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Nurturing yourself: Self-care strategies for adoptive parents

As our schedules fill with activities and appointments, adoptive parents often juggle school, extracurriculars, and health check-ups, along with additional appointments for our children. From counseling to medication reviews to IEP meetings, we rush between commitments while managing behaviors and meeting our children's needs. In doing so, we often neglect our own well-being.

Self-care can feel impossible, especially when balancing a child with special needs. The thought of one more thing can be overwhelming, and it's easy to justify putting ourselves last. But neglecting self-care leads to burnout and prevents us from truly supporting our families.

Self-care isn't a reward, it's a necessity. It's not about waiting until we've met everyone else's needs—it's about prioritizing our own health and well-being so we can show up as our best selves. We can't pour from an empty cup. Taking care of ourselves nurtures our bodies, minds, and souls, allowing us to care for others more effectively.

Actively listen to yourself

Active listening is when you feed back to others their emotional expressions by restating them in your own words. This allows the other person to feel cared for, heard, and understood. And saying phrases quietly to ourselves that specifically address the difficult moments in our lives connects us with our own emotions. It allows us to really hear and care for ourselves. "It's tough to work so hard and still feel unappreciated." "It was really painful when my daughter said those hurtful things." Allowing yourself to hear your own pain is healing. Try checking in with your emotions on a regular basis. Sit quietly and simply

name, without judging yourself, what you are feeling.

Start a compliments file

Write down the nice things people say about you so you can read them later. "Good work on your presentation." "You have a great smile." "Wow! This dinner is delicious." "I love you, Mom."

Change it up

Our brains need exercise to stay healthy. Mixing up daily routines causes our brains to create new pathways and keeps us thinking sharp! Try taking an alternate route to work or the store.

Narrow your choices

Life is full of choices and all this choosing can be overwhelming, causing us more stress. Limiting our choices, when we can, allows us to focus on the really important decisions. Try picking two healthy breakfasts, lunches, and dinners and rotate them for the week. This solves the endless question of, "What's for dinner?" and may just help you eat better.

Go fishing for a compliment

It's ok. You can do it. Ask three good friends or family members to tell you what they love about you. Yes. It's completely self-serving AND it's completely healthy!

Activate your self-soothing system

What do parents do when they need their children to sit quietly? They rub their backs or stroke their arm. Why? The sensation is calming and soothing. You can use this technique on yourself to relax. Try stroking your own arm. If that feels too weird, brush your hair longer than necessary or rub lotion on your body.

"Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation."

— Audre Lorde

Use your actions to adjust your mood

What are you best at doing? We all have a signature strength. Think about what you're really good at and then look for opportunities to do it daily. Just knowing what you do well and being able to exercise that skill builds confidence and increases your self-esteem. When you're feeling down, remember that if you can't be happy, you can still be helpful. Get up and do something for someone else. There is a good chance you will enjoy the experience of feeling useful and it might even change your mood.

Stop and find the roses

Try using your commute as a "beauty scavenger hunt." Try to find five unexpected, beautiful things on your way to and from work.

Prioritize "yes"

Life is busy and we want to be useful and helpful. However, saying yes to everything stretches us thin. Prioritize the things that are important to you and say yes to them. Then, learn to practice:

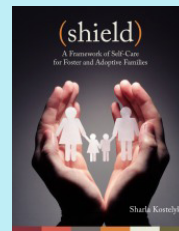
- **The deferral:** "I have too much on my plate right now, but feel free to check back later."
- **The referral:** "I'm not qualified/able to do what you're asking, but maybe I could do this instead."
- **The introduction:** "You know, I'm not sure I'm the best person for that, but I have an idea of someone who might be perfect."

Start and end your day with reflection and awareness

Dedicate a few moments when you first wake up to recall what you did the day before that you wish had gone differently. This will help focus your mind on making each day better than the one before. Then, punctuate every day with a few minutes of self-awareness. Take one minute to focus on your thoughts, feelings, and sensations, one minute of mindful breathing, and one minute of awareness of the body as a whole.

Remember, self-care is all about you! It's what nurtures your mind, body, and soul. If the suggestions listed here don't work for you, try writing down 50 things you would find pleasure in and then do at least one of those activities every day. Don't forget to eat well, exercise, and spend time with the people you love who love you back!

Suggested reading to strengthen adoptive families:



Shield: A Framework of Self-Care for Foster and Adoptive Families by Sharla Kostelyk

Foster care and adoption are very rewarding but carry additional stresses many people are not prepared for or familiar with. This book offers practical, encouraging advice for those in all foster care or adoption stages. It covers everything from important preparation ideas beforehand to surviving the first week at home, PADS (Post-Adoption Depression Syndrome), and tips and suggestions for ongoing self-care for years to come. Written by a former foster parent and adoptive mom of many, this book offers hope and support from someone who has been there.



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Check out postadoptionrc.org for past editions of our newsletter, events, helpful articles, and more information about us and services we offer.

All three Post-Adoption Resource Centers have many family fun events planned, as well as support groups and trainings. Please check your Post Adoption Resource Center region's Facebook page or website, watch for monthly calendars, or give us a call to find out what is available near you.

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