



3 Quick Ways to Overcome Parenting Stress

Have you ever felt like calling “Stop the world, I want to get off!?” If you have, you are not alone. Between meal preparation, doing the laundry, entertaining the kids, packing lunches, making sure the kids are safe, etc., you probably have little time for you.

But taking care of yourself is not a luxury, an indulgence or an act of selfishness. Rather, it is the responsible thing to do, just as putting the oxygen mask on yourself before

you help others on an airplane would be. After all, if you are out of oxygen, you can’t help anyone else.

But how do you find the time to take care of you when you are so busy caring for the kids?

The best thing to do is to have someone else care for your kids while you engage in an activity such as exercising, yoga, a get-together with a friend or creating art. But that is unlikely to happen daily. So here are three tips for quick daily self-care.

1. Breathing (the right way)

You are always breathing of course, but when you are stressed out, rushed or overwhelmed you tend to take shallow breaths, which contribute to stress and anxiety.

While you may have tried taking deep breaths to relax, the Relaxation Response, which is built into our nervous system, gets activated with long, slow exhalations. It is best if you can make your exhalation twice as long as your inhalation. Counting to four when inhaling through your nose and to eight while exhaling through your mouth is the trick. Holding your breath to the count of seven between inhaling and exhaling (only if you are not pregnant) makes this exercise particularly effective. Practice as often as you can and set reminders on your phone to help you remember.

2. Mindfulness Meditation

The practice of Mindfulness Meditation (MM) has been found to stimulate the Relaxation Response and to facilitate a sense of calm and wellbeing. Contrary to the common misunderstanding of MM, it is not about emptying your mind of all thoughts. Mindfulness Meditation is about focusing on the present and on whatever is in front of you, instead of revisiting the past or focusing on/dreading the future. The simplest example of mindfulness practice is mindful eating. Rather than eating in front of the TV or while scrolling down social media on your phone, you focus on looking at your food, smelling it, minding the flavours and textures and enjoying the sensation tasty food leaves in your mouth. "But wait a minute!" you might protest. "How am I to eat mindfully when I can barely sit down for five minutes to gobble up my food?"

Ok, I hear you. I have been there myself. Still, you can choose to focus on your food and your eating experience for those five minutes. Maybe not during every meal or even every day, but whenever you can.

Another way to practice MM is to follow a free recording, like the ones I have on my YouTube channel. Some are only seven minutes long and take you through the practice step-by-step. Try it. It's easy and effective.

3. Gratitude Practice

Regular gratitude practice has been linked to a stronger immune response, decreased levels of stress and a stronger sense of wellbeing. But I know that when things are hectic (which may be often) it is hard to stop and think about things to be thankful for.

So here is a little trick for you busy parents: you do not need to set time aside to practice gratitude. Rather, increase your awareness and your focus on little things to be grateful for. Ask yourself: "What can I be grateful for right now, or today, or in general?" You could start by leaving a note by your bed or setting a reminder on your phone which reads one word: "gratitude."

A study which used brain imaging on people who were instructed to think about things they were grateful for, found that merely the mindful search for those things improved brain health, even before participants came up with the things they were grateful for.

I personally practice gratitude spontaneously through the day and then set aside a few minutes for it at bedtime. I start by thinking about things we all take for granted, like having my rights and freedoms, a roof over my head and clean water in my home. I then focus on things that are unique to me, like my family, my friends and my work. Finally, I remind myself of little things that have happened during the day which I am thankful for, like a nice gesture someone made toward me or a laugh I shared with a friend.

So, take care of yourself.

Your family will thank you!

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