

IMPACT



University of Idaho
Cooperative
Extension System

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Balancing Work and Family: Helping Working Parents Meet Family Needs

The Situation

Today's parents struggle to meet the needs of their families at the same time as they handle the demands of a working day. Long working hours, changing shifts, problems with child care and transportation, difficulties keeping in touch with schools, and lack of time for family, friends and neighbors are among the work/family topics of conversation common in workplace coffee rooms around the country. Those challenges may be most intense for single parents, without other family adults who can help meet the family need. Those with limited incomes may be especially frustrated, with few financial resources for childcare, transportation, and other needs. A recent move may introduce new problems, as parents work to re-establish a network of friends and family to help meet family needs. With the initiation of welfare reform and its new work orientation, attention to the challenges of balancing work and family was especially timely.

Our Response

The University of Idaho Cooperative Extension and the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare joined forces to develop a curriculum to help ease the work/family conflict of these working parents. The curriculum was designed for working families of all varieties, with special sensitivity to those families where the need may be greatest.

Lessons were developed to help working parents find ways to effectively meet family needs in the areas of money, food, and family life. In initial sessions, participants would learn to develop a spending plan that allows them to best meet family needs with the funds they have available. Other topics included strategies for shopping and cooking for family in the context of a working day. Final sessions addressed some of the challenges in caring for the family, such as easing the transitions ahead for family members, and making the most of family time together. The course format was designed to foster the development of basic skills, such as group problem solving, building community ties, managing transitions, and planning for the challenges ahead.

Achievements

After a year in place, over 125 families have participated in the Balancing Work and Family curriculum through Cooperative Extension programming. The course is also being offered by other related agencies working with the welfare to work program in Idaho. All participants in the training report that they learned strategies and ideas that they adopted into their family practice, including areas such as food buying and preparation, budget balancing, stress management, family communication, and building a support network.

Even more families have benefited from newsletter articles on the topic. Not surprisingly, overburdened working families sometimes have a hard time



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finding time to take a class on how to ease their burden. Newsletter columns and media presentations make a good alternative for these parents, putting strategies within their reach that can benefit all family members.

In a final project, we have developed a set of handouts with suggestions for balancing work and family needs on such issues as keeping in touch with school, family communication, and enlisting children to help with household chores. These are designed in a convenient format for distribution by schools, childcare centers, etc.

Cooperators and Co-Sponsors

University of Idaho Cooperative Extension System
and the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare.

For More Information

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