



guide to
self-care
for families together
at home



introduction

Hey there, I'm Jonas Ellison. I'm so happy that I could write this "Guide to Self-Care for Families Together at Home" in collaboration with my good friends at the SALT Project. In this time of pandemic and "sheltering" at home, taking care of ourselves and each other is more important than ever.



This little guide was designed to give you some tools to pick and choose from to foster self-care in your family during this challenging time. Peruse through it, use what speaks to you, and discard the rest. There's no certain order to this guide – so settle in and feel free to jump around. I've selected from my own mental Rolodex of family self-care ideas as well as ones I've borrowed from the cultures of my Scandinavian ancestral siblings (because it's true – they are the masters of self-care).

I hope you enjoy this little guide. In these uncertain times, as we stay home in the name of love and care for our neighbors, may these new challenges bring us closer together – with God and each other.

As Ever,
Jonas Ellison



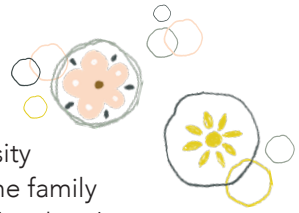


simple ideas

relatively quick and easy;
little or no prep time necessary

schedule 'curiosity days'

Curiosity is one of the highest virtues (at least, according to me). But just like any muscle, curiosity can atrophy if not exercised. Have everyone in the family write down one thing they're curious about and book a day to explore it together, in print or online. Then, reflect on it over pizza (or whatever fare your family best converses over) afterward.



be intentional about your music choice



"Next to the Word of God, music deserves the highest praise..."

+ Martin Luther

The music we listen to has a profound effect on our overall well being. Any kindergarten teacher knows that if kids are getting rowdy and frantic, playing classical music is like turning the chaos knob down at least a few notches.

At home, it's so easy to just throw on Top 40 or Kidz Bop (not to knock Kidz Bop – it has its place!). But when the energy gets too raucous, consider switching the playlist up to something more soothing in nature.

(See our 'Recommended Playlists' at the end of this guide for suggestions.)

go on a social media check-in spree

Grab the kid(s) and your computer and head over to the social media accounts of friends and family (especially those of whom you haven't seen/heard from in a long time). Surprise them with quick, fun, and sincere hellos and updates from the family. Make them short and fun hellos rather than long diatribes – and feel free to get a little goofy!

Note: The best place for this might be via direct message unless you're okay with your check-ins being public.

plan some one-on-one time

Time at home can often end up being spent either all together, all separate, or in an ever-shifting jumble. Intentionally create space for some quality one-on-one time. Maybe just mom and son go for a walk together. Or dad and daughter play some cards. And don't forget parent dates too:) It helps for family time to be balanced between group time and individual time.

the timeless power of gratitude



"Give thanks in all circumstances..."
+ 1 Thessalonians 5:18



We have gratitude apps, journals, t-shirts, beads, etc. – that's because it works! Gratitude really is a powerful thing. As often as possible, talk about what you're grateful for. Write it down in a journal. Mention it at meals. Counting your blessings doesn't ever get old.

chore-crushing wind sprints

Are things getting a little messy around the house? All that lounging you've been doing (right?!) has that effect. When things get untidy, it frays our nerves. As author and Netflix phenom Marie Kondo so eloquently states, tidying up is a spiritual practice. Huddle up and have everyone do a single tiny household chore that stands out – empty one drawer, give away one bag of clothes, or clean one shelf of your fridge.

schedule in catnaps



"And on the seventh day God finished the work that God had done, and rested on the seventh day..."
+ Genesis 2:2

Napping does not mean giving up, productivity is not tied to your true worth, and family naps are THE BEST!

don't just do it, savor it



"This is the day that God has made;
let us rejoice and be glad in it."

+ Psalm 118:24

Choose something that you're going to savor today – taking a shower or a walk, chopping vegetables for your lunch or dinner, starting a new novel, etc. Take time to "savor" it instead of just "doing" it.

what's in your backyard?

