

BACK TO BASICS

A COURSE ON INFANT AND
TODDLER SLEEP



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Week 4: The Importance of Self-Care

Welcome to our final week of the 'Back to Basics' Sleep Course. By now, my hope is that you have some more realistic expectations for your child's sleep that accounts for their developmental level, unique circumstances, and any periods of growth they may be going through. I hope you feel confident in all your habits that have helped you bond with your child. I hope you understand the basics of healthy sleep habits and how you can work those in to maximize the sleep your child does get (and by extension, you). I hope you feel confident when you need to look elsewhere for other potential problems that are impacting sleep instead of thinking they are a sleep problem. I hope that for some of you this is all enough and you feel okay about where you're at with your child's sleep now and moving forward.

But I know that for some of you, it won't be. For some, you still may feel like you're caught in a tunnel with no light in sight. I hope you understand why sleep training isn't the answer, but I don't want you to feel that I'm asking you to suck it up. I'm not. What I am asking is that you realize that the goal may not be to get *out* of this situation, but rather to get *through* it. This is where our discussion of self-care this week comes in.

If you are forever waiting for your child to change, you are putting a lot of hope and dreams on the biological functions of a very young person. That's not just irrational, but probably not helpful for you in the long-run. This final week has us explore in depth the ways in which you can structure *your* life to help with *your* needs so that you can better be there for your child.

Section 1: Why is Self-Care So Important?



In some ways we all know why self-care is important: if we are struggling ourselves, we tend to struggle to be gentle or parent in a way that we want. When we can't be calm, cool or collected (or even just a semblance of that), we aren't the parents we want to be and our children end up suffering for it. In addition to this, however, most of us have been exposed to some ongoing cultural (and subcultural) interpretations of self-care that lead us to struggle even more with the concept.

Many of you will be aware that Western, Industrialized society values the productivity of the parent more than the act of parenting. This has led to many statements like, "Happy mother/parent, happy baby" to supposedly support self-care, but actually only justifies non-responsive care with our children. The idea is that for us parents to take care of ourselves, we need to stop responding to our kids; the two acts are – somehow – incompatible.

Obviously, this isn't true in any way, shape, or form, but it can feel true when you are exhausted and worn out and the pressure to become non-responsive to care for yourself surrounds you in so many ways. Whether it's an article online, a doctor suggesting sleep training, parents who say you turned out fine and they left you, partners who aren't supportive, or friends telling you what you're missing, it certainly can start to *feel* like that's the essence of self-care. Adding to the problem is that because these people have all bought into the belief that self-care = non-responsive parenting (at least some of the time), they are also less likely to offer that much-needed support and help to allow you to be responsive and care for yourself at the same time.

A second issue is the problem of mistaking wants for needs and vice versa. Often grown adults mistake their *wants* for their *needs* and so they seek a world in which they can do what they *want* which requires non-responsive care to their children. You may *want* 10 hours of sleep a night, but that probably isn't what you *need*. Conversely, these people are more likely to view other people's *needs* as *wants*, especially young children. So we say that our children only *want* to be cuddled by us or sleep close or eat, when really these are often *needs* that reflect their developing biology or ways in which your child is coping with the stress of growing up. But the more we consider our own wants as needs, and in turn

our children's needs as wants, the more troubles we have in trying to balance self-care with responsive parenting.

Now there has been a push back to this cultural view amongst a subculture of parents who are more attachment or gentle-oriented, yourselves likely included. This is wonderful, but it has come with a bit of a cost in that many of these parents – and maybe you too – have moved towards complete self-sacrifice and this is almost always unsustainable. Although some parents seem to be able to keep this up for years on end, not everyone can and there is no shame in not being able to handle ongoing sleep deprivation.

