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In the confidentiality and comfort of her private practice, conveniently located downtown, Dr. Walker has been dedicated to caring for Chicago area residents and professionals for twenty years, helping them build happier, healthier, more successful lives.

Using the approach to psychotherapy, Inner Humanism, Dr. Walker helps clients grow in ways that aim toward lasting improvements in their daily lives and inner happiness. Clients can receive help focused on overcoming painful feelings (such as anxiety and depression), addressing unstable self-esteem and self-confidence, creating a better work-life balance, developing more constructive family and work relationships, and changing unhealthy habits and lifestyles.

No one should have to live with feelings of unhappiness or remain caught in negative patterns. Psychotherapy can help people seeking to make improvements by addressing the inner roadblocks that oppose positive change.

CREATE A BETTER WORK-LIFE BALANCE AND ENJOY A HAPPIER LIFE

An important part of building a happy life is creating a balance among work, personal, and family needs that allows you to pursue your dreams, achieve your goals, and enhance your emotional and physical well-being. As you might have discovered, finding and maintaining the balance that suits you best are not always straightforward endeavors.

Today, many people feel that their lives are out of balance. Their priorities always seem to be competing in distressing ways—perhaps they enjoy their career achievements but can't find the time to take care of themselves and exercise, or their work seems to be interfering with having a loving family life. Whatever type or degree of work-life imbalance you might be experiencing, I offer this information to assist you in creating, without further delay, a balance that is better for you.¹

Consequences of Work-Life Balance Struggles

Work-life balance struggles can diminish your overall happiness and well-being and negatively impact your life in far-reaching ways. When you feel torn between a demanding job and a growing family, you can conclude that you never do enough in either area of your life, compromising the enjoyment you experience in both.

When you are at work, feeling guilty that you aren't meeting your family's needs, can result in reduced efficiency and productivity. Adverse health consequences, such as stress-related illnesses, can result when you are chronically tense or upset. These illnesses can be further exacerbated when you aren't able to make time to exercise or have regular medical check-ups.

When you pursue personal and family needs, you can be distracted by the work that you aren't getting done. Requests by your partner or children to spend time together can feel like more demands rather than positive desires for closeness and fun. These struggles in family relationships have consequences that range from tension and conflict to divorce and developmental problems for children.

Situational Factors Are Only Part of the Problem

Many situational factors pose challenges to your efforts to create the work-life balance you want. As you are well aware, tasks in daily living, such as supporting yourself or your family financially, job responsibilities, cooking meals, and paying bills can feel like obstacles to balancing your life.

Certain situational factors pose special burdens. These factors include having young children, working extra hours in a demanding career or a second job, being a single parent, poverty or serious financial constraints, and caring for an aging parent. Terrible losses, which create great hardships in people's lives (e.g., death of a spouse, divorce, job loss, serious illness, natural disasters, and being involved in war), can derail efforts to maintain a good work-life balance.

When you are undergoing a crisis or experiencing high levels of stress, it is strongly advisable that you seek professional support. Talking with a psychotherapist about your feelings is a direct way of dealing with the effects of stress and will help you to cope in more adaptive ways. Unfortunately, when people don't get the care they need, they are more

likely to suffer anxiety, depression, and stress-related illnesses; rely on less adaptive outlets (e.g., alcohol or drugs); and fall back on non-constructive coping mechanisms (e.g., overeating) and relationship patterns (e.g., arguing).

In most instances, real life needs and stressful situations usually account for only part of the difficulty people experience they aren't able to create the work-life balance they want. Most people recognize that their difficulties aren't entirely created by factors outside their control, but also stem from some of the choices they make. Unfortunately, even when you know you want to change some aspect of your lifestyle (e.g., procrastinate less or get regular exercise), you can't always stop doing something you know isn't good for you, or start doing something you know would be better.

Many people are caught in the middle of inner conflicts that make it hard for them to make changes to create the healthier and happier balance they would like. When confusion caused by inner conflicts is cleared away, with help from a psychotherapist, you often can find more flexible and adaptive ways of meeting your real life needs.

Inner Conflicts Can Make Balancing Your Life Harder

People sometimes make balancing their lives harder than necessary by unknowingly getting in their own way. Tendencies to make life harder are referred to as *motives for unhappiness* within the approach to psychotherapy I use, Inner Humanism, because they make people unhappy rather than happy.²

Motives to unknowingly cause yourself unhappiness can take on many forms, including chronic negative feelings about yourself, low self-esteem, lack of confidence, moodiness, long-standing bad habits, as well as counterproductive responses to stress and losses, and counterproductive relationship patterns.

