



Investing in Yourself

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What Does it Mean to *Invest in Yourself*?

Investing in yourself is taking time to care for yourself so you can be a healthier version of you. Just like depositing money into the bank is investing in your savings account, every time you do something for your physical, emotional, or mental health you metaphorically make a deposit into your self-care bank and invest in yourself. The experience of divorce can cause many negative feelings like grief, loss, anxiety, and anger. Many attempt to stay busy to avoid experiencing those negative feelings. With so many changes in your, and your children's life, finding time for self-care might feel impossible or selfish, but it is one of the best gifts you can give your children. The following self-care options are ways for you to begin *investing in yourself* and thus increasing your physical and mental health.

Balance Your Health. It may sound obvious, but exercise is one of the easiest ways to quickly boost your mood. Exercising naturally produces positive hormones that lower stress and anxiety and boost not only your physical health, but also your emotional and mental health (Biddle & Asare, 2011). ***Exercising an hour three times a week***, or more frequently for less time, are both beneficial. A gym membership is not necessary for a quality workout. There are many apps and resources online for free to get you started. Incorporating exercise while playing with your children is another great way to get in daily exercise. Research shows that a western diet high in processed foods, fat, and sugar increases physical health problems and mental health problems like depression and anxiety (Rucklidge & Kaplan, 2016). In addition, ***a good night's sleep*** has proven effects of counteracting stress. Your body needs adequate sleep to function properly and for most adults the average is 8-10 hours. ***Improve your mental health and physical health with a balanced diet and quality sleep.***



Get with People. A great way to increase positive feelings is by ***joining a group of people with shared common interests***. Joining a church group or a group with a shared hobby or interest, allows you to engage in something you enjoy while ***meeting new people***. During difficult times it is easy to isolate oneself and allow negative emotions to overwhelm, but opportunities to socialize can counteract those negative feelings and increase your emotional health (Brent, 2014).

Practice Gratitude. Gratitude is the ability to find value and appreciation in the things you have, rather than focusing on what has been lost or what you do not have. According to research (Layous, Chancellor, & Lyubomirsky,

Taking time for yourself doesn't have to take long. Finding 10 minutes each day can impact your health.

2014), practicing gratitude is one of the most powerful, cheapest, and easiest ways to increase happiness. Gratitude can be found in the smallest of moments, and the more we look for gratitude, the more we are capable of recognizing it in every day occurrences. Challenge yourself to ***find three different things you are grateful for each day***, and each day make them different than the ones before. You can write your gratitude down in a journal, or put them into your phone. You can also try this activity with your children by spending five minutes at bedtime discussing the three things you are each grateful for that day. ***Expressing gratitude to others*** increases closeness and connection in relationships and has many positive mental health effects (Layous, Chancellor, & Lyubomirsky, 2014). Take your

gratitude a step further by expressing it with a quick phone call, an email, or mailing a letter.



Relaxation, Meditation, and Mindfulness.

Meditation is a proven technique to lower anxiety, stress, depression, and improve physical health (Tarrasch, 2014). There is not one right way to meditate and it does not require much time. There are phone apps, online videos, and other free resources online to get you started. Just as with meditation, **relaxation techniques are a great way to administer self-care** and they also can be done in little time. **Mindfulness is the ability to be fully present in the moment rather than thinking about the past or worrying about the future.** Too often we allow our mind to wander and we are not fully present with people. Reflecting on the past, or worrying about the future increases anxiety and depression (Gu, Strauss, Bond, & Cavanagh, 2015) and decreases the quality of interactions with others. So, not being fully present is not giving your child the quality of interaction they desire. Mindfulness takes practice, but will allow you to appreciate the moments of life much more.

- **Breathing Colors.** Select a color to represent the negative feeling you want to release (e.g., I am feeling angry and angry feels like the color orange). Now select a color for the positive feeling you wish to incorporate (e.g., I want to feel peaceful and that color feels like gold). Close your eyes and take slow deep breaths through your nose and out through your mouth. As you breathe in, visualize breathing in the peaceful color you chose, and visualize blowing out the color for the negative feeling. You can take it a step further and visualize all of the systems in your body slowly moving the peaceful color in (e.g., lungs, stomach, legs, and arms) and removing the negative feeling color. Try to assign a different color for different emotions (e.g., stress, anxiety, and sadness).
- **Counting.** In this technique you will also take deep breaths in through your nose, hold for two seconds, and then blow out through your mouth. With each breath, count backward from ten until you reach zero.
- **Muscle Release.** This can be done anywhere and

takes less than five minutes. First, close your eyes and beginning at your toes, tense the muscles in your feet, hold for 20 seconds, and then let the muscles relax. Move up your body to the next muscle group repeating the exercise until you reach the top of your head. Flexing your muscles and releasing them reduces tension and increases relaxation.

