



Episode 7: Pure Self-Care with Sally Wood (The Mindful Mum)

Pure Self-Care

Self-care for parents.

Tiffany: Hi everyone! Today we're excited to speak to Sally Wood, who is the CEO and founder of The Mindful Mum. Sally is also a mother to six-year-old Leila and four-year-old Charlie.

This episode is all about the importance of self-care, what self-care is, and why we all need it. It's a really important topic and I'm so excited to chat today. Thanks, Sally, for coming on.

Sally: Thanks, so much for having me on, Tiff!

Tiffany: So, Sally, can you tell us a little bit more about The Mindful Mum and why you started it?

Sally: Yes, absolutely. The Mindful Mum is essentially an online platform that helps mum squeeze self-care into their precious spare moments. We bring together expert-led online wellbeing classes tailored to the needs of mums and it was created specifically because of the wholehearted belief that when mums nurture their health and happiness, everyone benefits.

The flow on affects cannot be underestimated. When we're feeling strong, calm and connected, the benefits ripple out to our loved ones and it's really the ultimate win-win. I realised early on in my mothering journey that nurturing our loved ones really does start with nurturing ourselves. In the first few weeks I was unlucky to have experienced ongoing bouts with mastitis and a breast abscess that left me in and out of hospital, right at a time where I felt like I should be devoting my absolute all to my newborn baby.

It was in that moment though, that I experienced firsthand the utmost significance of the Oxygen Mask Theory. I was going to be no good to anyone if I didn't take care of myself first. I needed to heal, and I needed to adjust my new identity as a mum, but I also noticed some deeper resistance to doing this. Slowly but surely though I started to cultivate a daily self-care practice, where every night when my little one went to sleep, I would light a candle, roll out a yoga mat, do some light stretches and a short meditation.



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Sally: (cont...) I also turned to the practice of mindfulness and realised just how powerful it can be in the context of motherhood.

You know, where things can go from pure magic to mayhem in a matter of moments?

Tiffany: Yeah, absolutely!

Sally: So, before long I was preparing to return to my demanding career, and I was increasingly anxious at the thought of how I would juggle all the roles I had to play while also managing to find that much needed me time. So, I kept thinking, “if only there was a place where mums could go where they could learn to love and nourish themselves and get the support they need to not just survive but thrive throughout motherhood.”

That’s when I made it my mission to bring to life this dream of an online sanctuary completely devoted to wellbeing of mums!

Tiffany: That’s a great story! Thank you so much for sharing, that’s so powerful and I think it’s really helpful to hear people stories along the way, particularly when you’re starting on your own parenting journey.

So, what is self-care, really?

Sally: Yeah, it’s been quite a journey, that’s for sure!

While there’s been a growing natural thirst for self-care, I think the concept still remains a little fluffy and it has a tendency to be thought of purely as pampering and indulgent activities like, spending the day at a day spa or spending hours getting massages and things like that. I think it is helpful to first get clear on what self-care truly is.

One of our amazing teachers in the sanctuary, Susie Redding, has a great working definition for it. She describes self-care as, “healthcare - it’s nourishment for the head, the heart and the body.” She also makes another key distinction that, “not only is it nourishing our present selves and our needs in the moment, but also our future selves and the person we’re hoping to become.”



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Sally: (cont...) So, from that perspective you can see how one glass of wine genuinely savored at night can be a form of self-care, but if that glass then turns into three or six, your future self isn't exactly going to be thanking you the next day. Or, having friends around soon after having a baby can be really exciting, but if it means you're overextending yourself by having the house really clean and perfect and busy catering for them, that activity may actually be more depleting than nourishing. Sometimes self-care is having the discipline to say no even when it's uncomfortable.

It's about cultivating that awareness around what genuinely nourishes you and what depletes you and also realising that your needs are going to change over time as you evolve.

Tiffaney: Yeah. I love what Susie says, "self-care is healthcare. It's nourishment for their head, heart and body". I mean it's so important to really emphasise that and understand that more deeply.

It's great to be able to broaden your understanding of self-care. It's not always easy to do the things that we know we need to do that are good for us. Why would you say self-care is really needed in everyone's lives?

Sally: Yeah, you're right, it's not an easy thing to do. I think it's particularly important to understand why self-care is so crucial, especially for us mums.

Look, the fact is in this modern world of mothering, it's really hard to avoid stress. It's really an inevitable part of life and I think one could even argue a certain amount of it could even be good for us to keep us evolving, but the nature of stress is that it accumulates where we can find ourselves being reactive and showing up in ways we not proud of, and we all know prolonged periods of stress are not good for our health. Which is precisely why we can't afford to be complacent about it. This is really where self-care comes in because it's the thing that can help us cope with the inevitable stresses of life.

