

Expectations from Self and Others

Section 5



Parents and caregivers experiencing compassion fatigue are often competent people with high expectations for themselves, who may feel overworked and underappreciated. We give the very best of who we are every day, yet all too often struggle to feel like anything we do is good enough. We carry with us beliefs about how a parent or caregiver “should” look, think, feel, act, and be viewed by others. We often expect more from ourselves than we can reasonably give. As caregiving demands add up, our self-image, self-esteem, and sense of worthiness may erode, thus changing our perceptions of ourselves and our children. Our compassion resilience may decline. Understanding, and at times challenging, our own expectations and perception of others’ expectations is key to learning to identify, transform, and overcome unrealistic beliefs that may limit our ability to approach others and ourselves with compassion.



[Distribute this document to all participants to explore prior to this session.](#)



Circle Agenda

[Circle Agenda for Section 5, In-Person](#)

Use this agenda if you are leading your group in a session in-person.

[Circle Agenda for Section 5, Virtual](#)

Use this agenda if you are leading your group in a session virtually.

Handouts to Support Content Covered in Circle Agenda

[Understanding Temperament](#)

[Affirmation Worksheet](#)

This activity was also referenced in the Introduction Document for this section. Formatted as a fillable PDF, you can send this document to participants to complete on an electronic device or print and distribute as a hard copy.

[Caregiver Bill of Rights](#)

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INTRODUCTION

Parents and caregivers experiencing compassion fatigue are often competent people with high expectations for themselves, who may feel overworked and underappreciated. We give the very best of who we are every day, yet all too often struggle to feel like anything we do is good enough. We carry with us beliefs about how a parent or caregiver “should” look, think, feel, act, and be viewed by others. We often expect more from ourselves than we can reasonably give. As caregiving demands add up, our self-image, self-esteem, and sense of worthiness may erode, thus changing our perceptions of ourselves and our children. Our compassion resilience may decline. Understanding, and at times challenging, our own expectations and perception of others’ expectations is key to learning to identify, transform, and overcome unrealistic beliefs that may limit our ability to approach others and ourselves with compassion.



INFORMATION

We all carry a load of expectations with us. Our expectations paint a picture in our head of how things “should” be, look, and feel and of how the people around us “should” act and feel. Our “shoulds” reflect expectations, responsibilities, or duties that we feel we are not meeting. If our internal dialogue says *“I should spend more time playing with my child,”* the unspoken end to that sentence is *“... but, I am not.”* This can result in guilt, frustration, or anxiety.

Well meaning, but unchecked, expectations can be at the core of compassion fatigue. Expectations may operate in the short-term: *“If I get this dinner just right, the family will love it.”* In this example, we create expectations for ourselves (*“If I get this dinner just right...”*), as well as for others (*“the family will love it”*). Such thinking can invite shame if we don’t live up to our self-expectation, as well as resentment if others do not live up to our expectations of them. Expectations also operate in the long-term and may be evident in the goals we set for ourselves or our children: *“I will be a great parent if my child conquers their anxiety about going to parties.”* This example shows our own expectations may be influenced by expectations others have for us - *“That parent should know how to help their child get over social anxiety.”*

Expectations can evolve into shame or resentment when they go unnoticed. It is only when we become conscious of our expectations that we can examine how realistic they are. We can increase our compassion resilience by making an effort to notice the “shoulds” in our life and the effect that such expectations may have on us. We must first *notice and name* our expectations if we are going to align them with reality. Let’s take a moment to think about some expectations we carry as parents and caregivers. Try to think of a few expectations in each category.

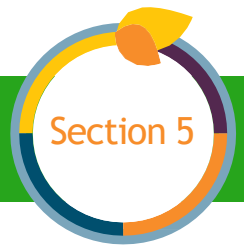
Developed in partnership with:

ROGERS
Behavioral Health

wise END
STIGMA
TOGETHER
one story at a time

compassionresiliencetoolkit.org

Expectations from Self and Others



	Expectations of self	Expectations of child	Expectations of partners or extended family members	Expectations of people in helping professions
Example	<i>I should always stay calm when my child is upset.</i>	<i>My child should appreciate how hard I try to be a good parent.</i>	<i>My partner/family member should have the same priorities as me.</i>	<i>The people I go to for help should be able to give me accurate answers.</i>
My Examples				

Let’s look at a few examples of how unchecked expectations may lessen our compassion resilience. For each case, we will consider strategies that may be helpful in building our compassion resilience.

