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## HAPPY MOM = HAPPY CHILD *By Sarah Fernández*

As moms, there are plenty of times we've received unsolicited advice, which we eventually learn to filter. When I announced my first pregnancy, one of my coworkers called to congratulate me and said, "Just as people spend more time preparing for the wedding day instead of the marriage, you need to prepare more for parenthood rather than just the birth." It seems like an obvious recommendation, but it's easy to get caught up in the excitement.

It was only after the birth that I understood what "survival mode" was. I wasn't fully prepared for feelings of loneliness and isolation, anxieties over caring for my kids, and thinking I was in over my head. In hindsight, what if instead of telling expectant parents things like, "Get all the sleep now while you can!" (which I've been guilty of saying, too), we asked, "When the sleep deprivation is taking its toll, how will you plan to take care of yourself?"

I'm in the early stages of motherhood, so while I still have much to learn, I've learned a lot thus far, through trial and error (mostly error). One of the

biggest lessons has been: you have needs, too. We always hear, "You can't pour from an empty cup," and that it's important to "put your oxygen mask on first." We often think about self-care as physical rest, opportunities to recharge, or social connection. But we also have needs for mental stimulation, creativity, a sense of accomplishment, and feeling seen, known, and appreciated.

It's common to believe that fulfilling our kids' needs fulfills our needs, but the opposite is true: children match what we model. When we take care of ourselves, we can give our children our best. It's even more challenging to do this during a global pandemic. I didn't think physical distancing would be much different from my everyday life of being at home with my kids; little did I realize the isolation I already felt would intensify. Self-care looks different right now, we're all still figuring it out, and that's okay. Whether it's connecting with loved ones from afar, adjusting your expectations, or even just stepping outside for some fresh air, do what helps you feel centered and re-energized. You are not alone.