



SPINA BIFIDA  
ASSOCIATION

# Spina Bifida and COVID-19

*Self-Care for Caregivers*

*May 14, 2020*

# Our Presenter

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# Today's Session

- ✓ **What is self-care?**
- ✓ **Why is self-care important for caregivers, especially during COVID-19?**
- ✓ **How self-care needs for caregivers may change over time?**
- ✓ **How can caregivers practice self-care?**
- ✓ **Tools and resources for self-care**

# To Ask a Question

- **Using the Zoom platform:**
  - **Click on the Q&A button in the Zoom webinar system (*not the chat box*)**
  - **Type your question in the Q&A box**
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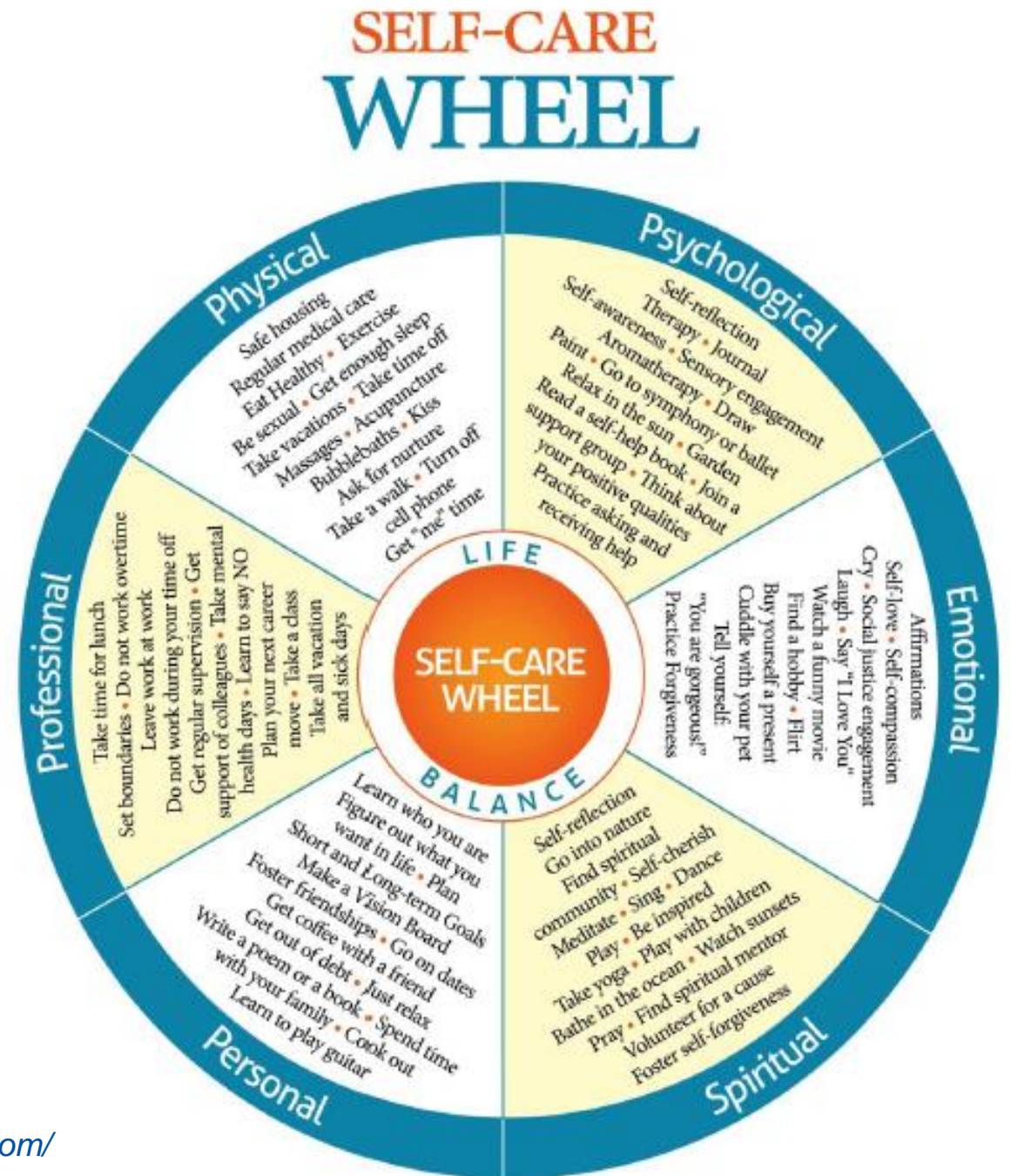
# What is self-care?