- **Blowing Bubbles.** This is a great technique to use with your children. Blowing bubbles is similar to deep breathing because of the skill required to blow the bubble, thus blowing bubbles with your children is a great relaxation technique for everyone to relieve stress and have fun at the same time.

Self-Compassion. Self-compassion is treating yourself with the love and kindness you would give others. Often times we tend to treat others with more compassion and love than we show ourselves. The ability to truly love another person begins with the ability to truly love one's self. **Learning to have self-compassion can increase both psychological well-being and happiness** (Raquel-Bogdan, Ericson, Jackson, Martin, & Bryan, 2011). **Things to remember when considering self-compassion:**

- **Be patient.** Just like you would be patient with your children, or a friend, during a difficult situation, practice the same patience with yourself.
- **Be kind.** Pay attention to your self-talk. Be aware of the things you say to yourself that are hurtful and unkind. You would not likely say those things to a friend, so do not say them to yourself.
- **Forgive Yourself.**
- **Resources.** Visit the website www.selfcompassion.org for more information and resources on self-compassion.



Make Time For Fun. Bring out your inner-child with play. **Play** brings joy, stress relief, and builds connection in our relationships. **Learning something new** increases feelings of self and confidence. Research shows that learning increases optimism, the ability to cope with stress, improves self-esteem, and instills hope and purpose in life (King, 2016). **Think about the things that truly bring you joy and make a list.** Having a list allows for you to select an activity even when negative feelings challenge your motivation. Doing intentional positive activities elevates happiness and increases our ability to cope with negative emotions like stress (Layous, Chancellor, & Lyubomirsky, 2014).

- **Color.** Coloring or drawing allows for creative

expression. You do not have to be artistic to benefit from this activity.

- **Play with your pet.** Playing and laughing with your pet naturally increases dopamine, the chemical in our body that makes us feel good, and is a great way to relieve stress.
- **Let your children make the rules and take the lead.** Release your ideas of what play should look like and let your children make the rules. Allowing them to be in charge of playtime reverses the roles and lets your creativeness flow.
- **Go to the park.** Release your inner-child with some play at the playground. Slide down the slide instead of just watching your children play. Swing with your child and enjoy the moment.

When flying you often hear the flight attendant say, "Put on your oxygen mask first before helping your child." Similarly, self-care allows you to be a healthier version of you, so you can be better equipped to be the parent you desire for your children.

- **Learn a new hobby** or revisit an old hobby you once loved.
- **Learn a new skill.**
- **Read an interesting article.**
- **Take a class.** Many community centers, technological centers, and libraries have adult classes you can take on a variety of subjects such as photography, cooking, yoga, or other subjects within one session.
- **Read a book.** Reading a book on an interesting topic or a self-improvement topic like parenting or financial improvement...fix this.
- **Do a DIY project or craft.**

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Self-Care Ideas When You Only Have 10 Minutes

Self-care does not have to take a lot of time. Some ideas vary in how much time is needed, but practicing self-care daily, even if for only 10 minutes can be impactful to your health. Below are additional ideas that require just 10 minutes or less to complete

- **Just Dance.** Turn on your favorite song and dance by yourself or have your children join in on the fun.
- **Start a Compliment Log.** Write down the compliments that other people give you so that when you are feeling low you can reflect back on the nice things said.
- **Watch a funny video.** Watch a funny video online to lighten your mood and have a good laugh.
- **Take a spa bath.** A hot bath is relaxing to the body.
- **Smell something pleasant.** Aromatherapy has positive physical and mental benefits.
- **Cloud Watch.** Relax and watch the sky. Some Vitamin D from the sun is a great mood booster too!
- **Write a Letter.** Write a letter to yourself. What do you need to hear right now? If your friend was in this situation, what would you say? Say that to you!
- **Say Something Nice.** Self-affirmations are free and take seconds. Look yourself in the mirror and say something nice to yourself!

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