

Support Group Discussion Guide: **Take Time to Recharge**



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We thank them for their generosity!*

Table of Contents

Purpose.....	3
Ice Breaker.....	4
Introduction to Topic.....	5
Objectives.....	6
No Matter What Video.....	7
Video Discussion Prompts.....	8
Strategies.....	9
Energizing Activities to Do With the Kids.....	10
How Well Are You Taking Care of Yourself? Quiz.....	11
How Well Are You Taking Care of Yourself? Results.....	13
Activity.....	14
Resources.....	15

Purpose

The purpose of this session is to assure caregivers that it is not selfish, as it may sometimes feel, to carve out time for the friends and activities they enjoyed before finding themselves parenting again. In fact, making time for book club, fishing, or even an uninterrupted soak in the tub is healthy not only for the parent but for the child(ren), too. Replenishing our mental, emotional, and physical energy reserves makes for more patient and regulated parenting.



Ice Breaker



My Guilt-Free Pleasures (10-15 minutes)

Ask participants to take a couple of moments to think about and share some of the activities that help them recharge during busy, chaotic, or stressful times. This icebreaker serves a variety of purposes:

- It's a fun way for participants to get to know one another better to create a safe space for sharing.
- Merely thinking about the activities that bring us joy puts us in a "good feeling" place. This sets a positive and encouraging tone for the discussion.
- It's a gentle reminder of how important it is to take time to "recharge."
- Doing this exercise with peers helps to normalize giving ourselves permission to take time for self-care.

An example:

"Crocheting, even for just a half hour, calms me and just makes me happy. Not only do I forget to worry while I'm crocheting, but I'm also creating something beautiful!"

*For a group larger than eight, breaking into smaller groups is recommended.

Introduction to Topic

Needing to recharge? You're not alone.

Parenting is hard. Parenting someone else's child can feel completely overwhelming. With only so many hours in the day, we find ourselves prioritizing the needs of the children to the exclusion of our own needs. Do you ever find yourself staying up until the wee hours to have a few moments to yourself just to feel exhausted and even more overwhelmed the next day? We simply can't be at our best if our reserves are depleted.

The included video for this session features foster parents talking about the variety of ways they make time to recharge.



This session also asks us to think about the importance of continuing to engage in the activities that fulfill us, as well as strategies for finding the time to enjoy those activities.

Objectives

This session will help us better understand:

- While taking time for ourselves may make us feel guilty or selfish, it actually makes us better caregivers.
- We're better able to handle the stressors of relative caregiving when we're meeting our own needs.
- Chronic stress can take a toll on our mental, emotional, and physical health (including the immune system). Self-care reduces stress.
- We're better able to regulate our own responses to external stressors when we've taken time to recharge. (Remember, our kids are looking to us to help them regulate.)
- Engaging with friends and hobbies keeps us from feeling isolated and alone.
- Connection to others is a biological imperative.

No Matter What Video: Take Time to Recharge

In this video, foster and kinship parents talk about the importance of finding time to stay connected to support, and the different ways they recharge.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BSft-xJmwbY>

Click link to play video

Take Time to Recharge Discussion Prompts

Reactions

1. Are there any thoughts, feelings, or reactions this video clip brought up for you?

Challenges

1. Do you feel you've still been able to stay connected to the people and activities you enjoy since taking on the care of a loved one?
2. What are your barriers to having time to recharge? With some support, could those barriers be eliminated?
3. Do you ever have feelings of guilt when you take time for yourself? If so, can you describe why you feel that way?
4. Do you worry you're being selfish if you take time for your own needs? If so, can you describe why you feel that way?
5. Do you have a support system you can rely on when you need a break?
6. Do you have trouble asking for what you need?

Strategies & Success Stories

1. What ways have you found to make time to recharge? (e.g., date night or a "me day")
2. Where are places in the day where you could find some time for yourself?
3. Do you have a story to share about ways you take care of yourself?

Strategies for Recharging

Below are a few thoughts on how to manage time for yourself.

Build a support network

Enlist the help of a few close and trusted friends who can:

- Step in to take the kids for a bit or even supervise activity at your house allowing you to have a bit of time to yourself
- Listen when you've had a difficult day
- Make you laugh despite the overwhelm

Chores can wait; maximize your alone time

Rather than doing the laundry or dishes when the kids are napping, at school, or at a friend's house, do something that makes you happy. Grab lunch with a friend, take in a matinee, go for a nature walk, take a long shower, or work on your hobby.

Commit to setting aside time for yourself daily

Even as little as 20-30 minutes each day can make a big difference. Let the kids watch a favorite TV show or movie while you catch up on your reading or talk to a friend.

Establish a routine and schedule

Parenting again unexpectedly has undoubtedly drastically changed your routines. This can make your life feel out of control. Establishing a new scheduled routine, which builds in time to meet your own needs, can help you regain control and calm. Remember, the kids are feeling that loss of control and predictability in their lives as well. Having an established routine (with room for flexibility) helps the whole family decrease stress. Check out the Caregiver Monday Toolkit at <https://caregivingclub.com/caregiver-monday-tool-kit/>.

Energizing Activities to Do With the Kids

Below are some ideas for creating opportunities to sneak in time for yourself while spending time WITH the kids.

