

# ParentingWell® Workbook

## Plain-language version



# Skills, Tools, and Resources for ParentingWell

You may not need any new skills or tools to use a ParentingWell approach. If you are a doctor or a peer specialist, you have received training. This training can help you use a ParentingWell approach. You have learned about strategies for talking with a “client” to help them meet their need. You can use the same skills for parents.

If you don't have any training, practice with your peers or your supervisor. There are resources to help you. The ParentingWell practice profile is one resource. You can also use the coaching materials.

## Provide Information

Parents can benefit from having different types of information.

They may want information about:

- their mental illness
- relationships between parents and children
- how parenting and family life help you recover
- resources in the community
- how to get services

When a parent is making a decision, you might help them understand the impact of the choice. You may give information about what might happen. You may share what other people might think. This can help the parent make informed choices about their life.

## Example

“Just because you have a mental illness doesn't mean your child will have one also. There are things you can do to help your child grow up well. We can talk about these things.”

## How to Ask the Parent Questions

How you ask a question is just as important as what you ask. Sounding curious can help you learn more about the situation. Sounding direct and straightforward might help when a problem is serious. Your question can help you learn more about the parent. You can learn why a parent wants to change. You can learn what barriers are in the way of reaching a goal.

### Example

“Think about what will happen if you miss your treatment appointment. How important is your mental health in your relationship with your children? Are there ways that not taking care of yourself might affect them? What is keeping you from going to your appointment? What would help you get there?”

## How to Help the Parent Reflect

Parents reflect when they look back on their experiences, thoughts, or feelings. You can help parents reflect. This can help the parent make a positive change. It can also help you understand what is really “going on” for the parent. It can help you understand what the parent is saying. It can help you understand what else is happening in their life.

Some parents overthink. They may get stuck thinking too much. It may help to set a limit on thinking too much about something. Distractions or taking action might help stop overthinking.

### Example

“You’d like to have more positive phone conversations with your children. What happens in these calls that you would like to change? What makes you start crying? What would help you with that?”

## Reframe

When someone changes how people view a situation they reframe the situation. You need to change how the parent and yourself are viewing the situation. This

does not mean to avoid or ignore a situation. Even if a parent is not doing well or things are going poorly, don't avoid or ignore it.

Instead, reframe. This lets the parent see the same situation in a different way. It can help them move forward. Do not get stuck in the past.

### Example

“You think you're a failure because you gave up your children for adoption. I think that took a lot of strength. You looked out for their needs. This is a sign of good mothering.”

## Change Perspectives

When we imagine we are someone else we take a new perspective. Changing our perspective to imagine we are someone else can be hard to do, especially if you are very different from the other person. When you “walk in another person's shoes” you are taking a new perspective. For a parent, you might imagine the experiences of others. For example, imagine you are a child, a partner, a grandparent, or a child welfare worker. Imagining the other person's perspective can help a parent to understand other people's experiences.

### Example

“I know there are many days when you are depressed and crying. What might your 8- year-old think about that?”

Many children think that if their parent is upset, it's their fault. They think they can fix things for you.

It might be easier for your child to go to school in the morning if you explained to her that you are feeling 'down.'

Explain that it's not something she can fix. You can share that you have a therapist who is helping you take care of things and feel better.”

## Role Model and Rehearse

People often learn best by watching someone else. Then they try it themselves.



You can be a role model for the parent. You can help practice things that might be difficult for the parent.

For example, parents with mental illness may struggle to advocate with teachers or school counselors. They want to get their children the educational services they need. But advocacy can be difficult.

You can role model advocacy skills.

For example, you can have a parent sit next to you while you make a phone call to the school. You could join a team meeting together. You can practice the situation. You can practice specific skills. For example, the skill of how to ask for help without getting angry or upset.

### **Example**

“Ok, let’s try this out. First, you be the teacher and I’ll be you, asking for help with your child’s homework. Then, I’ll be the teacher and you ask me for help.

I know you feel the teacher blamed you in the past for not helping your son with his math.

Let’s see if we can come up with what to say and do. Let’s practice so you don’t start the conversation feeling angry or ashamed. Let’s practice so you can get to your goal.”

## **See Patterns, Change Habits, and Build Skills**

Everyone gets stuck repeating thoughts, feelings, or behaviors. Even when we want to change, we can get stuck. Parents may find habits or triggers they want to change.

You can find tips to change habits on the Internet. One strategy is to identify the cycle that is repeating itself. You can try a different response. You can see if the result is different.

Parents may need help with these skills. They may need help to share about their experience. They also may need help learning to listen. This can help them care for others better.

Changing habits and building new skills requires practice, practice, practice.

