Life in Balance: Improving the Quality of Your Journey

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Learning Objectives
At the end of this session, the learner will be able to:
1. Discuss contemporary sources of stress that contribute to chronic role overload and decreased life satisfaction among busy healthcare workers and their breastfeeding clients.
2. Implement practical life strategies that promote enhanced satisfaction, balance, resilience, and well-being among lactation professionals and their nursing clients who need to re-align priorities to accommodate breastfeeding.

The Rewards of a Balanced Integrated Life
- Life balance is fundamental to our emotional and physical health and well-being.
- Life balance promotes personal happiness, improves our relationships, and enhances our workplace productivity.
- Our own positive example can serve as a healthy model for countless others within our sphere of influence.

1. Sources and Impact of Stress & Role Overload
   2017 APA Stress in America™ Survey
   - Future of our nation
   - Money
   - Work
   - The economy
   - Family & personal health concerns
   - Family and caretaker responsibilities
   - Job stability
   - Housing costs
   - Personal safety
   - Relationships
   - Significant life adjustments
   - Chronic sleep deprivation
   - Daily irritants, i.e. long commute
   - Overweight, depression


American Psychological Association 2018 Stress in America™ Survey
- Nearly 3/4 of adults say they have experienced at least one symptom of stress in the past month.
- Almost half say they lay awake at night due to stress.
- About 1/3 of adults eat too much or eat unhealthy food due to stress.
- Nearly 2/3 cite work, money, and health-related concerns as sources of significant stress.


The Gender Gap in Stress
- The average reported stress level among respondents in the 2018 survey was 4.9 on a scale of 1 to 10.
- As is the case every year since the survey began, women in 2017 reported significantly higher stress levels than men.

   (5.1 vs 4.4 on a 10-point scale).
Changes in Gender Role Stereotypes

- Welcome changes in gender role stereotypes have increased options for both men and women.
- However, in many cases, these “options” have translated into a whole new set of expectations that push many women into oppressive role overload.
- The Women’s Movement not only opened opportunities for women to “be anything.” It created the new and unrealistic expectation that women had to “be everything.”

The Burden of the Superwoman Myth

- The Superwoman Myth is the unrealistic expectation that women not only can “do it all,” but they should “do it all with perfection.”
- Integral to the myth is the notion that anything less than perfection in any arena is the equivalent of failure.
- The expectations on our young families today—especially our young mothers—are greater than ever.

Increased Expectations on Today’s New Mothers

- Today’s mothers experience intense pressure to breastfeed exclusively and to parent perfectly.
- The idealized and unattainable images of perfect parenting promoted by social media reduce mothers’ confidence and increase their stress.
- In nearly half of 2-parent families, both parents work full-time. Parenting stress has negative consequences on mental health.
- Participating in a Mom’s Group validates mothers’ experience and reminds moms they are not alone.

Repacking Our Bags for the Rest of Our Journey

- We need to keep our highest priorities foremost, and remove weighty, self-defeating behaviors that throw us off balance, including unrealistic expectations and perfectionism, need for approval, people pleasing, self-judgment, and self-denial.
- “The greatest gift you can give the world is a healthy you.” Caroline Myss, bestselling author and renowned speaker

Reflection Question

What personal price am I paying for trying to do too much?

2. Clarify Our Governing Values, Highest Purpose, and Life Mission

- The first step to achieving greater balance is to identify what we value most, the glue that holds our life together, our highest purpose... the target we aim for as we live our lives.
- Once we gain clarity about our governing values and highest ideals, it becomes far easier to set daily priorities that align our actions with our highest purposes.
## Examples of Parenting Values

- Your client’s unique birth plan.
- Whether to have one’s son circumcised.
- Your client’s feeding plan: whether exclusively at-breast-feeding, expressing some milk to be fed by bottle, or using formula.
- Whether to use disposable or cloth diapers.
- Whether to become employed and how soon.
- What childcare option(s) to use.
- Discipline style, schooling, vaccine choices.
- Faith-based parenting values.

## Defining Our Life Mission

- All organizations have a **mission statement** articulating what they do, how, and for whom they do it.
- An aspirational **vision statement** for the future provides direction and promotes innovation by clarifying what the organization ultimately wants to become, and *WHY*.
- We, too, should create an inspiring personal mission and vision, encompassing our diverse roles, unique gifts and experiences, highest purposes, lofty goals, and legacy hopes.

