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You Need Attention, Too: Developing a Self-Care Plan for Parents of Children with Special Needs

Statistics show that [6.2%](#) of minor children ages 5 to 15 have some kind of disability, with 20% of the U.S. population aged 16 to 64 also impaired in some manner. As the parent of children who fall into one of these categories, you have expended a great deal of physical, emotional, and mental effort ensuring they have the best lives you can provide in spite of disabilities.

Burnout is very much a real condition. Due to the added stress of special-needs parenting, you are naturally more susceptible to it, [depression and anxiety](#) than parents without disabled children. It is imperative that you tend to yourself as well as your children. Evaluating your condition and implementing a strategy to incorporate self-care into your life can aid in reducing fatigue and bolstering mental health.

Developing a good self-care plan can be overwhelming, which is why the [Cisco Center](#) presents the following guide to help you get yours into action.

Assessing Fatigue Levels

There is no medical standard for measuring fatigue, though there are methods like the [Fatigue Assessment Scale](#) that can be used to get an idea of tiredness levels. However, since exhaustion is relative, questions can also serve as useful tools for gauging fatigue:

- How is the quality of your sleep? Do you feel well-rested when you wake up or like you've hardly closed your eyes?
- How much sleep do you get?
- How much time are you putting into caregiving?
- Do you ever have any time to yourself to just relax?
- Do you feel like mealtimes are rushed and incomplete?
- Are you constantly behind in other areas of life or feel like you're neglecting them?
- Are you suffering from overwhelming anxiety and depression [symptoms](#) (irritability, restlessness, unreasonable anger, hopelessness, loss of interest in previously enjoyed subjects or activities, no energy, etc.)?
- Is your mental state worsening?

Answering these questions is the first step in self-care. If you aren't sleeping well, try [tactics](#) like playing music, doing yoga, or meditating before bed. Carve out little blocks for quick naps whenever possible. Try supplements like valerian root or melatonin or drink soothing decaffeinated beverages like chamomile tea at night. Designate a [time](#) that is solely for yourself to rest and pursue hobbies or sneak in periods of self-care where you can if your schedule is too chaotic for that. Seek professional [treatment](#) if needed.

Facing Challenges

As with any process, the road to introducing self-care into your life can be bumpy. Problems you may encounter include overcompensating for partners, doing [too much self-care](#) and putting too much on your support networks. Moderation is the key here.

Another issue you may run into is underestimating the depth of your anxiety and depression and not receiving proper treatment as a result. Ignoring your symptoms or downplaying them is not the answer. These are roadblocks that can hinder you on your self-care journey, so keep a lookout for signs of them.

Chasing Personal Objectives

While being a parent is one of the most important things you will do in your life, it should not be the whole of your identity. Pursuing personal goals is another way to boost your mental health. Start that business you've always dreamed about. You could form a limited liability company, which offers limited liability, [tax benefits](#), flexibility and less paperwork. (Check your state regulations first since they do vary from area to area.)

Going back to school is another option; higher education is a steppingstone on the path to career advancement or pursuit. Online programs make it easier than ever to get an undergraduate degree from an accredited institution on your schedule.

Parenting special-needs children can be exhausting. Self-care can help you maintain your mental, physical, and emotional health.