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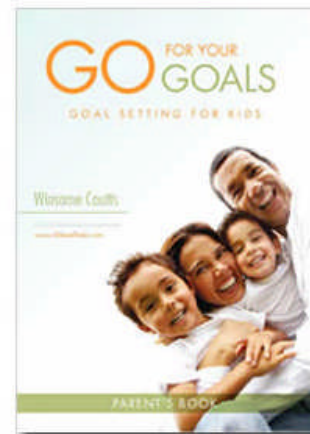
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## **The Transition And New Circumstance**

### **"The transition and new circumstance - journeying down the path of the single parent**

You are also growing and changing throughout this process. You will realize it, your kids will know and see it, as will others. This is another change you and everyone around you have to deal with as well, on top of everything else.

You might also feel anxious, lonely, and angry or evoke these emotions in your child/family. Again this is quite normal and natural behavior.

### **"Seeing things from the child's point of view**

This is not only all about you either. Try and see things through the eyes of your child sometime and whole new worlds of understanding and possibilities will open for you.

### **"A new path and survival plan for single parents - rewards and challenges**

We have spoken a lot in theory about what happens to you when faced with these situations. Now we get to the more practical WHAT DO I DO NOW, NEXT, IN MY CASE TYPE OF QUESTIONS?

### **"SETTLING IN AS INDIVIDUALS AND A NEW FAMILY UNIT**

#### **Challenges:**

There are so many, that it is probably possible to write one whole book on this topic alone. We are opting to take a little less 'negative' approach to this. Rather focusing on the process and outcome than the surrounding, complexities and factors, uphill battles and obstacles some and all of us might specifically face. Here are some examples:

Getting everything done, on time, being where you need to be, do what you have to do and stay sane through it all.



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Finding the financial means (food, boarding/housing, transportation, food, clothing and providing necessities of life, safe place to stay, live and play) Baby-sitting and daycare, employment and income, support and other family-related challenges.

Emotionally supporting your kids, while and despite your world crumpling before your eyes. Being and providing the stability although you do not feel you can or have it in you.

Coping with loss and change and the new roles and responsibilities of being a sole custodian and major care-giver, provider and head of the family.

### **Rewards: Life does go on! You can do it!**

Together with your kids you are embarking on reclaiming and building your life together. You are embracing your future with a positive attitude, hope and a plan of action.

Renewed connection, deepening love and caring relationship with your kids.

## Organizing

**Challenges:** Tension, stress, harsh words, conflict, fights, arguments, quality of family life together, synergy, emotions that are rampant and patience wearing thin, upset at the smallest little thing. Lack of focus and direction

**Rewards:** How you as a family can bond together and work through things, caring and supporting each other, even when the going gets tough, making the bonds and connections even stronger than before. Talking about things that are hard and how you are coping can be an eye-opener, sharing perspectives and solutions very empowering! Providing stability, order, schedule, routine and a firm foundation amidst uncertainty is a huge responsibility BUT also an immense opportunity to reconnect with each other.

Getting, staying and keeping everyone else on track and organized, fed, clothed, taken care of, on time, where they need to be, when they need to be, in clean clothes and staying sane in the process can be quite the challenge for any single parent. The reward is that it provides you with the opportunity to inspire, engage and mobilize your kids into and in your family unit. They take part in building and shaping their own happiness, family life and future. That is the great reward. A new start and beginning, possibilities and potential. Keep focusing on the positive as opposed to dwelling in and upon the past. It is of extreme importance that anyone and everyone stay connected, have a voice, speak up, communicate clearly and check in with each other regularly. This is the perfect opportunity to help starting the healing process, strengthening the bonds and connections between parents and kids, individually and collectively as a family unit.

You are the authority and disciplinarian in the family unit. Demand and earn respect, trust and honesty. Be fair, open and consistent. Do not over-react and set some rules that you all can live with in this new situation. Organizing and customizing your lives the way you want it. Who gets to do what, when? Which sports and after-school activities, weekends and hobbies and more can be discussed and decided together. The sole parent, guardian and champion of course has the final say and input.

Do everything in your power to foster your children's uniqueness and personality. Everyone has something that makes them unique NEVER FORGET THAT. Encourage their self-sufficiency

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and independence. Let them do chores around the house, take control of their lives and stop acting like victims, try and play guilt-games or manipulate, disobey, rebel or act out. Teach them to respect you, each other and others at all times.

How does your family (new) handle conflict, stress and crisis?

Are there verbal arguments in the household?

Can you still love and care for each other, despite the difficulty and or words that you are having? How do you stay grounded and connected with each other?

Are there opportunities for the family and you and the kids, one-on-one to discuss how they feel, what they want, concerns, disagreements?

## **New Family Unit**

Challenges and rewards: letting go of the old and embracing the new, also involved moving beyond the past, breaking ties and moving on. As mentioned earlier, this causes a lot of stress and anxiety (especially for the kids). It is journeying into the unknown, uncertain and un-chartered waters and territory.

As a member of this new family situation and context, unit, everyone has a role to play and a contribution to make. Whether you are in an only child or multiple children situation, you will feel the weight of this one on your shoulder. These children's lives are entrusted and loaned to you to champion, enable, empower and foster. You are all they've got. You are the one left behind. Some children cope with changes, loss and upheaval better than others. NO TWO KIDS ARE THE SAME.

Dealing with fights, rebellious behavior, bad grades, even isolation and detachment, can be hard at times - especially if they are your own children. You can try and compensate for the missing parent but never replace or bad mouth. Teach and model respect, forgiveness and consideration, no matter how tough the situation. They are now looking to you for guidelines and direction.

If you have an only child, you might see this as your ONE opportunity to get things right. Do not put too much pressure and expectation on either of you. Enjoy and foster, grow your relationship, bond and connection.

Being over-protective is the real danger here. Attachment and preoccupation is quite common as kids become the core of our being and existence. They are the reason we live. Sometimes we as the single parent can take this too far and need to step back somewhat to allow our kids to live their lives, explore and define who they are, outside of us and the family unit.

### **THESE ARE THE FIVE “S” approaches to dealing with an only child:**

Self-definition - who are you, where do you fit in and you are not the ONLY person in this household or the world that matters. Self-assured and important, self-absorbed and selfish need



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not be tolerated. Appreciation and consideration of others needs to be taught at home, in the family, even and especially if there is an only child in the unit.

Socialization - interacting with others, beside yourself is critical, especially kids their own age, friends and other neighborhood adults and families can also help. It is important for them to be and act their age!

## **Age - Appropriate Actions**

Always remember that your child did not ask to be placed in this situation. Whether you have babies, teenagers or young adults in the house (early, mid or late adolescence) and/or kids who would want to assert their independence and use this as an opportunity to move out on their own, there are considerations, challenges and rewards. IT DOES NOT ALL HAVE TO BE BAD!

Uncertainty, conflict and opposition can be very real as kids start to become more and more self-sufficient and independent. It can be hard to allow this and not be over-protective, BUT YOU HAVE TO LET GO.

As the single parent you are the one helping your child/children shape who they are, becoming and will be. Their character and characteristics will begin defining itself, both physically and socially . Values, habits and wants change over time as they become more independent. This can both make a parent smile and frown with instant worry. You might be asking yourself if your child (and you) are ready for the challenges of life and the real world outside the family.

While this growing apart and separating happens over time, it can be stressful for both parties and cause discomfort even confrontation and conflict as these 'wills' collide.

Yet, it does not all have to be an on-going battle, there are lots that you can do to foster independence and get along living under one roof.

Energy, attitude and behavior are often the first tell-tale signs that something is different and changing. Negativity, rebellion and even experimentation that does not always meet with your approval might be happening.

Values, risks and observation are the single parent's arsenal for coping with this. Accountability and consequences, discipline and sensitivity, understanding and a firm, consistent stance can be life-savers as well. In everything try to work towards keeping and fostering that positive bond and connection that you share and always provide that soft spot to fall and come home to for them.

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Being considerate of you and siblings, as well as family life in general are all important. You have to teach your kids that they are part of the family and have a role to play, contributions to make, rules to respect.

## **School Society And Family**

Single parenting also means you will not be dealing exclusively with the members of your immediate nuclear family, but also the social, societal and family networks and contexts around you.

As parents, we can easily push too hard, or not hard enough. Finding the right balance between encouragement and performance-driven motivation is important. You can foster a love for learning, reading and inquiry right in your home. Taking the time to do some homework, show interest in schoolwork, after-school activities and the like, will all help you rise to the challenge. Embrace both challenge and reward gladly and proudly.

