



Parental Self-Care During the Holidays



1. Regulate

- Sleep
- Nutrition
- Stress Response
- Movement



2. Relate

- Self-love
- Family
- Friends



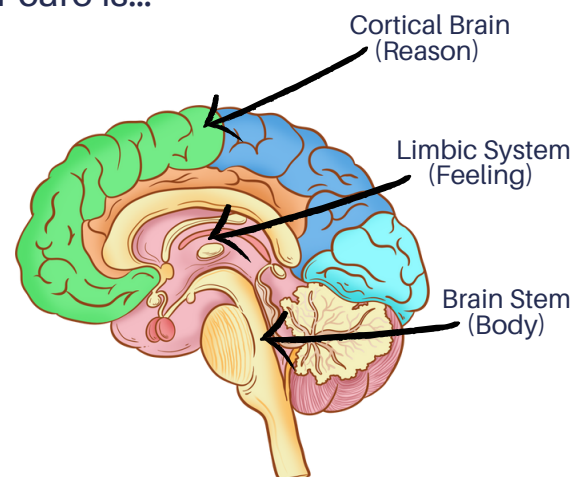
3. Reason

- Problem Solving
- Planning
- Emotion Regulation

With the insanity of the holidays, many parents may be tempted to indulge in industry related self-care...get a massage, buy new shoes, eat a fancy meal. Although all wonderful, we know that the "buzz" from these experiences are short-lived.

Let's explore what true self-care is...

Our ability to regulate our stress response, connect with others, and make sense of the world are critical elements of self-care. In order to experience Eudaimonia ("flourishing" or "living well"), we always work with the brain stem first (Regulation), then the Limbic system (Relationships and Connection) and then the Cortical Brain (Reason).





1. FOCUS ON REGULATION

When we look after our body and focus on restoration and rejuvenation, the lower floors of the brain are less likely to be chronically activated by the stress response. Here are some tips:

Stress:

“Stress is not something to be afraid of or avoided. It is the controllability, pattern, and intensity of stress that can cause problems.”

— Bruce D. Perry, *What Happened to You?: Conversations on Trauma, Resilience, and Healing*

The holiday season will undoubtedly be stressful, so prepare for it by fuelling your body with good food, restful sleep, and revitalizing movement.

Nutrition:

We can not regulate our stress response, if we are not fuelling our body correctly. For stress-busting nutrition, include these foods:

- Complex Carbs (Whole grains, steel cut oats, sweet potatoes): Carbohydrates can increase levels of serotonin in the body- which boosts mood and reduces stress
- Bananas: Potassium boosts levels of dopamine (mood enhancing chemical) & magnesium (relaxant)
- Fatty Fish: Omega 3's may help with depression and lower stress
- Nuts: Vitamin B found in nuts have been shown to lower stress levels
- Leafy greens: Magnesium found in leafy greens can help to regulate cortisol and blood pressure (<https://www.everydayhealth.com/wellness/united-states-of-stress/ultimate-diet-guide-stress-management/>)

Movement:

Exercise reduces stress hormones and stimulates endorphins (feel good hormones). Using large muscles in a rhythmic, repetitive manner (like walking or running) can be particularly calming. You should move your body every day.

Sleep:

Adults who sleep fewer than eight hours a night report higher stress levels than those who sleep at least eight hours a night (<https://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/stress/2013/sleep>). People who sleep less than 7 hours a night are an increased risk for heart disease, obesity, diabetes, stroke, depression, arthritis, and kidney disease (https://www.cdc.gov/sleep/data_statistics.html). When we are stressed, sleep onset and quality is impacted. When sleep onset and quality is impacted, the stress response in the body is hyper-sensitive.

Some ways to enhance sleep include:

- Switching off all devices an hour before bed
- Limiting caffeine intake after lunch
- Limiting naps
- Practicing mindfulness (“Calm” is a great app to help with sleep)
- Creating a sleep sanctuary: dark, cool, quiet spaces make the best sleep spaces



2. INCREASE RELATIONSHIPS

When we feel a deep sense of connection and belonging, we build resiliency towards the holiday stressors.



Self-love:

Spend some time by yourself over the holidays. We can not give to others, when our cup is empty. Think about the activities that fill your cup. Actively carve out time to journal, to go for a walk, to enjoy a movie, or to linger over your morning coffee. What do you need? Now fiercely protect it.



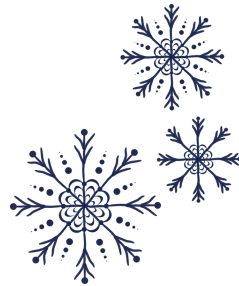
Family:

Say "No," to another family dinner and say "Yes!" to a pyjama day with the kids. Remember, stress is contagious. When we are stressed, our children are more likely to be stressed. This is your family. Your story. Write it, don't allow others to write it for you.



Friends:

Who do you need to reach out too? Who fills you up and who empties you? Make space for the joy-fillers, put boundaries around the relationship vampires. When you go out for dinner, watch a movie with a friend, or go on a weekend getaway, you are modelling self-care to your children.



"Parental self-care in 4 steps. Step 1: Accept that self-care isn't selfish, Step 2: Know that modeling self-care is good for your kids, Step 3: Prioritize yourself and use your supports, Step 4: Engage in self-care that restores you."

- Hayley Gallagher

3. SPEND TIME TO REASON

What activities drain you? Who drains you? Holidays are an essential time to hold boundaries that help you to prioritize wellness.

Here is how to do it-

1. Reflect on what you need and what you want from the holiday season.
2. Write it down.
3. Now change the need into a boundary by using "I"

I feel _____

When _____

Because _____

I need _____

An example might be: "I feel overwhelmed when hosting the whole family because all the prep falls on me. I need everyone to bring a potluck item."



What inspires you? Ignites passion? Over the holiday season, what is one project that you want to spend time on?

There are times in the holidays when your stress level may peak. Allow yourself to feel your feelings, to connect with someone, and when you are ready, you can ask yourself the following three questions:

1. What exactly is the stressor? (Write it down and break it into concrete facts)
2. Do I need to do anything about it?
3. If your answer is no - Redirect your energy into an activity that restores and rejuvenates. Actively practice gratitude, it retrains the brain to focus on positive aspects of the environment.
4. If your answer is yes - Brainstorm what is in your control and what is out of your control. Figure out the steps that you need to put in place to reduce the stressor. Again, actively practice gratitude.

REGULATE - RELATE - REASON

Self-care always needs to happen in this order. So, this holiday season when you reach for another miracle face cream in the hopes that it will make you feel better, stop and ask yourself...

- *Is my body cared for?*
- *Am I feeling deeply connected?*
- *Right now, what is in my control in my life that I can actively pursue?*

Self-care is a word that is carelessly flung around as part of one of the biggest money makers in the world. Don't give away your power. You have everything you need to take care of you. Trust yourself.

