



Updating Agencies, Professionals, and Individuals with Current Life Skills Information

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Time Management Tips

From Extension Educators:

- Keep a Calendar.
- Keep a "to do" list AND PRIORITY THE LIST.
- Do the most important tasks when you have the most energy.
- Break big jobs into smaller tasks.
- Organize storage and work space.
- Keep important documents in one spot.
- Avoid procrastination and time robbers.
- Arrange for "fun" time with your children and by yourself.
- Let others help.
- Remember to keep practicing.

Source: *Gateway to a Better Life Curriculum. Lesson 6, Handout 4: "Tips for Taking Charge"*. University of California Cooperative Extension, 1998. Adapted from materials developed by Fond Du Lac County, Wisc., Family Living Program Staff.

It's About Time—Balancing Work and Family

Time is a valuable and unique resource. It is limited to 24 hours a day, no matter who you are or what you do. When you work and take care of a family, it is not easy to find enough time to do everything that needs to be done. The first step in improving how we balance work and family is to become aware of how we use our time.

Help your clients assess how they use time by asking them to think about the statements listed, recording the responses that best fit their life, and then totaling those numbers to find their "time management score".

How Do I Use Time?

During a typical day, I feel rushed—

1. Always
2. Often
3. Sometimes
4. Never

I wish I had more time to spend with my family members—

1. Always
2. Often
3. Sometimes
4. Never

My daily schedule is best described by—

1. There aren't enough hours in the day to do everything.
2. I have just about enough time to do what I have to do.
3. I usually do what I have to do, with a little time left over.
4. I usually get things done with time left over to enjoy my family and myself.

On an average night, I sleep for—

1. Less than five hours
2. Six hours
3. Seven hours
4. More than seven

While talking on the telephone, I am likely to—

1. Do paperwork, wash dishes or some other chore
2. Straighten the surrounding area
3. Do small personal tasks (like file nails, reset watch)
4. Do nothing else

I don't plan ahead and find that when I get home there isn't anything to eat—

1. Always
2. Often
3. Sometimes
4. Never

I am so busy, I end up forgetting and missing some appointments that I made earlier—

1. Always
2. Often
3. Sometimes
4. Never

How do your clients use their time? Are they "Time Experts" (total score 22 to 28), where time management is a strength and they balance their time well. Are they "Time Jugglers" (total score 15 to 21), where they have started to use their time well but could use some tips on how to manage better? Or are they "Time Strugglers" (total score 14 or less), where working and caring for their families fill all their time?

Few of us are "Time Experts". But by thinking about the time we have, learning some basic skills for time management, and planning ahead, your client's days may go smoother.

Source: *Gateway to a Better Life Curriculum*, University of California Cooperative Extension, 1998.

Learning to Manage Time

Employers want employees to be punctual, dependable, and thorough. Your client's ability to manage time is essential to his/her success. This means developing the skills and abilities to plan work and home life in an organized way.

In *Bridges Out of Poverty: Strategies for Professionals and Communities*, the authors state "Planning requires a mental model for time, space, and part to whole... a mental model for time that includes a past, present, and future." (Payne, et. al., p. 156) For individuals in poverty, time is often the present and their ability to determine the

amount of time a task will take is not developed. Help your clientele develop this mental model by teaching them to realistically plan how much time tasks will take both at home and in the workplace. You can start by having your clients learn to plan their time:

- Identify a task necessary to their home or work success.
- Set a task completion date.
- Plan the steps necessary to accomplish the task.
- Determine the amount of time

necessary for each of these steps.

- Take action on their plan.
- When the task is completed, analyze whether their time allocations were realistic.

Encouraging your clients to practice managing their time will help them develop positive work behavior skills and strengthen their ability to "bridge" the gap between welfare and work.

Source: Payne, Ruby K., DeVol, Philip, & Dreussi Smith, Terie, *Bridges Out of Poverty: Strategies for Professionals and Communities*. aha! Process, Inc., 2001.

The Time Dilemma—Quantity vs. Quality

With growing numbers of parents becoming employed under welfare reform, most researchers are finding that as parents work hours increase, the quantity of time they have with their children decreases. This decline is a concern for parenting and family life experts.

