



The Cornell Research Program
on *Self-Injury and Recovery*

For Parents *the Importance of Self-Care*

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Learning that someone you love is self-injuring can be shocking and upsetting. And finding out is just the beginning – the road to recovery can be long and full of ups and downs. Of course, this process is often clearly stressful for your child, but it is important to acknowledge that this causes stress for you, too.

In our study of parents and children going through the recovery process, we have learned that parents spend a lot of time, energy, and resources helping their child; however, they tend to neglect putting additional supports in place for themselves. ***It is very important to establish support systems for yourself in this time.*** Times like these are when professional help and support are particularly useful and benefit everyone you live with and love. In addition to helping you manage your own health and wellbeing, it is an opportunity to model healthy coping for your child, too.

What can I change?

Think about the ways that you already take care of yourself when you are stressed - the healthy ways and the not-so-healthy ways. Do you go for a walk, work out, call a friend, meditate, have a drink, find comfort food or sex, create something artistic, listen to music, or look for chocolate? Do you procrastinate, avoid the cause of the stress, or start a planning process? Taking some time to identify ways you already cope can help you see not only what you could improve, but acknowledge and use the strengths you already have.

Next, think about what you might want to add or change if you are feeling extra stressed. In addition to the positive coping methods you already use, you may want to find time to practice others that you have been considering. Now is a great time to add additional tools and make good use of those you have. Yoga, meditation, other exercise outlets and classes, and artistic expression (e.g. painting, pottery, photography, etc.) are among the things you might want to add. Also, in addition to support from a mental health professional, consider reaching out to friends and/or family for additional support.

It is important to realize that no one coping method is going to work for all stressors. It is best to find and practice a variety of healthy coping techniques so that you have a full and varied “toolbox” to use during times of stress. Just taking time for yourself to do small but kind acts of self-care every day and giving yourself a break when you feel overwhelmed or have a lot of negative thoughts is an important way of staying balanced. In most cases, taking some action – no matter how small – to directly deal with the stress will help reduce the upsetting feelings that come with it.

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