

Self-Care

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

By: Alisha Parker-Cummins

When the responsibilities in life allow us to forget to take care of our personal needs, it's time to do a self-care check- up. This is most commonly true for moms, who have many caregiving responsibilities, but none the less we moms certainly don't own the "letting life get in the way of taking care of ourselves" monopoly. Educators too often easily lose themselves in the mission of education, many times feeling the need to do more or work harder for their students, which can 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 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 Adult Program Manager with Psycamore, LLC, defines self-care in a practical way. Parents often think it's not important to make time for themselves - as if the job of parenting can only be done through self-sacrifice. At Psycamore, we often use the metaphor of an airplane with mechanical problems. The crew will tell you, if the oxygen masks drop down, PUT YOURS ON FIRST. 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, 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. Also, you will be a role model teaching kids to manage stress throughout their lifetime.

Although self-care means different things to different people, when self-care is the last on the list of "to-do's" it can be easily skipped and a 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:

- Make a gratitude list
- Listen to upbeat or relaxing music
- Take 5 minutes to sit down and put your feet up
- Go for a walk during your lunch break
- Listen to a meditation ("Insight Timer" free app)
- Write in a journal for 5 minutes
- Turn off your phone for 30 minutes

- Schedule a date night with your spouse, partner , or friend to connect without distractions
- Light a yummy scented candle
- Take a yoga class
- Un-follow someone on social media who is negative or makes you feel badly
- Go to bed 15 minutes early

So what happens when we don't fit in time for self-care into our daily schedule? It is much easier to become snippy and less understanding when interacting with others. What else happens when self-care isn't a part of our daily life? Emily Lehigh, LCSW, Child Program Manager, and Zach Thompson, MA, PLPC, Adolescent Program Manager at Psycamore, LLC, offered their qualified advice below.

Consequences of not practicing self-care could be:

- Low energy
- Feeling hopeless
- 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
- Worsening mental health symptoms like depression or anxiety
- Feeling “burnout”
- Difficulty concentrating
- Strain or distancing in the relationship with your spouse or partner
- Less patience with your children
- Reduced performance at work
- Less motivation to engage in social activities

If you are feeling overwhelmed in thinking about how to make changes to better prioritize your own self-care, help is available. 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 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.