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MAY, 2018

CARE FOR YOURSELF FIRST!

As an Occupational therapist working with special needs children, day in and day out, I want take a moment to acknowledge the fact that “Each special need child has special needs parents”.

You parents inevitably become special, considering the amount of things you have to deal with, without having a choice. You all have way too much on your plate and the roller coaster ride of emotions that you swing through is unimaginable. According to the National Mental Health Association and the Federation of Families for Children’s Mental Health (1993), parents who are caring for children with mental illness find it extremely difficult to get their own mental health needs met while trying to meet the mental health needs of their child. Also many researches in the past show that parents of children with special needs (various conditions like autism, ADHD, Cerebral Palsy) are seen to face a series of mental health related challenges like increased levels of parental stress, family discord, disrupted parent-child relationships, reduced parenting efficacy and clinical depression. Hence, your physical and mental health is equally crucial as that of your child. Therefore, going an extra mile to care for your own mental wellbeing and attempting to nip your troubles early in the bud will only do good and no harm.

From very early on you parents tend to battle through a spectrum of emotions such as: guilt, anger, resentment, isolation, anxiety and many more. Some of you might feel responsible for your child’s condition and blame yourselves for everything. Others may be forever anxious



about, What their child’s future beholds? What else can they do for their child? And Whether or not they are doing enough? Your question and emotions are all valid and can be dealt with. It is a good ideas to ask these questions to the professionals (developmental pediatricians, neurologists, therapists, psychologist, counselors, etc.) you seek. This will help you learn about your child’s condition, clear all your areas of concerns and free up even the tiniest of guilt, so that you can channelize all your energy towards working for the betterment of your child.

It isn’t a shocker for you’ll to experience a heap load of stress or feel tired all the time. It is commendable how you can be up and about 24/7, put your child’s needs above your own. Repeat and re-repeat yourself to teach your child simple things or calm your child whilst being equally stressed. It’s not an easy job and can surely be very taxing, frustrating and nerve wrecking. Dear parents don’t be so

hard on yourself. You'll do this and so much more like it's all a cakewalk! Though it does come along with a downside i.e. at times you might get upset with others around you, or feel lonely and weighed down. It's okay to feel so! Trying some of these things might help you de-stress:

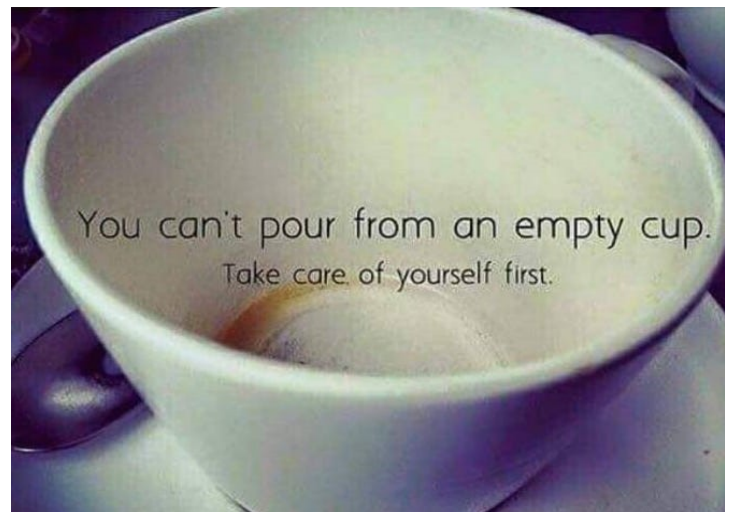
- Install a whiteboard in your kitchen or keep a notebook by your bedside. This will help you track and note down even a small happy moment with your child every day. You'll be surprised to see how a visual reminder of little success can make you extremely happy
- Sometimes it's okay to stop, take a deep breath and step back from the hustle that you are in. As they say, every day is a new beginning! A new day brings new strength and new thoughts and can help you re-approach the same situation with a fresher outlook. The same problem may not seem as challenging as before
- Call up your best friends and vent out your emotions. If not that, then journaling or writing down how you feel can also be liberating
- Share your responsibilities with your partner, this will give you a chance to take a break and get you the "Me time" to unwind
- Treat yourselves to a vacation, spa or your favourite dessert. Chocolate always makes everything better at least for me

A research study in 2012, found that the parents of children with autism were more likely to get common ailments such as colds, coughs and headaches as a direct result of the increased stresses linked to their caretaking responsibilities. It is obvious that their mental state is going to be in the form of a cognitive overload all the time. They may have a hard time remembering things apart from their child's appointments, therapy dates, specific allergies, preference (likes and dislikes) etc. where would be the space for anything else. It is important for parents to take care of themselves so that they can care for their child. Do not take small illness casually. Never miss any of your doctor's appointments. Research shows that a healthy mind equals a healthy body which ensures improved quality of performance. So only a fit physical and mental state will aid you to fulfil all your roles and responsibilities towards your child.

