

Finding Time to Take Care of Your Own Needs

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Parenting a young child is incredibly hard work. You read to your child, play with your child, care for your child with all your heart. And then your child has a tantrum where he throws himself down, screaming in misery. You haven't gone to the bathroom alone in months, you haven't been in control of your sleep schedule, and usually your meals get cold before you can eat because you're busy tending to your child. It's so much to handle! Where does time for self-care and meeting your own needs fit in?

Giving Yourself Permission to Take Care of Your Needs

The first big step is to acknowledge that you *have* your own individual needs and that you have the right to sometimes be "selfish" and put your own needs first. Doing this will make you a happier, relaxed, more energized parent, which will lead to happier kids. It recharges your batteries.

Working with Your Child's Schedule and Needs

Sometimes you can fit in self-care *while* caring for your child. What distracts your child enough that you can get a moment to yourself? Will they play happily in the bathtub while you sit on the floor nearby giving yourself a manicure? Can they play in a playground while you read a great book? Can you take them for a walk, while you listen to a podcast or call a friend? Can you take them to a swimming pool with floaties on and do water exercise while they splash around?

Seize the moment

Sometimes your child finds their own distraction and they're completely self-entertaining for just a little while. Make a list of "5 minute self-care ideas" – little things you can do for yourself in the moment.

Prioritizing

Is there something you would *love* to do, but just can't figure out how to make it happen? If so, start making a plan. First, it's good to figure out *why* you want it, and *what part* of it is most important to you (e.g. if you find yourself longing for a movie, figure out: is it getting caught up in a story that matters – if so, watch videos at home after you child is in bed. Is it being out in a theater that matters – if so, take your toddler to a daytime matinee of a kids' movie, or find a sitter so you can see a grown-up movie. Is it really just important to have two hours of uninterrupted time where you're responsible for nothing? Well, then the goal is to be child-free, and it doesn't matter much what you do!)

Contingency Planning

Once you've made a plan, then have a plan for contingencies: if X happens, what will I do? If Y happens, who will deal with it? Think: what's the worst thing that could happen? When would I know it was time to give up, and try again some other day? Have alternatives planned. Even if the plan fails, you will have accomplished one very important thing. You will have demonstrated that your own needs are important and placed a priority on nurturing you. Celebrate that!! And have a plan to try again.

Asking for Help

Ask other people (friends, families, or paid professionals) to help out or do child care swaps with other parents. In addition to asking for help with taking care of your child(ren), ask them to help you take care of yourself! Often parents will get their partner to take care of the child or hire babysitters so they can do the things they *have* to do, like grocery shopping or doctor's appointments, but they feel guilty asking for help so they can do something "selfish" that they *want* to do, like meeting a friend for coffee, or just taking a morning off. It's OK to ask for help getting your desires met as well as your needs. And if the first person you ask says no, find someone else to ask!