

## Peaceful Parent, Happy Kids Online Course

### Week 8: Self-Care

#### Transcript

Hello, and welcome to Week 8 of the **Peaceful Parent, Happy Kids Online Course!** This is Dr. Laura Markham, and today we're talking about Self-Care.

You're listening to this course because you want to be the best parent you can be. You've invested a lot of time and energy into learning to be that parent over the past eight weeks – and for a long time before that – and yet I'm betting that even though you know a lot about how to be that parent, you can't always pull it off. That's not because there's anything wrong with you, and it's not because you're not trying hard enough; it's because this is a new way of being, you're changing your habits, there's not a lot of support, and life – with its many challenges – gets in the way.

During our 12 weeks together, one of the things that you're doing is changing your view of your child so that you can be more emotionally generous. However, we can only be emotionally generous to our child if we're emotionally generous to ourselves, so that we have something to give inside. If we're completely depleted, it's very hard to be emotionally generous with another person, and that's true for all of us.

We get over-scheduled, stressed out, and then meeting our own needs can seem impossible. Our kids can even begin to seem like a burden. That's when the joy of having children becomes somewhat elusive, and we find ourselves screaming inside, "This isn't what I signed up for!" But it doesn't have to be that way. It is possible to reduce the stress in our lives so that we can slow down and find more joy in parenting on a daily basis.

I know. It's hard to be joyful when you can't remember the last time you finished a sentence without being interrupted. But when we find ourselves resenting our children, it's usually a sign that we aren't taking care of ourselves, and whose responsibility is that?

Every one of us can get pushed to the limit and go over the edge. Since we're the grownups, it's our job to stay away from the edge. That ability to self-regulate is impossible if we don't notice our own needs and emotions. We aren't doing our children any favors if we don't care for ourselves at the same time that we're caring for our kids.

What if your child is in crisis? All the more reason to put on your own oxygen mask first – so you can think straight. I'm not talking about running off to Tahiti by yourself; I'm suggesting that taking care of your own needs and feelings, which includes your body, will allow you to feel

so much better about life and about your child, so that whatever challenge you're facing will be much easier to solve.

I know that self-care is often at the bottom of your list, or it even gets pushed off the list altogether, but that's not sustainable. Taking care of yourself is not a luxury. In fact, you owe it to your child. Your child's ability to regulate his or her emotions depends on how well you regulate yours when you interact with your child.

If you can stay centered and joyful, your child will respond by wanting to cooperate with you, and your child will also learn from you something about life and how to be a gracious human being, even in the face of life's constant imperfections, challenges and difficulties.

Do you need more motivation? You owe it to yourself. Life is too short to spend it feeling stressed and resentful. We never know how long we have to be alive. Unless you're very lucky, you've probably known someone who died without warning at a relatively young age.

Ultimately, you're the one responsible for how you spend the life you've been given. On your deathbed, there won't be anyone else to blame if you've been unhappy. The secret work of adulthood is that we're all still growing up, and parenting forces us to learn to parent ourselves as well as our child.

So that's the work for this week – parenting yourself, nurturing yourself. But I know that's hard. How can you nurture yourself when all the hours in the day are already accounted for? There are two keys. First, change what you do, and second, change your attitude.

Here's what I mean.

Changing what you do: Don't assume you necessarily need a big solution that changes everything in your life. Instead, nurture yourself in small ways throughout your day, including while you're nurturing your child, so you're not always at the end of the list. That's "Changing what you do," and we'll talk a lot about that.

The second key: Change your attitude. What you think, the lens through which you're seeing your life – and that's really about cultivating compassion—compassion for yourself, compassion for your child—and gratitude—gratitude for the good in every single day.

If you can cultivate compassion and gratitude on a daily basis, you'll be giving yourself much more support to be happy, which will allow you to take better care of yourself and to find more internal resources. In other words, you'll feel more supported—because you'll be giving yourself more support!

Somehow when we do that, we find that the universe shows up with more support for us, as well. In other words, what we are able to take in, inside ourselves, opens up the possibilities for what we're able to take in from outside ourselves.

I know it might seem impossible to find the time to care for yourself, to find any kind of inner peace and balance that would allow you to cultivate compassion and gratitude. I wish I could be your fairy godmother and wave a magic wand to help you find the balance you need in your life. The bad news is every magic wand we can access takes work – meaning, to create an exercise plan and really live it, takes an enormous amount of work. To build a meditation practice takes work. Simply retraining our minds to be less critical and more grateful and more compassionate – that takes work.