These tendencies to unknowingly cause yourself unhappiness are relatively common, and in the past, were mistakenly viewed as inevitable, undesirable aspects of human nature. Progress in understanding child development has led to the recognition that children can develop motives to make things harder

for themselves when important psychological developmental needs are not accurately understood and are not fully met.³ These unrecognized motives can continue throughout life and set up barriers to living happy lives.

Motives for unhappiness often contribute to difficulties finding and maintaining the right balance among important priorities. Getting help to identify these tendencies as they occur, and to understand why they developed and continue to persist, can enable you to work toward overcoming them and toward gaining more control over making the choices you would prefer.

In my practice, I apply the approach to psychotherapy, Inner Humanism,⁴ in understanding and treating motives for unhappiness to help clients come to recognize that they don't need to accept previously unrecognized tendencies that interfere with their genuine happiness.

Psychotherapy Can Help in Finding and Maintaining a Better Work-Life Balance

Two composite examples from my practice highlight some of the common barriers that make it difficult for people when they try to create an optimal work-life balance. The examples show how psychotherapy can help people understand and overcome their unrecognized motives for unhappiness that are getting in their way.

In the first example, a woman struggled with finding the balance that suits her best, in this case, deciding whether to concentrate on her rewarding career as a business executive or to cut back in order to begin a family. In the second example, a busy architect

with a growing family of three children was having difficulty maintaining the work-life balance he knew he wanted.

According to accepted practices in the field, in these composite examples, I have changed the names, disguised all identifying information, and altered enough of the facts to completely protect the identity of clients and the confidentiality of their treatments. In addition, the issues these examples highlight are not unique to any one individual, but are commonly experienced by many people with whom I work.

Getting Help To FIND the Right Balance

Determining the balance that will make you truly happy involves contending with a range of issues, such as:

- Learning to listen to your feelings and weigh what is most important to you.
- Choosing a career or a way of pursuing your career that takes into consideration the kind of personal life you want.
- Choosing whether to focus on your career until you are well-established professionally or to make commitments to a partner and a family early on.
- Deciding whether to become a parent.
- Deciding when to have a baby or an additional child in light of career demands or career path.
- Determining how to combine work and family commitments on a daily basis.
- Deciding whether, and for how long, to reduce work responsibilities to care for young children.

If you are experiencing difficulty in making any of these types of decisions, I can help you determine which decision would be best for you.

Joanne's Story

Helping Joanne Find the Right Balance

Joanne had struggled for some time with knowing what would make her most happy—whether she wanted to focus on her rewarding career as a corporate executive or, in addition, raise a child.

Joanne's husband was unusual in that he did not have a strong preference and felt that he would be happy whether or not they chose to become parents. He knew that Joanne was trying to

decide what was best for her, and he was willing to support her decision.

Joanne repeatedly sought advice from her friends and family, but hearing other people's advice didn't help her make up her mind. She frequently compared herself to her friends, thinking maybe she would be happy doing what they were doing. She was also concerned about the expectations of her relatives, who often asked when she and her husband were

Joanne's Story, cont'd

going to have children. Joanne was living in a state of anxiety that was affecting her adversely and creating symptoms of insomnia, fatigue, and lack of enjoyment of her life.

Joanne's Motives for Unhappiness

Joanne sought psychotherapy because she felt stuck regarding this deeply important decision. Initially, she expected that I would advise her as to the choice that would be better for her. Rather than advise her, however, I helped her see that asking others for direction, comparing herself with others, and being concerned about other's expectations all came out of unrecognized motives for unhappiness in the form of negative feelings about her own ability to make important choices about her life.

Joanne began to see why it was hard for her to listen to her feelings in order to determine what was best for her. She described how her feelings and choices were seldom heard or respected when she was growing up. She came to realize that her confidence and sense of value as a person had not been fully developed in childhood, enabling her to understand why she dismissed her feelings and choices and focused too much on those of others.

