

SELF-CARE TIPS WHILST CARING FOR YOUR LOVED ONE

It may sound obvious but while most of us acknowledge the need for self-care, when life is generally busy and even more so in the unique circumstances presented by the Coronavirus pandemic, it can be the first thing that goes out the window.

But beware of this false economy – saving a little time just for yourself, whether for mental space, exercise or to indulge in a passion, can be rewarding on a much greater level than just the pure act itself - i.e it becomes greater than the sum of its parts.

It's the same for children as it is for eldercare – that little bit of respite for yourself to recover and regroup from the challenges of your charge, will steel you for the next phase, providing you with space, perspective and resilience for the next stretch of caring.

A classic piece of advice for new mums is you need to look after yourself, so you can look after your baby properly and the same applies to caring for any children or an elderly relative. Taking some time out for yourself and allowing yourself to unwind is key.

Hopefully these five self-care tips will help you take a step back and do what you need to for your own well-being.

1. **Check in with Yourself & Ditch the Guilt**

Try to have regular check-ins with yourself and evaluate what you want and need. Whether it's a walk in a park, some pampering – like a bath or sitting and reading a book in the sun, watching a great movie, it's important to give yourself some 'me time' and not feel guilty about it.

2. **Set Realistic Goals**

Try to establish a practical daily routine and reward yourself for the accomplishments – no matter how big or small. Don't be afraid to say no to tasks that could become overwhelming and tip the balance for you from coping into not coping.

3. **Focus on What Is Realistically Achievable**

Yes, it would be wonderful to be able to give our loved ones everything they want and need – but don't feel that you have to achieve everything within the realm of possibility. It's important to acknowledge that it's often too difficult to achieve everything you want to with your loved one, especially now. So try to recognise that you are doing the very best that you can for them. Don't listen to the inner critic inside telling you that you're not doing enough, pat yourself on the back for the efforts you are making.

4. **Get Connected**

Support groups can be a fantastic source of validation and encouragement, as well as providing problem-solving strategies for the uniquely difficult situation we find ourselves in during lockdown. There are many options for joining a support group – whether it's a group that meets virtually on a regular basis, an online running chat group, a charitable network, or even a local whatsapp group – all will help connect you with like-minded people who understand exactly what you're going through.

5. **Take That Moment**

If your adult/elderly relative needs a nap or has a regular appointment, try to plan ahead for yourself in that time and schedule in a virtual coffee with a friend, a walk, or perhaps just find a corner where you can sit and read a book for half an hour.

6. **Ask For Help**

Accept that in many cases of caring for an elderly loved one, your care may at some point either not be enough or become overwhelming for you. Don't be afraid to reach out for help if you feel you're becoming overwhelmed. It's important to accept that you aren't expected to always know the next step, so try to establish a support network of professionals you feel able to reach out to for guidance – consider your GP and expert care professionals.

No one's saying it's easy to carve out time, but it is well worth it if you can. If you've got to a point where you need to reintroduce some balance for yourself, start small and notice how it not only helps you feel better and stronger, but that the world didn't fall apart because you took a little time out for you.
