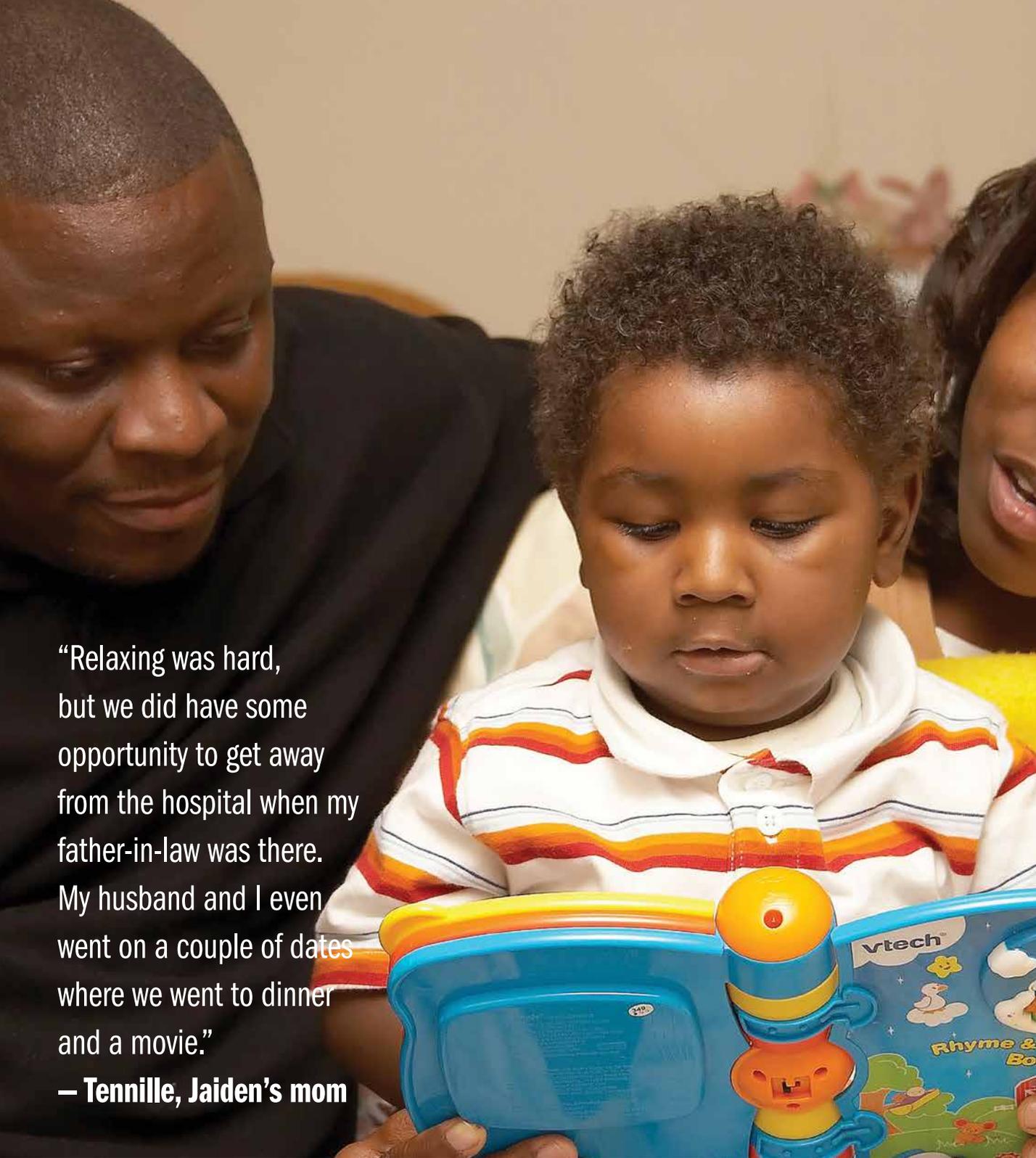


The Parent's Companion to  
Relax and Recharge:

Finding ways to  
**relax and recharge**



“Relaxing was hard, but we did have some opportunity to get away from the hospital when my father-in-law was there. My husband and I even went on a couple of dates where we went to dinner and a movie.”

— **Tennille, Jaiden’s mom**



# Finding ways to **relax**

**Y**our body reacts to stress as if you're trying to escape from danger. Your pulse quickens, your blood pressure goes up, and your muscles become tense.

In the short-term, stress is not harmful. But the journey you're on right now can bring on stress for a long period of time, which causes wear and tear on your body, your mood, your productivity, and your quality of life.

It's no wonder that an overheated pressure cooker is often used to illustrate unrelenting stress.

