

Follow the Rules of the Teeter-Totter

By Gail Nelson, M.Ed., LPC

With the changing demands on parents, students and workers due to COVID-19 precautions, we are all experiencing new ups and downs that lead us to find new ways of creating “balance”. The teeter-totter comes to mind because the ups and downs are part of the pressure applied by the two parties sitting on either side of the plank. For kids at a park, it is play. For adults trying to manage the challenges on all fronts, it is part of this difficult new reality.



The pressure forcing you to find a new balance is massive. This **new balance is dynamically changing**, so expect the ups and downs as a normal part of life. You can assume that some things you try will work, and that old routines will not. We all need to continue finding creative solutions to the problems we face.

Personally, I am impressed with how adaptive we have all become in the last six months! Think of all the ways we are succeeding to rearrange at work, school and home. All things considered; we are getting through this with remarkable innovation. But, let’s not forget that it has come at a high price to our emotional coping reserves.

With public health officials telling us the pandemic will last another 6 to 18 months, you should expect to “double think” every decision you make related to your job, family, health, well being and children. As you try to cope with balancing work and home, here are some reminders.

- You **did not choose** to live in this sudden onset of the pandemic environment. Fear and resistance to change are natural. Honor the pushback you feel to making these changes to home, work and school. It is inconvenient, unnatural and unprecedented.
- **Honor the struggle.** Say these phrases to yourself often:
 - *This is new.*
 - *This is different.*
 - *This is out of the ordinary.*
 - *This is a marathon, not a sprint.*
 - *I may not have the support I need.* Allow yourself to reach out and ask for help.
- **Follow the rules of the teeter-totter.** The rules for the teeter-totter apply well to what will help us during the pandemic and struggles of today.
 1. Hang on!
 2. Help lift each other up. Maintaining your social bubble means both giving and receiving support.
 3. Do not jump off suddenly. Drastic changes can negatively impact ours and our social bubble’s ability to manage other unexpected changes.

4. Relax on the ride up.
 5. Prepare for the ride down.
 6. Know that this playground game is a useful metaphor for finding “balance” in our new normal and future normal world with many, many ups and downs!
- **Be compassionate with yourself and others.** As with all disasters, we have normal reactions to abnormal events. Expect to feel disappointment, anger, disillusionment and confusion. You are learning to live in an environment that is threatened from an unseen enemy—COVID19. To succeed you’ll need to be flexible, adaptable and creative with both yourself and with others.

For today, remember ups and downs are part of the expected pressure applied to any system like a family, workplace or school—like the teeter-totter on the playground. Your cooperation to the game helps the other riders in your life avoid crashing to the ground without support.

Your VITAL WorkLife Employee Assistance Program (EAP) can help you feel supported as you manage the ups and downs of this pandemic we are living through. **Reach out, get support and share your unique experiences of living through these times of dynamic shifts in roles and responsibilities.**

We Can Help

As part of your [EAP](#), you and your family members have access to:

- Face-to-face or virtual counseling
- In-the-moment behavioral health support, available 24/7
- Financial and legal consultations and resources
- Work & Life Resources on your [Member Website](#), including such as articles, seminars and more that can support your well being through the pandemic and beyond
- And much more

Contact VITAL WorkLife today at **800.383.1908** or through the **VITAL WorkLife App** to access your resources today. By using your EAP you can share the load and get support for any challenge you’re experiencing from a trained mental health provider.

About the Author

Gail Nelson, M.Ed., LPC, has been an EAP Consultant and counselor for VITAL WorkLife for over 10 years and has also provided onsite Critical Incident Response services.

In partnership with the Couples Institute and their tools in the developmental model of relating, Gail specializes in guiding couples through problems and issues that can be too much to handle on their own.

She owns her own practice, [Journey Counseling](#), in the Fargo, North Dakota area, and offers individual and couples therapy.

