

SELF-CARE

As a parent, you are sometimes so busy looking after your child, you forget about yourself. Parenthood constantly throws challenges at you. You try to fulfil your different roles as best as possible and this can lead to significant stress. Be aware that the perfect parent does not exist and neither does the perfect child. Therefore, be kind to yourself and others. A lot of parents often exceed their limits. The balance between giving and taking then gets out of kilter. We want to make you aware that self-care is necessary to keep your strength.

Why self-care?

Self-care is a mindset that you need to teach yourself. It is a lifelong process that you start within yourself. Becoming aware of what you need to unwind is hereby essential.

By self-care we mean that you can slip away unplanned to what gives you positive energy when you feel the need. What exactly self-care entails is very individual and therefore different for everyone.

When you, as a parent, feel more comfortable in your own skin, this has a positive influence on how you raise your children, as well as on your child's development. A lack of self-care compromises the quality of life and affects you, as a parent, and your surroundings.

Stress

Stress isn't always unhealthy. Short-term stress can have a positive and motivating effect, it helps you to focus. You will think and act with concentration. If everything goes well, you will be able to relax again afterwards. Recovering from brief moments of stress is relatively easy.

Sometimes, however, tensions can keep accumulating. You do not find the opportunity, time or space to relax and recover. Your brain and body feel out of sync. Everyone reacts differently to stress. Furthermore, the symptoms sometimes differ so much that you might not recognise them. Often, people suffer from a combination of symptoms. It is important that you learn to recognise your own stress-related symptoms. In this way, you will be able to react in time.

Workload and coping capacity

Parenthood can come with a lot of stress. As a caregiver, you want the best for your child. For this reason, you can sometimes set the bar quite high. Other tasks or problems can come on top of this. The workload then becomes too much. The demands of your surroundings become more than you feel able to cope with.

Coping capacity is the way you cope with the workload you experience on a daily basis. This capacity increases mainly through everything which gives you positive energy. Visualising the balance between coping capacity and workload will give you insight in why a situation might become too much. A balance that is out of kilter manifests itself in signs of stress.

Some tips

1 Be mindful of your energy givers and energy guzzlers

Energy givers are things that you are looking forward to, things you enjoy doing. They give you a physical, emotional or mental boost. They are small or big activities that give you energy. Each day, try to include a few of these energy givers.

Energy guzzlers are things you dread, things that make you feel tired. You find it difficult to motivate yourself and to concentrate. These activities ask a lot of your energy. They often manifest themselves in signs of stress. Be aware of this.

Recognize your energy givers and energy guzzlers. Try to get a better balance. At the back of this booklet, you can find where to consult the self-care tool.

2 Keep an eye on signs of stress

An imbalance or excessive stress can affect your body and your thoughts. Intervene in time, look out for signs: try to feel, check in on yourself (like you would into a hotel). Often, things go wrong when you spend all day trying to please and help other people. You do not reflect enough on what you yourself need at that moment in time. How do I feel? What do I need? And then give it to yourself.

3 Set boundaries, dare to say NO

Boundaries are imaginary separation lines indicating different aspects. What you want or don't want, what you can or cannot cope with or in which things you do not want to invest time or energy. They are very individual and therefore different for everyone. By naming your boundaries, you are standing up for yourself.

It is not selfish to set boundaries, on the contrary. By setting boundaries, you teach others how to treat you.

Practise this by saying no more often. You don't learn this in a couple of days, it is a slow learning process. Give yourself time. Behaviour that you have been accustomed to for years cannot be changed that quickly.

4 Prioritise

Start off with the question: Do I have to do this now?

Do I HAVE to do this now?

Is this task urgent and necessary? Is there an alternative?

Do I have to do this now?

Is this your task? Can someone else do this or help with it?

Do I have to do THIS now?

How do I do it? Is there a more efficient way?

Do I have to do this NOW?

How urgent is this task? Can I do this at a different time?

Do I have to DO this now?

Ask yourself the question: do I have to take action?

5 Dare to ask people in your surroundings for help

You don't raise children on your own. Even if you are capable of multi-tasking, you don't have to complete these tasks on your own. The people you think of first are most often the people who are closest to you, such as your nuclear family. Your network is larger than you think. For instance, think of your extended family, friends, neighbours, organisations, etc.

Sharing your experiences with other parents (at the school gate, in a hobby club, in a Huis van het Kind, etc.) can be a huge relief. You receive recognition and acknowledgement for your situation. Exchanging tips and tricks can make all the difference. Being able to vent or offering a listening ear are examples of emotional support. But support can be more than just emotional. Your network can also offer you practical or medical support. We kindly refer you to our tool.

6 Self-care doesn't need to take long but it does take time.

Self-care is more than taking a moment for yourself. A warm bath, locking yourself in the toilet or reading a book will relax you in the short-term. We call it 'me-time' which can be a form of self-care. Limited me-time is important. But, in the long term, this might not be sufficient. Self-care is a continuous attitude or way of life whereby you constantly see to the balance between workload and coping capacity.

Self-care doesn't need to take long. But it does take time sometimes. And that's ok!

Dramatic events can happen to us all. Again, these are very individual. They can vary from major events to small incidents. Allow sufficient time to grieve and to give your sadness a place.

7 Allow yourself not to be perfect

You don't have to get everything right, you don't have to be liked by everyone. Letting go of these ideals is not easy but will create space in your head. It is normal that not every day goes smoothly and that you don't always feel great. It is OK to not be OK sometimes!

8 And furthermore ...

Be mindful of your breathing

A simple but efficient way is abdominal breathing. You can do this at any time of the day.

Change your thinking

The way you look at a situation influences how you feel. For every drawback, try to come up with a positive: the 'blessing in disguise' scenario. Children are good at what we, as adults, have unlearned. We moan when it rains; children will dance in the puddles.

#Kleinegelukskes (#thesmallthingsthatmakeushappy)

Try and reflect on the little things that make you happy, such as eating a childhood meal prepared just the way only your grandma could.

Schedule worry time

At a fixed time of day, consciously try to make time to think about all the problems you face. Write them down. If necessary, share them with someone in your surroundings. Always finish the worry time on a positive note: focus on what is going well. And don't forget to give yourself a pat on the back!

Make sure to have a healthy lifestyle

Make sure to have a good night's sleep. Try to bring structure into your sleep pattern. Go to bed on time so you have enough hours of rest. Switch off all screens. Don't check your mailbox and don't read any news on your smartphone or tablet.

Exercise sufficiently. It is enough to start off with a short walk. Build it up to 30 minutes of physical exercise per day. Don't set the bar too high too soon.

Be aware of what you eat and drink. Eating a healthy and varied diet is the basis of good health. Drink enough water and limit sugary or light drinks as much as possible.

Do you have further questions? Pop into a Huis van het Kind or visit www.kwadraatantwerpen.be