A concept it's really handy is thinking of having an energy bank or an energetic bank balance. Self-care is the means by which you make deposits into that bank, so, it can stay replenished and avoid chipping into the red zone, which so many of us can relate to.



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Tiffany: Yeah, I love that one. That's a really good one to be thinking of.

Sally: It's good to have a visual of it.

Tiffany: It is, yeah.

Sally: Ultimately, I think it is important to remember these five key reasons we need self-care.

Firstly, we need it to help us cope through periods of stress, loss and change, and let's not underestimate the huge psychological transition we go through when we become mums. Secondly, I think we also need it to help us heal after these periods. In this fast-paced life, many of us don't really give ourselves the space to even process what we've gone through. Thirdly, self-care also provides an energetic buffer to help protect us and boost our resilience, so, when we engage in self-care, when we've taken care of our head, our heart and our body, we're able to access the best version of ourselves. You know, we're more compassionate with others, but also to ourselves. We're generally happier, more energised and at ease.

Finally, and I think this last one is really important, we all want to be able to raise compassionate and emotionally resilient kids. Self-care is ultimately something we're able to model to them, so as your children grow, you can teach them the importance of their own self-care and engage in a range of practices together.

Tiffany: Yeah. It's great to have some insight as to why we need to take care of ourselves, as this can often be forgotten, even though as you've explained it seems so simple and makes so much sense, Sally. I think we all kind of have so many barriers up for ourselves as well, so, what are some of the barriers you feel that mums face? And when it comes to engaging in regular self-care, what are some of the things we can do to overcome these barriers?

Sally: Aside from the practical challenges I guess, in lacking in energy and being particularly time poor, I think mums also can experience some of that deeper mental resistance when it comes to self-care. It's good to unpack that actually notice what comes up for you.

The most common barrier I think we tend to hear on this front, is guilt.



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Tiffany: Absolutely, absolutely!

Sally: I don't know if you've heard this saying, but there's a saying, 'the minute the baby comes out, the guilt goes in' and this is particularly true when it comes to taking care of ourselves. It's almost nature's way, I guess, like keeping us evolving, I don't know. It's a tough emotion and I think all mums can relate to. So, first and foremost with guilt, I think it's really key to remember that it's normal to feel it and accept that it probably isn't going to go away. It's sort of about just recognising that feeling when it does rear its head, and just coming back to those reasons why you need to engage in self-care in the first place.

Actually, a really great mantra our teacher, Susie Redding shares is, "it's not me first, it's me as well". So, all you are really doing is just making sure you get a look in too you. It's not selfish or indulgent it's really self-preservation, and it's crucial for sustaining yourself throughout motherhood. It enables you to be the best version of you, and isn't that what we all want?

Tiffany: Yes, absolutely!

Sally: Going back to the practical challenges, I think it's worthwhile recognising there is a bit of an art to self-care. So, as mums I think we really need to be creative and rather opportunistic at squeezing it in whenever and wherever we can. We don't usually get huge pockets of alone time, so try not to wait for the perfect time to fill your cup. In some cases, mums can wait years, but you're better off remembering that a little bit often beats a lot seldom. Try and leave in those micro moments of self-care, where you're really peppering these little moments of nourishment into your day to keep that energetic bank balance topped up.

For example, when you're changing your little one, use it as a cue to do three slow shoulder rolls and encourage a more open-hearted posture. Something as simple as that really can boost your mood throughout the day. Or, when you've gone and put your baby down for a nap, now this is a one, I think many of us mums suddenly launch into wanting to do all things and needing to do - there's a lot to do, let's face it - but just try and resist the urge to immediately rush into that and just give yourself permission to pause, even it's just for five minutes, and do something nourishing.



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Sally: (cont...) We often hear, 'sleep when the baby sleeps', and yeah I think if you can do that, fantastic, but I think as mums, we struggle with it, because often we do feel like we need to be productive and the reality is, there is just often a lot to do. This is where a meditation or yoga nidra practice can be so beneficial, because you can boost your energy levels in a really short space of time - I've found that really helpful for me.

On those days when you're really lacking in energy, you could simply lie with your legs up the wall and have your eyes closed for a few minutes. I don't know if you've ever tried that?

Tiffaney: Yeah.

Sally: It's really powerful.

Tiffaney: It can be really good.

