

Oxygen Mask Rule – Self Care

Every time we fly, we hear flight attendants sharing some variation of the Oxygen Mask Rule: **“Should the cabin lose pressure, oxygen masks will drop from the overhead area. Please place the mask over your own mouth and nose before assisting others.”** Why do they say that? What could possibly be wrong with helping others first?

In the case of the airplane, oxygen masks are deployed in situations where the oxygen level has dropped dangerously low. Without our oxygen mask, we will quickly lose consciousness. If we don't make putting on our mask our first priority, we will very likely not be able to help anyone.

If someone we love has an addiction that is creating problems, it's natural to want to be a part of the solution. As a result, we may find ourselves devoting abundant energy to the addiction in various ways (educating ourselves about addiction, trying to keep the peace with our loved one, worrying about the future, trying to influence our loved one to address the problem). We may choose to do this willingly and lovingly....but in many cases, our choice may come at an expense to our own physical and mental health.

When “helping” (whatever that means in our situation) seems to leave little time for anything else, the result is quite often “burnout”. Some feelings that may accompany “giving too much” are exhaustion, frustration, and anger, along with possibly feeling ineffective, helpless, or hopeless.

Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy (REBT) teaches that we are each responsible for our own happiness. When we find ourselves in a situation where our happiness is suffering, the “oxygen mask rule” analogy is helpful.

To avoid burnout, managing our self-care is a key responsibility to maintain our happiness, our physical health, and our mental health. It requires consciously planning to include time in our day to attend to our own needs and make that time a priority. If we don't, we eventually won't be able to care for others.

What do we really need to maintain our physical and mental health? Exercise, good nutrition, alone time, social time, time for creative endeavours, medical care, and support groups are just a few ideas to consider. We may have become so accustomed to “dealing with” the addiction or trying to “help” our loved one, that it may feel wrong to give priority to our own needs but doing so is critical. If we don't take care of ourselves, who will?

Airplanes have sensors to protect against oxygen deprivation. Fortunately, so do we: our friends, relatives, and support group members. We do well to pay attention when we hear others reminding us to “take care of you first” or reminding us of the Oxygen Mask Rule. They are seeing signs of “oxygen deprivation” in our life, signs that we have not noticed ourselves.

Discover the Power of Choice!

www.smartrecovery.org.uk

0330 053 6022