little mended hearts®

TO PARENTS FROM PARENTS

CARING FOR YOURSELF

If you have a child who was born with a heart condition, you may think that taking care of your child is all that matters. However, you must also take care of yourself so you can effectively care for your child. You will need to learn many new things about caring for your child and make important choices about your child's care. It's hard to do this well if you're too tired, physically unwell, overwhelmed, or have high levels of stress or anxiety. That's why it's vital for you to learn to take care of yourself too.

ASK FOR AND ACCEPT HELP

Asking for and accepting help can be difficult, but often family and friends *want* to help and support you during stressful times, so let them do so. Make a list of things that need to be done and be realistic about what you have the time and energy to do yourself. Keep the list handy, and next time a friend or family member asks how they can help, pick something from it.

GIVE YOURSELF A BREAK

You don't need to have all the answers or be with your child every second of every day. You need to take breaks! It can be scary to leave your child's side, particularly after surgery or a hospital stay, but you need to get away— even for just a few minutes. Schedule time away from the responsibilities of parenting and caregiving. Make plans for someone you trust to spend time with your child while you read a book, take a walk, enjoy a healthy meal, nap...anything that is truly relaxing.

TAKE CARE OF YOUR OWN HEALTH

When you are caring for a child with a heart condition, it's easy to overlook or ignore your own health. But if you aren't healthy, it will be more difficult to take care of your child. Make the time to see your doctor or health care provider regularly. Eat healthy meals, get enough sleep, get some physical activity, and find tools to reduce stress. If you have recently given birth, it is important to follow your doctor's recommendations and to keep follow-up appointments.

CONNECT WITH OTHERS

Being the caregiver of a child with medical needs can make you feel isolated and alone. It is important to reach out and connect with others who can help you feel supported. Ask your health care provider or social worker to refer you to community support groups or put you in touch with another parent. Use the internet to keep family and friends updated on your child's condition, care plan, and your needs. Learn about community support services in your area such as social workers, counseling services, pastoral care and other ways to get support.

TAKE YOUR FAMILY BACK

Don't let your child's diagnosis define your family. Recognize that every member of the family may be under increased stress, and this can make it more difficult for you to support each other. This is especially true for siblings who may have fears and anxiety that they are not voicing. It is important for your family to spend time together that is not focused on your child's diagnosis. Plan family game nights, share special meals or attend a social event as a family.

If you feel frustrated, overwhelmed or are unable to manage, call your child's doctor so he or she can help you find support. Don't be afraid to get help if you need it. If you need more information on caring for yourself and your child, visit ***www.mendedlittlehearts.org****.*

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