

3 Questions to Ask Yourself if You're a Stressed Out Parent

"I'm so tired," she says, looking down at the table, her finger tracing the wood's grain. "I just don't know what to do."

I nod. I know that place too.

"I mean, my daughter's so intense. I've read every book and article that's supposed to help. I've tried everything people recommend. All that work with counselors led us nowhere. The classes, support groups . . . even getting her an IEP . . ." Her voice trails off. She's looking for something. Words? Feelings? Maybe the magic bullet she's missed that would make everything just . . . work. Or make any sense whatsoever.

"And you know what? I even tried that crazy idea from the tabloid magazine!" She laughs. But her eyes search mine for judgment.

"See?" I seize her levity. "You're as nuts as I said you were!"

She laughs again. I smile too. Then tears fall. Fast.

"We're doing the best we can with our daughter," she continues. "I just don't have a clue how I'm going to do this forever! I can't even relax sitting here at lunch with a friend."

Tears keep coming. I hold her hand and we sit together. I want to embrace and hold her tight. Make her laugh again. Tell her she's not alone. But she may as well be on an island at the South Pole right now. Even sitting with someone who understands as I do—even amidst the smiles, the touch, the

gallows humor—the isolation she feels is almost palpable.

What about you? How are you holding up?

If you're like me, the answer is probably something like, "What do you mean . . . 'me'?" And if that's how you're feeling, I assure you, you are not alone.

There's not much space in a family with special needs kids for us as parents to have a life of our own.

Chronic stress unravels us. It agitates us and messes with our weight, sleep, memory, energy level, and long-term moods. It blanches our view of life, ourselves, our marriages, and our kids. Then again, I don't have to tell you that. You're already living it.

As a mom of four—the older two foster-adopted who, between the two of them, boast diagnoses of bipolar disorder, anxiety, ODD, ADHD, seizures, enuresis, encopresis, sensory integration problems, and speech and developmental delays—I've struggled hard and often with feeling numb and resentful. I've been angry over what I've lost: the family I imagined, the kids I'd dreamed about, the life where I didn't have to do damage control with onlookers as my twelve-year-old goes ballistic in the middle of a supermarket parking lot. I've longed for the alternate universe where I don't constantly struggle with feeling guilty, inept, lonely, and depressed, especially when I consider what life is like for my two younger children, who are growing up in a family with an intensity they never asked for.

The point here is not to add to your stress . . . or to languish in mine. It's to recognize how real and intense our daily stressors can be, and how crucial it is to our health and well-being to learn to thrive despite them all.

Because as airline attendants remind us at the start of a flight, in order to be the best help to those nearest to us,

we've got to put our own oxygen masks on first. Only then can we help others well.

- What would it take to re-discover the “you” God made, apart from your role as a parent?
- Who do you know that could help you along the way?
- What first step might you take to begin the process of taking good care of you?

*Excerpted from **Laurie's Wallin's** book, Get Your Joy Back ©2015 Kregel Publications. Laurie Wallin is a speaker and the author of Get Your Joy Back: Banishing Resentment and Reclaiming Confidence in Your Special Needs Family. A certified life coach, she has helped people for over ten years to get unstuck and live powerfully by discovering and developing their strengths, identifying and releasing resentment and pursuing their God-inspired hopes and dreams. She blogs at , and is on Facebook (LivingPowerLifeCoaching), Pinterest (lauriewallin), and Twitter (mylivingpower).*