

Make time for yourself

A Self-Care Guide for Busy Parents



Have you ever felt that taking care of yourself comes last? Many parents feel guilty when making time to take care of themselves because they think they should prioritize their family, job, and everything else before taking time for themselves. By the time everyone is fed, teeth are brushed, homework is done, bills are paid, and dishes are done, you may feel that you don't have much energy left for taking care of yourself. You are not alone in feeling this way. This guide can help you find ways to take care of yourself and be less stressed.

This guide is brought to you by Yolo County Children's Alliance
Learn more at yolokids.org/forfamilies



WHY IS MAKING TIME FOR YOURSELF IMPORTANT?

ALL parents and caregivers feel tired, stressed, and overwhelmed at times. We don't always have control over the stressful things in our lives, but we do have some control over how we react to them. During times of stress and frustration and in between those difficult times, doing little things to take care of yourself can help you:

- Reduce your stress level and improve your physical and mental health
- Handle your long to-do list by increasing your focus, and
- Improve your relationship with your child.

When you are calm, you can connect more deeply with your child. When your kids watch you take care of yourself, you are also teaching them how to handle stress better and be healthier!

What does making time for yourself involve?

We know that our bodies need nutritious food, plenty of sleep, and regular exercise to stay healthy. However, making time to take care of yourself (your self-care) also involves doing activities that make you feel calm and rested. Take a minute to think about everything you already do to take care of yourself. You're off to a great start! In the following pages, you'll find additional ideas about what you can do to take care of yourself, but here are some general self-care tips:

- Self-care looks different for each person.
- Self-care doesn't need to take a long time each day; even a few minutes can help.
- Self-care works best if you do it regularly, but any self-care is better than none!
- Realize that you do not have to do everything. Self-care sometimes means letting go or saying, "No."
- Ask for help from friends, relatives, and professionals when taking care of yourself isn't enough. We have included some resources that might be helpful at the end of this guide. When you can, offer help to others; it will make you feel better, too!
- Have compassion for yourself. When you make a mistake or have a bad day, forgive yourself, apologize to others if necessary, and start over tomorrow.
- Try not to compare yourself to others. We are all human, and we need to be kind to ourselves!

How can this guide help you?

Read through the self-care ideas on the following pages and think about one or two you might want to try. Because we know you're busy, self-care ideas are separated into those that only take about 5 minutes and those that you can do when you have more time. There are also activities you can do with your child. The ideas involve calming your mind, connecting with supportive relatives and friends, exercising, laughing, finding activities that bring you joy, and getting enough sleep. The ideas do not cost money or require special equipment.

**Congratulations on making self-care a priority.
Have a wonderful time making time for yourself!**



Refilling your own cup gives you energy to care for others

SELF-CARE IN 5 MINUTES

For your mind

- **Focus on your breathing / meditate:** Lie down or sit up straight, eyes closed, with a hand on your belly. Slowly inhale through your nose, feeling the breath start in your abdomen and work its way to the top of your head. Reverse the process as you exhale through your mouth. You can also say (out loud or silently) a positive statement such as, "I am calm."¹
- **Slow down / practice mindfulness:** Focus on one of your senses, such as sight, hearing, or touch. Notice how the air feels on your face when you're walking or how your feet feel hitting the ground. Enjoy the texture and taste of each bite of food.¹
- **Tune in to your body / center yourself:** Mentally scan your body to see how stress affects it. Lie on your back or sit with your feet on the floor. Start at your toes and work your way up to your head, noticing how each part of your body feels as you move up.¹
- **Be grateful / practice gratitude:** Write down things that make you grateful, like your child's smile, sunshine, and good health, to help you remember the good things in your life. Don't forget to celebrate accomplishments. When you start feeling stressed, read through your notes to remember what really matters.¹
- **Download and use free meditation or calming apps** like *Calm* or *Take a Break!*²
- **Participate in religious or spiritual practices** if they bring you comfort.

For your body

In addition to the physical benefits of exercise, did you know that exercise can also reduce stress and improve sleep, mood, and even concentration?³

In 5 minutes you can...

- **Go for a quick walk or do some jumping jacks.**
- **Stretch:** Touch your toes, reach your fingers to the sky. You can find more ideas by searching the internet for "quick stretches."
- **Do yoga:** Do an internet search for "yoga in 5 minutes" to find videos or websites or borrow a yoga book or video from the library.
- **Calm your senses** by dimming lights, sitting in the dark, breathing in cool air, smelling a flower or a favorite scent, or touching a soft blanket.

For fun

Connect with others

- **Hug someone for at least 20 seconds or hold hands for 10 minutes.** Research shows that hugs and hand-holding reduce the effects of stress.⁴ Plus, they feel great!

Smiling and laughing are excellent ways to relax.

