



## Parenting in a Pandemic: Tips for Caring for Yourself while Caregiving

Exhausted? Overwhelmed? Feeling like you are being pulled in dozens of simultaneous directions? Being a parent is hard under any circumstances; being a parent during the COVID-19 crisis can feel overwhelming.

The task at hand can feel impossible, as if you are set up to fail. Your daily to-do list is long—cooking, cleaning, shopping—all while trying to work from home and support your children in distance learning. Alternatively, you might be leaving the home every day to work in an essential capacity, worrying about your children’s safety and well-being in the back and forth. Most parents are noticing that their children’s emotional needs are understandably higher than usual as they soak up the anxiety in the world around. Amidst all of this, where do you find even a moment for self-care or connection with others?

The tasks listed above would require superhuman capacity in the best of times. We are not in the best of times; we are living in a crisis. We are experiencing grief for what we have lost, anticipatory traumatic grief for what we may lose. The collective nature of this experience means that the people who would normally step in and tend to you during a time of grief are also grieving and therefore not emotionally available. Additionally, the constraints of physical distancing mean that the “village” who help you raise these young people—the grandparents, aunties, cousins, neighbors, and childcare workers—are not able to come and provide support.

Parents, the Wendt Center sees you. We understand that your needs have likely taken a back seat to your children, other family members, and even your employer. The COVID-19 pandemic is a collective grief experience, but parents may feel that they do not have the time to process their reactions to a global pandemic. With compressed time and multiple demands, parents easily slip into “doing” rather than tuning into their “feeling” self. Yet for some, tasks that may have previously felt simple and straightforward are now difficult and overwhelming. This is normal in grief. For others, they might feel laser-focused on tasks and checklists, responding with irritability when this plan gets derailed. This is also normal in grief.

The Wendt Center encourages parents to reject the double bind of “either I care for myself” OR “I care for my family and others.” Do any of these statements sound familiar?

I don't have the time

I can't afford to be a mess right now

There is no one else to do this

There is no other option

One of the many losses that you are likely experiencing is time to care for yourself. Neglecting ourselves can lead to higher irritability, decreased frustration tolerance, and less peace in the home. The Wendt Center wants to remind you that **taking time for yourself IS VITAL to being the best parent you can be.** A stressed, frantic and overwhelmed parent will struggle to meet the needs of their children.

Any moments you can take to tend to YOU will help increase inner calm and increase clarity of thoughts. Being calm in your own body and spirit will allow you to more effectively tend to your child. When a child senses warmth and calmness from a parent, they can more successfully regulate their own emotions.

So, what do you do when you cannot escape your home and have limited access to the outside world? We suggest you embrace the micro-moments of your day. Even six five-minute breaks throughout the day will make a difference.

Reclaim these moments:

- Use the time you wash your hands to take a pause and feel the water and soap. Take a breath.
- Put in your ear buds, or don't, and dance to a favorite song.
- Set an alarm for the same time each hour. When it goes off, take 10 slow deep breaths.
- Set an alarm for the same time each hour. When it goes off, repeat the mantra "I am enough. I am doing the best I can, and my best is good enough."
- Involve your kids in a few minutes of quiet time—make it into a game!
- Visualize a calm, safe place and spend five minutes there.
- Give yourself permission to tell someone that this is really hard.
- Set realistic expectations each day; what do you need to survive?

Most of all, know that the staff at the Wendt Center see you and know how hard you are trying. When parenting during COVID-19 becomes overwhelming, please reach out to someone for support. After all "no one should have to grieve alone."