- Self-care = *any activity that we do deliberately and on a regular basis to reduce stress and maintain and enhance our health and well-being*
- Similar but different from using *coping strategies*
- Important for **EVERYONE!**



# What is self-care?

- Includes lots of different activities
- Looks different for everyone



# Why is self-care important for caregivers?

- All caregivers juggle many demands
- Caregivers of children and adults with Spina Bifida tend to juggle even more!
- While families of individuals with Spina Bifida are resilient, caregivers may be more likely to experience stress, depression, and anxiety for various reasons
- Research shows self-care improves our emotional/psychological well-being!



# Why is self-care more important NOW?

- **COVID-19 threatens lives and LIVELIHOOD!**
- **Stress, uncertainty, loss of control, grief/loss, isolation**
- **Working from home or loss of work, e-learning**
- **Families of individuals with health care needs may face even more challenges, including disruptions to:**
  - **Medical care, home health care, medical supplies**
  - **Special education, therapies**
  - **Social engagement**
  - **... and more**



# What gets in the way of self-care?

- **Doubt**

- *“It’s just another thing I have to do.”*
- *“It’s not going to make much of a difference...It won’t really help.”*
- *“I’m too busy; there’s not enough time.”*
- *“I’m just too tired.”*
- *“I don’t have the money to practice self-care”*

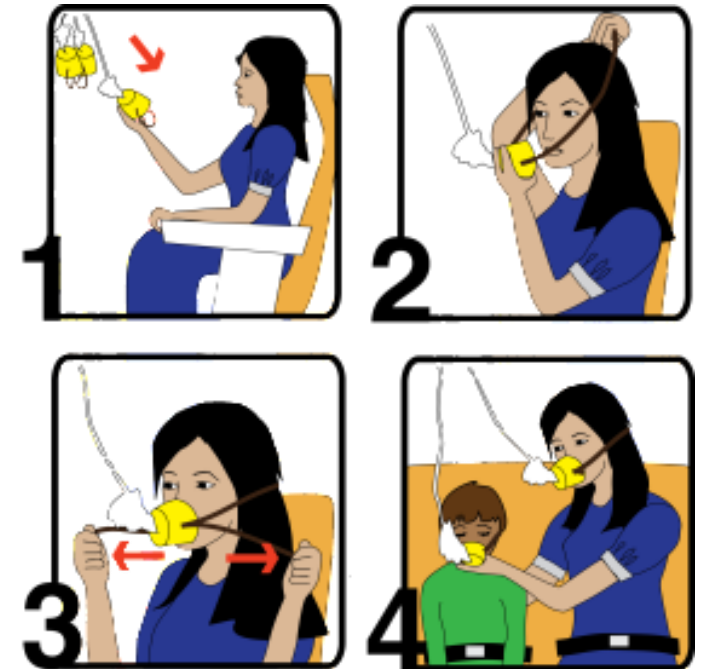
- **Guilt**

- *“It’s selfish to focus on myself.”*
- *“My family’s needs must come before mine.”*

# Why is self-care important for caregivers?

- If you don't prioritize your well-being, who will?
- If you're not okay, how can you help your children be okay?
- Taking care of ourselves *models an important life skill* for our children
- Our families want us to feel good too
- “Self care is not about self-indulgence, it's about self- preservation.” - Audre Lorde

“...Place the oxygen mask on yourself first before helping children or others who may need your assistance.”



# How self-care needs change over time

- Our caregiving capacities change over time
- Our relationship with our child changes overtime
- In general, caregiving-related stress stays somewhat constant
  - Points to individual differences in how caregivers cope with stress
  - Points to the importance of stress management and **SELF-CARE!**

The logo for SELF CARE features the word "SELF" in large, multi-colored letters (S: blue, E: green, L: red, F: yellow) and "CARE" in large, multi-colored letters (C: purple, A: blue, R: red, E: yellow). A smaller "SELF-CARE" logo is visible within the "A" of "CARE".

# How self-care needs change over time

- **How we find time may change**
  - *May* have more flexibility as our children get older
- **The self-care activity may change**
  - Our needs/interests may change
  - Our children/partners may join us!
- **The importance of self-care may change**
  - The harder it rains, the more we need our umbrella!