CASE 1:

Lisa is parent of a four-year-old child named Jax. She has loved parenting, and although there have been challenging times, she has felt like a “successful” parent. She expects she should feel the same as Jax ages. However, she’s noticed that some of her strategies are not working as well as they used to and that Jax is pushing against the limits she sets more and more lately. The pre-school teacher has made several comments about Jax “misbehaving” at school. Lisa recently miscarried a baby at 6 months and is experiencing stress in her relationship with her boss at work. Lisa is struggling to deal with her feelings surrounding the loss of her child, but also believes that her problems should not interfere with her ability to provide the best support for Jax. She is concerned that his challenges are her fault.



Reflection 1a: Lisa is experiencing multiple sources of stress and compassion fatigue, which are then affecting the likelihood she can parent Jax in the way that she expects of herself. Her compassion resilience may suffer if she does not adjust her expectations to these new circumstances. **In the table above, what drivers of fatigue make it difficult to achieve the expectations you listed?**

Reflection 1b: Self-compassion supports our compassion resilience, while unrealistic expectations can undermine it. Lisa’s perceived inadequacy could lessen her compassion resilience even further. With self-compassion, Lisa is better equipped to recognize her own needs to maintain her physical, emotional, and mental well-being so that she may again show up compassionately for Jax.

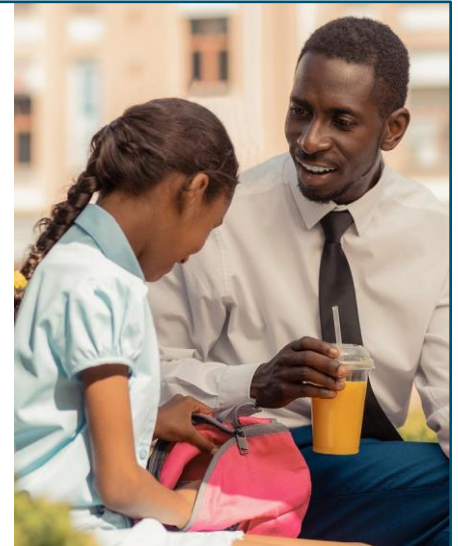
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CASE 2:

Todd is undergoing his first teacher-parent conference in quite a while. He cares for his 13-year-old niece and hasn't gone to her conferences in recent years. He is excited to communicate with his niece's homeroom teacher because he has noticed his niece seems down a lot lately. He's discouraged to find that the teacher does not appear to really know his niece and doesn't seem to take the conversation as seriously as he had hoped. After this meeting, he starts to blame the teacher for his niece's moods and feels angry that she is not getting the support she needs at school.

Reflection: Our expectations are often internal and undiscussed. Todd may have found it useful to discuss his expectations regarding the conference with the teacher to see if they are aligned with the reality of middle school conferences. Making his expectations known might create space for him and the teacher to figure out another time for them to have a deeper conversation about his niece. That would also invite the teacher to step up to Todd's expectations that she knows his niece and participate in a helpful way with Todd to address his concern about her moods. **How might you test the expectations you listed above by talking with others?**



So far, we have discussed the expectations we have for ourselves and the expectations we have for others. While it pays to keep an eye on our own expectations and assumptions, we also have a laundry list of expectations that are heaped upon us. Many of us struggle mightily as we try to fulfill the expectations of others. Expectations placed upon us are often left unstated or are not clearly defined, leaving us to make inferences or guesses about the expectations people have for us. When unreasonable expectations are placed upon us, it may be a quick path to feeling burnt-out. Giving too much of ourselves as we strive to meet or exceed expectations, without taking time to care for ourselves, leads to burn-out. And then people may presume that we will continue to go above and beyond at each and every opportunity. When we no longer can go the extra mile, or no longer wish to, then everyone may be disappointed. It is not difficult to see how expectations can be a root cause of damaged relationships.

We have the opportunity to build more satisfying relationships with others when we talk to people to clarify their and our expectations. With open lines of communication, we can be clear about what the expectations are and whether we can reasonably meet them.

Building positive family, friend, and work relationships rests on the following:

- acknowledging we all have expectations;
- striving to be aware of our expectations and clearly communicate them to others;
- seeking to understand others' expectation of us; and
- being open to altering our expectations to make them realistic and aligned with our values.

