

SUSTAINABLE PARENTING

GOAL

To help you reduce stress, build emotional resilience, and feel more supported—so you can continue to show up for your child with energy, compassion, and confidence.

BACKGROUND

Parenting a child with significant support needs can be incredibly demanding—physically, emotionally, and mentally. Many parents feel exhausted, isolated, or overwhelmed. You may find yourself putting your own needs last, simply trying to get through the day.

You're not alone. And your well-being matters. Research shows that when caregivers are supported, outcomes improve for children too. This guide offers practical, realistic ways to care for yourself—even when time and energy are limited.

Self-care doesn't have to mean taking a break or finding extra time. Sometimes, it's about small, intentional shifts that give you space to breathe, reset, and reconnect with what matters most.

WHY THIS MATTERS

When you take care of your own emotional and physical health:

- You're more able to respond calmly during stressful moments
- You model healthy coping strategies for your child
- You're more likely to stay consistent with strategies over time
- You feel more connected, supported, and capable

This guide is here to remind you: taking care of yourself isn't a luxury—it's a key part of helping your child thrive.

FINDING TIME TO BREATHE

It's easy to put your own needs last when you're focused on supporting your child. But the truth is, you can't pour from an empty cup. Prioritizing your well-being—even in small ways—can actually help you show up more fully and patiently for your child. Self-care doesn't have to be fancy or time-consuming. It just needs to be something that helps you recharge.

SMALL MOMENTS THAT MAKE A BIG DIFFERENCE

- Breathe: Even 30 seconds of deep breathing can help calm your nervous system.
- Move: Stretching, walking to the mailbox, or standing in the sun can lift your energy.
- Connect: A quick text to a friend or joining an online parent group can ease isolation.

These small moments add up. You don't need to overhaul your life—just notice what helps you feel a little more grounded and do more of that.

SUPPORTIVE SELF-TALK

Your inner voice matters. Instead of criticism, try offering yourself the same kindness you would give a friend:

- "I'm doing the best I can."
- "It's okay to have a hard day."
- "Small steps still count."

BUILDING A SUPPORT SYSTEM

You don't have to do this alone. Think about who can support you:

- Family or friends
- Support groups (online or in person)
- Professionals like your child's BCBA®, counselor, or physician

Asking for help is not weakness—it's strength. When you're supported, your child benefits too.

SELF-MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES THAT WORK

Caring for a child with high support needs often leaves little room for your own well-being—but your needs matter too. These small, practical strategies are designed to fit into the margins of your day, helping you feel more grounded, supported, and capable. You don't have to do it all—just start where you are.

NOTICE YOUR TRIGGERS

Stress doesn't always come from one big moment—it often builds throughout the day. Begin by noticing when you feel your body tense, your thoughts race, or your patience run thin. Was it during transitions, meltdowns, or a moment of quiet when you expected a break?

Learning to recognize these moments helps you pause and respond with intention instead of reacting automatically. Awareness is the first tool in your toolbox.

START SMALL WITH ONE DAILY INTENTION

Self-care isn't about overhauling your life—it's about doing one thing today that makes tomorrow feel a little easier. Think about a value that's important to you—maybe it's calm, patience, connection, or strength. Then choose one small way to act on that value today.

BUILD A MICRO-ROUTINE

Your day is likely full of chaos and unpredictability—but even a tiny bit of routine can help you feel more grounded. Choose one moment in your day you can count on and use it as a cue for a calming routine.

It might be writing a quick journal entry, sitting in silence, stretching, or just staring out the window. This is about creating a pocket of time that's only for you, even if it's just one minute long.

REINFORCE YOUR OWN PROGRESS

You are doing incredibly hard work. Don't wait for others to notice—acknowledge yourself. You can do this by writing down a success, no matter how small, or simply saying aloud, "That was hard, and I did it."

Progress doesn't mean perfection. It means showing up, trying again, and giving yourself the same kindness you'd give your child.

What's one small change you can make this week to support your own well-being?

LET GO OF GUILT, EMBRACE GRACE

It's common for parents to feel guilty when they take time for themselves, respond less patiently than they wanted to, or can't "do it all." But guilt isn't helpful if it stops you from caring for yourself. You're doing your best—and that's enough.



GIVE YOURSELF PERMISSION

No one can be calm, patient, and consistent 100% of the time. And that's okay. You don't have to be perfect—you just have to keep showing up. Your child doesn't need perfection. They need a parent who cares, repairs, and tries again.



REFRAME THE NARRATIVE

Instead of saying:

- "I messed that up."

Try:

- "That was a hard moment. I can try something different next time."



PRACTICE SELF-KINDNESS

Start noticing your inner dialogue. Are you being harder on yourself than you would be on a friend? If so, pause and ask, "What would I say to someone else in my shoes?" You deserve the same kindness you give to others.



YOU'RE NOT ALONE

Every parent struggles. You are not failing. You're doing something incredibly hard, and your willingness to keep going—even when it's messy—is a sign of strength, not weakness.