Recognition, praise, reward, expectations all work together in a dynamic way. Celebrating achievement is important and even when failure occurs, kids need to know that they are still accepted and loved and that if they need help, they can ask and will get it! You have to be there for your kids. Not just obsess about your own competence and the achievements of your kids. There are more to kids than their grades! The role and importance of learning, self-discovery and exploration has to be fostered in the home as well. This role can not just be abdicated to the school. As a single parent you have to take interest in the schooling and development of your child. Read together, go to the library, work on projects, ask and support any outdoor, sports or extra-curricular activity your kids partake in. Support, love and care, show interest and develop a good partnership with the educators and role-models in your kid's/children's' lives.

Learning asks for brave steps and curiosity. You need to be able to make mistakes, look foolish, ask question without feeling dumb, stupid or left out, slow, ignorant. Kids need to know that they matter and that it is not the grades that you love! BUT THAT IT IS THEM! And that you want them to succeed. Performance pressure can be a very negative and de-motivating force for children. Try and make learning fun and reward good performance (within bounds and in moderation of course!).

Positive encouragement is always good. Let your child/children know:

It is OK NOT to know something, everything. We all have to start somewhere and can not possibly have all the knowledge in the world!



## **Single Parenting – Becoming the Best Parent For Your Child!**

Effort is good and keeping on trying encouraged (good for you, you tried, now do it again, let us see if you can do it)

No-one wants to feel 'stupid' in any way, admire their willingness to abandon, risk and ask!

Encourage inquiry. Be and keep things positive. If you are really worried about grades slipping or learning difficulties, get professional help, tutoring and keep on encouraging as you go along.

## **Single Parenting And Black Males**

Every day, all over the world, single parenting is a quickly-growing family situation. It doesn't matter if the country is rich or poor, there are more single parents than ever before.

Societies are changing, and single parents aren't the social outcasts they were in olden times. Earlier societies that had strict moral codes used to view single parents as immoral or personal failures. They thought being a single parent was a sign of personal or intellectual weakness.

But today, many households are run by single parents, and single parents are not limited to one race or gender. You'll find single-parent families headed by men and women of many different races.

In fact, there are just about the same number of black and white males who are also single parents in the U.S. today. And those single fathers face the same challenges and problems.

The truth is that census figures don't really tell us how many black single-parent males are out there today, although the 2002 US Census did find that three of every ten children are raised by a single parent. But it's safe to assume that, no matter how many single black fathers there are today, the number is rising.

It doesn't really matter why. Whether children are born because they were wanted or not is not the issue. The fact that single parents choose to stay with and care for their children is the important point.

As mentioned earlier, black males face the same problems as do other single parents. And as other single parents are qualified for financial help, so are single black fathers.

### **Studies About Single Black Fathers**

Several studies are available that examine the issue of single parenting for black males. The make one assumption up front: that single parenting is more difficult for men because they are not very domestic.

They suggest that men do not cope with single parenting as well as women. Some psychologists argue that single mothers tend to be more mature and emotionally stable than their male counterparts, making them more capable single parents.

On the other hand, some professionals argue that men approach parenting more logically than women do and that they are more likely to impose consistent rules and discipline on their children than their female counterparts.

One ethnographic researcher talked to single black fathers about their reasons for deciding to raise their children alone. They told the researcher that they felt a sense of duty for their children, that they wanted to avoid their own childhood experience of having a father absent, that they wanted to be a role model, and they that felt a strong bond with their kids. These fathers had high expectations for their kids and got most of their parenting advice from their mothers. Most of the fathers reported that single-parenting had a positive impact of their lives, and they felt the relationships with their children improved their own satisfaction with life in general.

To learn more about the findings of research into the lives and challenges of single black fathers, you might read these timely articles. They are easily available on the Internet.

\* **"Black Men: the Crisis Continues"** by Slaim Muwakkil. This article was published in a popular magazine. It discusses the political issues facing blacks today, focusing on black males.

\* **"The Black Family: 40 Years of Lies"** by Kay S. Hymowitz. This magazine article talks about the social implications of being a single black father for the race as a whole.

\* **"Parent Trapped: Dating for Single Parents"** tackles the issue of single parents beginning to date again after the end of their previous relationship. The article discusses issues that black men identified related to single parenting.

\* **"Black Single Fathers"** by Roberta Coles. Published in the Journal of Contemporary Ethnography, this article reports on research into the motives of African American full-time single fathers in making the decision to become parents.

\* **"African American Single Full-time Fathers: How Are They Doing?"** by Roberta Coles.

Published in the journal African American Men, this article reports on interviews where ten single black men talked about their experiences and attitudes with single parenting.



## **Single Parents: Spotlight On Black Single-Parent Males**

The number of single-parent families is increasing everywhere. The 2002 US Census found that three of every ten children were living in a single-parent home. Experts believe the number to be steadily increasing and expect the trend to continue for years to come.

Increasing acceptance of divorce as a solution to marital problems is one social factor supporting the increase in single-parent families. With that acceptance has come greater tolerance for parents without partners.

Single parents face many challenges. They must earn a living and raise their children without the help and support of another adult at home. They face financial difficulties if they don't receive child support or have a big salary. Their time is over-booked with work, household duties, parent-teacher conferences and PTA meetings, and attempts at private time for rest and relaxation.

Support systems for single parents are growing, but they still frequently feel isolated and alone. New single-parents must cope with children who are having their own problems adjusting to the new lifestyle. They may face anger, feelings of abandonment, and rebelliousness from children who feel they don't get enough attention.

Although there are no clear census data on the number of single black fathers, experts assume the number to be increasing as well. They express concern that single black fathers may face more pressure than other single parents due to continuing social discrimination, despite less political or legal discrimination.

Many experts assume that males are less equipped to be single parents than females, arguing that men don't receive the same level of training in domestic tasks and that women are naturally more nurturing care-givers. However, other professionals assert that men are more likely to be objective and logical in their decision-making for the household and that they are more consistent in disciplining their children than women are.

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Interviews of African American full-time single fathers conducted by Robert Coles of Marquette University explored why they wanted to be full-time fathers. When the men talked about their motivations, they listed fulfilling their responsibilities, reworking their own feelings about their absent fathers, being a role model, and maintaining an established relationship with their children.

Several new studies have been conducted by experts and psychologists trying to learn more about black single-parenting. There are also a number of websites containing information and advice focusing on the black male's single-parenting experience.

The following articles are examples of the literature available on the Internet targeting black male single parents.

\* **"Parent Trapped: Dating for Single Parents."** Penned anonymously by a male single parent, this article talks about the author's experiences with dating as a single parent. Assuming his experiences can be generalized to other men and to black single fathers, readers can relate to his joys and challenges.

\* **"The Bad Rap Against Mothers."** This article was published in a popular main-stream magazine several years ago, but it remains fresh and relevant. Its author is a single mother who was abandoned by her black male partner.

\* **"The Bad Rap Against Mothers, Part 2."** A second part to the previous article, Part 2 more carefully describes and analyzes the challenges presented by single parenthood for mothers. The author imagines what life might have been if she had been the one to leave the relationship. Explaining her argument, the author believes that single parents are well-positioned to raise "exceptional men" who have good manners and lofty principles.

\* **"Come Back Home" inspiring excerpt is from the popular "Chicken Soup for the Single Parent: Stories of Hope, Healing and Humor."** This selection acknowledges that everyone's experience with single parenting is highly personal and that each single parent has their own story to tell.

\* **"Get More Time with your Children and Manage Your Child Support"** was written for black single-parent males, but it will be equally touching and valuable for white single fathers. The article gives insights into the personal and financial issues single-parent males face.

\* **"Dreaming Through the Twilight"** is as sweet and mushy as its title but at the same time profound. It is also available as a book that compiles personal diary-type articles on black single-parent males having difficulty coping with their life as single parents.

## **Black Single Parents**

There was a day when being a single parent earned public scorn. The assumption was that you must be immoral to have ended this way. But times have changed. The past decades have seen a dramatic increase in the number of single-parent households, and there's no stigma attached to the status today.

Single parents who are facing financial hardships can find help today. Society is recognizing that "it takes a village to raise a child," and governments are providing more financial assistance for families in financial distress.

And the help is not limited to white Americans. Black single parents face the same challenges and hardships as any other single parents, and government assistance programs are color-blind.

For example, black single parents in Arkansas can apply for a special scholarship program that helps them attend college. They attend school for free and receive a stipend every month to help meet expenses. The State of Arkansas believes that children will grow up to be better citizens if their parent is better educated. And Arkansas does not require both parents to be present to recognize a family. Single-parent families are as important in Arkansas as any family unit.

