Mindfulness and Other Self-Care Practices for Parents

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Linda Lotspeich, MD, MEd
Today we will Cover:

* Importance & Challenges of Self-Care

* Sleep, Exercise & Enjoyable Activities

* Mindfulness Practice & Self-Compassion
  * A few example mindful exercises
  * And a discussion of self-compassion

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It is Hard to Practice Self-care

Some comments from parents:

* “Self-care is self-centered, indulgent, or lazy.”
* “Taking time out for self-care feel like a burden.”
* “I don’t have any time for self-care. I know I need it, but I feel like I’m a bad parent if I take time for myself.”
Importance of Self-Care

* “You cannot give anyone water from an empty well”

* Parent self-care increases parents’ wellbeing as well as their ability to care for their children.

* Parental self-care fills up the well so there is plenty of water for everyone in the family!

Time Challenge of Self-Care

* Taking the time for self-care is challenging.
* Many parents learn to do it in small doses that can fit into complicated and busy schedules.
* Today, the goal is to provide self-care strategies that are time efficient.
* Some self-care activities can be done with your children, they too need exercise and relaxation.
* Self-care is taking time to do things you love 😊
Self-care: Benefits of Sleep

- Improves Physical Health
- Improves Mood
- Improves Concentration
- Improves Memory
- Improves Exercise Performance

Few Tips for Sleep

- If you can set up a bedtime routine
- Mind-Body exercises to disengage from overstimulating thoughts at bedtime
  - Counting breaths to 10 and then repeat
  - Body Scan to relax mind and body (instructions given later in the presentation)
- Find times during the day to rest the mind and body, even if for only a few minutes.
Self-care: Benefits of Exercise

- Improves sleep
- Increases energy level
- Improves mood
- Improves physical health

Few Tips for Exercise

- You don't need to do all your exercise at one time can break it up during the day/week
- Exercise with a friend
- Key thing is to move. Examples: stand or walk while on the phone or while listening to this webinar
- Listen to music, audiobook (etc) during exercise
- Exercise with your children – like taking a walk together
Self-care: Benefits of Enjoyable Activities

- Increases wellbeing
- Improve stress coping
- Lowers fatigue
- More life satisfaction

Enjoyable Activities

Social Connections
Taking a walk or other exercise
Sleep/Naps
Spiritual/Religion Engagement
Music – like singing, dancing or playing an Instrument
Creative Activities: like cooking, gardening, art, needlework etc.
Reading or Journaling
Coffee/Tea/cold drink or Mealtime or Snack
Other
Self-care: Benefits of Mindfulness
Relaxing the Mind & Body

* Improves focus and mood
* Less emotional reactivity
* Increases compassion
* Reduces muscle tension
* Improves sleep quality

Mindfulness Definition

* Jon Kabat-Zinn
* Psychological State of Awareness

“Mindfulness is about being fully aware of whatever is happening in the present moment, without the filter of judgment”

* Aware of body sensations, thoughts, emotions, sounds, sights, smells, sense of motion
So Where are We When we are not Living in the Moment

Often Our Minds Are are caught up in...

Wandering Thoughts

“Thinking about something other then what we are currently doing/experiencing”

Our brains are thought machines (autopilot), producing thoughts all the time; planning thoughts, random thoughts, whole stories, fantasies, ruminations, creative thoughts, etc.

Exercise:
Finger Breathing
Exercise:

Body-Scan Muscle Relaxation

- Human brains tend to focus on:
  - Negative experiences/thoughts
  - Past Regrets
  - Future Worries
  - Focus on worse scenario

- Rick Hanson a Neuropsychologist
  - Brain is Velcro for Negative Experiences
  - Brain is Teflon for Positive Experience
Reactive negative emotions helped early humans to survive and reproduce in primitive circumstances.

Brains are wired to fight, flight, or freeze when we perceive a stress/threat.

So, our minds focus more on negative events in our life than the positive ones.

Mindful Practice: STOP
Can use during stress

S - Stop
T - Take a Breath (in and out)
O - Observe
(surroundings, physically, mentally, emotionally)
P - Proceed
Exercise: Mental Break

* This exercise might be helpful when your mind is stuck on stressful, overwhelming thoughts
* Scan the room for corners, one at a time
* This can also be done with colors. Scanning the room for colors and labeling them, one at a time

* OR scan for sounds, (what sounds are being noticed) or body sensations (what sensations are being noticed)
**Mindfulness Practices**

- **Formal Practices**
  Different Meditations to train the muscle of the mind to settle and not get lost in thoughts

- **Informal Practices**
  Applying mindfulness to everyday activities and parenting, including stressful ones

- **Cultivating Self-Compassion**

**Mindfulness Settles the Mind**

- When we develop a mindfulness practice, we are enhancing our awareness. This provides us with more space to observe, feel, & acknowledge what is happening for us and others.
- In this space we can
  - Choose to respond instead of reacting to stress
  - Notice positive events in our lives that we tend to take for granted or minimize
  - We can better choose how we want to spend our time
  - What we want to expose our mind/body to
**Self-Compassion**

* Kristin Neff’s book - Self-Compassion: The proven power of being kind to yourself (2011)

Self-Compassion Involves:
* Being Aware that this is a moment of suffering (mindfulness)
* Connecting with our common humanity
  (ALL people suffer, so we are not alone)
* Responding with self-kindness (being our own ally)

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**Bringing Kindness to Ourselves & Others**

* We can bring kindness to ourselves, just like we would for a dear friend who is stressed.

* We can also extend kindness to children and others in our lives.
Bringing Kindness to Ourselves

* Bringing kindness to ourselves is self-compassion.

* Kristin Neff, PhD, is a mother of a youth with autism, and she is a psychologist and researcher at the University of Texas
* Her career is devoted to researching and teaching the benefits of self-compassion
* https://self-compassion.org

Stanford Mindful Parenting Course

* 8-week Online (Zoom) course
* For parents of children/adolescents/adults with behavior challenges and/or learning differences.
* Offered three times a year (next course in the spring 2023)
* Stanford Parenting Center, Division of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry and Child Development
* This website also has audio recordings of mindful practices
* (scroll to the bottom)
  https://med.stanford.edu/childpsychiatry/parenting.html
  https://med.stanford.edu/childpsychiatry/parenting/topics/mindfulparenting.html
Mindfulness-based Stress Reductions (MBSR)
Most medical centers offer MBSR courses

Awareness Relaxation Training Program (MBSR Course)
Different Mindfulness Classes for the Community
Teacher: Bob Stahl, PhD and others
http://mindfulnessprograms.com

Mindful Practice Apps

Insight Timer
Calm
Headspace