



Nurturing Your Child's Well-Being

MIDDLE SCHOOL

Trisha DiFazio • Allison Roeser



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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

LCCN: 2024015414



A division of Teacher Created Materials
5482 Argosy Avenue
Huntington Beach, CA 92649-1039

www.tcmpub.com/shell-education

ISBN 979-8-7659-7725-5

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Introduction

Do you ever wish parenting was just a tad easier? Do you find yourself feeling tired and stressed out by its never-ending demands? Let's face it, being a parent can be incredibly rewarding, but it can also be really hard. This book was designed with you in mind to help lighten the load.

We admire and appreciate all that it takes to be a parent these days. Our decades of experience in education and supporting families, along with personal experience in parenting, have shown us time and time again how important social and emotional topics are to daily life. No matter where in the United States we are doing trainings, it all comes back to this: when we can focus on connection and well-being, it helps children and adults grow, feel a sense of belonging, and thrive.

In this book, we offer support and ideas to help make the parenting journey a little easier by providing examples and activities on social and emotional topics that are important to parents and children. We have placed specific emphasis on supporting not only the child but also you, the adult. At the end of the day, one of the best things parents can give a child is a well-regulated adult.

Getting the Most from This Book

Each chapter offers tips, ideas, and activities to support you and your child. We designed the book to be flexible, so you can start on page one and read it through or skip to the chapters that are most relevant for you and your family right now. For example, if you feel like screen time has become a constant battle, check out chapter 6,

Managing Tech Time. Or, if you're looking for new ways to connect with your child, take a look at chapter 4, *Creating Connections*. That said, as a parent, guardian, or caregiver, you need to be well taken care of too. Therefore, we do suggest you start with the first chapter, *Bank on Yourself*, which provides ideas for ways to take care of yourself on a daily basis.

You'll get the most out of this book if you fill out the personal inventories, respond to the reflection questions, and use the tips and activities provided. Feel free to use this resource as a workbook, making notes about what works well and adding your own ideas. We've also included digital versions of the inventories and several activities that you can download. (See page 61 for download instructions.) If you're interested in diving a little deeper, callout boxes highlight connections to science and research.

This book is for any parent, guardian, or caregiver parenting children. Parenting is a unique journey for each individual and family, and there is no one-size-fits-all approach. What might work for one child might not work for another. You know your child best! We are not here to tell you how to do anything, but we want to offer ideas that can help along the way. You've got this!

 Chapter 1

Bank on Yourself

Parental Self-Care

Parenting is not about perfection; it's about progress. As a parent, you are going to make mistakes. It's okay. Parenting is messy. There isn't one "right" way to parent. Social media might make it look like every second of parenting is fun and easy, but of course that's not true.

Parents want what's best for their children. Turns out, the best thing you can give your child is a calm and present adult. But being calm and present is a lot easier said than done. It requires that you take care of yourself. And when children see their parents taking care of themselves, they feel safe to do so too. **Taking care of yourself is not selfish—it's necessary.**

Deposits and Withdrawals

As a parent, your energy is valuable. One helpful way to conserve energy is by asking yourself this question: *Is this a deposit or a withdrawal?*

What does that mean?

Basically, think of daily activities in terms of deposits and withdrawals. Deposits are things that give you energy, and withdrawals take it away. Everything takes *some* energy, from going to work to cleaning the house. In that way, withdrawals are just a part of life. But people are different, so deposits and withdrawals can vary from parent to parent.

For example, one parent might love cooking dinner because it brings them joy. Engaging in an activity that you enjoy, even a necessary one, is a deposit. However, another parent might dislike cooking dinner. For them, it feels like just one more chore on the to-do list. In that case, it would be a withdrawal.

Making small investments over time can make a big difference. The goal is to understand how these daily activities affect you, so you can focus on making as many deposits as possible. You will have a better chance at making deposits when you carve out time to do so.

Parent Piggy Bank

Identify activities that energize you with the Parent Piggy Bank. This will provide a visual that can serve as a reminder throughout the day. A blank version is available in the digital resources.



Always on the Go

The go-go-go of parenting can make it easy to forget an important truth: **Sometimes the most productive thing you can do is rest.** That's right. Read that sentence one more time.

We know it can feel impossible to find time to rest during your busy day. But just because you definitely can't take a thirty-minute nap doesn't necessarily mean you can't take a ten-minute rest, right?

Make a Plan

It's easier to make deposits when you plan for them. In the example below, the parent has scheduled time for several deposits. Take a look at your schedule for this week. Where is there time to make



Stress impacts your nervous system, causing your body to enter a "fight or flight" response. This response releases extra stress hormones called cortisol and adrenaline, which make it more difficult to respond calmly.

This Week

Monday

9:00 a.m. Meeting
1:30 p.m. Dentist
3:30 p.m. Go for a walk ✓
6:00 p.m. Dance class pickup

Tuesday

8:00 a.m. Bring snack for school
11:00 a.m. PTA meeting
5:30 p.m. After-school pickup

Wednesday

9:00 a.m. Call a friend ✓
5:00 p.m. Grocery shopping

Thursday

7:30 a.m. School carpool
3:00 p.m. Laundry
5:30 p.m. Dinner

Friday

8:30 a.m. Parent-teacher meeting
12:00 p.m. Register for summer camp
5:30 p.m. After-school pickup

Saturday

10:00 a.m. Soccer practice
2:00 p.m. Rest or nap ✓

Sunday

Visiting grandparents
8:00 p.m. Watch a show ✓

deposits? Or are there ways to take away any withdrawals? For example, can you ask for help with cooking or cleaning?

