

## It's National Stress Awareness Day!

Here, Principal Social worker Heather Liveston, shares her top tips for combating stress through self-care.

With today, 6th November, being National Stress Awareness Day, I am wondering how you are managing the stresses associated with adopting and I would like to share with you my top tips for combating stress using self-care. No matter where you are in your adoption journey, at Adopters for Adoption we recognise that it can be tough, and caring for children who have experienced trauma through abuse and/or neglect can be stressful, challenging and leave you with very little time and energy for yourself or others.

Making sure that you practice self-care is an essential way of reducing the impact of stress, which will in turn increase your availability for your child and the energy you bring to parenting. Think of what cabin crew say as your plane is taking off - "please put on your own oxygen mask before helping others" - this is also true in adoptive parenting, and in parenting generally. If you are experiencing high levels of stress, then it will be harder for you to care for your child. But if you are finding ways to self-care you will not only have more of yourself to offer but you will also be showing your child the importance of caring for themselves and how to do that.

So, what is self-care? When I first heard the words "self-care" and thought to myself "I should be doing that" (whilst eating a bar of chocolate and sitting on the sofa watching reality TV!) I believed that it was all about eating healthily and going to the gym, or perhaps taking up yoga. And without a doubt, eating well and being active are important. However, self-care is so much more than that.



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- Heather Liveston

I attended a conference earlier this year on self-care and secondary trauma delivered by Dr Karen Treisman, Clinical Psychologist, ([www.safehandsthinkingminds.co.uk](http://www.safehandsthinkingminds.co.uk)) who spoke of the many ways people can self-care and the need to take care of ourselves when caring for children with trauma.

It's really important that you make time to properly reflect on how you are feeling and what's happening in your life, and also for "life admin" (household tasks, paying the bills etc.). Sleeping well is important, as is having screen-free time. But, and this is especially true if you do start to feel an unhealthy level of stress, it's essential that you also find ways to switch off and re-charge, to totally forget about where you are in your assessment, or that difficult meeting you had with your child's school, and do something that takes all your attention... where for a few hours or even a few minutes you are thinking of something different, so that when you come back to whatever it is that is causing you stress you are refreshed, and can bring some perspective.

This will be different for each one of you. The practice of mindfulness, where you focus on something completely, for example, the sound of the rain, can be a really good way of diverting you from feelings of stress. Breathing more deeply is always good; one of the first things that happens when people are stressed is that their breathing becomes shallower (think of that oxygen mask again.....). But it could equally be meeting your friend for a cup of coffee and having a good laugh, going to see your favourite football team play, being creative, or escaping for ten minutes in a good book. For me it's wrestling (watching it, not doing it!). Even just doing something that you have never done before that challenges you in a different way. I did a Segway experience recently and I can honestly say that when I was on that Segway all life's stresses and strains were banished whilst I tried my best to stay upright!

Given that Christmas, which can be very stressful for adopters, is round the corner,

you might want to visit Hannah Meadow's page on making yourself a [self-care advent wreath](#). This activity could be altered to fit in with other festivals or stressful times, for example, the start of the school year and is something you can also do with your children to teach them self-care. Hannah Meadows is an adopter who has set up an online self-care community for adopters. If you are adopting as a couple, talk to each other about how you can give each other the space to self-care, or if you are a single adopter, is there someone in your support network who can enable you to have some time for yourself? The most important thing if you are feeling overwhelmed with stress is to talk about how you are feeling, whether this be with your partner, family, friends, other adopters, your GP or your social worker.

