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WHEN THERE'S NOT ENOUGH TIME

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
College of Agriculture
Cooperative Extension Service
Circular 1249



You can manage your time to free you from repetitive, time-consuming tasks. There is a way you can have the time you need for enjoying life, for enriching the lives of your children, and for those other important goals in your life. Everyone has 168 hours a week. You can't get more, and you never have less. But you do need to learn how to use them effectively. Learning to use time is like learning your way around a new place. It becomes easier every day.

Set Goals and Priorities

Each family — including yours — has its own unique set of values and ways of doing things. Values represent what's important, such as education, financial security, and family unity. Before you tackle improving your time management skills, get in touch with what's important to you and your children and use this knowledge to decide on what you need and want. The specific desires are called goals.

Priorities, or how you rate your goals, change with the demands and events of life. Learn to recognize your priorities by making your needs and wants more concrete. Begin today deciding how you would like your life to be. Get a pad and pencil and write down your thoughts. Once you have a list of goals, you can decide just how important they are and when you want to achieve them.

All items on your list may not be equally

important. It may be hard to decide which to work toward first. Most of us are used to making lists — shopping lists, for example — on which everything is essential. One expert, Alan Lakein, in his book, *How to Get Control of Your Time and Your Life*, suggests that effective time use starts when we use an A-B-C priority system. Give a letter "A" to activities you want to do that are very important, a "B" to those that are semi-important, and a "C" to those that are less important. Much of what you do, you will discover, is made up of C's — the things that aren't too important for your family's happiness. How important is a wax-shine on the kitchen floor? Is it more important than spending time with a child? You decide.

Having a clearly defined goal — for example, "finding the right job before the end of this year" — gives you something to work toward. It would be remarkable if you could direct all energies toward one goal until it was completed. But in real life, there are many goals as well as other responsibilities and obligations that compete for your attention.

Make a list of the family's major goals — all the things you want to do during your lifetime. Then make a list of the goals you have for the rest of this year. Later you'll make a simple "do list" to cover shorter periods of time. Goals can be useful for long-, intermediate-, and short-range planning. Try to involve the entire family in making the lists. Most children enjoy sharing their goals.



"I save time by not cleaning. I keep a friend's kids in exchange for her doing the major housecleaning. I love it. It's the best thing that ever happened to me. She thinks it's great too."

Inventory Resources

A resource is anything your family can use to reach its goals or to meet the demands of the busy world you live in. Think about all the resources you can call upon to help achieve the goals that are important to your family. Many resources are personal — talents, skills, and atti-

tudes that help you toward your goals. You will find many other resources outside yourself, including schools, churches, relatives, and community agencies. Getting to know the organizations that can provide services is one of the important first steps in managing your time and your life.

Our Family Resources

List some of the important resources you have or know about that can help you achieve your goals.

Personal Resources (Examples: high school diploma, ability to make household repairs, sense of humor): _____

Family Resources (Examples: apartment, camping equipment, ability to work together): _____

Community Resources (Examples: women's center, church, job service office, playground): _____



Use Community Resources

The following organizations are found in many communities. The address of the national, regional, or state organization is given below. If you cannot find the agency in your local telephone directory, write and ask for the name of the nearest chapter or office.

The Adoption Information Center of Illinois, 201 North Wells Street, Suite 1342, Chicago, Illinois, 60606, or call toll free 800-522-2390, for information on all aspects of adoption.

American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy, 1717 K Street, N.W. #407, Washington, D.C., 20006. Help in locating family counselors and services.

Big Brothers/Big Sisters of America, 230 North 13th Street, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 19107. Can provide children activities with adults.

Boys Clubs of America, Midwest Service Center, 1535 Burgundy Parkway, Streamwood, Illinois, 60103. Can provide locations of supervised activities for youth.

Boy Scouts of America, 1325 Walnut Hill Lane, Irving, Texas, 75038-3096. Can provide addresses of local organizations sponsoring supervised learning activities for children and youth.

Closer Look, 1201 16th Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036. Can provide information for parents of handicapped children.

Cooperative Extension Service, University of Illinois, 122 Mumford Hall, 1301 West Gregory Drive, Urbana, Illinois, 61801. Provides programs for youth and adults.

Family Service America, 44 East 23rd Street, New York, New York, 10010. Help in locating appropriate agencies for counseling and therapy. (Send a self-addressed, stamped envelope for information.)

Girls Clubs of America, 205 Lexington Avenue, New York, New York, 10016. Can provide structured activities for children; newsletter, *Voice for Girls*.

Girl Scouts of the USA, 830 Third Avenue, New York, New York, 10022. Can provide opportunities for youth to work with adult volunteers.

National Foundation for Consumer Credit, 8701 Georgia Avenue, Silver Springs, Maryland, 20910. Affiliate agencies provide help in budgeting and credit planning.