Depending on your circumstances, go somewhere local that you've never been before – a new nature preserve, a new park, a new corner of your community garden, etc. Extraordinary things love to lurk in ordinary places close-by!

write a letter

It's a lost art – and a downright lovely way to spend part of an afternoon. Try writing a longhand, thoughtful, heartfelt letter, and reconnect with how our ancestors routinely used to stay in touch with each other. Who knows, if you write enough of them, you just might get some in return – and how great would that be!



the rule of three

It's easy to get stuck in a rut. No need to stress about it, but it's nice to be excited about things on the horizon. Try following the "rule of three": always be consciously aware of 3 things that you're looking forward to. When one gets checked off the list, add another one. Again, these don't have to be epic. Simple is always enough!





medium sized ideas

good stuff to chew on;
some modest planning involved



fill up each other's buckets

There are two types of behaviors we can choose to exhibit: bucket-filling or bucket-dipping. Kindness is often contagious. All it takes is one act of kindness for more to be perpetuated. If someone does a kind act for you, then you are more likely to pay it forward to someone else.

Have the kids create actual buckets (or jars, or glasses) at home for the family. Then, make slips of paper available. When someone does an act of kindness for someone else, write it down and put it in their bucket. See how close you can get to having your bucket filled by a specific date you all agree upon. Make a family tradition every weekend or two where everyone gets to read from their buckets and feel the love.

dinner discussion: is this inside or outside of my control?



"Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow..."

+ Matthew 6:28

So much of what we worry about is outside of our control. And so much of what's inside of our control goes unattended to.

The next time you gather around a meal, have an open discussion about what's bringing stress and worry to each of your lives. Grab some paper and a pen and start a "worry list" for each person. Beside each thing, decide whether it's inside or outside of your/their control. If it's outside your/their control, cross it off the worry list and give each other permission to let it go.

teach each other something

It's empowering to showcase, celebrate, and pass on our gifts. Plus, it increases our connection to each other. Everyone in the family grows when we do this.

Make a short list of your top gifts that you may be able to teach to the rest of the family. Then, schedule in afternoon workshops that the family can attend together hosted by the 'expert.'

if you need an excuse to eat more cake



"The word is added to the element, and there results the Sacrament, as if itself also a kind of visible word."

+ St. Augustine of Hippo

Fika is the Swedish ritual of afternoon coffee/tea and cake. In my home, we don't do it enough, but when we do, it's a holy ritual. For Swedes, it borders on dogma in that many of them do it every day (how they stay so svelte is a mystery to me).

Get some nice coffee (tea, milk, or juice for the kiddos is fine) and bake a cake (from scratch is even better, but not required). Schedule it in and make it a ritual – slow and intentional.

No one should be running around when you're making, preparing, and serving it. Give it a blessing and make the coffee and cake sacramental (okay, it's not bread and wine, but it can still be sacred). And it must be done together – Fika in solitude is merely a coffee break.



know that kids don't need 'epic'

Perfectionism is real, even (particularly) in parenting. But you don't have to be the world's best homeschooler, or the world's best "fun activity" director, to give your kids the support and structure they need. Most kids (especially those under the age of 10) are fine with a mere stroll around the block to chase fireflies or pick up rocks and sticks. If you live near a wooded area or a stream, you have a built-in wonderland that's easy to take for granted because we adults can get bored so easily.



In fact, from what I've found, the simpler the better. My daughter would much rather hang out in her little workshop area and make things out of cardboard and tape than do just about anything else. So enjoy the simple desires of your young ones while you can. They might actually prefer it that way.

parents: you can have friends too



"Then God said, "It is not good that the human being should be alone..."

+ *Genesis 2:18*

Being together at home is a great thing – a blessing, in fact! But just like anything, too much of anyone can be, well, too much! Friendship time with people outside the family isn't just important – it's essential.