But that work, bringing compassion to our own imperfect selves, supporting ourselves, slowing down to just be present in this moment in our lives, that work is what transforms us and what allows us to transform our lives.

This week's audio and homework will focus on practical ways to de-stress and nurture yourself, so you can be happier and more peaceful inside, and so you can bring your best inner parent into your relationship with your child every single day.

What does self-care mean to you? Does it mean caring for yourself physically, maybe by getting a good night's sleep? Does it mean caring for yourself psychologically? For instance, by loving yourself, even when you do something you regret?

Maybe it means finding time to meditate so you can rewire your brain to be more mindful. Or maybe it means finding social connection or intellectual stimulation or childcare support so that you can have just a little time to yourself. Or maybe inspiration that keeps you on track as a parent or inspires you to be the best person you can be.

These are all examples of self-care, and you need to care for yourself on all of these different levels for you to stay happy and in balance. In each of these areas, there are things you can do to inspire yourself and care for yourself better.

But you can't change every area of your life at the same time. So this week, you're going to come up with a plan for self-care that prioritizes what you need most right now and also projects out the areas you want to work on next and what your plan might be in those areas.

First, though, we need to talk about our approach to self-care. Most of us think of self-care as something we can only do once we get our kids out of the way. That leaves us free to concentrate on ourselves, right? But that means that most of the time, we go through our days not taking care of ourselves.

We have a running list all the time, of course – finish these dishes, then get the three-year-old's teeth brushed, and *"I have to remember to find that permission slip and then get everyone's shoes on and... Oops! Looks like we need a diaper change!"* That's what your morning sounds like, right? Something like that. Just adjust it for the age of your children.

Notice you're not on the list. And that's the problem. We rush through our days, trying to tend to everybody's needs, and meanwhile, we're always saying to ourselves in the back of our mind, *"Sorry, you don't count."* And how could you possibly feel at the end of your day, if you feel like, sorry, you haven't counted at all, it's all been about sacrifice? It doesn't make you more patient with your child, and if your cup is empty, how can you possibly be emotionally generous to somebody else?

Willpower only takes you so far. I'm going to suggest that you have another job that needs to be on your list. I know, another job. But actually this one is about you. It's your responsibility to keep your own cup full, so that you can be the parent you want to be, so that you can be patient, so that you can be emotionally generous to your child. Otherwise, you can't handle the disasters of everyday life, or at least you can't handle them in a way that calms the storm; you'll end up escalating it.

Self-care is essential to remain patient with your child, and I'm going to submit to you that it's also essential to enjoy parenting. When we're depleted, we don't notice the joy and delight that is present – not always noticed, but always present – in every day with our children. Even the tough ones, the tough days and the tough kids—and that's what sweetens parenting. That's what makes all that sacrifice worth it.

If we don't take care of ourselves, we can't enjoy our children. I think enjoying our children may be the biggest secret there is to child development. When children feel that we delight in them, they flower, they flourish, they change – for the better – and they're able to grow into their best selves. Children love our joyful presence. They respond by becoming happier, more cooperative.

I'm going to ask you to add something else to your list, all the time – managing your own well-being. Managing your own well-being means that you monitor your moods and you notice your own cues, your physical cues, your emotional cues, and you honor your own needs along with honoring the needs of your children. When you notice that you're getting out of sorts, return yourself to a state of feeling good, a state of well-being, or at least a state of calm. I actually think that this is the number one responsibility of parenting – managing ourselves.

When you hear most parenting advice, it assumes that you're in a good place, you can handle that advice and implement it well to get results with your kid. But the truth is, all parenting advice should begin with the advice to you to regulate yourself, to get centered, because you

can't do anything until you're centered and feeling at least somewhat calm, and hopefully, emotionally generous.

You can't do that unless you're managing your own well-being, unless you actually put yourself back on the list so that you can take care of you and fill your own cup. There's no one else who is going to do it for you.

This is one of the secrets of being a parent – you're the parent. You're the one who is supposed to take care of everyone else *and* yourself. You have to learn how to be a parent, not only to your child, but to yourself.

