

2017

## Balancing Research, Teaching, Clinical Work, and Family: Nine Suggestions for Young Professionals

Elizabeth K. Lefler  
*University of Northern Iowa*

*Let us know how access to this document benefits you*

Copyright ©2017 Elizabeth K. Lefler. This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License-NonCommercial, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited and use is for any purpose other than commercial.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-Share Alike 4.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).

Follow this and additional works at: [https://scholarworks.uni.edu/psy\\_facpub](https://scholarworks.uni.edu/psy_facpub)



Part of the [Psychology Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Lefler, Elizabeth K., "Balancing Research, Teaching, Clinical Work, and Family: Nine Suggestions for Young Professionals" (2017). *Faculty Publications*. 2.  
[https://scholarworks.uni.edu/psy\\_facpub/2](https://scholarworks.uni.edu/psy_facpub/2)

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Faculty Work at UNI ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of UNI ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact [scholarworks@uni.edu](mailto:scholarworks@uni.edu).

# BALANCING RESEARCH, TEACHING, CLINICAL WORK, AND FAMILY: NINE SUGGESTIONS FOR YOUNG PROFESSIONALS

## RÓWNOWAGA POMIĘDZY PROWADZENIEM BADAŃ, NAUCZANIEM, PRACĄ KLINICYSTY I ŻYCIEM RODZINNYM: DZIEWIĘĆ SUGESTII DLA MŁODYCH NAUKOWCÓW

ELIZABETH K. LEFLER<sup>E-F</sup>

Psychology Department, University of Northern Iowa, USA  
and Visiting Fulbright Scholar, Jagiellonian University, Poland

**A** – przygotowanie projektu badania | study design, **B** – zbieranie danych | data collection, **C** – analiza statystyczna | statistical analysis, **D** – interpretacja danych | interpretation of data, **E** – przygotowanie maszynopisu | manuscript preparation, **F** – opracowanie piśmiennictwa | literature review, **G** – pozyskanie funduszy | sourcing of funding

### SUMMARY

Balancing multiple professional roles and a family can be demanding. The current paper is a non-evidence based list of informal, anecdotal suggestions for professionals who strive to balance multiple work roles with the demands of raising young children. It is important to note I make no claims that this is an evidence-based method for achieving optimal work-family balance. Rather, I was invited to this conference to discuss my own experiences balancing work and family; this paper reflects that non-scientific aim, and includes a list of nine suggestions that I hope will be helpful to some. I am a licensed clinical psychologist in the United States. My primary position is as an associate professor at a mid-sized university, and my secondary position is as a clinical psychologist in the community. I am married and I have one child, and I recognize that the following suggestions might be most helpful to those who are demographically similar to me. The nine suggestions I propose include: 1) Be a single-tasker, 2) Use daycare hours wisely, 3) Establish parameters for your work email, 4) Out-source the chore you dislike most, 5) Designate a primary parent for discrete periods of time, 6) Play with your children, 7) Take good vacations, 8) Learn to say no, and 9) Attend to your own mental health. Each of these anecdotal suggestions is discussed in turn, and the interested reader is pointed to some empirical articles for further reading.

**KEYWORDS:** work-family balance, research, clinical work

### STRESZCZENIE

Znalezienie równowagi pomiędzy życiem zawodowym i prywatnym może być trudne. Niniejszy artykuł jest nieopartą na dowodach listą nieformalnych, anegdotycznych sugestii dla osób pracujących zawodowo, które próbują znaleźć równowagę pomiędzy licznymi rolami w pracy oraz wychowywaniem dzieci. Pragnę podkreślić, że nie twierdzę, iż jest to oparta na dowodach metoda osiągnięcia optymalnej równowagi między życiem zawodowym i prywatnym; niniejszy artykuł jest przykładem nienaukowego ujęcia i zawiera listę dziewięciu sugestii, które, mam nadzieję, będą dla niektórych pomocne. Jestem dyplomowanym psychologiem klinicznym pracującym w USA. Na pierwszym miejscu jestem profesorem nadzwyczajnym na średniej wielkości uniwersytecie, na drugim klinicznym psychologiem w tej społeczności. Jestem mężatką, mam jedno dziecko, i jestem w pełni świadoma, że sugestie mogą być najbardziej pomocne dla osób ze zbliżoną sytuacją rodzinno-zawodową. Na dziewięć proponowanych przeze mnie sugestii składa się: 1) Skupiać się na jednym zadaniu naraz; 2) Rozsądnie wykorzystywać czas, kiedy dziecko jest w przedszkolu; 3) Ustalić parametry dla zawodowego e-maila; 4) Zlecić komuś najbardziej nie ulubiany obowiązek domowy; 5) Wyznaczyć głównego rodzica na różne okresy; 6) Bawić się ze swoim dzieckiem/dziećmi; 7) Wyjeżdżać na urlop wypoczynkowy; 8) Nauczyć się mówić „nie” oraz 9) Dbać

o własne zdrowie psychiczne. Każda z tych anegdotycznych sugestii jest kolejno omówiona, wskazując również empiryczne artykuły do pogłębienia wiedzy dla osób zainteresowanych.