So whenever I talk about self-care, I often have to convince parents that (a) I'm not talking about the type of non-responsive care they may be used to hearing advocated, and (b) I don't think there's any shame in needing some care for yourself now and again. It's okay to say you're struggling. Now if you happen to be on the fence about self-care, let me take this time to hopefully convince you of the reasons to consider it (as I'm pushing it). As I see it, there are five main reasons to get over any guilt you may have about self-care and jump on board:

1. It makes all sorts of habits sustainable. If you are caring for yourself then you can handle a whole lot more and this means you won't feel the urge to place the burden of change onto your child. You are the adult here and so you have the capacity to think of ways to meet your needs while *still meeting those of your child*. In cases where it can take a while to identify what's going on or see change, this can be a huge difference. I often suggest people think about what they would do if they knew their child had a problem that was impeding sleep and that would take time to resolve. Would you try to force your child to sleep (even if it might make the problem worse?) or would you be able to tolerate things as you worked on the issue? This is the essence of self-care – working on you so you can better understand your child's needs.
2. No "what if" issues. Sometimes ongoing sleep problems are actually reflective of other health or medical issues that aren't picked up until later (if you're interested in seeing if there is any potential concern, you can complete the Brief Infant and Toddler Sleep Screening here: <http://evolutionaryparenting.com/test/bitss/>). For example, allergies and later diagnoses of various developmental delays are linked with earlier sleep disruption which means the lack of sleep parents struggle with is actually a *symptom* that shouldn't be ignored. Now, most wakeful babies are within the realm of normal (so please don't panic), but *what if* your child was one who was waking because they were struggling? What if it's a feeding issue or chronic ear infection? What if your child has apnea? What if you just have an orchid child who needs you to be responsive in order to thrive? How would you feel if you went the non-responsive route then later realized what was wrong? That your child had been struggling – possibly in pain – and you weren't there? The problem is that the more sleep is problematic, the *more likely* something like this is, and yet the more likely families will find a solution of self-sacrifice unsustainable. Caring for yourself means you can see things through to the end with your child and provide the type of care you want for them *and you*.

3. You get to be in charge of your outcomes. Seriously, you actually are in control (to a degree). I have worked with many clients where relationships are strained because they are waiting for their child to change in some way to make it *easier* for them to have an adult relationship again or to do things that help them feel fulfilled again. However, at no point is it logical to think that the strength of a marriage or relationship or our own mental well-being is dependent upon a 6-month-old or 2-year-old or *any child* sleeping more. Again: It is not logical to place the burden of any of our problems on our child. Children may *reflect* problems that are already there or raise new ones as dynamics shift, but as the adult, it is up to you to make changes and identify your needs in this regard *without asking the youngest member to do all the work*.
4. You're modeling healthy self-care for your kids. If none of these resonate for you, then at least think about how you want your own child to respond to their children, because no matter what, it will be more influenced by what you do than what you say. If you think about your own child struggling with sleep, are you going to tell them to suck it up? Sleep train? Hopefully you'll be in a position to offer the type of support that you are lacking, but you also will hopefully help them find ways to care for themselves while caring for their child. And like all things, modeling this ourselves by taking care of our own self-care *with responsiveness to our child* is one of the most powerful lessons we can provide.
5. We might change society. One of the biggest criticisms of gentle or responsive parenting is that it sacrifices the adult and most people aren't willing to make that sacrifice. But what if they knew they didn't have to? What if you get to be living proof that you can care for yourself (even though it will look different from the type of self-care you had pre-child) and be sensitive and responsive to your child? That takes away some of the main arguments in favour of extinction sleep training methods, and the more people witness those of us able to handle this, the more it opens up avenues for them to explore. And the more people who find an alternative, the more we may also see people moving towards offering help to make this happen and reducing the number of people who think we need to pick parent *or* child. Wouldn't that be nice?

Are you thinking, "That's great, but I don't have help to make this work?" It's true, we don't live in a supportive society and some of us aren't in supportive relationships or have supportive family, but there are steps we can still take to ensure we benefit from some self-care while remaining responsive and sensitive to our children. It takes work on our part, it takes shunning certain cultural ideals for how you should live, and it takes thinking outside the box. I strongly recommend you find someone you are comfortable with to talk out (even over the phone) some of the ways in which you can implement the areas of self-care that are going to be covered this week. Much of what I do is help people see the space outside that box to help them find ways to care for themselves while still caring for their wakeful babies and toddlers. Over the next few sections we'll discuss the main forms of care that I recommend you find space for (or the three S's): Sleep care, Self-Care, and Social Care.

