

Parents: How to Take Care of Yourself While also Supporting Your Child

When your child struggles with mental health, parents can feel not only responsible to help them “feel better”, but also do all you can to support them. It can be tough and although you are a parent, you are human too. Self-care is an integral part of our overall wellbeing. Think about it this way: cars need gas to drive; you’re the car that is driving your life. You can only go so far before you will need to “refuel” to continue your journey. Self-care is our gasoline: the things that “refuel” our overall health (mind, body, soul).

As parents, we sometimes neglect our self-care and especially can feel like a last resort when our child is struggling. On the contrary, showing your child you can take time for yourself demonstrates and models to them how important self-care truly is. Not only are you modeling this, but you are also allowing yourself the ability to be fully present: emotionally, physically, and mentally for your child. Below are some tips to aid in providing self-care to yourself:

- Small breaks: self-care does not necessarily need to be a big thing to do. It can be as simple as taking a short walk around the neighborhood, calling a close friend, having a night out with friends, watching your favorite show, or reading a book can contribute to your “refueling”.
- Support from close family and friends that we trust: As parents, and as humans, being able to process what is happening and how your child may be struggling is a way to take care of yourself. Similarly, to therapy, being able to express our thoughts, feelings and emotions helps us feel as though we can “take some weight off our chest”.
- Provide praise, support, and nurture to your child: Do this by setting clear and concise limits and reinforce them consistently. It can feel exhausting to consistently do difficult things for our children. Not only is it tiresome, but it teaches our children that we will just do the hard things instead of allowing our children to use the necessary coping skills learned in therapy. Safety and holding boundaries can be hard to follow but in conjunction with your child’s therapist, a plan can be discussed.
- Find a local support group: Organizations like the National Alliance for Mental Health (NAMI) and Mental Health America (MHA) provide support groups for parents as well as other family members. These groups can be extremely helpful as you will hear from other parents/family members whose children/family members are struggling with mental health issues. It can create, for you, a sense of connectedness with others and know that you are not alone.
- Seeking your own therapy: Knowing when it starts to feel overwhelming to where you need extra support is important. Not only will you obtain the support you need from a licensed professional, you are also modeling the importance of seeking help when it is needed.

Adapted from Self-Care for Parents of Children with Mental Health Needs. (2017, May 26). Nationwide Children’s Hospital.

<https://www.nationwidechildrens.org/family-resources-education/700childrens/2017/05/self-care-for-parents-of-children-with-mental-health-needs>