

A PARENT'S SELF-CARE and SELF-REFLECTION

(Adapted from the NCTSN)

It can be hard to think about yourself when you're dealing with personal trauma or trauma history while doing your best as a parent. It helps if you remember that you are the most important person in your children's lives and the biggest influence on how they respond to stress. If you don't take care of yourself, both your body and mind, you will have less to give your kids in the way of guidance and support. Being able to cope with your own stress is good for you and your children.

SIZING UP STRESS IN YOUR LIFE

All of us face stresses in our lives. Some stresses are temporary and some actually help us perform better. But stress that you feel over and over again—chronic stress—can take a toll on your health and well-being. Your body has a harder time calming down. You may find yourself with sleep problems, irritability, or poor memory. Over time, chronic stress may lead to heart disease, weight gain, weakened immunity, and unhealthy behaviors like smoking or heavy drinking. Self-care during stressful times means different things for different people. But whatever your plan, your self-care time should always take place where you feel safe, both physically and emotionally. When you feel safe, set aside time to ask yourself some questions about stress in your life.

My Stress Audit

- How is my body feeling today?
- Do I have a problem that could be stress-related?
- Have I become more short-tempered or irritable than I used to be?
- Am I often tired or exhausted?
- Am I having trouble concentrating? Am I overeating or not eating healthy food?
- Am I smoking, or drinking too much?

Did you answer “yes” to any of the questions? Becoming aware of how stress affects you is often the first step toward taking better care of yourself. Use your answers to begin to make a plan.

A PLAN THAT WORKS FOR YOU

There are many effective methods for stress relief and self-care. Think about how you have coped with stress in the past, recalling what helped you and what didn't. Breathing exercises, meditation, visualization (imagining and focusing on a soothing image), listening to music, exercising, praying—each of these activities has been shown to lower blood pressure and stimulate hormones that help us relax. By practicing them you are taking care of your physical health as well as your emotional health.

Twelve things that I can do to relieve stress:

1. Connect with others
2. Listen to music
3. Say a prayer
4. Exercise
5. Enjoy a cup of tea/coffee
6. Create artwork
7. Take a walk
8. Meditate
9. Take a hot bath or shower
10. Watch a good movie
11. Breathe deeply
12. Join a support group

Remember that each of us is different. What will work for one person may not work for another. If you are in the midst of ongoing trauma, it may be especially hard for you to self-reflect or make a self-care plan. Ask yourself which activities would help you feel stronger and more centered even if you have only a few minutes to devote to them. Then make a pledge that you will do one or two of these activities regularly. No matter what your situation is, try to do something for yourself every day.

Two Things I Can Do to Take Better Care of Myself

1. _____
2. _____

Check your pledge in two weeks to see how you are doing. Do you want to try a new activity? Replace one? Pay attention to how you are feeling, and take care not to become overwhelmed with your activities. Try a variety of ways to find the ones that work best for you. And don't forget to take a moment to focus on the positive aspects of your day and your life, beginning with an acknowledgement of what you have done so far to increase safety for yourself and your children.