



Taking Care of You





Focus on You: Looking Back and Moving Ahead with Your Child

Taking care of yourself is a win-win for you and your child. This is true for moms and dads.

Self-care activities help you de-stress; refuel emotional and physical energy; and recognize when there is a need to connect to others, whether with a supportive friend or a professional, such as a healthcare provider or your home visitor.

Caring for yourself can help you be healthier, more focused, and optimistic—even when there are life challenges. With a more positive mindset, you will find it easier to see what you do well. You’ll be a better problem-solver and feel more confident asking for support. You’ll make even better decisions for yourself and for your child.

Yet, when you are so busy caring for everyone else in your family, it can be easy for your needs to be pushed to the side, and you may feel guilty taking time for yourself.

Self-care is not about being selfish or adding another task to your already busy life. It is about being aware of what you already do to support your well-being and building upon those actions as needed. Self-care activities *fill your cup* and might include:



Enjoying activities that calm, refresh, and energize you.

Maybe you look forward to going for a long run or listening to your favorite music. Perhaps you’ve made child care arrangements, so you can get a much-needed nap or exchange books and movies at the library.



Choosing activities that fit into your life and work best for you.

Some examples include going window shopping rather than giving your credit card a workout when you are trying keep to your budget, spending an afternoon working on your motorcycle project, or choosing to pass up dessert for a few weeks when you want to drop your sugar consumption.



Connecting with others.

You may want to meet a friend for coffee, join in a pick-up game of basketball at the park, or talk with your home visitor.



Being aware of what depletes you and how you can adjust.

For example, if you end up feeling angry and drained every time you see or talk with your sister, it may be better to agree to email for now or even take a break for a few months and then try again.



Looking Back at Self-Care

Self-care isn't always as easy as it sounds. You or a member of your family may be going through an especially bumpy and stressful time right now, like an illness, the loss of a job, a deployment, or a homecoming. The more stress there is, the harder it can be to find time and energy for self-care – even though these are times caring for yourself are most important!

But there is good news! There are things you can do that are under your control and that can help *fill your cup*.

The Power of Mindfulness

Mindfulness is about being aware. It is noticing and paying attention to your feelings and thoughts. Being mindful helps you focus on and be in the here and now. Mindfulness helps you be aware of what you notice and feel in the moment without judgement.

Everyone has some ability to be mindful, and it can happen at any time and in any place. Being mindful releases chemicals in the brain that are associated with happiness. With practice, this ability can grow stronger and become a more intentional part of your everyday life.

Here are two mindfulness exercises to practice. Talk with your home visitor about other suggestions.

Experiment with Visualization

Also known as guided imagery, the idea is to reduce stress and calm yourself by directing your mind to focus on a positive, calming experience or place:



Imagine you are hiking in the woods.



See the sun setting behind the mountains in the distance.



Listen to the sound of the birds around you.



Feel the cool breeze against your skin.



Savor the smell of the evergreen trees around you.



Enjoy the refreshing taste of cold water.



Watch Your Breath During Mindful Meditation

Mindful meditation influences how your body and mind work. Researchers have found that meditation actually slows brain waves to the point where your learning, thinking, and planning brain shifts into a deeper state of awareness (which many describe as drowsiness) in which your intuition and ability to visualize become stronger and clearer to you.

Learning to control your brain gives you an inner resource. You can help yourself move from feeling drained because you are replaying negative experiences or worrying about what tomorrow might bring and move toward accepting what happened in the past and making different choices for your tomorrows.

Try this once a day for 3-5 minutes to get started. You can then add time when you feel ready. Shorter and regular meditations are more helpful than a longer session every few weeks.



Find a quiet and comfortable spot.



Sit tall with your hand rested on your lower abdomen.



Close your eyes or glance downward.



Take a deep breath in through your nose.



Notice your breath flow in and out.



If your mind begins to wander, turn your attention back to your breath.



