



6 Tips for Peak Performance Parenting

A friend told me a story about sitting on the runway at L.F. Wade International Airport, heading out on a trip with her child. As they were preparing to push away from the gate, the flight attendant gave emergency and safety information. “Should there be a change in pressure in the plane; an oxygen mask will drop down above your head. Please place the mask over your mouth and nose and breathe normally.” She continued with, “If you are traveling with a small child, please put your mask on first and then help your child with their mask. Oh, and if you are traveling with two children... well... you’ll just have to pick your favorite!” Everyone on the plane laughed and I laughed when I heard the story. Taking care of yourself and others is a hectic reality full of tough decisions and, as they say, “if you didn’t laugh, you would cry.”

I’ve thought often about the instructions we get from flight attendants. It makes so much sense on the airplane. Put your own mask on so you won’t pass out before you can take care of your child. It is just as true in our daily lives but more complicated. If we don’t make time for self-care then we are certain to run out of energy, patience, creativity, enthusiasm and all of the other things that make successful parenting possible.

No one else can make your choices or set aside the time for your self-care. You have to set the priorities for work and home and lifestyle in just the same way that you would have to put your own mask on in the airplane. Unless you are one of the very fortunate few, that isn’t going to be easy. Most of us are overbooked and overwhelmed with schedules and duties. Self-care is the key to making it all work so the first task is to choose the self-care activities that will give you the greatest benefit and allow you to maintain your other responsibilities. We have gathered some suggestions that we hope you will find helpful.

Schedule time for yourself.

Use a calendar or planner to set aside specific times for buying and cooking healthy foods, resting, visiting with friends, swimming or whatever you truly enjoy. Don’t be afraid to ask family members or friends for help. Maybe you can take a break while your child participates in activities. You would schedule a meeting or business appointment. Why not commit scheduled time to do the things that replenish you and make you happy?

Practice skills that help you to better manage emotions that are draining.

Fears, worries and stress are normal but chronic unaddressed anxiety about health, money and relationships ruin quality of life for a lot of people. You can use exercise, positive self-talk, relaxation, deep breathing, and other techniques to reduce stress. Self-help books, counselling and support groups are not just for emergencies. These are education tools that can help you learn how to recognize your needs and opportunities to better manage stress and address problems before they become emergencies.

Seek and accept support from others.

Don’t wait for others to read your mind and decode messages. Ask for help preventively. Take a good look at your network of family, friends and services. Who genuinely cares about you and your child(ren)? Who has something you need that they could share or trade? Maybe a vacation home or a swimming pool, child care or carpool. Maybe you like to cook and they like to clean. Trading and sharing duties helps everyone and breaks up your routine.

Relax.

Stress is the real cause for most destructive behaviours. Even when something else is going on, stress is what causes the explosion. And yet, stress is usually built up over time. You can reduce stress by practicing good lifestyle habits. Try not to over-schedule yourself and set an unrealistic pace. If you are on an important phone call and helping kids with homework at the same time, something is going to suffer. Give yourself the gift of leaving early for appointments. Sleep is super important but it is better to get up 15 minutes early than to have a meltdown on the way to school drop-offs.

Be realistic about your child’s schedule.

Quality is more important than quantity. Kids are learning many things we take for granted. They need lots of sleep. They are sensitive and shaken up by things that they don’t know how to understand or talk about. When schedules are overwhelming and children are running from school to sports and errands and other stops that parents need to make, they become exhausted, hungry and overwhelmed. These simple things are often the cause of grumpy, noisy or mischievous behaviour. Do your children and yourself a favour and slow down the rat race.

Nurture Yourself.

Are you feeling sad or scared about something? Don't ignore your own inner voice. Take a few minutes to write in a journal or talk to a trusted friend. Simply breathing and allowing time to feel sadness or hurt is often the best way to let those feelings go. If we avoid feelings, they have a way of intensifying and building up to an outburst. Resist the urge to take action when you're upset. Instead, give yourself a fighting chance: *"Breathe. It's ok to be sad. Go ahead and cry. You'll feel better in time and new opportunities will come along"*.

Your children deserve a parent who can offer kind words of support and so do you. Put your own mask on first and then assist your beloved children.

If you would like more information on this topic you can contact Family Centre and ask to speak with the Community Support Worker at 232-1116.