## Mission

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<tr>
<th>Learn</th>
<th>Vision</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teach</td>
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<tr>
<td>Strive</td>
<td>At the end of my journey, those with whom I have crossed paths would feel blessed to have traveled a while with me.</td>
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<td>Grow</td>
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<td>Serve</td>
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## Living in Alignment With Our Life Mission

- Having a personal mission statement helps ensure life balance by daily focusing our energy and guiding our decisions and actions toward the things we value most.
- Our mission statement is like a road map for success, empowering us to say “no” to life’s many distractions.
- Seeing our values reflected in the work we do and the choices we make contributes immensely toward feeling that we are living authentically.

## The Full Life (The Ultimate Journey)


1. Experiencing positive emotions about the past and the future, and in the present moment.
2. Deriving abundant gratification from using our unique gifts and moral virtues—our signature strengths—in the major realms of our lives ([VIA Survey of Character Strengths](https://www.authentichappiness.sas.upenn.edu/testcenter))
3. Applying our signature strengths in service to something larger than ourselves, which gives our lives a fulfilling sense of purpose and meaning

## “Psychology of Postponement”

- In pursuit of lofty goals, many people become masters of delayed gratification.
- The “psychology of postponement” can obscure our true purpose, as we rationalize: “This isn't really *it*. It will be *it* when…….”
- “The preferred time to live out what we value is NOW.”
Reflection Question

Will I commit to writing an inspiring mission statement that encompasses my diverse life roles, unique strengths, core values, and highest purposes?

3. Prioritize Our Daily Actions

- After we clarify our purpose, mission, and values, it becomes easier to prioritize our daily actions to live authentically and in sync with our values.
- Don’t let daily “urgent” tasks crowd out the “important” activities that give meaning and purpose to our lives and that will be remembered.
- Resolve to do more “important” things every day. Give timetables to the things that matter most!

Keep First Things First

- Make breastfeeding a high priority.
- Ask for help; delegate/defer everything you can.
- Don’t resume all your life roles at once. Life has different seasons. Take time to recover from childbirth, both physically and emotionally.
- Don’t compare yourself with others.
- Accept that your house will be cluttered as long as you have small children.
- Choose quality child care (essential brain food) that will help optimize your child’s development.

Re-Align Our Priorities to Resonate with Our Highest Purpose

- When we find our lives have veered off course, we can choose to re-align our priorities by deliberately saying “No” to some good things in order to open a space to say “Yes” to our best thing.
- Whether and how we say “No” determines the quality of our lives.
- It’s easy to say “No” when there is a deeper “Yes” burning inside.

Don’t Let “Good” Things Crowd Out Our “Best” Thing

- People who can’t say “No” to good things in pursuit of their highest purposes discover that, if you aren’t willing to live your own life, plenty of people are willing to live it for you by scheduling the time slots on your day planner in fulfillment of their priorities and mission.
- Don’t let someone else’s “good” thing keep us from our “best” thing.

The Power of a Positive “No”


- An ordinary No begins with No and ends with No.
- A Positive No begins with Yes and ends with Yes: Yes – No - Yes

Yes: “I am deeply committed to spending more time with Andrew during his Senior year this year.”
No: “For this reason, I need to decline your request to serve on the Program Committee.”
Yes: “I know now important the annual seminar is, and I heard Sally say she would like to help.”
The Power of a Positive “No”

- An ordinary No begins with No and ends with No.
- A Positive No begins with Yes and ends with Yes:
  Yes – No - Yes
  Yes: “I am deeply committed to spending my non-working hours with my partner and new baby.”
  No: “For this reason, I need to decline your request to serve on the Program Committee this year.”
  Yes: “I can suggest several others who may have the commitment and availability to help out.”

Reject the Burden of Perfectionism

- Perfectionism, with its exceedingly high expectations, siphons off essential energy and often takes a toll on our primary relationships, vital self-care practices, peace of mind, and our productivity.
- For most tasks, “good enough” is perfectly adequate.
- “Ring the bell that still can ring; forget your perfect offering. There is a crack in everything. That’s how the light gets in.” Leonard Cohen

Reject the Destructive Belief that “The More we Do, the More We Are”

- Being “too busy” fuels our sense of importance and gives us a special identity.
- When we doubt our own self-worth, we become vulnerable to pursuing significance by taking on too much to gain the approval of others.
- We may accept excessive responsibility because we are afraid to disappoint someone and are overly concerned about their experience of us.
- When we take on a new responsibility, we need to put another commitment back into circulation.

