

AUTISM MUM SUPPORT

Finding Time for Yourself

Why it can feel impossible, why it matters and practical ways to reclaim even small moments for your own wellbeing.

Being told to 'make time for yourself' can feel almost insulting when your day is already full. If your child needs close supervision, struggles with sleep, finds separation difficult, needs predictable routines, has appointments or cannot easily be cared for by somebody unfamiliar, free time may not simply appear because you put self-care on a list.

This resource is not about pretending that every mum can create hours of uninterrupted time. It is about recognising that you are a person inside the caring role and looking for realistic ways to protect small pieces of yourself without adding another standard you are expected to meet.

Why time for yourself can feel impossible

Time is not only about minutes on a clock. To use time for yourself, you also need enough safety, energy and mental space to stop monitoring everyone else. A child may finally settle, but your mind may still be running through tomorrow. Somebody may offer to help, but you may spend the entire break wondering whether they understand your child's communication, sensory needs or triggers.

Some mums also find that every spare moment is swallowed by the work that cannot be done while their child needs them: forms, laundry, school messages, shopping, work, cleaning and planning. The moment technically belongs to you, but it immediately becomes catch-up time.

The guilt problem

Guilt can make even genuine rest feel uncomfortable. You may think you should be using the time productively, spending it with another child, supporting your partner, working or completing the jobs that have accumulated. If your child is struggling, enjoying yourself can feel particularly difficult.

Rest does not mean you care less. Having an identity, interests, friendships and quiet moments outside parenting does not take love away from your child. It helps preserve the person who is doing the caring.

SELF-CARE THAT FITS REAL LIFE

Stop measuring self-care by how impressive it looks

Self-care is often presented as an activity: a spa day, exercise class, weekend away or long bath. Those things may be lovely, but they are not the only forms of care. For a mum with very little capacity, care may be eating before you become shaky, sitting in silence for ten minutes, changing into comfortable clothes, cancelling something optional, stepping outside, asking somebody else to make one decision, or going to bed instead of finishing the washing.

The question is not 'What should self-care look like?' but **'What would reduce demand or restore something in me today?'**

IF YOU HAVE...	TRY SOMETHING REALISTIC
2 minutes	Breathe by an open window; drink water; unclench your jaw; stop scrolling
5 minutes	Sit somewhere quiet; stretch; listen to one song; step outside
10 minutes	Shower alone; short walk; read; lie down without doing a job
20-30 minutes	Move your body; call someone safe; hobby; watch something just for you
A longer window	Do something that reconnects you with who you are beyond caring

Micro-rest matters

A short pause will not solve an unsustainable caring situation, but small moments can still matter. Micro-rest means deliberately creating brief periods in which your body is not required to perform another task. The key is that the pause is genuinely a pause - not five minutes in which you answer emails, research services or mentally organise the next day.

Try attaching a small pause to something that already happens. Sit for five minutes after school drop-off. Stay outside for a moment after putting the bins out. Listen to music while waiting in the car. Protect ten minutes after your child settles before beginning household jobs.

Reduce before you add

Sometimes the most useful self-care question is not 'What can I add?' but 'What can I remove?' You may not need another wellbeing routine. You may need fewer expectations. Consider whether one commitment can be cancelled, one household standard lowered, one task shared, one message answered tomorrow or one person told no.

RECLAIMING PIECES OF YOURSELF

Remember what belongs to you

Long periods of intensive caring can narrow life until nearly every conversation, appointment and decision relates to your child. That can happen gradually. Think about what made you feel like yourself before life became so full - music, reading, gardening, work, clothes, learning, friends, humour, sport, creativity, television, walking, crafting, gaming or simply being alone.

You do not have to return to an old version of yourself. Your life may have changed. The aim is to notice whether there is anything that is yours simply because you enjoy it, rather than because it benefits somebody else.

Make help usable

A vague offer of 'let me know if you need anything' often creates another job. Where possible, make support specific. Could somebody sit with your child for twenty minutes while you walk? Take a sibling out? Collect a prescription? Make dinner? Stay in the house while you shower without listening for every sound? Do one regular school run?

If your child needs time to trust another adult, support may need to build gradually. The first step may be another person joining a familiar routine while you remain nearby, rather than expecting an immediate long break.

A realistic time-for-me plan

The part of the day where I have the least capacity: _____

One thing I can remove or lower: _____

A five-minute pause I could protect: _____

Something that makes me feel like me: _____

One person I could ask for specific help: _____

What I will ask them to do: _____

When Mum is autistic or ADHD too

Your own neurodivergence may change what restores you. Socialising may not be restful. A busy exercise class may increase sensory load. Unstructured free time may be difficult to initiate, while hyperfocus can make transitions away from caring tasks harder. Choose restoration based on your nervous system rather than somebody else's idea of relaxation.

You may need sensory quiet, predictability, parallel company, movement, deep pressure, a familiar interest, a visual plan or permission to spend time doing something repetitive and comforting.

YOU DO NOT HAVE TO EARN REST

When a small break is not enough

If you have almost no opportunity to sleep, eat, attend your own appointments or safely leave the caring role even briefly, the issue is bigger than self-care. It may be time to explore practical support. Depending on your circumstances this could include family help, a carer's assessment, local carers services, social-care support, school support, workplace adjustments, peer support or conversations with your GP about your own wellbeing.

No wellbeing technique can compensate indefinitely for a level of responsibility that exceeds one person's capacity. Asking what structural support is available is just as legitimate as asking how you can cope better.

UK starting points

Local authority: ask about a carer's assessment and local support for unpaid carers.

Carers UK: information about carers' rights, assessments, work and practical support.

National Autistic Society: autism information and family resources.

Contact: information and support for families with disabled children.

Your GP: speak to your GP if caring is significantly affecting your own physical or emotional wellbeing.

Support and eligibility vary by area and can change. Check current information directly with your local authority or the relevant organisation.

A different way to think about time

Instead of waiting for the perfect free afternoon, look for **protected moments**. Instead of asking whether you deserve them, ask what helps you remain connected to yourself. Instead of filling every gap with another responsibility, experiment with leaving one small space unfilled.

Message from Maggie

When somebody says 'make time for yourself', they may not understand that sometimes there simply is not much time to make. I do not want this resource to become another thing you feel you are failing at. Start with what is possible. Five minutes counts. Saying no counts. Sitting down counts. Asking somebody else to take over one job counts. And if there genuinely is no room for you anywhere in your week, that matters too. You are not only Mum. Somewhere underneath all the organising, advocating, worrying and caring, there is still you - and you deserve some space to breathe.

Space to Breathe Therapy