

# SELF CARE

It can be hard to find the time to look after ourselves – but it is key to feeling positive and being physically and mentally healthy





If you aren't looking after yourself well, if you feel overloaded, or are lacking sleep, it can be very hard to manage strong feelings and challenges. Your resilience takes a dip when you don't eat well or you drink too much, so self-care is actually key to achieving health and happiness in life.

Start with something simple. If you can carve out even 20 minutes **down time** to read a book, a magazine, draw, work in the garden, lie on the couch and rest or do something else that replenishes you most days, you will notice a difference.

Fitting in some **exercise** like a brisk walk to the shops or the park every day will also help you feel noticeably better. As adults we should be doing 30 minutes vigorous exercise a day – so even 2 x 15 minutes fast walking will make a difference. If you like going to the gym or swimming pool that is great, but if you don't...just try to move more.

Think about building a **support network**. It's important to be able to discuss (with friends, other parents or a professional counsellor) what makes you feel stressed or angry and how you can deal with it better. Rediscover some of your old hobbies and interests if you can, this reconnects you in with the person you want to be and lifts you out of the 24/7 focus on work or the self-sacrifice of parenting that can undermine your resilience. It's not an indulgence to look after yourself, it is a vital foundation of good mental health.

## ACT EARLY WHEN TENSION IS RISING

People often start to feel stressed or anxious because of their thoughts. If your child is misbehaving you may find yourself thinking “That’s it – he’s doing it again! I can’t stand that!” which escalates your stress levels. Catch yourself thinking this way and reframe calmly to something more helpful like, “This is challenging, but I can handle it calmly – we will get there.”

Similarly, if you are thinking “I can’t stand going to that meeting at work”, try to take a few breaths and think more moderately – “everyone has to go to meetings they don’t like, it will be over soon”. Try to monitor your stress levels and head off problems at work or home by showing empathy for what those around you are feeling. Don’t try to control or solve everything, know your boundaries and be realistic about what you can do.

## MANAGING WHILE IN A STRESSFUL MOMENT

Tell yourself everyone has stressful times – it won’t last too long. Focus on your breathing, take deep breaths and relax your shoulders. These things tell your brain – everything’s going to be OK so you are less likely to go into fight/flight mode.

Try to take a break, ask for time to think about the issue, or excuse yourself for a moment to gather your thoughts. Not everything has to be dealt with immediately! You might go to the bathroom, splash some water on your face or go outside for some fresh air, then continue managing the situation. Try to contain what’s happening and slow things down – you will have more time to think about addressing the issue afterwards. Avoid knee jerk reactions or saying something you may later regret.



## RESETTLING AFTERWARDS

Give yourself some time to settle and calm. It's natural to feel upset after stressful events. Use deep breathing and play some soothing music if necessary. Try having a quick shower or go for a walk. Distract yourself with your favourite show or by connecting with friends and family until you are ready to problem solve. Be kind to yourself and try to get back into your normal routines as they help us resettle.

If you need to seek support- ask for it openly, most people like to help others and may even be flattered. Be specific about what might help e.g. "If I had a couple of hours to myself without the kids on a Sunday afternoon that would really help me cope better throughout the week".



## Some self-care ideas:

- » Take a long hot shower or bath
- » Get moving – walking, running swimming, dancing etc. A simple walk around the block will help to clear the mind.
- » Talking/venting with a partner or friend and then laughing about it
- » Cup of tea and a good, funny TV show
- » Play music (instruments, sound engineering) or pump up the volume on your radio or ipad of your favourite song
- » Travelling, book a holiday or some time out so you have something to look forward to
- » Read a good book or study/google things that are not work related
- » Cooking/ baking
- » Gardening – get into the dirt, it is cleansing!
- » Mindfulness, yoga or meditation – use the calm app to assist you if needed
- » Catch up with friends
- » When struggling with sleep, use the Calm app – mindfulness and listen to a bedtime story to go to sleep
- » Get creative – Paint, draw, sculpt
- » Spend some time on the beach, the energy of the waves lifts you



## LEARNING FROM EXPERIENCE

It's important to show some empathy for yourself as well as you cope with the ups and downs of life. Work stress, family problems, challenging children, chronic health issues can be incredibly aggravating and almost all of us feel like we are losing it at some point. However it's important not to be too hard on yourself if you behave badly, but rather to seek the extra support or learn the skills you need. You definitely don't have to just keep trying to cope on your own. If you need someone to talk to immediately there are some great helplines with trained people available 24/7.

You can try:

Lifeline 131114

Beyondblue 1300 22 4636

Mensline 1300789978

WIRE (Women's Information and Referral Exchange Inc)  
1300134130

Safe Steps 1800015188

Parentline 13003011300

**For longer term assistance call  
drummond street services on (03) 9663 6733.**



We acknowledge the traditional owners of the land where we work and pay respects to elders past, present and future.