If you feel like you're a pressure cooker ready to burst, use the relaxation exercises in this chapter to turn down the heat and release the pressure building up inside of you.

Many of these exercises don't take long. So you don't need to carve out hours a day. Just spending a few minutes here and there throughout your day can help you feel relaxed and recharged.



Jennifer with her daughters Grace, age 2 months at transplant, and Bea, age 2 at transplant

The purpose of *The Parent's Companion to Relax and Recharge* is to help you learn easy relaxation techniques to reduce your stress and recharge. In this chapter:

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### Examine your stress

- Understand what triggers your stress
- Write it down

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### Now work in relaxation — simply

- 10 easy ways to recharge now
- Let music take you away
- Let the pictures in your mind distract you
- Breathe your way to a peaceful state
- Carve out some “me” time

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### Relaxation resources

- Books, music, movies, and phone apps can help

This chapter focuses on relaxation techniques as a way to “turn off” stress. But you can also “burn off” stress by increasing your physical movement. See the *Physical Health* chapter to learn about how to become healthier and more stress-free by incorporating more physical exercise into your day.

# How are you doing **right now**?

Before you read on, take a minute to answer a few questions about your current skills in relaxing.

- Do you know what things trigger your stress?.....*  Yes  No
- Are you able to find time to rest and relax each day?.....*  Yes  No
- Can you easily let go of any negative emotions?.....*  Yes  No
- When stress builds up, are you able to quickly recharge? .....*  Yes  No
- When you try to let go of stress, does it work? .....*  Yes  No
- Are you able to do at least 1 thing you enjoy every day?.....*  Yes  No

If you've checked "No" more times than "Yes," you're not alone. But that also means it's time to add some relaxation exercises into your day to reduce your level of stress.



Joan, Joe's mom

## Figuring out what brings on your stress

### Write it down

Use a journal to find out which stress reducers work for you and which don't. This way, you'll be able to pinpoint when and where you can start using relaxation techniques.



You are your own person. What is stressful for you may be different for someone else. You have your own situations that can set off stress, and have your own way of calming down. By recognizing some common signs of stress, such as feeling tired or having trouble concentrating, you can more effectively use the relaxation exercises in this chapter.

A great way to become aware of the things that stress you out is to write them down. Each time you feel stress, make a note of it in your journal. Write down:

- What caused your stress (make a guess if you're unsure)
- Explore where you carry your stress (Your back? Your neck?)
- How did you feel, both physically and emotionally?
- How did you respond?
- What did you do that helped you feel better?

(From HelpGuide.org)

# Working in **relaxation** – simply

In order to make sure that you relax or take a break each day, you may need to actually schedule it. Make it a priority. Set aside 10-20 minutes a day as YOUR time.

## When you are relaxed, you:

- Slow your heart rate
- Lower your blood pressure
- Improve your concentration
- Reduce discomfort or pain

