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Parent Well-being & Self-care Guide

Tips and strategies to care for your own mental health while supporting your children — finding balance, connection, and calm in everyday life.

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Being a parent is an experience filled with love, laughter, and the small everyday miracles of life. Every smile, every hug, every new “achievement” your child makes is a source of joy and pride.

At the same time, a parent’s daily life can easily become demanding and exhausting. Amid so many responsibilities, it’s common to forget about yourself. But self-care is not a luxury — it’s the foundation that allows you to give your best to your children. When you take care of your body, mind, and soul, you gain more patience, strength, and joy. And the most beautiful part? Through your own example, you teach your children that loving and caring for ourselves is healthy and deeply valuable.

1 Self-Care and Resilience

No one is born a “perfect parent.” We all make mistakes, get tired, and sometimes feel we’ve reached our limits — and that’s perfectly normal. Emotional resilience doesn’t mean never falling; it means finding the strength to get back up. With small, steady steps, you can learn to manage challenges, face guilt with kindness, and trust yourself more.

Speak kindly to yourself

Instead of judging yourself harshly, try speaking to yourself with compassion. A tired parent isn’t a “bad parent” — just a tired human being.

When you feel like you’re not doing enough, look in the mirror and tell yourself something encouraging: “Today, I gave it my best.”

Don’t neglect your basic needs

Sleep, nutrition, and hydration are the essential “fuel” for both body and mind. Simple things — yet often the first we sacrifice for our children or work. But without them, patience and joy quickly fade.

Small moments of self-care

You don’t need hours of free time to breathe. A few minutes just for yourself can make a difference — a cup of tea on the balcony, a favorite song, a warm bath. These small moments are “drops of energy” that refill your strength.

Tip:

Plan your own bedtime routine just as you do for your child. Turn off your phone 20 minutes before going to sleep and give your body the signal that it’s time to rest.

Many moms and dads end up eating on the go — often in the car, on the way to their child’s activities. Set a goal to sit at the table for just 10 minutes, take a deep breath, and enjoy your meal in peace. This small change can make a big difference in your energy and mood throughout the day.

Tip: Relaxation breathing

Place your hand on your belly. Inhale slowly through your nose (until your belly rises), hold for two seconds, and then exhale gently through your mouth. Repeat five times. You can do this while waiting for your child after an activity or before going to bed.



View your mistakes as opportunities

Failures don't define you. They are experiences that show what needs to change. See each mistake as a "trial," an opportunity to try something differently, not as "proof of failure."

Ask for and accept support

Resilience grows stronger when you're not alone. A network of friends, relatives, or fellow parents can provide practical and emotional support. Many parents hesitate to ask for help, fearing they might be seen as "inadequate." The truth is, seeking support is a sign of strength and wisdom. We all have moments when we need someone to listen, to comfort us, or to assist with practical matters.

Be more flexible in your daily life

Parenting doesn't come with a manual. No matter how much you plan your day, unexpected twists will always arise: a child who suddenly refuses to go to school, or rain that spoils the outing you had arranged. Trying to control everything will only leave you exhausted. True strength lies in your ability to adapt. Tell yourself, "It's okay that it didn't go perfectly. Let's do it differently." Flexibility reduces tension and sends children the message that changes and mistakes aren't disasters—they're part of life. Try saying "let's see it differently" more often instead of "nothing is going right."

Look at the bright side of things

Optimism doesn't mean ignoring difficulties or pretending that everything is perfect. It means consciously choosing not to let the negative aspects overshadow the whole picture. It's like holding a flashlight and deciding exactly where to shine it. Even on a tough day, there's always something small worth noticing: your child's smile as they greet you, a joke that made you laugh, the aroma of the coffee you sipped in peace.

Tip: Write it down!

Before going to bed, jot down "one nice thing" that happened during the day. This trains your mind to notice small positive moments, even during difficult times.

Simple ways to build Emotional Resilience

- Keep a gratitude journal, noting three things that went well each day.
- When something stresses you, ask yourself: "Will this matter in a year?"
- Learn to ask for help before reaching your limits.
- Remember that parents are... children too, learning every day.

Having emotional resilience doesn't mean you can handle everything or that everything will go the way you want. It means finding a way to stand back up, take a breath, and keep going. With kindness toward yourself, a little support from those around you, and small changes in your daily routine, you can maintain your balance even on the most demanding days. Through this example, your children learn that challenges are part of life—but they are not insurmountable.

2 Stress management

Since stress is part of contemporary life, it naturally affects both family life and the role of a parent. But this doesn't mean that "something is wrong"! It simply shows that the body and mind are trying to adapt to demands. However, when stress becomes constant, it turns into a burden that impacts mood, patience, and relationships. The goal isn't to eliminate stress entirely, but to recognize it early, understand its causes, and find ways to manage it effectively.

