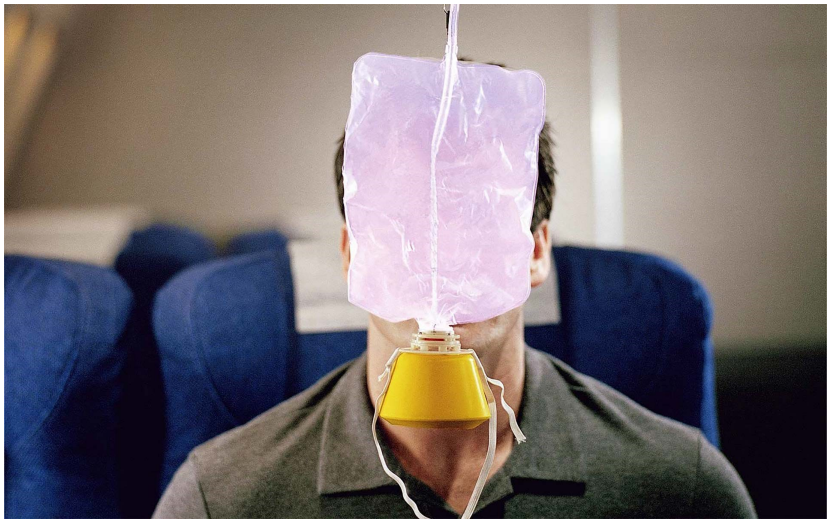
First Step: Help Yourself

By Mary Adcock, President

Step onto a plane. Get settled into your seat. No matter what airline, once the aircraft starts to taxi you're sure to hear the same instructions. If you've been on a plane often enough, you might even be able to recite those instructions.

"If the plane loses oxygen pressure for any reason, an oxygen mask will drop down out of the small overhead compartment above you. Put the mask over your nose and mouth, then pull down on the line to start the flow of oxygen."



That all seems reasonable. But the first time I took my children on a plane, I found the next part of the instructions to be unsettling. I was thinking through how I would react to this emergency and I wasn't sure I could do what was being asked.

"If you are seated next to a child or someone who might need assistance, put your own mask on first before assisting the other person."

It's not that I felt I didn't understand how to complete the task. I was thinking that in an emergency my **first** instinct would be to keep my children safe --- even at the cost of my health. So what I couldn't comprehend was the idea of helping myself **first** before ensuring that my children were safe.

I took a deep breath and considered the directive a little more closely. I thought beyond my "mother hen" instincts. I pondered why the airline would be asking parents to get their lifelines in place before tending to their children. Of course, in airline terms, the answer is simple.

"You need to have a steady flow of oxygen to help as you complete your task" of helping others.

And when I thought about it a little longer, that answer made a lot of sense. In fact, the answer seemed to share a wisdom that could be a guide to parents in any situation. In short, the guideline holds that as a parent you best keep your families safe when you:

Take care of yourself first.

Check on those around you.

Realize you have the power to help others. *(Special training is not required.)*

As the flight continued, I realized this guideline also applies when thinking about membership in a parents of multiples club.

Take care of yourself first.

Joining a parents of multiples club is a way to take care of yourself. The connections that the club offers in terms of friendships, education, and parenting support can be the lifeline that brings a steady flow of energy to you and to your day-to-day parenting.

Joining in a club meeting, a state or national convention offers another opportunity to take care of yourself. Yes, it can be difficult to get away: coordinating child care, arranging for time off from work, organizing finances to pay for convention expenses. But I've always found the benefits outweigh any hassle. We all need time away to regroup and recharge, and a club gathering – whether on the local, state, or national level – provides that chance.

Check on those around you.

The airlines ask passengers to help those seated next to them. A parents of multiples club often works on the same principle. There might be a need to check in with parents of newborn multiples, to prepare a meal or to give them a break from the sleep deprivation that can come with caring for infants 24 hours a day/7 days a week. Or you might want to call or email some members who weren't able to attend the last club meeting just to let them know they were missed and to relay news of the club activities planned for the coming month. Or there might be a need to help parents who are facing decisions concerning classroom placement of their multiples connect with the resources that Multiples of America focuses on that area.

Realize you have the power to help others.

(Special training is not required.)

The airline doesn't ask passengers to enroll in any special training courses about emergency oxygen procedures prior to booking a flight. They offer a few quick instructions and then entrust passengers with the important task of being there for each other in a crisis. Likewise, no special training is required to become involved in a parents of multiples club. Sure, some positions take a specialized set of skills. But given all of the work that goes into running a club, there should always be a place for anyone willing to share his or her time and talents. As an added plus, I've always found that when I reach out to work with or to help others, I become empowered with new knowledge, new skills, and new connections.

So step onto a plane or into a lifetime of parenting multiples, the guidelines for a healthy trip hold true for both experiences. If you're looking toward a safe landing, the best you can do for someone else is to start with yourself. Or perhaps, Abraham Lincoln put it better; he said, "As you grow older you will discover that you have two hands. One for helping yourself, the other for helping others."