

Self-Care

When taking care of yourself is the No.1 thing you can do for your child

By: Alisha Parker-Cummins

Sometimes responsibilities in life cause us to forget to take care of our personal needs. We say it's time to do a self-care check- up! This is most commonly true for moms, who typically tend to have many caregiving responsibilities. Regardless, we moms certainly don't own the "letting life get in the way of taking care of ourselves" monopoly. This is often also true of Educators. They too often easily lose themselves in the mission of education, and many times find themselves feeling the need to do more, or work harder for their students. This could easily lead to a burn out, if self-care measures are left out. No matter if you are a parent, spouse, educator, or none the like, self-care is not a "nice-to-have" goal only when you have the time. It's the foundation that allows all of us the focus and energy we deserve, as well as an important aspect of stress management.

One might ask what self-care is and what self-care isn't. Angela Essary, a Master's level counselor, and the Adult Program Manager with Pyscamore Psychiatric Programs, defines self-care in a practical way. She warns that parents can often view the job of parenting as only being done correctly through self-sacrifice. This mindset lends no time for, and often causes feelings of guilt, in relation to self-care practices. She uses the metaphor of an airplane with mechanical problems. The crew will tell you, if the oxygen masks drop down, PUT YOURS ON FIRST. This is because, if you pass out, you are no help to your kids or anyone else. Self-care is the same principle. If you don't care for yourself, by stopping to refuel, you won't be able to provide your kids with the things they really need, like the warmth of being fully present with them.

Referring to a 2018 research study (Mikolajczak, M., and Raskam, I., *Frontiers in Psychology*), Dr. Sudha Madakasira, Chief Medical Director of Pyscamore Psychiatric Programs, states that certain parents may be at more risk for burn out if their belief system of perfect parenting outweighs their inability to use available resources. He recommends parents to evaluate own attitudes about parenting responsibilities and to reach out for community resources (nurseries, churches, families, friends, etc.) to prevent a burnout.

So, what happens when we don't make time for self-care in our daily schedule? Emily Lehigh, LCSW, the Child Program Manager, and Zach Thompson, MA, PLPC, the Adolescent Program Manager at Pyscamore Psychiatric Programs, shared with us that you may be experiencing burnout if you experience any of the following:

- Low energy, tired all the time
- Feeling more irritable than usual
- Less patience
- Increased headaches, stomach aches, and other physical symptoms of stress

- Difficulty falling and staying asleep
- Challenges in choosing healthy food and urges to eat “comfort” foods
- Feelings of depression or anxiety
- Difficulty concentrating
- Strain or distancing in the relationship with your spouse or partner
- Trouble conversing with others when not child related
- Reduced performance at work
- Feeling obligated to say your happy 100% of the time

Reducing the chances of burnout includes self-care daily. Although self-care means different things to different people, when self-care is the last on the list of “to-dos” it can be easily skipped and the rinse and repeat of life’s chaos can continue. The key is just to try. Start small. Maybe you try one thing and it just didn’t give you that relaxed feeling you had hoped for. Then just try something else until you find what works best for you. The secret to self-care is making it a habit we wouldn’t second guess doing.

Below are some simple ideas:

- Exercise regularly
- Listen to upbeat or relaxing music
- Go for a walk during your lunch break
- Write in a journal for 5 minutes
- Turn off your phone for 30 minutes
- Maintain quality friendships
- Schedule a date night with your spouse, partner , or friend to connect without distractions
- Light a yummy scented candle
- Practice mindfulness
- Go to bed 15 minutes early

If you are feeling overwhelmed in thinking about how to make changes to better prioritize your own self-care, help is available. The consequences of burnout can lead to neglect, harm and thoughts of escape. Especially if we struggle with mental health concerns, it can be really hard to find the energy or motivation to start making changes to better ourselves. Psycamore can help you break down your goals into easier, achievable steps and will support you in this goal of making yourself a priority. For more information reach out to Psycamore at 601-939-5993 or visit www.psycamore.com.