Black single parents who are unemployed can also get help from state and local governments to find a job. Employment offices will try to find work near the home for single parents who must also manage their household. In fact, they may offer financial assistance while the black single parent is job hunting.

To find sources of assistance in your state or community, check the blue section of your yellow pages. Look for family assistance, unemployment, and children's welfare agencies and departments, and start calling. It may take some time to find that one person who really cares, but you will find help if you are patient and persistent.

Some local governments will advise both white and black single mothers to work from the home to give them more time to care for their children. The Internet offers opportunities to earn

supplemental income from home. It's not just a dating service! If you have the determination to learn and the patience to persist, you can earn a living from the Internet.

Online shopping services rake in millions, if not billions, of dollars every day. Selling their products through your own website can earn you commissions. There are also many opportunities to find work as a virtual secretary, writer, host for a forum, or a survey poller. And with a little help, you can sell your own products and services over the web. Having your name and number show up when someone queries for a local service is a great way to find additional work.

Trying to earn a living to support your family while also caring for your children is a stressful full-time job. As a single black parent, you may need to find some support to help you cope with daily stresses and the transition from one way of life to another.

Group therapy sessions are a great way to find a listening ear and emotional support when you are going through these struggles. The other group members are in the same situation, so they understand you and your problems. They can offer advice based on lessons they've learned while dealing with the same issues. Your local government may even sponsor such a group. Check out local services to see if that free service is available to you.

Support and therapy groups can help solve problems before they even come up. Group members know what you're going through because they've been there. They may be able to help you build strong healthy relationships with your children. They may have solutions to household repair problems that you didn't think of. If you don't have a network of close friends to play that role, you may find a single parent group the perfect support system.

Black single parents need to take advantage of all the opportunities and services their state and local governments offer. It's time to let go of that stubborn pride and admit you can't do it all alone. Your children need a happy healthy parent, and you need to be there for them. If you don't take advantage of the programs out there, you've cheated yourself and your family.

## **Consequences Of Single Parenting**

Being a single parent involves many difficult challenges. It's even harder than it looks. Single parents deal with challenges all day, every day. Many of those challenges arise from being not only single but a parent. There are children to care for and take care of. And because you are the only parent, everything you do carries greater weight.

No matter what you do, as a single parent, you must think of its effect on your children. You must be diligent in keeping up with their activities and their thoughts as they grow up in a single-parent home. In fact, the biggest challenge of being a single parent is the effect of your status on your children.

The transition to a single-parent family is difficult for kids. They may feel abandoned or insecure. They may feel isolated and different from other kids, even if there are more single-parent families than ever before.

Your children may resent you for the loss of your spouse, or they may have unresolved issues with the missing parent. As a single parent, it's your job to keep them talking about what's going on with them and what they think. Even though they may resist, you need to get them to talk to you about their worries, their fears, and their anger.

And you need to let them know they're all right. They're normal kids despite their circumstances. They aren't responsible for the change, and they don't have to make up for it. You should give them as normal a childhood as possible and be a role model. Even when they don't act that way, they look to you as their example of what a grown-up is and does.

Your kids need to know you're there for them, no matter what. You have a busy schedule trying to earn a living and manage the household. But you must never be too busy for your children. Even when you are in financial trouble, the job can't take priority over the kids. They need to know how important they are to you. They need to know you love them more than anything else.

## **Single Parenting – Becoming the Best Parent For Your Child!**

You're going to have to build a new relationship with your children. As a single parent, you're the only source of affection and guidance in the home. Even if you weren't close before, you're going to have to get close now. One good way to do that is to do lots of fun family activities.

Another way that will help the whole family is to assign specific chores to your children that will help keep the household running efficiently. Giving them responsibility will help them feel that they belong and that they are important. It will also give them a sense of accomplishment necessary to build a healthy self-image.

Single parents need to admit that they need help and then get help. You can't do everything by yourself. Trying to may ruin your health, your attitude, and your relationships with your children. Getting to know your neighbors is a great way to find people who can help you look after the kids when you must be away. Neighbors can also help with household repairs and yard work.

Your neighbors may also be adult companions and role models for your children, but you must be careful. Get to know your neighbors well before you allow your children to be alone with them. Remember that the world is a more dangerous place than it was when you were a child. There's no substitute for good parental judgment.

Time is the enemy when you're a single parent. You probably have to work, and that means being outside the home a lot. Unless you have help, it also means your children may spend a lot of time at home alone. You'll need to take extra precautions and lay out specific rules for time you're not there.

Children who are alone a lot are vulnerable to drugs and criminal behavior. Gang activities are sky-rocketing. You'll have to find a way to monitor your kids while you're not home. This difficult challenge must be met head-on or your children may pay for it with their very lives.

You may have a challenge with your children's attitudes about you as well. They may blame you for their situation or think you're not doing things right. They may not show you the respect you want and expect. And they may feel cheated if you can't attend special events like birthdays, PTA meetings, parent-teacher conferences, recitals, and other events that parents usually attend. These time pressures are especially difficult for single parents.

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If you can't make the time to make at least some of these events, it's time to have a talk with the boss. Maybe you can work out a special work schedule or do some of your work at home. If you can't find a solution with your current job, you may need to look for other more flexible working arrangements. If both are impossible, it's important that your children know and understand why you can't be with them. Be honest. They'll understand the truth better than no explanation at all.

It's important to remember that you can't just give time to your kids. It must be quality time that helps them grow and mature. They need to know that you love them and that you need them. Never give them the idea that they're a burden to you. Tell them often how much you love them. Listen to them. Ask them questions and listen to their answers. Show your interest in them as individuals. Even when time is limited, you can make the time you spend with them special and positive. It's worth the trouble. And your reward is the love and respect of well-behaved, responsible children.

Even when life deals you and your children a bad hand, you can make life together enjoyable and productive. You can build healthy relationships with your kids and watch them become happy, productive young adults.

Despite the many hard challenges of being a single parent, you must always maintain your perspective and honor the most important priorities. It won't always be hard or unpleasant. You'll have many happy times and lots of love and laughter in your single-parent family as long as you keep a healthy positive attitude and keep on working toward a better life for you and your children.



## **Dating Meeting A Single Parents Children**

Especially if you've never been married, dating a single parent can be difficult. And meeting the single parent's child or children can be a source of tension for a new couple. Let's face it, this isn't your normal relationship. You may have no strings, but your partner has big responsibilities - a child.

If you're dating a recently-single parent, you need to be open and understanding. They're going through a very difficult time, and they have much to think about. They may still be processing their feelings about being single again. Or they may be dealing with their children's emotional baggage.

Dating comes with all kind of feelings - excitement, anticipation, nervousness. And when you decide it's time to meet the kids, those feelings get more intense. It's not just you and your new partner that go through these feelings. The children have greatly mixed feelings about their parent's new flame. They may be happy and excited that Mom or Dad is having some fun, but they may feel threatened with abandonment issues. They may resent anyone if they think they're trying to replace their other parent. They may be jealous.

One or two dates may not be a big deal and may not involve much more than a dinner and a handshake. It's when you see you really like each other that the challenges begin. Here are some tips that may help you through these first phases of your relationship with a newly-single parent.

### **About the Dating**

***1. If you're becoming emotionally involved with a newly-single parent, you'll want to be sure they're really finished with the old relationship.*** It's common for people in your position to feel they're getting someone on the "rebound," and they tend to get insecure when they don't understand something said or done by their new partner. It's easy to fear being in a rebound romance. Many newly-single parents try to replace or duplicate feelings that had become comfortable and normal with their old partner. So, as gently and respectfully as you can, talk to

your new partner. Find out if they're really through with the old relationship. Try to be sure that chapter of their life is over.

***2. Be sure to compliment your partner as much as you can without being dishonest.***

Newly-single parents may feel anxious about re-entering the single world and dating. They may feel insecure about their looks and their personality in general. They need reassurance that they're okay, that they look great, and that they're fun to be with. When you like the way they look, tell them so. Let them know you enjoy your time with them. You're still dating them. Tell them why. But be honest. No one wants to get caught in a little fib, and white lies can be more destructive to relationships with a newly-single parent than unpleasant truths.

***3. Don't be compared with your new partner's ex.*** Comparisons are a number one cause of fights between newly-single parents and their dates. Whether they're looking for someone like their last partner or someone entirely different, don't let them slip into comparing you. You're a unique individual, and comparisons can only hurt the relationship. You don't have to change who you are, but you need to be clear with your new partner that you are your own person.

***4. Don't expect to fall into bed.*** Any healthy relationship needs to get started on a healthy base. Entering too quickly into a sexual relationship is especially tricky for newly-single parents. Having sex before you really know each other can make things very confusing and complicated. When there are children involved, it can be a messy disaster. Give you and your new partner time to discover each other first. Let the kids get comfortable with you, too, before introducing more complexity into the matter.

