

Self-Care for Parents

Any time you travel on an airplane, the flight attendants announce that if the oxygen masks drop down, you should first put on your own mask, and 'then assist small children.' This is good parenting advice for life in general. Yes, our children have many needs that need to be met, and even more desires they would like you to fulfill. But in order to have the energy to care for them, you need to make sure that you're also taking care of yourself! Take a few whiffs of parenting oxygen now and then, and it will help to rejuvenate you.

Here are some tips for what to do when you're "running on empty."

IDEAS FOR MEETING YOUR PHYSICAL NEEDS:

- Exercise, on your own and as a family
- Sleep (as much as you can), and nap when your child naps
- Eat right: food affects mood, so try to cut down on sugars and processed foods
- Get or give a massage
- Cuddle, kiss, or make love with your partner
- Take a hot shower, or a long bath (add a little lavender oil to increase relaxation)
- Have a cup of chamomile tea or warm milk (or hot chocolate with marshmallows!)
- Go for a long walk outdoors - on your own, or with your child in a sling or stroller

IDEAS FOR MEETING YOUR EMOTIONAL AND SOCIAL NEEDS:

- Spend time with friends
- Spend time alone each day
- Prioritize the activities that make you happy
- Be creative / flexible about social activities you can work around your child's needs
- Schedule time each day to talk to another adult
- Allow yourself to cry
- Find things that make you laugh
- Find a way to have a weekly date with your partner
- Say no to extra responsibilities

IDEAS FOR MEETING INTELLECTUAL NEEDS:

- Take your child to the library, but pick up something for yourself while you're there

- Listen to radio programs, audio books, or podcasts from the web while you drive, or while you work around the house
- If your child is doing an art project, sit down and create your own art!
- Write – stories, a blog, a personal journal – get your thoughts out on paper
- Watch documentaries on TV, or on DVD from the library or Netflix
- Identify a project that would be challenging and rewarding
- Return to old hobbies you may not have pursued since baby's birth

IDEAS FOR MEETING SPIRITUAL NEEDS:

- Go to religious services
- Meditate or pray each morning, or each evening
- Do volunteer work or help out others spontaneously
- Spend time outdoors
- Write in a journal – reflect on your new life
- Be open to inspiration and awe
- Contribute to causes you believe in

Every morning when your alarm goes off, or shortly after your child wakes you, spend one minute in bed deciding what you are going to do for yourself that day. Start small – promise yourself just 15 minutes a day. You'll soon see the rewards (for yourself, and your family) of a little bit of "me time."

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