

## **The Importance of Valuing Your Self Through the Practice of Self Care**

**By: Cindy Ricardo, LMHC**

### **Everyone else is more important:**

Does your life seem like an endless list of things to do? Do you find yourself doing more for your kids, spouse, career, family, community or home? Are you drained, overwhelmed and irritable at the end of the day? If you answered yes to any of these questions you are not alone. In my private practice, I encounter many women who face the difficult task of juggling various roles with little or no time dedicated to self care. They set high expectations on meeting the needs of others, fitting in, moving up the corporate ladder or gaining the approval of others; at the expense of their own emotional and physical wellbeing.

### **What drives us to place others needs before our own?**

From the time we are little girls, our parents, society, teachers and others emphasize the need for girls to be nurturing, non-assertive and nice. Little girls are taught that “nice girls don’t yell” and “if they make someone cry they need to apologize and make it up to them!” Society teaches us that in order to be loved and respected we must focus on meeting the needs of others. We get praised for being a super woman or a super mom but our need to take care of ourselves is rarely validated.

Taking good care of ourselves is as necessary to life as our need to breathe. Yet how many of us really take time out of a busy, hectic schedule to take care of ourselves. If you are a stay at home mom your focus may be on the kids, your house and your husband. You may find that there aren’t enough hours in the day to complete all tasks. Most of the day is spent driving the children to baseball, soccer practice and ballet or martial arts classes. If you are the president of a company your goals may look different but the end result will be the same. Overwhelmed, irritable and stressed out are signs that you are out of balance and are neglecting your own needs. Whether you are a stay at home mom or President of a company, driving yourself do more or be more can be draining and harmful to your emotional and physical health.

Another negative effect of sacrificing your needs for others is that you end up losing your identity. Shutting out your surroundings and becoming hyper-focused on the end goal you lose connection with the person you are, things you like to do, and what you enjoy about life. You may end up feeling like a victim; controlled by and at the mercy of others.

### **Putting self care on the top of your to do list:**

Adding self care to the top of your to do list may sound like a strange concept, however it is as essential to your wellbeing as oxygen. You can’t give to others from an empty place. Taking time for self-care allows you to be replenished and energized instead of irritable, angry and overwhelmed. If you nurture, love and appreciate yourself you will be able to

do the same for others. This is very important, especially if you have children as they learn how to take care of themselves from their parents.

So how do we put ourselves on the top of the list? The following are a few suggestions about how you can start to value yourself and bring balance back into your life. Performing one or two of the following tasks on a daily basis will help you to feel refreshed and energized and better about yourself.

### **Steps towards incorporating self care into your life:**

1. Schedule yourself on your to do list. Take 15 minutes out of your day to dedicate towards yourself. Incorporate a relaxing or soothing activity into your day, such as listening to relaxing music.
2. Create a self care ritual that you practice once a day. This could be taking time out to read a book, attend a yoga class, exercise, take a bubble bath or write in your journal.
3. Reach out for support from your spouse, friends or a professional such as a therapist. Have someone take care of your children so that you can take care of yourself.
4. Schedule a date with yourself where you do something you like. Go the book store attend a support group; go out to dinner with a friend.
5. Become aware of when you are feeling overwhelmed and then take a break to de-stress. Go for a walk or sit in the park. Find a spot in your house where you can relax.

### **Self care through the practice of Assertiveness**

1. Engage in a personal growth activity such as attending therapy sessions geared towards exploring your inner thoughts and connecting with your needs.
2. Learn to say no when you are feeling overwhelmed or stressed out.
3. Pay attention to your body and make sure that you are meeting your own needs for sleep, nutrition and exercise.
4. Learn to incorporate time for play, fun and laughter into your life.
5. Pursue your interest and the things you have put off doing as a result of placing other's needs before your own.

Finally it is vital that you make time to relax, breathe and take care of yourself as no one else can do it for you! Empower yourself through self-care!

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