

# THE RESILIENT KID PODCAST

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## Season 2 – Episode 11

### Teaching Our Kids Self Care

Hello and welcome back to the Resilient Kid podcast with me, Ashley Costello, Psychotherapist of over 25 years. So, we're going to talk about self-care. Why? Because Mental Health Awareness Week is coming up. It's on the 10th of October. And I think quite often we don't realize that our kids are declining in mental health.

Sometimes it can happen and it feels like overnight. And I was talking to a mum yesterday and she said, you know, it just crept in. It wasn't a thing. And then all of a sudden it really was. And so, I think ahead of mental health day, we should talk about self-care and what it looks like for kids, what it looks like for us.

If we look kind of as we were growing up, things like washing yourself, brushing your teeth, brushing your hair, um, parents showed us that. They absolutely showed us that bit, but that's not enough, is it? It's important that we show our kids how to take care of ourselves and teach, show them as we model it as well.

So, for instance, let them see you take care of yourself. Because that's really important. We're modelling. Everything we do as parents' models for them. Mistakes and all and you know, if you know anything about me, you know that it's really important for our kids to see us mess up. So, in the book, I wrote about, you often hear self-care in the media and it's usually long baths, bubble baths, you know, the bubbles are all for flowing, aren't they?

Um, massages with fancy oils. Well, these are the message our kids are getting with self-care. And actually, they think, well, that doesn't apply to me. Why would I want to do that? Why? I know my teens, like what? The only time she has a bath is because. If she's injured herself at rugby. So, you know, if they're the messages that they're getting from the media, we need to teach them something different.

I think they need to know the stuff that we weren't probably taught. That self-care is about being at your best, whatever the task or whoever you're with, which isn't

some sleep deprived zombie with hair sprayed to within an inch of its life with dry shampoo.

I'm hesitating because I don't want to. We've all used dry shampoo, but it is an industry that allows us not to take care of ourself. It is an industry that says, I'm too tired. I can't be bothered. I don't want to, instead of saying, do you know what? I'm going to look after myself. I am going to wash my hair today.

You know, yes, it's great for an emergency. You ask your teens how many times they're using dry shampoo a week. So, run over. It's learning to listen to your body when it's tired, hungry or thirsty. And honouring that. Not trying to override its natural warning systems. It's not watching another episode of the latest box set knowing that we've got a big day tomorrow.

Now, the practicalities and definition of self-care changes with age. The expectations we have for primary kids to care for themselves looks very different to what we want and we expect for our teens. And again, very different to ourselves as adults. So, let's start with the basics.

Hygiene. Of course, washing, showering, cleaning teeth, hair, the whole thing.

However, it takes them a little while to cotton on to responsibilities. When they're younger, we, you know, they're probably bathing most days, you know, or showering for some holidays, you know, when it can go all week. No, I'm kidding. Um, but when they're primary, we give them that direction. And yes, we hope they get into that habit.

But actually, have a look at the teens in your life. Are they leaving their hair, like, one day extra that maybe they shouldn't be getting away with, that you and I wouldn't get away with at work? Yeah? Have a look at how often they're showering. Now, I, I came across a family the other day, and this is not to shame them in any way, but actually, the eldest was so big on, you know, doing a levels and things like that, that when I met them, the first thing I noticed is the hair needed washing.

And actually, the younger one in the family, they were all absolutely sparkly clean. But, um, for me it was around their priority to become a levels and homework and not themselves, but actually we know that if we don't take care of ourselves, the

impact it has on our mental health is huge and the, and our physical bodies become sick.

So, it's important to just check in and have those difficult conversations with teens. You know, we don't have to be rude. We can be sensitive, we can be diplomatic, but we also. Assuring we care if we're saying, do you know what, hey, I think you need to wash your hair a little bit more often. Or, do you know what, why don't you chill out?

Go and have a shower. You know, get into PJs early. Things like that. Let's go deeper though, than hygiene.

Nutrition. We want our kids to understand nutrition and the role it plays in feeding, strengthening not only our body, but our mind as well. Eating snacks or fast food all day isn't going to help them in the long run.

Although eating a balanced diet with occasional treats at the drive thru is fine. Now I'd say nutrition for me, yes, we get a lot of fussy eaters when they're younger. For me, it feels like nutrition starts to take a little bit of a nose dive as they start to live away from home. Say the university kids.

I think in my time at uni, it was a lot about pot noodles. Um, not for me. I was just very lucky. I didn't like them, but you know, it was about quick fixes. But actually, if they understand that to get the best out of their brain and mind, especially if we're putting it under a little bit of stress because we're going out occasionally, then putting in that nutrition ahead of time really works.

So, talk to them. You know, I, so my eldest has got a couple of years before she goes off to uni, but she has started making recipe cards. Um, her idea is that if she cooks, the rest can pay for food, but those recipe cards for her are the kind of meals that I probably do, you know, week in week out, you know, to the point where you're like, I'm bored now, but I then say to her, oh, you know, when you do this, it's really important that you know, this is why I put them in.