Reflection Question

What are some good things that are keeping me from my best thing?

4. The Importance of Healthy Relationships for Emotional Health and Well-Being

- Our deepest needs are satisfied by our relationships, not our accomplishments. Healthy, balanced relationships give life its greatest meaning, promote well-being, and foster our sense of community.
- When our relationships aren’t working, our productivity decreases and our health declines.
- “The best use of life is love. The best expression of love is time. The best time to love is now.”
  Rick Warren, author & pastor

4. Strengthen Your Primary Relationships

- About 2/3 of couples become dissatisfied with their relationship within three years of having a child.
- Each parent requires “me” time to re-energize as an individual, and together, partners need “we” time to remain close as a couple.
- The most common reason our romantic partnerships deteriorate is that we have failed to attend to the relationship.
- “Be of love a little more careful than of anything.”
  E.E. Cummings
### “With A Little Help From My Friends”
- Quality friendships are good for your health!
- Good friends share our joys and help us cope with life’s traumas.
- Healthy friendships provide reciprocal companionship and a sense of belonging, reduce stress and raise our happiness level, support our self-improvement efforts, and increase our self-worth.
- A New Mom’s Group is “good medicine!”

### Health Benefits of Quality Friendships
- The Nurses’ Health Study from Harvard Medical School found that the more friends women had, the less likely they were to develop physical impairments as they aged, and the more likely they were to be leading a joyful life.
- A key finding from a major study of adults’ lives was that close, long-term friendships enhanced moods and functioning, as well as emotional and physical health.

Chopik WJ. Associations among relational values, support, health, and well-being across the adult lifespan. *Personal Relationships.* 2017; 24:418–422

### Volunteer on Behalf of Others
- Making a positive difference in the lives of others is one of the most rewarding experiences life has to offer.
- “We make a living by what we get. We make a life by what we give.”  
  Dr. Albert Schweitzer
- “I’ve learned that you shouldn’t go through life with a catcher’s mitt on both hands. You need to be able to throw something back.”  
  Dr. Maya Angelou

### Reflection Question
**How can I use what I am learning to improve my relationships?**

### 5. Change Your Thinking
- “My life has been full of terrible misfortunes, most of which never actually happened.”  
  Mark Twain, Winston Churchill, and many more
- “It is ills that never happened that have mostly made men miserable.”  
  Martin Farquhar Tupper, English writer and poet, 1800
- “There is nothing either good nor bad, but thinking makes it so.”  
  William Shakespeare
- Our jobs, relationships, finances, health, etc. do not cause our stress. Rather, it is our thoughts about these things that is the source of our stress.

### We Can Change the Story We Choose to Tell About Events that “Throw Us Off Balance”
- **Events** (things that happen in our lives) +
- **Responses** (our interpretation of the event and emotional response, thoughts, beliefs) =
- **Outcomes** (how we feel, the actions we take, the way we decide to “show up” for life each day)

Stress does not come from the events in our lives. **Stress comes from the story we choose to tell ourselves to give meaning to the events in our lives.**
The Myth of Psychological Stress

- All psychological stress is an inside job.
- Stress is not a function of our circumstances. It is the result of the beliefs and assumptions we hold about the world.
- Until there is a thought, there is no stress.
- If we feel stress, it is because of something we are thinking. Are we willing to challenge our thoughts and assumptions?


Changing Your Attitude About a “Perceived” Challenging Situation

- “Am I aware of my present attitude toward this situation?” “If necessary, am I willing to change my attitude?”
- Use the technique of reframing to change your perception of being a victim or a martyr.
- Think of a recent challenging situation in your personal or work life. Pause, reflect, stretch your imagination, and write down 10 positive things that did result or could result from this potentially negative circumstance. Now let the positives become possibilities in your thinking about the situation.

Alex Paattakos, Ph.D. Prisoners of Our Thoughts. 2010.

