

## *Stress Relievers for Single Parents*

### *Single Parenting*

Single parent families are more and more common in today's society. One of every four American children lives in a single parent home. While most single parent homes are the result of divorce, many parents are raising children alone for other reasons as well. Some parents may be alone due to the death of a spouse. Others choose to have or adopt a child without a partner. A parent with a spouse in the military may be alone with children for long periods of time. Whatever the circumstances, single parents cope with unique issues and challenges, one of which is stress.

### *11 Ways to Reduce Stress*

#### **1. *Get a handle on finances.***

Finances are often a problem for single parents. Learn how to budget your time and money. Do what you can to improve your finances, even if it means finding a new job or getting additional education.

#### **2. *Talk early and often.***

Don't leave children in the dark about the changes in the family. They will handle problems much better by talking about feelings. Sometimes it helps to sit quietly with each child just before bedtime, giving the child an opportunity to tell you what is on his or her mind.

#### **3. *Find support and use it.***

Don't try to handle everything all by yourself. It is difficult when a single parent must hold down a job and care for children at the same time. Try not to feel guilty about things you can't do or can't provide without a partner. You will need the support that family and friends can give.

#### **4. *Take time for family.***

Working every day, fixing dinner, cleaning the house and paying the bills can be overwhelming. Take some time each day to enjoy your children and your relationship with them. Time spent together is one of the most important things you can give to your children.

#### **5. *Take time for yourself.***

Whether you are reading, relaxing or visiting with friends, finding some time to spend away from your children is important for you and for them. Being a single parent doesn't mean you can't have an adult life.

#### **6. *Keep a daily routine.***

Making rules, setting a good example and providing support is tough, but giving in to your child's demands will not help. Schedule meals, chores and bedtime at regular times to help your children feel more secure.

#### **7. *Maintain consistent discipline.***

If others help in the care of your children, talk to them about your own methods of discipline. Divorced or separated parents should work together to use the same way of disciplining their children. If you would like to learn about ways to discipline children, check the library for books on parenting or find a parenting class in your community. Learning good ways to handle your children's behavior will reduce stress for both of you.

*stress relievers...*

**8. *Treat kids like kids.***

Children have a right to enjoy childhood and grow up at their own pace. Though single parents can get lonely, resist treating your children like substitutes for a partner. Try not to express your frustration to them or rely on them for comfort or sympathy. Children will be able to take on more responsibility as they get older, but don't expect too much too soon.

**9. *Stay positive.***

The pain of separation, divorce or death will ease over time. Be aware that your children are affected by your mood and attitude. It's okay to be honest about your own feelings of sadness and loss, but let them know better times lie ahead for both of you.

**10. *Take care of yourself.***

This is a difficult time for you, too. Exercising regularly, maintaining proper diet and getting enough rest can help you deal with stress.

**11. *Seek help.***

Call a crisis hotline when you are feeling lonely, trapped, resentful, angry or just want to talk.

Raising children on your own isn't easy. Single parents face unique problems, but children in single parent homes can grow up happy. Providing a loving, supportive home for you children is the most important factor in helping them grow up well adjusted and happy. Making the right choices for you and your children will help all of you live a new and rewarding life together as a family.

Adapted from "Single Parenting: What You Need to Know," provided by the American Academy of Pediatrics and "Stress Relievers for Single Parents," compiled by the Virginia Coalition for Child Abuse Prevention.