



Caring for yourself while caring for others

A parent's guide to self-care

Raising children is both rewarding and challenging. As a parent/caregiver, it's normal to struggle with conflicting feelings of love and gratitude, guilt and self-criticism. Time restraints, scheduling, financial responsibilities and juggling multiple needs at home are just a few of the many demands parents/caregivers experience.

Additionally, many parents/caregivers feel pressure to live up to an idealized version of "good parenting" as portrayed in media, regardless of how unrealistic it is. These stereotypes, along with conflicting opinions by friends and family, can lead you to compare, question, and criticize your parenting. In fact, modern parenting has become so overwhelming that the U.S. Surgeon General recently declared parental stress a [serious public health issue](#).

The good news is that by acknowledging and accepting that parenting can be challenging, you take the first step in prioritizing your mental health to ensure your own well-being.

This resource was developed to support parents/caregivers in understanding the importance of compassionate self-care and knowing how to practice it.

Note: While we use the term "child" throughout, we recognize that the child in your care may be a teenager or young adult, and that you may be caring for more than one child.

What is self-compassion?

Most of us have heard of the oxygen mask analogy: before tending to anyone else on an airplane –including the child in your care – you must put your own mask on first. In the same way, before you can genuinely care for others, you must care for yourself. Yet, putting ourselves first can be difficult. Psychologist and leading self-compassion researcher Dr. Kristen Neff says: "With self-compassion, we give ourselves the same kindness and care that we'd give to a good friend."

Self-compassion is **not**:

- self-pity
- self-centred, just "being kind" to yourself
- about removing difficulties in your life

Self-compassion **is**:

- noticing that we are suffering or feeling bad
- accepting that we are human and therefore, imperfect
- being intentional about helping ourselves



Why are self-compassion and self-care important?

The practice of self-compassion and self-care **can**:

- provide a foundation of kindness, strength, self-forgiveness, accountability and confidence
- help reduce stress and improve mental health and overall well-being

How can practicing self-compassion help?

Self-compassion:

- helps us to cope with stress
- enables us to take responsibility for our actions and reflect on our needs
- allows a break from the pressure of “being perfect”
- leads to positive parent-child attachments with better outcomes for children
- models self-compassion and self-care to your child

How can I practice mindful self-compassion?

Check in with yourself. Are your thoughts more positive or negative? Are you feeling stress in your body (tension, short-tempered, tiredness)?

Ask yourself these five questions every day:

- How am I feeling today?
- What's been worrying me lately?
- Am I providing my body with its basic needs?
- What am I doing to bring myself joy?
- Who do I have in my corner, and who are my supports?

Get to know yourself better by doing a self-check for self-compassion.

Ask yourself:

- Do I have triggers and stressors that make me react to my child versus respond to them?
- Am I self-critical?
- Do I compare my parenting beliefs/style to other parents/caregivers?
- Do I use a negative or positive tone and language when talking to myself?
- Do I have trouble forgiving myself for the mistakes I make?

You aren't alone if you answered “yes” to any of these questions. It's part of life as a parent/caregiver. Treat yourself with kindness and try to use positive self-talk whenever possible: “I'm struggling and feeling overwhelmed right now. I know I'm not the only parent/caregiver who sometimes feels this way. I am a good parent. I'm managing in the best way that I can right now.”



How can I practice self-care?

Intentional self-care is any deliberate activity that brings a sense of joy, peace, and mental and physical wellness. Some examples include:

- staying connected to others
- practicing gratitude
- choosing healthier foods when possible
- getting enough sleep when possible
- physical activity
- setting personal goals

Look for parent/caregiver supports in your community.

Parenting is a team sport; it's hard to parent in isolation. Engaging with personal and professional community supports is an essential part of self-care.

If you are experiencing concerns about your own mental health, you can speak to your family doctor and/or contact [ConnexOntario](#) to learn more about services in your area (1-866-531-2600).

Helpful resources

- <https://self-compassion.org/what-is-self-compassion/>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=11U0h0DPu7k> (Kristin Neff: The 3 Components of Self-Compassion)

References

Exploring the Meaning of Self-Compassion and Its Importance. (n.d.). Retrieved October 25, 2024, from <https://self-compassion.org/what-is-self-compassion/#what-is-self-compassion>

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