Recognize the signs of stress

Before it overwhelms you, stress gives warning signs:

- Tense shoulders
- Frequent headaches
- Irritability and angry outbursts
- Difficulty sleeping



Tip: Self-Observation Exercise

For one week, jot down each day how you feel physically and mentally (e.g., "neck tension – 7/10"). This helps you recognize your own patterns before they get out of hand.

Take small "breathing breaks"

You don't need much time—just 2 minutes!

Try the 4-7-8 technique: inhale through your nose for 4 seconds, hold for 7 seconds, exhale through your mouth for 8 seconds. Use it while waiting at a traffic light or before responding when you feel a strong emotional reaction building up.

Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Focus your attention on each part of your body, tense the muscles for 5 seconds, and then let them relax. Start from your toes and move up to your face. Ideally, do this exercise before bedtime or after a stressful day.

Change begins with the smallest step: Behavioral Activation

When you're feeling down or low in mood, start with something very small—an activity that takes no more than 5 or 10 minutes. It doesn't matter how little it seems; what matters is that you take the first step. For example, step out onto your balcony for a few minutes, send a message to a friend, or do a few stretches. These small actions “wake up” your body and mind and gradually help lift your mood.

Resilience in challenging moments

Sometimes you can't change the situation, but you can endure it until it passes.

Tip: STOP!

Stop – pause what you're doing

Take a breath – breathe deeply

Observe – notice what you're feeling

Proceed – continue calmly

Learn to see stress as a wave

Think of stress as a wave that rises and then falls. It doesn't stay at the same level forever. If you wait a little, it will start to recede on its own.

For example, imagine you're at the supermarket and your child throws a tantrum over a toy. You feel the stress rising. Try taking a deep breath and telling yourself: “This is a wave—it will pass.” This helps you avoid reacting with tension.

A small tool to help is the “Stress Thermometer”:

Draw a thermometer from 0 (calm) to 10 (very stressed). Mark where you are each time you feel pressure. When you go above 7, use a relaxation technique that works for you—breathing exercises, a short break, or a brief walk.

Stress will never completely disappear from life, nor does it need to. What matters is learning to recognize it, manage it, and give yourself space to breathe. This way, you stay calmer and more available for your children.

3 The power of Mindfulness

Mornings before school, transitions from one activity to another, those “chaotic” days with the kids at home... these are moments every parent knows well—when tension and stress can easily multiply. That’s where mindfulness can become a life raft: a way to slow down, see things differently, and take a breath in the middle of the chaos.

What is Mindfulness?

It’s the ability to be fully present in the moment—without judgment, without rushing.

To pause, observe, and respond calmly instead of reacting on impulse.



Why it helps parents?

- It reduces everyday stress and tension.
- It helps parents notice and regulate their emotions.
- It creates a calmer home environment—because while stress can be “contagious,” so can calm.
- It sets an example for children that you don’t need to be perfect—just present and genuine.

Practical applications

Slow Down Your Mornings

Not everything needs to be “perfect.” If your child wears mismatched clothes, it’s not the end of the world. Prioritize starting the day with joy rather than shouting.

Breathing in the Chaos

When you feel things getting out of hand, tell yourself: “This is chaos.” Naming it helps reduce tension and brings your mind to the present.

Give Attention, Not Perfection

Children don’t need perfect parents! They need parents who look them in the eyes, listen attentively, and accept them.

Reframe Your Expectations

Being five minutes late to school isn’t what children will remember. What matters is whether the morning began with shouting and stress or with smiles and good energy.

Create a Safe Environment

When you remain calm, children feel secure and trusted. Your composure becomes their guiding light.

Mindfulness is not another “task” you must remember in your daily routine. It is a way of life that helps you accept your imperfections and enjoy moments as they come. This is a gift for both you and your children.

4 The Power of Calm in the Family

Calmness is not just the absence of noise. It is an inner state of balance that helps the brain and body function better. When both parent and child are calm, there is space for thinking, understanding, play, and love. Today’s children are bombarded with choices, screens, and overly packed schedules, making calmness not only desirable but also a precious gift.

Calmness is a valuable gift a parent can give to their child. This does not mean eliminating stress, but cultivating moments of balance, simplicity, and genuine connection. Ultimately, a child who learns to be calm and feel secure within the family carries this ability throughout their life.

Calm Body – Calm Mind

Calmness starts from the body. When the body relaxes (through breathing, movement, or sleep), the mind more easily finds balance. It’s no coincidence that a simple “time-out” or a hug can bring more calm than a thousand logical arguments.

Limit excessive choices

When a young child is constantly asked to decide (what to wear, where to sit, what to eat), they become overwhelmed. Too many “Do you want this or that?” creates insecurity and whining. Balance lies between structure and freedom. Offer a few choices, but don’t let them carry the weight of decisions they don’t need to make.

