

# Parent Blocks

## NEWSLETTER



"Providing resources to parents throughout West Virginia"

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## Self Care for Parents

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Many parents today are overwhelmed with the stresses of family life. In fact, a lot of parents feel like they're just treading water trying to keep up with the daily tasks associated with caring for children. Being a parent is not easy—it can feel as though we're constantly focused on our children: feeding, clothing, teaching, disciplining and more all day long. But are you taking time to focus on yourself, too?

If you're like most moms and dads, you need to be told that you're WORTH focusing on, and that it's okay to take time to take care of yourself. Practicing self care is actually a very important step to becoming a better parent, and there are things you can do today to get started.

### What is self care?

Think about what you do to care for your child every day. You feed her meals, bathe her, change her diapers and play with her. If you have an older child, you might enroll him in sports, help him with homework and read to him every night. These basic steps of care are the same when it comes to taking care of yourself.

As a parent, we often dismiss even the most basic of tasks for ourselves. We've all lamented about having not showered all day because we're caring for a newborn, or skipping meals because we're too busy running our children around to preschool and music lessons. Self care includes the simplest, physical things – like making sure we get enough sleep and eating healthy meals. But it also includes more emotional, social, psychological, creative/artistic and even spiritual time for ourselves.

### Physical self care can include:

- Eating regularly in healthy ways
- Getting enough exercise
- Receiving regular, preventive medical care

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- Sleeping enough
- Getting time away from the phone, email, TV, etc.
- Spending time outdoors in fresh air and natural light

Ask yourself, are you doing these most basic things to care for your body? If not, it's time to rethink your daily routine. Maybe getting up 30 minutes early would give you a chance to take a walk or make breakfast before your children wake up, and going to bed an hour earlier would allow for more adequate sleep.

#### **Emotional/Social/Psychological self care can include:**

- Spending time with friends and family
- Staying in touch with other people in your life
- Expressing emotions, allowing yourself to cry and finding things that make you happy
- Reading
- Working on your marriage or other relationships
- Getting a massage or going to a spa
- Reducing stress
- Saying no to extra responsibilities

#### **Artistic/Creative/Spiritual self care can include:**

- Giving yourself quiet time for self-reflection
- Writing in a journal
- Spending time out in nature
- Enjoying a hobby or trying something new

These last few types of self care actions are especially easy to neglect. They can feel indulgent if you already feel like

you're struggling to get everything done on your to-do list. But let's consider this next point, then: What happens when parents neglect themselves?

As parents, we often feel pressured to give so much to our children that we forget to take care of ourselves, or we even feel guilty for taking care of ourselves. This is simply unreasonable!

When ANYONE neglects to take care of him or herself, they put stress on their mind and body. This stress can lead to physical effects like a weaker immune system and high blood pressure, but it can also lead to mental effects such as depression and anger management issues.

As parents, this has two major impacts:

1. We model unhealthy behavior, teaching our kids that it's okay to neglect self care. This can teach them that things like healthy eating habits, relationships with partners—whatever it might be that we're neglecting in our own lives—are not important. For any parenting challenge, it's said that leading by example is one of the best ways to teach our children. SO consider for a moment how you want YOUR children to take care of themselves as adults. Are you SHOWING them how an adult should respect and care for themselves?

2. The second problem we face if we don't practice self care is that parenting can become an even greater challenge than it already is! It takes ENERGY to be a good parent. When we're overstressed and not taking care of ourselves, we can be irritable, exhausted or sad. But positive, proactive parenting takes patience, energy and optimism. All traits very hard to come by if we're not taking care of our physical and mental health. So on top of not taking care of ourselves, we cannot care for our children as we might otherwise be able to. This can lead to reactive parenting, with lots of yelling, missing opportunities to

reward positive behavior and more.

#### **So where can I start with self care?**

It's not easy to change the way you prioritize yourself in your hectic life as a parent. Remember that practicing self care is not about neglecting your children's needs. And it's also not as simple as planning a weekend away at a spa. Instead, it's about showing yourself the respect and care you deserve on a consistent basis.

A good way to start is to choose one area of self care and focus on making a change. Perhaps you love to read but don't do it anymore because you feel like there's not enough time in the day. Make it a priority to enjoy 15-30 minutes with a good book every evening, even if it means skipping time on the computer or washing the last few dishes.