It's never easy to balance all the needs in a family, but raising children and self-care don't have to be mutually exclusive. The solution is to tend to ourselves and our own needs throughout the day, just as we tend to our children. In other words, put yourself back on the list. I'm going to give you some specific things that I'd like to suggest you start doing during your day.

Now, it's very hard to change habits, and in our 12 weeks together, you're changing a lot of habits. You don't need to do everything at once, but I suggest one habit that will change your life – it's a self-care habit, and to me, it's the most basic self-care habit there is, right up there with getting a good night's sleep and eating nourishing food during the day.

Here's the habit. Ask yourself as often as possible, as you go through your day, "*What do I need right now to stay in balance?*" This is a great thing to ask yourself if you feel you're slipping out of balance, if you're starting to get irritated or resentful, but it's also great just to train yourself to do it as you go through your day.

Maybe you want to set a little alarm on your phone to go off every hour and when that alarm goes off, you ask yourself, "*What do I need right now to stay in balance?*" Maybe the answer will be really clear, "*Wow, I'm starving. I need to eat something.*" Or maybe you're doing great and what you need is just acknowledgment from yourself, "*Wow, I'm doing great right now. This is working, whatever I'm doing right now*" and maybe that thing you're doing is a job at work or maybe that thing you're doing is engaging with your child and building a tower.

Research shows that when we focus on the positive, we create more positives in our life. When your little alarm goes off, and you're doing well, really soak that in. Soak in the smell of your child's hair. Soak in how patient you just were when he was having a hard time with the blocks in the tower. Soak in what a great job you do at your workplace, especially given that you're balancing that with being a parent.

There are lots of different things we can give ourselves as we go through the day. We can give ourselves the positive acknowledgment that we all need from somewhere, and since we don't have a parent giving it to us every hour on the hour, we can do that for ourselves.

We can also take care of physical needs that are showing up that we might have been not noticing because we were too busy getting the kids in the car and shuttling them off to their music lessons. Whatever it is, if we train ourselves to ask, "*What do I need right now to stay in balance?*" that's the way to put ourselves back on the list.

This week's homework will guide you step by step through coming up with a self-care plan for you to implement. But if that's too overwhelming right now – if you're too busy stopping yelling and starting special time – no problem. This is the one thing to do as a takeaway, and then, put it on your calendar to come back in three months and listen to this audio again, and at that point, maybe you'll have a little more spaciousness in your life that you can take some of these other suggestions, both from the homework and also from our audio today.

But do this one thing, starting now: start setting your little alarm to go off every hour on the hour and even if half the time, you can't focus on what you need and you can't even ask yourself the question because you have a child who is having a tantrum or you really have to get the kids out of the house at this moment, that's okay. The other half of the time, just ask yourself, "*What do I need right now to stay in balance?*"

Now, let's talk about stress. You can't be a good mom or dad when you're stressed out, no matter how positive your intentions, because you're already overloaded, you're already running on empty, and you're already on the verge of fight, flight, or freeze. When your child exhibits childish behavior – which I guarantee will happen – you just fall apart at that point.

Now, it's hard to get away from stress in our modern life, but it's also true that to some degree, stress is how we react to our circumstances. There are things that virtually anyone in the world would find stressful, but there are other things that might stress one person out that, for another person, would just roll off their back.

Stress is partly what happens to us, but it's largely our reaction to what happens to us. Even if it is what happens to us, some of that we can manage by how much we take on in our lives. Each of us has a responsibility as a parent to manage our own stress. After all, do you want your kids to have the best of you or what's left of you?

I recommend a three-pronged approach for stress. One, pare down the stressors in your life. Two, keep your cup full so you have more internal resources to deal with whatever life throws at you.

Three, work on retraining your attitude, so you'll notice as you slip into stress mode and you can make the choice to shift your perceptions so that you don't get quite so stressed by circumstance.

Okay? Again, our three-pronged approach to stress: pare down the stressors in your life, keep your cup full so you have more internal resources, and retrain your attitude so you can reframe things when you start to get stressed out.

How can you pare down the stressors in your life? Well, you have to make hard choices. Much of the stress we feel comes from routinely over-scheduling. That's a choice, and it costs us.

Sometimes we over-schedule because we love running on adrenaline. It's exciting; we're all pumped up. But if you're anything like me, it feels exciting at the moment, but then you get worn out and run ragged and resentful. Even while the adrenaline feels good, if you're anything like me, you get depleted, and therefore, you end up being short with other people, especially your children.

