

Work-life Balance



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**Education
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Work-life Balance

Work-life balance is something that is often spoken about in the education sector, but is often difficult to achieve.

Do you identify with any of these statements?

I have seen my family grow up without me!

There has been a huge reduction in my social life due to work at home (I regularly work more hours outside of college than I am contracted to work each week)

Weekends are planned around work

Not sleeping, too much wine, too tired to enjoy 'down time', no family time, very little contact with friends

I shout and swear at home because I feel unheard and unsupported at work so it is destroying my relationship with my family

(Quotes taken from the Education Support Partnership Health and Wellbeing Survey, 2011)



If you recognised yourself in any of these statements, you might want to look at how you balance your work life with your life outside of school, college or university.

Work-life balance is notoriously difficult to find. According to findings from the Office of National Statistics, almost one in two (48.4 %) of adults aged 16 and over in Great Britain report a relatively low satisfaction with their work-life balance. This is particularly applicable to education. Teachers do 20% of their work (10 hours or more) before school, after 6pm or on weekends. This can have a dramatic impact on a teacher's life. One teacher told us:

"I had completely lost my boundaries, I didn't know where my job ended and myself started. It had all become this glutinous, amorphous thing."

Unlike most other professions, teachers feel a responsibility to their colleagues, pupils, students and schools even when they are not working. 59% of teachers who responded to the Education Support Partnership's health survey confirmed that they had adapted their behaviour outside of school, because they thought it would impact on their role within school.

Effects of poor work-life balance

The side effects of a poor work-life balance can include:

Personal life

- ▶ poor relationships
- ▶ poor social life
- ▶ detachment from others
- ▶ lack of time with children
- ▶ lack of time with friends

Health

- ▶ exhaustion
- ▶ anxiety
- ▶ sickness in holidays
- ▶ absence from work
- ▶ loss of voice
- ▶ panic attacks
- ▶ infertility

Wellbeing

- ▶ no exercise
- ▶ lack of sleep
- ▶ lack of control
- ▶ short-tempered
- ▶ loss of confidence
- ▶ poor quality of life

If you are experiencing any of these symptoms for a prolonged period, you should contact your GP or a health care professional.

What can I do about it?

As with your workload, there will always be discussions on how to achieve the perfect balance between your work life and your home life, but ultimately, it will be up to you to achieve it.

One of the difficulties in finding a balance is that life constantly changes and there will be times when your career requires more effort and time than your personal life and vice versa. The key is to have strategies and techniques already in place, so that you can maintain a balanced lifestyle.



Setting your own goals

Once you have assessed your current work life balance, you can begin to set some goals about changing or maintaining your work-life balance.

It can be helpful to start by setting smaller goals for changes in your general work pattern than to tackle everything at once.

Keep a diary for a week or two about how you work. Ask yourself what patterns you might be able to change and set yourself specific goals – but write these in a positive way, focusing on the benefit of the change, not the problem.

- ▶ Set a time to finish each day during the term, such as 6pm to leave time for dinner, exercise and time with friends or family.
 - ▶ Set free time on weekends and/or on some weeknights.
 - ▶ Think about signing up to a regular, scheduled activity or group, such as a spinning class or book club. This will ensure that you make time each week or month for an activity you enjoy.
 - ▶ Set personal goals you want to achieve, such as “I want to learn to play the piano”, or “I want to go to the gym twice a week.”
- ▶ Start slowly. You can't expect to change your entire life overnight. Introduce small changes, such as regular 15-minute relaxation breaks into your schedule. As you begin to get used to these breaks and your work patterns adapt, gradually increase the length of these breaks.
 - ▶ Schedule a break during the day. Research from Bupa in January 2011 found that only three in 10 UK workers take a lunch break, but almost half of those questioned (48%) felt that their productivity plummeted in the afternoon around 3pm and as a result lost 40 minutes of their day due to the dip.
 - ▶ Set time to exercise. Although, it is often one of the first things to go when we feel stressed, exercise boosts energy levels, and can help us be more productive as a result.
 - ▶ Separate home and work. Can you stay a little longer at school and leave the marking behind? At home, keep the paperwork out of the bedroom or move it to another room before you go to sleep.
 - ▶ Be prepared. Priorities can change over the course of a year, not to mention over the length of a career. What can you put in place now to ensure that your work and life remain balanced in the future?



Write your goals down

Once you have set yourself goals, write them down. You are far more likely to achieve your goals, once you have written them down. Not only will it commit them to memory but it gives you something to refer to later when you feel overwhelmed.

Tips to improve work-life balance

Actively change your state of mind when you go home

Take fresh air, exercise or enjoy a nice, hot bath. Try to leave the anxiety and worry of the day behind at school. Physically separate your home life from your work life. If you can, leave your books, marking and assessments behind. If you do have to take them home, leave them in a room where you can close the door when you have finished, and make sure this is away from where you sleep. Have different email and social media accounts for your home and your work.

In the holidays

Support your body by taking plenty of Vitamin C, drink lots of water, wrap up warm and enjoy some gentle exercise in the fresh air. Allow yourself time to unwind and do not overwhelm your social calendar with little time to rest. Do not try to accommodate everyone else's needs. Prioritise what you want to do and give yourself permission to serve your needs first. Rest. Do not fill the holiday with work you have not been able to do during term time.

Find time and space

Create some time and space for reflection – not only to think about your approach at work, but also your personal life and relationships. Get up 30 minutes early, or take 30 minutes when you get back from work to sit and be calm. Do a time log to make sure that you're making the most of the day and spending the right amount of time on each task.



Review how well you did at the end of the week, notice which barriers got in the way and how you might remove them.

At work

There will always be more to do than there is time to do it. Prioritise and talk to your line manager if you cannot physically do all that is being asked of you. They should be able to provide some support. Make sure you always take a lunch break and limit checking emails to twice a day. Try to minimise unnecessary meetings – could the issue be solved or discussed with a simple phone call or email – and keep those that need to happen on track with an agenda. An hour is plenty. Do not over commit yourself – teachers are a conscientious bunch and it is tempting to always say yes to everything asked of you.

Planning and paperwork

It's important to build up a bank of readily accessible resources that will engage the students without too much reliance on you and your materials. Do not fall into over-planning lessons. Reports can also mean a heavy workload over a short period of time, particularly if you have multiple classes. Try to plan ahead, ask for help if it's needed and develop a 'statement bank' that you can use as a starting point.

Enjoy the autonomy

Teachers often feel as if they are just churning through the work and feel over directed. But many have more autonomy than they realise, particularly in class. Make your lessons enjoyable for yourself and students, tell the stories you want to tell and include activities you want to do. Ignore the stay-late culture and don't be afraid to politely ask for time off if you have an important family event.

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