I don't put peppers in. For a bit of colour, although I do I put peppers in because of the nutrients that gives us Yeah, I might put chicken for the protein, spinach for the protein, things like that. So as much as you might want to flick that to the side of your plate, this is why I put it in. So, think about having those conversations, um,

checking in if your teens live away from home, checking in how they're doing with their eating and stuff like that.

You know, and it doesn't have to be, have you eaten today? It can be, oh, what did you have for your lunch or what did you have for dinner? Yeah. So, water, drinking plenty of water throughout the day helps our brains and bodies to function. Research has shown that students who drink water during exams score 5 percent higher than those who don't.

Now you think about, we were just talking about uni students, but you take uni students doing homework. Teens doing homework, primary kids doing homework, if they have got water, how cool is that? Now there's a few reasons why water has been seen in research to help out and it's because A, it gives them time to think sometimes, because if they go into that fight and flight, their brain can go offline and actually It just calms them down a bit to reconnect to those thoughts.

So, it gives them that space, it helps calm down fight and flight. And also, you're re-energising your body with water. And you're telling that fight and flight, you're safe, it's okay. Um,

Energy. Now, we don't talk about this very often with our kids. But we want them to understand the importance of energy and how to direct their energy.

So, for instance, kids who are more introverted often get peopled out, yeah, if they have too much interaction socially, particularly if you've got kids who are neurodiverse. You know, that is something that I always say, look out for if we're asking too much of them too much socially. Then it drains them quickly.

Extroverted kids, you know, the ones who are jumping up and down, they're funny, you know, things like that. Then they often get their energy topped up when they interact with others. The danger is though, for them, is that it's drained away with school or if they get involved in any drama or conflict, they get worn out.

If they get pulled into those friendship issues, you know, the he said, she said kind of scenarios. So being aware of their own energy and the boundaries that they put in to protect that, you know, that is an act of self-care.

Comparison. Take a big breath for this one. Particularly in an age of social media, you think we have Instagram, we're expected to post perfect pictures.

Is it Insta worthy? Snapchat. I don't know about you, but if you know anything about Snapchat, the streaks. There is keeping up streaks. Now, it could just be a picture of this. It could be a picture of, you know, your hand, your book, your food. It doesn't matter. But those streaks, if they're kept up with a number of people, oh, that takes time.

That is an energy zapper right there. But also, it's Are they keeping up with me? It's that whole comparison thing and then be real, you know, there be real's gone off. They've got to get theirs within a certain time, you know, whose was better. It's really hard for kids not to compare themselves to their peers.

Unfortunately, they also compare themselves to internet stars who get paid thousands and thousands to create amazing content, you know. But it's often filtered and it's often striving for perfection. That is what their sponsors expect. This comparison trap can lead to a real kicking for their self-esteem for our kids.

Teaching your kids not to compare themselves to others is a form of self-care. I am not saying it's easy, but knowing their strengths, what they might need to work on, give them bigger confidence and a stronger self-identity, and that is what's needed that kind of that will bolster that comparisonitis that we often see.

Okay, just moving on a little bit from that online gaming and social media.

These platforms are set up. To get easy rewards. Rewards come thick and fast when playing games that boost the dopamine and happy hormone in the pleasure center of our brain. It's no wonder kids love playing them as they get constant rewards and this can lead to being addicted to that feeling, and that is why stuff like social media and, um, gaming can really be addicted because it is that dopamine hit after hit after hit.

And actually, when we come off, often we have a drop in that and it feels rubbish. And that is why they're so addictive. If we look at social media platforms. When kids post, for example, on Instagram, the platform withholds some of the reaction's comments, like in a drip-feeding style. So, the person will return to the platform again and again and again.

So, for example, if I was to post up a picture, and 100 people liked it, it would hold back, say 75. for 20 minutes then trickle a few more than a few more over a matter

of time so that I would keep going back and checking it and checking it and checking it every time I check it and I see those likes I get that dopamine hit.

So again, this is why they can be so addictive. Am I saying that technology is bad? Absolutely not. It is a gift for me, an absolute gift of the golden age for kids and us alike. However, we do need to heed the addictive nature of it and teaching our kids to regulate their tech intake responsibly, without a doubt, will boost their self-care and actively promote emotional regulation.

Sleep. Yes, this is a big one. Particularly for our teens. But, if we don't get enough sleep, we're more likely to get stressed about the small stuff. It can have a profound effect on our mental health if we don't get enough. It's not just about resting. It's about that time that our brain processes memories from the day, consolidates our learning, and heals our body.

Our brain is amazing, but it does need that reset at night. So quick guide to the amount of sleep needed. And I know that there are, you know, kids that I see that are not getting enough sleep, that it's having an impact. And actually, we kind of don't realize sometimes the impact that that is over time. So, for instance, if kids are, say, having one, two hours less than may be recommended over a week, that's a night's sleep.