### **About Meeting the Kids**

When you enter the newly-single parent's home, you are entering their world. When they have children living their, it is a community. You must respect their ways of doing things and their ways of communicating.

**1. Respect family routines.** Understand that they already have their routines. Family routines help keep the family stable and secure. Children need routines to provide discipline and predictability to their lives. If they've just been through the loss of one parent, their needs for

stability and security can be overwhelming. When you enter their home, you are a threat to that stability.

It's important that the children know you don't intend to make any changes in their lives beyond seeing their parent. If your new partner invites you over for dinner, obey the family rules and practices. Sit where they ask you to, not where you choose. Take their cues on how to use your napkin and how to ask for the salt. Be content with things they way they have always been, and you'll seem less of a threat and more of a guest in their home.

**2. Delay the sleep-overs.** Just as it's important to save the sexual relationship for later on, it's important to avoid any sleep-overs early in the relationship. Whether you are having sex or not, the children will be confused and frightened by this change. Kids today are worldly-wise, and they will think you had sex whether you did or not. It will create tension between them and their parent and between their parent and you. Better to wait until everyone's more comfortable with the new dating arrangements before making anything appear really serious to the children. You also need some time to build personal relationships with the kids if you want to continue seeing their parent.

**3. Reserve the dates for the adults.** Try to keep dating and parenting time separate. Your newly-single parent may feel an overwhelming sense of responsibility for their children, and they may not realize that they're bringing that role into your dates. Try to let them know that your dates are personal time for the two of you. After all, it's a chance for them to get away and relax as well. Encourage them to take that important "me time" while they're on a date with you.

**4. Understand being introduced to the kids.** It's important that you realize that a single parent is not likely to introduce people they're dating to the kids unless they think it is or could be serious. They won't want to take a chance on upsetting the kids' lives without good reason. So, however you may feel about the relationship, know that meeting the kids is a clear signal that you're important in their lives. And don't be too impatient if you really want to meet the kids. Work on the relationship, and the right time will come. These are just a few of the many things you'll want to think about when you start dating a newly-single parent. Children complicate relationships, and they can tremendous impact on the nature of your new dating relationship. If you're serious about this person and want the relationship to develop further, you'll have to be open, flexible, honest, and understanding.

## **Dating Single Parents**

I admire and respect single parents. They overcome many hardships and challenges, which they face with grace, all the while caring for their children and creating a safe, happy family.

But, you know, single parents are human. They have human emotions and human needs. They need love and affection not only from their children but from other adults who are not also relatives. Like most of us, they need a companion for their life journey.

Some people tell me it's not right or appropriate for single parents to go on dates. They say that the time for dating in single parent's life has passed - that the family and children are everything. They tell me that single parents who date are promiscuous or irresponsible.

I strongly disagree. I think single parents have as much right to a social life as anyone. After all, they are single, aren't they?

Everyone needs love, and most of us want a partner in life. To let society's whims force us to be lonely is wrong. Single people have a right to be happy and to find someone who will want to help them and support their children.

When you're the only adult in a household, raising a family is hard. Kids really need two parents when they're growing up to get a healthy balance of role models and realistic ideas about gender issues. A single parent can't give that to their children.

And children always grow up and move away. They have families and lives of their own. If a single parent shouldn't date, you're saying they are doomed to grow old alone. That just doesn't seem right.

Some people seem to think that single parents must meet different standards than the rest of us. They may think single parents are immoral people just because they have children and aren't married. Single moms get criticized for getting pregnant too early or getting pregnant without a husband. Single dads may be accused of being irresponsible or of being more likely to cheat in a relationship. What are people thinking?

The truth is that almost all single parents are hard-working responsible people who care about their families and love their children deeply. They work hard to make a good living for their family and to balance work with school functions with no one to share the burden. It just makes me mad when I hear people judging others for what they assume to be personal mistakes. It just isn't so.

But single parents may be the best potential mates a person could find. They are mature and responsible. They are obviously committed to their families and children, or they wouldn't be struggling with the single-parent lifestyle now. It's the best thing in the world when a single parent dates and finds a partner to build a new life and a strong, normal family.

Finding a partner isn't easy for single parents. First, they are carrying some baggage from their previous relationship. Whether it ended in death or divorce, there are feelings and habits to break. Second, they have children, which can be a real problem for some singles who don't have children.

When you're dating a single parent, you have to accept that they have another set of important priorities in their daily life. You may be tempted to try to compete with them. But that would be a mistake, because you'd always lose. The best thing to do is to accept them for who they are and what their life is like today.

You need to recognize that they love their children very much, and you need to respect that. After you meet the children and get to know them, you will most likely love them too. After all, when you're in a serious relationship with a single parent, you're really in a relationship with a family. The kids come with the package.

You may have to deal with some single-parent-specific issues if you want a serious long-term relationship with them. They may have been hurt badly in the past, and they could have some trust issues. You'll have to show them over time that you can be trusted.

My guess is that you'll have to demonstrate your maturity, responsibility, and loving nature before a real relationship can get off the ground. And once you gain their trust, you'll have to

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earn the trust of their children. That could be even more difficult, since the kids may think you're trying to replace the missing parent in their hearts.

The kids will be protective and possessive of their single parent. You might as well be prepared for that. They may suspect that you have evil intentions. Or if the previous relationship was marked with a lot of fighting or violence, they may fear a repeat of those very uncomfortable times.

By being a friend without being pushy, you may be able to begin a relationship with the children. You'll have to be tolerant of and patient with their moods and suspicion. You'll have to be loving at the same time you acknowledge they already have (or had) another parent. You'll have to take it slow with the kids, one step at a time, to build a relationship that will someday be a strong foundation for the happy, healthy family you hope to have with their single parent.

## **The Effects Of Single Parenting**

Over the last few decades, there's been a dramatic increase in the number of single-parent homes. As you might expect, the number of children in single-parent homes has increased as well. Many people believe that separation and divorce are very bad for developing children, while others argue that nothing's worse for them than constant arguments and even violence in the home.

Social scientists have come to conflicting conclusions on the positive and negative impacts of single parenting. Some studies conclude that living with a single parent results in low self-esteem for the children. Others find no impacts different from two-parent households.

It's clear, though, that single parents can make all the difference in helping their children adapt and cope with the change to a single-parent household. How single parents deal with their children at this time can mold family dynamics for the future and determine the well-being of both parent and child.

Here are a few ways the newly-single parent can be a positive supportive force for their new family.

### **1. Help your children understand why you are now single.**

Before a separation or divorce, the chances are that the home life wasn't too pleasant. The children may have overheard fights or witnessed personal violence that you don't know about. It's also likely that you weren't as sensitive to their feelings as you might have been if you hadn't been going through so much yourself.

Children who don't understand the realities often assume that they are the cause of their parents' problems. Now that the fireworks are over, it's time to be honest with them. You don't have to go into graphic detail, but you do need to make them understand that they are not responsible for the break-up.

Without blaming the absent parent, explain as much as you can about the basic conflict between you and why you couldn't work it out. Your openness and honesty will help them put it in perspective and will tell them you respect their feelings. Hopefully, this will also reduce any resentments they may be holding against you.

### **2. Spend more time with your children.**

You've all been through a very hard time. Tensions during the break-up may have been intense, and your children may have been aware of and affected by the stress. They probably are very familiar with screaming, fights, and cold silences. They know hostility well.

Now that you're single and your home is getting more stable, it's time to invest some time in your kids. Doing things together helps re-establish communications and help you get to know each other outside the conflict and tension of the old life.

Take time to talk to them about your hopes and dreams. Ask them about theirs. Plan and go on vacations, week-end trips, and quick trips to the beach or nature preserve. Have a special family night to "celebrate" the week's accomplishments. The important thing is spending time together to help heal old wounds and build new healthy relationships. It will produce a happier, healthier family.

### **3. Become part of your community.**

Single-parents have busy lives and many responsibilities. Depending on the age of your children, they may be able to help. But it's important that you find nearby support. Get to know your neighbors. Where they have children near your kids' ages, encourage them to play together.

Ask your neighbors for help when you need it. Don't be too proud to ask for help. You have neighbors who'll be more than happy to help you out with some baby-sitting or household chores. Neighborhood kids may want to earn a few extra dollars by helping you in your yard.



And don't just ask for help, get involved. Take part in neighborhood and community events. Volunteer, as a family, to participate in and contribute to block parties, community flea markets and yard sales, community watch programs, and other organized activities.

It will help both you and your children establish new relationships and keep you from feeling isolated or lonely after the dramatic changes you've been through.

