Self-Care for Caregivers and Leaders
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About This Webinar

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Objectives

1. Understand that parenting children or youth with significant early loss or trauma opens you up to compassion fatigue and vicarious trauma
2. Identify and anticipate triggers
3. Understand that self-care is essential to effective parenting and sustaining family stability
4. Explore and debunk barriers to self-care
5. Develop ways to find joy, hope, and healing in your life
“The expectation that we can be immersed in the suffering and loss daily and not be touched by it is as unrealistic as expecting to be able to walk through water without getting wet.”

Dr. Naomi Rachel Remen

Vicarious/Secondary Trauma

- Vicarious trauma is the emotional response to exposure that caregivers can have from parenting children as they are hearing their trauma stories and become witnesses to the pain, fear, loss, and terror that their children have endured. The symptoms of vicarious trauma can create emotional disturbance such as feelings of sadness, grief, irritability and mood swings.

Compassion Fatigue

- People who experience compassion fatigue can exhibit several symptoms including hopelessness, a decrease in experiences of pleasure, constant stress and anxiety, sleeplessness or nightmares, and a pervasive negative attitude. This can have negative effects on individuals, including a decrease in productivity, the inability to focus, and the development of new feelings of incompetency and self-doubt.
Parenting children with trauma histories can call into question everything we thought we knew and believed in. We often end up throwing out many of the books we read in preparation for parenting.

Parent Group Leaders

It is crucial that group leaders model self-care in order to help the families they support see the value and practicality of doing self-care.

Children Bring and Do…

- Trauma histories and experiences
- Challenging behaviors as a result of their trauma and loss
- Project their hurt onto parents
- Need parents to hold both pain and hope for them
The harder you try to help this child, the harder this child resists!

The Struggle is Real

- Multiple appointments for children
  - Therapy, PT, OT, medical, school, systems
- Multiple and varying needs of children
- Work
- Volunteering
- Peer support
- Extended family and friends

Barriers to Self-Care

- Finding time and a reason to care for you. Need to prioritize you
- Natural caregiving instincts and drive
- Desire to do and be more for loved ones
- Not knowing what would help, what to ask for
- Not believing you have a right to ask
- Outside influences and concerns (i.e. national and international disasters; constant negative news-loop)
- Misconceptions/attitudes
Working Towards Self-Care

- Permit yourself to have needs
- Start small and simple
- Don’t compare yourself or your family to others
- Assess your day
  - Where is it most difficult?
  - What can you/your family do to ease challenges?
  - Make a plan
- Rely on your group’s support
- Schedule something to look forward to
- Focus on positives, small successes

Dangers of not taking care of self...

- Loss of sleep
- Health issues
- Marital/relational issues
- Job impact
- Self esteem takes a hit
- Expensive
- Overwhelming sense of guilt
- ?

Results from lack of self care...
Our greatest strength can turn into our greatest weakness

Our ability to care, connect and empathize

Not caring for ourselves, can turn us into:
- Slob
- Yeller
- Robot

Blocked Care

- "Blocked care" is the term used for the state of mind that a parent reaches where he or she is no longer able to make a healthy connection with the child due to continued upheaval in the relationship. The parent may feel angry or upset, or take children’s behaviors personally.
Individual Indicators of Distress

- Emotional Indicators
  - Anger
  - Sadness
  - Prolonged grief
  - Anxiety
  - Depression
- Personal Indicators
  - Self-isolation
  - Cynicism
  - Mood swings
  - Instability with partner/family
- Physical Indicators
  - Headaches
  - Stomach aches
  - Lethargy
  - Constipation
- Workplace Indicators
  - Avoidance of certain clients/collleagues
  - Missed appointments
  - Tardiness
  - Lack of motivation

Your Emotional World

Assess:

- Spirit damage
- Learning new ways of doing things
- Creative ways of taking care of YOU
What Parents Need to Do:

- Know your patterns
- What are your triggers?
- Who will support you when your triggers are pushed?

Sleep & Exercise

- Sleep is crucial to improved physical health, mental health, and will help you be a better parent and partner
- Exercise is as well. Start small.
  - Take a 5 minute walk daily.
  - Walk up and down your stairs 10 times in a row.
  - Do sit-ups while watching TV or helping with homework

We often are driving our kids to all kinds of therapy appointments, but we forget about ourselves

Find a competent adoption/trauma therapist
Support Groups

- There is HUGE value in being around others who are living the same struggle
- Normalizes feelings
- Makes you feel less isolated
- Gives you ideas on dealing with tough situations
- And most importantly ...

Laughing is crucial

We have to find the humor in some of the tough situations. Laughter lowers blood pressure, reduces stress hormones, triggers the release of endorphins, & improves cardiac health.

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Accepting Limitations

- We need to help parents realize and accept their limitations.
- Place as many safety nets out as possible, and acknowledge the children will still fall through them at various times, especially in the teenage years.

Respite

- Find and use respite- stop making excuses.
- Re-entry is hard, but the time off is still worth it.
- Be creative in finding respite.
- Our brains rarely get to slow down as we are always thinking 10 steps ahead to avoid the next rage or the next issue, or remembering the umpteen appointments we need to make.
- We need to allow our brain to just "be" from time to time.

Other Ways to Fill Yourself Up

- Alone time
- Arts and crafts
- Canoeing or kayaking
- Cooking
- Crafting
- Dancing
- Drawing
- Eating a relaxing meal at your favorite restaurant
- Enjoying a cup of coffee or tea
- Enjoying a spa day
- Exercising (running, going for a walk, lifting weights, rock climbing, etc.)
- Finding joy in each day
- Getting a massage
- Hiking
- Journaling or blogging
- Laughing
- Listening to music
- Meditating
- Painting
- Playing a sport
- Playing an instrument
- Praying
- Reading
- Rock climbing
- Singing
- Spending time at the beach
- Spending time taking in the sights- even if it’s local!
- Spending time with family and/or friends
- Taking a nap
- Taking a relaxing bath
- Taking deep breaths
- Talking to others- especially those who are in a similar position and truly "get it!"
- Traveling
- Volunteering
- Walking on the beach
- Watching television
- Writing poetry
- Yoga
Helpful Attitude!

Life isn't about waiting for the storm to pass, It's ABOUT learning to DANCE in the rain.