### Example

“I always scream at my kids on the phone when they don’t want to talk to me. I get mad when they call their foster mother ‘mom.’ She is not their mother. And then I start yelling. And they hang up....”

You can help the parent look at the situation. Brainstorm together another way to respond. Practice together to reach their goal.

The parent can try the new skill out in the “real world.” They can come back to you and see how it went. They can ask for feedback. Keep practicing together.

## Problem-solve and Set Goals

Parents may need help figuring out what needs to change and what it will take. You can help them identify what they will need to make the change. This can include motivation, time, and energy.

You can also help find barriers to the change. Together, you can help the parent try to solve the problem. You can work together to imagine what will happen if they make the change.

It can be hard for parents with mental illness to balance self-care and taking care of others. Taking care of yourself might seem like the opposite of what a good parent is. Don’t children always come first if you are a “good” parent? But actually, taking care of yourself can help you be a better parent.

Ask the parent to think how taking care of themselves can help them meet their parenting goals.

Identify a solution. Build on the parent’s strengths. Get to a reasonable goal.

The key is to make an opportunity so that the parent can be successful. Success is not the same for everyone. Success is based on the individual parent.

Track the parents progress along the way. Set a time to see how they are doing. Make a new plan, if needed. Remember, change happens in baby steps.

## Example

“My problem is that I get really stressed out fixing supper. The kids are supposed to be doing their homework. Not watching TV. I have to keep yelling at them and they won’t settle down. And then I have to have a glass of wine or two to calm myself down. That becomes three or four glasses until dinner is ready. Sometimes I just give up on dinner and give them bowls of cereal...and I keep drinking. Then they have to put themselves to bed....”

The specialist can help the parent imagine how they would like things to go.

- Identify barriers and supports
- List steps they can take to meet their goal
- Check in on their progress
- Provide feedback

# Reflect On Your Own Lived Experience

## *Steps you can take*

### **1. Think about your parents.**

Even if you are not a parent yourself, you have parents. Think about them and yourself.

- On a scale from 1 to 10, how important is being a parent to you?
- How important were or are your parents in your life?
- If you are a parent—where do you turn for help when you are feeling tired or overwhelmed?
- If you are not a parent, think about your own childhood. Were there others, besides your parents, who helped you out?
- All parents need partners. Partners are other people who provide care for the child. They may help babysit or provide day care. They can help plan activities for the child. They may help the child with their emotions and to feel safe. They may help your child explore their faith.
  - Who were your parents' partners? In your family? In your community?
  - Who are yours?

### **2. Think about your childhood.**

It is easy to think about what our parents did wrong. This might even be expected.

For example, when we talk with friends, family members, or with service providers. It can be easy to list off where our parents have let us down.



Many adults who become parents want to do better. They say they will “never do to my children what my parents did to me.”

It can be harder to find the ways our parents did right by us. Ways they took good care of us and were supportive.

It is very important to look for what your parents have done well. Look for their strengths. These strengths, along with the negative, can help make the whole picture. It can help you better understand yourself, yourself as a parent, and the parents you work with.

### **3. Consider your own parenting style.**

- How would you describe yourself?
- Are you strict or easygoing?
- Are you more of a “friend” to your children or the “boss” of the family?

It is easy to think of ourselves as one extreme. Either positive or negative. Think about all the space in between. Keep an open mind about different parenting styles. Remember there are not many things that are completely right or wrong.

### **4. Reflect on your own experience of health and wellness.**

You may or may not be a person with a mental illness. But everyone has their ups and downs. We all experience being calm and at peace sometimes and other times being stressed.

For everyone it is helpful to know what makes you feel relaxed and happier and what makes you feel stressed or bad.

- Make simple notes for one week.
  - Pay attention when you feel depressed or anxious.
  - Pay attention when you feel happy, relaxed, or confident.
- Select one example of a time when you felt great. Select one example of a time when you felt not so great.

- What happened in both examples? Where were you? What were you doing? What were you feeling? Who were you with?
- For when you were feeling good—what was it that felt good?
- When you were feeling bad, what were the reasons why you were feeling bad? What helped you feel better afterwards?
- From thinking about these examples, what did you learn? How can what you learned help you in the future?
- Try out this strategy a few times this week. Was it helpful? How might you change the strategy in the future to feel better?



## Engage:

*Think about the parent's experience*

Think about the parent's experience in your work. Think about everything. From the first phone call to make an appointment to the time when they walk in the door.

Pretend you are a parent calling for an appointment.

Listen to how phone calls happen. Is it easy to find an appointment time? Is it easy for people who have busy schedules to find a time to meet?

Look at the waiting room. Is there somewhere for children to play?

If you meet with a parent at their home, think about what it might be like. Can you change what you say if there are children who can hear you? If the television is on, will that distract you?