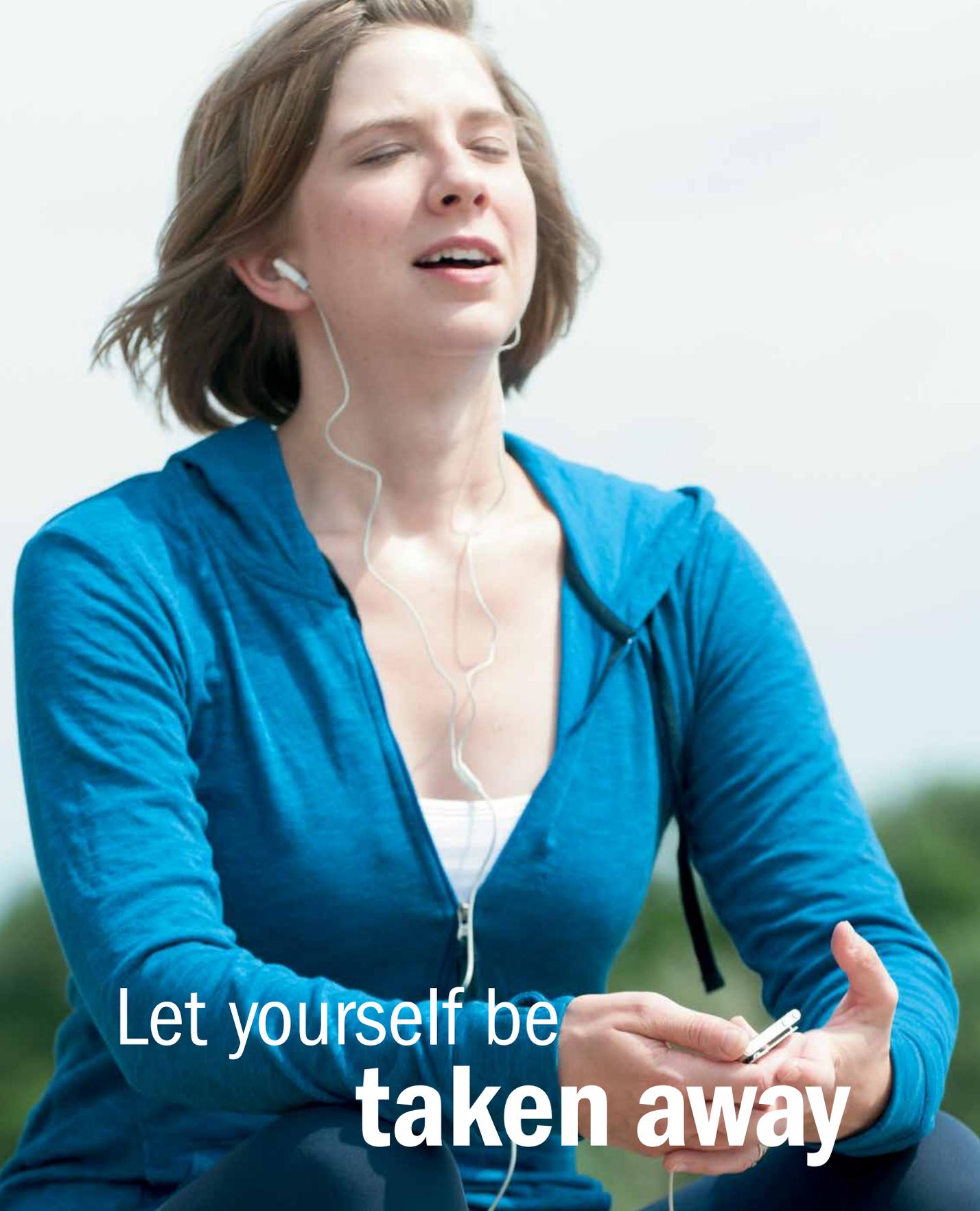
So let's get started on learning some relaxation techniques to lower your stress. And remember, relaxation strategies are skills — the more you practice, the more it will help.

## **10** easy ways to **recharge NOW**

To get you going down the road to relaxation right away, take a look at these ideas that can be easily added to your daily routine:

- 1 Take 5-10 minutes every morning** and/or every evening to be quiet, breathe, meditate, or pray. You could stretch, gaze out the window, do a 5 minute meditation, listen to the sounds of nature, or go outside and breathe the fresh air.
- 2 While you are driving**, at every stop sign take your hands off the wheel for 1 moment and put them in your lap. Take 1 deep breath in and out and then be on your way.
- 3 Take breaks** to truly stop and relax, rather than only “pausing.” For instance, instead of having coffee, a cigarette, checking your phone, or reading, take a short walk, or sit outside quietly taking some deep breaths to renew yourself.
- 4 Change your environment.** Get up and walk down the hall or go outside.
- 5 Take 5 extra minutes** in the shower to enjoy the warmth and water.
- 6 Hold and pet your cat** for a few minutes or play outside with your dog.
- 7 Spend 10 minutes talking to a friend.** Agree to not talk about medical topics.
- 8 Watch a few funny videos online** to get your funny bone working again. Or if you have more time, plan a movie night with family and friends.
- 9 Escape into a chapter** of a good book or a magazine (even if just for 15 minutes).
- 10 Turn up your favorite song** and sing loudly in the car on the way to the grocery store.

At the end of the day, retrace the day and recognize your accomplishments. If you need to, make a list for tomorrow. You've done enough for today.



Let yourself be  
**taken away**

# Let **music** take you away

Listening to your favorite music is relaxing and easy to work into your schedule.

Enjoy your music in whatever way feels best:

- As you do the gentle stretching exercises described in the *Physical Health* chapter
- As you lie down to sleep, let the sounds relax you, allow your thoughts to float away for the night, so that you can be fresh the next day to pick them up again
- As you write in your journal
- While doing deep breathing (see page 8) to maximize your relaxation
- As you tap your toe, sing along, or dance to burn off stress and become recharged

# Let the **pictures** in your mind take you away

Imagery is using your mind's eye, or your imagination, to form a picture in your mind of something that helps you feel positive or relaxed. It distracts by redirecting your attention on something else.

Here are some examples of mental images you can form:

- A favorite place, perhaps somewhere you like to go with your family, alone, or on vacation. What sounds do you hear? What do you smell in the air?
- Something simple and soothing, like sitting next to a serene lake. See the sunlight (or moonlight) reflecting off the water. Hear the birds singing. Smell the pine trees.
- A tropical beach. Feel a cool breeze on your body. Hear the lapping waves. Smell the tropical flowers, taste the tropical fruit.