Let children’s schedules “breathe”

In trying to offer everything, we often fill children’s days with activities, tutoring, and sports. However, a lack of free play, rest, and simple interaction with peers deprives children of something essential: time to relax and learn social skills that foster calmness and confidence.

Watch out for overprotection

Parents who constantly worry about germs, injuries, or every possible danger may unintentionally convey to the child that the world is unsafe. A little freedom, a little exposure to normal challenges, helps the child develop resilience.

Growing Up Balanced in the Digital Age

Technology is an integral part of daily life and can provide children with learning, entertainment, and social connections. What often requires attention isn't the use of technology itself, but how it is balanced with other activities. Children also need time for outdoor play, social interactions with friends, and creative, screen-free activities. When this balance is maintained, technology becomes a helpful tool that complements other experiences rather than taking away opportunities for children to develop social skills, imagination, and a sense of calm through real-world interaction and unstructured play.



5 Protecting Against Burnout (for Parents of Children with Developmental or Mental Health Challenges)

Raising a child with a developmental disorder or mental health challenge is a journey full of love, but also one filled with unique challenges. Parents often become the primary caregivers, shouldering responsibilities that can feel endless. This can lead to physical and emotional exhaustion.

Feeling tired or needing a break doesn't mean you love your child any less. It simply means you are human. Taking care of yourself is just as important as caring for your child.

By learning to ask for help, take small breaks, and support yourself, you give your child the most precious gift: a parent who remains strong, present, and full of love.

What is caregiver burnout?

It is a state in which constant stress and continuous caregiving without rest lead to:

- Anxiety and depressed mood
- Persistent fatigue and exhaustion
- Feelings of isolation and loneliness
- Difficulties in relationships or marriage

What can you do to protect yourself?

Recognize your limits

You can't do everything alone. Asking for help is not a sign of weakness—it's essential to continue caring with love.

Prioritize your basic needs

Sleep, water, proper nutrition, and exercise are not "luxuries." They are the fuel you need to keep going.

Find moments for yourself

Even 20 minutes of walking, a coffee with a friend, or a bit of reading can provide relief. Small breaks make a real difference, even if you can't make big changes.

Build a support network

Don't expect others to guess your needs. Ask clearly: "Can you stay with the child for an hour so I can run errands?" or "Could you cook something for me for tomorrow?" Most people want to help—they just need to know how.

Don't lose your personal life

Your identity is not only "parent-caregiver." Stay in touch with friends, go for a short walk, continue a hobby—it will refresh you. Small daily routines with your partner, like a short conversation each evening ("What challenged you today and what made you happy?"), can bring back connection and understanding.

How to keep going without burning out

Caring for a child with mental health challenges often feels like giving 200% of your energy—and still feeling it's not enough. You may feel tired, worried, or tempted to compare your child's progress with that of their peers, leading to frustration. Yet your strength lies not only in endurance but in love. That love can become a source of support and motivation—as long as you make room for it in your daily life.



Small ideas that can make a difference

“A hug, a caress, a small physical gesture can rebuild bridges when words fail.”

- Remember your child’s strengths: keep a list of what you love and admire about them. It could be their creativity, humor, or tenderness. Share these with the child, your partner, or friends. These reminders bring hope to life.
- Revive pleasant memories: talk about funny family moments or small joys from the past. Laughter and memories create connection and remind everyone that life has light.
- Small acts of kindness: you don’t need grand gestures. A favorite snack, a touch on the shoulder, or a warm “good morning” can show love even when communication is difficult.
- Greet your child with a smile: the surprise on their face when you see them with joy instead of worry is priceless. A simple “I’m glad to see you” can ease tension.

- Cultivate empathy: When you feel anxious or overwhelmed, remember that your child may feel this way almost every day. This can give you patience and understanding.
- Physical closeness: A hug, a gentle touch, or a small physical gesture can rebuild bridges when words are hard.
- Give space to your own feelings: You are not a “bad parent” if you feel anger, sadness, or disappointment. You are human. Find healthy ways to express these emotions (writing, talking, or seeking support).
- Record small bright moments: Even something tiny, like a smile or a calm moment, write it down. Gradually, these “moments of light” become a source of strength.
- Watch your own reactions: If you become excessively angry, it may not be only the child—it might touch your own old wounds. Observe this kindly and ask for help if needed.
- Open your heart to others: Isolation is heavy. A supportive parent group or a friend you can talk to openly can provide relief.
- Don’t take your child’s words personally: When they are hurting, they may speak harshly. Remember that this is part of their struggle, not the truth about you. Repeat to yourself: “My love is stronger than their pain.”
- There is no “perfect” way to raise a child with developmental or mental health challenges. But there is a way to keep your love alive, find small moments to breathe, and continue without burning out.

More information and tips for parents can be found on our website **camhi.gr**, in the dedicated “Parents” section.

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