Section 2: Sleep Care



I always start with sleep care when working with families on sleep because, to no one's surprise, it's the driving force behind the consult. For most families, the concern is how utterly sleep deprived they feel in responding to these never-ending needs. This can hit as early as 3 months if your expectations may have been a bit out of line or you're surrounded by sleep training friends and so have made unrealistic comparisons, or it may hit at 18 months after so many months of sleep deprivation and trying to just "wait it out". If you're back at work or have more than one child or just struggle with sleep yourself, this can seem particularly hard as the days bleed into the nights which bleed back into the days. Sometimes it gets to the point where it's downright dangerous and you aren't safe on the road or caring for your child.

Let's start with the normal and move to the danger zone. In most cases, we're exhausted, but surviving. The question we face is, "For how much longer?" We know that end *should* be in sight and yet there's no light coming at us from anywhere. At this stage, I am a firm believer in the importance of finding and working in your own sleep needs as much as possible. This means there's no critical intervention, but rather taking the time to create the light that you so desperately need.

When I speak about sleep care here, I am *not* talking about 12 hours in a row – that ship sailed with the baby – but rather what you actually *need* in order to function on an ongoing basis. Everyone is different and so it's not about a set number of hours, but rather *how* you best restore yourself *given your child's needs as well*. Although you may think, "I need a full night of sleep once a week", if you have an exclusively breastfed baby who nurses overnight, it won't be in the cards. At this stage you need to step back and say, "Okay, what's second best?" and think about what you need *within the constraints of your child's needs*. As your child develops and changes, you can shift your needs with that. Also, you should always make sure you have a responsive other person (e.g., grandparent, partner, friend) who is comfortable being as responsive as you would be to your child. If you don't have that, you won't feel comfortable and you won't sleep. If you are nursing, please read the side bar on nursing overnight.

A Note on Nursing Overnight

Many mothers and partners worry that nursing overnight is *causing* the sleep disruption and thus see this as the means to the end for sleep deprivation. As I hope has been made clear so far in previous weeks, there is actually a good reason to nurse overnight and this can not only facilitate more sleep for Mom, but help build sleep patterns that are – in the long-run – beneficial to the family.

In the early months, mothers can often be misled into believing that nursing overnight isn't needed and that what's important is how much milk a baby gets in a 24-hour period. I want to be clear that it matters very much that your baby gets milk overnight and this is why I do not suggest taking long breaks from nursing overnight. Not only is there the issue that your baby has a tiny stomach and needs to feed frequently to feel satiated, but also night nursing helps maintain your supply. Thus if you start moving towards bottles overnight (even pumped milk if you aren't pumping overnight), you risk losing your supply. This will not happen for all mothers, but rarely is this risk mentioned when bottles are touted as a cure-all for sleep deprivation.

Now if you happen to be in an incredibly sleep-deprived state or have a baby who is nursing all night or every 30-40 minutes, you may need to look at the crisis intervention, but also you should absolutely book an appointment with an International Board Certified Lactation Consultant (IBCLC). Many times when babies are nursing *that* frequently, it represents a problem in the feeding relationship, such as an incorrect latch, a tongue tie, or something else that can be best handled by a professional who knows exactly what to look for. If you don't know where to find an IBCLC in your area, take a look at your local La Leche League group (they are nearly everywhere) and they should be able to help.

Some examples of what you may be able to do to help facilitate greater sleep for yourself include:

1. Taking one full night a week to yourself (I don't recommend this until baby is older than 12 months). This can mean going to another room in the house if you can handle it or a friend's or family member's house or even a hotel (if you can afford it). This night off once a week allows you to build up your sleep over time to handle the hard nights in between as you'll have that light at the end of the tunnel each and every week. This requires a supportive person who will do what is needed with your baby to provide comfort and support during those nights (and they can be long at first if babe doesn't go down readily without you).
2. Taking a 4-5 hour chunk 1-2 nights a week. This is the 'lite' version of taking a full night to yourself as it involves taking about half the night, but enough to get you the sleep you need. Obviously I recommend taking the chunk in your first stretch to get that restorative sleep over the later-in-the-night lighter sleep. This also requires a responsive other during these periods and an environment for you where you won't be awoken by your baby.