One recent research study at the University of California Berkeley, the Growing Up in Poverty Project (GUP), followed mothers and their pre-school age children for two to four years after the women entered the new welfare program. Analysis of responses from 336 mothers in California and Florida who had participated in the study for two years indicated that employment was closely related to whether mothers reported a decrease in time spent with the child. "Among currently employed mothers, 45% said that time together had decreased, compared to 25% reporting that decreased time among the jobless group."¹

Ellen Galinsky, President of the Families and Work Institute, looked at the time issue as part of her book *Ask the Children*, based on in-depth interviews and surveys with a nationally representative sample of working parents and children 18 years old or younger. She concluded that both "... the amount of time and what hap-

pens in that time matter."² Her study revealed that parents and children consider being unrushed and focused as the most important aspect of the time they spend together. She defined "focused time" as "being attuned to the child's cues and clues; paying attention; and being responsive".² She termed unrushed time as "hang-around time" and defined it... "as time when the parent and child are not necessarily interacting, but are nearby."²

The reality is that as our clients go to work, their available time to interact with their children will decrease. Our role as teachers and trainers should include helping parents make room in their daily schedules for focused and unrushed parent/child interaction time. This might include activities such as: reading books *together*; playing games or exercising *together*; talking/listening *together*; playing in the park *together*; attending school/after school events *together*; preparing and/or eating family meals *together*; cleaning the house/yard *together*; or even relaxing on a Saturday or Sunday morning *together*.

Contact your local county Cooperative Extension office for a list of curriculums and publications for helping parents develop skills for managing their time and becoming more involved with their children.

Sources:

¹ The Growing Up in Poverty Project. "New Lives for Poor Families? Mothers and Young Children Move Through Welfare Reform-Technical Report". Wave 2 Findings from California, Connecticut, and Florida. April 2002. pp. 63-69. Available online at: http://pace.berkeley.edu/pace_new_release.html.

² Galinsky, Ellen. *Ask the Children: what America's children really think about working parents*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1999. pp. 308-316. Available online at: http://www.familiesandwork.org/publications/index_2.html.



Professional's Corner—Increasing Productivity by Getting Organized

The principles of organization—first things first, one thing at a time, when in doubt, throw it out—have been around for years. The techniques of getting organized are obvious: making lists, planning ahead, avoiding distractions, clearing away clutter. And, it's relatively easy. The problem is staying organized and for most of us, it is a lifetime project.

Where do you begin? You may want to begin with cleanup if the mess has become too overwhelming. However, it may be best to start with the most difficult problem—time management.

First, unjam your schedule by taking on less. Whether at home, work, or both, cutting down on the extras often helps you concentrate on what's important to you. Learn to say “no” tactfully but decisively.

There may be some tasks that you can delegate to other members of the household or others at work. Delegating to subordinates is nothing new. The skill is learning how to delegate work back to those above you when appropriate. However, be prepared for your boss and/or the recipient of your delegation to pass the job back to you.

No matter how hard you may try to avoid it, making a list may be the only way to make sure you get everything done. Making a list before you leave work can get you off to a fast start the next day. It may help to have a long-term list for all those jobs that have deadlines in the future and an everyday “to do” list. Putting the list in a special notebook or on a different color paper may help ensure easy access at all time. Of course, if you're one of those people who puts everything in a “safe place” and never sees anything again, a list probably won't help.

In fact, lists don't work well for everyone. Some people consistently make long daily lists without realistically estimating how long each job will take. Most of Monday's “to do's” become Tuesday's, Wednesday's, or Thursday's. The result is total frustration and the list is abandoned.

Goal-setting is another common technique for making sure you get done what



you want to get done. Whether it be for the job or the family, goal-setting can help you get organized. Unfortunately, many people find the idea totally repulsive and make it more complex than it need be. Start by working on some simple goals and build on your success.

Try taking a task-oriented approach and ask yourself what you want to accomplish during the next few months or year. List those items you know must happen such as doing the taxes or submitting quarterly reports. Then add ongoing projects and gradually you'll work up to adding new items. Next, take a calendar and start planning time for each activity in advance. For items that require concentration, plan blocks of time so you can really get things done. Try to plan “high energy” time so you can get a lot done. Then, make sure you work on these tasks as scheduled.

Now that you've allowed for major items, what do you do with all those little tasks that have nothing to do with your goals in life, such as collecting for the hospitality fund? Again, make an appointment with yourself for once a week during “low energy” times and do everything at once.

What do you do when you're organized, but you're interrupted? You can always tell people to “get lost!” but it probably won't win you too many friends. At home, perhaps you can remove yourself from the mainstream of traffic. At the office, perhaps you can move your desk so you can avoid eye contact with persons passing by. As long as you don't make it obvious that you're trying to avoid people, you should be

able to have privacy without alienating everyone.

The telephone is, of course, an entirely different problem. You need to develop tactful techniques for limiting conversations. Try calling people shortly before lunch; then both parties will probably be interested in keeping the conversation short.