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SELF-CARE



STRATEGIES

MIND: Developing positive affirmations



This exercise is designed to help identify unrealistic self-expectations and transform them into positive affirmations.

Step 1: List some of your unrealistic self-expectations related to caregiving. These often contain words such as always, never, must, should, no one.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Step 2: Take each unrealistic self-expectation and change it into an alternative belief that feels right to you. These affirmations should be positive, short yet specific, stated as if it already exists, and be only about you. See the table for examples.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

 Step 1: Examples of Unrealistic Hurtful Self-expectations	Step 2: Examples of Positive Self-affirmations 
No matter how well I parent, it will never be good enough for my child.	I am good enough today as the person I am. While I will strive to do better in my parenting, I accept who I am today.
I can't feel good about myself unless I am successful in alleviating my child's problems.	I will be there with my children as they face complex challenges. Together, we will learn what works and how to deal with what we cannot change.

Step 3: Choose one affirmation from above that especially appeals to you. Say it to yourself with increasing focus and intention repeating and accepting the affirmation. At some point, notice the affirmation repeating itself even when you do not consciously try to repeat it. Feel a growing sense of calm, clarity and peacefulness as it begins to take root.

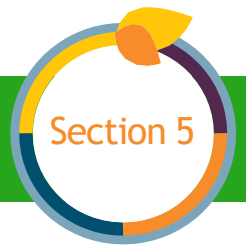
* Adapted from the [Traumatology Insitute](#).



WHAT'S NEXT

Compassionate boundary setting.

Expectations from Self and Others



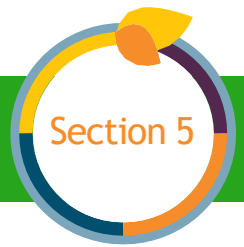
Parent & Caregiver



Circle Agenda

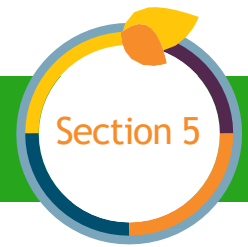
Circle Topic	CR Section 5: Expectations from Self and Others
<p>Planning</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Send out pre-read for Section 5 <input type="checkbox"/> Prepare materials for Session 5
<p>Purpose of Circle</p>	<p>Today you will:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Learn to identify the expectations we have for ourselves and for others. 2. Learn whether these expectations are helpful or holding us back.
<p>Time/Materials/Preparation</p>	<p>Time: 90 minutes</p> <p>Materials:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Group agreements <input type="checkbox"/> Group values and family goals <input type="checkbox"/> Centerpiece <input type="checkbox"/> Talking piece <input type="checkbox"/> Fidgets <input type="checkbox"/> Flipchart paper with compassion resilience definition <input type="checkbox"/> Pens/markers <input type="checkbox"/> Flipchart <input type="checkbox"/> Name tags <input type="checkbox"/> Handouts: Understanding Temperament, Affirmation Worksheet, and Caregiver Bill of Rights <p>Preparation: Arrange chairs in a circle without furniture in the middle. Hang compassion resilience definition on the wall.</p>

Expectations from Self and Others



Circle Topic	CR Section 5: Expectations from Self and Others
<p>Opening and Check-in (15 minutes)</p>	<p>Share</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome back! I invite everyone to get into a comfortable position with your eyes closed or looking towards the ground. We are going to take a moment to pause. Take a few slow breaths. <i>(Pause)</i> Name in your mind what you want to let go of to be present in this circle and your personal reason for being here. <i>(Pause for 10 seconds)</i> I invite you to bring your attention back to the circle. • When we were together last, we discussed things that caused us fatigue and things that filled us up or built our resilience. <p>Ask</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (Go-around) What have you done since our last group that has built your resilience? <p>Share</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We have completed half of our compassion resilience groups. So far we have discussed our values, our family goals, compassion resilience, steps to compassionate action, self-compassion, mindfulness, the cats visual of the cycle of compassion fatigue, emotional regulation plans, things that cause us fatigue and things that build us up, along with the practice of letting go. • Today we are going to look at expectations and the impact our expectations have on our wellbeing and our families. Last session we discussed things we do and don't have control over. Our own expectations are something we have control over. • As we have our discussion today, let's remember to do our best to follow our group agreements as well.
<p>Guiding Questions (10 minutes - Expectations Explanation)</p>	<p>Share</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If we want to minimize frustration and anger in our families, let's look at what unrealistic or unclear expectations might be behind those feelings. We will use kindness as our desired outcome in this example. • An expectation can be: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Too high - <i>"I expect my child to be kind at all times."</i> b. Too low - <i>"Of course my child is mean to others, like all kids."</i> c. Not stated - <i>"Why do I have to tell her? She ought to know."</i> d. Stated but unclear - <i>"Be kind!"</i> e. Clearly stated - <i>"Please be a kind friend by smiling and asking her if she would like to play with you."</i> f. Unrecognized - <i>"I didn't realize I expected my child to be kind in all social situations." Often you don't realize it is an expectation until it's not met.</i>