#### **4. Give your children new experiences.**

Your kids may be having a difficult time, especially if their time is divided between parents. They may be trying to adjust to a new school and make new friends. Life may seem overwhelming to them right now. It's important that they feel that life is still an adventure, and they that belong.

Be sure to ask them about what they did when away and do not, under any circumstances, use it as time to criticize your ex. Show your interest in what your kids did and what they accomplished. Encourage them to participate in events for children, join local sports teams, and learn new things. Keep them interested in the bigger world so that they don't become self-absorbed and overwhelmed by their personal troubles.

#### **5. Let your children grow up with you.**

Children need to feel that they have successes, just like the rest of us. You can encourage their feelings of accomplishment by giving them responsibility. Assign them specific chores in the house, and then leave the tasks to them. Don't supervise or criticize. Let them fail, and learn, on their own. But do praise them when they do a good job. Let them know how much you appreciate their help and how important they are to your family. And try to find a job for each child that is visible to and supportive of the family unit.

#### **6. Balance your life by prioritizing your life.**

Single parents can be overwhelmed by responsibilities and the things that must be done after a break-up. It's important that you learn how to use your time to make life better for everyone, including you! If your job is too demanding, you may need to find something else so that you

can focus on your family. If financial obligations are difficult, maybe a new job's not the answer. Perhaps trying to negotiate a new working schedule with your boss will be the key.

Begin to think about and create family schedules that are flexible enough for those inevitable unexpected events yet structured enough that your bases are covered. And include recreation and family entertainment in your schedule. Let your children help you develop a schedule. This will be another opportunity for some quality conversation and getting to know each other better. You never know, your children may have some great ideas that will make everyone's life easier.

### **7. Make decision-making a family affair.**

Now that you're a single parent, it may be tempting to rule with an iron fist. But that would be a mistake. Your kids need the reassurance of knowing you respect and need them. When decisions about the home or family need to be made, include them in the process. Help them understand your decision-making parameters and the pros and cons of different decisions. This will them become more self-reliant and responsible within the family and afterward as they become adults.

These are just a few things you can do to help your children accept you as a single parent and start your new family life off on the right foot. You should seek advice and guidance from several sources. Internet research may give you a lot of ideas, but you may need to get some personal counseling or face-to-face discussion time for your specific issues.

You may be able to find a support group for single parents that will be very helpful. Other single parents can share with you their experiences and lessons. And you can have some support from people who really do understand your situation.

## **Ethnically Speaking: The Trends In Single Parenting**

Studies show that 90% of all single parents are women. In 1995, almost one-third of all black families lived in single-parent homes with children. At the same time, only 8% of white families and 7% of South Asian families were single-parent households.

About half of black women of 30 and over are the main source of income for their single-parent families, while only a tenth of South Asian mothers are the main bread winners.

These statistics underscore the challenges facing single black mothers today. Further, other studies show that, for both black and white women from 15 to 44, decisions about marriage and having children are largely driven by concerns about family disruption.

Bumpass and McLanahan conducted an ethnic study about daughters of single mothers. Their findings may surprise you. Daughters of single mothers have a:

- 53% chance of marrying while teenagers
- 111% chance having babies while they are teens
- 164% chance of having babies out of wedlock
- 92% chance of having marital problems

In families where the father died early, the study came to these conclusions about daughters of single mothers:

- Early loss of the father does not significantly affect black children.
- Growing up in a single-parent family has little effect on whether daughters would remarry after divorce whether they were black or white.

The Bumpass and McLanahan study supports the conclusion that women who grew up in a single-parent family with their mothers as head are more likely to marry and have children while they're young, to have illegitimate children, and to have failed marriages ending in divorce.

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Being a single parent is difficult for anyone, regardless of race or ethnicity. Everyone goes through the same grief process after the loss of a serious relationship, whether through divorce or death. Single parents share the same or similar emotions about their change in status: sadness, confusion, guilt, abandonment, anxiety, and fear of being alone.

Here are some suggestions that, while sometimes difficult to perform, may make your new life as a single parent easier.

**1. Let go.** In order to get past the feelings, it's important to forgive and forget. Holding on to anger only creates health problems, difficulty in social relationships, and delayed emotional healing. While you may not really be able to forget the hurts of the past, it's important to forgive and move on. Especially for the kids, you need to resolve feelings about your spouse so you can provide a healthy loving home for your children.

**2. Keep up with and make friends.** Looking to your neighbors and community as a source of emotional support can make all the difference when you're trying to adjust to a new and strange lifestyle. Neighbors can provide social interaction, support for childcare, and help with home repairs and yard work. Making new close-to-home friends will also help you get past feelings of abandonment and isolation and give you some critically-important relaxation and fun. Neighbors can also be very important in helping your children adjust to their new situation.

**3. Give the kids some responsibility.** When you give a task to your child, it makes them feel important and needed. It also gives them a wonderful sense of accomplishment to complete the task successfully. Giving your children household responsibilities will help strengthen family bonds, build self-confidence, and let your children know you need and trust them.

**4. Accept your responsibilities.** Before you were a single parent, responsibility for earning a living and taking care of the family and household was shared. Now, you're the only adult, and you have to do it all. Don't get hung up in feeling cheated or punished. You may not realize it, but your children will interpret your feelings as their fault. Unless you're willing to step up to the plate physically and emotionally, you're likely to drive a wedge between you and your kids that will be very difficult to overcome.

**5. Ask for help.** You have to accept responsibility and do the best you can with it. But recognize that you don't have to do everything by yourself. Relying more on your children for household chores and family decision-making will build a stronger family and take some of the weight off your shoulders. Relying on friends and neighbors who offer to help will reduce your stress and build your own feelings of gratitude for the good things in your life. Taking the initiative and seeking out assistance from state and local governments will get you much-needed help that you're entitled to as a citizen. Never think you're alone because you aren't.

**6. Honor old routines.** Both you and your children need stability at this difficult time. If you used to go out for dinner every Wednesday or have pizza every Monday, continue to do it now. If you used to go to the park every Saturday afternoon as a two-parent family, do it now as a single-parent family. The more habits and routines you can preserve from your old way of life, the more stable and secure your family will be in their new life.

**7. Encourage your kids to grow.** If their time is split between parents now, your children are having their own set of challenges and issues to resolve. The more you can do to help them broaden their perspective and learn to deal with life's challenges, the better prepared they will be for the future. Just as you have to work through emotions after the loss of your spouse, your children have to work through their emotions. You can help them do that by open and honest conversation. You can also help them expand their awareness of the world by offering them new experiences.

## **Financial Help For Single Parents**

Being a single parent is a difficult challenge, especially when money is tight. If you're a single parent in financial trouble, you may find this article helpful.

Governments around the world are becoming more aware of how important it is for household with single parents to have a stable source of income. They recognize that single parents have to make difficult choices and sacrifices to provide a safe home for their children.

Single parents, after all, have other options. Abortion is the first decision to make, and single parents have decided not to take this "easy way" out of their situation. They have not abandoned their children or offered them up for adoption. Whether we realize it or not, single parenting is a choice, and many single parents who make that choice are heroes.

Without enough financial resources, the life of a single parent can be difficult and dreary. Struggling from day to day to provide healthy meals is a battle. Providing appropriate clothing for growing children often forces acceptance of hand-me-downs and clothes cast off by more fortunate people. Health insurance may be out of the question, so free and low-cost clinics are the health care services they must choose.

If they don't have a car, transportation depends on regular operation of sometimes undependable public mass transit systems. And even if they do have a car, regular maintenance costs and repairs may make using that car impossible. Keeping the children well-fed, warm, and healthy is a major task with many obstacles.

Yet, in spite of it all, they continue to trudge their path. They do what they can to meet the challenges and provide their children with as near a normal life as possible. Fortunately, there are places where single parents can go for financial help. This financial assistance may help relieve some of the stresses single parents face. Any help is welcomed help when your children are hungry.

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While the federal government offers some limited help, local and state governments most often are the best hope for financial aid for single parents with children at home. Unfortunately, it is sometimes difficult to qualify, but careful research and persistence may pay off.

### **Where to Find Financial Help**

The best places to start looking for financial assistance are your county and municipal governments. Family service departments, children's agencies, and local unemployment services may offer financial assistance. Your state government may also have programs that will help. Start with the blue pages in your telephone book. Look for family services, health and welfare, employment/unemployment agencies, and children's welfare departments and agencies. Make a lot of phone calls to find the offices that can help you.