Sally: It's fantastic for relaxation and it helps the blood flow going through your body and it just gives you energy and relaxation at the same time, it's really cool.

There's plenty of moments when you're feeding your baby, you spend a lot of time in those early months doing that and I think many of us sort of have a tendency to automatically just go reaching for our phone and scroll through social media, we're trying to connect with the outside world - it's normal and it's very alluring to want to do that - but I think the truth is, it can leave us feeling pretty depleted and we don't really realise that accumulative effect that being on our phones has. I think it's not really giving ourselves the chance to genuinely switch off as much as we might think. You know, just try getting into the habit of passing that time, even if it's just a portion of that time, with some mindful breathing exercises. You can use those quiet moments as an opportunity to actually develop skills of compassion and gratitude.

This is where I think mantras can be really helpful. So, you could simply repeat to yourself as you've sat down, and even if it's at the start, give yourself 5 minutes to practice this to begin with, and you just sit there and you say, "I soften into this moment". Or, after you been doing all the things all day, you could sit down and say, "I appreciate me".



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Sally: (cont...) All of these things are effectively skills that do need to be cultivated over time, but they become more automatic. It's really a case of training your brain to notice what you're needing in the moment and doing your best to follow through then and there with a small act of self-care.

A couple of other examples could be as simple as noticing you're dehydrated. I think we can get through our day without even having glass of water sometimes, since we're so focused on everything else and it's just sometimes tuning in and going, "actually, I've got a bit of a headache. I might need a glass of water" and taking a moment to actually pour yourself a cup of tea and go and sit outside in the sunshine.

Tiffaney: Yeah.

Sally: Finally, I think the barriers tend to fall away when we bring a level of intention to our day. So, when you roll out of bed for the first time in the morning it's really easy to latch on to some of the more negative thoughts that our minds tend to wander to, especially when we've had broken sleep. Try and think to yourself, or better yet, even write it down - we encourage mums to do journaling and all of that - just simply write one word. It takes two seconds to connect with a feeling you want to have that day. It could be, "I want to feel calm" or "I want to feel joy". When you connect with that positive emotion, you're more likely to actually tune your awareness and align your actions up to that feeling throughout the day.

I actually do with it my kids now while having breakfast in the morning and it really can set the tone for the day.

Tiffaney: I think knowing that all of these things are there as tools is so helpful, Sally. I think considering some new options that you haven't considered prior to starting a family is also important because we have these other things that we might do before having kids, but often they're not necessarily things you can do so much, once you have your own family.

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Tiffaney: (cont...) Some of the things that I think are great that you've mentioned or that I've used myself, are simply having alone time, creating some mantras for yourself, I definitely try to get out in nature whenever I can and go for walks because that really helps me and just breathing in the beautiful fresh air, having that hot cup of tea and finishing is definitely one of the things that I've done and I try to do at least once a day, because you get busy and you forget about that cup of tea sitting there.

Also, spending a bit of quality time with each of my kids each day and my partner and actually, what I've got in my phone is a reminder that actually comes up saying, 'spend 8 minutes a day with each child' and that comes up every day in my phone. I find that is just a great reminder that it's not about necessarily about the time that you might see each other and what it is that you're doing, it's more about intentional quality time, for me anyway because I've got teenagers, so that's really helped me to remember that that's important for their self-care and also mine, feeling connected to them and that sort of thing. And as you said, just being slow and not doing stuff every second. Just spending that quality time with them has really helped me.

Also, having a shower at the end of each evening and visualising washing away my worries and frustrations from the day also really works well for me to reset myself at night and hopefully have a restful sleep and get rid of the day and start afresh. So, they are some of the things that I've tried.

Sally: Yeah, they're really good ones. That's really cool and I think you know, you're right, self-care really does take on a new form when you become a parent, which is why I think it is really important for mums to add that broad and varied self-care toolkit to draw from. Our needs do sort of change day to day and they evolve at a time and I think we're sometimes tired or just time poor, all those things that we've talked about that can be the barriers, we often forget what makes us feel good in the moment. It's good to have these things top of mind and these systems or reminders that you mentioned to prompt you is really powerful.

But some days we might need something more vigorous where we really want to move our bodies and work up a sweat, and other times we might need something super gentle depending on what we are navigating and how we are feeling.



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Sally: (cont...) For me, that absolute anchor has been to have a daily meditation practice. We all know the importance or the value of meditation, you hear about it everywhere now, and a lot of mums that we speak to like they say, “it’s not for me, I’ve tried it.” “I can’t switch off my monkey mind”, all that sort of stuff and just bear with me and I will tell you a little bit about my story.

