



# Importance of Self-Care: Why Parents Need Time Out to Recharge

By: Whitney Casares, MD, MPH, FAAP

I remember a mommy friend telling me she had booked a day with a massage and a pedicure for herself a month after her second daughter arrived, and I felt slightly annoyed. She said she needed it. Really? What a seemingly selfish thing to do. But, in reality, she was doing herself and her family a huge favor.



Taking small chunks of time for yourself as early on as possible is one of the best ways to keep yourself from feeling trapped as a new parent. Keeping yourself happy and healthy will allow you to give the best care possible to your new baby. You forget that you need a mental break sometimes to recharge your battery.

## Make a self-care plan

The reality is, the only way to take the best care of your family is to make sure you're taking time to take care of yourself. Can you push through and be a mommy martyr for the next 18 years? Sure. Will it leave you resentful and angry? Most definitely.

Even though self-help is necessary, it's helpful to remember one simple principle: *you cannot have it all as a new mom*. I know the media tells you otherwise. I know it seems like you should be having it all. But look at your life. Do you have it all now? Even when you've tried your best at it? Even without kids? I didn't.

I could never look exactly the way I wanted and be the best at my job and always have a hopping social calendar and travel the world and have tons of money in the bank and be peaceful and happy all the time at the same time. Anyone who tries to sell you otherwise is selling you lies.

You do, though, have time for the top 3 priorities in your life that are unique to you and your growing family. And if you choose things that really do fit your needs (as opposed to what other people want you to do), you will have more space for the extras.

## Ideals & reality

My friend Christie is a business executive coach. She spends all day guiding leaders personally and professionally as they make million-dollar decisions. One night, discussing life at a bar, she took a cocktail napkin and wrote out the major categories of life—kids, spouse, work, exercise, friendships, hobbies, homemaking, travel and experiences, and appearance. For clarification, exercise to me meant releasing endorphins, stress reduction, and meditation, whereas appearance included everything that goes into looking put together (including exercise for the purpose of having a good appearance).

She wrote them in random order and then asked me to rank them in order in the left-hand column according to what I, in an ideal world, would spend the most time doing. "Rank them as a private, honest list, not based at all on what other people would think is the right way to rank them," she said.

it my *ideal list*.

LIST

1. Exercise and stress reduction
2. Kids
3. Travel and experiences
4. Hobbies and sports (including writing and reading)
5. Partner
6. Friendships
7. Homemaking (tasks such as laundry and dishes)
8. Appearance
9. Work

In the next column, she asked me to rank what I thought I spent my time on.

Here is my *reality list*.

### REALITY LIST

1. Work
2. Homemaking
3. Kids
4. Hobbies and sports
5. Partner
6. Appearance
7. Friendships
8. Exercise and stress reduction
9. Travel and experiences

Then, she told me to compare them.

Ideal	Reality
1. Exercise and stress reduction	1. Work
2. Kids	2. Homemaking
3. Travel and experiences	3. Kids
4. Hobbies	4. Hobbies
5. Partner	5. Partner
6. Friendships	6. Appearance
7. Homemaking	7. Friendships
8. Appearance	8. Exercise and stress reduction
9. Work	9. Travel and experiences

Look at the striking comparison between what my ideal life looked like and what my actual life looked like. This exercise is what convinced me to make a change in my life. Also, notice that while my kids ranked high on the list, they were not first. That's OK. In fact, it's probably healthier. Because, in the end, my kids are going to grow up and do their own thing (yours will too). My husband was also not first. That's OK too. It's important we have separate interests and desires, which we can build only if we spend some time doing things separately.

[Back to Top](#)

You might be thinking, "I'm going to have to work!" That is true for me too. That's how I pay for all the music classes, the nanny, and the nutritious quality food I want to provide for my kids in the first place. It's how my daughter goes to that fun preschool the nanny drops her off at. It's how we make sure we get to live in the house we do and get our kids into the great school district that they will eventually go to. There is not going to be some overhaul of my life that allows me to live work-free and spend all day sipping lattes while I supervise my children.

Also, you might have a different top 3 than I do, and that is totally fine. My husband is a huge extrovert. I had him make this list, and his was in a completely different order. No problem. That's the beauty of it.

I'm not saying don't go to work or don't figure out a way to get your house clean once your newborn arrives, but, as my friend says, "Work is like a parasite. It will leach out of you as much as you will give to it." Same with housecleaning and coordinating 80 million schedules. Of course, we have to do some of that to keep things running smoothly, but we can't let them suck the life out of us. The rest of the things on the list you'll have to consider like gravy or a cherry on top if you can get to them, at least in the early weeks and months of motherhood.

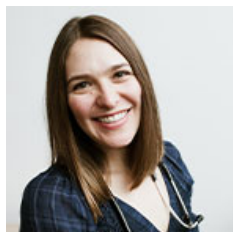
It's OK if your makeup isn't perfect, your socks aren't organized, and you can't remember the last time you cooked something more complicated than a quesadilla.

Sounds good to get your priorities in line from the get-go, right? But it takes a little preplanning to make it happen. I learned early on that to do all I do, I have to automate and delegate.

## More Information

- [How to Cope with the Challenges of Being a New Mom \(/English/ages-stages/baby/Pages/Challenges-of-Being-a-New-Mom.aspx\)](#)
- [Depression and Anxiety During Pregnancy and After Birth: FAQs \(/English/ages-stages/prenatal/Pages/Depression-and-Anxiety-During-Pregnancy-and-After-Birth-FAQs.aspx\)](#)
- [Tips for Caring for a Newborn during COVID-19 \(/English/health-issues/conditions/COVID-19/Pages/Tips-for-Coping-with-a-New-Baby-During-COVID-19.aspx\)](#)
- [Parenting in a Pandemic: Tips to Help Keep the Calm at Home \(/English/health-issues/conditions/COVID-19/Pages/Parenting-in-a-Pandemic.aspx\)](#)

## About Dr. Casares



Whitney Casares, MD, MPH, FAAP, is a board-certified, practicing pediatrician and author of *The New Baby Blueprint: Caring for You and Your Little One* (<https://shop.aap.org/the-new-baby-blueprint-paperback/>). She is also creator of the popular website [modernmommydoc.com](https://modernmommydoc.com). The mother of two young daughters, Dr. Casares lives in Portland, OR.

**Last Updated** 7/29/2020

**Source** The New Baby Blueprint: Caring for You and Your Little One (Copyright © 2020 American Academy of Pediatrics)

The information contained on this Web site should not be used as a substitute for the medical care and advice of your pediatrician. There may be variations in treatment that your pediatrician may recommend based on individual facts and circumstances.