Worst Case, Best Case, Most Likely Scenario

- Many of us already are experts at formulating worst case scenarios in which everything goes wrong.
- We can practice also envisioning the best case scenario, in which everything goes right.
- After identifying both extremes (neither of which typically happens), it’s easier to arrive at the most likely scenario, in which there will be manageable problems, as well as opportunities.
- Ask yourself, “If the worst-case were to happen, how would I cope with it?”
- Weigh the costs/benefits of worrying about this.

“Future Fantastic”

- Instead of worrying about what could go wrong, visualize a scenario where everything goes as well as you had imagined:
  “If everything goes as well as can reasonably be expected…..”
- Periodically write about how you want your life to be different in the future.
- Then let your subconscious mind look for ways to turn your vision into reality.

Reflection Question

Can I give an example of how I might change my thinking about a situation in my life that I currently view as stressful?

6. Practice Self-Care and Self-Compassion

- We nurture others from our own emotional overflow.
- Taking better care of ourselves energizes us to give more effectively to others.
- Life-giving coping mechanisms help us to:
  1) process difficult feelings and challenge faulty thinking;
  2) raise our self-esteem; and
  3) enhance emotional intimacy.
6. Practice Self-Care and Self-Compassion

- Life-depleting coping mechanisms numb or suppress difficult feelings instead of helping us process them. Because these coping strategies often are shame-based and involve deceit, they 1) lower our self-esteem and 2) erode our cherished relationships by 3) interfering with emotional intimacy.

- Examples: angry outbursts; withdrawal/isolation; and compulsive behaviors like abusing substances, shopping, TV binging, gambling, computer gaming, pornography, workaholism, and eating disorders

Adopt an Attitude of Gratitude

- “When you focus on what’s working in your life, you get more of a life that works.”
  Martin Seligman, PhD, father of Positive Psychology

- Keeping a gratitude journal re-wires our brain to search for the positives.

- Make fewer judgments about the events in your life, and look for the positives in every challenging situation.

Establish Child Care Routines

Although we shouldn’t try to schedule our baby’s activities, we can establish regulating routines.

E = Eat
A = Activity
S = Sleep
Y = You Time

Cultivate a Humor Perspective

- Laughter diffuses tension, lights up your face, relaxes your muscles, restores your perspective, shrinks your problems, buoys your spirits, aids in healing, and boosts the immune system.

- Humor has been likened to the balance pole used by performers in a high-wire act. It’s necessary to navigate the, often precarious, “tightrope of life.”

Practice Mindfulness

- In rushing through our busy days, it’s easy to lose our connection with the present moment and not notice what we are doing or how we are feeling.

- Mindfulness—the practice of purposely focusing on the present moment and accepting it without judgment—can evoke the relaxation response and improve both physical and psychological well-being.

Mindful Breathing Exercise

- Sit in a relaxed, comfortable position, in a quiet spot, on a chair or a cushion on the floor, with your hands resting on your thighs, and your back and neck straight. Your eyes can be open or closed.

- Breathe deeply through your nose or mouth, letting your stomach rise with each breath, and release the air slowly (nose or mouth). For 5 to 20 minutes, try to keep your focus on your slow, deep breathing.

- If/when your mind wanders, simply acknowledge your intrusive thoughts without judgment, and gently bring your focus back to your breathing.
Self-Compassion

- Recognize our struggles with perfectionism, fear of failure, or inadequacy, and begin practicing compassionate self-talk to refute our inner critic.
- When we recognize that we are experiencing a moment of pain, we can give ourselves the support we would offer another to enable us to bear the pain and be transformed by the experience.
- Silently offer an encouraging word ("May I be kind to myself in this moment of suffering"), place a hand on your cheek or heart, or give yourself a hug.

Kristin Neff, PhD. Self-Compassion. William Morrow Paperbacks, 2015

Additional Self-Care Practices

- Talking with friends or a therapist
- EST (Magic Pill)
  - Exercise
  - Adequate Sleep
  - Human Touch
- "Me time" doesn't mean "Me First." It just means "Me Too."
- Healthy eating; reading; pampering (massage, bubble bath, manicure); practicing one's faith; music; hobbies and creative outlets; movies; pets; volunteering; yoga; spending time with nature

Reflection Question

What is something I will commit to begin doing to take better care of myself?

Action Promise to Improve the Quality of Your Journey

What specific steps do I commit to take to reduce my self-imposed expectations, live in greater sync with my values, improve my relationships, challenge my negative thoughts, and practice essential self-care?

Citations