**SŁOWA KLUCZOWE:** równowaga między życiem zawodowym i prywatnym, prowadzenie badań, praca kliniczna

Balancing multiple professional roles and a family can be very demanding. Many researchers have documented the challenges inherent in work-family balance. Interested readers can find an abundance of information on the matter elsewhere, as the current paper does not serve as a review of this body of literature [1–4]. Rather, the current paper is an informal, personal list of suggestions for professionals with young children. As such, although some research is presented to support the suggestions contained herein, I make no claims that this is an evidence-based method for achieving optimal work-family balance. My experiences are purely anecdotal, and are shared with the hope that one or two of them may be of help to the reader. I am aware that my non-evidence-based suggestions may not be of use to everyone, and that they might be most relevant to those who are demographically similar to me.

Let me start by introducing myself: My name is Elizabeth Lefler, PhD, and I am a child clinical psychologist in the United States. My primary position is as a professor at a mid-sized public university where I am expected to A) conduct, present, and publish research, B) teach three classes per semester to students at the Bachelor's and Master's levels, and C) provide service to the university and my profession (e.g., advising psychology students, facilitating student groups, serving as a reviewer for peer-reviewed journals). Additionally, I am a licensed psychologist, so in my secondary position I am a clinician in a family practice (medical) setting in the community. My responsibilities in my clinical practice are to A) conduct diagnostic assessments on children with suspected mental health problems, B) provide therapy to families and children, and C) consult with physicians in the practice who have a question about matters of mental health. I am married, and my husband and I have a 3-year-old daughter. My husband is a middle-school science teacher.

The following are a list of nine tips and suggestions that have proven to be of use to me as I strive to balance research, teaching, clinical work, and my family:

1. Be a single-tasker. Despite popular claims to the contrary, cognitive psychologists have demonstrated repeatedly that multi-tasking reduces performance on all tasks, especially complex ones [5–6]. Thus, my suggestion is to dedicate clear, discrete blocks of time to one single task, do that task well and with all of your cognitive resources, and then switch to another task. For me this means setting aside a day for my clinical work, a day for my research, two hours on Mondays to prepare my courses for the week, etc.

Try to set a single-tasking schedule and stick to it (and refer to tip #3 regarding setting parameters on email).

2. Use daycare hours wisely. We send our daughter to daycare approximately 35 hours a week. These 35 hours are precious; treat them as such. Your child/ren are well taken care of during this time, but it is expensive. Do not waste these precious hours on social media. Do not go out to lunch or coffee with colleagues on a regular basis. Of course it is possible to socialize with colleagues from time to time or to check social media every once-in-a-while, but for the most part when someone else is taking care of your child/ren, you need to use your time efficiently.
3. Establish parameters for your work email. I have two specific tips related to work email parameters, but even if these two tips won't work for you personally, I encourage you nonetheless to set email parameters that will. The bottom line is that non-stop email checking and responding can eat away at your productivity and family time. First, I suggest that you do not link your work email account(s) to your smart phone. I recognize that sometimes one needs to check work email from home or on the go, but make it a little more difficult for yourself to do so. Second, I recommend that you refrain from checking and responding to email for at least two hours each workday. Check and respond to emails when you have short breaks between meetings; not when you have two hours during which you could get a larger task done. These two specific email rules work well for me; determine which parameters will work for you and stick to them.
4. Outsource the chore you dislike most. Time is a commodity for professionals with young families, and if you absolutely hate cleaning your house or grocery shopping, for example, manage your budget so you can afford to have someone else take care of these tasks. There are numerous meal preparation, grocery delivery, cleaning, dog walking, landscaping, and other services available in most areas today. You do not need to use these services in perpetuity; but while your children are young and you are busy establishing your professional presence it could be worth it.
5. Designate a primary parent. For a discrete period of time, designate one parent who is in charge of the child/ren; and alternate. This primary parent is responsible for clothing, meals, naps, injuries, activities – everything. The secondary parent

then has the flexibility of either spending some low-stress time with the family or doing something alone such as working or exercising. As an example, my husband and I divide the weekend into four discrete time periods: before and after naptime on Saturday and Sunday (we refer to these four time periods as weekend quadrants). Each of us is the primary parent for two of the four quadrants. If I'm the primary parent for Saturday morning and I plan an outing to the Children's Museum, it's my responsibility to make the plans, get the child dressed, pack water and snacks, etc. My husband then has the option of coming along to the Children's Museum with low expectations (just fun with the family!), or he can stay home to grade exams, or go for a hike alone. This can be done on the weekends, the evenings, or both. I find that when we alternate the primary parenting responsibilities we are all happier with one another.

