

Your Employee Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Getting Back to Basics: Strategies for Simplifying Life

Although people have faced challenges in every generation, few had to juggle the endless list of complicated responsibilities we struggle with today. Workplace requirements, debt load commitments, the added responsibilities of two-career parenthood… all have added to the challenges we face. If you have ever dreamed of streamlining your life and getting back to basics, perhaps now is the time.

Getting back to basics is essentially about re-connecting with a life that's rooted in basic values, rather than on the expectations or lifestyles of others. This doesn't have to mean going back to the Stone Age —many of today's conveniences can be vital parts of a simplified life.

By engaging in the steps outlined below, you'll be well on your way to a more relaxed, more fulfilling life:

Review your values.

- Reflect on the values that you would like to live by.
- Consider aspects of your current life that don't fit your values.
- Open discussion with family and problem-solve how to focus more on your individual and collective values.
- Consider which values could be compromised and which can't.
- Reflect whether a lifestyle change might be in order e.g., changing jobs, cutting back hours, working from home or moving.

Simplify family life.

- Reflect on current demands and consider how many of these demands relate to others' expectations rather than your own values.
- Review extra-curricula activities. Are they all necessary or just "something everyone does"? Let children choose just one extra-curricular activity—they may benefit from extra down-time with the family.
- Simplify meals. Do a monthly bulk cook-up with a friend. Share the results and split them into family-meal freezer portions that can go straight into the microwave.
- Switch the TV and computers off at least one night a week. Enjoy board games or play cards.
- Consider simplified vacations closer to home.

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Cut back on flashy purchases.

- Model values for your children—think twice before buying designer items.
- If older children want expensive items, let them earn money by doing chores—then it's up to them how they spend the money they earn.
- Borrow books, CDs and videos from the library. Explore classic favorites with friends or family.
- At birthdays and holidays, encourage children to give one of their gifts to a local charity for donation to a needy family.

Focus your social time.

- Don't accept invitations to social functions you don't enjoy—you'll have fewer social obligations to return.
- Invite friends over for casual weekend brunch parties or barbecues—children included. They cost less than evening affairs and they're often more fun.
- Instead of being torn in numerous directions, decide to focus on just one charity program, school volunteer role or community initiative. Throw all your efforts into the direction you choose and refuse all others without feeling guilty.
- If there never seems time to lunch with friends, join up for gardening or other chores that have to be done anyway.

Simplify your finances.

Simplify your expectations of yourself. Part of feeling overwhelmed by the complexity of our lives may have to do with the expectations that we have of ourselves. Sometimes, our expectations of what we can accomplish in our personal time can be unrealistic.

Letting go of the need to do everything and to be perfect in everything can help open our minds to creative ways to simplify our lives.

There are many factors that may contribute to feeling overwhelmed by the complexity of our lives and sometimes these factors are not always clear. Many people find it beneficial to speak to a professional counselor, who can assist in identifying the source of such a problem and suggest ways to help.

Balancing the multiple demands of life today is an ongoing challenge. The true task at hand is not trying to do everything. Instead, figure out what you must absolutely accomplish today because it is truly important, and then set your mind and efforts toward getting these one or two essential things done.

- Consider consolidating debts on one low-rate interest card or loan.
- Keep just one credit card and save it for emergencies.
- Cut clothing costs—factory outlets and used clothing stores offer great bargains.
- Cut costly fitness club membership and go jogging, cycling or swimming with friends.
- If you have two cars, re-think whether they're both necessary.
- Be a financially wise food shopper.
- Consider growing your own vegetables and herbs—you'll not only get better tasting food, you might have fun doing it.