

Self-Care Tips for Special Olympics Families

As you care for your loved ones, remember to care for yourself. Everyone reacts differently to stressful situations, and you are no different.

1. Be Mindful

Check in with yourself consistently. Ask yourself, how you are feeling? Have you been drinking water? Your body will tell you what it needs when you ask. A great tool for this is the “Five Things Game”. Sit comfortably wherever you are and think of five things you can feel, hear, see, smell, and taste. This can be done anywhere and at any time and it is helpful to set reminders in your phone to do this every few hours.

2. Be Creative

Find an expressive art and go for it. Our emotional brain responds well to creative arts, and it is a great way to release negative feelings and gain energy. Find something that is creative that you enjoy or always wanted to learn and give it your all, (have a dance party, listen to music, blast the music and sing/play along). See how relieved you can feel.

3. Entertain Yourself

Find lightness and humor in each day. There is a lot to be worried about, and with good reason. Counterbalance this heaviness with something funny each day: videos on YouTube, a stand-up show on Netflix, a funny movie—we all need a little comedic relief in our day, every day. Give yourself permission to enjoy them.

4. Meditation / Relaxation

- a) Muscle relaxation. Squeeze your hands into fists as hard as you can and release. Tense up your entire body and release. This helps you move the fight or flight energy coursing through you during a time of stress.
- b) Deep breathing. Inhale filling up your lungs as much as you can then exhale releasing all you let in and repeat up to ten times. You may also breathe normally and count how many seconds it takes to completely exhale. Continue breathing and count the seconds on your exhale. Repeat until your exhale is as long as it can possibly be.

5. Be Active

Move your body throughout the day. Commit to your preferred forms of exercise such as taking a walk, a 30 minute online workout, yoga, etc. and try do this most days of the week.

6. Boundaries

- a) Physical: Find one spot that is all your own. This may be difficult but even if it's outdoors or in a small space, find a space that is yours. Allow yourself to go there at least once a day, and as needed, to catch your breath. It's ok if you cry in there.

- b) Social: Edit your social media. Mute or unfollow those accounts that trigger anxiety and/or the comparison bug. Use social media as a positive way to connect with others but limit your time if it is causing discomfort.
- c) News: find your preferred trusted news outlet and check in occasionally but limit your time watching or listening to it.
- d) Respect others. Allow physical and emotional space for everyone in your home to maintain their responsibilities and mutually support each other while working from home, taking online classes, exercising and connecting with friends virtually.

7. Structure your day

Provide your family with a semi-structured schedule to serve as a starting point or home base to return to when needed but give yourselves a break from sticking to it perfectly. A schedule is to help formulate some structure but not intended to add pressure. Leave room for extra rest, extra play, and creativity.

8. Be kind to yourself and remain positive

Lower expectations and be kind to yourself. Try to find something to do for yourself each day (i.e. read a book you enjoy, journal, listen to a podcast, or meditate). You can also take time to think of some positive thoughts and write them down or say them to yourself throughout the day.

9. Challenge yourself

Break up your days into moments by focusing on whatever bite-sized piece of a challenge feels manageable. We have no road map for this. We don't know what this will look like in one day, one week, or one month from now. Find what feels doable for you, and set a time stamp for how far ahead in the future you will let yourself worry. Take each section of the day at a time, and move through stress in pieces.

10. Connection

Schedule phone calls, Zoom chats, Facetime calls and other ways to connect with your friends and family. Share your experiences with others and ask how you can support each other. Allow others to support you and your family while you offer your friendship, listening ear, and share tips on what's working for you.