

# Making Time for Yourself

**Tip** – Giving yourself adequate “down time” can result in improved problem solving ability.

“Parents are overwhelmed these days,” a parent educator remarked a couple of years ago, citing more activities than are good for families.

Activities are only one culprit. There are hundreds of reasons life can get to be too much – not all of them under our control. The good news is that since we are the directors of our own destinies, we have some measure of control over how stressed we get.

One of our authors describes herself as a recent case in point. She reports, “I found myself getting very overwhelmed this past summer – behind on deadlines, some bills, a lot of housework. Summer activities, house guests and a seriously ill mother all combined to push me to the edge. I was taking care of the kids, but not much else.

“Fortunately, my husband dragged me away for a weekend trip. I was able to relax, read, and sleep in. When I arrived home to all the unfinished work, I found myself much calmer.

“Clearly, the R&R had improved my ability to cope. I realized that in the past few hectic months, I’d stopped reading for pleasure and become very spotty in my daily exercise – two things that usually help control stress.”

Margaret Carlson, Barbara Healy and Glo Wellman, authors of *Taking Care of Me (So I Can Take Care of My Children)*, point out that parents need to deliberately schedule time and budget money for their own interests and well-being.



Their advice: look at your daily schedule and decide where you can fit in a workout, a hike with the dog, or a walk with a friend. Make sure you’re making time for sit-down meals, not grabbing fast food on the run. Take a serious look at your bedtime and bump it an hour earlier, if necessary (the kids will be tickled if you actually go to bed at the same time they do a couple nights a week).

Don’t forget unstructured time. Everybody needs personal time they can use for naps, reading, mindless TV, or a bubble bath. Studies show that our problem solving minds actually work best during unstructured time; our minds are freer to make connections and sort through stored information.

More tips drawn from Carlson, Healy and Wellman’s book:

- Chart your daily schedule, so that you can see which hours of the day your children will need you most. Take care to reserve some time for yourself – an hour for exercise here or a half-hour to read there. It will be easier for you to use this time if you schedule it in.
- Budget a certain amount of money for your own hobbies and interests.
- Be realistic in planning how much you can do in a day. Slow down.
- Plan to do your hardest tasks for the time of day when you have the most energy.

You’ll find more practical tips you can use right now in *Taking Care of Me (So I Can Take Care of My Children)* by Barbara Carlson, Margaret Healy, and Glo Wellman.

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