

Replenish Thyself

Steering Clear of Parent Burnout

By Ann Douglas

You wouldn't dream of heading out on a lengthy road trip with your car's gas tank running on empty. Odds are you'd run out of fuel long before you ever reached your destination. And yet we parents are often guilty of allowing our parenting reserves to run on empty for far too long—something that puts us at risk of parent burnout.

If you are no longer getting a lot of enjoyment out of parenting or are experiencing persistent feelings of resentment towards your children, you may be experiencing parent burnout. Other symptoms of parent burnout include irritability, anger, frustration, sadness, emptiness, and exhaustion. There can be physical symptoms, too, including difficulty sleeping, difficulty concentrating, headaches, backaches, gastrointestinal problems, lethargy, cardiovascular problems, and skin conditions.

If you're battling parent burnout, how do you turn the situation around? By taking better care of yourself, that's how. Here are a few suggestions.

- Set the parenting bar high, but not too high, for yourself. Parents with perfectionistic tendencies are at higher risk for burnout. There's no such thing as perfection when it comes to the art and science of childrearing, so cut yourself some slack and you'll find parenting a whole lot more enjoyable, and you'll be less likely to burn out.
- Don't try to do it all. Unless you want to start looking and sounding like Bree on *Desperate Housewives*, let some of the non-essentials go. Who says you have to keep your house immaculate, serve up gourmet dinners, and otherwise shoot for perfection in every area of your life? None of us can do it all. Most of us find that we have to let some things go in order to have the time and energy to invest in parenting. The moral of the story? Don't feel like a failure just because you've taken in a few dust bunnies as tenants.
- Don't let multitasking make you crazy. While time management gurus like to talk up the benefits of doing five things at once, living life at hyperspeed can leave you feeling five times as stressed at the end of the day—and only one-fifth as happy. Besides, some tasks, like reading a bedtime story to a preschooler or breastfeeding a baby, can't be done in the fast-lane, even if you wanted to. Don't be afraid to slow your life down to a saner pace.
- Put your parenting support team in place. Connect with other moms and dads who can offer you support and encouragement as you tackle the mother—and father—of all challenges: raising kids.
- Finally, give up on that crazy notion that says that "good parents" have to be on duty 24/7. Sometimes taking a brief timeout from the mommy or daddy trenches is the greatest gift you can give to your kids. If taking that break leaves you feel relaxed and renewed and ready to give parenting your all again, don't you owe it to your family to take that break?