

## **You Can't Give What You Don't Have**

As parents, you put a great deal of energy into trying to do the best you can for your children, ensuring they have all the opportunities, relationships, skills and attitudes – the assets - they need to become caring, resilient, healthy adults. On top of that, many parents work long hours outside the home. Parents also care for extended family, volunteer in schools, neighborhoods and the faith community, and coach sports teams. The list goes on and on and on! With a new year beginning, perhaps now is a good time to shift focus and think about what YOU need and how to build YOUR assets.

**What kind of support do you have in your life?** We all need people who are just “crazy” about us, and, as best we can, we need to spend lots of time with those people. In order to feel supported and cared for, we need to be with people who mirror back to us our very best possibilities. Spending time with your spouse or partner as two adults who love each other is essential to feeling supported. So is making sure to stay connected to friends, neighbors and extended family who share your values and who care about you. The [Building Strong Families](#) poll (Search Institute and YMCA of the USA) found that most parents are not seeking support from family, friends and community and are more apt to be “going it alone”. But research shows that having support from others is associated with positive outcomes for both parents *and* children.

**How empowered do you feel?** We all want to feel competent, valued and appreciated. And the truth is, parenting is not known for making people feel competent, valued and appreciated. For most parents, it will be a very long time before your children will tell you how much they value and appreciate you. (It will happen – trust me!) But meanwhile, find something you'd like to do that does make you feel valued and valuable. It may be volunteering in the classroom, or working with homeless people or gardening. It may be playing hockey or basketball. It may be painting or writing. I know a Mom who made the time to learn Spanish and another who always kept up her ballet the whole time her four boys were growing-up. It doesn't matter what you choose to do; what matters is that you value yourself enough to make the time and do it!

**What are your boundaries for yourself?** The rules parents set-up for children about healthy eating and exercise and getting enough rest also apply to parents. It's hard to take care of everyone else, if you don't take care of yourself! But perhaps the most important boundaries parents can set are the boundaries on time and space. In this age of laptops, cell phones and the Internet, parents really have to work hard to set and keep boundaries. It used to be you could go home and shut the door, but now work runs into home, and home runs into work. Through television and the Internet, all the joy and tragedy of the whole world are right there inside your home 24-7. No wonder we feel stressed! The tools of modern technology are just that, simply tools. It's up to you to use them in a way that supports and empowers you and your family.

The beginning of a New Year with all its possibilities does seem like a good time to reflect and maybe make some changes. Take the time to think about what you need as parents in order to feel supported and valued. Here's an idea you might find helpful. In

her book, Kids are Worth It, Barbara Coloroso advises parents to “. . .take at least a half hour out of your day, every day and give it to the only person who’s going to spend the rest of your life with you – and that’s you. You’re honestly the only person you can count on being there when you need you the most. So, take that half hour and do something that says, I like me!”

It’s a possibility . . . . . Happy New Year!