From the Director's Desk by Suzanne Bowers - "Who is a Caregiver?"

A caregiver is defined as anyone who provides help to another person in need, such as an ill spouse or partner, a disabled child, or an aging relative. Caregiving can have many rewards, including being there when a loved one needs you, but it can also be stressful. It is natural to feel angry, frustrated, exhausted, alone or sad. The emotional and physical demands involved with caregiving can strain even the most resilient person. That's why it's so important to take advantage of the many resources and tools available to help you provide care for your loved one.

Remember, if you don't take care of yourself, you won't be able to care for anyone else.

The Mayo Clinic has some suggestions for reducing caregiver stress, including but not limited to:

- **Accept help.** Be prepared with a list of ways that others can help you, and let the helper choose what he or she would like to do.

- **Focus on what you are able to provide.** It's normal to feel guilty sometimes, but understand that no one is a "perfect" caregiver. Believe that you are doing the best you can and making the best decisions you can at any given time.

- **Set realistic goals.** Break large tasks into smaller steps that you can do one at a time. Prioritize, make lists and establish a daily routine. Begin to say no to requests that are draining, such as hosting holiday meals.

- **Get connected.** Find out about caregiving resources in your community. Many communities have classes specifically about the disease your loved one is facing. Caregiving services such as transportation and meal delivery may be available.

- **Set personal health goals.** For example, set a goal to establish a good sleep routine or to find time to be physically active on most days of the week. It's also crucial to fuel your body with healthy foods and plenty of water.

- **See your doctor.** Get recommended immunizations and screenings. Make sure to tell your doctor that you’re a caregiver. Don’t hesitate to mention any concerns or symptoms you have.

As the population ages, more caregiving is being provided by people who aren’t health care professionals. These informal caregivers provide 80% of long-term care in the United States so we need to do what we can to take care of ourselves and our caregivers!
Haciendo tiempo para usted y tus emociones

¿Siente que ya no tiene o se le está acabando la energía? No está solo, todos los padres se sienten así algunas veces. Sin embargo, ser padre de un niño con dificultades de aprendizaje y atención es aún más agotador. Es muy posible que padres de familia se sientan sensibles y pasen por un ciclo emocional y tener sentimientos de – negación, enojo, negociaación, depresión, aceptación. Todos estos sentimientos pueden ser agotadores para los padres y sus familias en general.

Ser padres de un niño con necesidades especiales puede llegar a ser un trabajo agotador, añadiendo dificultades cotidianas que pueden duplicar o triplicar en nivel de estrés – ya sea que se preocupen por la integración social de su hijo, su próxima reunión con el equipo de IEP o cualquier otro asunto. Por eso es importante que los padres cuenten con estrategias que les ayuden aprender como relajarse y bajar su nivel de estrés y ansiedad. Practicando “conciencia plena” es la llave perfecta para reducir el estrés y tener una vida más plena.

Existen tres técnicas simples que serán de mucha ayuda para aquellos padres ocupados que necesitan ayuda controlando su nivel de estrés, practicando las siguientes estrategias: disfrutando de su respiración, sintonizándose con su cuerpo y practicando una relajación consciente.

La primera técnica es enfocarse en su respiración. Esto lo puede hacer con los ojos abiertos o cerrados, con la boca abierta y respirando a través de la nariz enfocándose en sentir su respiración, como el aire entra y sale de su cuerpo. Pueda que sea un poco difícil al principio pero mientras lo practique, más fácil será relajar su cuerpo, mente y deseara sentir esta paz a cada instante.

La segunda técnica se trata de la importancia de estar en sintonía con su cuerpo y percibir todas las sensaciones físicas que usted experimenta en el momento por causa del estrés. Se le recomienda mantener una vida activa y saludable, caminar cada día, hacer ejercicio, hacer deportes, etc. Cualquier tipo de actividad que mantenga su cuerpo en forma, le ayudara a reducir el estrés, a tener una actitud positiva, más energía y a deshacerse de toxinas que causan dolor en su cuerpo. Lo que quiere es poder darse cuenta de la sensaciones su cuerpo está sufriendo a causa de estrés, falta de sueño, depresión y otros más.

La tercera y última técnica es cuando se sienta estresado, ansioso y tenso. Usted necesita poner en práctica la técnica llamada “relajación consciente”. Esta es un estrategia que padres pueden practicar en cualquier momento y lugar, solo requiere de unos minutos de tu tiempo. Empiece recostándose en el piso sobre una superficie blanda y cómoda, con sus palmas de las manos hacia arriba a unos pocos centímetros o pulgadas de los costados de su cuerpo. Comience con sus pies y luego intencionalmente déje que se relaje. Permita que los músculos se relajen y se pongan más blandos. Vaya hacia arriba de su cuerpo hasta llegar a su cabeza.