Notice that as your breaths grow deeper and longer, your body and mind begin to calm.



Repeat as many times as you feel are necessary.



It may take time for these exercises to feel natural and relaxing. You deserve the gift of giving yourself that time.



The Power of Positive Thoughts

Some things in life you can control. Other things you just have to cope with. One element you can control is your approach to the world. Your mindset can define your experience, and it is up to you.

Positive thoughts lead to a positive attitude. A positive attitude makes you happier and more resilient and allows you to see yourself as a person who can actively direct your own life. When you are optimistic and positive, you may see setbacks as temporary. Problems become challenges that provide you opportunities to learn and grow.

On the other hand, blaming and complaining can weigh you down. It can feel as if you are living in a cloud of negativity and can make you feel like you have no control in your life.

Here are some suggestions you may decide to try for a more positive attitude:



Think about the words you use.

Your language matters: "I feel strong." "I can manage." "I like myself."



Notice and enjoy small pleasures.

Your child's smile, a cooling breeze on a warm day, the smell of your morning cup of tea, the taste of a fresh peach are small delights.



Decide how you are going to feel.

Try to manage your emotions and reactions no matter what is happening around you.



Find a positivity partner.

Search out someone you can talk to during the day, and share one or more good things that happened to each of you.



Write down at least one thing you are grateful for before falling asleep.

It is a calming way to end the day.



Expect life to be bumpy at times.

Sometimes you just have to make it through and adjust as you go.



Appreciate How Much You are Growing and Learning

Like your little one, you are learning and growing as a parent every day. It can be hard to see the changes in yourself when you are busy or tired. Yet taking a moment to think about how you have grown and changed can nourish and energize you.

For example, you might have learned how to do some of the following:



Quiet your fussy baby – most of the time.



Ask a friend to babysit so you can take a nap.



Respond better to your child’s needs because you have a good understanding of what her behaviors communicate.



Get out the door in the morning with everyone and everything.



Make a list of questions to ask your child’s healthcare provider before an appointment.



Keep a clean shirt by the front door so you can do a quick change if needed before you go to work or school.



Add in more vegetables to your own meals as your toddler is trying out new foods.



Take a Moment: Appreciating How Much You Have Grown and Changed

What is something you have learned to do since becoming a parent?

What is something you have learned about yourself?



You Are Not Alone

Whatever you may be feeling, it's important to remember that you are not alone. It may be helpful to think about the words you would share with a friend to support him. Then, say those words to yourself. This can help you change your inner voice to be more compassionate toward yourself.

All parents find life easier when they have other adults to count on and trust. Supportive people can include a spouse, partner, family, friends, neighbors, community leaders, or your child's healthcare provider.

Thinking about and writing down the names of people you can call upon can be helpful. You may have already identified members who form your *Circle of Support*. Perhaps you have one or two key support people in your life. If you find yourself forgetting you have people you can depend upon for help, post their names in a place you can easily see, such as on the refrigerator or your bathroom mirror. When parenting starts to feel like too much, sometimes knowing you are not alone will be enough. But if that doesn't help, pick up your phone and reach out.

What You Decide to Say and Do Matters

Think about the many ways you support your child. Here are two examples written from a child's perspective and space for you to add one about your family.

When You...	You Help Me Begin to Learn That...
Reach out to friends or our home visitor...	We are not alone. It is OK to share with others and to ask for help or support. We are part of a community.
Use mindfulness to be calm and present...	You are here for me. I can count on you. Being with you will help me feel calm and safe.



Taking Care of Your from a Child's Point of View



Figuring It Out Together

Here are some things your child might tell you about taking care of yourself– if she had the words:

Through a Young Child's Eyes
What I Might Learn When You Take Care of Yourself

Taking care of yourself is important for grownups and children too. I take care of myself when I eat fruit, brush my teeth, and play with my friends. I go to the doctor just like you.

Some people and places help you feel better. I learn more about this when I hear you say things, like "Today we are going to take a walk to the park where it is quiet and calm, so we will feel calm too."