How would you respond? Are you ready to answer a child's questions about who you are? Are you ready to talk about what you will be doing with their parent? If the home is messy, can you still pay attention to the conversation?

You may see the parent and child interact. If the interaction is negative, do you know how you will react? What will you say? How will you role model a better approach? Are you ready to point out the parent's strengths?

Think about this beforehand. That will help you be more respectful.



# Engage:

## *Challenge your assumptions*

Assumptions are things that we believe are true even without proof.

### Try this quiz:

1. Parenting is an important aspect of life for adults with mental illness.  
 True  False
2. Adults with mental illness are as likely as other adults to have children.  
 True  False
3. Their children will definitely have problems.  
 True  False
4. A parent's mental illness just by itself does not increase the chance of child abuse.  
 True  False
5. Parenting may be challenging, but children can provide meaning and hope for parents.  
 True  False

**See below for answers.**

## The answers:

1. **True.** Parenting is important for many people. Parenting is important just like housing and employment. Most people want to be good parents.
2. **True.** Adults with and without mental illness can be parents. They are just as likely to be parents. This is true for men and women.
3. **False.** Their children may not have problems. There is no direct link. Yes, some illnesses can be passed on from parent to child. However, children also have resources that help them thrive. At different ages, children can be more affected. How long a child is around a parent with an illness can also impact them. Supports, education about mental health, and help with coping strategies are good for children.
4. **True.** Parents with mental illness are not necessarily abusive. Mental illness does not directly cause abuse. When parents have lots of challenges, this can increase abuse or neglect. For example, poverty, unemployment, and mental health conditions. All parents are helped by supports to overcome challenges.
5. **True.** Yes, it can be challenging to be a parent. This is true for all parents. Many parents have life goals just like everybody else. For example, these goals can be parenthood or family life. Children can motivate parents and make them hopeful.

## Why are these answers important?

- All parents benefit from supports. With the right supports, both parents and children improve.
- Working with parents with mental illness can prevent problems for children.
- Parents should be supported when they ask for help. Parents should not be afraid that the people who help will think badly of them. They should not be afraid that they will lose their children because they ask for help.



## **Challenge your assumptions:**

It is important to think about your thoughts about parenting and mental health. You have a unique background and history. Your experiences impact how you see the world. Your family, friends, and co-workers all impact how you see the world. Media can impact how we think about parents and mental illness.

It can be hard to understand our view of the world. Think about why you feel how you do. Think about where you got the ideas you have. This can be hard and painful but it is important.

For example, you may have a parent with a mental illness. It can be hard to think about your experience when you were a kid. You may have a mental illness or issue with addiction. You may need support to understand your own experiences. It can be helpful to connect with a family member or friend who has a similar experience. You can also connect online or with a Facebook group.



# Engage:

*Change hurtful words into feelings*

Our world has a lot of violence and abuse. Many parents we work with have experienced or seen violence and abuse. Without thinking, many people use words that can be harmful to parents. Parents may even use these words themselves.

For example, there are a lot of things we say in everyday words that can be violent. There are a few examples below. Make your own list of common phrases that may be violent. Think of another way to say that.

You may want to share different ways to say things, especially if parents are talking to children.

## Examples:

“I could kill you.”

This could mean,  
“I am really angry with you.”

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“I felt like strangling him.”

This could mean,  
“I was really frustrated by his behavior.”

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# Explore:

## *Topics to think about*

Issues may come up as you work with parents to think about parenting and family. Some professionals who are not parents themselves think they will do a bad job working with parents. However, most people have parents or people who acted as parents when they grew up. Everyone has some experiences with family.

It is important to think about your past and how it impacts the work you do. You can use your past experiences in your work. You can get help thinking about these experiences from a peer, supervisor, or counselor.

## **Think about your background.**

What is your family background? What is your race? What is your ethnicity? Are your parents from another country? Are you from another country?

Even if you and your parents were born in this country, we all have traditions that are passed down. And different regions of the United States have customs and traditions. For example: there are differences between the North and South. Or the East Coast and the West Coast.

What are your family's expectations regarding family life? Do you spend holidays with your parents? What would happen if you didn't? Do you serve traditional foods on a family occasion? Think about the ways your family background has an impact on you. How does it have an impact on your family life or what you expect from other people?

## **How do you define yourself?**

The way you see yourself impacts how you behave, how you treat others, or how others treat you. The way you see yourself may shape what is important to you.

List the five identities most important to you. For example, daughter, social worker, significant other, runner....

Would other people describe you in the same way?

What do they see when they look at you? There may be things they can't see that really matter to you.

Think about how you see the parents you work with. Think about how they see themselves.

