



The Balance Beam: Caring for Yourself While Caring for Your Kids

Valuing the importance of taking care of yourself is essential to successful parenting. Life, work, and family commitments take a toll on everyone. We all have responsibilities that pull us in countless directions, making us feel stressed out, short-tempered, and, at times, overwhelmed.

For foster parents, relative caregivers, and adoptive parents, self-care becomes especially vital. The job you are doing comes with many complexities and challenges. In addition, you may experience secondary trauma, which is the emotional toll you experience from hearing about, seeing, and living with the trauma that kids bring with them when they come into care.

Because of the challenges, some families can reach a point where they feel the task is too difficult and the emotional cost too high. Before making such a significant decision, we invite you to read on for tips and suggestions to weave some self-care strategies into your family's routine.

Keeping Your Cup Filled

We know it's often hard to fit one more thing into your incredibly busy day. And self-care indeed takes time. However, finding time to care for ourselves is not just a personal need; it's a vital component in maintaining a healthy family dynamic.

You may have heard the saying, "You cannot pour from an empty cup." It's true. You can only be your best self to care for others when you are taken care of—when your cup is full. Self-care is all about finding ways to fill your cup.

Below, you'll find some ideas that touch on these areas. Think about what might or does not work for you. Remember that what works for you may not work for everyone in your family, and you each may need time to get into a new routine that includes self-care.

Tips for Taking Care of Yourself: Mind, Body, and Spirit

Mind

- Honor yourself by acknowledging that this work is hard and, if it were easier, more families would do it.
- Take breaks! Respite care is a valuable resource. Build a support system of caregivers who can step in when you feel you're at your breaking point. Or tap into the system your agency has in place.

- Participate in trainings and conferences. Knowledge is power and provides you with additional parenting resources.
- Ask for help. We all need help sometimes, and it's more than okay to reach out when you're feeling overwhelmed—it's one of the strongest things you can do! Please take advantage of support from your agency (such as mentoring or more frequent contact from a caseworker), your circle of support, and us at the Wisconsin Family Connections Center. It's also okay to seek support from a therapist or counselor.
- Join a support group in person, online, or network with other foster and/or adoptive families. Sharing experiences with others who foster or have adopted can be enriching. (Need help finding a connection? Contact us at the Wisconsin Family Connections Center, and we can point you in the right direction.)
- Engage in a hobby or interest. While you may feel there's little time for such luxuries, an activity that requires immersing your mind in a task or creating something that delights you can free your mind and help you feel more present later.
- Meditate. Many people find mindfulness and/or meditation helpful. Those who engage in this activity say it brings them a sense of well-being, gratitude, and acceptance.

Body

- Nutritious eating is one of the biggest underpinnings of our immune system, and new research shows healthy eating is a significant factor in our mental health. If you can do only one thing for your body, do this.
- Getting enough sleep can be challenging, especially with children who have special needs in your household. This may require planning a respite overnight for your children or yourself. Could you and your partner trade off nights? Or perhaps fit in some daily naps.
- Movement is known to relieve stress and improve health. Simply standing rather than sitting can be more beneficial than you might know! Yoga and many other kinds of exercise will improve your strength and flexibility. Yoga can also have emotional and spiritual benefits.
- Massage can be a tremendous stress reliever and helps tissue heal. Touch has the power to heal like no other.
- Laugh! Turning upsetting events into funny moments is sometimes as simple as how we frame it. Most parents and caregivers say humor is essential.

Spirit

- Lean on and use your faith group if you belong to one.
- Spiritual reading, meditating, or praying regularly can renew and put you in a frame of mind that will help you cope when things feel challenging.
- A spiritual retreat could rejuvenate you, your partner, or the whole family.
- Let go of guilt. Remember: there is no such thing as a perfect parent.

Don't Forget the Kids

Remember to include kids in your family's self-care plans. Encourage the children in your care to participate in activities that fill their cups, too. It could be quiet reading time, a particular program or movie they enjoy watching, sports, or extra-curricular activities, or even one-on-one time with Mom or Dad. Other suggestions include mindfulness training for kids, family digital downtime, or sessions with a therapist.

Parenting isn't easy. We encourage you to take time for yourself so that you are fully charged and ready to lean into the curve when life throws you loops. Contact us at info@wifamilyconnectionscenter.org or 1-800-762-8063 if you need additional support. We're here to offer ideas or even listen.

Resources

From [the Resource Library](#)

- Fostering Across Wisconsin Newsletter: [Self-Care](#)
- [Prioritizing Self-Care](#)
- E-Series: [Self-Care](#)
- [Virtual Resource Kit: Self-Care](#)
- Fostering Across Wisconsin Newsletter: [Resilience & Self-Care](#)
- *Self-Care for Foster and Adoptive Families*, by Sharla Kostelyk

Training From [the Champion Classrooms](#)

- [Compassion Resilience for Caregivers of Children](#)

Additional Resources

- [Family Resources & Support](#)
- [Online Inspiration & Resources for Self-Care](#)
- [Wisconsin Foster Care Handbook – Chapter 5 – Self-Care](#)
- [Wisconsin Foster and Adoptive Parent Association](#)