

SELF-CARE

Meeting Timing

Highs & Lows: 30-60 minutes

Break: 15-20 minutes

Dev. Moment: 2-5 minutes

Topic Discussion: 30-60 minutes

Mix with topic:

- Adjustment to Parenthood
- Mindful Self-Compassion in Parenting

Resources: See “Parent Wellness”



“

I thought PEPS was all about sympathy and tears, but I feel very supported in other ways, and I have all these great friends with kids now!

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SELF-CARE

Introduction

As parents of babies and toddlers, it's easy to feel that every hour is consumed by caring for children, keeping up with the housework, meeting work commitments, attending to your relationship with your partner, and so on.

It can feel like there's no time left over for your own needs or desires. However, self-care is vital for ourselves and for the happiness of our family. Self-care makes for a more patient and loving parent and partner. With the flurry of activity around attending to baby's basic needs, time management has probably become a huge (and often unexpected) problem. Parents often feel like whole parts of their pre-baby life have dramatically shrunk in size or even disappeared. This discussion will hopefully help you find those forgotten parts of your life that you want to re-connect with again.

Today we are going to about why it's so incredibly important to take time for yourself. We'll brainstorm ways to find the time and energy to prioritize the activities that nourish you.

Discussion Prompts

- Prior to baby**, what did you like to **do for fun**?
- What is your **favorite form of exercise**?
- What do you **miss most from your life** before baby?
- What would you like your **life to look like in 5 years?**
10 years?
- If you had **two hours to take a break**, with no responsibilities to meet, **what would you do**?
- What are some **things you currently do to take care of yourself**? What helps you refuel?
- How does your **partner help you get a break**? What role could others play in your self-care?

Notes for Group Leaders

New parents undergo substantial changes (physically, emotionally, and socially) in their perception of themselves and in how the "world" perceives them. For your group members long-term health and well-being, now is a great time to encourage them to take breaks and care for themselves. This discussion helps parents acknowledge the importance of self-care, and helps them get past barriers to finding time for self-care. Some of your group members may feel the barriers are insurmountable. You can help them set simple and small self-care goals.

* Parent Activities

- **This week, brainstorm a list of things you can do at home to nourish yourself.** Commit to spending at least fifteen minutes each day practicing some form of self-care.
- **Have a conversation this week with your partner, or another person who could support you in self-care.** Let them know that you would appreciate help in carving out time to take care of yourself. Come up with a plan together for one thing you could do in the next week to get a break for yourself.

SELF-CARE

Focus Points

- **Parent self-care is vital to the health of the baby, the couple relationship and the family.** It is not selfish, and it's not a "luxury" that you can do without. Think of the metaphor of an oxygen mask on a plane — they always say to first put on your own mask, then help others. As parents, we too need to take care of ourselves first, so that we have the energy to care for others.
- **It is the responsibility of each parent to find personal time in their daily lives.** Partners can help one another get some "down time."
- **Self-care can be practiced in very small ways throughout the day.** Examples include: daily shower, dress in something that looks good and is comfortable, eat well, take naps when baby dozes, have interesting reading materials around, get out of the house every day, make exercise a priority. Starting small may be more successful than starting with some big goal.
- Old ways of nurturing oneself (hobbies, exercise, routines) may not work anymore; **each parent needs to find ways of relieving stress and tension.**
- **Prioritize the things that most nourish you.** Can you relax your standards for housekeeping or cooking in order to make some time for yourself? If you're feeling like there's some "ideal parent" role that you're having a hard time living up to, can you let go of some of those ideas?
- **Recognize what is possible, given the current circumstances of your life.** But also be willing to attempt things that may seem beyond your reach.

* Group Activity

- Give each group member a paper plate or blank paper and ask them to draw a circle. **Ask each member to divide the circle into pie portions according to how they currently portion out their day.** List tasks (feeding, diapers, cooking, work) or roles (partner, parent, household manager, worker, friend, daughter/son, etc.) to describe where time is spent. Discuss how "balanced" the circles are and how this visual representation of their day makes them feel. Then, repeat the exercise to reflect how each group member would like to change their own "circle of time." Discuss concrete ways to begin to move toward that goal and share what happens the next week.
- **Decision-making by prioritizing:** When we want to change a lot of things at once, it's hard to decide in what order to proceed. This exercise is often helpful in determining priorities.
 - ✦ Ask members to make a list of four or more things they want to do (e.g., "I want to start exercising daily, I want to go on a date with my partner, I want to get 8 hours of sleep, I want to get together with my friends.")
 - ✦ Then, compare the statements to each of the other statements — if you had to choose between exercise and a date, which would you choose? Whichever one you rated higher, then compare it to the next thing on the list: if you had to choose between a date and 8 hours of sleep, which would you choose? Go down the list, always comparing your current top choice to the next thing on the list. When you're done, you'll know which thing you most want to do.

Meeting Plan and Report Notes

Please send your notes, and any new resources and/or tips your group may have gathered to Cate Palmer at catep@peps.org.

WEEK # _____ **DATE** ____ / ____ / ____ **TOPIC** _____

WELCOME *(optional icebreaker as parents gather)* _____

NOTES ON HIGHS & LOWS _____

DEVELOPMENTAL MOMENT _____

TOPIC INTRODUCTION *(A sentence or two on how you would introduce the topic)* _____

DISCUSSION NOTES *(help summarize the topic discussion)* _____

NOTES FROM THE MEETING *(Resources parents share (gear, activities, tips, etc.). Include this in your follow-up email to the group and in your weekly report!)* _____

NOTES FOR YOU *(Things to follow up on, people to check in with later, reminders for next time, situations to manage, etc.)* _____

HOUSEKEEPING *(Reminders for the group, hosting schedule holes, announcements, etc.)* _____