

## **Work and Family**

By Randy Daron, Psy.D.

Did you know that October is designated as National Work and Family Month?

In 2003 the US Senate unanimously passed Resolution 210 designating October as National Work & Family Month and more recently, on Oct. 14, 2009, both the U.S. House and the U.S. Senate approved (unanimously) resolutions declaring October National Work and Family Month. Dedicating a month to work and family issues encourages all workplaces to pause once a year and reflect on the progress already made on the journey to work-life effectiveness, to celebrate and then raise the bar moving on to even more pervasive progress.

It may or may not seem apparent to us as to why there is a need to pay special attention to family issues at work. **A variety of studies and reports have cited examples of the importance of the consideration of “Work-Life” issues that affect workers and the workplace:**

- 85 percent of wage and salaried workers in the United States have immediate, day-to-day family responsibilities outside of their jobs.
- 47 percent of wage and salaried workers in the United States are parents with children under the age of 18 who live with them at least half-time.
- Unpaid family caregivers will likely continue to be the largest source of long-term care services in the United States for the elderly.
- The Department of Health and Human Services anticipates that by 2050 the number of such caregivers will reach 37,000,000, an increase of 85 percent from 2000, as baby boomers reach retirement age in record numbers.

**Other cited research which demonstrates the important role and interplay between work and family:**

- Research has shown that men in their 20s and 30s and women in their 20s, 30s, and 40s identify a work schedule that allows them to spend time with their families as the most important job characteristic for them.
- Research by the Sloan Center for Aging and Work reveals that the majority of workers aged 53 and older attribute their success as an employee by a great or moderate extent to having access to flexibility in their jobs and that the majority of those workers also report that, to a great extent, flexibility options contribute to an overall higher quality of life.
- A 2008 report by the Families and Work Institute, showed that employees in more flexible and supportive workplaces are more effective employees, are more highly engaged and less likely to look for a new job in the next year, and enjoy better overall health, better mental health, and lower levels of stress than employees in workplaces that provide less flexibility and support.
- According to a 2004 report of the Families and Work Institute entitled “Overwork in America”, employees who are able to effectively balance family and work responsibilities are less likely to report making mistakes or feel resentment toward employers and coworkers.
- According to the “Best Places to Work in the Federal Government” rankings released by the Partnership for Public Service and American University’s Institute for the Study of Public Policy

Implementation, work-life balance and a family-friendly culture are among the key drivers of engagement and satisfaction for employees in the Federal workforce.

**In regards to parents:**

- Job flexibility often allows parents to be more involved in their children's lives and research demonstrates that parental involvement is associated with children's higher achievement in language and mathematics, improved behavior, greater academic persistence, and lower dropout rates.
- A 2000 study demonstrated that a lack of job flexibility for working parents negatively affects children's health in ways that range from children being unable to make needed doctors' appointments to children receiving inadequate early care, leading to more severe and prolonged illness.
- Studies report that family rituals, such as sitting down to dinner together and sharing activities on weekends and holidays, positively influence children's health and development and that children who eat dinner with their families every day consume nearly a full serving more of fruits and vegetables per day than those who never eat dinner with their families or do so only occasionally.
- Studies show that 1/3 of children and adolescents in the United States are obese or overweight, and healthy lifestyle habits, including healthy eating and physical activity, can lower the risk of becoming obese and developing related diseases.

More and more, there is evidence that supporting a balance between work and personal life is in the best interest of the employee and the employer. Reducing the conflict between work and family life *should* be a national priority and employees and employers both play a role in the intersection of work and family. Employers can offer inexpensive and effective ways to allow enrichment, flexibility and balance to employees. Employees need to utilize work-life programs, explore various options available to help balance work and family demands, and seek services to positively affect their personal wellness. Two organizations who have been central in advancing work and family issues are the [Alliance for Work-Life Progress](#) (AWLP) and [WorldatWork](#). They can be a good source of information for employees as well as managers. Many resources that are dedicated to helping you to achieve some balance at work, improve your wellness and increase your understanding of a variety of topics affecting you at home and at work are located here on the **UCSF Living Well portal**. Please take a moment to reflect on your work and family issues and explore some options.

*Randy Daron is the Acting Director of the Work~Life Resource Center at UCSF. The WLRC is dedicated creating, improving and sustaining an infrastructure that humanizes the UCSF workplace and promotes work-life balance.*