

How to Cope with the Stress of Single Parenting

Stress strikes everyone, however single parents can be especially susceptible. Oftentimes, single parents feel like there's too much to do, too little time to do it, and not enough money to adequately support themselves and their children. Furthermore, single parents who became so as a result of a very stressful event, such as a death or divorce/separation, are dealing with additional challenges as they are faced with the difficult emotions that usually accompany such an event.

Reducing your stress is very important for both you and for your children. Children thrive when a parent can relax and take time and interest in them. Reducing stress gives you the time and energy to be a better parent. In fact, you can be better at everything you do if less of your energy is wasted by stress. The following are some suggestions for healthy ways to cope with the stress of single-parenting:



- ◆ **Gain some control of your life.** Think about when you're most stressed. It's probably when you are in situations beyond your control, like when a bus arrives late, or when there's a long line in the grocery store. Make a list of tasks that must be completed and check them off as you go. When you're working on one task, don't worry about others. You'll do a better job in less time by concentrating on one thing.
- ◆ **Establish a routine.** Your home life will be much more comfortable if you and your children know what to expect. Have regular times for meals, chores, housework, and bed and stick to this routine as closely as you can.
- ◆ **Make the decisions that have been hanging over your head.** Uncertainty is more stressful than making difficult decisions and setting a plan of action. If you need to move, find a new job, or return to school to complete your education, you probably are worrying, consciously or unconsciously. Once you start making necessary decisions about your future, you'll feel better. Don't be hard on yourself. After you've made a decision, follow through with confidence. Don't think about alternatives.
- ◆ **Build a good support system.** Single parents can be very lonely. You're so busy that taking time for friends may seem like a luxury you can't afford. You may already feel as if you don't have enough time to spend with your children as it is. Time away from everyday pressures, however, can work wonders in getting rid of tension and helping to keep your life in perspective. Consider joining a single-parenting support group to talk with other single-parents about the stresses and challenges you are dealing with. No matter how stressed you get, don't forget that being with other people can be nurturing and therapeutic. Make sure, however, that the people you bring into your home do not pose a danger or threat to you and/or your children.
- ◆ **Take care of yourself.** You can reduce stress by taking good care of yourself. Your health is important. Get proper rest and eat healthy foods. When you're feeling especially stressed, take some deep breaths and close your eyes for a few minutes. Ask a trustworthy relative, friend, or neighbor to care for your children occasionally so you can take some time for yourself. You will probably see that your child's behavior improves as the stress in your life is reduced—after all, a happy parent and a stable life are very important factors that contribute to the physical and emotional well-being of your child.