



Lutheran Child and
Family Services of Illinois

Foster Family Focus



Why Is Self-Care Especially Important For Foster Parents?

You've probably heard the term "self-care" more often in recent years. And like many, you might not have taken it seriously. The most common thinking is that a spa day or a fishing trip is all that's needed to restore stress levels, improve mental health and ensure physical wellness. A simple reprieve is all you need to keep going, right? Not necessarily. Self-care is so much more than a simple "break" – it's an essential factor of well-being. Let's look at why.

What is Self-Care?

The International Self-Care Foundation (ISF) and The World Health Organization (WHO) offer this definition: "Self-care is what people do for themselves to establish and maintain health, and to prevent and deal with illness."

These experts elaborate that self-care encompasses hygiene, lifestyle and pursuits, and nutrition. It's also influenced by environmental factors both physical, like with housing, and by socio-economic factors like income. Self-care isn't some buzzword or an indulgence, but rather, an important discipline to have in your life. These are the steps you take to ensure you're healthy and happy, and thus able to give your time, energy, and attention to those around you.

However, today's social media and culture have prioritized actions like taking a bath, developing an elaborate skincare routine or splurging on expensive purchases as key examples of self-care. While these practices may be

right for some people, it's important to remember that taking care of ourselves must also involve addressing our most basic human needs like getting a good night's sleep and socializing with friends and family. When we neglect self-care, we're ignoring what our bodies and minds need to function.

What Happens When You Neglect Self-Care?

According to Psychology Today writer Dr. Maria Baratta, "Self-care, in essence, is the mindful taking of time to pay attention to you, not in a narcissistic way, but in a way that ensures that you are being cared for by you." Just as any machine requires maintenance, self-care can prevent harm to your physical and mental health. It's important to maintain these good habits. In fact, Dr. Baratta also emphasizes that things like burnout and compassion fatigue can result from prolonged neglect and stress.

Burnout is mental and physical distress after the continued enduring presence of stress. Compassion fatigue is indifference to others' suffering as a result of continuous exposure to it or taking on the burdens of others' suffering too much without reprieve.

These are very common issues for those in the medical field and other stressful, emotional jobs. Studies on those working in emotionally charged disciplines like psychotherapists, hospice professionals, and children's Intensive Care Unit providers indicate that self-care needs to be a priority for these individuals. Besides helping themselves, it's clear that self-care helps them continue serving others.



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Help a child...
feel safe, build a future, return to his/her family
Be a foster parent



Self-Care for Parenting: An Essential Ingredient

parent self-care What about parenting? Parents, specifically foster parents, rely on love and compassion that drives their every move to care for their children. For parents, children can take up every waking thought and every ounce of energy outside of work. This is especially true for foster parents.

Foster parents often care for children who have experienced hardship or are struggling with the impacts of trauma. As a part of their support, foster parents do everything they can to help alleviate the child's struggles or worries. They not only provide for their basic needs and try to build a relationship with them, but they also try their hardest to deliver a carefree and joyful environment that every child deserves. While all of this hard work is worth it, it can also be emotionally and physically draining.

Foster parents, just like those in caring professions, are especially in need of proper self-care. This isn't just because of how much work goes into foster parenting, but also because of the type of people foster parents tend to be. Foster parents are often natural, unselfish caregivers with many people who rely on them. As they spend all of their time and energy taking care of others, they may struggle to prioritize their own needs.

Foster parenting brings so many joys and rewards. Moments like connecting with a child who had seemed emotionally unreachable, or seeing a child succeed in school for the first time, or having a fulfilling family night of fun and laughter... these can fill foster parents' cup. But these moments are not all that will sustain a foster parent in the important work they're doing. Foster parents must also ensure that they're engaging in the sustaining practices of self-care, whatever that looks like for them.

Address Your Needs to Continue Impacting Others

If you're a foster parent and are struggling in some way, you might be ignoring your personal needs. To get back on track, go through the ISF pillars of self-care. Ask yourself if there are any areas you've been neglecting and accept that it's okay to ask for help. If you have a partner, ask them to take over for an hour or two. If you're a single foster parent, try to find some time in your schedule for you—even if it's only five or ten minutes.

When exploring self-care, it's important to understand that everyone's needs are different and to not compare yourself to others. One common trend for foster parents is comparing themselves to other parents. This can be discouraging and force you to neglect yourself as you try to exceed the perceived expectations of others. Every family has its struggles. No one is perfect, no matter what they post on social media or talk about publicly.

As popular researcher, author and speaker Brené Brown said, "Comparison kills creativity and joy."

It doesn't help your mental health to ignore your stress or unhappiness. Self-care starts with acknowledging and articulating your needs and accepting that you matter too. Check out these self-care resources from KVC partner, Sesame Street in Communities, for ideas on how to care for yourself and how to teach children about the importance of self-care.