## **Consider your 24-hour day.**

Daily life can be complicated. To better understand a parent's situation, think about what 24 hours looks like for them. Their mental health, family experiences, and children all interact. Think about how they interact.

One strategy is to have a conversation with parents. Ask them to describe a typical day for them.

Practice this strategy. Think about your own typical day. Take 10 minutes. Write down all the things you do. From the time you wake up until you go to bed. What are you supposed to do? If you are a parent of a young child, you may have to wake up at night too.

Think about how complicated your typical day is. Think about how you plan if something goes wrong. Think about the skills you use to make sure everything gets done.

Use this strategy with parents. Learn about their life and challenges. Identify strengths also.



## Explore:

### *Create a positive view of yourself*

For people with mental illness, being seen as a parent can be a good thing. Unlike being called a patient, which can be a bad thing. A parent can be a good part of who someone is.

When parents with mental illness get treatment, people don't see them as parents. They may only see them as patients.

Think about questions you might ask a parent. Ask yourself the same questions to get ready. Below are some examples. Use them to guide the conversation. Help the parent figure out what is important. Help them create a positive view of themselves. Create hope.

Try it yourself. Add other questions you think might be helpful. When you think negative thoughts about yourself, try instead to think a positive thought from this list. Add more positive statements.

- How would you describe yourself?
- What do you like about yourself?
- Name three things you do well.
- What kind of food do you like? Music? Television shows?
- Other?





# Explore:

## *Daily activity log*

Keep track of the things you do in a typical day or for several days. Include eating, napping, and sleeping.

Think about what you do.

Are there activities that take up most of your time?

Do you have time to do the things you want to do?

Are there times that are more stressful? Times that are more relaxing?

Are you getting enough sleep?

Think about what is important. What would you add to your day? What would you take away?

12:00 Midnight	12:00 Noon
1:00 AM	1:00 PM
2:00 AM	2:00 PM
3:00 AM	3:00 PM

4:00 AM	4:00 PM
5:00 AM	5:00 PM
6:00 AM	6:00 PM
7:00 AM	7:00 PM
8:00 AM	8:00 PM
9:00 AM	9:00 PM
10:00 AM	10:00 PM
11:00 AM	11:00 PM



# Explore:

## *Focus on positives*

It can be hard to think of the positives when you are depressed or feel like nothing is going right. Try keeping a journal of positives and strengths for one week. Remind yourself that sometimes things go well. There are many ways you are capable.

These don't have to be big events or super special talents. For example, a nice conversation with your child is a positive event. Being able to organize to get dinner ready is a strength.

Identify three things each day for one week. See what you notice.

Day	Positives and Strengths
<b>Example: any day</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Got to an appointment on time.</li> <li>2. Fixed my daughter a good breakfast.</li> <li>3. I have a good sense of humor.</li> </ol>
<b>Sunday</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.</li> <li>2.</li> <li>3.</li> </ol>
<b>Monday</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.</li> <li>2.</li> <li>3.</li> </ol>
<b>Tuesday</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.</li> <li>2.</li> <li>3.</li> </ol>

<b>Wednesday</b>	1. 2. 3.
<b>Thursday</b>	1. 2. 3.
<b>Friday</b>	1. 2. 3.
<b>Saturday</b>	1. 2. 3.
<b>Sunday</b>	1. 2. 3.



# Explore:

## *Focus on strengths*

Below are “worst case” scenarios. This means the provider in the scenarios says all the “wrong” things. These are just examples to show how strengths can be difficult to find. Think of a more positive way of responding. Examples are below.

## Worst Case Scenarios:

### 1. Making Assumptions

Assumption means a thing that is believed to be true even without proof.

In this example, a provider is talking with a parent about their living situation.



*Practitioner says:* “So you’re homeless because you weren’t able to pay the rent?”

*Practitioner thinks:* You must be one of those homeless people who think the world owes them something.

*Practitioner feels:* I am so overwhelmed by your problems.

*Parent says:* “Yeah, the landlord kicked me out.”

*Practitioner thinks:* You won’t take responsibility for the situation. Like, it’s the landlord’s fault....



*Practitioner feels:* I can't think of any way to fix this for you.

*The real story:* The parent has a serious mental illness. It means she has to go to many treatment appointments. Because of that, she is not able to hold a job or pay the rent. However, she does a good job with her treatment. She manages her illness well.

## **2. Attributing Bad Intentions or Traits**

This means thinking someone is bad or lazy. Or that they are doing things for the wrong reason.

*Practitioner says:* "You need to get your kids to school on time."

*Practitioner thinks:* You're not going to "trick" me into taking care of things for you.

*Practitioner feels:* I have too much of my own work to do. I'll get in trouble if you don't do a better job of parenting.

