



TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF



We live in a society very different from the world of our ancestors, and very different from the stresses that our bodies were designed to deal effectively with. Getting the children off to school and meeting the inevitable traffic jams on the way is only the start of a day normally dictated by the clock. These stresses are widely recognised as part of the 'normal' parenting routine. If you are parenting a traumatised child these normal stresses can be magnified by several times. Often by the time parents of traumatised children are on the school run they have had to cope with the struggle to get their child up, dressed and breakfasted amidst protests and arguments few parents of securely attached children could imagine.

Parents who struggle hard to provide a caring and nurturing environment for their children often forget the vital elements in family dynamics – themselves. This is especially true of mothers who are renowned for their caretaking and nurturing skills, and for the ability to put their family's needs before their own. Added to this is the fact that it is often the mother who is at the receiving end of the worst of the traumatised child's behaviours. In part this may be because it is still, in general, mother who has the primary caring role.

But this is by no means the only factor. Children are born with the belief that their mother should be there for them and that she will keep them and keep them safe. If a child suffers abuse, neglect or abandonment, he feels let down by his mother. This will be the case whoever caused the child's traumatic experiences. Children may, in a new family, act out their anger at not being kept safe within their birth family, on any other mother figure. Hence the central role of the mother is highlighted and exaggerated in families who are caring for traumatised children.

It is therefore easy to see why parents in general, and mothers in particular, need to look carefully at their stresses and develop ways in which they can begin to control the pressures on themselves. Recognising their central role within the family and thinking about ways to take better care of yourself is essential. You need to do this for your own sake; but also because strong and healthy parents are vital for the development of strong and emotionally healthy children. Furthermore, if you do not respect yourself enough to take care of yourselves it is unlikely that your children will respect you.

We cannot emphasise enough the need for you to take care of yourself and to nurture yourself. You need to do this first and foremost because you are a valuable and worthwhile person. Nurturing yourself will also let your children see that you have belief in yourself and counter any negativity from them. It also mirrors a way of treating people with respect – a lesson that is likely to be of benefit to your children.



SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF



Buy yourself a bunch of flowers.

Take time to sit down with a good book and a cup of tea.

Play your favourite piece of music. Use the music to reflect your mood:
Rousing music if you need to let off steam; quiet, calm music to relieve stress.

Go for a long walk (or a short one).

Find a special place where you can let go of some of your feelings.

For example a wood or sea in a storm can tune into feelings of anger and allow you to shout and scream your frustration.

Swimming is a very good way of relaxing.

Have a long bath preferably with the addition of a few drops of essential oils.

Arrange to have an aromatherapy massage.

Get in touch with friends and arrange a night out with them – ban talking about children.

Plan a meal out with your partner – or a meal ‘in’ if babysitting is difficult.

Buy post-its. Put positive messages on them for example “I am a good mum.”
Place these around the house to remind you of your special qualities.

Try to find ways of having fun and laughing.

Remember that you are living in a stressful environment and that you need to release some of the stress. Laughter is a good way to discharge adrenaline and inject serotonin.

These are only a few ways in which you can begin to nurture yourself.

You need to think of a way, which fits with you as a person, and with your lifestyle.

It's really important to set aside time at least once a week to do something for yourself.
It would be even better if you could do something every day; even 15 minutes to yourself could have a very positive effect.

Try very hard not to think about your child; or indeed any problems during this nurturing time. This might not be easy and may require practice.

Protect the time you have laid aside for yourself. Do not let anything, short of a dire emergency, come in the way of you having this precious time.