



Taking Care of the Parent

Parenting is hard work. There are so many things to take care of. The demands don't stop at night. There is no one else who can easily take over and give you a break. It is hard to know how to deal with some situations. Further, most of us get no training to be parents.

All these challenges can combine to make a person tired and discouraged. They can also make a person irritable and angry. There are several areas that are important to being a good parent, including information (such as books and knowledge), resources (such as a crib, a safe house, and diapers), social system (such as friends and family that you can count on), health (such as energy and well-being), and purpose (such as enjoying parenting and having a strong spiritual life).

Know your strengths. As you think about your parenting, consider what strengths you have. Maybe you have lots of good information on caring for children and you have good friends and family members who are glad to help you. It is good to know what your strengths are.

Know your needs. We all have needs and limitations as well as strengths. Maybe you do not have a stroller for your baby and your energy has been low. Noticing those needs prepares you to do something about them.

Get help. All of us need help. In a job as difficult and important as parenting, most of us need lots of help. Use the strengths you have to help you deal with your needs. Maybe you can call on friends and family members to help you locate a stroller. You may know mothers who can help you understand your health needs. Or maybe friends and family members will take turns helping you with your baby so that you can get out once in a while.

Make time for your own growth. In the crunch of parenting it is easy to ignore our own needs. Make time to do things you enjoy. Maybe you can arrange for a neighbor to watch your baby a few minutes every day while you take a nature walk, go to the library, take music lessons, or visit your grandmother. For more ideas on how to find your talents and develop them, see the unit in this series, "Learning and growing: Using your talents."

Be patient. There are "seasons of imbalance" in parenting. A baby is generally 3 months to 1 year of age before being ready to sleep through the night. This can be tough on parents! It is why it is so important to know what your strengths are and use them well to deal with the demands of being a parent.

Despite all the challenges of being a parent, most people still choose to have children. The reason is simple. There is nothing quite as amazing and satisfying as watching a human you love grow and develop.

Applications:

Fill out the chart below. It may be useful to have a partner, friend, or other family member help you so that you don't miss important elements to add to your chart.

Strengths:
Needs:
Ways to get needs met:
Information (such as books and knowledge) For example, what books and knowledge do you already have to help you?
What books and knowledge do you still need?
How can you get the books and knowledge you need? Borrow a book from the library or talk with a friend?
Resources (such as a crib, a safe house, and diapers)
Social system (such as friends and family that you can count on)
Health (such as energy and well-being)
Purpose (such as enjoying parenting and having a strong spiritual life)

University of Arkansas, United States Department of Agriculture and County Governments Cooperating.
The Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service offers its programs to all eligible persons regardless of race, color, national origin, religion, gender, age, disability, marital or veteran status, or any other legally protected status, and is an Affirmative Action/Equal Opportunity Employer.