*Parent says:* "I just can't get everything done by the time the bus comes."

*Practitioner thinks:* You're just too lazy to get out of bed in the morning.

*Practitioner feels:* There are plenty of days when I don't feel like getting out of bed in the morning.

*The real story:* The parent takes medication for her depression. Her medication makes her groggy in the morning. She could stop taking her medication to meet her children's needs. This would not be good for her recovery. She is in a bind.

## **3. Ignoring or Downplaying What the Other Person Says**

*Practitioner says:* "So, you really believe that using drugs today helps you cope with being sexually assaulted by your uncle 20 years ago?"

*Practitioner thinks:* You would come up with any excuse to use drugs or alcohol.

*Practitioner feels:* I could use something to help me cope!

*Parent says:* "When I'm by myself, it's all I think about—what it felt like, what he said to me."

*Practitioner thinks:* That was 20 years ago—how could that still be such a big deal to you now?

*Practitioner feels:* You want to hear about problems? You should know what I'm going through!

*The real story:* The parent “self-medicates” with drugs and alcohol. Self-medicating is when you do something on your own to make the pain better. For her, she uses drugs and alcohol to decrease the pain she feels from her sexual assault. This is not a healthy strategy. However, no one or nothing else can comfort her. This is what she has available. Using this strategy, she has kept herself alive for 20 years.

#### **4. Judging the Other Person**

*Practitioner says:* “You say your boyfriend takes your food stamps and sells them to buy drugs....”

*Practitioner thinks:* You must think I'm stupid if you think I believe that!

*Practitioner feels:* This parent doesn't appreciate the work I do.

*Parent says:* “I give them to him so he'll let me use the car.”

*Practitioner thinks:* Well, that's really stupid, to give up food in exchange for driving the car.

*Practitioner feels:* Why do these parents keep making bad decisions? It's so frustrating.

*The real story:* The parent needs her boyfriend's car to visit her children in foster care. She understands that she needs to show up for her children. They need her to keep showing up like she promises.

## Strategies to Find Strengths:

### 1. Listen to and support what the other person tells you

Example: “What happened to you was wrong and painful. You were very brave to ‘hang in’ there.”

### 2. Want to know more

Example: “What did you do then to solve the problem?... That was pretty resourceful of you!”

### 3. Get specific

Example: “Well, you say you’re not smart enough to get your GED. What makes you feel that you’re not smart?... But in a different situation, you do very well!”

### 4. Encourage the other person to communicate in any way possible

Example: “Look, I know it’s hard for you to talk about this. Maybe you could take this little notebook. Write down things you feel good about as you notice them during the day.”

Here is a list of things you may need to do as a parent. Circle the answer that is true for you.

ParentingWell® Strengths & Goals					
	This is a strength of mine.	I do this okay.	I'd like to do this better.	Does not apply.	Check items to work on.
1. Complete everyday household tasks	Strength	Okay	Better	DNA	
2. Plan and make healthy meals	Strength	Okay	Better	DNA	
3. Understand my feelings and actions	Strength	Okay	Better	DNA	
4. Take care of my family's money	Strength	Okay	Better	DNA	
5. Set limits with my child	Strength	Okay	Better	DNA	
6. Have positive visits with my child	Strength	Okay	Better	DNA	
7. Have a nice routine with my child	Strength	Okay	Better	DNA	
8. Find fun things to do with my child	Strength	Okay	Better	DNA	
9. Get childcare for my child	Strength	Okay	Better	DNA	
10. Balance work or school, and parenting	Strength	Okay	Better	DNA	
11. Know what to do when my child has problems	Strength	Okay	Better	DNA	
12. Point out my child's strengths	Strength	Okay	Better	DNA	
13. Have positive "family time"	Strength	Okay	Better	DNA	
14. Know my legal options as a parent	Strength	Okay	Better	DNA	
15. Get help for myself, if I need it	Strength	Okay	Better	DNA	
16. Talk with my child about my situation or worries	Strength	Okay	Better	DNA	
17. Keep in touch with my child who is not living with me	Strength	Okay	Better	DNA	
18. Live a drug-free lifestyle	Strength	Okay	Better	DNA	
19. Communicate well with my child	Strength	Okay	Better	DNA	
20. Have good relationships with my child's caregivers/helpers	Strength	Okay	Better	DNA	
21. Express anger without hurting anyone	Strength	Okay	Better	DNA	
22. Keep my child and myself safe	Strength	Okay	Better	DNA	
23. Make time to take care of myself	Strength	Okay	Better	DNA	
24. Manage stress and worries in healthy ways	Strength	Okay	Better	DNA	
25. Cope with bad things that have happened to me in my life	Strength	Okay	Better	DNA	
26. Get special services and supports for my child	Strength	Okay	Better	DNA	
27. Other:	Strength	Okay	Better	DNA	

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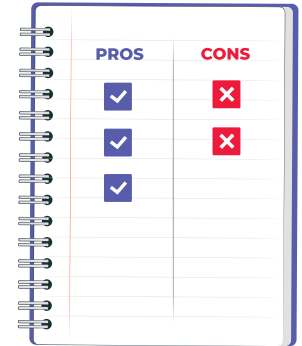


# Plan:

## *Help parents think about their options*

Support in making decisions can help parents with mental illness. It is important to have support. Support can look like figuring out what the parent's options are and thinking about what option they should choose.

