

# Self-care top tips

for young parents & carers



Supported by



**Anna Freud**  
National Centre for  
Children and Families



**NOMINET**

# Self-care top tips for young parents & carers

What can I do with my child today?  
Is what I'm planning good enough?  
Should it be more fun? Or more educational? Am I letting them down?  
Do they have enough other children to play with? Are they watching too much TV? What if I don't end up leaving our home today at all? Am I a bad parent?

Young children's needs can demand a lot of attention, and at times your nerves can feel frayed, and your emotions fragile.

It's easy to forget that as a young parent or carer you need to look after yourself in order to look after your children.

This is true for all adults, but if you are one of the first of your group of friends to be juggling parenting responsibilities, it may be a little harder for you to think up ways to do this. But if you don't look after your own needs as well as your child's, you can start to feel stressed and overwhelmed, and this won't be good either for you or your child.

Here are some tips that may help you to feel happy and positive, and find time to look after yourself. You can also discover over 90 self-care strategies on our self-care resource for [On My Mind](#).



# Ways to keep your children happy when you're feeling exhausted or overwhelmed

At times when you're feeling tired or overwhelmed it probably won't help to plan a high energy trip or activity for your children. If you're feeling like this, you can plan some special stay at home 'me and you' time with your child or children.

If you happen to have some outside space, and it's good weather, it might be worth investing in some sand or water toys so you can unwind a little in the garden while you watch them play. And if not, maybe you could play a few easy indoor games that they like, or do a jigsaw or even some colouring in with them. (It sounds strange, but many adults find [colouring in](#) can calm their nerves). Or you could make a comfy den to chill out in and have a giggle with them.

Most of the time it's true that playing with children is important, as is exercise and being outdoors. But if you are feeling exhausted, overwhelmed or in the need to recharge, you could just sit on the sofa and allow yourself to watch some children's TV or a long family movie with them - [without feeling guilty about it](#).

Remember it's important for you to feel happy, well, and rested, if you want to be able to look after your children as best you can.

There are a number of [breathing exercises and relaxation techniques](#) that are designed especially for children. Some are pretty fun to do, and can spark up their imaginations or prompt them to visualise different things. You could do a quick internet search to find a few techniques that you think your children will enjoy doing. Then turn the lights down low, put on some relaxing music, and unwind with your children to a special relaxation session within the walls of your own home...



# Some ways to connect with friends if you're feeling isolated, lonely, in need of a chat or a good laugh

## Schedule some 'playdates' for yourself

Spending some time in adult company is important. You may feel the need to discuss adult problems such as relationship issues, or other personal worries. Or if you are feeling low or overwhelmed for any other reason, it often helps to be able to talk about your feelings with a [friend](#).

If you have young children to look after in the day, but have [friends, family or other parent friends](#) who want to hang out in the daytime with you and your children, then try to schedule in a few of these 'adult and child' playdates when you can. Or ask a neighbour to [join you on a walk](#). Or you could schedule in some [facetime](#) with a friend at an appropriate moment. Social media can make you feel like you're 'connecting' with people, but an actual conversation with a real person can allow you to truly connect in a more real and satisfying way.



## Reconnect with an old friend

Some young parents can end up losing touch with friends who don't have children, or who are at a different stage of life. If some of these friends would prefer to see you on your own, maybe you can arrange for this to happen occasionally – even if they just pop in while the kids are asleep. Or you could just pick up the phone and dial up their number for a chat. New 'parent friends' are great, but sometimes an old friend is the only person who can really make you laugh, or help you feel better about a niggling worry.

## Form a TV club

Let's face it, [book clubs](#) aren't for everyone, and how many people do you know who like exactly the same books as you? But if you're feeling a little isolated and need an excuse to get a bunch of friends together you could suggest a weekly evening [TV club](#) meet via a digital chat. It can be to discuss the latest episode of a must-see drama, box set or reality TV show. It doesn't really matter, because most times, these meet ups just end up as a big old chat and catchup, which makes everyone feel good.



# Ways to relax and lift your spirits

## Let music back into your life

Did you used to [listen to your own music](#) more regularly before you had children? If you need a break from 'The Wheels on the Bus' or the latest boy band, dig out some of your favourite tunes and put them on. They can be on in the background while getting up, or tidying the house, or feeding your child. This is one thing you can do for 'you', to lift your spirits and relax, even if you are looking after your children's needs at the same time. We produced a [report](#) that looked into the different 'self care strategies' of children and young people. Here our survey found that 97% said that listening to music helped them when they were feeling low or anxious.

## Write down a list of things that are bothering or worrying you

If you have a few niggling worries swirling around your head, sometimes it helps to [write them down](#) on a piece of paper. If you can think of any ways you could resolve some of these worries at the same time, then write the solutions down too.



## Spend time in nature

Get outside when you can to parks, gardens, woods. Even if it's raining, you could still dig out a raincoat and umbrella to get out and blow away the cobwebs. Some people also find being near water helps their frame of mind. You don't need to be near a sea or lake, you could just check out the nearest duck pond or park fountain. [Spending time surrounded by nature](#) can be good for you mental wellbeing and lift your spirits if you're feeling low.

