

FOUR INGREDIENTS FOR PARENTING SELF-CARE

How many flights have you taken where you've ignored the instructional video before taking off? Most of the time I have already put on my headphones and I've tried to send my last few texts messages before the flight attendant tells me to set my phone to airplane mode. The famous line we all know comes over the video or speakers,

"In the unlikely event of a sudden loss of cabin pressure oxygen masks will drop down from the panel above your head. Secure your own mask before helping others."

That part of the safety presentation is so important, reminding us that we are useless to help those around us if we don't first take care of ourselves first. This is true for us all as parents. **Our kids feed off our attitudes, energy, and emotions. If we are not taking care of ourselves first, we will likely struggle to fully give our kids our best as a parent.** Each of us is wired uniquely requiring different ways we take care of ourselves. However, I believe there are four ingredients all of us should use for parenting self-care:

1 Ingredient #1 = SLEEP

When we get good rest, we have better focus and problem-solving skills, both of which are necessary to parenting effectively. Most doctors will tell you that when we don't sleep, we increase our risk of serious health problems such as heart attacks, high blood pressure, stroke, and diabetes. If you want to give your best, you must get some sleep. Taking care of yourself starts with getting enough sleep.

Try this: During the next seven days, track how many hours of sleep you are getting. It is recommended that we get seven to nine hours of sleep each night. Do the math and see how well you are sleeping. If you find that you are not getting enough, get off your phone, turn off the TV and get some sleep.

2 Ingredient #2 = PRAYER

Dr. Herbert Benson at Harvard Medical School discovered what he calls “the relaxation response.” This occurs during periods of prayer and meditation. At such times, the body’s metabolism decreases, the heart rate slows, blood pressure goes down, and breathing becomes calmer and more regular. If we want to grow in our love for God, we must spend time in communion with Him through prayer. If we want our kids to grow in their love for God, we must show them how we spend time in prayer and in the Word.

Try This: Set a timer on your phone every day at the same time to pray; maybe at 9:00 AM and 3:00 PM. Setting these times and stopping what you are doing to pray will reset and refocus your mind and heart towards God.

3 Ingredient #3 = MOVEMENT

Taking care of your physical body means that you must actually take care of your body. Doing so doesn’t require joining a gym or hiring a personal trainer. This can be as simple as going for a walk. Studies show the correlations between personal satisfaction and physical exercise. When you work out, you may be tired but mentally and physically you feel better. Get up and add movement in your life.

Try This: When you schedule out your next seven days, add three 30–45-minute blocks where you commit to movement. Example: Tuesday morning at 7:00am (Walking). Start with three days and see if you can add physical activity every day of the week.

4 Ingredient #4 = RELATIONSHIPS

We all need friendships that fill us up. Guys need to hang out with their buddies. Women need friendships with other women. It is not a selfish thing to have vibrant relationships outside the home. We are designed by God to live life in community and a lack of community will leave us unhealthy relationally. The key to this is not to just have friends to have friends, it is to spend time with others so that you are reminded that you are not alone. At times it can be easy to isolate ourselves as parents. We get tired and run down and believe we have nothing left for other relationships. However, quality time with a friend can be truly life giving.

Try This: Schedule a lunch with a good friend in the coming weeks just to catch up with them. After that lunch take notice of how you are interacting with your kids. Is it worse, the same or better? Encourage your spouse to spend time with their friends in the coming weeks.