



PEN Notes: Fact Sheet #25

Published by Parent Education Network: 500 W. Lott St, Suite A Buffalo, WY 82834
Toll free 1-877-900-9736 or (307) 684-7441; Website: www.wpen.net

Successful Single-Parenting

“Single parenting means one person managing the affairs of a family without the benefit of a partner. It happens when a spouse is away for an extended period of time (e.g., in military service), when a family experiences a divorce, when parents do not marry and one parent chooses to raise children, or when a spouse dies. Single parenting is common and accepted in today’s society. Single parents face many concerns that are often economic, social, emotional, and practical in nature.” (Tactics for Improving Parenting Skills, edited by Bob Algozzine and Jim Ysseldyke, 1995)

Single parents may often feel isolated and alone, but the number of single-parent families has more than doubled over the past 25 years. Today, over 16 million children are living in single-parent homes. Being a single parent may well be a real challenge, but single parents can and do find ways to help their children grow up to be happy, healthy, productive adults who place a high value on family unity and relationships. Single-parent families may have problems, and there may be some drawbacks to that situation; however, all families face problems of one kind or another, and most of them survive the difficulties and come out stronger as a result of their experiences.



What Are Some Characteristics of Successful Single Parenting?

- Accept responsibility: successful single parents accept the responsibilities and the challenges of parenting their children by themselves
- Seek solutions to problems: without understating or overstating the difficulties, successful single parents find ways to make things work
- Recognize the difficulties: without self-pity or bitterness, successful single parents accept the sacrifices they will make for their children
- Make plans: successful single parents look to the future for their children and for themselves instead of wallowing in self-pity
- Maintain traditions and routines: successful single parents carry on family holiday customs and traditions as well as day-to-day routines to provide stability for children
- Commit to the family: successful single parents make the family their highest priority and put the needs of their children first
- Create open communication: successful single parents encourage clear and open expression of thoughts and feelings with their children
- Manage the home: successful single parents seek to be well-organized and provide financially for their children to the best of their ability
- Take care of themselves: successful single parents recognize the importance of taking care of their own physical and emotional health
- Encourage: successful single parents encourage their children to develop healthy relationships with their extended family members
- Make the most of time spent together: successful single parents know that *quality* time spent with their children is always better than buying more toys, clothes, or gadgets to make up for an absent parent

(Source: Dr. Stephen Duncan, “Characteristics of Successful Single Parenting”)

Single-parent families may face some problems that two-parent families may not face:

- helping children adjust to living with one parent in the case of divorce or death
- visitation and/or custody arrangements
- effects on the children of conflict between parents
- decrease in the amount of time parents and children spend together
- disruptions in extended family relationships
- change in the financial resources available

Regardless of the circumstances that have brought you to being a single parent, you still have the responsibility to raise your children to adulthood, and a great opportunity to create strong bonds with them that will last a life time. Though different from a two-parent family, a single-parent family can adapt to the changes and develop unique relationships that will hold the family together.



How Can Single Parents Help Children Adapt to the Single-Parent Family?

In the case of divorce:

- keep the children out of the dispute between the two of you
- don't have the children take messages to the other parent for you; communicate with your ex-spouse yourself
- keep quiet about the ex-spouse's faults
- realize that you have different parenting styles
- work to make visitation time pleasant for children
- keep the other parent informed about and involved in the children's activities, school progress, problems, etc.
- promise your children that you will not abandon them
- understand that everyone grieves and handles separation differently, so be patient and sympathetic
- seek professional help if your child shows signs of extreme and prolonged sadness, loss of appetite, inability to sleep, loss of interest in activities that he or she normally enjoys, preoccupation with death or too much worry about the absent parent
- spend extra time with children to assure them that you will always be there for them
- include the children in age-appropriate chores and decision-making at home to encourage voluntary cooperation from them
- enlist the help of extended family members and close friends to give you some time off to renew your own emotional and physical health
- make your children and their safety and well-being your first priority to guarantee their security and comfort
- continue to require your children to behave according to your expectations; appropriate discipline is needed to maintain stability and continuity in the family
- contact the Wyoming Children's Access Network (WyCAN) at 307-674-5595 for help for parents who are divorced, separated, or never married

In the case of death or temporary-yet-long-term separation (military assignment, for example):

- admit and talk about the sadness and loneliness you all feel, but then talk about the good things in your lives to focus on the positive aspects
- help your child form meaningful bonds with other family members (grandparents, uncles and aunts, older cousins) who can help to be role models

As a single parent, you need to take good care of yourself, focus on the family issues that are *really* important (a tidy house may not be the highest priority!), get support when needed from family and friends, spend quality time and have fun with your children—and most importantly—make sure to tell your children *every day* that you love them.