Be intentional about it. Plan Skype or phone dates with your friends and acquaintances. Create some "away" time and enjoy yourself every now and then. Your family will thank you.



grandma had a point: go for 8 hours of sleep



"It is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil; for he gives sleep to his beloved."

+ Psalm 127

It's real. People are sleeping less and less, and this global pandemic isn't helping AT ALL! We need sleep now more than ever. Like, NEED it. During sleep, our health is restored, our minds are reset, and we wake up stronger and more able to face a new day.

leave room for blueness



"...a time to weep,
and a time to laugh..."

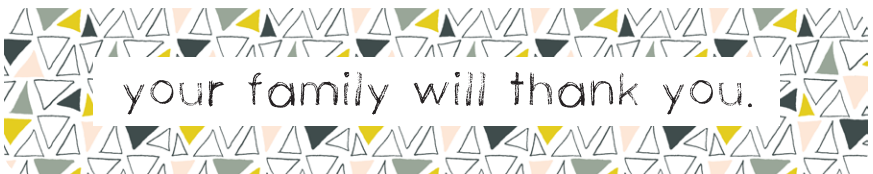
+ Ecclesiastes 3:4



We're human. Sometimes we get down in the dumps. We get blue – sometimes for a reason, but often for no reason at all.

Everyone wants family time to be loving and enjoyable. But we're all going through a super tough time. We have to allow each other space to be blue. Yes, care for each other. Keep an eye on your loved ones. But incessantly expecting perpetual positivity is a burden no soul can bear (this includes you, mom or dad).

Let yourself have a good cry, eat too much ice cream, and share your raw truth to a trusted friend or a blank journal page. Just make sure you commit to coming out on the other side restored.





bigger ideas

deeper waters to swim in,
with a wider time frame in mind



hygge: the danish phenomenon of sincere and comfortable self-care

Maybe you've heard of the cultural Danish phenomenon of hygge. Though hygge is usually promoted in the US during the winter months, it can be practiced year round just like the Danish do.

I've been a practitioner of hygge for the last few years since hearing about it and I love how it's a form of self-care that feels sincere instead of obligatory or forced (plus, it's fun to say).

Meik Wiking, the author of *The Little Book of Hygge: Danish Secrets To Happy Living*, and CEO of the Happiness Research Institute in Copenhagen, says that hygge has been called everything from "the art of creating intimacy," to "coziness of the soul," and even, "cocoa by candlelight."

As Wiking explains, hygge is something we know when we feel it. It's hard (plus it defeats the purpose) if we make it too prescriptive, but some of the key ingredients of hygge are togetherness, relaxation, indulgence, presence, and comfort. "The true essence of hygge is the pursuit of everyday happiness and it's basically like a hug, just without the physical touch," he says.

In the 2016 World Happiness Report, Denmark ranked as the world's happiest country. Wiking and other hygge enthusiasts believe that hygge is the reason why. "The Danes are exceptionally good at decoupling wealth and well-being," he says. "We focus on the small things that really matter, including spending more quality time with friends and family and enjoying the good things in life."

but seriously, how do you say it?

Hygge is pronounced HOO-gah. Hygge can be a noun, a verb, and an adjective. Hygge practitioners say things like, "What a hyggelig (hygge-like) home you have!" Or, "We had such a hyggelig time last night." If you get really into this, you can be a hyggespreder (someone who spreads the hygge) and reserve every Friday night for "familiehygge."

Hygge requires only a small effort and it costs little – if any – money. As Wiking says, “There is nothing fancy, expensive, or luxurious about a pair of ugly woolen hygge socks – and that is a vital feature of hygge. It’s about appreciating the simple pleasures in life and can be achieved on a shoestring budget.”

here are a few ways to start making your life as hyggelig as possible...

board games, not video games

Old school, baby. Let’s face it, we need more analog in our lives.

flickering light

Flickering light set the hygge mood like nothing else. In warmer months, you don’t want the fireplace going, so candles will do the trick. Don’t blow a lot of money on \$20 organic soy candles (unless you want to). Cheap white unscented votive candles are fine. If even just after the kids go down (and even if you’re not getting romantic, though, ya know...). Another plus is having a darker room increases natural melatonin levels and makes for better sleep.

make popcorn. over the stove.

