

Looking After Yourself When Your Children Are in OOHC



When your children are in OOHC, *looking after yourself* can feel impossible or even wrong. Many parents say they feel guilty for resting, laughing, or focusing on themselves while their children are not home.

The truth from parents who have lived it: **you cannot pour from an empty cup and the system cannot refill it for you.**

"I felt guilty every time I rested while my children were away from me.

If I sat down, if I slept, if I watched something on TV, there was this constant voice telling me I didn't deserve to rest because my kids weren't home.

It felt wrong to laugh. Wrong to take a break. Wrong to feel okay for even a moment.

I believed that if I was exhausted enough, sad enough, always thinking about them, that somehow proved how much I loved them. Rest felt like betrayal – like I was choosing myself over them.

But the truth is, the exhaustion nearly broke me. I was showing up to meetings empty, overwhelmed, barely holding myself together. I couldn't think clearly. I couldn't advocate properly. I was surviving on fear and guilt.

It took a long time to understand that resting didn't mean I loved my children any less. It meant I was trying to stay well enough to keep fighting for them.

Rest didn't make me a bad mother. It made it possible for me to keep going."

Why self-care is different in this space

This isn't spa days and bubble baths.

This is grief, fear, anger, waiting, and being assessed while you're broken.

Looking after yourself means:

- Staying emotionally regulated enough to attend meetings
- Having the energy to keep showing up for family time
- Protecting your mental health in a system that constantly looks backward
- Staying alive to hope even when progress is slow

That is not indulgence. That is **survival and resistance.**

What "looking after yourself" can realistically look like

1. Lower the bar - radically

Some days, getting out of bed *is* the achievement.

Feeding yourself, showering, or answering one email counts.

You are not failing because you're exhausted.

You are exhausted because this is traumatic.

2. Choose one safe person

Not everyone deserves access to your story.

Find one person; a peer worker, trusted friend, counsellor etc.. who can hold the truth *without fixing you*.

3. Protect your body

Trauma lives in the body. Gentle care matters:

- Eat something, even if it's small
- Sleep when you can
- Walk, stretch, breathe not to "heal," but to survive today

4. Step away from system talk sometimes

It's okay to have hours or days where you:

- Don't reread reports
- Don't plan the next meeting
- Don't rehearse what you'll say to your caseworker

Your worth is not measured by constant readiness. How you look after yourself matters.

5. Remember who you were before removal

You are more than:

- A case plan
- A report
- A risk assessment
- A parent with a child in OOH

Do one thing that reminds you:

- You are human
- You are capable
- You existed before this system entered your life

"I thought if I stopped focusing on the case for even a second, it meant I didn't care about my kids. But I realised I had to stay well enough to keep going. Falling apart completely wouldn't bring them home."

A final truth

Looking after yourself **does not mean you've given up.**

It means you are staying strong enough to keep fighting *without losing yourself entirely in the process*. This system is confusing, overwhelming and mentally/emotionally/physically draining, you need strength to get through it, the foundation of that strength is how you look after yourself.

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