



Taking Care of YOU

—The Importance of Self-Care When There are Exceptional Needs

By Annette Nuñez, LMFT, PhD

PARENTING A CHILD WITH EXCEPTIONAL NEEDS CAN BE A CHALLENGING AND OVERWHELMING JOB. YOUR LIFE REVOLVES AROUND YOUR CHILD, FROM MANAGING MELTDOWNS TO TAKING THEM TO VARIOUS THERAPIES. IT IS VITAL TO ASK YOURSELF, “WHAT HAVE I DONE FOR ME TODAY?” YOU ARE HUMAN, AND IF YOU DON’T TAKE TIME OUT FOR YOURSELF, YOU MAY FIND YOURSELF WITH LITTLE LEFT TO GIVE TO THE PEOPLE YOU LOVE.

Remember your child's achievement is dependent upon you. When you have nothing remaining in your tank, you will become impatient and frustrated, which in turn affects your child, likely leading to more meltdowns or increased anxiety. Self-care is a mindset, and it is vital to surviving as a parent. When you are your best self, so is your child.

Many parents tell me, "I don't have time." My suggestion is to MAKE TIME! When you pause, slow down, and take time for yourself, you are giving yourself permission to care for oneself. For clients who struggle with self-care, I tell them to participate in my 21-Day Self-Care Challenge. It has been said it takes 21 days to alter a habit. So, if you are in the practice of NOT taking time for yourself, let's change that starting today! I recommend starting the challenge when your child is in school because school provides a natural break for you. Instead of running an errand, use that time to take care of YOU. Believe me, the errand can wait. For 21 days, take 10 to 15 minutes a day to care for yourself. By doing this, you are saying to yourself that you are worth it and that you are valuable. To start the challenge, create a monthly calendar and decide when you will begin. Write down 21 self-care activities you can do. Here is my list of 10 easy and simple self-care ideas:

1. Take a walk
2. Listen to your favorite song on repeat
3. Indulge in a bubble bath
4. Eat your favorite food
5. Sit outside for five minutes while taking deep breaths
6. Watch a movie
7. Read a book
8. Join an exercise class
9. Nap
10. Learn to say, "No."

When your 21-Day Self-Care Challenge is complete, reward yourself with meeting up with friends for the evening or going



away by yourself for the weekend. In just 21 days, you should see your mood improve. Studies have shown self-care promotes positivity, improves confidence, and raises self-esteem. This eventually affects your mood as a parent. You may notice you have more patience and energy after practicing regular self-care, which then affects your child's mood. So the next time you are confronted with the choice between completing an errand or making time for you, ask yourself, "Does this errand promote my health? Is it allowing me to become the best version of me?" If the answer is, "No," drop that errand and go take care of yourself. YOU are worth it!



Annette Nuñez, LMFT, PhD is the founder and director of Breakthrough Interventions, LLC and Potential Health, LLC. She is a licensed psychotherapist and has worked with children with ASD and other related disorders for over 28 years. As part of her doctorate work at the University of Denver, Dr. Nuñez developed the Children's Social Competence Scale (CSCS). The CSCS is an early intervention evaluation tool that measures social competency in young children. She served as the Program Director for Connect Us, a non-profit organization that helps children cultivate positive relationships through facilitated play. Her research interests include the mainstreaming and socialization of children with high functioning autism.

Dr. Nuñez co-wrote and self-published the [Friendship Is...](#) book. She conducts many seminars both nationally and internationally and has consulted with many schools in China and supervises the therapists at Breakthrough Interventions in South Africa. Her most recent project is starting Potential Health, LLC—a hemp line that offers various products to children with autism and their caretakers to help with sleep and relieve the stress of day-to-day living. Dr. Nuñez has been featured in the Huffington Post, San Francisco Chronicle, NPR, ABC, CBS, NBC, FOX News, Forbes, The Jenny McCarthy Show, and The Today Show.

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