You can share information about the options the parent doesn't think of. For example, community or government resources that the parent has a right to get.



One strategy to help decide about options is to make a list of them. Write down the good things that might happen. Write down the bad things that might happen. This is called a pros and cons list.

Help the parent through the process. Be clear and direct. "If you choose this, then this will happen." "If you choose that, then you might miss out on this." With this strategy you can help the parent think about their options and make a choice.

Your job is to help parents see choices they might not think of.

For example, think about a mother who just arrived at a shelter. She may think her only option is to go back to her partner who abuses her. You could help her think about what her goals are. Think of what options can help achieve the goal. It can help to have good information and resources to share.

A parent might have things that are important to them that aren't what you would think. It may be hard to accept the choice they make. You shouldn't tell a parent what to do. But you can offer some feedback on what might happen. Don't judge them. This is not an easy task. It can be hard to not use your own opinions.

Be respectful in how you respond to parents. Not "I told you so," but "What can we do together now to make this better?" But don't stand by when people are in danger. If people are in danger, you can share clearly what will happen because of the choice. For example, if you have to call child welfare or the police.



Encourage parents to get extra help if they need it. For example, get child mental health support. If it is needed to get child welfare involved, act as a supporter for the parent to get help.

The important thing is to create chances for success. Success may not mean the same thing to everyone. It may be something very big. It may be something that other people think is small but is big to the parent. For example, make and go to a dentist. This may seem like a small success. But it may feel huge to the mother who hasn't had the time to take care of herself.

Other examples, like finding housing or ending a bad relationship, can be seen as huge by others. Set goals along the way. Mark your progress. Set up a time to consider making a new plan if it's needed. Each success, small or large, is a great thing. It should be celebrated. It is a step towards recovery.



# Plan:

## *Back-up childcare*

This activity helps you create a plan for childcare if you are unable to care for your children for any reason. Work on this plan when you can take time to think it through. Think about what strategies will best meet your and your family's needs. Create a plan during a time of calm, not during a time of crisis. This will go a long way to help you be confident and prepared. This will help when you need help with childcare all of a sudden.

It may take time to make the plan. It will be worth it. The plan will help during a difficult time. It is important to make this a real plan of action. Involve others in making the plan. See if they can be counted on to help. Find out where they can be reached at all times.

After you make the plan, talk about it with your children if they are old enough. Talk about it with your partner and other family members. When everyone knows the plan, they can use it when it is needed. Put a copy where it is easy to find. Make sure it is updated every few months.

This back-up plan is for (children names and dates of birth):

_____	_____
_____	_____

If my child needs to miss time at school or from other activities, please contact:

Name	Phone
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**Childcare provider/  
School:**

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**Childcare provider/  
School:**

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**After-school  
program/Activity:**

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**After-school  
program/Activity:**

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**Other:**

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**Other:**

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**Other:**

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**Continued on the next page**

For back-up childcare for a few hours, contact:

Name	Address	Phone
<hr/>		
<hr/>		
<hr/>		

For back-up childcare for overnight, contact:

Name	Address	Phone
<hr/>		
<hr/>		
<hr/>		

For long-term back-up childcare or time-off (like a weekend or week), contact:

Name	Address	Phone
<hr/>		
<hr/>		
<hr/>		



# Plan:

## *The importance of self-care*

Self-care is important. But it can be hard for many people to make it happen. You may need to work with a parent so they understand how important self-care is. They need to take care of themselves to take care of their children.

Parents may respond to a child's need first. This is a natural response. Parents with mental illness may also have guilt or shame. They may feel extra guilty when they take care of themselves. They may think they are ignoring their children's needs.

Over time, putting your kids' needs first all the time may make you run out of energy. It may be hard to cope with challenges during the day. We need to do self-care to make sure we have good energy.

Self-care can help us respond to life's challenges. It may help you feel better when you are hurt or feeling bad. Self-care is something you can do every day. It can help you deal with stress or crisis as it happens. People who take good care of themselves can cope better with the challenges. It is important to find what works best for you. Or for ParentingWell, it is important to find what works well for the parent you are working with.