- **Read a funny comic or post.**
- **Talk to a friend who makes you laugh.**

Listen to a favorite song or nature sounds.

You can dance, sway with the music, close your eyes, or sing at the top of your lungs!



1) <http://www.webmd.com/balance/guide/blissing-out-10-relaxation-techniques-reduce-stress-spot>

2) <http://www.healthline.com/health/mental-health/top-meditation-iphone-android-apps#6>

3) <http://www.health.harvard.edu/staying-healthy/exercising-to-relax>

4) <http://articles.mercola.com/sites/articles/archive/2014/02/06/hugging.aspx>

SELF-CARE WHEN YOU HAVE MORE TIME

For your mind

- **Spend more time doing any of the exercises in the 5-minute section!**
- **Do an activity that calms your mind and helps you focus.** You can do a crossword puzzle, a Sudoku puzzle, or play a game on your phone like Candy Crush.
- **Take a break from your phone and the internet** to clear your mind.

For your body

Exercise

- **Go for a walk, bike ride, swim, or run.** You can also do squats, crunches, push-ups, use a park's exercise circuit, or do an exercise class like Zumba.
- **Do some yoga:** You can go online, borrow a video from the library, or take a class.
- **Lift some weights:** If you can't go to a gym, you can always use cans of soup!
- **Decompress:** Use a tennis ball to massage away tension. Put the ball between your back and the wall, lean into it gently for up to 15 seconds. Move the ball and repeat.⁵

Get enough sleep: Never underestimate the value of a good nap or going to bed early! Adults need 7-8 hours of sleep a night for good health.

For fun

Connect with others

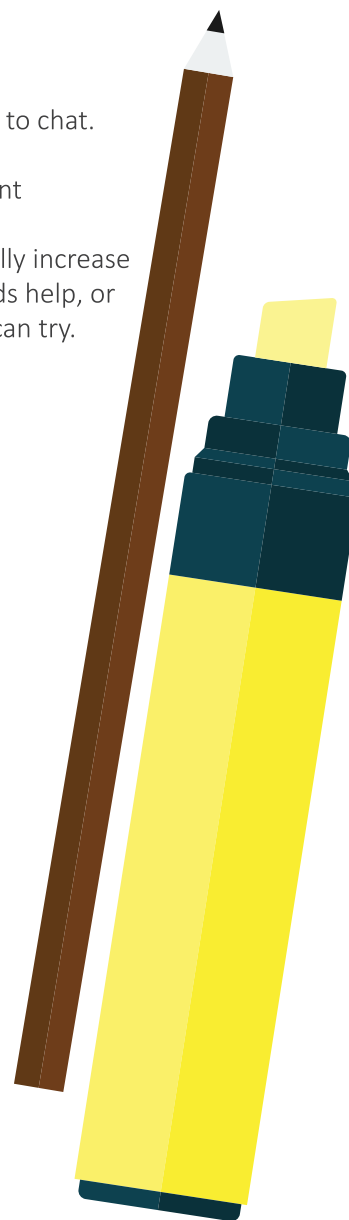
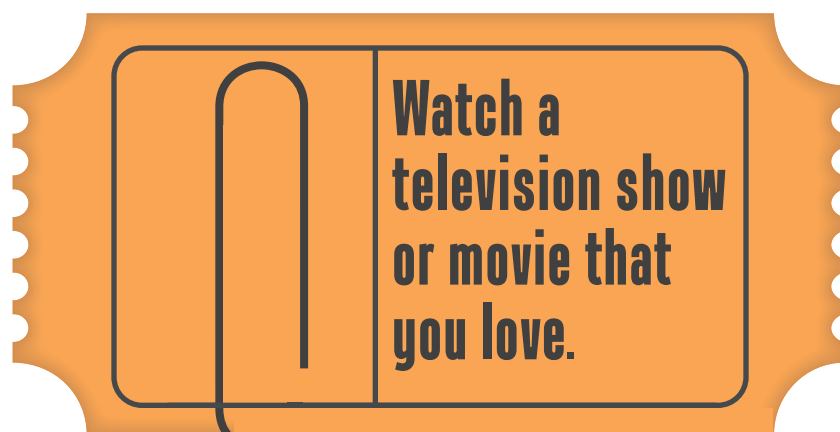
- **Get together with a friend or relative** for coffee, a meal, a walk, or just to chat.
- **Connect with other parents** through **online parent forums**.
- **Make time to talk to other parents** either informally or through a parent support group to share stories, struggles, and strategies.
- **Find ways to give to others:** Volunteering and helping others can actually increase your happiness!⁶ Making a meal for someone, calling a friend who needs help, or donating clothes that your child has outgrown are just a few ideas you can try.