Another reason that many of us over-schedule is perfectionism. We're just not doing enough unless we're run completely ragged. We can't say no when someone asks us to take on yet one more fundraising responsibility or one more responsibility at work. Even when we look at our own child, we project our own feeling of inadequacy. We think, oh, we have to get him music lessons, we have to get him chess lessons. We have to do this, that, and the other thing so that he'll be good enough. But our child is good enough right now, and so are we, and both of us might be better off if we weren't rushing around so much.

We end up overloading ourselves out of fear, whether it's a fear of saying no or a fear of missing out or a fear that our needs just don't matter as much – of course, we can give up a little bit more.

However it happens, if you find yourself rushing all the time and having to rush your kids and you find yourself resentful and not having time to take care of you, that means that you're overloaded; your schedule is overloaded.

I would say prioritize your children, prioritize your partnership if you have a partner, and then drop everything else you can. Your house can stay a mess a little longer. Serve scrambled eggs and carrots out of the bag for dinner again. You don't have to prove anything. You are more than enough exactly as you are and so are your children.

Remember how I said that in self-care, we had to look at things you can do and also ways you can change your approach or your attitude? Dropping things from your schedule, as we just discussed, that's something you can do. But here's something you can change in your attitude, and it's related. I'm going to ask you to give up your perfectionism. Sure, life is messy. You're not perfect. Neither am I, and neither is anybody else. Join the club.

You're more than enough exactly as you are. There are no perfect people, there are no perfect parents, and trying to be perfect is a huge source of stress. It tightens a vice around your heart. Loving yourself, really feeling your love for yourself, even though you aren't perfect, that may be the single most important thing you can do to de-stress. The most important thing for self-care is your own self-compassion. I talked about learning to parent ourselves. That includes being compassionate to ourselves.

I know you're not perfect. That's okay. Whatever mistakes you have made as a parent and as a person, it's time to forgive yourself. Beating yourself up does not help you do something different next time. Deciding to do something next time, being compassionate to yourself, supporting yourself to do something different next time, that's what changes things.

Right now, I would like you to give up being perfect and to love yourself anyway, just the way you are. You are more than enough just the way you are. More than enough. How did that feel when I said that? If it felt hard, then let's take this a step further – and even if it felt easy, let's take it a step further.

Just do this for me. Let's say it together – right now, aloud – *“I am more than enough. I am more than enough.”* How did that feel? If it gave you chills, that's great. Do it every single day. Do it several times a day. Look in the mirror while you do it to heighten the feeling. If you felt nothing, then you especially need to look in that mirror, and you need to say it more. If it felt really hard to say, like some part of you said, *“No, no! I'm not enough!”* then you really need to go and look in that mirror and say it.

This is an important thing – to get to the point where you really do feel like you're enough just the way you are, because everything in us leads to this. It's just the way the mind is designed, it's nothing even from our childhoods, although that can be part of it. But just the way the human mind works, we're always looking for things that are going wrong. We're always looking to see if we measure up, so we can make ourselves better, so we have a better chance of surviving. We don't feel good enough, most of us, most of the time.

This is a really important exercise to do, especially if it's hard for you. I'm going to suggest you write those words down and you go in the bathroom and you look in the mirror and you say this as often as you can – *“I am more than enough.”*

Now, you may wonder how looking in the mirror and saying *“I am more than enough”* is going to help you with stress. Actually, if your stress is partly about not feeling that you're good enough, then this absolutely will help. It's also part of strategy #2 for managing stress – keep your own cup full, so you have more internal resources.

That brings us to the other strategies for keeping your cup full that are physical strategies. One of the definitions of being a parent is that you're tired much of the time if you have young children, so getting a good night's sleep is a very important part of keeping your cup full so that you have some internal resources to deal with things when life gets stressful.

Your body uses the time while you sleep to heal and to restore a better biochemical balance. It really is important to get enough sleep so that you feel less stressed out. I know sleep often feels out of your control because your kids wake up at night or your kids get up early. It might seem impossible to get good night's sleep, but there are ways to do it.

One of my favorite is just to go to bed when the children go to bed. I know that means you don't have an evening and that's a loss – I understand. But it is a way to give yourself the self-care you need and deserve and to shift your body and your mind into a more positive state. In the morning, you can do some of those things you might have done in the evening, and you'll feel so much better. You don't even have to do this every night; you can do it some nights of the week, just to catch up on sleep when you're really tired.