# Plan:

## *Develop good self-care strategies*

It is really important as a parent to take care of yourself. You need to know yourself well to take care of yourself. It can be a part of your everyday routine. You need to know yourself to know when you are stressed. Over time you can add good self-care strategies to your daily life.

Parents work hard to find time to do something for themselves. It may not be the most important thing during a busy day. You may feel guilty. You may feel like a bad parent because you are taking care of yourself. Many parents feel this way.

Figure out what works best for you. Find ways to take care of yourself that don't hurt your children. This can help you be well.

A self-care strategy helps you feel better. What works for one person does not always work for another. Not all strategies for helping us feel better are healthy or safe. While everyone has bad habits, your goal may be to have more good self-care strategies.

Good self-care strategies add to your health. Some examples include:

- read for pleasure
- exercise
- listen to music
- dance
- play with a pet
- try a new recipe
- participate in a faith community

Doing self-care during your everyday life shows your children you take care of yourself. You can help your children do self-care too. Think about what good self-care strategies help you feel better. Think about what they make you feel.

Positive Self-Care Strategy	This Makes Me Feel

Keep this list where you can find it. Look at it everyday. Remind yourself to take a moment to yourself. Share it with friends and family. They can help you remember to take good care of yourself. If your children are old enough, help them make a self-care list of their own.



## Plan:

### *Create a self-care plan*

Take care of yourself so you can take better care of your children. Making time for yourself can be hard. But it is good for your wellness. You are a great role model for your children! Encourage them to learn what things help them to feel well.

List your positive care strategies.

Use the grid below to create a self-care plan. The plan will remind you of what strategies are useful. It will help you make them happen. Keep this plan where it is easy to find, especially when you are stressed. Share it with your family and friends. They can help you remember to take good care of yourself.



<b>Self-care strategy</b>	<b>How does this make me feel?</b>	<b>How often do I do this?</b>	<b>What keeps me from doing it more often?</b>	<b>How can I do this more often?</b>
<i>Example: exercise</i>	<i>More energy, good about my body, healthy</i>	<i>Once a week</i>	<i>No childcare</i>	<i>Leave the kids with their grandmother</i>



# Plan:

## *Deal with your stress*

Managing stress is important to avoid burn-out. When you work with parents and families it is very important to manage stress. You can search online to find examples of strategies for managing stress. Here are three examples you can try for yourself or with the parents you see.

### **Identify what is important**

Think about what is most important to you. Think about the change you want to make. For example, to find a new apartment or take a class on how to interview with people.

Think through the steps it will take. For example, check Craigslist, ask friends if they know of anything, etc.

Write down examples of action steps. Identify who might help you or what you need to take the next step. Make a reasonable deadline. Review your progress.

Change your plan as you go. Add new steps or change old steps or deadlines. Celebrate as you go and when you get to your goal.

### **Adjust your plan to achieve your goal**

If you feel anxiety or stress, that could be a sign you are not taking good care of yourself. These feelings can happen when you are not able to do what you want to do. They can also happen when you feel like you have failed at an important task. One reason this might happen is that we may set goals that are too hard to achieve.

One strategy to help with anxiety and stress is to change the tasks to make them easier to achieve. For example, a challenging goal could be getting a master's degree this year. You may need to change your timeframe. You may need to cut back on your work hours so you can achieve the goal. Instead of saying "I'm going to run a marathon at the end of one month," say "I'm going to run as far as I can, hopefully two miles, by the end of one month."

Remember, it's important to reach your own goals. This is just as important as helping the parents you work with to reach their goals.

**Make self-care an important part of your day**

Write a list of activities that help you feel better. Think about how they make you feel. Some examples are below. Add activities that help you relax.

Positive Self-Care Strategy	This Helps Me Feel
<i>do a crossword puzzle</i>	<i>relaxed, calm, smart</i>
<i>exercise</i>	<i>more energy, good about my body, healthy</i>
<i>participate in a religious activity</i>	<i>spiritual, involved in a community</i>



# Plan:

## *Mapping activity<sup>1</sup>*

What would you like the future to look like for you with your children?  
What does this picture look like?

### **Obstacles**

*What gets in the way?*

### **Supports**

*What helps you get there?*

### **Plan**

*What needs to happen next? Write some action steps!*

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<sup>1</sup> Based on W. C. Madsen & K. Gillespie, *Collaborative helping: A strengths framework for home-based services* (2014), NY: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.



# Access & Advocate:

## *Think about your own support network*

Supportive relationships can both give and take from both people. Sometimes, you may be the giver. Sometimes you may be the receiver of help or advice. Family or friends may want support from you. You may want support from them. They may expect you to help. They may expect something in return when they help you.

