

## Take Good Care of Yourself, You Belong to Them!

*Parents put children first.* They are little, needful, growing, and we adore them. Their needs should always be put ahead of our own. Right?

Wrong! In order to take good care of our kids, we need to take good care of ourselves. If you've ever flown on an airplane you've heard the safety talk given just before the plane takes off. One item mentioned is the need for a parent to put on her own oxygen mask before placing a mask on her child. The reason for this is simple: if a parent attempts to place a mask on her child first, she may run out of oxygen before successfully putting the mask in place. In this scenario, taking care of one's own needs first best meets the needs of the child.

For many parents, the idea of taking care of oneself first, can be a foreign and uncomfortable concept. Of course we put our kids ahead of ourselves! What kind of parents would we be if we put our needs first?

*Good parents! Healthy and happy parents!* Parents who model the importance of taking good care. The most common reason young children experience stress is because they have overly-stressed parents. Our kids mimic our behaviors. So if they see us happy and relaxed, they will model these good feelings.

When attempting to cope with stressful and busy lives, parents often try to become better organized. We think if we try harder to fit everything in, then our daily routine can become like a well-oiled machine-- running better and more efficiently. Actually, it is often less important to examine how to do it all more efficiently, and more important to see what we can remove from our hectic schedules. Trying to "do it all" is a frustrating and unfair expectation. We would certainly never expect this kind of perfection from our children and would urge them to prioritize. Perhaps we would do well to heed our own loving advice.

Here are a few suggestions for taking good care:

### **Eat well and get plenty of rest.**

We already know this rule and are quick to enforce for our kids. But how often do we monitor what we are eating (versus grabbing a quick bite or even forgetting to eat). And how carefully do we ensure that we "rest" when tired.

### **Schedule downtime for everyone.**

Downtime is not a luxury, not laziness, and certainly not wasted time. While most of us recognize the value of downtime for our children, how many of us incorporate it into our own daily lives? Making the time to read, pursue a hobby, or simply sit quietly with our own thoughts are excellent ways to feel renewed and more relaxed.

### **Schedule some grown-up time.**

If you have a partner, be sure to plan occasional dates (remember those?). If you are a single parent it is even more important that you get some time with other grown-ups. Attend a play, see a movie, go to a concert, or join a book group. If finding childcare is an issue, see if you can trade with another parent and take turns having an evening out.

### **Remember to laugh.**

One of the first things to go when overly-stressed is one's sense of humor and we all know how vital the ability to laugh can be while raising children! Read silly stories, watch funny movies, and show our kids how good it feels to be able to laugh at oneself.

When we are depleted and drained, the quality of our parenting will suffer. Taking the time to eat well, exercise, have fun, talk with a grown-up (and when necessary ask for help and support) are all crucial elements to being a good Mom or Dad. We are then at our best to deal with tantrums, endless questions, boundless energy, and inevitable challenges.

### **Take care!**

Diane Vinal,  
Maine Parent Federation