

Life Enrichment
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Modern life is demanding and stressful. If you are going to have the energy, patience and stamina necessary to succeed, you must take care of yourself. Some people believe they should always put their own needs last. Obviously it is often necessary to make sacrifices and we are happy to help others even when it means placing their priorities before our own. However it is also true that if we don't care properly for ourselves, we will not have sufficient emotional resources available to effectively care for others.

Based upon my experience as a psychotherapist for over 20 years I have developed ten ways for people to take better care of themselves and thereby to live a more fulfilling life. These methods apply to everyone and all of you will benefit by following these suggestions.

- 1) ***Live in the present.*** Too often, in our fast-paced society, we focus on what we have done or what we have not done in the past. We also worry a great deal about what the future will bring. It is important to learn from the past so we do not repeat our mistakes. It is also wise to prepare for the future. However, many people spend so much time thinking about the past and the future that they do not enjoy each moment. Your child, whatever age they are now, will never be at this period in their life again, so take the time to enjoy these special moments. Try to focus on the present and soak up the sights, sounds and feelings surrounding you. Enjoy the moment!
- 2) ***Think positive and be positive.*** Our world is full of negativity. The news headlines are full of crisis and sadness. It may be difficult to remain positive but it is healthy and fun. Think about how people have been nice to you. Enjoy how much fun your kids can be. Look for the positive behaviors they exhibit and instead of ignoring these, praise your child for them. "It's so nice to see you sharing", "I love watching you have fun and play so nicely", "Oh, you cleaned up your mess, thank you!" Look for the positive things in life and positive things will find you too!
- 3) ***Laugh!*** When we laugh it is good for us and good for our children. Laughter is fun, it reduces stress, it lowers blood pressure, and it even improves our immunity from disease! What else is so much fun, healthy and totally free of charge? Teach your children not only to laugh at the fun times but also to be flexible enough to laugh at our frustrations. This means you will have to loosen up and be able to laugh at yourself sometimes.
- 4) ***Talk about it.*** We all have feelings and these feelings will emerge one way or another. The best way to express them is by talking. If we do not talk about our feelings they will affect us in other ways. Usually this will be in our behavior, our mood or the way we treat others. Talking with people about

your feelings helps you to be more emotionally calm and available to your child. Help your child talk about her feelings as well. Show her you will listen and that you value what she has to say.

5) **Connect with others.** Friends and family are the most important people in the world. Spend time with others having fun, helping each other and appreciating their importance in your life. Spend quality time with your children without the interruption of TV, phones or other distractions. Get on the floor and play with your child whatever HE wants to do, not what you want to do. Show your son that he is important and deserves his share of your undivided attention each day.

6) **Prepare for tragedy-** No matter what we do it is inevitable that we will experience “hard times”. Accepting that life deals you hardships means you need to be prepared. Whether it is an accident, loss of employment, illness, death, divorce or another life-altering event, none of us is immune to tragedy. It’s important to be optimistic but realistic about life. There will be death, disease and misfortune. We cannot let this overshadow our lives. Some hardships will be more overwhelming than others. We sometimes will feel devastated and the only way we get through it is to let time pass and to surround ourselves with those we care about and those who care about us. Sometimes we need to experience grief, loss and pain. Take comfort in knowing that it will eventually come to an end. Maintain good relationships with your support network of family and friends. Allow others to help you and support you during your time of pain. You will do the same for them when they are in need.

7) **Do what makes you happy-** Several years ago I was lecturing on the topic of stress management. One of the things I mentioned was the importance of relaxing activities and hobbies. After the lecture a gentleman approached me to comment on this. He told me how much he enjoys fishing and how it helps him to forget about all of his worries. He spoke of how relaxing it is to look at the ripples in the water and to float on the lake in his boat. I asked him how long it had been since he had been fishing. He thought for a moment before looking surprised as he told me it was about two years ago.

It is essential that we make time for what is important. It is also important to make time for what relaxes you. It will help you have the energy to do the things you have to do on a daily basis, including parenting your children effectively.

8) **Make someone else happy-** I have volunteered during the last several winters at a homeless shelter. My son has also participated for several years. When he was 15 years old he did not want to participate. He wanted to stay home and talk to girls on the phone or spend time chatting with his friends on the Internet. I “strongly encouraged” him (“forced” is such a strong word) to participate in the homeless program. He begrudgingly came along, nevertheless protesting the entire way there. An interesting thing happened after we had been

there for about thirty minutes. My son came over to me, put his arms around me and gave me a heartfelt hug as he said, "Thanks for making me do this dad". Helping others is an unselfish thing that comes back to us in many positive ways. Not only do we help people, but we also feel "warm and fuzzy" inside. Altruism can take many forms but always makes us feel good. Helping friends, family and strangers, even in very simple everyday ways, enriches our lives.

9) ***Simplify & slow down***- What did we do before cell phones, answering machines and caller ID? We waited! It was no big deal. We didn't use the car to catch up on phone calls, we had "down time" to think. All of the recent technological advances have served to train us to expect instant gratification. What do cell phones, the Internet, & microwave ovens have in common? They train us to get what we want immediately. The problem is the modern way of life creates "time pressure". We are all expected to accomplish more in less time. The risk of time pressure is that we cram too much into every hour or every day and then feel we've failed to live up to the expectations of ourselves or others. Take time to "slow down and enjoy the scenery". Take a day, a half-day, an hour or even a few minutes to decompress. Take off your watch and forget about time, deadlines and expectations. Close your eyes and meditate, take a walk outside or do whatever relaxes you and: SLOW DOWN!

10) ***Live your legacy*** - Do you remember the last funeral or memorial service you attended? Most likely you felt sad and reminisced about good times with the dearly departed. You reflected on the kind of person they were. Maybe they were kind, considerate, loving and had a good sense of humor. You remembered personal interactions between you and the deceased. Often the message expressed at funerals has to do with remembering the good qualities this person exhibited during the course of their life.

Have you ever thought of what you want people to say or think at your funeral? Do you want them to say how much money you were worth and how pretty your car was? Or do you want them to say how you were a wonderful husband or father? Do you want them to remember what a caring person you were and that you gave of yourself to others? It's important to begin living your legacy now. Focus on what's really important to you and on spending time with the people that are important to you.

What will be remembered about you long after you have died? There may be memorabilia- awards, things you have accomplished, created, built, achieved or written. More important to perpetuate long after you have left the earth are your beliefs and the way you lived your life. This lives on in the people you've come into contact with- your family, friends, coworkers, neighbors and most importantly your children.

"Some folks never find it, some folks only pretend. Me, I just want to live happily ever after every now and then"- Jimmy Buffet