



guide to
self-care
for families together
at home



introduction

Hey there, I'm Jonas Ellison. I'm so happy that I could write this "Guide to Self-Care for Families Together at Home" in collaboration with my good friends at the SALT Project. In this time of pandemic and "sheltering" at home, taking care of ourselves and each other is more important than ever.



This little guide was designed to give you some tools to pick and choose from to foster self-care in your family during this challenging time. Peruse through it, use what speaks to you, and discard the rest. There's no certain order to this guide – so settle in and feel free to jump around. I've selected from my own mental Rolodex of family self-care ideas as well as ones I've borrowed from the cultures of my Scandinavian ancestral siblings (because it's true – they are the masters of self-care).

I hope you enjoy this little guide. In these uncertain times, as we stay home in the name of love and care for our neighbors, may these new challenges bring us closer together – with God and each other.

As Ever,
Jonas Ellison





bigger ideas

deeper waters to swim in,
with a wider time frame in mind



hygge: the danish phenomenon of sincere and comfortable self-care

Maybe you've heard of the cultural Danish phenomenon of hygge. Though hygge is usually promoted in the US during the winter months, it can be practiced year round just like the Danish do.

I've been a practitioner of hygge for the last few years since hearing about it and I love how it's a form of self-care that feels sincere instead of obligatory or forced (plus, it's fun to say).

Meik Wiking, the author of *The Little Book of Hygge: Danish Secrets To Happy Living*, and CEO of the Happiness Research Institute in Copenhagen, says that hygge has been called everything from "the art of creating intimacy," to "coziness of the soul," and even, "cocoa by candlelight."

As Wiking explains, hygge is something we know when we feel it. It's hard (plus it defeats the purpose) if we make it too prescriptive, but some of the key ingredients of hygge are togetherness, relaxation, indulgence, presence, and comfort. "The true essence of hygge is the pursuit of everyday happiness and it's basically like a hug, just without the physical touch," he says.

In the 2016 World Happiness Report, Denmark ranked as the world's happiest country. Wiking and other hygge enthusiasts believe that hygge is the reason why. "The Danes are exceptionally good at decoupling wealth and well-being," he says. "We focus on the small things that really matter, including spending more quality time with friends and family and enjoying the good things in life."

but seriously, how do you say it?

Hygge is pronounced HOO-gah. Hygge can be a noun, a verb, and an adjective. Hygge practitioners say things like, "What a hyggelig (hygge-like) home you have!" Or, "We had such a hyggelig time last night." If you get really into this, you can be a hyggespreder (someone who spreads the hygge) and reserve every Friday night for "familiehygge."

Hygge requires only a small effort and it costs little – if any – money. As Wiking says, “There is nothing fancy, expensive, or luxurious about a pair of ugly woolen hygge socks – and that is a vital feature of hygge. It’s about appreciating the simple pleasures in life and can be achieved on a shoestring budget.”

here are a few ways to start making your life as hyggelig as possible...

board games,
not video games

Old school, baby. Let’s face it, we need more analog in our lives.

flickering light

Flickering light set the hygge mood like nothing else. In warmer months, you don’t want the fireplace going, so candles will to do the trick. Don’t blow a lot of money on \$20 organic soy candles (unless you want to). Cheap white unscented votive candles are fine. If even just after the kids go down (and even if you’re not getting romantic, though, ya know...). Another plus is having a darker room increases natural melatonin levels and makes for better sleep.

make popcorn.
over the stove.

There’s just something about sharing popcorn in a bowl (plus, who doesn’t like the smell of popcorn, right?). Sure, you can throw in the microwaveable stuff, but here’s how to do it hygge-style on the stovetop...