Evidentemente, estas técnicas no eliminarán el estrés completamente pero le serán de gran ayuda para reducir el nivel de estrés en su cuerpo y sentirse con más energía. Tome unos cuantos minutos de su día para cuidarse y enfocarse en sí mismo. Para todos aquellos padres que están cuidando de sus hijos incondicionalmente, les queremos decir “Muchas Gracias!”

Making Time for Yourself and Coping With Your Emotions

Do you feel like you’re running on empty? You’re not alone, all parents feel like this at some point in time and it is completely normal. Parenting can be a very stressful job, especially when parenting a child with special needs. Parents might feel very emotional and may experience the emotional grief cycle – such as denial, anger, bargaining, and depression and finally acceptance. Overall it can be very draining on themselves and their families.

There are many issues parents with special needs children deal with on daily basis to include issues that might double the amount of stress compared to other parents —whether you worry about your child fitting in, your next IEP meeting or your child’s health, it is very important for parents to learn about strategies to help themselves. Learning to relax and start putting more time and effort into talking better care of their mind, body and spirit. Practicing “Mindfulness” is the key for reducing stress and helping to live a better life.

Here are three techniques to help busy parents to manage their stress by doing the following: learning about the importance of breathing, proper daily exercise and conscious relaxation.

The first technique: is to focus and simplify your breathing. You can do this either with your eyes open or closed, with your mouth closed and breathing through your nose. This form of mindfulness takes only a few moments and it helps you to start focusing your attention on your breathing. At the beginning, it might be a bit difficult but the more you practice it, the more relax your body and mind will feel and your body will start craving it on daily basis.

The second technique: is about the importance of being in tune with your body. It allows you to become more aware of the physical sensations and pain you experience due to stress. The following activities are highly recommended to keep your body healthy: walking daily, working out at the gym, dancing, playing sports, etc. Any kind of activity that will keep your body moving will help you increase your energy, clear your mind and get rid of those toxins that are causing pain in your body. Keeping your body active will give you a better perspective in life, the goal is to be aware of the sensations your body is suffering due to stress, lack of sleep, and depression among other things.

Third and last technique is for when you feel very tense, stressed out or wound up, you would want to try and practice a technique called “consciencious relaxation”. This is something parents can do at any time and requires just a few minutes of your time. Start with just lying down on the floor or a comfortable surface; put your hands with your palms facing up just a few inches away from your body. Start at the bottom of your feet and focus on letting the muscles relax and to release until you will feel them become soft. Practice the same technique throughout your entire body, all the way to the head until you feel the same sensation.

Granted these techniques will not eliminate stress entirely, but they can help reduce stress levels and give you more energy. Taking a few minutes from your day to let yourself relax will help you take care of yourself while you constantly take care of the ones you love. A special note for all the care givers out there, giving so much back to the one’s we love and care about, we want to say “Thank you!”
Mental Health Corner by Caroline Gendelman - "The Month of Taking Care of the Caregiver"

Take a deep breath now, because you don’t know when you’ll have another opportunity.

What is on your list for the next few days? A sample list for a children’s caregiver during the summer days might well include grocery store stops, as well as suddenly-urgent trips to buy a new swimsuit and beach towel. The swimsuit was left on the laundry room floor, damp, and it has the fashionable splashes of purple mildew. The beach towel went in the bottom of the dog cage and the kids painted the shower wall and the cat with your sunscreen. Add that to the list. You should make an appointment to get the refrigerator repairman to visit. There is a constant puddle on your kitchen floor and you now put a diaper on both your son and the refrigerator. Trying to prioritize the car maintenance, doctor appointments, paying bills in a (somewhat) timely manner and getting the right child to the right place, right time AND retrieving him is a small slice of life with children.

Is this picture glorious? Yes, yes it is. How many of your activities did I neglect to mention? Without a doubt, many! The question older than parenthood itself is, “How do we do it all to our best and not lose ourselves in the process?” Caring for others is one of the job descriptions of being a mammal. In the throes of a never ending list of needs and chores it may not feel very noble. No wonder caregivers of all breeds feel “burned out” at points.

Make yourself a reasonable list of what you truly need to accomplish in the upcoming day. Color code your chores in urgency to provide a literal picture of obligations and priorities. Summer comes with its own requirements and opportunities. Browse through the following site for some further thoughts: http://www.friendshipcircle.org/blog/2013/05/20/19-summer-tips-from-special-needs-parents/.

It is easy to say but a caregiver must also include some time to refresh herself. Some of the activities you do with your child(ren) can recharge you. If the family goes for a walk in the evening, take the time to breathe and concentrate on the summer air. Waiting while your child has an appointment might give you ten minutes to read; not a book on parenting or a condition your child has but a novel or one on a hobby you like. Trading 30 minutes with another parent can provide each of you time to decompress from the tyranny of your schedule, and you can each emerge refreshed and ready to resume your role as Caregiver Extraordinaire.