Joanne had a new experience of herself through the way she was cared for in our therapeutic relationship. I always listened to and respected her feelings, and valued Joanne as a person. She started to feel better about herself and about her own opinions and preferences. She felt free in our relationship to pay attention to all of her feelings. Joanne discovered that, unlike her relatives, I had no personal agenda regarding what decision she would eventually make. She explored what she thought she would enjoy about each option and also what would feel difficult to her, given her life history. She talked through how the commitment of raising a

child would impact her marriage and career, as well. As Joanne understood her feelings better, including her concerns and reservations, she was able to come to know with confidence what would make her truly happy.

Joanne felt great pride in arriving at a decision that she felt to be her own. She was certain that she wanted to become a mother, but first, she wanted to feel happier and make improvements in both her marriage and her work life. She had begun to recognize the effect her motives for unhappiness had been having, unknowingly, in these important areas. Starting psychotherapy was the beginning of a process of true self-discovery and growth for Joanne.

In her married life, Joanne worked on creating greater intimacy through becoming more comfortable expressing her needs and more open to hearing the needs of her husband. She discovered that her husband wanted to know her feelings and that he responded positively to her desires for increased closeness. Their marriage grew happier and more stable through this deeper mutual involvement.

In her career, Joanne applied the new model for taking care of herself that she developed in psychotherapy, in making leadership decisions with greater confidence and in expressing her views when they were different from those of others. She also applied the new model in listening better and being more responsive to the needs of her business clients and supervisees. Joanne's team became the model for successful client relations within her company, and morale within her team improved significantly.

With the increased happiness and stability Joanne was able to create for herself, she now felt ready to embrace motherhood and enjoy it to the fullest.

Getting Help To MAINTAIN the Right Balance

Once people are able to determine the balance they want, they often find it difficult to follow through and maintain this optimal balance. Work-life balance struggles, by their nature, involve difficult choices among competing priorities. Ongoing inner conflicts over these competing priorities cause people to have difficulty sticking with their decisions. When you have conflicting feelings about your priorities, whenever

you pursue one goal (e.g., beginning an exercise program), a competing goal (e.g., working extra hours), can nag at you until you pursue the competing priority, instead. As illustrated in the next case, if you feel caught between competing priorities it is important to ask yourself, "Am I listening to the part of myself I really want to listen to, or did I want to do one thing but find myself doing another?"

Jeff's Story

Helping Jeff Maintain the Right Balance

After thoughtfully searching his feelings, Jeff, an architect with an excessive workload, decided not to take on any additional projects for the summer so that he could spend summer weeknights attending his children's baseball and soccer games. Jeff felt great when he told his wife about his decision. Later that evening, however, he began second-guessing himself and felt anxious as he anticipated his lighter work schedule.

These anxious, uncomfortable feelings nagged at Jeff over the next week. When a client called, he felt compelled by these uncomfortable feelings to accept a new project on the spot. Upon accepting the project, his feelings of anxiety were relieved.

At some level, Jeff realized that he had pushed aside his prior choice to share in his children's summer without carefully thinking through whether that was what he really wanted. As he spent many evenings working on the project, Jeff felt vaguely upset with himself for disappointing his children, and he missed the fun he used to have with them at their games.

Jeff recognized that this was a familiar pattern for him. He always felt overwhelmed by his volume of work. No matter how much he did, he never felt it was enough. He would try to spend more time with his wife and children, but something inevitably came up. Furthermore, whenever he attempted to reduce his work-load, he felt very concerned that

his supervisor would think less of him and that this could jeopardize his chance for promotion. Despite his best efforts, he could not find a way out of this pattern. He sought psychotherapy because he wasn't happy with the way either his work or family life were going and he didn't want the situation escalating into a crisis.

Jeff's Motives for Unhappiness

I helped Jeff see that he was in a type of tug-of-war with himself. This tug-of-war created unproductive results both at work and at home. He always experienced himself as being in conflict with either his supervisor or his wife, feeling both wanted more of him. He had not seen before that he was caught, really, in a conflict between two sides of himself—two sides with opposing sets of feelings. One side wanted to spend more time with his family and have a reasonable work schedule. The other side felt deeply self-critical when he took off an evening or weekend and, furthermore, was convinced that his supervisor shared this harsh view.

Jeff began to understand, through help in psychotherapy, the inner tug-of-war that prevented him from having the work-life balance he really wanted. He talked about how his parents had very high, probably unrealistic, expectations of him as a child, causing him to feel that he always came up short in their eyes. They expected him to have capacities that adults have,

Jeff's Story, cont'd

such as being able to reliably complete all of his homework and chores. When he slipped up, they would tell him he wasn't trying hard enough and could do better.

