

Looking after yourself while caring for your child

Everyone has their own way of coping. This is influenced by your life experiences, support network and your child's illness. You do not have to manage everything on your own. Spending time with others, participating in activities and communicating your individual needs to your family and friends is important.

Caring for yourself

Coping or survival strategies help us get through difficult situations. Every person will have, or develop, their own coping strategies. Finding out that your child has a life-limiting illness, combined with the task of caring for them, is a difficult situation for everyone involved.

Looking after yourself can be hard, however it's important. Taking time to look after your own needs can give you more energy, capacity and reserve to care for your sick child and your family. Caring for yourself helps stress and avoid illness.

There are many reasons parents don't seek help for themselves. Some of these reasons may include feeling that their child's needs are more important than their own, their care team is too busy, distrust in another carer or simply wanting to stay close to their child.

Tips for caring for yourself

Each person has their own way of coping when they are going through a difficult situation. Below are some general coping strategies that may help you maintain a level of energy and resilience.

- › Accept help from others — talk with people who are willing to help you, trust them to do some practical things to take the load off you. Keep a list of people and things they can do. Some examples of things friends could assist with include washing clothes, gardening, grocery shopping, meal preparation or running errands. Accepting offers of help is a good way to keep connected with your support network while reducing your stress.
- › Find outlets for your feelings, such as physical activity, music or gardening.
- › Eat well and exercise regularly to maintain your energy. You can use simple stretching and relaxation guides or exercise videos if you don't want to leave home.
- › Get enough sleep. It is common for parents to have trouble sleeping but if you are finding it hard to sleep on a regular basis, speak to your doctor.
- › If you are working, negotiate a flexible time schedule and workload with your employer.
- › Make time to be with your partner. It's important to support each other.
- › Share your feelings. Join a support group, talk regularly with a friend, or write in a journal.
- › Talk with your care team about respite options.