3. Going to bed with babe early 1-2 nights per week. This early bedtime allows you to maximize your sleep by getting that longest stretch with your baby, which is why many cultures just have the one bedtime for everyone (albeit a later one) so that the parent in charge of wakings gets that longest stretch. Of note, sometimes that stretch is even longer when the parent goes down with the child because the child doesn't have to fully wake to get your attention which can cause more wakings the rest of the night.
4. A couple hours in the morning, kids-free on a regular basis. Depending on how your days work and how readily you can fall back asleep in the morning, some families find it easiest to have someone else watch the kids in the mornings and they take a 2-3 hour nap then. This works well on weekends if a partner is home or if you can get someone else in for the mornings during the week. The benefits of this include having that stretch right before waking up for the day which allows you to feel more refreshed for the day and it also is at a time when your child will be more likely to be comforted and engaged with someone else (as opposed to overnight when they typically want you).
5. Napping with your baby. This is the only one most people speak about and yet is often the least practical, but I still include it because you may be one of the few people for whom it works. However, if you work, have more than one child, or simply find it hard to fall asleep during the day (possibly thanks to the caffeine needed to stay awake), it's just not a feasible option.

Regardless of which option you choose, the key is knowing that whichever change you make, it has to be ongoing and become a part of your routine. Often when it comes to sleep, we try to play catch-up when we've had a bad night, but we don't work this into our routine and thus we're always perpetually behind. When we work sleep self-care into our daily or weekly routine then we're able to cope much better with the down times because we're always staying a step ahead (after the first few weeks as we really are playing catch-up).

Now comes the question of what to do when you're in what some might call a 'sleep crisis'. In these moments (which are far more rare than many people think), I find the key is to start by getting that one night's sleep so that you can see things more clearly. When we are sleep deprived, our cognitive capacity is much lower and we can hit 'cognitive overload' much faster and this is part of the problem. One good night's sleep can make a world of difference in our ability to formulate a longer-term plan that supports our babies and us.

What does this look like? For the few families who have experienced this, it often looks like one night at a hotel, possibly a sleeping aide if safe for you, and just sleeping for 10-12 hours. During this time, baby is cared for by that responsive other, whoever it is. At the end of this time, the primary night-care parent (typically a nursing Mom in these cases) feels better and can start to look at plans that will provide longer-term solutions.

What if you don't have a responsive other or worry too much about the overnight? In this case, I strongly recommend switching the day/night and if you can, take a day off work or if you're home anyway, see if you can hire a responsive sitter (a postpartum doula may be your best bet as they are almost inevitably as gentle and responsive as they come) and do the same thing, but at home and during

the day. This likely won't mess up your sleep if you're that sleep deprived and you may be able to sleep hours, be up a bit, then still do your haphazard sleep again that night.

Regardless, a sleep crisis does not require us to move to any form of sleep training, but does require a short-term intervention to get us sleep while someone else cares for our child.

Section 3: Self-Care



The second S in our care is the more general “self-care”, even though self-care actually encompasses all of the types of care we’re discussing. In this section, though, we focus on the things that actually allow you to feel human and like ‘yourself’ again. This is divided into two sections: daily and weekly care.

Let’s start with the gas tank analogy. For many of us, we go through our days and use up our gas and eventually we’re running on fumes. We just have nothing left, we don’t feel like ourselves, and we struggle to get the bare basics done for our kids, for ourselves, or around the house (include work here too if you’re a working parent facing this). The goal of self-care is not to always be running on a full tank – just like our cars, which would be ridiculous and not very functional with the rest of our lives – but rather to keep the times when we hit empty to a bare minimum.