Jeff learned that he was now treating himself just as his parents had treated him, by feeling that he wasn't working hard enough, whenever he wanted to have a realistic workload. He had always thought, like his parents, that being harsh with himself was the best way to motivate him to strive harder. More and more, he recognized that these harsh feelings were, instead, motives for unhappiness that were only making things worse.

Psychotherapy helped Jeff understand, for the first time, the source of his deep concern about his supervisor. Jeff's motives for unhappiness led him to expect that his supervisor would feel exactly the same way about him as did his parents. Jeff recognized that he didn't have any real evidence that his supervisor actually viewed him harshly. He was now able to see that it was really a part of him that felt that he was lax, and that he was probably his own harshest critic.

Jeff Grew Less Critical of Himself

Jeff gradually began to feel less critical of himself as he experienced unconditional support, for the first time, in his therapeutic relationship with me. He developed more positive feelings about himself and his career, which paid off in increased efficiency and productivity during the time he was at work.

When new projects came up, Jeff felt comfortable turning to his supervisor for help to determine how

to best utilize his time now that he was less concerned that his supervisor viewed him negatively. His supervisor made the helpful observation that Jeff tended to do everything himself and didn't delegate parts of projects and get the rest of the staff involved. Jeff saw that by delegating some of his duties he could make better use of his time and be involved in additional projects.

I worked with Jeff to help him stand his ground with his intention to delegate work, and also to catch himself whenever he subsequently fell prey to feelings of self-criticism. I helped him understand that, when he chose to follow his goal to delegate projects, the part of him that believed he never did enough became very uncomfortable. Knowing why he felt uncomfortable helped Jeff maintain his resolve when he questioned his choice to delegate and felt internal pressure to reverse his decision.

Just as Jeff tended to be critical of himself for delegating projects, he also tended to feel critical toward people to whom he delegated work, feeling that they didn't do enough, either. Through understanding his inner tug-of-war, and with the support of his therapeutic relationship, Jeff was able to overcome these critical feelings and stick with the goal he really preferred, delegating work on an increasingly regular basis.

Steadily over time, Jeff grew comfortable with wanting a more balanced life, and his family grew closer together.

When Is It Time To Seek Psychotherapy?

If you are wondering if you should seek psychotherapy, then you must already have identified at least one area of your life that you would like to be different. Anyone who feels less than satisfied with the way their lives are going most likely could benefit from psychotherapy. You don't have to view feeling badly as inevitable or wait until problems reach a crisis.

Many people experience more unhappiness than they would like. Unhappiness is never something you should have to live with or accept. People who seek psychotherapy recognize that they deserve to be happy and reach their potential, and they are determined to take positive action and work toward making this happen. Changing negative feelings and counterpro-

When Is It Time To Seek Psychotherapy? cont'd

ductive patterns often takes more than empathic listening or advice from family and friends.

Using the clinical approach described in this article, I can help you begin to understand why these unwanted feelings and patterns continue, and help you with the inner roadblocks that oppose positive change. You can receive help in gaining greater control and choice over how you feel and over which motives you pursue. Positive, optimistic feelings about yourself will also be strengthened, helping you gradually to move beyond the negative cycles toward the goal of enjoying lasting improvements in your moods and in your life.

A common initial obstacle to beginning psychotherapy is thinking that obtaining help from a psychologist is a sign of weakness. It is just the opposite!

People who seek psychotherapy have the courage to change their lives and the strength of their convictions. Tragically, many people in our culture are burdened with feeling that they must struggle with problems alone. Contributing to this sense of isolation is often a concern that it would be difficult to discuss the problem with a stranger. Be assured that a caring psychotherapist will be non-judgmental in helping you regardless of the nature of your problem.

Choosing to start psychotherapy is an admirable and constructive way of supporting and caring for yourself that can assist you, beginning right now, in making changes you desire.

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Dr. Walker is a Member of the American Psychological Association, the Illinois Psychological Association, and The Intrapsychic Humanism Society.

¹ Adapted from a symposium on, *Profession, Community, Family: Keeping the Juggling Act in the Air*. Paper presented at the American Institute of Architects National Convention, Chicago, Illinois, 2004.

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