

News Column

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Self Check Up

You know the safety speech that you hear right before the airplane takes off every time you fly? There is one part that usually goes something like this, “In the event that the cabin loses pressure, and oxygen mask will fall from the compartment above...please secure your own mask before attempting to assist others.” Have you ever wondered why that reminder to take care of yourself is in there? Doesn't it seem obvious that if you aren't taken care of, you aren't going to be of any use to those around you? This all makes sense; we understand this intuitively. However, we don't always apply these practical lessons in flight safety to real life, especially when it comes to relationships.

Oftentimes as parents or partners, we find ourselves so concerned for those we love, so instinctively desirous for their well-being, that we neglect ourselves in order to care for them. If we are aware enough to realize this is happening, we sometimes even justify our self-neglect in the name of love or service. When we pause to consider what our own needs might be, shameful guilt often rears its ugly head making us feel selfish. Here's the thing: taking care of yourself so that you can best take care of those you love is not selfish. Taking care of yourself is called self-care, and it is absolutely critical if you want to be the best you possible for those you love.

Self-care involves all aspects of life. We need to care for our physical, emotional, spiritual, intellectual, and social selves. In order to do this, it's a good idea to take a periodic inventory. Think of it the same way as children undergo periodic well-child checks, where each aspect of their growth and development is assessed and tracked. Ask yourself, “How am I doing emotionally?” or “How am I feeling about my social life?” Be honest with yourself, and then determine what steps you can take to take care of yourself in every aspect of your life.

Sometimes we can be persuaded by media (especially social media) to believe that self-care has to be elaborate or expensive, that it must be planned in advance and executed perfectly in order to be effective. The reality is that the best self-care is the kind that is manageable and realistic, and often that means keeping it really simple. Consider things you already do that fill you up, things that make you feel energized and happy. Brainstorm ways you can make those simple things happen on a regular basis. Create enough mental space to savor the moments that are satisfying to you, rather than letting them pass without recognition because you are too busy worrying about what comes next.

A few weeks ago, I met a young mother with three young children, including a new baby. In an effort to get to know her, I asked, “What do you like to do for fun? What kinds of things do you enjoy?” She paused thoughtfully. Then she tilted her head slightly and looked up, as though she was searching for an answer. When nothing came to her, she finally confessed, “I don't know. I can't think of anything. Last week I got to go to Smith's all by myself. Does that count?” she

half-joked. Many of us can empathize with her conundrum. We often forget who we are when we are so busy caring for those we love.

The question then becomes, “If you could do something for yourself, what would it be?” When we sincerely ask ourselves this question, most often the first things that come to mind are sensible and achievable. Our motivation to prioritize self-care becomes even stronger when we realize that we cannot adequately care for those we love when we don’t take care of ourselves. Consider setting aside some time this week to take inventory of your own personal well-being. Brainstorm ways you can do the things that fill you up and make you energized and happy. Determine to incorporate self-care into your routine. You will thank yourself for it.