In this regard, I view daily and weekly care working *together* to allow this. Let’s start with daily care, which is a 15-30 minute time each day where you focus on doing something that “takes the edge off”. In the tank analogy, it would be turning the car off at the end of the day so it rests and doesn’t use up fuel or not driving so erratically that you use up the gas you have. Most people seem to find they need this time near the end of the day when they feel the most drained. It also allows you to be mentally ready for sleep and can be the thing that allows you to be emotionally available for your kids’ bedtime (which, as previously discussed, makes the process easier).

The key is that whatever this activity is, it helps you feel a little bit better and *isn’t just a distraction*. This is important as we often go for distractions when we’re stressed out, but here we need to do something that helps us so that when we have to turn it back on, we actually feel better, not just like we’re back to the same old. This is why I often tell clients that screens are a big no when it comes to daily self-care. Some examples of what people have identified for themselves as activities that help with daily care include:

- Reading a book
- Taking a bath or shower (with the door locked!)
- Doing a bit of exercise (especially yoga)

- Meditation
- Puzzles, crosswords, etc.
- Knitting, stitching, crafting, etc.
- Woodworking, building, etc.
- Playing music

What you require will be unique to you and so it's something you'll want to think long and hard on. You do not want it to be related to work and you need to know it will help you. It also doesn't need to be the same thing each day, but you won't want to spend too much time figuring it out so you may want to either set yourself a schedule so you don't have to think about it or, if possible, do it on a project-by-project basis (e.g., one book then a knitting project then woodworking, etc.).

As you may have noticed, you will be taking the edge off each day, but there's no real time to fill that tank, so to speak. You may be helping it from getting to empty faster, but you still have to fill it and this is where weekly care comes in. Weekly time is for restoring yourself and finding that somewhat-human feeling again. To do this, you need a 2-3 hour chunk of time in which you pick something you miss doing, have wanted to start, or know would make you feel better and then take the time to do it regularly. Like with daily care, the key is that it's something that when you finish you feel refreshed and really good about yourself. You may even find yourself talking about it to others over and over (and over) again. If you have a young baby, this extended stretch may not work, so find a bit of a shorter time, or think of something you can do *with* your child in the interim as you build up to this stage. Some examples of this include:

- A longer bout of exercise or exercise class (e.g., going for a prolonged hike or a yoga class)
- Crafting
- Nature walk/hike
- Music/band
- Taking a course you've wanted to
- Volunteering somewhere
- Going to a spa

When you're able to do this weekly you will feel yourself return to you, but often only when you've had the week of not going to empty too soon. If you go to empty too soon, the weekly time often just serves to take the edge off the way the daily care does and so you get some gas in the tank, but it's not full and so the chance of you making it through the next week without hitting empty is slim-to-none.

Section 4: Social Care



In my world, social care refers to caring for the various relationships we have and maintaining our own social lives in a way that makes us comfortable. There are *many* types of social relationships to be concerned about, but the three I focus on here include: romantic relationships, relationships with other children, and our social lives. Not all of these will be relevant for everyone, but you can use each section as a framework for the various social relationships that require care for you.

The first element to discuss is romantic relationships. It is here I find that things with sleep can wreak the most havoc within families, especially attachment-oriented, bedsharing families. Why? If you're attachment-oriented, you are very likely spending large portions of your day with little ones attached to you, physically and figuratively. The amount of care you need to provide to these little creatures can absolutely drain you and by the time your partner gets home, there's often nothing left. From the partner perspective, where there was once romance, sex, and time, there's now nothing.

Each side often feels unheard and the brunt often falls on the sleeping arrangements or the style of parenting. Others may suggest you need to get that kid out of your room and prioritize your relationship or it will fail. Before we get to ways to work on this romantic relationship, problems that arise due to children are often not really *due* to kids, but rather they reflect prior issues or highlight areas where the relationships probably needed some work anyway. And that area is often communication.