Sometimes practicing self care—especially in the beginning—means asking other adults for help. So don't be afraid to ask your spouse to give you a break one night a week while you take a yoga class, or ask a neighbor or friend to take a walk with you each evening. Getting another adult to support you in self care can be a big help in making it a permanent part of your life.

#### **How will taking care of MYSELF help my KIDS?**

By taking one small step toward better self care, you'll soon realize how beneficial that special focus can be and what an impact even one little change can have on your physical and mental state. Once you've established one new self care routine, choose another one to work on.

The truth is, it's a constant battle as parents to care for our children AND ourselves. But just as there are certain things we provide—without question—when caring for our children, there should also be things we never question providing for ourselves as well.

# 3 REASONS

## GOOD INFANT MENTAL HEALTH MATTERS



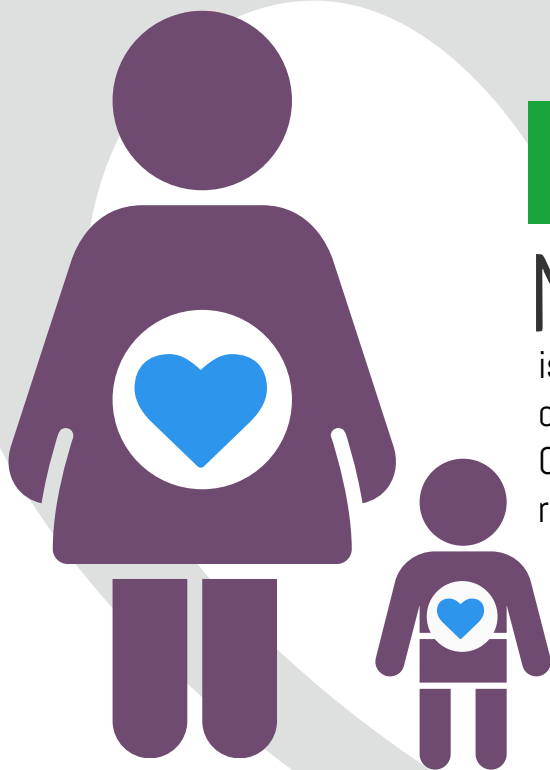
We have a shared stake **to make sure babies develop sturdy brain architecture**, because this foundation supports a lifetime of learning and productive participation in society. A reliable caregiver who is responsive to a baby's needs is the base for secure attachment, which allows an infant to explore and learn.



**Toxic stress** from broken caregiver-infant relationships can push a baby's stress hormones into overdrive. When constantly present, these hormones disrupt brain and physical development. And babies can't learn if their brains and bodies are working against them. **The antidote to toxic stress?** Affection and protection by a nurturing caregiver.



**Secure attachment** is a fundamental building block of social function. Children need relationships with sensitive caregivers to self-regulate, get along with others, solve problems, and be productive -- the basis for civic and economic prosperity.



# INFANT MENTAL HEALTH

is the optimal social, emotional, and cognitive well-being of children ages 0 to 3, developed by secure and stable relationships with nurturing caregivers.



**West Virginia Infant/Toddler Mental Health Association**

*Supporting the social and emotional well-being of children*

304.697.0876 | [nurturingwvbabies.org](http://nurturingwvbabies.org)



West Virginia Infant/Toddler Mental Health Association is a member of the

**Alliance for the Advancement of Infant Mental Health**

[mi-aimh.org/alliance](http://mi-aimh.org/alliance)



# 5 Simple Tips

To Support Your **Infant's** Social Emotional Health During



## Dressing

- 1 Talk about what you are doing.**  
*"Mila, Daddy is going to put your shirt on now."*
- 2 Practice patience.**  
*"David, this shirt is hard for mommy to get over your head, I am going to try a different way."*
- 3 Leave extra time.**  
*"It will be time to go to child care soon, let's get you ready Sasha."*
- 4 Offer positive words.**  
*"Ellen you wiggled your foot into the sock. Way to go!"*
- 5 Have fun.**  
*"We got your shirt on Dedrea, let's clap your hands!"*

## You Are Your Child's First Teacher!

Together, you and your infant can make dressing a special time for connecting. When you show patience and use gentle words, your infant learns from you how to be kind and patient. When you talk positively about what you are doing together your child learns that you like taking care of them, *"Daddy is going to dress you in warm clothes today for our walk, it's chilly outside."*

