

Ep #21 ADHD and caretaker fatigue

In this episode, we talk about caretaker fatigue. This is episode 21. Let's get started.

Smarter Parenting welcomes you to our podcast series, the Parenting Coach for ADHD. Here to heal and elevate lies is your parenting coach, Siopé Kinikini.

Hey everybody. I am really great. Wow. That sounded weird. Actually, I hope you're great. I am doing great as well. I am super happy to actually be talking to you today about something that is very dear and near to me. It's called caretaker fatigue. And I'm not sure if a lot of people know what it is. I am sure people have heard of it, but caretaker fatigue has to do with the caretaker of somebody and how well they are doing. Whether or not they are exhausted or tired or or what because they're so busy caring for somebody else. Now, the reason that this is really important to me is because caretaker fatigue really does affect the entire system. In fact, there is a study that says caretaker fatigue is a severe enough issue that a lot of times caretakers pass away before the people that they are caring for.

Now, I haven't really described what it is. Well, I guess I did, but anyway. Caretaker fatigue ... That's part of my inattentiveness. You know what I mean? I'm a little scattered, but I'm not scattered in my brain. It makes complete sense. It's just when it comes out it's kind of like, "Huh, what?" ADHD, what can you say, right? Anyway, caretaker fatigue, let's talk a little bit about that.

I was working with a family where the issue was not ADHD, but it was the death of the mother in the family and the people caring for her. So the children and the dad were all caring for her during this illness. And her illness actually spanned the course of maybe about three or four years, and I was there during the last year of her life in and out. And then I went back into the home. It was an in-home service. Worked with them after the mother had passed away. So what I observed when I first started with the family was that there was a lot of tension and it was difficult because everybody was so focused on caring for mom that they were not caring for themselves. This included not getting enough rest, not eating and not exercising. I mean, those things were put on hold because at first everybody wanted to be there in case mom passed away, and second, because the care mom needed was pretty extensive.

And so dad couldn't do it all the time because he had to work. So kids had to do it, and they would take shifts and care for mom. And it's heartbreaking. It's absolutely heartbreaking. And the general idea and consensus of the family is well, we are healthy so we can take the time to care for mom and it would be selfish of us to take time for ourselves.

When I went back into the family after mom had passed away, what I noticed was the amount of exhaustion that the family had felt and the strained relationships that they all had with each

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other. Now death can do a lot of things to a family. Sometimes it unites everybody and brings them closer and sometimes it breaks families apart and it's very typical. But when you add the added element of caretaker fatigue and everybody was just so tired, it actually was starting to break this family apart even more. And so that compounded the grief that they were feeling, which is why I was there to work with them.

What we did was we evaluated what they were doing in order to care for themselves while mom was alive and then what they were doing for self-care afterwards. And one of the issues was they were not communicating with each other or talking about how they felt and what was going on during mom's sickness. And then that translated into them not communicating after mom had passed away. So, incomes, all these issues with caretaker fatigue. And it took a while for us to get them on track to caring for themselves.

Now as a parent of a child, you may have a young child who has ADHD and needs your attention. They absolutely need your attention. I understand that. I really, really do understand that. And the idea that you would feel like you're neglecting your duties as a parent if you were to take time for yourself is a very real belief and emotion. However, I'm going to challenge your belief. I'm going to challenge your belief because if you are unable to have enough energy to be 100% for your child or even 90% for your child, then your child actually is getting less than what is helpful for them to move forward. Does that make sense?

So, one of the examples that I gave this family that was working through this caretaker fatigue is that when you get on the airplane and the pilot is on the intercom, the pilot, they give you instructions and the stewardess is like, "Well, in case of an emergency, these masks will fall down from the bin. Please put your mask on first before adjusting and putting it on for your child." Right? That's the exact same advice I would give to parents who are caring for a child with ADHD. Your child may demand your attention and demand that you pay attention to what they're doing and demand all this time, but if you do not take the time to put your mask on first, you're both going to crash and burn. It's just inevitable. It is absolutely inevitable. You have to take some time out for yourself first in order to provide the very best that you possibly can for your child.