- Go for a long walk (movement is guaranteed stress relief)
 - Make the walk fun by playing the “I spy” game or collecting leaves
- Give the kids their own arts/crafts project to do while you work on your own projects
 - Give them old tube socks and some markers to create their own puppets while you catch up on your needlepoint or crossword puzzles
- Play “library” and have “quiet reading time” to get in some reading time of your own
- Invite a friend and their kids/grandkids to join you at the park. The adults can connect while the kids play.
- Make chores a fun family activity. Rather than spending time doing chores when everyone else is asleep, have the kids help with chores so you can relax after they go to bed.
 - Want to make meals ahead of time? Do a “pretend cooking show” and get the kids involved. (It’s fun AND you’re teaching life skills.)
 - Laundry day? Play “match the socks” or make a game of learning to fold or put away clothes.
 - Doing dishes? Pull up a chair and share those dish soap bubbles.
 - Yard work? Shoveling? Raking? Planting? Get the kids their own mini yard tools and let them in on the “fun.”
- Look for opportunities to connect with other families like yours such as Relative Caregiver events for parents and kids (e.g., support groups with separate activities for the kids).

How Well Are You Taking Care of Yourself?

Answer each question based on how often you do the following items. On the next page, you'll be given a key to score your self-care habits.

I DO THIS	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
I eat regularly (breakfast, lunch, and dinner)				
I stay hydrated and drink plenty of water each day				
I'm eating balanced meals with fruits and vegetables				
I get enough sleep (at least seven hours)				
I exercise or engage in movement daily				
I slow down and rest when I'm sick				
I take at least 15 minutes for myself each day				
I make time for creative outlets or to do things I love				
I make time to connect with friends				

How Well Are You Taking Care of Yourself? (continued)

I DO THIS	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
I have supportive people I can talk to				
I spend time outdoors/in nature weekly				
I ask for help if I need it				
I can say “no” to others when I need to				
I laugh each day				
I easily set healthy boundaries with others				
I’m staying on top of my own medical/dental needs				
I get out and do something fun at least once per month				
I express my emotions (in healthy ways)				

Scoring Your Results

Give yourself:

- 3 points for every OFTEN
- 2 points for every SOMETIMES
- 1 point for every RARELY
- 0 points for every NEVER

0-12	You need some serious self-care time. Start with baby steps. Call that friend who makes you snort-laugh. Let the dog take you on an extra-long walk.
26-13	Sounds like you're vaguely familiar with self-care, but you can up your game. Hide out in the tool shed and listen to an inning on the radio. Lock yourself in the bathroom with a snack you don't have to share.
27-40	You're doing a pretty good job of taking care of yourself. Can you increase alone time by another five minutes a day? Is there an old friend you've been putting off calling? Do it!
41-54	You know your self-care! Keep up the incredible work!

Activity: Making Time to Recharge

Sometimes we can get so wrapped up in day-to-day life that it's hard to even remember the last time we took time to do something for ourselves.

Activity:

Make a plan to spend time each day doing something you love. Take a moment to think about and write your responses to the following questions:

1. What is an activity that brings you joy?
2. When was the last time you engaged in that activity?
 - a. Remember it in vivid detail.
 - b. How did you feel?
3. How can you carve out time each day to enjoy doing something that makes you happy or brings you peace?
4. Is there someone whose help you can enlist to make sure you have that time each day?

Example:

I love to read. I am going to set aside time each day to read a chapter of my book.

Resources

Additional Coalition Resources

- [Resources for Relative Caregivers](https://wifostercareandadoption.org/resources/for-relative-caregivers-2/)
(<https://wifostercareandadoption.org/resources/for-relative-caregivers-2/>)
- [Wisconsin Kinship Navigator Guide](https://wifostercareandadoption.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/kinshipnavigatorguide7finalweb.pdf)
(<https://wifostercareandadoption.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/kinshipnavigatorguide7finalweb.pdf>)

Additional Resources

- [Coping with the Unique Challenges of Kinship Care: Loss and Ambivalence](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dncR5NUv3so)
(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dncR5NUv3so>)
- [5 Common Myths About Self-Care](https://drtesbrowne.com/journal/5-common-myths-about-self-care) (<https://drtesbrowne.com/journal/5-common-myths-about-self-care>)
- [Resources for Kinship Caregivers: Impact on Caregivers](https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/outofhome/kinship/resourcesforcaregivers/impact/)
(<https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/outofhome/kinship/resourcesforcaregivers/impact/>)
- [Taking Care of YOU: Self-Care for Family Caregivers](https://www.caregiver.org/resource/taking-care-you-self-care-family-caregivers/)
(<https://www.caregiver.org/resource/taking-care-you-self-care-family-caregivers/>)
- [Why You Should Stop Feeling Guilty for Taking Care of Yourself](https://theeverygirl.com/stop-feeling-guilty-for-taking-care-of-yourself/)
(<https://theeverygirl.com/stop-feeling-guilty-for-taking-care-of-yourself/>)
- [Taking Care of Yourself: Tips for Kinship Care Providers](https://cssp.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Self-Care-for-Kinship-Care-Providers.pdf) (<https://cssp.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Self-Care-for-Kinship-Care-Providers.pdf>)
- [Caregiver Monday Tool Kit](https://caregivingclub.com/caregiver-monday-tool-kit/) (<https://caregivingclub.com/caregiver-monday-tool-kit/>)
- [Wisconsin Kinship Navigator](https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/kinship/navigator) (<https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/kinship/navigator>)
- [Grandfamilies.org](https://www.grandfamilies.org/) (<https://www.grandfamilies.org/>)
- [Kinship Care and the Child Welfare System](https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f-kinshi/)
(<https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f-kinshi/>)
- [Wisconsin GrandFacts State Fact Sheet 2021 Update](https://www.grandfamilies.org/Portals/0/State%20Fact%20Sheets/Wisconsin%20GrandFacts%20State%20Fact%20Sheet%202021%20Update.pdf)
(<https://www.grandfamilies.org/Portals/0/State%20Fact%20Sheets/Wisconsin%20GrandFacts%20State%20Fact%20Sheet%202021%20Update.pdf>)