In the office, your desk is probably one of the worst distractions. Incoming mail and the piles of “very important” papers, to say nothing of the morning e-mails, all offer a convenient distraction. Having a messy, piled desk is not an indication of importance, and may be a reflection of your organizational abilities. So, organize your desk. Plan to open your mail at a set time everyday and remove items you're not working on from the desk top. This will help you to concentrate and use work time effectively.

The desk “clean-up” effort can be aided by throwing away the clutter and items you don't need to keep. If you have doubt about keeping something, ask yourself if you can easily get a copy somewhere else. If yes, pitch it. Most likely you'll never need to get that copy. For the items you keep, put them in order. Perhaps you could have files marked, “reading,” “immediate action,” “pending,” “referrals,” and “filing.”

There's nothing complicated about “getting organized,” but it takes time. For most people, the increased productivity more than makes up for the time spent organizing.

10-Minute Pick-up

Why?

Family members, depending on their ages, share responsibility in keeping their homes clean and organized. This activity can help make sure that things are getting done at home. It is also a fun way for family members to combine energies, get jobs done faster and feel good about doing their part.

What do we need?

- Oven timer or alarm
- Up-beat music of your choice
- Whatever cleaning materials you need

How long will it take?

10 minutes (or 5 or 15, whatever you choose)

What do we do?

1. Give each family member a section of a room to clean. For example the table, floor, picking up clutter, etc.
2. Make sure everyone has the cleaning supplies they need to do their jobs.
3. Set the time and shout, Go!
4. Ask each family member to do a good job quickly cleaning as much of their area as they can until the buzzer goes off. If anyone finishes before the buzzer goes off he or she can help another family member.
5. When the time is up, allow a few minutes for last-minute cleaning. Then stand back and join in a round of applause for all who did such a marvelous job in such a short time!
6. After working on one room, the entire family can work together on another room or area. For example the living room.



Adapted from materials developed by Fond du Lac County, Wisconsin, Family Living Program Staff.



¡Limpieza en 10 minutos!

¿Por qué?

Los miembros de la familia, de acuerdo con su edad, comparten la responsabilidad de ayudar a mantener el hogar limpio y ordenado. Esta actividad puede ser muy útil para asegurarse que se hagan todos los quehaceres en el hogar. Además, es una manera divertida para que todos en la familia usen su energía, completen los quehaceres y se sientan satisfechos de lo que hacen.

¿Qué necesitamos?

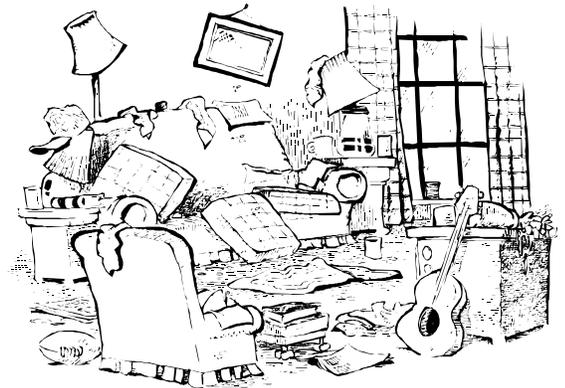
- Un despertador o reloj automático
- Música alegre que a todos les guste
- Materiales de limpieza necesarios

¿Cuánto tiempo nos tomará?

10 minutos (o si lo prefiere, 5 ó 15 minutos)

¿Qué hacemos?

1. Asigne a cada persona una parte del cuarto que van a limpiar. Por ejemplo, la mesa, el piso, recoger las cosas del suelo, etc.
2. Asegúrese de que todos tengan lo necesario para la limpieza.
3. Ponga el reloj o despertador y grite "¡A la carga!"
4. Pídale a cada uno que se esmere en limpiar lo que alcance, hasta que suene la alarma. Si alguien termina antes de que suene la alarma, puede ayudar a otra persona.
5. Cuando suene la alarma, dé unos minutos de más para darle los últimos toques a la limpieza. Luego, agrúpanse todos en el mismo lugar para contemplar la excelente labor que han hecho, en tan poco tiempo, y ¡aplaúdirse unos a otros!
6. Después de limpiar un cuarto, toda la familia puede trabajar junta limpiando otro cuarto o área, por ejemplo, la sala.



Adaptado de materiales desarrollados por el condado Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, Family Living Program.



SUBSCRIPTION INFORMATION

California residents should contact their local county Cooperative Extension Nutrition, Family and Consumer Science advisor. Their phone number can be found in the county section of the government pages of your local phone directory.

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