There’s just something about sharing popcorn in a bowl (plus, who doesn’t like the smell of popcorn, right?). Sure, you can throw in the microwaveable stuff, but here’s how to do it hygge-style on the stovetop...

1. Heat 3 tablespoons of olive oil or coconut oil in a 3-quart thick-bottomed saucepan on medium-high heat.
2. Put 3 or 4 popcorn kernels into the oil.
3. When the kernels pop, add 1/2 cup of popcorn kernels in an even layer.
4. Cover the pot, remove from heat and count 30 seconds.
5. Return the pan to the heat.
6. When the popping sound slows to about one pop per every few seconds, sprinkle with a pinch of salt and any other toppings you like.





netflix & chill

Hygge totally allows for chilling with your favorite streaming service! Just be conscious of it and make sure it isn't getting in the way of the key of hygge – togetherness. And here's an idea for creating that togetherness over distances: there's a free Google Chrome extension called Netflix Party that allows for watching simultaneously, pausing and replaying moments in sync, and connecting in a chatroom as you go.

carve out a hyggekrog

A hyggekrog is a nook. The Danish like nooks. These are little spaces (could be inside or outside) that you carve out for comfort. Maybe it's a hammock in the corner of your yard. Or adorn an empty patch of floor by a sunlit window with cushions and a plant. Make it somewhat private and – of course – comfortable.

Source: <https://www.self.com/story/practicing-hygge-danish-lifestyle>

know your zones

My daughter is in Kindergarten and she's hands-down light years more emotionally intelligent than I was at her age (heck, she's way ahead of where I am now!). A large part of this is because her teachers have taught her class to be able to recognize and name their emotions using a really handy cognitive behavior tool called, "The Zones of Regulation."

"The Zones of Regulation" is a way to categorize all the different ways we feel and states of alertness we experience into four concrete colored zones.

the four zones

the red zone is used to describe extremely heightened states of alertness and intense emotions. A person may be elated or experiencing anger, rage, or explosive behavior when in the Red Zone.



the yellow zone is also used to describe a heightened state of alertness and elevated emotions, however one has more control when they are in the Yellow Zone. A person may be experiencing stress, frustration, anxiety, excitement, silliness, the wiggles, or nervousness when in the Yellow Zone.

the green zone is used to describe a calm state of alertness. A person may be described as happy, focused, content, or ready to learn when in the Green Zone. This is the zone where optimal learning occurs.


the blue zone is used to describe low states of alertness and down feelings such as when one feels sad, tired, sick, or bored.

As you can probably see, saying you're in the 'red zone' is a low-impact way of saying that you just need space to cool off. Or saying you're in the 'blue zone' is a great way to communicate that you're just a little... well, blue. Saying someone is in the 'green zone' is another way of saying they're on a roll (or, 'in the zone' as they say in the sports world).



By creating a simple and consistent way to communicate complex feelings, you relieve the pressure of having to eloquently say what you might be going through at any given moment.

Source: <http://www.zonesofregulation.com/learn-more-about-the-zones.html>



be still and know:
simple and prayerful meditation
practices for the family

Try guiding a short family meditation. Here are a couple of practices that might do the trick:

returning to the breath

Start by having everyone close their eyes, breathe deeply, and focus on their breath. Guide their intention through saying this mantra three times before a 5-minute period of silent deep breathing, *"All sounds return to the breath, all thoughts return to the breath, all distractions return to the breath."*

be still and know that i am god

In this meditation, sit around in a circle and have everyone recite Psalm 46 as a group mantra: *"Be still and know that I am God."* But each time you recite the mantra, peel off one part as follows:

Be still and know that I am God.

Be still and know that I am.