Parents Without Partners, 7910 Woodmont Avenue, Bethesda, Maryland, 20814, or call toll free 800-638-8078. Provides balanced education program of family and adult activities.





Our Community Resources

The following agencies are usually part of your local, state, or federal government. Look in the telephone directory under the name of your county, city, or state for the address and telephone number of the agency from which you'd like more information.

For general assistance in obtaining resources and financial assistance:

- Department of Children and Family Services
- Department of Public Aid
- Department of Labor (Job Service — State Employment Service)
- Department of Veterans Affairs

For help with housing:

- State Housing Development

For help with day care services:

- Federally subsidized centers, child-patient centers

For educational needs of children:

- Head Start
- Public and private schools
- Parent and teacher organizations
- Superintendent of schools

For health and counseling:

- Department of Health and Human Services
- Department of Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities
- Department of Public Health
- Department of Rehabilitation Services
- Illinois Career Information Delivery System

For legal help:

- American Civil Liberties Union
- Attorney General's Office (Consumer Protection Division)
- Department of Human Rights (Equal Employment Opportunities)
- State's Attorney Office

Some other organizations (also listed in your telephone directory) that may be helpful are listed below:

- American Red Cross
- Child Abuse and Neglect Reporting (Department of Children and Family Services)
- Children's Home and Aid Society
- Parents Anonymous (Child Abuse)
- Salvation Army
- United Way

Various agencies are affiliated with religious groups. Look under the name of the religious organization.





Overcome Time Management Barriers

There are times when events, other persons, and our feelings keep us from accomplishing what we want. Everybody has some of these

barriers some of the time. Think about how often they slow you down:

Barriers	Always	Sometimes	Rarely	Ways to Change
1. PROCRASTINATION — putting off until later what needs to be done now.				Give yourself a reward for meeting a deadline.
2. PERFECTIONISM — regarding anything short of perfect as unacceptable.				Strive for excellence and let others worry about perfection.
3. FEAR OF SAYING NO — worrying about how others will react when you can't agree.				Learn to decline tactfully, but firmly, requests that do not help you meet your goals.
4. CLUTTER — scattered and disordered things that reduce effectiveness.				Avoid accumulating things and shuffling them aimlessly.
5. PREOCCUPATION WITH PAST — excessive concern with former happenings, good or bad.				Stop dwelling on the past. Think of the future and work toward it.

Make the Most of Your Time

There are many ways single parents can make the most of their time. Here are a few. Add your successful ideas to the list:

- **Get up early.** Get a head start on the day by getting up a half-hour early a few days a week. Sometimes this is a good way for a parent to do some thinking and planning before children are up for the day.
- **Plan ahead for meals.** If you're preparing food like a casserole or meat loaf, make two. You can store extras in the freezer, so that popping them in the oven is all that's left to be done before mealtimes. If you're shopping, buy two sale items if you'll be able to use both. This will save shopping time. Post a list of main dishes as a reminder of what's planned for each night of the week. This should save planning and preparation time each day.



“You have a schedule just for you . . . on Mondays and Wednesdays, aerobic dancing, on every other Saturday get a sitter and go to a movie with friends, or out to eat with friends . . . or just be on your own.”

- **Schedule appointments together.** Try to schedule dental checkups and annual physicals so that the entire family can go together. One long visit to the family doctor or dentist is usually more convenient than several short ones.
- **Take advantage of the marketplace.** Occasional meals purchased at carryout restaurants are well received by the family and can save much time in the kitchen. Watch for specials on products and services. If you can find enough funds in your budget, take advantage of specials and use the time you've saved from shopping for those A-items. Discounts on food and clothing are often advertised and taking advantage of them can save you valuable time and energy.
- **Put up signs or notes.** A sign on your refrigerator will remind you of your goals or special plans. You may want to designate a special place for notes and reminders to and from family members.
- **Give up “waiting” time.** Use time before appointments or in lines to relax, to plan to do something you would not otherwise have done, to read, or to write a letter.
- **Give up guilt feelings.** Don't waste time feeling guilty about what doesn't get done. Instead, think about all you *have* accomplished. Whenever you have a few spare minutes or can't decide what to do next, ask yourself, “What is the best use of my time right now?” Start doing whatever you answer!

Make Plans

To increase the chances of getting your A-activities done, plan your time each and every day. If you felt overwhelmed before, you may feel doubly so now that you have added the A-activities to whatever else you were doing before. You do need time for routine tasks — opening mail, preparing meals, chauffeuring the children. You need time for essential activities — shopping, eating, sleeping, grooming, and yes, even paying your bills. These are all activities that you usually don't think much about, and yet they fill up much of your day. In fact, combined with other commitments, interruptions, and crises, they can take over your life and eliminate your dream of having a few minutes each day to pursue an important goal.

