



I have been blessed with being a part-time stay-at-home dad since 1999 and a licensed therapist since 1996. I thank God for the gift of being a dad. Parenting is the most exhausting and exhilarating thing I have ever done. I have never been so caffeine-dependent in my life, but I am convinced that God is OK with that.

I do find that parenting for me and my wife is much easier when I learn the profound lesson of the airlines. (I am not talking about the way they price their tickets or overbook most flights.) Let me explain.

Before every flight the airline attendant comes into the cabin and tells the passengers something like this: "If cabin air pressure changes, masks will deploy from the ceiling. Grab the mask and make sure there are no twists in the tubing. Gently place the mask over your face. Oxygen will begin to flow immediately into the mask. Place the mask on yourself first and then help those around you who are unable to assist themselves. Have a nice flight and enjoy the pretzels."

Here is the key: "Place the mask on yourself first and then help those who are unable to help themselves." What are the reasons they teach this?

The airlines know that if adults are able to receive the oxygen they need first, then there is a chance that others can be saved. For example, we have a seven year old son who has Down's syndrome. If in the middle of a flight a mask with a rubber band comes down from the ceiling he is going to have a great time with this new toy from the sky! He will be flinging it all over the cabin, playing with the rubber band part especially. His oxygen supply will become critically low.

That is the reason airlines tell us to put our masks on first. If I live there is a chance I can help others. If I don't get the oxygen I need, then I will pass out, guaranteeing that those who can't help themselves will also pass out. If parents could learn from this model I am convinced that our families would be helped tremendously. Here is how it would look.

Parents would not feel guilty when they devote positive time away from their children: time to pray, time to exercise, time with life-giving friends. Of course, this

can't happen all the time, but we as parents have to make sure some of our basic needs are being met. These met needs provide much-needed air in the midst of a near-suffocating amount of parental tasks.

When we meet our basic needs then we are better able to meet the demands of our children. How do we do this?

It depends. If you are married, talk with your spouse and plan ahead for times where you can pray, go for walks, talk with uplifting friends, visit with a spiritual director, or simply take a nap. If possible, plan a retreat every year. I try to go on two or three retreats a year, and so does my wife. I miss my family, but I come back refreshed and full of new oxygen to share.

Also, plan on syncing your calendars at least twice a month. During this time talk to each other about how your needs are being met. If you need more time away for life-giving activities plan them ASAP. Spirit-led time away will always help our families.

If you are a single parent perhaps start a baby-sitting group so one person can baby-sit once or twice a week, giving the other parents some free time. Or, talk to your church and see if there are some trusted Confirmation students who are good baby-sitters and need service hours. Time alone as a single parent is critical.

When I have shared this wisdom with hurting families and the parents start to create positive time to meet their needs, amazing things start to happen. Parents become more patient with their children. As they become gentler with themselves, they become gentler with their children. They begin to breathe the breath of new life.

May God bless you as you meet your needs so that the Holy Spirit will equip you to meet your children's needs.