

Strong Bonds Fact Sheet:

Your Feelings : When your Life is on Hold

You may feel constantly worried about your young person, and find it hard to think about other things or relax. You may have let other things in your life go while you try to sort out your child's problems. Your health and wellbeing may have suffered. Maybe other children in the family or other relationships have suffered.

For your own sake, and your young person's, you need to look after yourself and live your own life. If you are healthy and relaxed, you will be better at supporting your young person through their hard times.

Children learn by example. Parents are role models. If you want your children to respect and feel good about themselves, and enjoy good health and wellbeing, you need to do the same.

Look after yourself and your life

It is important that you keep on looking after yourself and the other parts of your life even though your young person is having problems.

It can feel as though you should dedicate all your time and energy to them until the crisis is over. But you cannot do that. For one thing, the crisis may go on for a long time.

More importantly, it is your child's crisis, not yours. They are the ones that need to find a way to deal with it. They are the ones that control when and how it can start to get better. You need to be calm and healthy enough to support them when and where you can.

You will need the other relationships in your life to survive this crisis. It is important to continue giving time to other children, partner and friends.

You need the rest of your life to keep going. You need to be able to keep getting to work, doing housework and shopping, and all the other things that are part of your life. Do what you need to do to make sure you can keep coping with everything that is going on in your life.

Stress

We respond to the stress of a crisis by going into a state of alert. The body becomes tense and the mind becomes focused on the problem and finding solutions. Once the crisis has passed, we can relax again.

The trouble is, when the problem continues over time, and you can't find solutions, you may enter a state of stress or 'hyper-arousal'. In this state it can be very hard to relax, and to see things in a clear way. This may be bad for your emotional and physical health over time. It is important to be able to turn off the stress response and recover, physically and emotionally.

If your child is experiencing serious problems, you cannot avoid the stress of worrying about them or dealing with the crises. But you can learn ways to deal with stress and to relax.

Getting over stress

When you experience stress, you also need an opportunity to relax and get over the effects of stress on your body and mind. You need to do things that help your body relax and let go of its tension. You need times when you take your mind off the things that are worrying you.

Relax physically

Exercise helps the body to relax. Going for a run or a swim can help to release tension. Playing a game, like tennis or netball, can work even better because the tactics and other people occupy your mind as well.

Warmth helps the body relax. A hot bath, a spa or sauna, or lying in the sun can be relaxing. Massage and breathing exercises also help release tension. Becoming aware of tension in your body and being able to consciously relax that area may take practice, but it is a good strategy.

Relax mentally

Part of the response to stress is to narrow the focus of your mind. It can be hard to switch this off again. You may find it hard to move your focus away from your child's problems to think about other things.

Taking your mind off your problems for a while is a really important way to look after yourself. Your body and mind need a break from the stress of thinking about your problems.

Look for things in your life that can distract you and make you think about something else for a while. It might be a movie or a football game, or spending time with a friend.

Laughing releases tension. Watching a comedy show or having a laugh with friends is a great way to relax.

You can learn to consciously still your mind or move your focus away from the thing you are worrying about. Meditation is a way to clear your mind of worrying thoughts, relax your mind and body and create a sense of stillness and peace.

Practice putting the worries out of your mind by finding something else to concentrate on – maybe a crossword or a puzzle, or listening really closely to radio talk-back or the words of a song.

Being in a pleasant, quiet, orderly space can help to quiet your mind. You might be able to make a corner of your house free of clutter and nice to be in. Or there may be a peaceful place in your neighbourhood that you can go to – a park, or a library, or even a church. The sight and sound of water is relaxing – try a walk at the beach or sit by a fountain.

You may find it hard to find time to do these things. You may feel it is self-indulgent or a waste of too-precious time. But it is actually the most responsible thing you can do.

Think clearly

It is easy to get into a cycle of worrying that goes around and around the problem endlessly and uselessly. It is especially so when you are worrying about your child, because the situation is mostly out of your control.

It can help to try to write down your worries. Think about how likely these things are to happen, and what evidence you have. Think about how you would cope if things became worse. This can help to reduce your anxiety.

Ask yourself if there is anything you can do about your concerns. If there is, then probably the best way to stop worrying is to go ahead and do whatever you can that is sensible to resolve your concerns. If there is nothing that you can do to resolve whatever is worrying you, realising this may help. Perhaps you could try to do something positive about some other part of your life instead. It could help you stop feeling as though your life is completely out of control.

Set your own goals for your life

Set time aside to work out what other priorities you have in your life and plan time for these. For example, are there things you keep putting off for another time? Keep thinking about what you need and want to do in your life, and make these things a priority. If you have long-standing worries, get help for these from a professional counsellor or supportive friends. You will have a life beyond parenting. Put some time into yourself now. It may help your child to see that you can

make positive changes in your life and that you don't let problems constantly overwhelm you.

Enforce boundaries

Things will come up which will interfere with your own time and space. Now is the time to learn to say 'no', or 'not now', and to protect yourself and your own needs.

It takes time to develop new habits

If your young person has been your focus for a long time, it can take time and practice changing your focus and starting new activities for yourself. You may be tempted to put things off until tomorrow. You need to commit yourself if you are to make changes. It may help to put aside a set time each day or week.



Tips from this Help Sheet

- If you are healthy and relaxed, you will be better at supporting your young person through their hard times.
- You need to give your body a physical and mental break from stress to stay healthy.
- Exercise, warmth, massage and breathing exercises all help to relieve physical stress.
- Leisure activities, meditation, doing puzzles or being in a peaceful place all help to relieve mental stress.
- Write down your worries and think of ways to cope with them.
- It takes time and commitment to develop new habits.



Related Help Sheets

- [Setting Boundaries](#)
- [Need A Helping Hand?](#)
- [Dealing with Conflict](#)
- [Dealing with Past Hurts & Traumas](#)



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