Now, what that looks like for people depends on them. Some people will take a lot of things in order to recharge and some people will take a few things. I just want to offer a few suggestions on things that you can do that help people work through that and actually recharge their batteries in quick ways. One way that I have found that is very helpful is to find a friend, and I mean somebody who will listen to what you have to say and pretty much just listen. They'll offer advice if you ask it, but they're just there to be an ear. Now you're probably thinking, "Okay, who would I know?" Find somebody, a neighbor, a church member if you go to a church. You can do a sister, your mom, any family member that you can think of, jump online, a friend, but choose only one or two people to do this with or if you need three or four to bounce things off, but don't do a whole community because that's just too much.

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When you create these types of friendships, it's kind of a reciprocation thing where you're sharing back and forth, and if you have too many, that's a lot of energy that you're spending maintaining these things. So I would recommend just maybe one or two people that you can turn to vent and to just talk about things. Your spouse would be one as well, but sometimes the spouse is not great. I shouldn't say that, right? Because spouses are great. My spouse is great. She's fantastic. But what I'm saying is somebody independent and a little bit outside of the environment who can just listen to what you have to say.

Now, if you can be that person, that's great too. So look out for each other because parents with ADHD, we are a community. There are a lot of us out there. We should be helping each other. So, somebody who would just listen, no judgment. And the idea is that you can just spend maybe for a minute, maybe for five minutes a day, you can just talk to them and say this is what's going on in my day and this is how I'm feeling. So during the conversation you do want to express how does this make me feel? You do not want to call every time you're frustrated because the other person will burn out too. That's caretaker fatigue for them.

The idea is that you will be able to just communicate what you're feeling at a neutral time or just a break in between. You can even do this by text, but it's that human interaction and that human contact that is often very helpful because it makes parents realize, I'm not in this by myself. I do have support. I do have somebody that cares for me and wants to hear what's going on in my day. So, find a friend.

The next one is to take a break. So, find something you can do really quick that actually is rejuvenating for you. Now, I have, for me in order to rejuvenate, sometimes I like to just make some tea. Mint tea to me is just very calming and very soothing. I like it. It's warm. It's soothing in my throat. I like it. So that's something that I can do that's actually pretty quick. I just heat up the water and make some tea real quick, and I will sip it. I won't drink it super fast, but I will take some time and enjoy it and enjoy the aroma and that is super, super helpful for me.

So, taking a break. Now that doesn't take more than five minutes to do. I mean it's super quick. I would recommend doing something like that. Now I would avoid taking breaks that involves like not great healthy foods because those foods actually can alter your mood. They can change the way that you feel in a negative way. I'm talking about things with a lot of sugar. They may make you more lethargic and sometimes they're heavy, it depends, like a doughnut or something. Yeah, don't do that. But take a break. Something that will be rejuvenating for you. Some people use scents, aromas, like essential oils if you want to. It's just whatever works for you. You take a break and take a mental break where it kind of breaks everything down. You can be calm about something.

Okay, so again, find a friend, take a break, find something that rejuvenates you, and you are going to have to evaluate how much time that's going to take and what you can fit inside that time. For me, it's to do that. I usually do it at night and that's a way to calm down. A lot of people will do like warm milk at night. I do tea. So, I drink tea. It calms me down and it's my way of

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saying I'm taking a break. Some people do oils. They'll have a very specific scent that helps calm them down and all they need to do is smell it and then they feel calm. Some people like to go outside, and they just go outside, get some fresh air, take some deep breaths.

So, you want to find a friend and then you want to take some time out. You want to put yourself in timeout in order to recharge. Now, you can actually do this throughout the day instead of doing it once a day. So you can plan a time to say, "Okay from 10 o'clock to 10:05 I'm going to take a break, and then from two o'clock to 2:05 I'm going and take break." And actually schedule those in your day and be adamant about taking some time out to refresh. Now you may actually be so busy in your day that you're like, "Oh, I'll just skip it this one time." Don't do that. Take some time and be consistent with that to recharge. You may feel like you don't need it, but you will need it. You do need it. Okay.