For me, let’s just say my kids weren’t necessarily the greatest sleepers. I actually turned to meditation purely to help with sleep deprivation, but, over the years, you know I’m now sort of seven years into it, it’s become a constant. It’s absolutely a must have for a whole range of other reasons. Ultimately, what I think is amazing about meditation is it enables you to be more mindful in your day to day life - which is something we all want but we struggle with. So, mindfulness is almost a bi-product of meditation, it’s enabled me to be more reactive, more focused when I’m working and trying to get things done, I’m more connected to myself, I’m more in tune with what I’m thinking and feeling, and a whole lot more compassionate. It’s just been its been fantastic, so I highly recommend meditation and meditation for mums.

With anything, it just takes a little patience to sort of break-through that initial sort of uncomfortable feeling of feeling like your mind is constantly racing. It’s a bit like going to the gym, you need to sort of stick with it and push through the pain initially to get there. It’s also really important to have a comfortable set up when you try meditation for the first time. Even using guided meditation practices and things like that can really help.

Tiffaney: Yeah.

Sally: I have a fantastic cushion that I use, and I don’t get a sore back and things like that, so, worthwhile looking into that.

Another amazing tool that I recommend for mums, if you haven’t tried Tapping and you know maybe haven’t felt that you’ve needed something like this before but Tapping, or it’s called EFT, which stands for Emotional Freedom Technique. It is an amazing tool for anchoring into the present moment and calming that stress response. Effectively, you’re literally tapping on the Meridian points or energy hotspots to restore balance into your body.



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Sally: (cont...) I love it because it's a short and powerful way to honor and release difficult emotions. Often I'm feeling really overwhelmed, rushing to get from A to B, and all it takes is just a few rounds, which doesn't take very long, in fact the general set up phrase is as simple as this, it's really easy to remember, it goes like "even though I have this feeling of ..." of whatever it might be so overwhelmed, or stress, you say that and then you say, "I deeply and completely love and accept myself", and you repeat that phrase as you're tapping on the Meridian points.

Generally, I find after a few rounds of that you notice that feeling begins to subside. It's really great if you feel anxious and stressed a bit of the time. You can do it anywhere, like you can do it while you're stuck in traffic or struggling to get your baby to sleep at night. It's just really simple effective so I highly recommend Tapping.

Finally, I think we all know the importance of daily movement. It doesn't have to be like full blown runs or workouts at the gym or anything like that, just some form of daily movement ideally outdoors (even in the middle of Winter). Getting that fresh air or vitamin D if you can get it. It could be meeting up with another mum and taking a nice walk with the pram or rolling out the yoga mat and doing some Pilates or stretches and things like that. All of that adds up to really help those 'feel good' endorphins get going and it really does help with your mood. It's a natural mood booster so, I highly recommend that. Even if you can't get out of the house, maybe pop your baby in the carrier and put some really fun music on and just dance around the house. You know, try that for 5-10 minutes.

Tiffaney: That's a good one!

Sally: It gives you energy!

Tiffaney: Yeah

Sally: I mean I think there's so many other ways you can fill your cup as a mum. If you're short on ideas and motivation, we have a self-care planner that's filled with all sorts of inspiration, lots of tips and things. You can certainly have a look at that and of course you can also try some of our classes in the sanctuary. I love this topic and I could talk about it all day.



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Tiffany: Thank you so much for your time today, Sally. I've picked up some great tips on self-care as I'm sure the listeners have as well. Self-care has been mentioned in almost all the episodes in some form or another, helping us all realise to not underestimate it and the importance of self-care really is unquestionable. I think today has really highlighted that. So, thank you so much for your time today and all of your insight, Sally. It's been so informative.

Sally: Aw, it's been my pleasure, Tiff. Thanks, so much for having me on to chat.

Tiffany: Yeah, it's been so great and I'm really lucky to know you so well and have some tools given to me over the years and I have learned a lot over the time that I've got to know you. I really appreciate your time today and sharing it with all of our listeners, it's just been wonderful.

If you're looking for more support, please head over to www.themindfulmum.com they have some amazing online classes and resources to help make your journey easier and more fun. You can also find the, on Instagram [@themindfulmum](https://www.instagram.com/themindfulmum) and remember, if you'd like to know more about any of what we've discussed today and would like to get yourself a copy of the self-care planner that Sally has mentioned in today's episode, it will be available to download from the Blog about this episode, which you can find in the description of this episode. Have a wonderful day everyone.