6. Play with your child/ren. Really play with them. Put your electronic devices down. Lay on the floor. Tell stories. Pretend. Read books. Be silly. Swing and run at the park. When you are with your kids, really be with them. Play is good for them and for you [7]. I also find that you will feel less guilt when you have to work a few extra hours if the time you spend with your children is really fun and engaging.
7. Take good vacations. Plan long vacations early and often, and try to work as little as possible while you are away. Set an automatic email response, spend a few extra hours the week before you leave delegating tasks so that you are not needed as much while you are gone, and try to really focus on your family. Eat good food and have fun.

8. Learn to say no. This is a difficult tip to follow, especially when – as an early-career professional – you are eager to please your senior colleagues. However, having a clear understanding of the additional responsibilities and committees that will help your career and/or prove to be meaningful to you in some way, versus those additional tasks that will not benefit you is paramount. If you are punctual and responsible you will increasingly be asked to take on more and more duties. You may need to say no to individuals who will be evaluating your performance which is a difficult task; but one that must be done.

9. Attend to your own mental health. This suggestions will mean something different for each person, but it is vital. Reflect on what you need to be content. You will not be successful at balancing work and family responsibilities if you fail to take care of yourself. For individuals without diagnosable mental illness, this likely means taking time for yourself to do things you enjoy. On the other hand, for those with diagnosed mental health concerns such as Major Depressive Disorder or Generalized Anxiety Disorder it is not this simple. Therapy and/or medication should be considered in consultation with your own mental health professional.

I hope my nine tips and suggestions have given you some ideas about how to realistically balance multiple professional roles and a young family. There is an abundance of additional information on achieving work-family balance should you wish to read further [8–9]. Please feel free to email me if you would like to discuss any of this in more depth: [elizabeth.lefler@uni.edu](mailto:elizabeth.lefler@uni.edu). I wish you luck in your efforts to balance work and family successfully.

## REFERENCES

1. Amstad FT, Meier LL, Fasel U, Elfering A, Semer NK. A meta-analysis of work-family conflict and various outcomes with a special emphasis on cross-domain versus matching-domain relations. *JOOP* 2011; 16(2): 151–169.
2. Byron K. A meta-analytic review of work-family conflict and its antecedents. *J Vocat Behav* 2005; 67(2): 169–198.
3. Greenhaus JH, Allen TD. Work-family balance: A review and extension of the literature. *Handbook of occupational health psychology*. Washington DC: American Psychological Association; 2011: 165–183.
4. McNall LA, Nicklin J M, Masuda AD. A meta-analytic review of the consequences associated with work-family enrichment. *J Bus Psychol* 2010; 25(3): 381–396.
5. Lang A, Chrzan J. Media multitasking: Good, bad, or ugly? *Communication Yearbook* 2015; 39(1): 99–128.
6. Jeong S, Hwang Y. Media multitasking effects on cognitive vs. attitudinal outcomes: A meta-analysis. *Hum Commun Res* 2016; 42: 599–618.
7. Fromberg DP. A review of research on play. In: Seefeldt C, ed. *The early childhood curriculum: Current findings in theory and practice*. New York: Teachers College Press; 1999: 27–53.
8. Haddock SA, Simmerman TS, Lyness KP, Siemba SJ. Practices of dual earner couples successfully balancing work and family. *J Fam Econ Issues* 2006; 27(2): 207–234.
9. Halpern DF, Murphy SE. *From work-family balance to work-family interaction: Changing the metaphor*. London: Routledge; 2004.

Word count: 2223

• Tables: –

• Figures: –

• References: 9

---

**Sources of funding:**

The review was funded by the author.

**Conflicts of interests:**

The author reports that there were no conflicts of interest.

**Cite this article as:**

Lefler EK.

Balancing research, teaching, clinical work, and family: nine suggestions for young professionals.

MSP 2017; 11, 1: 15–18.

**Correspondence address:**

Elizabeth Lefler, PhD

1078 Bartlett Hall

University of Northern Iowa Psychology Department

Cedar Falls, IA 50614-0505

USA

phone: (319) 273-7637

fax: (319) 273-6188

Received: 24.02.2017

Reviewed: 01.03.2017

Accepted: 13.03.2017