To help accomplish A-activities, planning is important. At first, schedule a small block of time — maybe fifteen minutes — for A-items. Forget all C-items during this time. Gradually increase the time as you become more comfortable with the idea of putting first things first. Remember to plan some time, too, for just relaxing, meditating, and thinking your own thoughts. Relaxing may not seem like a high-priority task, but you'll be surprised how a few minutes of quiet time can recharge your batteries and give you a fresh perspective. A few minutes' worth of “time out” can help you get more done in the long run.





"The hardest thing for me has been the time pressures . . . no time for myself, not getting enough rest, and taking care of a job and the family . . . that's been the most difficult thing for me."

Plan a daily "things to do" list — A fundamental time-planning tool is a daily list of things that need to be done. It's simple. Put "Things To Do" at the top of a slip of paper. Then list those items you want to do. Keep it visible and use it as a guide as you go through your day. List everything that has a high priority today and may not get done without special attention. Cross out items as they are completed and add others as you think of them. If you have an unexpected interruption, don't panic. Be flexible, there's always tomorrow.

Set aside a small portion of every day for planning. Decide when you do the best work. This is your prime time. If your prime time is in the morning, you might want to make your list first thing, before your day begins. On the other hand, if you're at your best later in the day or at night, make your list then. You will sleep easier knowing that all those important activities are on the list. You won't have to worry about forgetting them.

Remember to put the A-activities for your long-term goals on your daily lists, too. You will need to break them down into small, manageable parts. Your goal might be to succeed in a satisfying job, but first you have to look for a job. Although it may appear strange to see "gather

information for a job application," "talk to a new person today," and "record our expenses" on the same list with "go grocery shopping" or "mail birthday card," you want to do them in the same day. Remember to give everything on the list an A-B-C priority. Delegate as much as you can to others and work on the other items, doing all the A's before the B's, and the B's before the C's. Sometimes, you may not even finish the A's. By doing more A's and fewer C's, your management will improve. Get in the habit of thinking, "Maybe I don't have to do this C." Sometimes you may find yourself rearranging magazines, sorting mail, or filing correspondence, and not getting more important things done. Stop. Get busy on those A's.

Control Your Plans

Once your list is completed, it's time for *action!* Actions take many forms, from the mental work of making decisions to the routine job of putting out lights and checking locks before the family goes to bed at night. To keep the action flowing smoothly, you need to capitalize on your resources. Tapping the potential of individuals and organizations within your community will help you save time and reach important goals.





Evaluate Your Time Management Skills

As you work on improving your time management skills, it helps to stop once in awhile and think about how you're doing. This evaluation helps you learn from your experiences, helps you judge just how satisfied you are as a result of your efforts. Sometimes you'll want to compare your management successes with other families and other times you might look at how you're doing compared to how you want to be doing.

Although you as a single parent often feel like the family manager, it is important to include your children and any other members of your

household in planning and evaluating your family management. As a parent, you usually set goals and make plans for yourself and your infants and toddlers, but you can gradually include them as they grow older and are ready to take on some of these privileges and responsibilities.

In the chart below, check one column for each statement that is typical of how you as a single parent and you with your child or children see how you manage as a family. Answer according to what you do, not what you think you *ought* to do. No one will know your answers except you.

How We Manage	Almost Never	Sometimes	Almost Always
1. Each day my children and I set aside a small amount of time to think about and to plan the day for our family.			
2. My children and I set specific, written goals, and put deadlines on them.			
3. We make a daily "things to do" list.			
4. We decide which activities on our "things to do" list are more important than others and get the important ones done as soon as possible.			
5. We keep flexible schedules to allow for unexpected events.			
6. We make use of community resources whenever possible.			
7. We plan time for family conferences to discuss goals and plans, and to make other decisions.			
8. We make an effort to keep common interruptions (visitors, meetings, long telephone calls) from continually disrupting our plans for the day.			
9. We get help from others for things we don't have or can't do by ourselves.			
10. We try to say no to requests for our time that would keep us from finishing important plans.			

To find your score, give yourself:

3 points for each "Almost Always"

2 points for each "Sometimes"

1 point for each "Almost Never"

Add your points to get a total score.

If you scored:

0-15 You and your family may want to give some more thought to managing your time.

16-20 Your time management's okay, but you could make some improvements.

21-25 You're very good managers!

26-27 You're excellent managers!

28-30 You're unbelievable! A super family!

You may want to think about these management techniques again in six months to see how you're doing.



Summary

As a single parent, you can continually improve your management skills. Avoid the barriers — procrastination, perfectionism, and preoccupation with the past. Put your plans in writing and free your mind to cope with the unexpected and the spontaneous happenings of this world. Mastery of time management can help determine the quality of your family's future.

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Project coordinators: Robert Hughes, Jr., and Jane A. Scherer
Editor: Charles S. Thomas
Graphic designer: Lynn H. Smith

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