Expectations from Self and Others



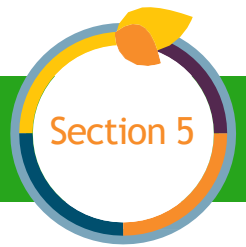
Circle Topic	CR Section 5: Expectations from Self and Others
<p>Guiding Questions <i>continued</i></p> <p>(30 minutes - Application Questions)</p>	<p>Ask</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (Open mic) What are some examples of expectations parents and caregivers have of themselves for each category? <p>Scribe the examples on a flipchart paper.</p> <p>Share</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We learn a lot about how to parent, or not to parent, from how our own parents and caregivers interacted with us as children. Thinking back on what your caregivers modeled for you when you were a child can help you better understand your approach to parenting. <p>Ask</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (Go-around) What is an unreasonable or unstated expectation your parent/caregiver had of you and what impact does that expectation have on you now? <p>Ask the group to get into pairs. If there is an odd number and you have more than one facilitator, one facilitator can pair with a participant. Otherwise, one group of three will work.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (Partner discussion) Share an expectation you have for yourself that you think might be unrealistic. What is the impact of that on you and your family relationships? <p>Ask</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (Open mic) What would you like to share with the circle from your partner conversations? <p>Share</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We've discussed expectations for ourselves, but what about our children or those we care for? <p>Ask</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (Open mic) What is one example of an unstated expectation that either you have for your child or you think your child has for you. <p>Hand out Understanding Temperament handout.</p> <p>Share</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Often, we find we need to adjust our expectations to the needs and temperament of our children. Temperament is a person's manner of thinking, behaving, or reacting. There are three general types of temperaments often referred to as easy-going, slow-to-warm, and active. • We are all born with a certain temperament. Understanding our child's temperament can help us adjust our expectations in a way that makes them more realistic and attainable. <p>Ask</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (Open mic) How might you need to adjust an expectation you have for one of your children to account for their temperament?

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Circle Topic	CR Section 5: Expectations from Self and Others
Check for Understanding (15 minutes)	Ask <ul style="list-style-type: none">• (Go-around) What is an expectation you'd like to clarify in the next week?
Self-care and Closing (20 minutes)	Hand out Turning Unrealistic Expectations into Affirmations and Caregiver Bill of Rights Share <ul style="list-style-type: none">• As we explored today, expectations have a huge impact on our wellbeing. This handout has a practice that was also included in the pre-read for this session. It walks you through turning an unrealistic self-expectation into an affirmation.• I also handed out the Caregiver Bill of Rights. This is from the lens of caring for aging family members and has some good examples of affirmations that would counter some unrealistic expectations. (Open mic) What is an affirmation you can tell yourself that would counter an unrealistic expectation you have for yourself as a parent? Share <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Thank you for being here today. We look forward to seeing you (<i>insert next meeting day/time here</i>).

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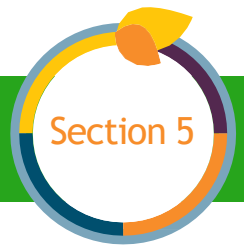
Parent & Caregiver



Virtual Circle Agenda

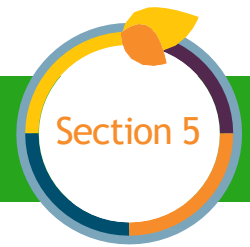
Circle Topic	CR Section 5: Expectations from Self and Others
<p>Planning</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Send out pre-read for Section 5 <input type="checkbox"/> Prepare materials for Session 5 <input type="checkbox"/> Share handouts from Session 4
<p>Purpose of Circle</p>	<p>Today you will:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Learn to identify the expectations we have for ourselves and for others. 2. Learn whether these expectations are helpful or holding us back.
<p>Time/Materials/Preparation</p>	<p>Time: 90 minutes</p> <p>Documents to Share During Session:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Understanding Temperament <input type="checkbox"/> Affirmation Worksheet <input type="checkbox"/> Caregiver Bill of Rights <p>Items to Place in Chat During Session:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Group Agreements <input type="checkbox"/> Family Goals