This may be an intensely frustrating exercise, as you'll get a lot of accidental hang-ups and be transferred more than you think possible. But hang in there. Keep talking to people, and eventually you'll find that one dedicated public servant who really wants to help. Get their name and keep their phone number in case you need their help again. And thank them for their generosity. They may do it for a living, but the ones who will really work for you do it from the heart.

Once you've located the right office, you'll have to fill out some forms. Be prepared to spend some time doing it. Patience and tolerance are the code words. You can't gain anything by becoming angry or hostile. As much as it may chafe, be polite and gentle.

When you fill out all the necessary forms, be honest. Half-truths, omissions, and downright lies will only bring disappointment later on, and they may disqualify you from help from any agency in the jurisdiction.

You'll probably have to prove your income level, jobs you have had or have now, your address, and the number and ages of your children. Be prepared to provide income tax statements, payroll stubs, mail documenting your address, and birth certificates for you and your kids. The more documentation you have in hand, the faster and smoother the process will go.

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It's important that you know the requirements and qualifications. Most financial aid agencies have minimum income requirements. If you more than that amount, you could may not qualify for help. There may be other requirements, too. You may have to qualify on the basis of rent you pay.

Look into the options available for your children. Even if you don't qualify, your children might be eligible for assistance for school meal vouchers or other services.

### **How Do I Know If I'm Eligible for Financial Help?**

Eligibility requirements will vary by state and by local government. You'll have to do your homework to find out what's required in your area. But if you've already located the right agencies, the work is almost done. The agency will have pamphlets and brochures that outline their requirements and qualifications.

Generally, there are basic requirements that all governments ask for. First, you must be single - divorced, widowed, or never married. You may not qualify if you are in a common law situation or living with someone without a marriage license.

If you are widowed, you and your children may already qualify for Social Security assistance. Contact your local Social Security Administration office for more information. Once again, prepare yourself for a long frustrating search. Try to find that one person who really cares. They are out there, and if you make enough phone calls, you'll find them.

If you are handicapped or disabled, you may qualify for disability assistance. Health departments and employment offices may be able to point you in the right direction for help with health and disability issues.

Parents whose partner is in prison may qualify for financial aid whether or not they are legally married. If you can demonstrate that your spouse can not provide funds, you may be able to get financial assistance from your state, county, or community. This will depend on where you live. Contact your state and local law enforcement agencies to start your research. They may be able to help you ask the right questions.



Again, your children may qualify for financial assistance in their own rights. Look into programs that are geared toward health and welfare for children. But beware, you don't want to get in a situation where the government questions your fitness as a parent. If you have ever had accusations or charges filed against your parenting, this may not be a good solution.

### **What If I Can't Get Financial Help?**

If your situation is dire and you still can't get help, it may be time to make some very hard choices. Perhaps you have relatives who could provide living space for a while until you can have a more stable income. Maybe your relatives would be willing to take one or all of your children in for a while until you can get on your feet. As difficult as that decision might be, it's better than giving your children up to a government institution.

See if local churches can help. They may be able to provide meals and clothing and some medical aid. Offer to do chores at the church in exchange for help.

If you are homeless, try local shelters. People will not let children suffer if there are any choices open to them.

Finally, if you can't seem to find the help you need, you may need to consider seeking foster care for your children.

Whatever decisions you must make, make them in the best interest of your children. And God be with you in your journey.

## **How Many Single Parents Are Enrolled In College**

Experts think that two of every ten college students today is a single parent, whether male or female. And the number of single parents in college is on a steady rise. This shouldn't really be surprising since single-parent households have been on a sharp and steady increase for several decades. Whether by chance or choice, single parenting is a popular lifestyle for adults today.

Today, there are more single parents enrolled in college than ever before. Single parents face difficult challenges, and single parents who are also college students have additional stresses and demands to deal with.

### **The Challenges for Single-Parent College Students**

Single parents attending college have many obstacles and difficulties. They have demands on their time greater than the amount of time they spend in class. They must also study to achieve satisfactory academic performance. Pressures to perform in class are added to those they already feel from their home and child-rearing responsibilities.

Society may not recognize the added burden. Being a single parent in college doesn't change social expectations for making parent-teacher conferences, attending PTA meetings, coaching kids' sports teams, and the host of activities expected of parents today.

And people may view single parents in college differently. Even if having children was a conscious choice, people may assume that the single parent was irresponsible in his or her social and sexual behavior. Peers and professors may assume the single parent is promiscuous, creating even more problems for the harried student. So while the stigma against single parents has largely disappeared in modern western cultures, it may not be completely gone for single parents in college.

#### **\* Managing Time**

Handling crowded schedules and meeting difficult time constraints is hard enough for single parents. There are so many expectations and demands, and the same 24 hours for meeting them. For the single parent attending college, time is a precious commodity.

They must somehow deal with the need to study and keep up the grades with the need to take care of their children and give them a happy, healthy environment in which to grow. Class attendance and the children's extra-curricular activities may conflict.

Exams may be scheduled over soccer games. They may have to choose between taking the baby to the pediatrician and going to their own doctor about that bad cold. There are no easy choices for single parents in college.

Time constraints affect more than the kids and family unit. The single-parent college student has little time to care for their own physical and emotional health. Getting regular exercise, a healthy diet, and adequate rest may be impossible.

Finding the time and a quiet place to study may be one of the most difficult parts of their day. Often, study doesn't begin until after the kids are asleep. That means losing precious hours of their own sleep. Balancing academic life and a single-parent family are a Herculean challenge.

#### **\* Managing Money**

Single parents already face the challenge of being the main source of income for their family. Attending college adds a significant financial burden to an already strained pocketbook and budget.

As most of us know, college expenses are significant today. The costs of tuition and fees, textbooks, laboratory fees, and transportation and parking eat into limited money for rent, groceries, and child care.

While student loans are available, they add to financial burdens unknown to college students who don't have children. Mounting debt may be a necessary evil for single parents attending college.

Is there any question, then, about why so many single parents drop out of college or get failing grades? Recent studies suggest that some single parents are choosing to put their kids in foster care or out for adoption in order to improve their lives with a college degree.

## **Single Parenting – Becoming the Best Parent For Your Child!**

Those without a supportive extended family or outside resources may be forced to make this heart-breaking decision to give their children the best possible chance at life. The hard fact of the matter is that, without a college degree, the single parent may not be able to give their children a normal life anyway.

No matter how tempted we may be to judge the single parent in college who gives up their children, it is important to recognize and acknowledge their terrible dilemma. And for those that are able to pull it off, society owes a round of thunderous applause.

## **Meeting Single Parents**

Even when you knew it was coming, becoming a single parent can be an unexpected shock. A few years out of the dating scene, and you forget how to do it. Don't feel different. It's never easy to date, and dating as a new single parent is a real challenge.

It's been years since you dressed up and went out with someone for a pleasant evening. You've forgotten what to say and what to do. You feel awkward and clumsy. You may have put on a few pounds or grown some new grey hairs. Let's face it, you're terrified.

Well, dating isn't easy - even for singles without kids. It's hard to meet people. It's hard to know when someone's safe and dependable. You never know what you'll get until you go out, and then you're stuck - at least for an hour or so. Dating's just not the devil-may-care fun some people crack it up to be.

To be comfortable with dating, you have to have been dating for a while. You have to build up your dating repertoire. You have to exercise those social and emotional "dating muscles," muscles that easily atrophy without regular use.

But don't worry. It'll be all right. All you need is some refreshers to get back into the dating game. A little conversation, a cup of coffee, a walk in the park - all you need is a few simple successes to regain confidence and tone those atrophied dating muscles. After some experience and some fun dates, you'll be back in the swing of it.

Before you start dating again, though, you'll want to do some inside work - you'll want to get yourself in peak dating shape. Here are some tips that may get you off to the right start.

### **\* Tie up loose ends.**

Before you start dating and getting involved in new relationships, you want to be sure that your past is indeed your past. If you're still reeling from rejection, abandonment, or tragic loss, you need to give yourself time to grieve and heal. It takes about a year for people to get through the normal grieving process, so don't rush yourself. And if there are financial matters still up in the

air, get them settled and done. You don't want to start dating while you're still trying to work out financial and legal details. Once you've gotten through the grief process and settled business matters, it's time to move on with your life.

**\* Understand your motives.**

Why do you want to date again? Is it because your best friend thinks you should? The only good reason to date is because you want to. Maybe you want simple companionship and someone to do things with. It's okay if you're not ready to enter into a serious relationship. In fact, you probably shouldn't yet.

Are you so lonely that you'd go out with anyone? Loneliness isn't a good reason for dating either. If you're so desperate that you'll say yes to the first one that comes along, you're opening yourself up for disappointment, aggravation, and hurt. When you date, it's because you want to spend time with another person because you like them and want to know them better. Unless you're truly interested in a potential date, drop it.