Now, in terms of working on the romantic relationship, I recommend trying three-pronged approach:

1. Daily time in the evenings. This is time to just catch up, be physically present with each other (hopefully even cuddling, but sometimes the primary parent can be physically touched out so just feet touching may be enough), and perhaps not discuss children (or perhaps you will because they are central to your lives) for 15-30 minutes. And yes, kids can be present and playing around. I often recommend starting with random questions like, "What was the most ridiculous thing you

heard today?” (not a hard topic to start with in our political climate) as it can get you out of a potential rut of what to talk about when you’re tired. I know you’ll likely tell me you don’t have time for this because there are chores that need doing, but I hope you both can realize that prioritizing this time is more crucial than laundry or dishes. And amazingly, when you have this time regularly, you may also feel more ready to tackle the chores which means you do it faster.

2. Date time. Remember dates? With kids, especially sleep-challenged ones, we can forget about that whole romantic side of our relationship because we’re too tired. However, having one-on-one time with our partner to reconnect can help everyone feel better. Often when one parent wants to sleep train or something like that it’s because they’re feeling left out and miss that much-needed contact that we as humans need from the people we love. It can feel like they are neglected whereas the other parent is likely touched out and needing space when it can be gotten. Dedicating time for a date on a regular basis (monthly, bi-weekly, or if you’re lucky, weekly) means that you can reconnect (even if one person needs some space) and let everyone know how valued they are.

Now, for those wondering how on earth you do a date at night with a child that doesn’t sleep well, you don’t. Dates can happen during the day and that’s often easier for our kids to be out with us (if you have a young baby) or to be with other people (like a trusted caregiver) and so I strongly recommend getting used to the “day date” to help provide that time to connect.

3. Schedule intimacy (probably elsewhere in the house). Yep, sex is needed, but the bed may no longer be the place if it’s occupied by your non-sleeper and the spur of the moment is gone (that ship also sailed however many months ago). Find a time that works for you guys and schedule it as you would any other important event in your lives. This may be a part of your date time or you may have some regular times in the evening after babe goes to sleep (before that first waking). Sofas, guest rooms, etc. are all wonderful places to be for this. If you find it weird now, don’t worry, you’ll adapt. And if someone is too touched out, replace sex with just some time to cuddle and connect physically.

The second element is to do with our relationships with other children. When we have a new baby or we have a higher-needs toddler, we can find that we are no longer getting the time with our other kids that they need. Notably, this isn’t always about the baby taking away time from the older siblings, but sometimes our higher-needs older children take away time from our younger ones. We can find ourselves feeling pulled in all directions and also feeling like we’re failing our other children if we can’t give them the attention they need. This can feel worse when our kids start acting out in response to this lack of connection.

In order to build that connection when it feels like you don’t have the time, I recommend the following:

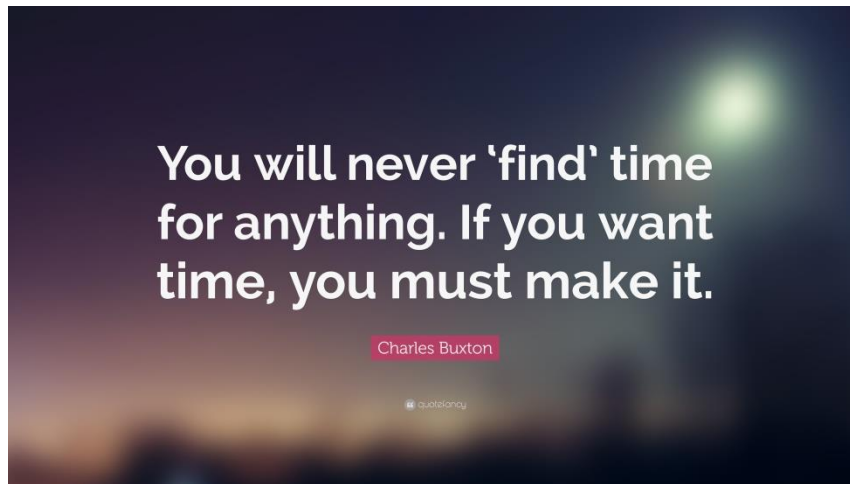
1. Daily time. This is not about taking tons of time, but rather 10 minutes a day of focused time with your child can go a long way when you have little time. The key is to make sure your child knows this is special time for just the two of you and that you are requesting it because you miss them and want to spend time with them. Sometimes we spend this time and forget to make it clear to our kids why we’re doing it and then they don’t actually feel it was special, just normal.

