

Time Out for Parents

Raising children can take everything you have and then some. Although it's a job that calls for an endless supply of energy, the truth is, no one has an endless supply of energy. Not even you. You need to take care of your own needs, on a regular basis, so that you have the strength and stamina for the very demanding role of parent.



Everyone Needs Support

Some parents have the idea that the responsibility of raising children is theirs and theirs alone. But it isn't natural to do it alone. The responsibility of raising children can sometimes be shared by the extended family. Grandparents, aunts, and uncles who live close by can be a source of help and support for families.

Many families today don't live close to extended family members. Therefore, they need to create their own network of support and assistance, adding new people to those family members that are close by.

Where to Look for Support

Your local community centre can be a good place to begin. It will often have parent and tot groups, well-baby clinics, and parent participation playschool programs where you can meet other parents. Community centres often offer low-cost childcare if you're participating in their programs. If you're a single parent, there are often groups specifically designed for you. Go to the park on a sunny day and sit beside another parent and start a conversation.

Notice what apartments in your building have children and deliver an invitation for coffee. Call your public health nurse and ask if she knows about any babysitting co-ops operating in your area.

The local high school may have a babysitting program, and they may be able to suggest a babysitter for you. Call the Continuing Education department at your local school or college and find out if they have any parenting courses - they are a great way to meet other parents.

When you need to find someone who will watch the children for a short time, friends, family, babysitting co-ops, drop-in daycare or babysitters are all possibilities. Your community centre may know of babysitting co-ops that already exist, or you could start your own. Neighborhood sitters, either teenagers or retirees, are the traditional source for babysitting. Drop-in childcare is now available in many places, including malls and fitness centres.

Everyone Benefits

The whole family benefits when parents take care of themselves. There's more laughter and more fun in their lives. A happy, well-rested parent has the patience to fix a dollhouse or read a story or play catch in the backyard.

It's also good for children to spend time with other families. Other families can offer experiences or interests with your child that they might not have at home. For example, Joey likes to go to his friend Jason's house because Jason's dad plays the piano.

Forming bonds with other adults and other families develops your child's understanding of the world and how it works.

What Could I Do?

You may have gotten so used to sacrificing your time and energy looking after your family that you've forgotten how to relax or have fun.

Some suggestions to jumpstart your memory:

- Take a bubble bath;
- Curl up on the couch and just relax;
- Take a nap;
- Ride your bike or take a walk;
- Meditate;
- Have coffee with a friend;
- Pursue a hobby;
- Take a course on a subject that interests you;
- Volunteer for something that would be fun;
- Follow a regular fitness program;
- Go away for a weekend;
- Join a team.

The important thing is to do something that refreshes and renews your spirit and your energy. Remember that when you are rested you feel better and have more to offer your children, your partner, and your friends.

Take Time for Your Love Life

One of the most important gifts you can give your children is a loving home. If you are in a committed relationship, make sure you are giving this relationship the attention it needs.

On a daily basis, take at least a few minutes just for each other. Don't wait until everything else is done and when you are too exhausted to express affection.

Schedule a date each week when you spend your time just enjoying each other's company. Forget about all the household business that normally takes up so much of a couple's attention and conversation. Go to the movies, take a walk, ride your bikes - whatever you most enjoy. Or find someone to look after your kids and spend the time snuggled up at home watching a video.

Happy times together are like 'money in the emotional bank' for couples. With enough 'money in the bank', a couple can weather all kinds of difficult experiences together.

Take Time for Friendships

Our partner or our children cannot meet all our needs. For some things we need friends. Friends that listen to us, laugh with us and share our history are very valuable. They give us gifts of understanding that our partner or our children cannot.

Friendships that refresh and renew our spirits make us more enthusiastic about life and feed us the kind of energy we need to be the best parents and partners we can be.

This BC HealthFile has presented some ideas to help you with the challenge of parenting. There are other topics in the child development series that you may also find helpful. The BC HealthFiles link and this series can be found on the BC HealthGuide Web site at:

www.bchealthguide.org/healthfiles/index.stm



For more BC HealthFile topics visit www.bchealthguide.org/healthfiles/index.stm, or visit your local public health unit.

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