

Care for Self

Alvin Toffler stated that “Parenthood remains the greatest single preserve of the amateur.” Our most important job, yet we do not get specific training for it. Parenting can be stressful!

One of the most significant contributions parents and other care givers can make in the life of children is care for self. Judith Graham, human development specialist, said “We cannot give what we do not have. Self-care is the foundation for caring about others.” *Care for Self* provides a backdrop of security, support, predictability, and purpose that indirectly influences the lives of everyone in the family. So caring for oneself means knowing and understanding oneself, establishing clear direction for oneself and managing life's demands. Self-care concerns must be addressed before a parent can begin to concentrate on the child and the behaviors related to parenthood. For example, a parent who has established a sense of purpose in parenting will be more comfortable choosing guidance strategies. A parent who is seen by their children caring for herself will model self-care for their children. A parent who is motivated in his own life will be more capable of motivating a child. A parent who mirrors how to manage their stress will teach their children how to manage theirs. Improving self-care improves the parent/child relationship. A parent's own mental health will have an influence on their children's emotional well-being.

Here are some critical practices and behaviors for self-care:

- Manage personal stress – identify the signs and sources of stress, have methods for coping and reducing stress
- Manage family resources – create and follow a household budget, organize & manage time. For information on making a budget, using credit, or managing money, contact Mary Ellen Fleming, CSU Extension, 852-7381. Also various resources are on the web (e.g. On line Resources for Financial Education from New Mexico Extension).
- Establish a *Constellation of Support* – having the ability to ask for and accept support from others and offering support to others, identify formal (church, school, social services, non-profit organizations) and informal (family, friends and neighbors) sources of personal parenting support, establish a balance between support offered to others and support from others.
- Recognize one's own personal and parenting strengths – identify personal and parenting strengths, increase in parental confidence. A few suggested resources are: 1) Gallup has a free personal strengthfinder at <http://freestrengthstest.workuno.com/free-strengths-test.html>; and 2) Martin Seligman's book entitled Character Strengths & Virtues: A Handbook and Classification.
- Have a sense of purpose in setting child-rearing goals – identify and set goals for parenting that helps you answer *What kind of parent do I want to be?* and *What will be*

my legacy? Develop a parenting plan that includes: my goals, characteristics I will mirror, values and skills I will teach, and what I want for my children.

- Cooperate with one's child-rearing partners – having the ability to discuss parenting issues, resolve issues, set shared goals and communicate effectively

Care for Self focuses on the parent's needs and well-being. Caring for oneself is not only a critical parenting skill, but a skill for life.