?

This handbook presents some introductory information on the benefits and importance of maintaining a health work-life balance. To use this resource with your local group, we recommend that you first play the short video lecture and then lead a group discussion about the importance of work-life balance and different ways to get started managing work-life balance.

To accompany this handbook, you will also find a short PowerPoint presentation that can be used with your local health network to introduce what is discussed in this handbook. Use the presentation to talk to the members of your local group about their work-life balance, whether or not they are aware of the dangers of bad work-life balance and how they could improve any imbalance between work and personal commitments.

## Group Activity

Once you have shared the digital resource and the PowerPoint presentation with your group members, you can start a group discussion about the work-life balance of people in the group. To start this discussion, pose the following questions to the group:

- How would you rate your own work-life balance?
- Do you make time for family, friends and personal time for relaxation?
- Would you like to make improvements? And if so, which improvements would you like to make?

After this discussion, ask all group members to work on their own or in small groups to consider their work-life balance and to write down 1-2 personal goals that they would like to achieve.  If group members are willing, they can share these goals with the whole group.  After this activity, group members are also invited to write down one change they would like to make to their work-life balance right now, and again they can share this with the group if they wish.

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