Expectations from Self and Others



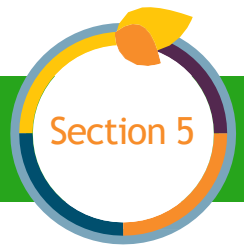
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<p>Guiding Questions (10 minutes - Expectations Explanation)</p>	<p>Share</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If we want to minimize frustration and anger in our families, let's look at what unrealistic or unclear expectations might be behind those feelings. We will use kindness as our desired outcome in this example. • An expectation can be: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Too high - <i>"I expect my child to be kind at all times."</i> b. Too low - <i>"Of course my child is mean to others, like all kids."</i> c. Not stated - <i>"Why do I have to tell her? She ought to know."</i> d. Stated but unclear - <i>"Be kind!"</i> e. Clearly stated - <i>"Please be a kind friend by smiling and asking her if she would like to play with you."</i> f. Unrecognized - <i>"I didn't realize I expected my child to be kind in all social situations." Often you don't realize it is an expectation until it's not met.</i>

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Self-care and Closing (20 minutes)	<p>Hand out Turning Unrealistic Expectations into Affirmations and Caregiver Bill of Rights. Feel free to put links to both these documents in chat as well so participants can quickly reference them.</p> <p>Share</p> <p>As we explored today, expectations have a huge impact on our wellbeing. The Turning Unrealistic Expectations into Affirmations handout has a practice that was also included in the pre-read for this session. It walks you through turning an unrealistic self-expectation into an affirmation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• I also want to share the Caregiver Bill of Rights. This is from the lens of caring for aging family members and has some good examples of affirmations that would counter some unrealistic expectations. <p>(Open mic) What is an affirmation you can tell yourself that would counter an unrealistic expectation you have for yourself as a parent?</p> <p>Share</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Thank you for being here today. We look forward to seeing you (<i>insert next meeting day/time here</i>).
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Understanding Temperament

Temperament is an important feature of social and emotional health. Temperament describes the way we approach and react to the world. It is our own personal “style” that is present from birth. There are three general types of temperaments often referred to as easy-going, slow-to-warm, and active.

Easy-going children are generally happy, active children from birth and adjust easily to new situations and environments. Slow-to-warm children are generally observant, calm, and may need extra time in adjusting to new situations. Children with active temperaments often have varied routines (e.g., eating, sleeping), and often approach life with zest. Children may fall into one of the three types of temperament, but often have varying behavior across the common temperament traits.

There are nine common traits that can help to describe a child’s temperament and the way they react to and experience the world. These traits include:

1. **Activity Level** - How active the child is generally.
2. **Distractibility** - The degree of concentration and attention the child shows when the child is not particularly interested in an activity.
3. **Intensity** - The energy level of a response, whether positive or negative.
4. **Regularity** - The predictability of biological functions like appetite and sleep.
5. **Sensory Threshold** - How sensitive a child is to physical stimuli.
6. **Approach/Withdrawal** - The child’s characteristic response to a new situation or strangers.
7. **Adaptability** - How easily the child adapts to transitions and changes.
8. **Persistence** - The length of time a child continues in activities in the face of obstacles.
9. **Mood** - The tendency to react to the world primarily in a positive or negative way.

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Each caregiver and parent is also unique in his or her own temperament. The compatibility between adult-child temperaments can affect the quality of relationships. This compatibility is often referred to as “goodness of fit.” A goodness of fit happens when an adult’s expectations and methods of caregiving match the child’s personal style and abilities. What is most beneficial about the goodness of fit concept is that it does not require that adults and children have matching temperaments. The parent or caregiver does not have to change who they are naturally, they can simply alter or adjust their caregiving methods to be a positive support to their child’s natural way of responding to the world. For example, if a child is highly active, a caregiver may pack extra activities in the diaper bag for waiting times at visits to the doctor, grocery store lines, etc. For a child who needs some extra time in approaching new activities, a caregiver might stay close by, giving the child time to adjust and feel safe.

