

Self-Care for Child Caregivers During a Pandemic

Most of us know the things we are supposed to do to care for ourselves like get 8 hours of sleep, exercise regularly, and eat healthy. What else can we do, especially during a pandemic to take care of our mental health while we continue to care for children? Here are 9 additional strategies.

- 1. Reach out to a professional:** We know that the most important element for young children is how their caregivers are doing. As early childhood mental health consultants we are here to support parents, teachers, directors and others who care for children as they navigate this stressful and uncertain time. Reach out to your early childhood mental health consultant or call our warm line, (303) 413-6390.
- 2. Be intentional about your news exposure:** Stay up to date on what is happening, while limiting your media exposure. Look to credible sources for information and take breaks from watching, reading, or listening to news stories, including social media. Hearing about the pandemic repeatedly can be upsetting.
- 3. Connect with others:** We can practice social distancing while still staying in contact with each other through the phone and internet. If you have children at home, consider doing a virtual story book time or tea party to help you and your children stay connected to loved ones and friends. If in a childcare center, remember the power of giving children, colleagues and families a friendly smile and greeting.
- 4. Do something creative and calming:** The beauty of being with children is you can practice certain self-care strategies just by engaging with them. Be creative by immersing yourself in your children's pretend play or joining them in an art project. Do calming activities together like cuddling, reading books or singing songs.
- 5. Create mindfulness moments:** Bringing attention to the moment without judgement can help us feel grounded. Mindfulness encompasses many things. Simple mindful moments include mindfully eating (notice the taste and texture of the chocolate), taking a one minute vacation (go somewhere lovely in your mind and imagine it in all its detail) and bring awareness to your environment (use your five senses by looking for all the colors of the rainbow and counting all the sounds).
- 6. Find moments of joy, humor and positivity:** While easier said than done try to make time to unwind and do some other activities you enjoy. Is there something short you can read/ listen to/ watch daily to make you laugh? Laughing releases the same "happy hormones" as exercising. Consider listing one thing you are grateful for at the end of each day.

- 7. Change your scenery:** With many of us restricted to our environments we need to be creative. Try going on a daily walk, take a different route to work, or (especially if in a child care center all day) put a daily picture up of something you find soothing to look at e.g. print off a picture of a tropic island, bring in an art book and flip it to a new page each day.
- 8. Remember to move:** Movement helps with mood and immunity. While many typical exercise options are limited (such as the gym) think about how you can adapt physical activities. If you're not sick or experiencing respiratory symptoms try getting outside for a walk, run, hike and/or bike ride. There are many free virtual classes for adults and kids to keep you moving at home. Put on music and dance with your children.
- 9. Use helpful affirmations:** "My community has experienced other historic crises. We too can get through this." "This too shall pass." "I can handle even this." "I'm doing the best I can one day at a time."

There are many aspects of our lives we do not currently have control of. We do have some agency in practicing self-care. Caring for yourself will help the children that you care for as well.