

With the information provided in mind, develop an essay educating youth how to take care of themselves first, in order to be available to take care of others. Be sure to include specific examples from your own health science education and training. (Formatting is not judged in online submissions)

I learned the importance of taking care of myself through my mama. Mama works as a home health aide - which is also known as a caregiver. Most of the time, she lives in with her client far away from home. Her job as a caregiver requires a lot of mental, emotional, and physical strength to be able to take care of someone else without burning herself out. I often wonder how mama has the mental capacity to work almost a whole month without seeing her family -- it seems like she doesn't get enough rest. Every time she returns home, she takes the time for herself by sleeping in, going to new places, or spending quality time with my family. When she returns to work, mama is always energized and ready to work as a caregiver. Mama's routine emphasized to me the importance of taking care of myself and how this could prepare me to holistically take care of others. I look up to mama since I also happen to have the responsibility of taking care of my papa. When I learned that papa's old age made him more forgetful, exhausted, and sickly, I was not mentally prepared to take care of him at fifteen -- especially with my mama being away and my academics at stake. According to the National Alliance on Mental Health, people who "pay attention to their own physical and emotional health" will be more ready to support someone. Thankfully, my education in high school showed me ways how I can take care of myself so I can fully support my father's needs. In my high school, health class is a mandatory class for freshmen. One of the lessons that stood out to me was mental health -- which is something that is not often discussed openly. In some families, children are tasked to take care of their siblings, parents, and even grandparents. Most of the time, they are not prepared to take on such huge responsibility -- which was something I felt when I learned that I had to take care of my father. My health teacher taught us the importance of taking multiple breaks in between tasks. This break would look different for everyone -- whether it's scrolling through Instagram, eating a snack, or stretching out. Doing so would allow the mind to recuperate after each task. As someone who prides on being a hustler, this was difficult to incorporate in my routine. I often feel overwhelmed from studying and doing homework without taking breaks. Once I gradually learned how to take breaks, I felt that my life was not as stressful anymore. Taking care of my father stopped weighing down on me since it felt more natural to do so. In junior year, when my school was fully remote, my gym teacher decided to revamp our Zoom gym class. Instead of listening to our teacher drone on for forty minutes, he decided to make each day a themed day -- which ranged from working out to mindfulness meditation. The class started with a Calm meditation video to allow us to relax our minds after being on Zoom for more than an hour. Afterwards, the students were allowed to choose their own path either by working out on their own, listening to some music, or continuing with meditation. This class reminded me the importance of meditation and physical health. Each day, I often switched between working out and meditation, so I could take care of my physical and mental health. Between balancing academics, extracurriculars, and family responsibilities, my gym teacher showed us a new method of taking care of ourselves mentally, especially during such an isolated time. Junior year was the most mentally taxing year because of workload and family responsibilities. By taking care of myself -- even for a few minutes on Zoom or outside of Zoom -- in this gym class, I was ready to fully support my father's needs after school. Of course, even when I felt that I had my life balanced out, there was still sadness. Sometimes, I still can't accept why I had to take care of papa, why mama had to work far away, and why my life had to be this way. It is normal to feel sorrow at times, but I made sure to seek for help. I did not want to bottle up my feelings. My group of friends became my support system, and I was able to express my emotions and thoughts to them freely. Although they do not share the same experience as me, my friends were able to provide good advice to level myself. Instead of channeling my stress to my father, I chose the healthier way of talking it out with my friends. More and more children are becoming the caregivers of their families. They are not mentally, physically, and emotionally ready to tackle such task at such a young age. From my story, the youth could learn how to take breaks between their tasks, focusing on their mental and physical health, and making sure to have a support system. Mama's job as a

caregiver and my high school education helped me take care of myself, so I could take care of papa as well.