When you take care of yourself, you are happier. When you and my other important people are doing well, we have more fun singing, playing, exploring, and enjoying. I am happier too.

We can make choices that work for us. I learn about this when you tell me, "Aunt Rachel sent these clothes your cousin wore, so you can wear them now. That was kind of her. Now you have great clothes, and we can use our money for other things we need."

It is ok to ask someone for help. You do not have to know everything or be able to do everything for yourself.

Counting to 10 and taking a deep breath is calming. When we are both upset, it helps us if we stop, count to 10, and take a deep breath together.

Sometimes people ask us for help, and we help them. People help each other. We are part of a community.



Take a Moment: Focus on You and Your Child

What might you tell your child about why it is important that you take care of yourself?

How might taking care of yourself support you in taking care of her?



Nurturing Your Well-Being: Feeling Good About You



Figuring It Out Together

When you feel healthy and happy, you are more likely to feel good about yourself and your life. You are likely to feel more confident and to build trusting, caring relationships with others. You are more likely to feel competent and engaged at home and at work, and you are positioned to cope better with the stresses of everyday life.

You Are Not Alone

Whatever you may be feeling – joyful, loving, sad, frustrated, angry - it’s important to remember you are not alone. Other parents share your feelings! It is important to be able to feel what you feel and still be able to see and respond in thoughtful ways to your child.

When you have someone to talk, laugh, cry, complain, share your joys and your doubts with, and to listen to, you know you are not alone. Someone sees you and understands what you are experiencing.

Have you created a *Circle of Support*? Do you have a list of people you can call and count on? Is the list on a piece of paper or in your phone? Is it hanging on your fridge or bathroom mirror? These are the people you can reach out to when parenting starts to feel like too much or when your child does something amazing that you have to share. You are not alone!

Baby Blues

If you have just given birth, you may be experiencing mood swings, or you may feel down, irritable, tired, sad, or impatient. You may even have trouble sleeping, despite the fact that you are exhausted. These postpartum blues, or baby blues, can make it hard to enjoy and respond to your baby.

Don’t be alarmed. These feelings are very common. Many new mothers (about 50-80%) experience the blues. Fathers also might notice the blues. The same is true for adoptive and foster parents.

Usually, baby blues tend to lessen in a week or two. The key is to recognize the signs and get as much rest as possible, accept the help of family and friends, and talk with other new parents. In the United States, newborns typically have several well-baby check-ups in their first few months. It is good to share about any baby blues you or your parenting partner may be feeling with these healthcare professionals. They can work with you, whether the blues lessen on their own or continue to affect and concern you.



Always remember - alcohol and recreational drugs can intensify mood swings and use of them should be avoided by those who care for young children.



Postpartum Depression

If the baby blues don't go away after a few weeks, or become more intense, you may be experiencing postpartum depression. Postpartum depression most commonly affects mothers within the first 3 months after giving birth but can occur at any point during the first year. Approximately 10% of women are affected, and each woman experiences her own unique combination of symptoms.

It is not only mothers who can become depressed after welcoming a new child to the family, fathers and adoptive parents can experience it too. Your home visitor has resources for you including hotline numbers you can call.



SAFETY ALERT: If you feel you may hurt yourself or your baby, put your baby in her crib or another safe place and call 9-1-1, or one of the emergency hotline numbers listed below, right away. Explain what is happening, and ask someone to come be with you immediately (e.g., A family member or trusted neighbor).

Arrange to talk with a healthcare provider. There are treatments, including talk therapy and medications, that can help. The sooner you get support, the sooner you will feel like yourself again and be able to enjoy your baby.

National Hopeline Network: 1-800-SUICIDE (784-2433)

If your depression is leading to suicidal thoughts, call the National Hopeline to connect with a depression treatment center in your area. The Hopeline also offers a live chat feature for those who don't want to, or who are unable to, call and can dispatch emergency crews to your location if necessary.

