



Parents Guide to Children's Self-Care

Kids need self-care too!

I'm sure by now you are all familiar with the topic of self-care. We are encouraged by society to start practicing these concepts, but oftentimes we don't get introduced to them until much later in life. Your kids need self-care too! Here are a few things you can do to help your kid indulge themselves:

Taking a Bubble Bath

Don't underestimate the power of bath time! While many younger kids might balk at the concept of bathing, running a bubble bath in a tub full of their favorite toys is a great way to help kids unwind. I know this is one of my son's favorites after a long day, along with some chocolate milk and marshmallows, of course. Many parents don't like the idea of spoiling their kids, but even we as adults like to be spoiled from time to time, don't we? As long as it's not in excess, it's OK to pamper your kids the way you would want to be pampered. It's also a fun way to promote proper hygiene!

Go to the Park

This one seems pretty straightforward, but it's so easy to miss. In the chaos of the day between running the kids to and from school and various activities, making sure their homework is done, making sure dinner is ready, and the other million tasks we have to do as parents, it is sometimes exhausting to think about leaving the house yet again. Think about it as an extrovert, who fills up on being with other people. If your kids are trying to fill up on your presence alone, or even their siblings, it's going to be draining on all of you. Plus playing on playground equipment encourages physical wellness and helps boost confidence. I know you're tired, mom and dad! But 30 minutes could help you get an evening of peace. And, let's be honest, the outdoors could do us some good as well.

Meditation

I can hear you laughing and saying, "My kid won't even sit down long enough to eat. Meditation, ha!" Well, that's true. My son is very active, but he does love meditation time. The best way to start is with a program like Headspace or Calm or even search YouTube for Guided Meditations for Kids. There are a lot of good free resources out there. Meditation will help your kid learn to sit in silence and be OK with inactivity. It is also good for the imagination!



Gratitude Jar

Here is a good way to counterbalance all the spoiling and pampering. If your kid is anything like mine, they often forget to say, “thank you” and we then end up sending thank you cards for their various presents. They also often get upset about things they don’t have or can’t do. In those moments, we have the opportunity to teach them different perspectives. Sit down with your child with some strips of paper and have them write down what they are thankful for. Then, have them put the strip of paper in a jar. When they are upset, have them refer to what they were previously grateful for; this can encourage flexible thinking. “I am disappointed I don’t have that, but I am fortunate to also have this.” In the process of teaching them manners and etiquette, you also create an environment of appreciation for what they have. Plus, it’s a great bonding experience for both of you.

Creative Time

There is a reason why art and music therapy exist. There are also reasons people going through difficult times in their lives turn to things like improv. Being creative is therapeutic and it gives younger children a way to express emotions that they may be unable to articulate to you. Through creative endeavors you can get insight into the mind of your child and better understand their interests, fears, and emotions. If they are angry, encourage them to draw their feelings or write a poem/song/story about the situation.

Cuddling

One of the most basic understandings of human nature is that we need the touch of another. Studies have shown humans need 4 hugs a day just for survival! It gives us comfort and makes us feel safe and secure; one of the biggest needs of children is to feel safe and secure. They won’t always want to cuddle, mom and dad, so make the most out of it while they still do. It not only helps improve your mood, but theirs as well.

Feel your Feelings

This doesn’t have to do with feeling them emotionally. That’s going to happen naturally, but emotional responses also illicit physical responses in the body. When your kids are happy, sad, angry, disappointed, or any other feeling on the spectrum, you can help them identify where it is in their body. If they are mad, is it in their chest? If they are disappointed, is that feeling in their stomach (akin to a punch in the gut)? This will help them recognize when those feelings are starting to come up before they become too much. It also gives you an inside language to help your children express their feelings verbally. This is particularly helpful for pre-K ages!