Whether it's getting back to basics with diet or sleep, cleaning or refreshing a living space, setting aside time for exercise, meditating, or

praying, self-care is all of this and more. Do these things for you and your family. It's time to fight against the stigma surrounding mental health and self-care. It's not a cliché or crutch, but an important part of remaining loving, compassionate, and caring.

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The Seven Pillars of Self-Care

The ISF identifies seven pillars of self-care, which are:

- Knowledge and health literacy: learning how you can take better care of your physical and mental health
- Mental well-being or self-awareness: managing stress, asking and accepting help, using coping skills, building self-esteem
- Physical activity: taking walks, going for a bike ride, taking a yoga class, playing a sport
- Healthy eating: being mindful of what you eat, limiting caffeine intake, maintaining a well-balanced diet
- Risk avoidance: avoiding or limiting alcohol and tobacco/nicotine use, using sunscreen, getting vaccinated
- Good hygiene: brushing and flossing teeth, washing hands
- Rational use of products and services: safely using medication, going to therapy or counseling, going to the doctor for regular check-ups

These pillars explain how we can best take care of ourselves. They encompass both physical and mental habits because self-care is holistic in nature. People must tend to their mental and physical health needs in order to be healthy. This comes in a variety of forms relevant to individual needs.

CONNECT - RESOURCES - SUPPORT



Virtual Foster Parent Support Groups

LCFS' Licensing Team invites all interested foster parents to come together virtually. Our virtual Support Groups are meant to be a means to connect with other foster parents, obtain support, ask questions that you all may have and get your feedback on how LCFS can better support you and your family.

Events are held on a monthly basis and topics vary each time. Be on the lookout for your invitation to the next scheduled event once dates are confirmed.

If you have questions or a topic you'd like us to consider covering at the next event, contact Licensing Supervisor Kymberle West: Kymberle_West@LCFS.org or 708-907-1475.

We Invite Foster Families to Grow With Us

As foster parents, you fulfill the most important role we could ask of anyone. Now we invite you to help in another way. We are seeking people to help us spread the word about our efforts to help children and families by joining our Grow with Us community. Or, please let us know if you have friends or family members with a passion for our mission who are willing to share it with their networks.

We are launching this community of LCFS ambassadors to help raise awareness of LCFS by learning about and sharing information on upcoming fundraisers. As a member of the community, you can:

- Watch for our quarterly emails and annual Zoom meetings to learn about our latest initiatives
- Engage with LCFS social media by following us and commenting on and sharing occasional posts
- Consider hosting at least one online fundraiser annually
- Be invited to attend or volunteer at our fundraising events

It's that simple! We'd love to have all of our foster parents be part of this. Please email mandy_widtfeldt@lcfs.org.





Lutheran Child and Family Services of Illinois

Foster Hope.
Foster Love.
Foster a Child.

Foster Parents Make a Difference

Help us Recruit Foster Families

All types of people make good foster parents as we all have our own special talents. As a foster parent, you know better than anyone what it takes to answer this call. **So we need your help.**

LCFS is looking for individuals or families willing to provide a child in need with a safe, loving home. Refer someone to become a licensed foster home, and if they complete the licensing process, you will receive a **\$50 Visa or American Express gift card**. Call 800-363-5237, talk to your licensing representative or call your local office and speak to someone in foster home licensing.

Anyone interested in learning more about the benefits and challenges of being a foster parent can attend a virtual informational meeting or have a one-on-one meeting with an LCFS licensing representative.

Consider becoming a specialized foster parent

Currently, there is a high need for specialized foster parents to care for children with special needs that extend beyond common emotional, behavioral or medical issues. These children need caregivers with extra training and/or competencies that can provide the additional support they need to thrive. To learn more about this new role, visit www.lcfs.org/foster-care-specialized or contact your licensing representative.



Vicarious Trauma, Vicarious Resilience

Trauma impacts our well-being, whether the other people are our children, family members, friends, or our co-workers. Learning how vicarious trauma affects us is the first step to improving our well-being and ability to sustain positive relationships. The workshop begins with learning about and identifying our own signs of trauma exposure response and our emotional triggers. Foster Parents practice strategies for de-escalating their own and our children's emotional responses at the moment. Further, they learn a framework for reading and shifting their own and children's energy to move into a positive relational zone.

This workshop offers tools for increasing foster parent's awareness, skills, and tools for understanding how to best respond when trauma or trauma history is in play.

Module 2: Thursday, September 16, 2021, 6:30-8:30PM

Module 3: Thursday, September 23, 2021, 6:30-8:30PM

To learn more, visit www.beststrongfamilies.org or register at:
<https://beststrongfamilies-net.zoom.us/join/91025202020>