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-TALK (8255)

This national hotline is another valuable resource for people whose depression has escalated to suicidal or other harmful thoughts. Their network of crisis centers provides emotional support and guidance to people in distress and are also available via a chat service and a special hotline number for the hearing impaired: 1-800-799-4889.

National Youth Crisis Hotline: 1-800-448-4663

This resource provides brief interventions for youth who are dealing with pregnancy, sexual abuse, child abuse, depression, and suicidal thoughts. They also provide referrals to local counseling, treatment centers, and shelters.

Text 741741 when you are feeling depressed or suicidal, a crisis worker will text you back immediately and continue to text with you. Many people, especially younger people, don't like talking on the phone and would feel much more comfortable texting. This is a free service for anyone.



Appreciate Your Own Parenting Journey

Every parent is on his or her own journey. Parents are finding their way with their very individual child. Appreciating who you are and your path as a parent is one of the most important ways to respect and care for yourself. This means not getting caught up in the comparison game. Comparing yourself to others can be a slippery slope because it is often easier to notice what another parent does well than to see your own strengths. Part of self-care is knowing there are parts of parenting you do well and other aspects you are working on - just like every other parent!

The reality is that there is no such thing as a perfect parent...or a perfect child...or a perfect anyone. To help you appreciate your journey, give yourself a break. Parenting is a juggling act. Usually there are so many balls in the air at once that some will inevitably fall. For example, the laundry may not get done, and you and your child go to child care in the same clothes as yesterday. Perhaps your flower patch in front of your home needs to be weeded, there may be toys all over the living room, or you may realize it has been 3 days since you've had a real shower. It happens. You can't do it all. No one can - and that is OK.

Just pause and realize and appreciate all you do well and those special moments that you and your child share.



Take a Moment: Partnering Moments that Give You a Boost

What is something you and your child do together that makes you both smile or laugh?

What is a memory of a loving moment between you and your child that you want to remember to share with her when she is older?



Moving from Comparing to Appreciating Your Child

It is natural to compare what and how your child is doing to others, for example your friend's 7-month-old baby has already started to crawl or your niece started using the potty at 26 months. Comparing can happen anytime, anywhere: while on a walk with a friend and her baby, in the park, at the supermarket, in child care, or on the bus.

You need to understand that comparisons often aren't the best thing for you, or for your child, even though, at times, it may be reassuring or even lead to a burst of pride. Comparing can put unnecessary pressure on you, which ultimately can add stress or tension to your relationship with your child.

It's hard not to compare at all, but focus on and try to appreciate your child's unique way of being, her path of growing and learning. She, like you, is one-of-a-kind, and there is no better way to help her thrive than to see and enjoy what makes her special, for example the way she smiles when you pick her up out of her crib; her interest in filling and dumping or trying to stack bottlecaps; or how she startles at loud, unexpected sounds but runs across the yard shrieking with delight trying to catch the bubbles you blow.

"But what if I feel something is really wrong?" you may be wondering. What if you feel your child is significantly behind and not meeting recommended developmental milestones? If that is the case, trust your gut. You know your baby better than anyone. Rather than compare and worry, talk to your child's healthcare provider. Ask your questions and pursue the answers until you have the information you need.



Soothing Thoughts and Practices for You

When you are quiet inside, it can be easier to notice and to appreciate positive traits about yourself and parts of your life.

Sometimes, the things you do to quiet your baby like rocking her, singing softly to her, bouncing her gently in your arms, dancing with her, telling her “everything will be OK,” will help you calm down too. Here are some other ideas to try when you need to soothe yourself:



Make a note or talk to yourself: Putting your feelings on paper or saying them aloud can be a relief.



Organize: Cluttered space can cause stress.



Take a few moments to put stray items in their place.



Laugh: Enjoying a comedy movie, telling a joke, or sharing good times with a friend will remind you that life is good, even when you may be feeling overwhelmed.



