
Not Enough Hours in the Day?

“There are many things I want to do. I want to finish my education, find a different job, and volunteer in my child’s school. Yet time just disappears and I don’t get these things done. There are so many things to do each day. I never have time to plan. I feel lucky if I get through the day in one piece!”

Most families today have hectic lives. Most parents feel they have too little time and too much to do. The first step to making the most of your time, however, is thinking about your goals. What is important to you?



Why have goals?

Having goals helps define what is important to you. They help you decide how to spend your time. Goals are something meaningful a person works to achieve. Goals usually answer the question: *Who wants what and when?*

You may have personal goals such as losing weight, staying in touch with friends or finding a job. You also may have family goals such as making time to do fun family activities, working together to save money for a family vacation or volunteering together.

1. Determine your goals

All families have a set of values or beliefs. These are things that are important to a family. Thinking about your values helps to develop your goals. One family may value “family time” and set a goal of eating dinner together five times a week. Another family may value cooperation, with family members seeking ways to help each other.

Having goals gives you something to work toward. Think about the following questions and then list one or two goals for each.

- What do I want for myself?
- What do I want for my children?
- What do I want from my children?
- What do we want as a family?

Include the entire family when deciding the family's major goals. Goals may be short-range (our family will eat dinner together twice this week), intermediate (our family will save \$200 in the next six months to pay for holiday gifts), or long-term (our family will go camping together once a year).

2. Set priorities

It's easier to reach your goals if you focus only on one or two goals at a time. Working toward too many goals at the same time makes it hard to reach any of them. Ask yourself the following questions. Write down your responses to help you think about which of the goals you listed above are important and why.

- How many of your goals involve material goods, or things that can be purchased?
- Why are these goals important to you, to you and your children, or to your children?
- Are these realistic goals?
- How do the goals affect your behavior?
- How do these goals affect other people in your family?
- How much time do you currently spend working toward each of your goals?

Look at your list of goals and think about these questions. Assign a letter to each goal to show how important that goal is to you. Assign an *A* if it is very important, a *B* if it is somewhat important and a *C* if it is less important.

3. Reach your goals

You may now have many goals in mind, but how can you reach them? The following steps should help you reach your goals. Try these steps with one of your goals.

1. Define the goal.
2. List all the possible ways to reach the goal.
3. Develop a plan to reach the goal.
4. Carry out and evaluate the plan. Ask yourself and your family how the plan is working. Be flexible and make changes to your plan if needed.
5. Review the goal. Did the plan work well?

Here's an example of how to reach a goal using these steps.

1. **Define goal:** To have time to exercise three times a week.
2. **Possible ways to reach goal:** Get up early, take a long lunch or make time right before dinner.
3. **Plan:** Get up one hour early on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday.
4. **Evaluate:** Am I too tired to get up early? Do I need to make time during the day? Will I be depriving myself of sleep? Fridays are too busy in the morning, so I will make time to walk with my two children on Saturdays.
5. **Review:** The plan worked because I could change it and still meet my goal to exercise.

Make the most of your time

Reaching goals is learning to make the most of your time. The good news is there are things to do to “save” time. Choose three ideas from the following list that you will try.

- Plan daily “To Do” lists. Don’t forget to include day to day activities on your list. Post the list in the kitchen or someplace where you will see it.
- Allow small blocks of time for working toward goals and planning.
- Prioritize goals using the “A-B-C” system described above. Remember not to fill your time with “C” activities that are not as important to you.
- Get up early one or two days a week. Use the time to think and plan.
- Plan ahead for meals. Make extra meals on weekends and freeze them for the week ahead.
- Write down a list of main dishes for the week as a reminder.
- Schedule appointments together. For example, try to get dentist appointments back to back for a few family members.
- Have a special place to post reminders and special notes.
- Schedule time to relax.
- Use your “waiting time.” Don’t worry about what you could be doing, instead relax, read, or plan.
- Plan time for family meetings to discuss goals, family decisions and fun activities to do together.

Barriers and ways to change

It’s easy reading about what to do. Yet actually making the most of your time is another story. Knowing some of the barriers to making the most of your time should help you develop useful ways to maximize your time.



Barrier: Putting off until later what needs to be done now.

Way to Change: Divide a project into small deadlines and reward yourself for meeting each deadline. For example, if you feel overwhelmed by the cleaning, laundry, and cooking that has to be done, work on developing a schedule. On Mondays, clean the bathrooms, on Tuesdays, do the laundry, etc. - don’t forget to involve the whole family.

Barrier: Expecting perfection.

Way to Change: Work toward doing your best rather than perfection.

Barrier: Fear of saying no.

Way to Change: Practice different ways of saying no. If you commit to too many things, there will never be enough time to finish everything. Before you commit, think about how long it takes to do something.

Barrier: Clutter.

Way to Change: Learn to organize. Have a folder for receipts, for school forms, for emergencies, etc.

Barrier: Thinking about the past.

Way to Change: Focus on things you can change and work on them. Make time to think about your dreams and what you want to accomplish, but live in and respond to the present.

Source

Family focus: Supportive connections for single parent families. University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension Hughes, R. Parenting your own. University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

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