So, let's have a look. Toddlers, about 12 hours. They need about 12 hours sleep. Um, three to twelve, we're looking at ten to twelve hours, teens, nine to ten. Um, and the same goes for uni students. As our, as our brains develop, as we hit those teens, um, what we tend to find that happens is that the clock shifts, and they are awake later, but they're sleeping in.

If you're at school or have to be up for a lecture, you have to adjust that back. Our education system isn't set up. If I was education secretary, that'd be the first thing that I'd change. Absolute first thing I'd change. That and breakfast in school. Um, however, let's not get, go there. Um, good sleep hygiene as well.

So, this could be, you know, having a bath or a shower before bed. We do that, don't we, with kids, with little kids. Um, but we don't always encourage it with, um, our older kids, our teens. No heavy meals or sugary drinks close to bedtime. Light snacks. Um, Virginia Hills, who's a friend of mine, who's a... fabulous nutritionalist recommends bananas are particularly good before bedtime because of the magnesium and potassium that they have.

They really promote sleep. So that's a good one. And lights dimmed as you get towards bedtime. So rather than big bright lights kind of put pumps on things as it's, um, you know, coming towards bedtime, excuse me, that helps our brain. Excuse me, helps our brain know it's like a little trigger, a signal, it's getting time for bed.

Um, and no, no screens before bed. And that is because the blue light of a screen, even if you put the thing on, you know, I know iPhones have a special thing, doesn't matter, does not matter. Um, they also have, which I find really good is you can take off the colour filters. Whenever you want. I think, don't quote me on this, I think you press your on off button three times really quickly and it makes everything black and white.

It has been proven that we are not as attractive to pick our phone up because there's no bright colours. It doesn't spark off in our brain. We see it as a little bit boring. So, for sure, things like that do help, particularly with teens. If we are using our screens as adults as well, you know, it wakes our brains up and prevents the usual body signal saying it's time to go to sleep.

Um, and also set screen time limits. Research has shown the more screen time, the higher the risk of kids developing anxiety. So that as an act of self-care, teach them that responsibility around it. I don't want to share this because I want to scare you into that, but I want to show you the relationship and the need not to have unfettered access to screens. For any of us, not just kids, us too.

So, why is self-care so important? Well, the easy answer is it helps our kids to combat stress. A little bit of stress in our lives is actually healthy for us. That's a tiny spike of cortisol and adrenaline, and natural stress hormones, and so it gets us through things like exams, driving tests, stuff like that.

However, too much can have a negative impact on our physical and mental health, and that cortisol and adrenaline can stay surging around our body.

So, clear signs of stress in our kids. Headaches, appetite changes, stomach pains, lack of motivation, changing sleeping habits, negative self-talk, wanting lots of noise, so no quiet time, crying, isolating themselves. Perfectionist. Need I go on?

Also look in the younger ones, stuff like bedwetting, biting nails, talking less or more than usual. Because they sometimes cannot tell us and actually it's important

to look at that. One thing as a parent I want you to know is what we perceive to be stressful is not always the same as what our kids think is stressful.

When asking students about what stresses them out, their answers can be anything from forgetting their school kit, to being asked too many things at once, changing plans, whether it's, you know, with friends, with you, things like, you know, giving them five jobs in the house at the same time. Just do this and this and that, you know, it stresses them out.

The list goes on for kids. Most of those things wouldn't register with us as adults. So, it's important that we don't diminish how they're feeling. You know, by saying stuff like, don't be silly, don't worry, you don't need to worry, they already are, they wouldn't be voicing it. Be careful because we run the risk of shutting kids down and getting them internalizing the stress that they're feeling.

Offer an opportunity to talk. I'm here if you want to talk about it. What can I do to help you? Let's take this one step at a time.

I'm gonna... Um, kind of leave it there for today, um, because I think it's important that we finish on parents taking care of ourselves. You know, it's not only taking care of our physical body, but also our emotions and our mental capacity too. So, are you getting enough sleep? Are you taking care of yourself?

Are you exercising? Moving? You know, you don't have to be a gym bunny, but just moving every day because that helps with that stress. It helps get rid of that cortisol and adrenaline. Are you taking time to wind down? Are you expressing how you feel? Are you talking to your family about what you need?

Often as parents, we're on that run of the mill of working, getting the kids started, running them here and there, doing dinner, things like that. We beat ourselves up if we've took something out of the freezer for the kids for tea. But you know what? We need to practice self-care ourselves. Um, in the, I go into more detail.

In the, um, book, but I want to leave you with this. Brené Brown says, we can't practice compassion with others if we can't treat ourselves kindly. And you and I know that often, as a parent, as the main caretaker in your household. If you are not okay, the kids are not okay. So please look after yourself. If you want some more information or more in-depth tips, then please check out the book, *A Parent's Guide to Raising a Resilient Kid*.



And yeah, thanks for joining us. Take care everyone.