Prioritize: If tasks get pushed back, don't sweat the small stuff.



Dance, sway, stomp, whatever it takes.



Take a look at your baby's precious little face when she is calm or asleep.



Enjoy a warm bath or a run or read a few pages of a good book or listen to a song you love. Do whatever it is that helps you take a breath and recharge.



What You Decide to Say and Do Matters

Think about the many ways you support your child. Here are two examples written from a child’s perspective and space for you to add one about your family.

When You...	You Help Me Begin to Learn That...
Notice and appreciate the things you do well...	I can feel proud and happy about things I am learning to do well. It feels good.
Notice and appreciate who I am as a unique person...	You see me. I can be confident and satisfied with myself.



What Fills Your Cup?



You fill my cup all the time. Now it is time to fill yours.

Figuring It Out Together

Before a plane takes off, a flight attendant reminds adult passengers traveling with children to put on their own oxygen mask before helping children with their masks. If you have passed out from not enough oxygen, there is no way you can be there to support yourself or your child.

It is the same when you are running on empty. Keeping your cup filled isn't selfish or indulgent.

It is necessary to assure you can be there for your child and share her pleasure in the everyday moments of your lives; to be there for other family members; and, most important, to be there for yourself.

Here are some questions to think about on your own with a family member or friend or your home visitor:

What Empties Your Cup?

Who and/or what drains your time and energy? Taking time to think about these points can be a way of taking care of yourself:



Are there family members and friends who may mean well but sap rather than fuel you since you've become a parent?

This could be a friend you hung out with when you were single who just can't understand why you have to cancel a date because your child is sick. Perhaps, a family member is so full of advice that it is a source of anxiety in your life. Young children stir up deep feelings. You may not need to make a complete break with them but just limit how often and for how long you see them.



Are there parts of your daily routine that bog you down?

For example, this could be getting out the door in the morning or late afternoons with a cranky child.



Are there events in your life that you have no control over that make tasks harder to complete?

For example, you may experience more challenges if your parenting partner is not able to help because of sickness or being deployed, your roof is leaking, or you come down with the flu.



What Fills Your Cup?

Who and/or what makes you happy and gives you energy? Taking time to think about these points can be a way of taking care of yourself.



What activities and places give you energy?

Perhaps it fills your cup when you wear your red scarf, listen to your favorite music, walk in the park, have video calls with family members who live far away, go out for dinner, go hiking in the mountains, spend time by a lake or river, or care for a pot of flowers on your porch. Whatever it is that fills your cup, do it as often as you can. In addition, try be open to finding new ways to fill your cup.



Who sees and appreciates your strengths – and helps you see them?

It is often easier for someone else to see your strengths than to see them yourself. This may be anyone: one of your parents, your home visitor, a friend, or a neighbor. How often do you see this person? How can you arrange to talk with him or her more often? How can you own what he or she tells you about the positive things you say and do as a person and a parent?



Who or what makes you laugh?

Do you have a friend who always has a funny story to share? Is there a book, a movie, a song, something you do with your child that makes you smile?



What personal care routines help you feel healthy?

Do you see a medical care provider for regular checkups? Are you able to set your family's sleep needs as a priority and build routines that support better sleep for everyone?



Does engaging in these activities, spending time with these people, and going to these places recharge you?

You deserve it. Taking care of you is a winning strategy – for you, your child, and your family.



Take a Moment: Talking About Filling Your Cup with People You Trust

Who is someone you can comfortably talk with about what depletes and fills your cup?

What is something you might tell this person about what depletes or fills your cup?

How does having someone you can share with help you keep your cup filled?



What You Decide to Say and Do Matters

Think about the many ways you support your child. Here are two examples written from a child's perspective and space for you to add one about your family.

When You...	You Help Me Begin to Learn That...
Keep your cup filled...	It is important to take care of myself. I will learn how to do that by watching you over the years.
Laugh often...	Laughing together is fun and feels good.