When you want to date because you need time to relax with an interesting person, it's time to start dating.

**\* Get your life in order.**

Single parents have special responsibilities and demands. You have to balance the need to earn a living with the need to raise happy healthy children. There may seem to be little or no time left over for dating.

That's why it's important to set your priorities and set up a calendar. Planning to attend school functions, put in those extra hours at work, and have some social life is essential. As a single parent, those spur-of-the-moment dates are most likely impossible. Recognize the limitations and adjust your expectations.

You'll be a much more interesting date if you're not worried about yesterday's laundry or tomorrow's lunches. When you get the chance to go out for a pleasant romantic evening, you

don't want to be preoccupied with the chores and worries of the day. It's your time to relax and have fun. Having and keeping up with a regular routine will help you do that.

You'll also need to arrange for baby-sitters, let people know where you'll be and when you'll be back, and carry a cell phone with you for emergencies. Daters who are not also parents may not have those needs. These are things you can't jump into. You need advance notice to get your life in order and be ready to relax and have fun on your special date.

**\* Stay Interested to Stay Interesting**

Even though your schedule is tight and your days are full, you need to be a well-rounded person to be an interesting date. Be sure to take personal time and keep your mind active in spite of the household chaos. Read a book. Go to a lecture. Take the kids to a museum. Learn something new. Take on a new hobby that your kids will enjoy too. Making personal growth a family affair can't be a losing proposition.

Maintain your friendships and family relationships. Even if you're not dating, it's important to have social contact with other adults. Invite your friends or family over for dinner or wrangle an invitation to go to their house. Plan some adult-only activities so that you can have adult conversations and keep up with current events. Stay active.

Take care of your health. Find ways to get regular exercise. Walks with the kids, visits to the local park or nature preserve, and workouts will keep you fit and healthy. You've got a lot of stress in your life, and exercise will help work that stress off and out. You'll be a more relaxed human being if you are a healthy human being.

Life as a single parent can come suddenly, without warning. Even when you know it's coming, it's a shock when your whole life changes. When you have children, those changes come with heavy burdens and difficult challenges.

Returning to the dating scene can be a frightening experience, but you can learn to enjoy dating when you take the steps necessary to build a strong, stable lifestyle and family.

## **Single Parents Dating: It Is Time To Move On**

Becoming a single parent isn't an end. It's a beginning. Your new lifestyle is full of responsibility and challenges. It may be more important now than ever that you find time for yourself. You need to relax and have fun. It may have been a while, but you can date now.

You may not be ready to enter into a new relationship, but that doesn't mean you can't go out and have a good time with friends. Dating old friends is a great way to re-enter the single world and renew old friendships. They already know you, and they're easy to talk to. You need someone now to talk to and to ask for advice. Old friends may also be a source for help around the house or at work.

But if you're interested in meeting new people and getting into a more serious relationship, you may want to do some real-life dating. But dating as a new single parent can present unique challenges. Demands on your time may already be great.

Taking care of the kids, earning a living, and maintaining your household are time-consuming chores. That makes it even more important to make time for your own fun and relaxation. But time management skills will definitely be needed to keep your life from being chaotic and stressful.

You may be emotionally raw at this time. Whether you've lost your partner through separation, divorce, or death, you're going through some really big life changes. You need to be careful not to jump into the first relationship that comes along. You need to have fun, but you also need some time to heal and become independent again.

Here are some things to consider:

Am I ready to date yet?

Re-entering the single scene can be frightening. You may not feel self-confident about your looks, or you may feel that you've lost some important social skills. But fear of dating shouldn't



be a deciding factor. Sooner or later, you're going to have to take that big step to have a normal life again.

There are some things to think about, though. You're coming through a difficult time, and you may be emotionally vulnerable and confused. You may not have the judgment to see your dates' flaws. You must take care to protect yourself and your children from predators and people that will use you.

Are you prepared to tell your children you're dating? Your kids are also going through a big change, and they may be insecure or jealous if a new adult is introduced to the family. Have you prepared them for this? Do they understand your feelings and support you? If your children aren't ready for you to date, you may not be. But there's a limit. The important thing is to be honest and open with them about what you need and want. After all, they aren't dating the person. You are. Just keep the lines of communication open and clear.

Getting into relationships too soon is a common mistake for newly-single parents. You're accustomed to being part of a couple and feel awkward and self-conscious going out alone. You may not be finished with the old relationship. Losing a partner, no matter how, involves going through a grieving process to heal emotionally and re-establish a normal life. Studies show that it takes at least a year for people to process their loss and move on. Be sure you've given yourself enough time to heal.

You may also need to tie up loose ends from the previous relationship. There may be financial and legal matters still open that must be closed. If your partner passed away, you'll need to settle the estate, dispose of property, and finalize insurance issues. Better to focus on the business at hand while you're grieving than to introduce a new complication into an already-complicated life.

You also need to take time to help your children grieve the loss. They may be feeling abandoned, and they'll need your love, support, and encouragement to move forward. And they need to build a new relationship with you, one where you're the only parent. Dating too soon can cheat them of this important time with you and create behavioral problems that are not easy to solve. Take it slow for their sake and for yours.

## **How Do Single Parents Find People To Date?**

It's probably been a long time since you were in the dating scene, and you may have lost touch with your single friends and activities. One way to meet new people is through your friends. Perhaps your best friend knows someone they think would be perfect for you. Take a chance. Go on a blind date.

You also have a constraint that many singles don't: time. It's important for you to plan your social activities well in advance so you can get a baby-sitter or make other arrangements for your children. So, whatever you do to meet new people can't be a spur-of-the-moment decision.

Many areas have singles groups where you can meet other unattached people. As long as you don't have to make commitments, this is a great way to meet people. Group social activities are fun and safe. You get a chance to get to know people before being alone with them.

You may even be able to find social groups specifically for single parents. This way, you'll meet people whose lives are more like yours. They have the same challenges and problems. You may find it easier to relate to another single parent, and certainly they will be more understanding when something comes up at the last minute.

### **What about relationships?**

You are the only person who knows if you're ready to start a serious relationship. Of course, you are not alone, and your children will influence your readiness and willingness to get into a relationship.

You need to be very clear in your own mind about where you are and what you want. Perhaps you only want companionship and social contact. If you're not ready to get serious, let your dates know. Don't allow yourself to become more involved than you can handle emotionally. Your first few dates shouldn't be serious, and you don't need to involve your children with your casual dates.

But if you're lonely and feel you need someone to love, you may be more interested in getting serious. First, you must ask yourself why. Getting into a serious relationship because you're lonely isn't a great idea. You want to get involved with a person, not just fill a hole in your life. Be sure of your motives before you allow things to get to serious.

### **What to do when on a date?**

You'll want to know that your dates will be both fun and safe. Your family depends on you, and taking chances to date isn't wise. Always be sure someone knows where you're going and who you're going with. Let them know when you'll be home, and take your cell phone with you in case of an emergency. Let your date know about your family and that you might get a call. No surprises is a good policy.

When you go out, you'll want to do something that helps you get to know each other. Look for places where you can talk and activities that encourage conversation and interaction. Movies aren't a good idea for those first few dates because they don't provide a good get-to-know-you environment. Better to go bowling or play miniature golf than to go to a movie.

For first dates especially, it's important that you go to public places. Your personal safety is very important, and you don't want to take chances with people you don't know. You might even want to arrange to meet your date somewhere so that you aren't dependent on them for your ride home.

## **Single Parents In South Africa**

The rise in the number of single parents is not limited to the Western world. In South Africa in 1998, over a fifth of all households were run by single parents.

As is true everywhere, single parenthood results from separation or divorce, death, and pregnancy outside of wedlock. In addition to widespread problems with AIDS, South Africa continues to experience increasingly high rate of teenage pregnancy.

This means that single mothers are bearing the brunt of serious poverty early and life without the benefit of support systems. The more traditional South African communities still believe that mothers should be responsible for rearing the children and giving care within the home. And they have the added burden of caring for family and children affected by HIV/AIDS.

A 2000 report on the "State of South Africa's Population" showed that the need for contraception for adult women and teenagers in rural areas far outstrips the availability of contraceptive education and supplies. Calling for programs that will give rural teenagers and women greater control over their reproductive lives, the report blamed the shortage in contraception for most of the teenage pregnancies (many a result of rape).

Sadly, many South African children grow up without fathers. In some cases, fathers have had to leave the family home to find work across the country's borders. In others, the fathers have fallen victim to AIDS, leaving widows and orphans in their wake. And some women have single-parenthood forced on them by war.