Think about a recent problem or need you faced. Some examples include: watching your dog while you are away on the weekend, driving you to a doctor's appointment, loaning you money to get a computer.

Different challenges need different solutions. Try responding to these:

- Make a list of the family members and friends you can count on if you need help.
- How and when can they help you?
  - Next to each name, note what and when you might ask for help.
  - Not everyone may be right for each situation.
- Which family members or friends might ask for something in return? What do you think you might do for them? Would you feel grateful for their help or feel guilty, as if you were a burden?
- Relationships are not just about helping each other. How do you maintain your relationships in other ways besides helping? What can you do to balance your relationships? Is a balance of give-and-take important?



# Access and Advocate:

## *Communicate with children of different ages*

Ways that you communicate with children can depend on their age. It is not always talking. Below are some suggestions for communicating. Check off your preference. Add others we haven't thought of. How does your child communicate with you?

0 – 2 years old	5 – 12 years old
<input type="checkbox"/> Show love and affection	<input type="checkbox"/> Be concrete
<input type="checkbox"/> Hold her	<input type="checkbox"/> Use her words
<input type="checkbox"/> Talk to him	<input type="checkbox"/> Get down to his level, like on the floor
<input type="checkbox"/> Gently touch your child	<input type="checkbox"/> Talk about feelings
<input type="checkbox"/> Rock your child	<input type="checkbox"/> Sing songs
<input type="checkbox"/> Cuddle your child	<input type="checkbox"/> Tell stories
<input type="checkbox"/> Sing to your child	<input type="checkbox"/> Read books
<input type="checkbox"/> Imitate sounds she makes	<input type="checkbox"/> Play games
<input type="checkbox"/> Be there when I can	<input type="checkbox"/> Go for rides in the car
<input type="checkbox"/> _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Eat meals together
<input type="checkbox"/> _____	<input type="checkbox"/> _____

**2 – 5 years old**

- Begin to label feelings
- Draw pictures
- Go for walks
- Be reassuring
- Sing songs
- Tell stories
- Explain things in simple words
- \_\_\_\_\_

**13 – 18 years old**

- Talk about feelings
- Discuss things honestly
- Keep the door to communication open
- Give things to read
- Text on a cell phone
- Be available
- Talk on her timetable, when she is ready
- Respect his growing independence
- \_\_\_\_\_

**Adult children**

- Treat her like an adult
- Discuss your situation openly, and work together to communicate with the next generation
- Ask and answer questions
- \_\_\_\_\_
- Talk about feelings
- Meet together with your doctor, therapist, or case manager
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_



# Access and Advocate:

## *Communicate about your mental illness*

Below is a list of pros and cons to communicating with your children and others about your mental illness. These are just a few. Some may describe how you feel and some may not. Check off the ones that apply to you. Add your own ideas.

Then, think about the questions below.

Pros	Cons
<input type="checkbox"/> I might feel less blamed.	<input type="checkbox"/> I might feel more shame or guilt.
<input type="checkbox"/> If people understand me better, they might have more compassion.	<input type="checkbox"/> Other people might show compassion without really understanding things. I don't want pity.
<input type="checkbox"/> It would give people the chance to help me.	<input type="checkbox"/> My children might feel upset or sad by knowing I have an illness.
<input type="checkbox"/> Providing accurate information breaks down stereotypes and negative attitudes about mental illness.	<input type="checkbox"/> Hiding my mental illness leaves me less vulnerable to stereotypes and stigma.
<input type="checkbox"/> I could make a plan for my children with family members for when I'm not doing well.	<input type="checkbox"/> People will be afraid of me, or for me, if they think I'm nuts.
<input type="checkbox"/> It would decrease my children's fear or guilt.	<input type="checkbox"/> My children might feel responsible.



Pros	Cons
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



# Access and Advocate:

## *Your network of family and friends*

Family and friends are really important. You have fun together and help each other out. Supportive relationships can be two-way, so that people both receive and give. People get help from each other, and they also give help to each other. Sometimes it might be just giving or receiving help or advice.

Family or friends may want support from you. You may want support from them. They may expect you to help. They may expect something in return when they help you.

Make a list of family and friends you can count on when you need help or when you just want to have fun.

**Continued on the next page**

<b>Family and friends: Name</b>	<b>Describe the relationship: Fun? Help? Depend on? Take care of?</b>	<b>Pros/Benefits/ How can they help?</b>	<b>Cons/Challenges/ What do they expect in return?</b>
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## Contact Us

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<https://www.cbhknowledge.center/parentingwell-resources>

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<https://heller.brandeis.edu/parents-with-disabilities/work/parenting-well.html>



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