



**healthy
families
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Program helps mothers recognize when frustrations become too much

By NICOLE ROALES

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KOKOMO, Ind. - It's just after 6 a.m. and Dana Huntzinger reluctantly rolls out of bed to grab a cup of coffee before exercising in her family's living room.

"After that I feel like I've done something for me today, and I feel like I'm ready for everyone else," Huntzinger said.

Her husband Joe is already off to work before she's awake and the hour between 6 and 7 a.m. is precious to her. At 46, Huntzinger is a full-time mom raising her four children: 17-year-old Laura Cariello, 14-year-old Alison Cariello, 8-year-old Tyler Huntzinger and 6-year-old Julie Huntzinger.

She is among the many mothers who find themselves burned out at times from raising children, working, doing household chores and more. While most women have help from their children's fathers or other family members, they don't always get time to themselves.

According to Sherri Rinehart, program manager for **Healthy Families** of Howard County, it's important for mothers to get some alone time.

"We help mommies and daddies learn how to recognize when that anxiety level is rising, so that they don't get to the point where it is too much for them," Rinehart said.

"Recognizing where you're at with stress is a good thing."

Healthy Families is designed to help mothers who are pregnant and families with a newborn baby recognize developmental stages of their child and recognize when their own frustration levels start to rise.

After being a mother for nearly 18 years, Huntzinger said she has learned to handle stress. She worked full-time as an engineer for 15 years before quitting after her fourth child.

Once the last child gets on the bus at 11:50 a.m., Huntzinger has laundry, dishes, errands and more to do before thinking about dinner. To add to Huntzinger's duties at home, she's also an active member of the PTO, the Mothers of Preschoolers and is a co-leader for her son's Cub Scout den.

By the time she's finished running errands or performing chores, it's 3 p.m. and the kids are home from school.

"Usually by 9, I've had it," Huntzinger said. "After I've got the little kids in bed, I'm pretty anti-social. I usually don't even watch TV. I prefer to read or just sit and I usually need to wind down."

Over Christmas break when her two oldest children were visiting their father in Wisconsin, Huntzinger's husband took the two younger children on an overnight adventure so she could enjoy some time alone. She watched four movies and stayed in her night gown until 2:30 p.m.

"I did nothing but what I felt like doing for 24 hours and I wouldn't like a steady diet of it, but, oh, it was great," Huntzinger said. "Right now I'm feeling the best I've felt in a long time, but we haven't been in our regular routines long enough where I feel burned out. But going into the holidays, I was feeling pretty fried."

Rinehart said the worst feeling for a new mother is to feel isolated at home. That can happen and that's when a support network will help.

"I'm sure that mommies are going to say they don't have time to do anything fun, but it's important that we learn to take time out for self and that's not a selfish thing for a mommy or daddy to do," Rinehart said.

She suggests keeping a list of names and numbers on the refrigerator so when the stress level rises, parents have someone to call.

Kokomo's Kelly Winslow has found that support from mothers helps her when she feels momentarily burned out. She has three children, 8-year-old Morgan, 7-year-old Macy and 2-year-old McKay who keep her busy daily.

"The most stressful time is between dinner hour and bedtime," Winslow said. "That's when the kids are first coming home from school and they are demanding time and attention, and I'm also preparing dinner and waiting for my husband to walk through the door."

Winslow is also involved in several activities including PTO, volunteering at Oakbrook Community Church and coordinating Mothers of Preschoolers, a support group for area mothers who have children kindergarten age and younger. The mothers support group is also a good time for Winslow to have some time away from home two times a month. "You can probably get too many activities that cause burnout, but for us the busier the day is, the better it seems to go because it keeps her entertained," Winslow said.

"Sometimes things like the laundry and the dishes have to wait."

Winslow's two older children and her husband help around the house. When she's feeling stressed, Winslow gives herself manicures, takes a bubble bath, reads a book, takes a walk with McKay or exercises.

If she gets overwhelmed during the day, Winslow will slip into the bathroom, close the door and take a deep breath - then she's fine.