Increased numbers of divorced in South Africa have also created more single-parent families. Reports indicate that the number of divorced increased from 27 thousand in 1986 to around 33 thousand in 1987 and 1989. And two-thirds of them involved children.

In 1985, more than 25 thousand South African children lived in a home run by a single parent. By September 1990, 73% of South Africa's children's parents were divorced, and over 150 thousand had been involved in divorce over a four-year period. We can only assume the numbers are greater in 2008.

South African children are greatly affected by divorce. Not only is the marriage dissolved, but the child is separated from one or both parents. Absent fathers are a serious problem for South African children and their mothers. The reduced ability to earn a meager income is magnified by the lack of a male role model in the home, which has serious consequences for future South African generations.

As divorces increase, so do the chances for South African children to be exploited. Extreme poverty forces single parents to abandon their children, increasing to the number of orphans and children living in the streets. Another reason single parents abandon their children is the fact that foster parents receive more financial support than do single parents. A single parent in extreme poverty may hope that the child will get better care from foster parents.

Unfortunately, it is the very children most in need of care and parenting that are the most at risk for exploitation. Child pornography is a major industry in South Africa, and sexual trafficking of children is increasing. Children are prostituted to provide basic food stuffs for their starving families. Labor exploitation is common, with children under the age of 15 being forced to work long hours for little to no pay.

South African women face a grim life. Frequent victims of rape, teenage pregnancies are common. Single mothers, no matter what the reason for their situation, face social stigma and extreme poverty. Sexual exploitation of women is a serious and growing problem.

Clearly, both governmental and non-governmental help is urgently needed, yet the need frequently overtakes available help. Better opportunities for single parents to find work, education, and vocational training would bring about great improvements in the log of South Africa's single parents.

One hopeful program is run by the non-governmental organization SOS Children. They offer vocational training courses (including beadwork and dressmaking) to single parents in Mamelodi, Mandela Village. The women who learn how to sew and decorate their work make clothing and knit jumpers they can sell. There are some single fathers in the courses, and the project helps some single parents by giving them grants to start businesses of their own.

## **All About SPARK ( Single Parents Raising Kids)**

In 1970, 90% of all children under eighteen years of age lived in homes with two parents. In 2006, only 70% of children under eighteen years of age lived with two parents. Thus, the number of children living with one parent tripled from 8.5 million in 1970 to 20.6 million 2006. Clearly, single-parent families have become much more common across the United States. In highly urban areas, single parents lead a complex and difficult life. Concerns about crime, economic pressures, time demands, and the busy pace of life make single parenting a stressful challenge.

Single Parents Raising Kids, or SPARK, is an association of single parents living in Montgomery County in the State of Maryland in the United States. SPARK also covers single parents in areas near Montgomery County and Maryland.

SPARK was formed in 1987 by nine people who have successfully met the challenges of life as single parents. The founders' goal was to give single parents the tools they need to deal with the stressful issues they already had faced and overcome.

### **About SPARK**

Single Parents Raising Kids is a non-governmental organization whose mission is to build a community where single parents in the area can interact, build new friendships, and share their experiences.

SPARK provides a forum where single parents in Maryland can support each other, share their the lessons they've learned through their common experiences, and help members learn from their successes and their mistakes.

SPARK fulfills its mission by encouraging active participation of its members in a balanced program that fosters strong, happy families. The group offers social and educational opportunities for each member.

## **Single Parenting – Becoming the Best Parent For Your Child!**

SPARK is an active organization that publishes a calendar of events each month to provide informal, friendly social gatherings where members can relax and enjoy building relationships with others who share their life experience.

Examples of such activities include concerts, movies, dinners, and classes that help members get to know each other and interact in comfortable, enjoyable surroundings.

### **SPARK Management and Operation**

Not-for-profit SPARK exists solely to fulfill its advocacy role for and commitments to single parents. It is not involved in, nor does it support, any other causes or organizations.

SPARK exists as a social support group. It does not generate income for its founders, leaders, or members. Its only compensation is the satisfaction of knowing that it creates the opportunity for support, social interaction, and sharing of hard-earned wisdom for its single parent members.

SPARK is directed and operated by volunteers. Operating expenses are funded entirely through voluntary contributions from and raised by its single parent members.

Based in Maryland and covering nearby states, SPARK is open to all single parents with children under eighteen years of age, whether or not the parent has legal custody of the child or children.

### **SPARK's Purpose**

The Single Parents Raising Kids organization's purpose is to give members practical, constructive ideas for resolving social, emotional, and monetary problems that come with single parenthood. SPARK provides social situations where single parents know they are not alone. With this in mind, SPARK gives single parents opportunities for:

- Participation with other single parents in wholesome and fun activities.
- Learning and generating more knowledge about problems and solutions for single parents.

- Sharing what they have learned that could benefit other single parents.

### **Reflections on Single Parenting**

Today's single parents are more fortunate than those in the past generations. The days when single parents were ostracized or looked down by the society have passed. Today, single parenthood doesn't carry the stigma and social burden associated in the old days with a failing marriage or pregnancy out of wedlock.

The single parents of today are lucky to have available to them the opportunity to enjoy the support and issue-oriented groups and activities to help them out meet the burdens of raising children alone.

Organizations like SPARK could have helped many a single parent in the past. But it's better late than never. Thank God, single parents can now get support from SPARK.

Having enjoyed success in making life better for single parents in the area, SPARK hopes the approach will expand from Maryland to the rest of the world.

To learn more about the organization or get information on events, contact SPARK headquarters at SPARK Incorporated, PO Box 288, Rockville, Maryland 20848.



## **Effective Vacation Tours For Single Parents**

Single parents can get overwhelmed with the heavy load of responsibility and time demands that come with being the only adult in a family. Concerns about money, child rearing, and personal health loom large, and single parents may neglect their own personal needs for relaxation and fun.

If you're a single parent feeling weighed down by too much to do and not enough time, maybe it's time for you to think about taking a vacation tour for single-parent families. Everyone needs the occasional vacation, and single parents are no exception to the rule.

A vacation tour for single-parent families offers time to refresh and restore your mind and body and opportunities to get closer to your children in a new environment. It's a family adventure you'll share for years to come.

Single parents have their burdens, and children in single-parent families have their own problems, too. They often feel neglected or abandoned by a busy single parent that has to go to work and care for the household. They get little bits of time from their parent and sometimes end up spending much of their time with other caretakers. A vacation tour for single-parent families gives them the chance to be with their single parent in a whole new way.

Vacation tour for single-parent families help you rebuild strained relations with your children. You won't be answering those phone calls from the boss, meeting with professional colleagues or your kids' teachers, and you won't have to deal with the thousands of daily interruptions that keep you and your children at odds.

The community of single-parent families is growing so rapidly that most travel agencies have vacation tours specifically for single-parent families. They'll arrange for travel by train, plane, or cruise ship and help your family comply with international travel requirements when necessary.

Of course, you can't just pick up and go for vacation tour for single-parent families. You'll need to plan your vacation several months in advance to get the best prices and accommodations. A

good rule of thumb is to book your vacation tour for single-parent families at least two months before the departure date.

If you don't have passports or visas, you'll need to allow a little more time for government processes to work to assure you have the necessary papers. Your travel agent should be able to tell you what the country you're visiting requires and help you get the paperwork started. If you're using a travel agent who specializes in vacation tours for single-parent families, they should be able to help you with almost everything you'll need including travel, hotel accommodations, tickets to special events and entertainment areas, and restaurants that cater to children.

Of course, vacation tours for single-parent families are available within the United States where you don't have to worry about passports and visas. They're easier to plan and don't take as much lead time for reservations. Wherever you decide to go, you can learn a lot about your destination by visiting the official website and travel-related sites that contain information and travel reviews that will help you figure out what you want to do when you get there. You can also give the country's consulate a call to get more information about what to see and do, and letting them know you're a single parent with children may be helpful.

Travel agencies who specialize in vacation tours for single-parent families should be more aware and considerate of your special needs than other agencies. They should understand your time constraints and relieve you of as much of the planning as possible. They should also be experienced working with children on vacation tours for single-parent families.

Some large corporations are sponsoring vacation tour for single-parent families in their company. They may offer the trip as a bonus for outstanding performance or as a special incentive for future performance. If you work at a large corporation, you might check with the personnel office to see if your company has or is planning this great service. Signing up for a vacation tour for single-parent families is the best favor you can do for yourself and your kids. You all cope with stresses and pressures every day. You more than deserve a quality break, you need it! Taking the kids on a vacation tour for single-parent families gives you all healthy sunshine and fresh air, brings you together as a family, and gives you memories that will last a lifetime.

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