

Life, Work & Family

Monthly work/life news for UAW-Represented DaimlerChrysler Workers

May 2005

Brought to you by the Circle of Life Committee 1-800-809-4996

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Take Time to Be Together

It's easy to feel like you don't have enough time in a busy week to spend relaxing with your partner and children. But the most important relationships in your life deserve your time and attention. If work and other responsibilities are slicing into the time you spend with your family, it's time to re-evaluate your priorities and put more balance into your life.

You can reclaim "lost" bits of time by re-examining your values, prioritizing work obligations and using time management techniques for work and household chores. Make a point of using the time you've "saved" to strengthen your bonds with your spouse and kids.

Time has a funny way of expanding when you're with someone you care about. The clock seems to stop because you're so involved in the moment. Small blocks of time together can make a big difference in the quality of your relationships. So, even if you have to schedule your time together in tiny parcels, make the most of it.



Time With Your Spouse

You'd be surprised how a little private time together in a new environment can enrich your relationship and give you both a new perspective on your busy lives. Get out your calendar and make a date with your spouse for the first free evening you can find. Plan to do something you haven't done in a long time. Make dates each month so you have something special to look forward to.

Add a bit of spontaneity by surprising your partner with reservations at a favorite restaurant. And the next time you hire a baby sitter for a school conference, ask the sitter to stay a bit longer while you and your spouse go out for a walk or for dessert and coffee.

Time With Your Kids

No matter how busy you are, your kids need your undivided time and attention on a regular basis. Spend your first 15 minutes at home listening to your children. Mark on the calendar part of each weekend for some private time with each child. Do something you both enjoy. Take each child to breakfast or lunch once a month to allow for solid one-to-one communication.

Although you may feel too tired to toss a football around the backyard at the end of the day, you can connect with your kids by playing quiet games or asking them to tell you about their day. Enjoy the intimacy of your kids' nighttime rituals. Use bedtime to cuddle up and share a favorite book.

Enrich Family Routines

You can make family errands more fun by bringing along the kids and topping off your expeditions with a stop for ice cream. Older children can help cut shopping time by taking part of the shopping list and meeting you at the cash register.

Make meal times more pleasurable by turning off the television and focusing on conversation. Use the time to catch up on the day's events and reconnect with each family member .

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Back-up Child Care: Help Your Child Feel Like It's Just Another Day



With back-up child care plans in place, here are some simple ways of making your child at ease when the unexpected happens.

For Family Child Care or Center-Based Back-up Care...

Visit the back-up provider's home or center with your child ahead of time. Let your child spend time exploring the environment and getting to know the caregiver or teachers and the other children. Notice if your child gravitates

toward a particular area of the room or seems to enjoy specific activities; a reminder on the day of transition can help a great deal.

Take a camera with you on your visit.

Make sure you and your child look at the photographs together, perhaps creating a positive story about your child in this "special" environment. When the time comes, the pictures will serve as a reminder that the place and people are friendly and familiar.

For In-Home Back-up Care...

Schedule a visit from your in-home caregiver before you need back-up. Welcome the caregiver into your home environment, and encourage time spent alone with your child while you're there. Share a list of your child's habits, personality traits, food likes and dislikes, daily scheduling, and favorite things to do so the provider has a head start in getting to know your child.

Talk about back-up care expectations in advance with friends or relatives. Both you and your child will want to know what's going to happen when it comes to "parenting styles." Involve your child, and discuss what's really important to you. Focus on your child's needs and what your family is accustomed to. Be willing to let go of the small stuff if situations are handled a slightly different way.

Allow some extra time on the first day you use your back-up provider. Spend a few minutes talking with your child and the provider, and stay until your child becomes engaged in an activity. It may help to bring a favorite toy, blanket, or perhaps a family picture to make your child feel secure.

Even if your child is happily playing, say goodbye before you leave. Go through the same goodbye ritual you use at your regular child care provider's. If your child gets upset, put the caregiver in charge and avoid a lengthy goodbye which might confuse your child.

As soon as you arrive at work, call! A quick call to the center, provider's home, or sitter to check in and see how your child is doing may be just the reassurance you need to feel you can get on with your own day.

Accor Services North America, Inc. 2005



Seniors and Fitness

Want to age gracefully? Keep moving.

Regular exercise can reduce the risk of chronic disease – such as heart trouble, diabetes, even cancer – and keep you feeling and looking younger as you age.

“Many of the chronic health conditions we experience as we age come from disuse rather than aging, and exercise can retard the onset of many of those condition,” says Conlin Milner, head of the International Council on Active Aging, a trade association of more than 3,500 organizations that specializes in senior fitness.

Need proof? Consider this: Starting at age 50, people begin to lose 12 percent of their muscle strength and 6 percent of their muscle mass every decade. But weight training can reverse these effects in a big way. Two to three months of weight training three times a week can increase muscle strength and mass by one-third, making up for three decades of loss of muscle strength and muscle mass, says University of Maryland kinesiologist Ben Hurley. And its never too late to start, says Julie McNeney, vice president of education for the International Council on Active Aging.



“You can be as fit as you want to be,” McNeney says. Of course, she added, “you can’t regain the strength you had when you were 18 or 19.”

Dr. Jack Higgins is vice president for health promotion for Fifty-Plus Lifelong Fitness, a Palo Alto, Calif.-based organization devoted to the promotion of physical activity for adults at midlife and beyond.

“Start slowly,” he tells older adults who have been sedentary. “Don’t overdo. If you get hurt, it stops you in your tracks.” Anyone resuming or starting an exercise program should first get a doctor’s OK, agreed Higgins and McNeney. Beyond that, they offer a host of other tips and guidance to get and stay motivated.

The goal is to work up to a minimum of 30 minutes of exercise at least five days a week.

If you’re unsure of how much stamina you have, start out with walking as your primary exercise.

Later on, you can add strength training, such as doing weight machines or free weights. Get advice from a professional. And don’t neglect two other aspects of fitness – flexibility, gained by stretching before and after exercise, and balance, crucial to prevent falling, especially as you get older.

Exercising in groups is especially motivating for seniors, Higgins says. That applies double to those who are social but reluctant to exercise, he adds.

If the prospect of joining a gym is intimidating, consider doing other, less-structured activities, such as mowing the grass or doing housework.

Finally, be sure to fit in activity throughout the day to get the recommended 30 minutes of activity, McNeney says. “If you watch two hours of TV a day, instead of sitting watching the commercials or channel surfing, get up and walk around the house, up the stairs, or march in place,” she says. “If you would do that with a two-hour [TV] session, you would accumulate the [recommended] 30 minutes.”

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