

# REAL LIFE SOLUTIONS

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## Managing a Family Crisis When You're on Work Overload

Juggling projects at work might seem difficult at the moment. But what would you do if a family crisis arose to boot?

### Managing at work

- Don't overwhelm your boss with details. Why? You're going to need practical cooperation from the boss, and maybe lots of it. If you give too many details, you will intensify your boss's stress. This will make it harder for him or her to offer flexibility or empathy if things go from bad to worse.
- Alert key clients (internal and external). Contact those who need to know. Phone to say, "I have a family emergency. I can't get the information you requested until early next week." Or, e-mail important customers to say, "I have a family crisis going on. I will be in my office from 9 a.m. to noon only this week."
- Set up communication support. Call on trusted people who will alert you

if there's a problem. For example, if your son is recovering from a motorcycle accident, ask a certain nurse on each shift to call you if anything changes. Or, ask a co-worker to forward work e-mails to your home.

- Call in favors. Ask for a little help from lots of people, and don't wait too long. If your crisis is really stressful, it's better to risk straining a few people than overloading yourself to the max.
- Find out if your company offers any resources. For example, ask someone in human resources if your company can provide time off, dependent-care assistance or other resources.

### Dealing with the crisis

In order to manage your crisis, gain information, find support, and stay focused. Ask lots of questions and don't give up until you get acceptable answers. Here are some tips:

- Face the real facts. If your parent has had a stroke, talk with doctors about recovery time, needed assistance, and financial obligations. Unanswered questions and false information can absorb your energy and ability to cope.
- Talk with others in the same boat. For instance, if your husband has had a serious heart attack, speak with wives

who've dealt with similar problems.

- Take things one day at a time. Any crisis is best managed in 24-hour increments. Focus on what you can give or do without jumping too far ahead. Keep in mind that a crisis destroys much of your ability to plan. Accept that you will be coping—not planning well—until the worst part of the crisis is over.

### Managing your family

As soon as you can reasonably stabilize the crisis situation, create a plan for your family to cope.

The crisis, your home life, and work all need to be managed as individually as possible. Try these suggestions:

- Talk with your children daily. Children will act out their frustrations when parents withhold information. In an age-appropriate way for each child, answer questions about your sick loved one or someone who has died.
- Don't hide all of your stress. Without role models, children will not learn that it's OK to feel their emotions fully. It's OK to let them see some of your tears and hear some of your fears—as long as you don't overwhelm them.
- Honor your spouse's feelings. As a couple, try not to overload each other—regardless of what is going on. Don't treat your spouse as a miracle worker; he/she has feelings and needs during this time, too.

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