1. Heat 3 tablespoons of olive oil or coconut oil in a 3-quart thick-bottomed saucepan on medium-high heat.
2. Put 3 or 4 popcorn kernels into the oil.
3. When the kernels pop, add 1/2 cup of popcorn kernels in an even layer.
4. Cover the pot, remove from heat and count 30 seconds.
5. Return the pan to the heat.
6. When the popping sound slows to about one pop per every few seconds, sprinkle with a pinch of salt and any other toppings you like.





netflix & chill

Hygge totally allows for chilling with your favorite streaming service! Just be conscious of it and make sure it isn't getting in the way of the key of hygge – togetherness. And here's an idea for creating that togetherness over distances: there's a free Google Chrome extension called Netflix Party that allows for watching simultaneously, pausing and replaying moments in sync, and connecting in a chatroom as you go.

carve out a hyggekrog

A hyggekrog is a nook. The Danish like nooks. These are little spaces (could be inside or outside) that you carve out for comfort. Maybe it's a hammock in the corner of your yard. Or adorn an empty patch of floor by a sunlit window with cushions and a plant. Make it somewhat private and – of course – comfortable.

Source: <https://www.self.com/story/practicing-hygge-danish-lifestyle>

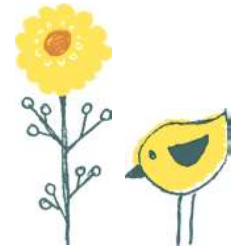
know your zones

My daughter is in Kindergarten and she's hands-down light years more emotionally intelligent than I was at her age (heck, she's way ahead of where I am now!). A large part of this is because her teachers have taught her class to be able to recognize and name their emotions using a really handy cognitive behavior tool called, "The Zones of Regulation."

"The Zones of Regulation" is a way to categorize all the different ways we feel and states of alertness we experience into four concrete colored zones.

the four zones

the red zone is used to describe extremely heightened states of alertness and intense emotions. A person may be elated or experiencing anger, rage, or explosive behavior when in the Red Zone.



the yellow zone is also used to describe a heightened state of alertness and elevated emotions, however one has more control when they are in the Yellow Zone. A person may be experiencing stress, frustration, anxiety, excitement, silliness, the wiggles, or nervousness when in the Yellow Zone.

the green zone is used to describe a calm state of alertness. A person may be described as happy, focused, content, or ready to learn when in the Green Zone. This is the zone where optimal learning occurs.

the blue zone is used to describe low states of alertness and down feelings such as when one feels sad, tired, sick, or bored.

As you can probably see, saying you're in the 'red zone' is a low-impact way of saying that you just need space to cool off. Or saying you're in the 'blue zone' is a great way to communicate that you're just a little... well, blue. Saying someone is in the 'green zone' is another way of saying they're on a roll (or, 'in the zone' as they say in the sports world).



By creating a simple and consistent way to communicate complex feelings, you relieve the pressure of having to eloquently say what you might be going through at any given moment.

Source: <http://www.zonesofregulation.com/learn-more-about-the-zones.html>

be still and know: simple and prayerful meditation practices for the family

Try guiding a short family meditation. Here are a couple of practices that might do the trick:

returning to the breath

Start by having everyone close their eyes, breathe deeply, and focus on their breath. Guide their intention through saying this mantra three times before a 5-minute period of silent deep breathing, *"All sounds return to the breath, all thoughts return to the breath, all distractions return to the breath."*

be still and know that i am god

In this meditation, sit around in a circle and have everyone recite Psalm 46 as a group mantra: "Be still and know that I am God." But each time you recite the mantra, peel off one part as follows:

Be still and know that I am God.

Be still and know that I am.

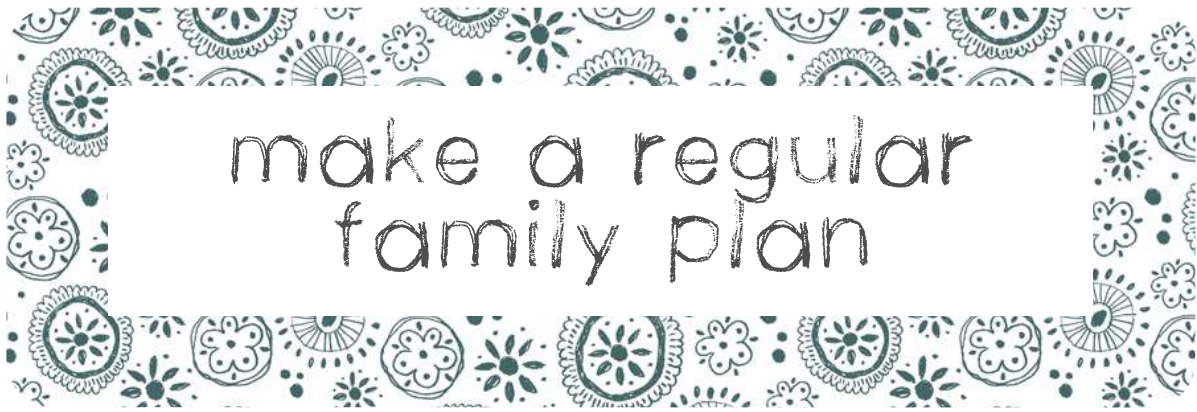
Be still and know.

