

Parenting Together

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Self-Care Strategies for Parents

Let's start with this important fact that all parents should keep in mind:

Taking time for yourself supports not only your own well-being, but drastically impacts the lives of your children.



Frazzled, over-stressed parents can make for frazzled and overstressed families. As a parent, you may feel the need to be on call all the time and this is exhausting.

Having one child is demanding (and some children require more than others), having more than one child even more so. Even if your kids have an easy-going temperament much of the time, the simple logistics of getting them out of bed, dressed, fed, out the door, and then back inside later on, all while continuing to manage all the grown-up tasks you've always had, can lead to parenting stress.

There's nothing most of us care more about than our children. Just having them causes most parents a fair amount of worry about their well-being. Add on chronic sleep

deprivation and disrupted routines related to eating, exercise, and your personal life....altogether, being a parent can come with a great deal of stress.

Not to mention, parenting can feel like one big sloppy mess, especially since family life never goes exactly as we plan.

A big school project that you were told is due next month is due tomorrow, and you forgot to stop by the store for milk on the way home, you haven't exercised in a month, and you wonder if your daughter forgot to bring her raincoat to school yet again. It seems there is always one more thing to worry about or to do or to fix or to change.

All the anxiety around raising children isn't without consequence. When we feel overwhelmed, it affects how we think and how we act. Chronic stress undermines our physical and mental health and it changes how we think.

One study even suggested that one of the best measures of a child's stress is their parents' stress level.

A little stress keeps us on our toes and motivated, but we can all benefit from having a few strategies to manage our parenting stress.

The Book Nook

I am Peace: A Book of Mindfulness
by Susan Verde

Now
by Antoinette Portis

Gracias/Thanks
by Pat Mora

Four Healthy Self-Care Strategies for Parents

There's a further implication to under-managed stress: The often-unspoken part of our "fight or flight" response is a mental "freeze" that can cause us to stop thinking clearly.

Stress relates to less flexible problem-solving and a decreased capacity to sustain an effort (like sticking to discipline and guiding intentions or a new homework routine). That stress-induced mental state makes managing family life harder, which can lead to a cycle that keeps us feeling exhausted and worn-out. If we don't find time to build our own resilience through self-care, we create patterns that repeat themselves.



Whenever family life seems unstable and overly chaotic (as opposed to routinely chaotic), an important first step to hitting the reset button may be spending a few minutes to take care of yourself. Rediscovering your own strength, or simply taking a moment to settle, is often what we need to take care of our children and ourselves.



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1. Value what keeps you healthy.

Find an activity that keeps you sane and strong. No matter how busy you are, make it happen - even for a few minutes. Listen to music on the commute to work, read for a few minutes in the bathroom, take your child outside with you for a walk or hike. Taking these moments will help your well-being and allow you to have more energy for your family. Keep in mind, it's not just for you; children tend to pick up similar healthy habits to those they see.

2. Be patient with yourself.

As with children, adult resilience relies on acknowledging what you do well, instead of focusing on self-judgment. Take small, steady steps toward change, pushing back against mental habits like perfectionism and negativity and allow for long-term progress toward family goals.

3. Value your relationships.

If you have the resources (and not everyone does), schedule a regular babysitting night so that you and your significant other can go out and do something grown up. Or trade nights of babysitting with another family. Likewise, and particularly if you're a single parent, find times for friends as consistently as you're able to. Creating this time also embodies healthy relationships for your children, letting them see the importance of treating others with warmth and compassion.

4. Take. A. Break!

Throughout your day (and your life!), when you see a chance, take a breather. Instead of continually doing and fixing and checking social media and email and giving in to the pull of your smartphone, actively choose something that allows you a calm, restorative minute or two.

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References

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- 4 Self-Care Strategies to Avoid Parental Burnout
<https://www.garrisoninstitute.org/blog/4-self-care-strategies-to-avoid-parental-burnout/>
- Self-Care for Parents
<https://www.peps.org/ParentResources/by-topic/self-care/self-care-for-parents>