Laugh

- **Watch a funny television show, movie, or YouTube clip.**
- **Read a comic book** (or any humorous book).

Find activities that bring you joy

- **Read a magazine or book** that makes you calm and happy.
- **Find and make time for a hobby that you enjoy.** You might learn to garden, cook, bake, paint, play an instrument, sing, rock climb, knit, sew, or quilt. You can join a sports team or play a pick-up game, play a video or computer game, or play board games or cards.



5) <http://www.webmd.com/balance/guide/blissing-out-10-relaxation-techniques-reduce-stress-spot>
6) <http://www.helpguide.org/articles/work-career/volunteering-and-its-surprising-benefits.htm>

SELF-CARE YOU CAN DO WITH YOUR CHILD

Sometimes we can't carve time out of our day to be alone. This doesn't mean that you can't do self-care. You can do activities with your child that will help you both relax and have fun!

For your minds

- **Practice taking deep breaths together.** Try to get your belly to grow and shrink with each breath.
- **Square breathing:** Breathe as you make a square in front of you with your finger. As you go up one side, breathe in for 4 seconds; as you go across the top, hold your breath for 4 seconds; as you go down the other side, breathe out for 4 seconds; and as you go across the bottom, hold your breath for 4 seconds.
- **Watch the "Just Breathe" video with your child.** In the video, children talk about how breathing helps them calm down: [youtube.com/watch?v=RVA2N6tX2cg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RVA2N6tX2cg)

For your bodies

- **Have a dance party!**
- **Go for a walk together.**
- **Go to the park.** Have fun on the playground, play chase or tag, or shoot some hoops.
- **Visit GoNoOidle.com** to find hundreds of videos that get your kids moving.
- **Take a nap.** If your child still naps, take a nap at the same time.

For fun

Connect with others

- **Have a play date** with another family so your children can play and you can visit.
- **Go to the park** so your child can play and you can meet other parents.
- **Join a local parent-child group.**
- **Find ways to give to others with your child.** Together you can read a book to a child who can't read yet, push a smaller child on a swing, help carry someone's groceries to their car, or give a book that your child has outgrown to another child.

Laugh

- **Watch** a funny television show, YouTube video, or movie together.
- **Read each other jokes** or read a funny book or comic together.

Find activities that bring you joy

- **Read a book with your child.**
- **Draw or color together.**
- **Write each other stories or letters.**
- **Listen to music together.**
- **Try some of the activities** in the **Talk+Play=Connect Toolkit for Families** at [yolokids.org/forfamilies](https://www.yolokids.org/forfamilies).

*Enjoy making time for yourself!
Keep doing more of what works
for you or try something new!*



*Find activities that
bring you joy*

For your mind and body

Life Out of Balance? Put Yourself Back on the List

This blog entry and the entire Aha! Parenting website focus on how parents can take better care of their kids when they take care of and calm themselves first.

ahaparenting.com/blog/Balance_Life_with_kids_self-Care

Stress and Stress Management: Grown-ups

This website covers what causes stress, signs of stress, and simple stress management tips.

raisingchildren.net.au/articles/stress_management.html

MORE RESOURCES

When the stress is too much

There are times when we are so stressed that self-care is not enough and we need outside help. If you are really stressed, angry, and/or feel like you might hurt yourself or your child, please reach out and get help.

The Childhelp National Hotline at 1-800-4-A-CHILD (1-800-422-4453) offers crisis intervention, information, and referrals to thousands of support resources. All calls are confidential. Available 24 hours a day.

The National Parent Helpline at 1-855-4-A-PARENT (1-855-427-2736) provides parents and caregivers with emotional support and refers them to services if necessary.

Suicide Prevention and Crisis Services of Yolo County provides a 24-hour hotline where you can get confidential, anonymous telephone counseling and referral information by trained crisis volunteers. Call **1-888-233-0228** or visit suicidepreventionyolocounty.org

Yolo Crisis Nursery provides a safe, temporary home for children up to age 5 during times of extreme family crisis. It also helps parents and guardians resolve immediate problems and gain family stability. Call **(530) 758-6680** or visit yolocrisisnursery.org

In Yolo County

2-1-1 Yolo

For help accessing resources in Yolo County, call 2-1-1 or 1-855-866-1783 or visit

211yolocounty.com

Be Well Yolo

Find Yolo County and California resources for your body, mind, and spirit at

211yolocounty.com/be-well-yolo.html

Family Resource Centers

Visit or call your local FRC to learn more about resources, events, and parenting classes:

Woodland, Davis, Yolo, Knights Landing & Dunnigan
Empower Yolo (530) 406-7221

West Sacramento & Clarksburg
Yolo County Children's Alliance (530) 757-5558

Winters, Esparto & Capay Valley
RISE, Inc. (530) 787-4110