Be still.

Be.

Repeat this together as much as you'd like. Soon, you'll notice an incredible cadence that you're entering into together.





make a regular family plan



"Where there is no vision, the people perish..."
+ Proverbs 29:18

Another good way to check in on each other and keep things moving in a positive direction is to sit down together and create a 'family plan' – for getting through the week, the month, or the pandemic writ large.

1. What makes your family special? Write two or three sentences that describe how your family is different from any other family in the world..

2. What is your family's highest priority goal - right now? Write down the ONE goal you are going to work on and the time period in which you expect to accomplish it.

3. What are the action steps needed to work towards this goal? List four to five action steps that will make this goal a reality for your family.

4. How will your family check-in on your progress towards this goal? Write down your plan for holding family meetings (when/where/how often).



See this as an exciting venture, not a punitive thing. Every couple of weeks or so, check in on the plan and track your progress. Update regularly. This is a living plan, not a static one.

playlists

To find these playlists, just search Spotify under the playlist name – and enjoy!

focus flow

This playlist is a paradox... Both upbeat and chill. Both relaxing and invigorating. It's a playlist that both the cool kids and their ex-cool parents can bob their heads to (without getting too hardcore for we uppity parents, of course). Bring flow to your afternoon with this blend of uptempo instrumental hip-hop beats.

chill hits

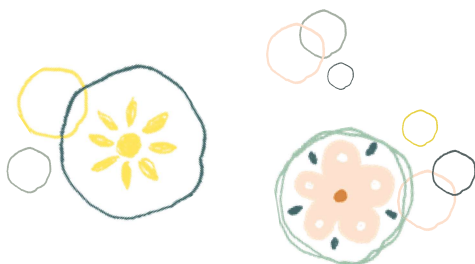
Picture this... the weather's getting warmer, and there's a refreshing breeze wafting around outside. You open the windows to let the fresh air in. The kids are coding, doing crafts, and whatever they do. You want to keep it relaxed, but you don't just want instrumentals. You want upbeat songwriting with a chill vibe. This is your playlist.

spotify orchestra: cello

In my opinion, there is no better solo classical instrument than the cello. If you're a cello freak like me, this playlist will bring you to your special place. Great for creative moments and soothing background music for relaxing dinners, etc.

this is taizé

The Taizé Community is an ecumenical Christian monastic fraternity in Taizé, Saône-et-Loire, Burgundy, France composed of members from both Catholic and Protestant traditions who originate from across the world. If you've ever been to a Taizé service, you know how transcendent the music can be. To set the tone on a beautiful sun-washed morning or to cool things off in the evening as you wind down, this playlist is ideal for setting a sacred mood.



yoga - playlist of the month

Now we're getting a little new-agey, but that's okay. These yoga beats are great for – well, yoga – but also for when your family tag-teams the house cleaning duties or for a festive gathering when you're bored of the same old classic rock and contemporary hits. Get your family and friends in that yoga flow and bliss out, my friend. All is well.

peaceful choral music by living composers

One of the most wonderful things about humans, in my opinion, is our ability to sing together and create something far bigger than the sum of our parts. Choral music is a representation of the divine, as far as I'm concerned. This playlist is one of the best collections of choral music I've found. Hallelujah!

under the stars

This playlist was designed for campfires (as the title suggests) under the stars. So grab those s'mores ingredients (literally or figuratively) and a few blankets, stoke the fire, and make this acoustic, folk-driven, bluegrassy, instrumental playlist a part of the night as you tell stories, ask questions, pray, and commune under God's stars.