



# Caring for Yourself

Parenting is for life. It is a complicated job, and you're on call 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Research shows that even minor parenting conflicts are an important source of stress in parents' lives. Working parents can be stretched thin as they meet the needs of the worlds of work and family. Parenting can also be isolating when we lose ties with family and friends.

However, research shows that we provide a solid foundation for effective parenting when we take care of ourselves. Parents need to take care of their own needs in order to continue meeting the family's needs. Try any of the following approaches to care for yourself:

**Work together.** Each adult in the family has his or her own strengths. By working together you can combine those strengths to meet your family's needs. Children also can help with family chores.

**Set priorities.** Look at your regular tasks and ask yourself if you can drop any. Things that seemed important to do last year may have little value to you today.

**Be organized.** Prepare backpacks and lunches the night before to reduce morning stress. Cook twice as much and freeze half to use on busy nights.

**Establish a family routine.** Kids thrive on routine, and parents do, too. Routine makes life predictable and helps reduce stress. Make it a family affair to clean up after dinner, and set a quiet time for homework. Read a book while your children study.

**Take some adult time.** We love the time we spend with our children, but most of us also need some time for adults. A regular bedtime for your children can free up some of your evening. Exchange babysitting with another parent so each of you has time to spend on your own or with your spouse or friends.

**Calm yourself.** Learn ways to relax when you're feeling stressed. Think of being in a quiet place, or count to ten backwards. Declare a time-out for yourself if necessary; play soothing music or light a candle. Remaining calm helps you remain in control.

**Build a support network.** Stay in touch with family members, or build a support system of friends and neighbors to celebrate family events. Compare notes with other parents on the ups and downs of daily family life.

**Forgive yourself.** Every parent makes mistakes, but that's how we learn. You can be imperfect and still be a good parent.

Be good to yourself so you can keep up with your busy family. These are growing years for you as well as for your children.

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