

Children's Center

A place where healing begins

Caring For Yourself

When you, as a caregiver, are concerned about your child, you may sometimes spend so much time supporting your child that you neglect your own needs. In stressful situations, you may feel guilty taking any time away from your child or children in order to meet your own needs. However, no matter how much you love your child, if you totally neglect your own needs, you may lose your ability to function as an effective caregiver.

As you demonstrate self-care, your child learns by example to do the same. Both you and your child will then have more energy to deal with grief and other challenges related to child abuse. If you are exhausted, stressed, worried and feeling overwhelmed or scared, angry or helpless, it is all the more important for you to increase efforts to attend to your emotional needs.

By taking care of yourself, your thoughts, and your feelings, you provide a healthy model for your child. This process is called self-care and is very different from being selfish. Some parents, especially women, are taught that everyone else's needs have priority. However, self-care is taking responsibility for meeting your own emotional, physical, and psychological needs without neglecting the needs of others you are responsible to. Selfishness, on the other hand, is consistently caring only about your own needs and neglecting the needs of others. As a self-caring caregiver, you work to meet your own needs, which are equally important to those of your child's.

What are some of the ways you already demonstrate self-care? These ways may be difficult to identify because you may be so busy that thinking of taking care of yourself may seem foreign or silly to you, or you might live in a situation where a break from every day stresses seems impossible. Changing this pattern may take some work. Think about others you know. Is there anyone you are acquainted with who might be a good role model for self-caring behaviors? The first step is to give yourself permission to take the time to develop a self-care plan. By taking even a few minutes a day for yourself, you increase your ability to be a resourceful, responsible caregiver.

If you are an abuse survivor, the abuse of your child may have reawakened painful memories for you. Self-examination takes courage. Many are reluctant to let themselves become vulnerable to painful memories and emotions without a good reason. Dealing with past pain shows great concern for your child and for yourself. Do not let your child be the first to handle the tough issues! Do not ask your child to make the journey to recovery alone. To serve as a guide and an example for your child, you may need to take the journey yourself first.

If you choose to seek counseling for your own abuse, you do not need to be alone. Specialized counselors and support groups can help you. Parents who have entered counseling to address their own abuse say that it was a hard decision to make, but one they recommend to other caregivers because of the support and success they experienced.