I know that you may feel like things should be different, your kids should just sleep, but it's more important for you to have a clear head and feel rested and not be exhausted when you make decisions about your children's sleep. It's more important right now that you first deal with putting your own oxygen mask on first, which means getting a good night's sleep.

Even if you end up doing this for a while, for a period of months, it's not forever; it's really for a very short time, and as you're more clear-headed and rested, you'll be able to address your child's sleep issues in a positive and productive way.

Now let's talk about another stress reducer that keeps your cup full: exercise. After getting enough sleep and deep breathing, exercise is probably the best stress reducer there is, again, because it changes the body chemistry. Twenty minutes of sweat-inducing activity every single day cuts your cortisol levels, puts you in a good mood, burns fat. What more incentive do you need?

I know you probably feel like you don't have time to work out, and I understand that; it's very hard to work out with kids around you. But you don't have to work out in the way that you used to do pre-kids to realize the benefits of moving. There is a list in the handouts for this week called **Self-Care Ideas from Parents** that includes things you can do with kids to get yourself moving. Take a look at the list and see which of these ideas you might be able to make into a habit with your family. My personal favorite? Put on music and have a family dance party.

After sleep and movement, the other really great stress reducer is breathing. I know, you breathe all day long, every day and all night too. But I'm talking about more conscious breathing.

Conscious breathing actually reduces the stress hormones that circulate in your body and bring you back into the moment, so you can stop getting carried away with your catastrophizing about *"Oh my goodness, my kid just dumped that on the floor,"* and instead of getting hijacked by your emotions, you can choose a better way to handle things.

It may sound simple to breathe, but remembering to breathe consciously actually can change your life. Did your kids just dump their toys in the toilet? Breathe. Did you just burn dinner? Breathe. We've talked about "It's not an emergency." Breathing is a physiological way of saying it's not an emergency, and it restores your body's equilibrium, so you're not as stressed out.

One great way to train yourself to do this is to put Post-Its up all over and just write one word on them – Breathe. Or if they're a certain color, the color might remind you – purple Post-It = Breathe.

I do hear sometimes from parents that breathing doesn't do a thing for them, and I would just say, since research shows that breathing consciously does help human beings to calm down, and since you're a human being, I'm betting it does have an impact on you. But if you're one of those people who needs to do a little extra work on the conscious breathing to put that tool to use for you, then recognize that about yourself and try to find some time in the evening after your kids are in bed to just sit quietly and practice consciously breathing.

It would be great if you could get your hands on a biofeedback machine, because that actually teaches you, trains you – trains your body, really – your physiology to slow down in response to your conscious breathing. Of course, most of us don't have biofeedback machines around. There is a small machine called an emWave, and I believe you can even use it now online, the emWave. I don't have any association with this company, but I have heard from many parents that using the emWave helped them to train themselves to relax, and it's a good way to begin meditation.

As you get deeper into meditation, the emWave is not as useful because it doesn't register the deeper states you're in, and it actually sees that your breathing has become more shallow, and it doesn't understand what's going on. But in the early stages, when you're learning to breathe more deeply, this kind of biofeedback is very helpful. It doesn't have to be the emWave, and you may not need this at all if you find that breathing calms you already. But if it doesn't, I encourage you to find some sort of biofeedback mechanism to train your body to relax when you consciously breathe.

There's another research finding that might be helpful to you as you think about your self-care. Every study I've ever seen – and I've seen a lot of them – on gratitude shows that gratitude

reduces stress and improves health and happiness. It makes us feel more emotionally generous, and that can only be a good thing for the people around you, but it's also a wonderful thing for you – that feeling of emotional generosity, feeling a sense of well-being—we all need that in our lives.

Every time you feel negative, try to find as many things as you can to be grateful for and really feel that gratitude. It will shift you from a state of “not enough, not good enough,” to a state of “more than enough.” Keeping a gratitude journal at night, where you write down things you're grateful for from your day, or simply reviewing them in your mind before you go to sleep, has also been shown to make us happier, not just that day but for a long time thereafter.