Let's be honest, if we could all take a nap in the middle of the day, I think we all would take a nap, right? So take some time to recharge. It doesn't have to be long, but just be consistent about it and you can schedule those out throughout the day in order to help take care of yourself. So be sure to take a break and again, if you're going to do something that involves food, which is also very comforting, be sure you're choosing foods that will actually help increase your energy, not temporarily, but in the longterm and that are healthy options for you. All right?

So again, caretaker fatigue. Pick a friend that you can vent to or talk to or share your day about because that's very helpful to discuss those things. Taking a break is also very helpful. The other part about caretaker fatigue is often exhaustion. So, finding a time that you can get some good rest, sleep, downtime in the evenings. You want to be able to sleep. Now you're probably thinking, "I'm so busy, there's so much to do." Yeah, there is, and there's always going to be work tomorrow. My grandfather always told me this. He was like, "Yeah, you're always going to have work tomorrow. The work is never going to get done. Laundry does not magically get done." I know people are like, "Oh, I finish laundry." Let's be honest. The clothes you're wearing need to be laundered, so you are never done with laundry. You need to let some things slide if you need to get the rest that you need. So, I'm giving you permission and give yourself permission and also give yourself a little bit of forgiveness that things are never going to be done. Just accept that as a fact.

Take some time to rest, right? Sleep at night. Get some sleep because your irritability is going to bleed into whatever else is happening in the home. And so you want to be able to be optimal. Put that mask on yourself and then let's worry about the kids. Sounds so counter to what we've been taught, but the reality is, is if we do not care for ourselves, the care that we're providing to our child is going to be less than excellent. So, do those things.

You want to also visit your doctor regularly. Now, it sounds like a really odd thing, but check in with your doctor to evaluate how your mood is and how you're feeling and what's going on. Getting a checkup. A lot of times we'll take our kids to go see the doctor, but we won't go see

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the doctor, right? Or we try and double up and we will actually put their needs before our own, which is absolutely right. We should care for them. But at the same time, we need to be very cautious about what we're doing to care for ourselves. So take the time to do that, right? Go see your doctor if you need to. Find out where your moods are and if he can help with that or offer you suggestions because he will know based on your history, things that you may need that may be more helpful to you.

So those are some of the suggestions that I have. I know they're super simple and they're things that you probably already know. In fact, most people already know these things, but it's a good reminder that self-care actually affects everything else that happens. Everything else. If you are able to take care of yourself, you are going to be happier and your child will be happier, your interactions will be happier, things will go better for you and for everybody else.

Try and get rid of that weird voice if you have it. A lot of parents have it where they're just like, "No, no, no. I'm just going to push through. I'm just going to push through." You need to find a way to decrease that voice and increase the voice that says, "If I'm optimal, everything else is optimal. My children will get the very best of me if I'm able to self-care." Right? And your kids need you. They need you longterm. They need you there and they need you at 100%, or at least 90%, right? They need you at your optimal ability, right? So you can let some of the other stuff slide if it needs to slide and go back to it later and don't feel guilty about it. Care for yourself. We should never feel guilty about caring for ourselves and our wellbeing.

So again, let's take the advice that we get when we fly in an airplane. Let's put a mask on ourselves first and then put the mask on our child and we can work around and adjust those things because that actually is the best and safest way to save all of us.

Anyways, that's it for me for this week. I'm going to go do some self-care things for myself and things that rejuvenate me, and I would suggest that you take some time to do that for yourself as well. Next week we're going to talk about some additional things related to ADHD and parenting, but if this has been helpful for you, please rate and leave us a comment. Feel free to contact us with any questions that you may have. Smarter Parenting exists actually to answer questions that parents may have regarding [raising children with ADHD](#) and also in helping them learn some [behavioral management skills](#) so that they can help their child become more successful.

This is in addition to any of the other treatment options that you are deciding to do with your children. If they decide to do medication or if they decide to do some alternative things and that's fantastic. But having some behavioral skills will be super helpful for them in the long run. So, that's it for me. Thanks for joining me and I will talk to you again next week. So hang in there and do your best and enjoy. All right. Bye.

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Additional resources

[Podcast #11: What is the Teaching-Family Model](#)

[Podcast #12: How to teach behavior skills](#)

[The ADHD Smarter Parenting Podcast](#) with Siope Kinikini

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