If you have trouble coming up with your own images or have trouble keeping an image in your mind's eye, you might prefer guided imagery, which uses a narrator.

If you are interested in trying a guided imagery exercise, visit [BeTheMatch.org/companion](http://BeTheMatch.org/companion) to explore resources that can help.

# Let yourself be guided into **relaxation**

Do you prefer to be guided through relaxation exercises? Then practice the exercises below. Each is designed to teach you the basic skills of stress awareness and relaxation. Most are less than 10 minutes long, and several are less than 5 minutes.

You can link to these exercises from [BeTheMatch.org/companion](https://BeTheMatch.org/companion)

- Deep Breathing: Breathe deeply and relax your mind and body
- Progressive Relaxation: Relax your tense muscles
- Sonic Meditation: Let sound help you achieve relaxation
- Scanning: Find, and then relax places in your body where you hold tension
- Deep Relaxation: Relax all the way to your toes

Visit [BeTheMatch.org/companion](https://BeTheMatch.org/companion) for a list of other relaxation resources that can help you

## **Breathe** your way to a peaceful state

For a simple, yet powerful relaxation technique, practice deep abdominal breathing. It can be done almost anywhere, and it quickly gives you the energy and oxygen you need to naturally reduce stress and body tension.

Do this simple deep breathing exercise for 5 to 10 minutes, twice a day:

- 1 Sit or stand with good posture
- 2 Breathe in through your nose
- 3 First, fill the lower stomach area (abdominal) part of your lungs
- 4 Then, expand your middle or chest area
- 5 And finally, fill the upper part, so that your lungs are completely full
- 6 Hold your breath for a few seconds
- 7 Exhale slowly, and visualize pushing out stressful thoughts or worries
- 8 Repeat



Stacey, Kelsey's mom

With each deep breath, you can also use positive self-talk by saying things to yourself that will help you feel calm and secure. For example, you might say to yourself “I am calm and relaxed” or “I am the best parent I can be.”



Diane, Matthew and Alexandra's mom

## 5 ways to carve out some “ME” time

Give yourself permission to rest and to do something for yourself each day. You will be a better parent for it. Here are 5 easy ways to carve out some personal time.

- 1 Acknowledge** that you need the time and that it's important to take time for yourself on a regular basis
- 2 Get others to agree** to your “me” time if it would help you to feel less hesitant or guilty to take that time
- 3 Make it a priority** — do it for your child if you can't do it for yourself
- 4 Make this a scheduled appointment time** and commit to it
- 5 Get recharged** — figure out what would help you the most

“We set up a mom-dad rotation schedule that allowed for some downtime to decompress, even if it was for just a couple of hours.”

— Lisa, Kameron's mom

## Other stress-management techniques

- 1 Keep some of your usual activities or slowly work them back into your routine. This includes your hobbies, sports and exercise programs, spending time with friends and other family members, and work projects. It can help to give you some normalcy at a time when everything may seem upside down.
- 2 Add breaks and relaxation to your routine. Set aside 15-30 minutes a day as your time. Put it in your daily schedule or planner to make sure that it happens every day. Use the time to lie down and close your eyes, listen to music, sit outside, take a walk, read a chapter of a book, look through a newspaper or magazine, or call a friend.
- 3 Take breaks from talking about illness and other medical things by creating a “medical-free zone.” Together with your child, family, or friends, set aside an hour or a whole evening when talking about medical topics is “off limits.”
- 4 Find surprising places to take a mental break. You can take a mental break in your car on the way to the grocery store. Put on some upbeat music and sing. While waiting in line somewhere, try to think of 3 things for which to be thankful or grateful today.
- 5 Give yourself time for an emotional release away from your child. It’s healthy to cry sometimes, whether you’re alone or talking with your partner, a close friend, or other parents.

“Someone told me, ‘Keep up with what you normally do for yourself. Your children will think the worst if they see you change your norm.’ I thought about this and realized there is quite a lot of truth to it.”  
— Sherri, TJ’s mom

## Chapter Recap:

Before the pressure causes you to burst, let out some excess stress using the quick and easy exercises in this chapter to relax and recharge.

You can get started right away, using the 5-minute recharges outlined in this chapter. And then fit in as many of these as you can into your daily routine:

- *Let music take you away*
- *Breathe your way to a peaceful state*
- *Let yourself be guided into relaxation*
- *Let the pictures in your mind distract you*
- *Carve out some “me” time*

Visit [BeTheMatch.org/companion](https://www.BeTheMatch.org/companion) for a list of resources and tips to help you relax and recharge