



Being a single parent

When a parent manages the affairs of a family without a partner, he or she is a single parent. A person may become a single parent in several different ways, including the extended absence of a spouse, divorce, by choice, or by the death of a spouse.

Single parenthood is commonly accepted, but it's important to explain to your children why the other parent is absent. You also should learn all you can about parenting, no matter how you became a single parent. This is especially important for single parents because they have no one to take up the slack or to fill in the gaps in parenting.

Single parenting comes with pressure

It can be difficult raising a family alone. Responsibilities and demands on your time and energy are doubled. Your earning power is cut in half.

Being a single parent may mean a limited budget. To cope, develop a budget that fits your income and expenses. To avoid spending excess money, choose inexpensive ways to relax and enjoy your family. You can always go for a walk in the park or play catch or sing together.

Single parents often are concerned about living on a smaller income and dealing with lifestyle changes. It's difficult when you don't have a partner to share parenting, income, feelings and your lifestyle. As a single parent, you may experience feelings of loneliness, guilt, anxiety, or grief – all are normal feelings.

If you work, you may need to make arrangements for the care of your children. Babysitters, day-care centers, neighbors, family and friends are resources which can be of help.

With all of the pressures you feel, remember that your children are an important part of your life. It is necessary to maintain a close, healthy relationship with them.

How to give your children what they need

To strengthen your relationship with your children without adding to your stress level, you can:

Plan family activities that everyone can enjoy.

Bowling, fishing, movies, swimming and picnics are some suggestions.

Help your children learn appropriate behavior.

Provide proper discipline and reward good behavior. Always explain why you're doing so.

Communicate with your children.

Encourage them to talk openly with you about school, friends, and problems. Listen to their feelings and give guidance.

Allow your children to help in decision-making and goal setting.

Children feel more responsible when they take part in important decisions.

Leave time for yourself

- While you care for your family's needs, do not neglect your own personal needs. Here are some tips to help.
- Hiding or ignoring your feelings will not make them go away. Talk to a minister or someone else you trust. Try to accept and understand your feelings.
- Deal with stress by doing things you enjoy. Spend time with a friend or alone if you prefer. Parenting is a difficult job. Often there is extra stress for parents who have no partner.
- Keep yourself healthy. Eat right, get enough rest and exercise regularly at your own pace.
- Keep in touch with close family and friends. If socializing conflicts with child care or other responsibilities, deal creatively with the situation. Don't neglect your social life.
- Recognize problems early and don't be afraid or too proud to ask someone for help. It's almost impossible to do everything yourself. Individual or group counseling may be helpful.

Sign up for a parenting class. Often, they are offered for free or for a small fee in your own community. This can give you perspective on your own situation; you will likely walk away with new skills.

Single parents are special people. A strong relationship with your children, a sense of self-reliance, a better awareness of parenthood, and an added sense of responsibility in your children are some things that can make you feel really good about being a single parent.

If you need more help ...

If you need more advice, call Crisis Services, at (810) 257-3740 or toll-free at (877) 346-3648, where a counselor is always available. TTY users call (810) 232-6310. © www.genhs.org