Destruction Junction

Hear me out! Anger is one of the most prevalent and easily recognizable emotions we have. It is also what we call a “secondary emotion”. It involves hurt feelings or disappointments and is often the child’s first reaction to anything unpleasant. Some children are hitters and throwers. We do want to *discourage* that behavior, but if we’re being honest with ourselves, smashing a dish from time to time feels pretty good. Create an environment that will allow your child to express those outbursts in a safe way, like making a list of the things that made them angry and then tearing it into pieces.

Those are just some ideas for you to explore with your children. Below we have some instructions, activities, and suggestions for these forms of self-care!



Glowstick Bubble Bath

Items needed:

Bathtub

Bubble Bath

10 Glowsticks

This fun little bath is mixed with an idea found on the world wide web. Most kids take their bath close to bedtime; the warm waters help us relax. Well, we also know that light helps keep the brain thinking we should be awake. This can make it difficult for some kids to relax at bath time. Safety dictates there should be some light, right? Enter the glowstick! This is a fun little alternative to bath time, with the added benefit of softer lighting. It will help your kid relax and make the bedtime transition easier for mom and dad!

Guided Meditation

Items needed:

A comfy place to sit or lie down

It can be a challenge to try to hunt down meditations and find what works for your kid. Here is one called “Your Secret Treehouse” from YouTube by New Horizon. They aren’t a sponsor or anything, but they do have some of the best meditations out there.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DWOHcGF1Tmc>

Storyboarding

Items needed:

Piece of blank paper or construction paper

Markers, Crayons, Colored Pencils, or Pencil

In production, we do something called storyboarding. We take a script and we basically create a comic book of how the scene will unfold. When kids are having big emotions, it isn't always easy for them to express those verbally. Here's a way to help them express those and turn it into words.

Fold the piece of paper into quadrants. Label them: Upper left "My emotion"; Upper right "How it makes me feel"; Lower left "Emotion I want to feel"; Lower right "How I think it will make me feel".

Start in the upper left and have your kid identify the emotion they're feeling in that moment and draw what they think it looks like. Ask them to tell you a story about that first scene. Move to the second quadrant and ask them to draw how the emotion is making them feel on the inside. Have them describe it to you as they draw. Make sure you empathize with these emotions (i.e. "Oh, those are big circles, you must be really [feeling]!") Move to the lower left third quadrant and then ask them how they would rather feel instead. Have them describe what that would feel like to them and draw that in the fourth quadrant. By then, your child should have moved through that big emotion.

Shredding Emotions

Items needed:

Storyboard from previous exercise or blank piece of paper

Drawing instrument (optional based on previous activity)

Garbage sack

If we're honest, we all enjoy watching things blow up or get destroyed now and then. When we are feeling angry, sometimes we as adults like to take it out on inanimate objects. Who here hasn't thrown their phone or knocked their hand on

a counter/table? Being a parent, you know sometimes that object can be animate, and generally ends up being you or a sibling. While it's important to encourage against violent outbursts, suppressing the urge will only keep them from understanding how to process it healthily. Take that storyboard you helped them create and have them rip it until they are tired of ripping the pieces (have a garbage sack nearby because this does get messy). If you didn't create a storyboard yet, that's OK! Have them draw (or write, depending on their age) their feelings on a piece of paper and rip that up. This activity serves two purposes: it gives them a creative outlet for the destructive anger and helps them walk through the emotion and get to the other side (an invaluable healthy coping skill).

Godzilla Express

Items needed:

Building Blocks or Legos

This one is pretty self-explanatory. If your child is a builder like mine, they also enjoy knocking their creations down after the building is done. When your little one starts to get upset, they may express their anger in a physical way much of the time. Use star breathing*, belly breathing, or other forms of deep breath work to help them calm down. This will help them get from their "basement brain", as Dan Siegel calls it, and back to a place of higher cognitive function. When they get here, help them build a city or a tower (or whatever) out of their Legos or blocks and stomp through it like Godzilla. These toys are meant to fall apart and break, so you run little risk of permanently damaging things and it gives your child a physical way to work out their anger through pretend play and imagination.

*Star breathing consists of taking deep breaths while tracing with your index finger of your right hand all around the fingers of your left.