

# Single Parenting

You may be a single parent for different reasons. Whether or not being a single parent was part of your life plan, you may experience some challenges. Here is information from the American Academy of Pediatrics on how single parents can support their children and themselves.

## Tips for Single Parents

Single parenthood can bring added pressure and stress because you're managing daily responsibilities or decision-making on your own. That's why it's important to know how to support not only your children but also yourself. Here are some things to keep in mind.

- **Get a handle on finances.** Learn how to budget your money, and keep track of your income and bills. If you need a job, contact employment and temporary agencies for help. If you need more education, consider getting your high school diploma, a college degree, or other special training.
- **Talk early and often.** Let your children know about the changes in your family. Sit quietly with your children and allow them to talk about their feelings.
- **Find and accept support.** Don't try to handle everything by yourself. You will need the support that family and friends can give. Get to know other single parents through support groups. Your child's doctor can also be a great source of help and information.
- **Take time for family.** Set aside time each day to spend with your children. Some ideas include reading a bedtime story or eating a meal together with cell phones turned off. Your time is one of the most important things you can give to your children.
- **Take time for yourself.** Time spent away from your children is important for you and for them. Find someone to care for your children while you enjoy time alone or with friends. Do things that you like. Also, take care of your health. Exercise regularly, eat healthy, and get enough rest so you can better deal with stress. Visit your own doctor regularly.
- **Keep a daily routine.** Schedule meals, chores, and bedtimes at regular times so your children know what to expect each day. A routine will help them feel more secure and help you manage multiple tasks.
- **Maintain consistent discipline.** Parents should work together to discipline their children similarly. Check local libraries for parenting books. Local hospitals, the YMCA, and places of worship may sponsor parenting classes. Learning positive ways to handle your children's behavior will reduce stress for everyone.
- **Treat kids like kids.** Although being a single parent may get lonely, try not to treat your children like substitutes for a partner. Avoid the temptation to rely on them for comfort or sympathy, and never complain to them about your co-parent.
- **Stay positive.** Be aware that your children can be affected by your mood and attitude. They will need your praise and your love through hard times. It's OK to be honest about your feelings of sadness and loss, but let them know better times lie ahead for all of you.
- **Find quality child care.** Quality child care is essential for your children's well-being and your peace of mind. Here are few things to keep in mind.
  - Never leave your children home alone.
  - Choose quality child care. Children need to be cared for by an adult with proven experience in child care. Do your research, including visiting the child care center and observing child caregivers when they are with your children. Also, ask for referrals from your child's doctor and other parents, and check whether your local city or county government may also have a list of licensed child care centers or homes. Don't rely on older siblings to babysit for younger siblings.
  - Be careful about asking new friends or partners to care for your children, even for a short time. They may not have the patience, especially if a child's behavior becomes difficult.

## Divorce and Separation

For some children, divorce can be just as hard as the death of a parent. It can take a long time for children to heal. It's almost universal for children to feel they are the reason for the divorce and to hope their parents get back together.

The age of your children may also make a difference in how they are affected. Preschoolers may regress in things like toilet training or may have nightmares. School-aged children may feel angry, guilty, or sad. Teens may worry about moving away from friends or not having money for college.

If you are considering separation or divorce, you may find it helpful to discuss the topic with your child's doctor. Counseling may also help by giving you and your children a chance to talk about any problems and to plan for the changes ahead.

## Dating

Be choosy about which dates meet your children. Form a solid relationship with someone new before bringing them into your home. Your partner should know that your children's well-being is your priority. Overnight guests may confuse your children. When you feel the time is right, let your children meet your new partner. Don't expect them to be close right away. Give them time to build trust. Observe how your partner gets along with your children. Your partner should be patient and understanding. Before leaving your children with a new partner, be sure that your partner can be trusted.

## Talking With Your Children

Talking with your children is a very important way for you and your co-parent to help each other through tough times. Feeling free to share fears, worries, and feelings can make your children feel safe and special. The more often you talk, the more comfortable all of you will feel. Although your children may have lots of questions, don't feel you have to have all the answers. Sometimes, listening is more helpful than giving advice. If needed, don't hesitate to get help from your child's doctor, counselor, or other health care provider.

Here are suggestions that may be useful in talking with your children about the changes in your family.

- **Be honest.** If your spouse has died, your children may not understand what has happened. Young children often see death as temporary. It is very important not to talk about death as "going away" or "going to sleep." Your children may believe that their parent will come back or wake up or that they themselves will die while asleep. If you are going through a divorce, talk about it in simple terms. Avoid blaming your co-parent or showing your anger. Explain that parents sometimes choose to live apart. Give your children all the comfort they need to feel safe and loved.
- **Make sure your children know they are not at fault.** After a separation, divorce, or death of a parent, children often blame themselves. They may feel alone, unwanted, or unloved. Let them know that the changes are not their fault and that you love them and won't leave them.
- **Talk with your children about their fears.** Confusion about a parent leaving or dying can be scary for children. In their minds, if one parent can leave, maybe the other can too. They may think that if they behave better, the parent who left will come back. It is important to talk about these fears and to be as reassuring as possible.

Visit [HealthyChildren.org](https://www.healthychildren.org) for more information.

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