2. Larger chunks of special time. Just like we need this bigger time for ourselves, so too do our kids. They need us to dedicate some larger time to them on a regular basis for them to have their tanks full and feel connected. This often starts being necessary around age 3, but some kids need it earlier and some will do okay waiting until a bit later. However, at this time, some time doing things together and alone should be a priority. Notably, this doesn't have to be something that is child-centric; sometimes kids are happy just running errands with us as long as we're focused on them as well.

If you can't spend the time because you have a very young child, please try to make sure some of the time with your older child is spent focused on them. I would also suggest you talk to them about *why* their little sibling needs to tag along and always try to involve the older child in care as *your* assistant.

The final element is our social life care, or our ability to feel like we have a social life outside of being a parent. This isn't something all people need, but when we need it, boy do we feel we need it. Luckily this type of care does not necessarily preclude having children with you, but making sure you have time weekly with other adults who you feel comfortable with and can talk to is often essential for your mental well-being. If you have like-minded friends with kids around, a weekly get-together is wonderful. If not, try some parenting groups or even just ensure you have a weekly phone call with an old friend who you enjoy talking to and who can help you feel good when you talk.

Section 5: How to Think About the Time it Takes



So you have the types of self-care, but now you need to fit it all in and I know right now that long list feels *way too big*. That's okay because you're not starting with it all. I recommend a more measured and slow approach based on your specific needs (which you'll be writing down as part of the homework), which means figuring out what's most important for you and starting there. Once that has firmly become a part of your routine then move to the next one, and so on and so forth.

Now, within each of these, the key is to think about these elements like a doctor's appointment. First, you should schedule them and if there's a risk of a time not working, have a back-up time. By scheduling it, you reduce the mental load of having to think about how you're going to work it in on a daily or weekly basis and reducing your mental load is something that is very helpful for your overall well-being. (Note that scheduling doesn't have to mean an exact time, but even just a part in the routine, like 'after dinner' or 'when I get home from work'.)

Second, you don't cancel a doctor's appointment unless it's urgent and nor should you cancel this time. Sometimes it'll be hard because your inclination will be to sacrifice self-care for some arbitrary task (laundry, anyone?) yet you will be better off if you can curb that urge and focus on yourself. But if it is urgent (like a sick baby) then you will cancel and let it go until you are able to resume. At no point should it be so dogmatic that you don't enjoy it, even if it may feel slightly uncomfortable to care for yourself at first.

Finally, you also want to book your times when you realistically think you can make it. If you know your kids need you to cuddle in the morning, then don't book time for yourself then, but do it later. Often we think of 'ideal' times and this means we end up failing at making it all work because we haven't been realistic with our schedule. So be realistic and know that it may not be ideal right now, but it works, and that's most important.

This highlights a key part: If it's not working for you, it's not a matter of trying harder. We often think that we just need to try harder when something fails, but the thing is, self-care should be enjoyable if we've set it up right. And if it's enjoyable, we'll make time for it. So if you are struggling, then I urge you

to step back and first consider if you identified the right thing for your care element and then to look at your scheduling times to see if perhaps there's a better time. This often takes a few rounds to get right so don't feel bad if it isn't working right away.

Remember: The overarching goal of self-care is not about pampering yourself, but getting yourself to the stage where you can survive whatever your child has to throw at you (which can be a lot). You want to remain responsive and loving and that means being responsive to yourself as well. Sleep will come, but it may not come fast, so make sure you're cared for in the meantime.

Thank you for taking part these last four weeks. I hope you have found the information helpful in your own sleep-related journey.

This is the end of Back to Basics: Week 4: Self-Care and the entire Back to Basics sleep course.