

What Happened to “Me”?

Bringing home a new baby is an exciting time for any woman. Hours of planning and research have preceded this event, from buying a new crib and researching car seat safety to reading for hours about which milestones should be reached and when. I remember getting an enormous free book from the Publix Baby Club that summarized, in a brief 500 pages, every possible ailment a child might face from birth to the age of five.

Early on, checking out little toes and changing doll-sized diapers was novel. But months later, exhaustion may have taken over for enthusiasm. We all read everything we can get our hands on about baby care, but how many of us consider researching how to take care of ourselves once the baby arrived?

Whether it's taught or comes naturally to us, mothers tend to put everyone else first. And then they wonder, “What happened to ‘me’?” Looking around, you might see others mothers who appear happy, well-adjusted and relaxed, which makes you think you are the only one struggling.

Let me reassure you, you are not alone! Focusing so much on this new little bundle of joy and putting yourself on the back



burner has left you tired and angry in a moment when you think you should be happy. But what is a mother to do? The question, so often overlooked, yet probably reinforced at every pediatric appointment is, "Are you getting time for you?" If you are feeling frustrated with the amount of care a baby needs, if you are tired most of the time, or if you just sense that you have lost something, I'd like to share with you three simple ways to take better care of you. As the saying goes, "If momma ain't happy, ain't nobody happy."

1. ALLOW OTHERS TO HELP

1. When I had my first child in the fall of 2001, I dreaded the pediatrician asking me if I was getting time away from the baby. As a stay-at-home mother, the truth was that I wasn't. I felt that the only one who could care for my baby as well as me was, well, me. My husband jokes that I was a 'baby-hog' back then. I wouldn't let him change a diaper without standing over his shoulder and micro-managing the process. Over time, this attitude of 'mom knows best' shut others out. So anyone who could have helped me just backed off. After my third daughter was born, I finally realized I couldn't do it all myself. I was a slow learner apparently! Out of necessity I started enlisting help. And wouldn't you know it, the kids were just as happy, and I was relieved to get a break!

2. KNOW YOUR LIMITS

2. When I coach women who are stressed-out, exhausted and over-committed, chances are they don't know their limits or how to set them. The key to knowing your limits is to check in with your feelings throughout the day. Before making a decision, ask yourself: "Do I really want to do this?" When I was living beyond my limits I found that I was more likely to snap at my children, my patience was short, and little things irritated me. Maybe you have felt that way too? Eliminate those negative feelings by adjusting your expectations. You don't have to be Super Mom; there is no award for that. Slow down your schedule and release the guilt you might feel for setting boundaries. You are simply taking care of you. There's nothing wrong with that!

3. REDISCOVER WHO YOU ARE

3. Caring for others can be rewarding. But focusing most of your time, attention and thoughts on others, including your baby, can create a lot of stress. On top of that you might lose yourself in the process. If you struggle with guilt, ask yourself: "Is it reasonable that a mother with a young baby might still want time to herself?" Of course the answer is 'yes'. There is no need to feel badly about taking time to rejuvenate. It is not selfish to take care of yourself. It is your responsibility.

If you do these three things, soon enough you will feel a new zest for life. Think of how much better you will be as a mother, as a wife, and as a friend when you put yourself back on the priority list. That is the most important thing any mother can do for herself and those she loves, babies included. Start taking care of you!

APRIL O'LEARY is a Certified Life Coach in Bonita Springs. She helps working and at-home mothers balance the demands of a busy life, focusing on self-care. Visit her website at apriloleary.com where you can sign up to get a free audio seminar and action plan called 7 Self-Care Tips in 7 Minutes, or be a part of her free Tuesday Tele-Seminars.