In fact, gratitude is so powerful, that I recommend that families keep a gratitude journal that they pull out maybe at their family meetings on Sunday evening, and they write things that they're grateful for that week. All the children can contribute to it. Periodically go back and re-read the things that you're grateful for, and your family will revel in that sense of “*Wow, life really is good,*” and it makes us feel a lot better, even when times are hard.

Related to gratitude is just remembering to stop rushing and to soak in the beauty and the joy of every moment that you can. Often you're going to be rushing, but this is an antidote to those times. Revel in your child's laughter. Watch the sunset together. Smelling the roses really does replenish your spirit, and we all need to replenish our spirit as part of keeping our cups full.

This can mean a higher power, but it doesn't have to. Just step away from the distractions and find the quiet that inspires you to connect with your own deepest wisdom. For some of us, that's as simple as a walk in the woods or gazing at the stars. Your kids benefit from quiet time in nature, too. We all need to reconnect regularly with the miracles that make our lives worth living.

You'll be interested to know that research also supports journaling as a way to keep our cups full. That's a funny idea, right? Sitting down to write in your journal actually replenishes you. I think it's because it develops that inner parent; that part of ourselves that is observing and supporting us at all times. As we hear ourselves, as we listen and witness our own lives, we grow from that experience, and we feel cherished by our own selves.

If you're wondering, “*Well, how do I re-parent myself? How do I learn how to be my own parent?*” yes, it's that day to day, moment-to-moment compassion for yourself. But another way to put that into effect is to witness yourself through journaling.

Just find some time every single day to write, and you'll be giving yourself a very valuable gift of witnessing yourself and holding yourself with compassion and really giving yourself the kind of love that we all need every day, even when we're well past childhood. Research shows that

journaling is a very effective way to develop self-regulation and to keep our cups full so that we have more emotional generosity.

The final piece of research I would like to share with you is about finding support. Parenting is the hardest work there is, but our culture does not offer a lot of support for it. We all need support, someone we can talk to who won't judge us or try to fix us. If you need more of that kind of support in your life, find other parents with whom you feel comfortable and start building new friendships with them.

There are other ways, too, of course. You can listen to parenting audios like this that inspire you, teach you, soothe you. You can find yourself a parenting coach with whom you can check in, either occasionally or for a short time in a really concentrated way as you grapple with specific issues.

Whatever kind of support you find helpful from other people, I urge you to find ways to get that, to find that in your life—because we all need that support. We all deserve that support. It can be hard to ask for help, but part of self-care is asking for what we need – not in an entitled way, but simply respectfully asking someone if they can help us. Wouldn't you do that for someone you cared about? That's why I love the idea of parents supporting each other, because then, it's a give and take, and we all get help and give help as we can.

I want to go back to our idea of asking yourself *“What do I need right now to stay in balance?”* because I want to encourage you to retrain your attitude when you're with your child. If your child needs something right now, great, he needs some nurturing, maybe some cozy time on your lap with a book. But why can't you nurture yourself at the same time? Maybe have a cup of tea while you read to him?

This even works with those times that feel like an emergency. Yes, your daughter is screaming, but why can't you take deep breaths at the same time? Maybe she's resisting a diaper change. Why can't you use that as a signal to slow down and be more fully present and breathe more deeply? You'll be reducing your own stress level. You'll be doing self-care. And you'll find that your child will handle the diaper change a lot better when you're slowing down and being more present and breathing, than she would if you just tried to race through it and jolly her along.

If you're driving, you can't do this right now, but it's in your homework. If you're not driving, grab a piece of paper. Write down some healthy habits that you would love to do for self-care that would energize you. These aren't the guilty pleasures. Those are fine too for self-care, but I'm talking right now about the healthy habits that you think would actually energize you. Maybe like exercising or meditating or taking vitamins that you don't always remember to take. Maybe keeping a journal. What healthy habits would energize you?

I'll wait. Go ahead and write them down.

Okay. So now you have a few habits written down, and of course, you'll be adding to this list in your homework. But look at the things you've written down, even if you only have one or two. How can you work those into an already overflowing life? The only easy answer is to make them part of your routine.

If you have to remember to take your vitamins, you won't do it most of the time. But if you take them every morning with breakfast, you'll do it automatically. If you crave time to write in your journal, maybe you want to make that a routine while your child is doing his homework or while you're nursing the baby. Anything that you have there on your list, think about how you can make those healthy habits into actual habits by tag-teaming them along with something that you do anyway.