WHEN TO REACH OUT FOR SUPPORT

Being a parent of a child with complex needs can be overwhelming, exhausting, and emotionally draining. You don't have to carry it all alone. Recognizing when you need more help is not a weakness—it's a strength. These signs can help you know when it's time to ask for extra support.

SIGNS YOU MIGHT BENEFIT FROM MORE HELP

If you're not sure whether it's time to ask for help, here are some common signs that extra support might be helpful.

You feel emotionally exhausted most days, even after rest.

You're frequently overwhelmed by your child's needs or behavior.

You've stopped doing things that used to bring you joy.

You feel alone, even when people are around.

You're snapping at others more easily or feel constantly on edge.

You feel stuck and unsure what else to try.

WHERE TO TURN FOR SUPPORT

Support can come from many places—here are a few to consider when you need encouragement or guidance.



Your BCBA® – Talk openly about how you're doing. They may be able to adjust the plan to better support you and your child.



Your Doctor or Therapist – Professional mental health support can help you process stress and build coping tools.



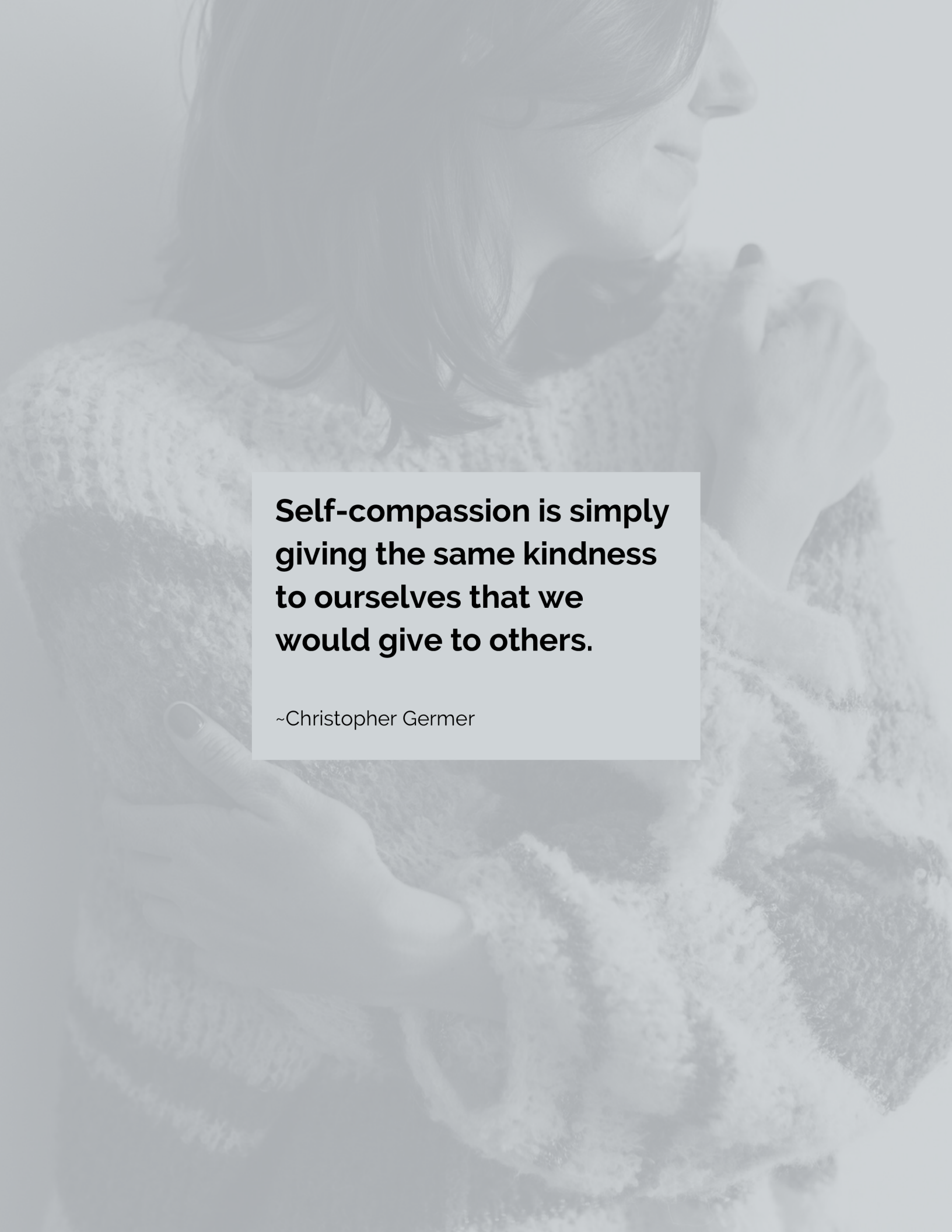
Local Parent Groups – Connecting with others who understand what you're going through can reduce isolation and offer encouragement.



Respite Services – Ask about options for temporary care or support to give you a break.

YOU'RE NOT ALONE

Asking for help isn't giving up—it's choosing to stay in the game. You are doing an incredibly hard job, and support is part of making it sustainable.



**Self-compassion is simply
giving the same kindness
to ourselves that we
would give to others.**

~Christopher Germer