## Get your body moving when you can

It's proved that [exercise](#) can make you feel good. So even if it's just a walk up your street with a pram, try and schedule in about 20 mins every day to get your body moving.

## Arrange treats for yourself

Make a [list of things you like doing](#) and schedule in a treat time for yourself if you can find an appropriate moment. A treat could be reading a good book or a celeb magazine, watching a box set at night, having a [low lit bath](#) with relaxing music, or have a warming or tasty hot drink.

You could also make a commitment to yourself to try 'savouring something' every day. Whether you want to savour your first cup of coffee, or a cuddle with your child, let yourself really enjoy it and appreciate the moment.



## Make a 'to do list'

At times you might find that your 'list of things to do' can build up. This could be general errands, shopping for vital items, or general admin. If these tasks are weighing on your mind [compile a to-do list](#) that you can tick off as you go along. Just seeing everything written down will probably make you feel more peaceful and in control.

## Try not to let your children's bed times slide too much

It can be easy to let bed times drift - especially during holiday periods, when there's no longer a set routine for school or nursery. But if you find yourself doing this, be careful. Bodyclocks can change quite quickly. If children often sleep late and wake early, the resulting lack of sleep could start to affect their moods. Also, if you start to find yourself attending to their needs until late at night, it might start to affect your mood too!





# Watch out for getting drawn into a tech and social media bubble that can make you feel down!

## The 'perfect activity' posts

Some weekends you may find social media platforms swamped with images of families sweeping their children away on fabulous day trips or glorious activities that sometimes take place miles away from their hometowns. Don't let these images of 'the ideal day out' make you feel bad about how you are managing your weekends. This isn't how these families spend every weekend, and children don't need big or expensive plans in far flung places to be able to enjoy themselves. The most important thing for children is time with trusted friends and family. And remember, the photos don't show the wasps at the picnic, the queues to get into the venue, or the endless lines of traffic on the way home!

It's good to remember that how people portray themselves on social media, doesn't always reflect how they're really feeling, or the amount of fun they're actually having. Some posters may also be struggling with a range of things themselves, which aren't being shown through their social media filters.





### **The child-free social posts**

Some young parents and carers say they find it hard to see social media images of people they used to hang out with, carrying on enjoying carefree social activities without the responsibilities of children. During certain times of the year there may be more of these kinds of images circulating. Maybe it's the height of the Summer, or the winter party season. But remember, FOMO (fear of missing out) brought about by social media can affect everyone at any age - whether you're 13 or 45. If you are having these feelings, it's healthy to acknowledge that you are having them, and to recognise that they are completely normal. It might help to talk about these feelings if you can.

Again, do remember that social media only shows the highlights - and that all stages of life throw up different challenges as well as good times. People in every stage of life can get feelings that perhaps 'the grass is greener' for other people.

If affected by a bout of FOMO, you could make a point of trying to savour any glorious moments that your own day might bring. This might be a snuggle of a sleepy child when they're waking up, or a random comment or action made by a child that left you giggling for hours.

## Taking a holiday from tech

Sometimes a 24/7 engagement with instant messaging and social media can feel a bit relentless and stressful. Some younger people say they stay on devices out of habit, but don't actually find it that enjoyable. If you find yourself struggling to keep your eyes open late at night because you're busy ploughing through content on your phone, or if you ever suspect that your engagement with social media might be contributing to feelings of depression or anxiety, then maybe just [stop for a second](#) and think about why you're doing it.

If you feel it adds to your life, then great, but if not, you could decide to regularly take a bit of time to detox from tech, or decide to stay off your phone completely some evenings. You could let people know that you are doing this and they should expect longer reply times from you, and not to be offended if you don't reply until the next day. Or you

could just unplug your device for an hour each night, and make a rule to sleep with your phone outside your bedroom.

If social media drains your energy and makes you feel low at times, you could also make a decision to take a break from looking at posts and posting things yourself for a few weeks. Some people like to post pictures featuring their children's activities and achievements on a daily basis - but just because they do, doesn't mean you need to. Life's not a competition, and chasing 'likes' can be exhausting. Sometimes it's nicer to be [completely present and in the moment](#), sharing any special time together just with your children. And sometimes, if you do happen to experience an extra special moment, it can actually feel more special because only you, your children, or close family or friends know about it.



# Where can I find support?

If you or someone you know needs help right now, you should, if possible, try to talk to a trusted friend or family member or with your GP.

If talking to someone is not possible, you can find a list of organisations which offer 24 hour support by text, email and phone on our [Urgent Help page](#) or below.

## Do you need help right now?

The AFC Crisis Messenger text service provides free, 24/7 crisis support for young people across the UK.

If you are experiencing a mental health crisis and need support, you can text **AFC** to **85258**.

The AFC Crisis Messenger is part of [On My Mind](#), our free online support for young people which includes our [self-care resource](#).

### childline

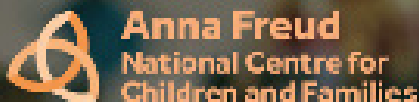
Call: 0800 1111

### SAMARITANS

Call: 116 123  
email | visit | write

### Emergency Services

Call: 999



# In crisis? Need support?



**Text AFC to 85258**

## Text the free, anonymous crisis textline

All texts are answered by trained volunteers,  
with support from experienced clinical specialists