For me, the hard thing to work into my life has been meditation. It's more important to me than just about anything else, but it's also really hard to make myself sit down and do it. What I found, for me, is that the only time I could do it is either before I went to sleep at night or when I first woke up in the morning. Otherwise, life is just too busy.

Whatever is really important to you, decide that one thing and find the time to work it into your schedule and just do it. You will find that it will take you probably three months to make that a reality of actually doing it.

As long as you pay attention to when it's not working instead of just feeling shame and blaming yourself, if you can notice when it's not working and say, *"It's not working because...? Oh, because the kids come running in and wake me up. I don't have time to do it in the morning, so I'm going to do it in the evening."*

Then, of course, you may realize, *"Oh, it's not working to meditate in the evening because I fall asleep."* Okay, then think about whether there's a way to meditate in the car with your earbuds from your phone and a guided meditation tape while you're waiting to pick up your child. Just go a few minutes early every time, park your car and sit there and meditate. Set the timer on your phone so that you don't miss the time to pick up your child.

Whatever it is, get creative. Notice what works and what doesn't. Do trial and error and just figure out *"What's going to really help me?"* Whatever you think it is, do that one thing because, as I said, there are thousands of ways to take care of yourself, and you'll be making a long list, as part of your homework for this week. Then I'm going to ask you to make a plan and make one thing happen. I'm going to ask you, how can you support yourself to make that one thing happen?

I could give you a long list of things that you could do to take better care of yourself, but you already know what those things are, and even if I gave you some new ideas, it doesn't really matter. How can you possibly fit that much into your life? Instead, I'm going to suggest that you find that one thing and you start to make a change, and you give yourself support, so that you can make that one thing a reality.

For me, I would say that what makes me a great mom is that I meditate. I know for some people it's that they exercise. For other people, it's something else entirely. It may be the support they get from other parents. Whatever you know will make a difference for you, that's the thing to move heaven and earth to do, to make it a reality in your life.

I hope this audio has inspired you to notice your own needs and to take better care of yourself, and I hope the homework helps you develop a plan to do that in very concrete terms that you can continue to do over time, and that you'll come back and revisit this anytime you need a little inspiration about why it's not only permitted to take care of yourself but essential and your responsibility to take care of yourself.

I'm not suggesting, obviously, that you go on vacation without your children to take care of yourself or that you binge on cookies every day. The bottom line in parenting is that our children depend on us to regulate them emotionally, which means we have an obligation to regulate ourselves emotionally. And yes, if a cookie will help you do that, by all means, go ahead – but my hope for you is much more profound than that. My hope is that you'll find habits that support you to stay more peaceful and centered.

Obviously, you won't start with changing all your habits at once, but if you do one habit at a time for two or three months, by the end of the year, you will look back and you will say, *“Wow. I'm so much calmer, I don't feel as resentful, I don't get as impatient with my kids, and I feel more fulfilled as a parent and happier.”* It will be because you've incorporated some habits of self-care that really help you to get nurtured while you're nurturing your children.

This is a gift to your child as much as it is a gift to yourself, and it's also – let's not kid ourselves – hard work. It's actually hard work to figure out how to do real nurture for yourself. Because, while cookies and bubble baths have their place, what we really need is something much deeper: an internal parent to love us unconditionally so that we can discover our own unshakable inner happiness. That's the secret of keeping our cup full, and giving ourselves that gift actually takes tremendous work and self-discipline.

I wish it were easy, and you are making it easier for your child. Just the act of loving your child the way you are doing it, putting your love into action in every day in your own self-regulation,

that will mean that it's easier for your child to actually find that self-love later in life, that unconditional love that your child needs so much.

That is my wish for you – that you find a way to offer yourself all the love and nurturing you so deeply deserve, and that will come in the form of practical self-care as well as something deeper and more present about responding to yourself with unconditional love in every moment.

There is no reason to wait. There is nothing that has to change for you to love yourself deeply. I know you have faults. I know you've made mistakes. Join the club. That's why it's called unconditional love. There are no conditions. There's nothing stopping you from loving yourself. If you take nothing else from this audio, please seize this Aha! moment: You are more than enough exactly as you are.

Thanks so much for joining me today and for your commitment to your child and to your own growth. This ends week 8 – Self-care – of the **Peaceful Parent, Happy Kids Online Course**. This is Dr. Laura Markham of AhaParenting.com.