



## ***Balance as a Long-Term Proposition***

A very wise therapist-friend told me he works with clients to understand that life-balance is a long-term proposition. He said many of his clients are stressed-out because they are trying to balance all of the roles in their lives on a daily or weekly basis. He believes taking such a short-term perspective on life-balance just adds to people's stress level. Instead, he suggests they take a long-term view. For example, when someone has young children much of their time and energy goes to parenting. As the children grow and become more independent the parent spends less time on parenting and has more time available for other areas of life. A parent with small children who is attempting to balance all of the roles in her life may find herself constantly frustrated and exhausted. There just aren't enough hours in the day to do it all! The same is often true for family caregivers of aging relatives.

As my therapist-friend noted one of the main reasons people seek out therapy is a desire for life-balance. If you share this desire, how can you create a sense of balance in your life? One way to do this is shift from the short-term to the long-term perspective on life balance. Following is an idea that can help you do this...

1. Find a quiet place where you can sit undisturbed for at least 30 minutes, and hopefully longer.
2. Write down all the different areas of your life. These could include: education, job/career, spouse/partner, parent, recreational activities that you enjoy, social life/friends, parent care, volunteering, travel, spirituality and any other areas that are pertinent for you.
3. Write down 3 main things that you would like to accomplish during your lifetime in each of these areas.
4. Then, think of your life as a book with many chapters. Divide your life into 5 year "chapters". For example, 20-25, 25-30, 30-35, 40-45, etc. You can either start from your current age, or go back to early adulthood.
5. As you consider each of these chapters, it is likely you will discover that one or two life-areas dominate. Currently, it might be caring for an aging relative and work –and possibly also raising children. Write down the areas of your life that naturally dominate in the various chapters.
6. As you do this, you will find that there are chapters in your life that are not as busy; in which you have more discretion in what you focus on and how you spend your time. In those chapters record the life-areas that perhaps you wish you could give more time to right now – for example your social life or travel or recreational activities. You should find that you have time for all of the life-areas during the course of your life. If not, you might want to consider doing this exercise with someone else who can help you see ways to adjust your "life book" to have long-term balance...you really can have balance over the long-term and you should consult with someone else if you can't see how to create it for yourself!



De-stressing Tip: Remember that your life is made up of many chapters. When you get stressed by a lack of life-balance, stop and recognize which chapter you are in and what area of your life is dominating during this chapter. You can look at your list and see that those areas of your life that you feel are currently being short-changed will receive more time and energy at another time. This practice will help you focus on the needs of the current chapter with less of a sense that you are “missing out”, and remind you that life-balance is, indeed, a long-term proposition! You can’t do it all today, but you can do it all over the course of your life.

Dr. Amy