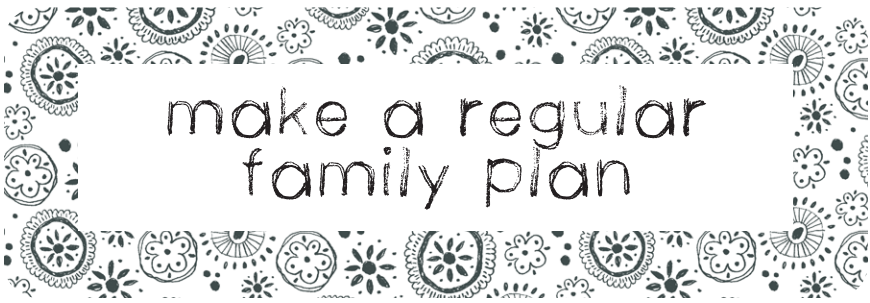
Be still and know.

Be still.

Be.

Repeat this together as much as you'd like. Soon, you'll notice an incredible cadence that you're entering into together.





make a regular family plan



"Where there is no vision, the people perish..."

+ Proverbs 29:18

Another good way to check in on each other and keep things moving in a positive direction is to sit down together and create a 'family plan' – for getting through the week, the month, or the pandemic writ large.

1. What makes your family special? Write two or three sentences that describe how your family is different from any other family in the world..

2. What is your family's highest priority goal - right now? Write down the ONE goal you are going to work on and the time period in which you expect to accomplish it.

3. What are the action steps needed to work towards this goal? List four to five action steps that will make this goal a reality for your family.

4. How will your family check-in on your progress towards this goal? Write down your plan for holding family meetings (when/where/how often).



See this as an exciting venture, not a punitive thing. Every couple of weeks or so, check in on the plan and track your progress. Update regularly. This is a living plan, not a static one.

playlists

To find these playlists, just search Spotify under the playlist name – and enjoy!

focus flow

This playlist is a paradox... Both upbeat and chill. Both relaxing and invigorating. It's a playlist that both the cool kids and their ex-cool parents can bob their heads to (without getting too hardcore for we uppity parents, of course). Bring flow to your afternoon with this blend of uptempo instrumental hip-hop beats.

chill hits

Picture this... the weather's getting warmer, and there's a refreshing breeze wafting around outside. You open the windows to let the fresh air in. The kids are coding, doing crafts, and whatever they do. You want to keep it relaxed, but you don't just want instrumentals. You want upbeat songwriting with a chill vibe. This is your playlist.

spotify orchestra: cello

In my opinion, there is no better solo classical instrument than the cello. If you're a cello freak like me, this playlist will bring you to your special place. Great for creative moments and soothing background music for relaxing dinners, etc.

this is taizé

The Taizé Community is an ecumenical Christian monastic fraternity in Taizé, Saône-et-Loire, Burgundy, France composed of members from both Catholic and Protestant traditions who originate from across the world. If you've ever been to a Taizé service, you know how transcendent the music can be. To set the tone on a beautiful sun-washed morning or to cool things off in the evening as you wind down, this playlist is ideal for setting a sacred mood.

yoga - playlist of the month

Now we're getting a little new-agey, but that's okay. These yoga beats are great for – well, yoga – but also for when your family tag-teams the house cleaning duties or for a festive gathering when you're bored of the same old classic rock and contemporary hits. Get your family and friends in that yoga flow and bliss out, my friend. All is well.

peaceful choral music by living composers

One of the most wonderful things about humans, in my opinion, is our ability to sing together and create something far bigger than the sum of our parts. Choral music is a representation of the divine, as far as I'm concerned. This playlist is one of the best collections of choral music I've found. Hallelujah!

under the stars

This playlist was designed for campfires (as the title suggests) under the stars. So grab those s'mores ingredients (literally or figuratively) and a few blankets, stoke the fire, and make this acoustic, folk-driven, bluegrassy, instrumental playlist a part of the night as you tell stories, ask questions, pray, and commune under God's stars.