Stress

Stress is a part of life, and it can be a major withdrawal for parents. When you're more stressed, you have less patience for dealing with the day-to-day challenges of parenting. Managing your stress doesn't mean you won't have tough days or lose your cool. However, learning to manage stress will give you the energy you need to show up and be the parent you want to be. Furthermore, the best way to teach your child how to manage stress is to model it for them.



High levels of stress correlate with decreased immune function, increased inflammation, less sleep, and poorer overall health.

You don't need to try to hide your stress from your family. Children actually benefit when they see you cope with stress in a healthy way.

The first step to managing stress is understanding its cause. Think about the questions in the Personal Stress Inventory on the next page to start unpacking your stressors. A downloadable version is available in the digital resources.



Personal Stress Inventory

When do you feel stressed?

What types of things stress you out?

What are you currently doing to manage your stress?

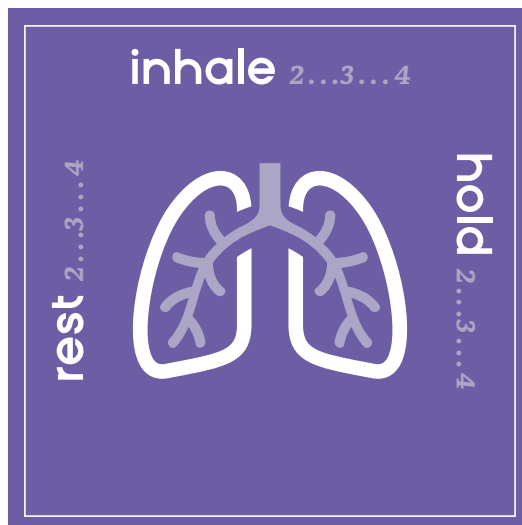
Tips for Managing Stress

There is no one-size-fits-all recommendation when it comes to de-stressing. Everyone is different, so it's important to find what works best for you personally. Each of the activities below can be done solo or with your child.

BREATHE

When life feels like it's moving too fast, deep breathing can help you pump the brakes. Your breath is one of the most effective, powerful ways to relax your body. You can adjust your breath in your car, at home, or at the grocery store.

One example of mindful breathing is called Box Breathing. Give it a try. Picture a square in your mind, and trace around it as you go. Breathe in for four seconds, hold for four seconds, breathe out for four seconds, and rest for four seconds.



CHECK IN WITH YOUR BODY

Sitting comfortably, take a deep breath in through your nose and let it out through your mouth. As you breathe out, close your eyes. Starting at the top of your head, scan down through your body all the way to your toes. Notice what feels uncomfortable or what areas may need some extra care. Give that stress or tension a color. Now picture a great big magnet pulling the stress out of your body.

MOVE YOUR BODY

Yes, walking, running, and yoga are fantastic ways to move your body. But small movements and stretches can be helpful as well. They can be as simple as rolling your shoulders or unclenching your jaw. Movement is a great way to make a deposit during a busy day.

CALL IN SUPPORT

The saying “it takes a village” is true. Parenting can feel a lot easier when you talk to someone. **Asking for help is not a sign of weakness, it is a sign of strength.**

Here are a few ideas:

- Connect with friends and/or family.
- Reach out to other parents.
- Seek out resources in your school district or community (schools, hospitals, community centers).
- Join online parent support groups.
- Follow social media parenting accounts.

Social media can be a helpful place to get parenting ideas and support. However, it can also be hurtful. If you decide to use social media for parenting advice, here are a few questions to consider:

- Does the content feature an unrealistic lifestyle?
- Does the account share only “perfect” (edited) images?
- Does the message use fear or shame you?
- Does the person have credentials or credible research to back up their message?
- Are you being sold something?
- Do you feel bad about yourself after checking out the content?

Similarly, online support groups can be most useful when they have clear ground rules and are well moderated. Notice how the group is run, what the agreements are, and if the content and environment are supportive.

REFRAME YOUR THOUGHTS

Your thoughts shape your whole day. Making mental deposits starts with being aware of your thinking. Reframing your thoughts is simply looking at them from a different point of view. This is a skill that, with practice, will have a big payoff.

Here are some ideas of simple reframes:

Instead of:	Try:
I'm failing as a parent!	→ I'm learning as a parent.
I'm a mess!	→ I'm human.
I can't do this!	→ I can do hard things.
Why is this happening?	→ What can I learn from this?
He just wants attention.	→ He is seeking connection.
She is giving me a hard time.	→ She is having a hard time.

FOCUS ON WHAT YOU CAN CONTROL

Your time and energy are valuable. Worrying about things you can't control is a withdrawal because it takes a lot of energy. You probably do it all the time without even realizing! It's totally normal. For example, you might worry that others judge your parenting decisions. But you can't control other people's thoughts or opinions. When you focus on what you can control, your energy can be used for deposits.



Outside my control:

The past
The future
Other people's beliefs
Other people's opinions
Other people's reactions
Other people's behavior

PRACTICE THE PAUSE

In terms of deposits, practicing the pause is worth its weight in gold. It's like hitting an imaginary pause button that can help your mind and body cool down when you are experiencing big emotions. Taking a moment to pause can make the difference between a hotheaded reaction and a calm response. Next time you feel a big emotion coming on, take three deep breaths and practice the pause.



BE YOUR OWN BESTIE

Imagine that your best friend is late to pick up their child from school. What would you tell them? Now imagine you are late to pick up your child. What would you say to yourself?

Parents often find it easy to be hard on themselves. To make sure you aren't being too harsh, ask yourself these questions:

- Do I forgive myself when I make a mistake?
- Am I flexible when things don't go perfectly?
- Would I let someone talk this way to my best friend?