Some examples of dos and don’ts:

- Do not punish the child for temperament style.
- Instead of reprimanding a shy child for being hesitant toward a stranger, encourage her when she looks at or speaks to the stranger.
- Instead of criticizing an intense child for being loud when she feels upset, quietly teach her about her volume control. After all, you wouldn’t punish her for being loud when she is happy.
- An irregular child shouldn’t be punished for lack of hunger at a mealtime, or for not being ready to sleep at every bedtime. Be flexible. Instead of a hard and firm time to sleep, have a routine to follow such as quiet playing or looking at books in bed before going to sleep.
- Notice the times when things go well.
- Recognize and accept the way the child really is.
- Recognize your feelings toward the child’s specific temperament traits, and adjust what you do, to create less stress and conflict.
- Notice if/how your temperament differs from your child’s. Work to set aside judgments about what “ought to be” that is based on your temperament. All temperaments are “typical.”



Combined from works of Cynthia Pollich, PennState Extension, [A parenting secret: Understanding temperament](#) and [Center for Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation, Infant Toddler Temperament Tool \(IT3\), Introduction to Temperament](#).



Developing Positive Affirmations

This exercise is designed to help identify unrealistic self-expectations and transform them into positive affirmations.

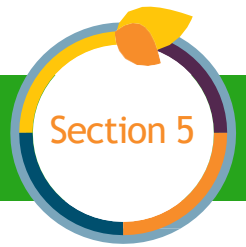
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- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Step 2: Take each unrealistic self-expectation and change it into an alternative belief that feels right to you. These affirmations should be positive, short yet specific, stated as if it already exists, and be only about you. See the table on page 2 for examples.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Expectations from Self and Others



 Step 1: Examples of Unrealistic Hurtful Self-expectations	Step 2: Examples of Positive Self-affirmations 
<p>No matter how well I parent, it will never be good enough for my child.</p>	<p>I am good enough today as the person I am. While I will strive to do better in my parenting, I accept who I am today.</p>
<p>I can't feel good about myself unless I am successful in alleviating my child's problems.</p>	<p>I will be there with my children as they face complex challenges. Together, we will learn what works and how to deal with what we cannot change.</p>

Step 3: When you have some privacy, sit comfortably with a straight spine. Relax your body and calm your mind. Release your thoughts, insecurities, and doubts. When your mind gets restless, focus on your breathing, taking slow breaths.

Step 4. As you relax, open your mind. Suspend judgment and disbelief. Allow yourself to accept the idea that you are good enough just as you are.

Step 5. Choose one affirmation from above that especially appeals to you. Say it to yourself with increasing focus and intention repeating and accepting the affirmation. At some point, notice the affirmation repeating itself even when you do not consciously try to repeat it. Feel a growing sense of calm, clarity, and peacefulness as it begins to take root.

Step 6. Imagine how you will be and feel when the affirmation has become real. Visualize how you might perceive a usually stressful or frustrating situation from a place of calm and confidence. Sense how you will respond to others from this secure place. As you visualize the new perceptions, thoughts, and emotions that may follow from living out this affirmation, allow yourself to feel a sense of gratitude for allowing your self-worth to grow and take root in your body and mind.



* Adapted from the [Traumatology Institute](#).



Caregiver Bill of Rights

I have the right . . .

- to take care of myself. This is not an act of selfishness. It will give me the capability of taking better care of my relative.
- to seek help from others even though my relatives may object. I recognize the limits of my own endurance and strength.
- to maintain facets of my own life that do not include the person I care for, just as I would if he or she were healthy. I know that I do everything that I reasonably can for this person, and I have the right to do some things just for myself.
- to get angry, be depressed, and express other difficult feelings occasionally.
- to reject any attempts by my relative (either conscious or unconscious) to manipulate me through guilt and/or depression.
- to receive consideration, affection, forgiveness, and acceptance from my loved one for what I do, for as long as I offer these qualities in return.
- to take pride in what I am accomplishing and to applaud the courage it has sometimes taken to meet the needs of my relative.
- to protect my individuality and my right to make a life for myself that will sustain me in the time when my relative no longer needs my full-time help.
- to expect and demand that as new strides are made in finding resources to aid physically and mentally impaired persons in our country, similar strides will be made towards aiding and supporting caregivers.

Source: [A Place for Mom](#)