Remember, you only have 100% of effort to put forth on any given day. It takes some planning to divvy up how and where that 100 points get divided. Although it may occasionally seem mundane, simple planning will help you stay better mentally focused and are more likely to find breathing room, albeit sometimes just a few deep breaths! You can do anything but you can’t do everything.
In July, take care of the Caregiver

Early Childhood Corner by Lakeshia Yancey - "Caring For Yourself So You Can Better Care For Your Little One"

Once your new little bundle of joy arrives your world is turned upside down. We lose sleep, alter our routines, and lose contact with our friends. When we are worried, anxious, or hurried our body begins to feel tense. Actually, this is a natural reaction and can cause you to not perform at your best. Being a parent is challenging on its own, if you are parent of a child with special needs you may have a few more challenges.

Giving your all to your little one can sometimes mean not having much left for yourself. It is easier said than done to rest when the baby is resting, but what happens if we do not take heed to the advice? What happens when the caregiver does not care for themselves? You cannot stop the impact being a good parent has, but there is a great deal that you can do to take responsibility for your personal wellbeing and to get your own needs met.

Some ways you can help yourself:

1. Accept help from friends and family.
2. Be honest about what you need.
3. Consider child care even if it is part time
4. Exercise
5. Take up a hobby
6. Find a play group so that your little one can have social time and that you can talk to other parents who may relate

Family Engagement Corner by Tina Norris - "Care of the Caregiver"

We all are familiar with the story of the oxygen mask on an aircraft. We are instructed to put our own mask on before attempting to assist or save another. It takes an exceptional person to put the needs of others before their own. As caregivers we have an enormous responsibility to nurture, support and guide our children. Many of us become in grossed in the process that we tend to forget about ourselves and our needs.

Caregiving can be an emotional roller coaster that can leave you depleted and overwhelmed. Periodically we have ask yourselves the hard question, what good will I be to the person I care for if I become ill because I did not make my own health or sense of wellbeing a priority? Living a balanced life will allow you to be an even better caregiver. Take responsibility for your own care. Give yourself permission to consider your needs as you care for others.

Be strategic in creating “me time” in the course of your day. Engage in activities that will make you feel more healthy and balanced. Incorporate something in the course of your day that makes you smile. End your day with relaxation. Our emotions are messages to which we need to listen to. Making minor adjustments now can make a world of difference in the days, weeks and years to come. Remember, it is not selfish to focus on your own needs and desires when you are a caregiver – it really is an important part of your job.

It’s up to you – make yourself a priority!
In July, take care of the Caregiver

PEATC Workshops and Events - July 2015

**Tuesday, July 7, 2015** - Exceptional Family Member's Program (EFMP) and School Liaison Officer's (SLO) Training, PEATC and VDOE are co-sponsoring this training for EFMP and SLO personnel at the Hilton Garden Inn Chesapeake/Suffolk, 5921 Harbour View Blvd., Suffolk, VA 23435. REGISTRATION REQUIRED: http://www.peatc.org/newsmanager/news_article.cgi?news_id=685.

**Wednesday, July 8, 2015** - Parents As Collaborative Leaders (PACL) training, PEATC and VDOE are co-sponsoring this training for Military members, dependents and professionals who serve them at the Hilton Garden Inn Chesapeake/Suffolk, 5921 Harbour View Blvd., Suffolk, VA 23435. REGISTRATION REQUIRED: http://www.peatc.org/newsmanager/news_article.cgi?news_id=685.


**Thursday, July 16, 2015** - PEATC will be an exhibitor at the annual 2015 Virginia PTA (VAPTA) Conference held at the Richmond Marriott Downtown, 500 East Broad Street, Richmond, VA 23219. Event information available at: http://www.vapta.org/events/annual-conference.html.

**REGISTRATION FULL!!**

**Wednesday, July 22, 2015** - Parents As Collaborative Leaders (PACL) training, PEATC and VDOE are co-sponsoring this training for Professional’s or parent’s that serve or have in interest in serving minorities. Attendees can be church leaders, community project leaders, or even small non-profit leaders throughout Virginia, at the Great Wolf Lodge, 549 E Rochambeau Dr., Williamsburg, VA 23188-2148. Event information available at: http://www.peatc.org/newsmanager/news_article.cgi?news_id=685.

PEATC On Demand and In the Spotlight by Kristin Kane - "Taking Care of You"

Remember, it is not selfish to focus on your own needs and desires when you are a caregiver—it’s an important part of the job. According to the US Department of Health and Human services:

“Take care of your own health. Managing your own health is important to make sure you are healthy enough to help others. Eat properly, get regular exercise, and set aside some time each week to do something you enjoy. Continue to get regular check-ups and see your doctor if you experience any health problems.” https://www.medicare.gov/files/ask-medicare-tips-for-caregivers-care-for-yourself.pdf

The month of July has been deemed “Taking Care of the Caregiver” Month for 2015. Watch for communication through our listserv, blog and other social media outlets on more tips and resources on taking care of you, as the parent, guardian and or caregiver. Our most recent post over on our brand new PEATC Blog features a few great resources and can be found here: https://peatc.wordpress.com/2015/06/29/taking-care-of-you/