# How to practice self-care

- **Lots of options!**

## Physical

- Stick to a sleep schedule
- Eat healthily/ practice mindful eating
- Exercise
- Swim, walk, run, play sports, dance
- Yoga, stretch
- Take dog for a walk
- Get a massage
- Be intimate with partner
- Take time off when sick

## Psychological

- Meditate
- Practice mindfulness
- Practice relaxation (guided imagery, deep breathing)
- Journal
- Practice gratitude
- Go to therapy
- Join a support group (in-person or online)
- Say “no” to extra responsibilities
- Take day trip/mini-vacation/vacation/staycation
- Turn off your email

## Relationships/Social

- Schedule a family activity/event
- Go on a date with partner
- Get together with a friend
- Call/text a friend or relative
- Spend time playing with pet
- Join a meet-up/special interest group (book club)
- Send greeting cards
- Volunteer
- Ask someone for help

# How to practice self-care

- **Lots of options!**

## General

- Take up a hobby (old or new)
- Build something
- Start a creative task
- Watch favorite movie/TV show
- Read an interesting book
- Listen to a podcast
- Play a phone/computer game
- Do a puzzle
- Pamper yourself
- Buy yourself something
- Schedule alone time
- Garden
- Spend time in nature
- Learn about something new
- Wear a fun outfit

## Spiritual

- Pray
- Attend church
- Spend time in nature

## Emotional

- Say affirmations, give self-praise
- Find things that make you laugh
- Do something fun or exciting
- Allow yourself to cry
- Express your passion through social action  
(write a letter, donate, participate in marches)

## Workplace/Professional

- Take a true lunch break
- Chat with a coworker
- Decorate your workspace
- Delegate tasks

# Okay, but how do I *really* practice self-care?

- ✓ Create a grocery list of options that work for you
- ✓ What makes me feel good emotionally, mentally, physically?
- ✓ Start with the basics – things you already have to do!  
(for example, sleep and nutrition)
- ✓ Start small – 15 minutes a day (1% of your day!)
- ✓ Make it part of your routine... but allow spontaneity!



# Okay, but how do I *really* practice self-care?

- ✓ Do what you *want* and would *look forward* to... if it starts to feel too obligatory, try something else!
- ✓ Stay consistent with what you do, or mix it up!
- ✓ Not all self-care tasks are created equal! Sometimes Candy Crush will meet yours needs, but sometimes it won't!





# Okay, but how do I *really* practice self-care?

- ✓ Sometimes self-care and obligations overlap, and that's okay! (the “fun” chores)
- ✓ Self-care doesn't have to be a solitary activity free of your children and family!



# Self-care during COVID-19

- What is doing my “best” look like TODAY?
- What do I *need* to do today and what can wait?
- What do I need to do today in order to feel like today was a success?



# Self-care during COVID-19

- **What can I do for others today that will also help me?**
- **What is the best time today for me to update myself on the news?**



Taking care of  
yourself doesn't  
mean 'me first'

It means 'me too'

Self-care is giving the  
world the best of you,  
instead of what's left  
of you.

Katie Reed

**YOU ARE NOT  
REQUIRED TO  
SET YOURSELF  
ON FIRE TO KEEP  
OTHER PEOPLE  
WARM.**

An empty tank  
will take you exactly  
**NOWHERE.**  
Take time to refuel.

IT'S NOT SELFISH TO TAKE CARE  
OF YOURSELF.

A HEALTHIER, STRONGER, HAPPIER  
YOU IS BETTER ABLE TO CARE FOR  
THOSE DEPENDING ON YOU!

To be a good parent,  
you need to take  
care of yourself so that  
you can have the  
physical and *emotional*  
*energy* to take  
care of your family.

✧

MICHELLE OBAMA

You owe  
yourself the  
love that you  
so freely give  
others



"ALMOST EVERYTHING WILL WORK  
AGAIN IF YOU *unplug* IT  
FOR A FEW MINUTES, INCLUDING YOU."

— ANNE LAMOTT

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# Resources: [spinabifidaassociation.org/covid19/](https://spinabifidaassociation.org/covid19/)

- **Websites:**

- **Resources for coping with anxiety related to COVID-19:**  
[Virusanxiety.com](https://Virusanxiety.com)

- **The National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN) COVID-19 family resources:** <https://www.nctsn.org/what-is-child-trauma/trauma-types/disasters/pandemic-resources>

- **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) COVID-19 resources for stress and coping:**  
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/managing-stress-anxiety.html>

# Resources: [spinabifidaassociation.org/covid19/](https://spinabifidaassociation.org/covid19/)

- **Apps:**
  - **Breathe2Relax**
  - **Calm**
  - **Headspace**
  - **Woebot**
  - **Motivation**
- **Worksheets and handouts**

**THANK YOU!**

**Additional Resources Available at**

**[spinabifidaassociation.org/covid19](https://spinabifidaassociation.org/covid19)**