Living with a special needs child can be tedious to both your body and mind. However hard you try, there will be days where you want to deny the reality and just transport to an alternate universe, or instances when you might get

angry at no one specific, whilst wondering Why me? There will be days when you are feeling down, disappointed and on the verge of giving up. But then there will also be the feeling of hope, hope for a better and brighter tomorrow, hope that you experience every time you notice the little things your child can do. Above all there is always going to be that feeling of love, acceptance and faith that you have for your child which outweighs everything else. It's absolutely okay to experience all these emotions, to sway from one feeling to another in the very same day. But even on those low days, fall back on a good memory with your child, think about the long way you've come, and the hard work you've put in to get here, this will help you sail through. Remember your state of mind will reflect that of your child. Children often model the behaviour of their own parents or what they see. Your positivity and motivation will push your child to try harder, do better and achieve his/her highest potential.

To continue being the Super special parents that you are, make sure that you are physically fit mentally strong and emotionally stable, you are the backbone of your family, the root of your family, if the root gets sick the entire house will be shaken. So take care of yourself first and the rest will be automatically taken care of.



“Living with a special needs child can be tedious to both your body and mind”

“Remember, your state of mind will reflect that of your child.”

MINDFULNESS

Mindfulness is nothing but living in the current moment, in the now, and in the present. All of us have so many perfect moments in the day that we miss out on because we are so busy worrying about something that might happen tomorrow or feeling upset about something that happened yesterday. As parents and professionals we need to really inculcate the habit of being mindful. Research suggests that adults who practice mindfulness incur many benefits, including reductions in overall stress levels and improvements in physical health, brain functioning, memory, attention, and social-emotional skills such as coping, empathy, and emotional regulation.

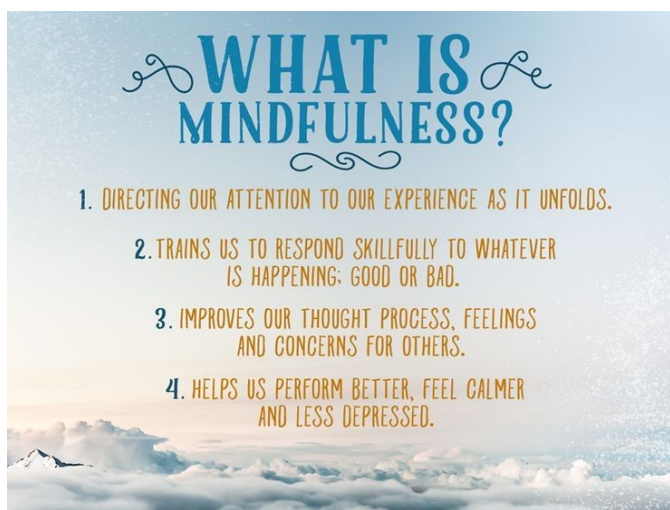
Being Mindful will make us more aware of things around us, make us more perceptive of our child's emotions and tell us exactly what they are thinking or feeling. We are also able to focus and stay calm, this enables us to think quickly and take an action that is most skilful, appropriate and best attuned to the situation. To understand this more effectively, think of the glitter jar as a metaphor for the mind. The glitter in the jar represents our thoughts and feelings, which start to swirl when we are angry, upset, wound up or too busy, making everything blurry. When you catch yourself in this state, simply shake your glitter

jar and watch the sparkles settle, remembering that your mind does the same when given the chance to quiet down.

The practise of mindfulness is extremely easy, all you have to do is breathe in and breathe out. Focus on your breath this can be done anywhere, in the car, while waiting in a line, in a chaotic classroom, or just a quiet comfortable space at home. Another practise is while performing an activity, be mindful of what you are doing, how you are doing it, how does it make you feel, how does it make others around you feel, the task can be as simple as taking a walk in the park or cooking a four course dinner meal. The aim is to heighten your self-awareness and be fully present, irrespective of where you are or what you are doing. Be present completely-body, mind and soul!



It is that state of mind which helps everyone: parent, professional as well as a child, excel at what they are doing, improving their quality of performance and the experience of life.



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For any question or concerns regarding the newsletter please write to us on: rechtcf@gmail.com

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Special thank you to Onissia Rebello, Occupational therapist, for her ideas, inputs and proof reading.