

**DAY
1**

Care for self



DAY 1 *Care for self*

To care for our children, we need to be able to care effectively for ourselves. If we have poor sleep, exercise and diet habits, lack goals or focus in our parenting, or struggle to maintain positive, healthy relationships, then we will probably be personally struggling. When we are under pressure or are ill (or carrying too much baggage), we are not only bad to ourselves, but we tend to be bad towards others – including our children.

Caring for ourselves means:

1. Understanding and responding appropriately to how we are feeling
2. Managing life's demands
3. Knowing where we are going.

Parents who are 'on top of things' and have a clear sense of purpose in their parenting are going to act more effectively as parents to their children. Likewise, a parent who is motivated in her or his own life will be more capable of motivating a child. A parent who is resilient and healthy is more likely to raise a child who can respond well to setbacks and make wise choices. And a parent who has strong, positive connections and support will know how to bring similarly positive and nurturing relationship habits into the family.

Your activities for the next three days are simple to plan, but challenging to do (which is like most things family and parenting related).



ACTIVITY #1

Create a sleep plan

Work out how many hours of sleep you need each night and commit to getting it. Every night. No exceptions.

Yes, I know that seems laughable. But switch off the Internet (at the wall), put your phone on flight mode (or – *gasp* – power it down!), ignore the tv... and go to bed on time.

“I need _____ hours of sleep each night.

This means lights must be out by _____ pm.”



ACTIVITY #2

Create an exercise plan

Now that you’re going to bed on time, work out how you can walk, run, swim, ride, gym, or do something a few days a week. If you don’t do exercise, just do something small for 20 minutes. Take the kids with you if that helps! What matters is that you do something. A stroll through the park or beside the beach or river, a hike, a 20 minute bath... some kind of mini vacation. It might even be exercise for your brain (like Sudoku)... the idea is that you do something that stretches you a little and makes you feel reinvigorated.

“I’m going to _____.

I will do it _____ times per week.”



ACTIVITY #3

Schedule date night

This one is a big one. If you’re in a partnered or married relationship, couple time is a MUST. Carve out at least an hour for a date, ideally once a week.

If the kids are too young and you have no babysitters, have date night at home. Another alternative is to do a swap each week with a couple you trust. Get them to watch your kids this week (where one of them stays home with theirs while the other comes to you to watch yours), and then swap next week so that they can have a date night too. If you have no money, just be together somewhere without phones or interruptions.

Here are the rules:

1. No screens. (Yep, I’m serious.) That means you have to talk. It’s not a night at the movies. It’s not a night checking your facebook status or following up that email or taking that call. It’s a date night. Be totally present.
2. No kids.
3. Minimise (or avoid) the grog too... this is about rejuvenating your relationship, spending time together, and talking about the stuff that matters most to both of you.

Keep it simple. Keep it fun. And don’t write yourself off (in terms of too late-a-night, or alcohol) or you’ll be no good for the kids the next day.

*“This week, we’re going on a date to _____ ,
on _____ , at _____ .”*



ACTIVITY #4

Discuss your vision

Get clear on how you really want to be as a parent. You probably can't complete this entire activity until you've read the book and finished the program... but you can start to think about it. Consider the following questions to discuss (on your date night perhaps?):

1. When has my/our parenting been its best?
2. How can we get more of that?
3. When have we felt most together and happy as a family?
4. How can we get more of that?
5. If I could have one wish for my family starting tomorrow morning when I wake up, what would it be?

Here are some bonus questions you might like to consider:

- *Identify 3 effective methods for coping with stress*
- *Identify 3 effective ways I can reduce stress.*
- *Who can I turn to for support when things go pear-shaped?*
- *What are my parenting strengths? How can I use them more?*
- *When do I feel most confident as a parent?*
- *What is my ultimate goal as a parent? How can I keep that in mind when things are tough?*

Take home message

I know that's a *lot* to work through. Play with the ideas. Become more aware. Take care of yourself. Enjoy the activities... and remember the 'take-home message':

Me time matters... but not 'stupid waste of time' me time. Me time that is about focus, rejuvenation, and building positive relationships is what makes the biggest difference. Think about the oxygen mask analogy: When you board a plane you're told that 'in the case of emergency fit your own mask before helping others.' We need to get ourselves in good shape before we can help others be in good shape.

So get some me time that restores you and strengthens relationships. Care for yourself so you can care for others. Then focus on we time. It will make your family happier.
