

The Importance of Self-Care for Parents

A recent study shows 66 percent of working parents meet the criteria for parental burnout

The following is excerpted from the article, “5 self-care tips for parents who need a break this summer,” by Janay Kingsberry of The Washington Post, July 16, 2022.

According to [a recent report](#), 66 percent of working parents meet the criteria for parental burnout, which refers to the emotional exhaustion, detachment, feeling of isolation and worthlessness caused by prolonged stress, said Gene Beresin, a professor of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School.

“At this juncture in our country, we are stressed about the economic downturn, return-to-work mandates, child care and day care shortages, political unrest and serious concerns about recent Supreme Court decisions, gun violence and mass shootings,” Beresin said.

“I think the pandemic made parents really aware of not just their own mental and emotional health, but also made them very aware of their kids’ mental-emotional wellness,” said Mercedes Samudio, a psychotherapist and founder of [Shame-Proof Parenting](#), a practice that helps families develop healthy parent-child relationships.

To help parents navigate a tumultuous time, Samudio and Beresin offered advice on ways they can slow down, recharge and encourage their kids to participate, too.

1. Encourage the entire family to unplug and have alone time

Samudio often recommends that parents engage the entire family in taking a break. “If you kind of get the whole family in on how to relax or do self-care, it actually allows it to be a family moment as opposed to just the parent trying to steal a moment for themselves.”

This practice can start once a day with families turning off their devices and opting for a relaxing activity. This introduces a new routine into the household and allows everyone, especially older kids, to figure out what it is they might want to do on their own, she said.



Beresin also suggests setting an alarm for a daily work break or creating a plan to rotate responsibilities with a partner to give the other a break.

2. Get out of the house and appreciate nature

“Think of the times you enjoyed a great sunrise or sunset, took a scenic hike, rode your bike in a park, or just took a walk around the neighborhood,” he added. There is something to our relationship with the outdoors that makes us feel good, if we can allow ourselves a few minutes not to rush or be disturbed by our ring tones.”

Consider a night out once a week or every other week as well. Setting a cadence for these nights will help it become an expectation for everyone, especially for kids. It also gives parents something to look forward to and distract yourself from more serious worries.

3. Exercise and practice mindfulness

Samudio recommends the whole family get involved with exercise and mindfulness, which [studies show](#) can help improve mood and manage mental health symptoms, such as anxiety and depression.

As Beresin points out, “Mindful meditation has proven to change the structure and function of the brain and is a fabulous way to promote relaxation while reducing anxiety, depression, and stress.” You can do this online through sites like [Headspace](#) and [Calm](#).. “Even a 10-minute meditation can change the course of your day.”

4. Spend time with people who care for you

“In our role as parents, we are the consummate caretakers,” Beresin said. He encourages parents to spend time with the people who care for them. That could be friends or family members you trust to nurture you, listen to you and give advice, sympathy and comfort during a rough spell, he said.

For connection with those outside the house, he recommends setting up time for short visits or a quick video chat. And to connect with those at home, Samudio and Beresin both recommend group activities, such as family dinners and game nights.

5. See a doctor regularly and consider professional help

Beresin stresses the importance of seeing a primary care physician annually to help maintain your general health. These visits are also an opportunity to discuss ways to improve self-care.