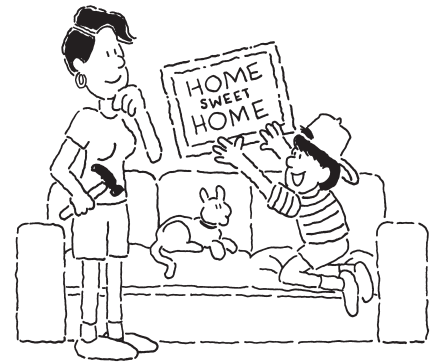


Single Parenting

Part II Additional Resources



10 ways to reduce stress

Single-parenthood brings added pressure and stress to the job of raising children. With no one to share day-to-day responsibilities or decision-making, parents must provide greater support for their children while they themselves may feel alone. The following suggestions may help reduce stress in your family:

- 1. Get a handle on finances.** Finances are often a problem for single parents. Learn how to budget your time and money. Know when your paycheck or other income will arrive, and keep track of household bills. If you write down monthly bills and due dates, they will be easier to manage. Do what you can to improve your finances. Contact employment and temporary agencies for help finding a job. Consider getting your high school diploma, a college degree, or other special training.
- 2. Talk early and often.** Don't leave your child in the dark about the changes in the family. She will handle her problems much better by talking about her feelings. Sit quietly with your child just before bedtime. It may be a great time for her to talk with you.
- 3. Find support and use it.** Don't try to handle everything by yourself. Get help whenever you can. 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. Get to know other single parents through support groups. Your pediatrician can also be a great source of help and information.
- 4. Take time for family.** Working every day, fixing dinner, cleaning the house, and paying the bills can be overwhelming. Set aside some time each day to enjoy your children and your relationship with them. Spend quiet time playing, reading, working on arts-and-crafts projects, or just listening to music together. Time spent together is one of the most important things you can give to your child.
- 5. Take time for yourself.** Whether you are reading, relaxing, or visiting with friends, time spent away from your children is important for you, and for them. Go to a movie. Find a hobby. Do things that interest you. 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 so that your child knows what to expect each day. A routine will help your child feel more secure.
- 7. Maintain consistent discipline.** If others help in the care of your child, 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. Discipline doesn't have to mean physical punishment. You can teach a child to behave in ways that are good for both himself and those around him. Many good methods have been developed. Check your local library for helpful books on parenting. Local hospitals, the YMCA, and church groups often sponsor parenting classes. Learning good ways to handle your child's behavior will reduce stress for both of you.
- 8. Treat kids like kids.** Children have a right to enjoy childhood and grow up at their own pace. Though single parenting can get lonely, resist treating your children like substitutes for a partner. Avoid expressing your frustration to them. Try not to rely on them for comfort or sympathy. As children grow older, they will be able to take on more responsibility and help around the house. Don't expect too much too soon.
- 9. Stay positive.** The pain of a separation, divorce, or death will ease over time. Be aware that your children will always be affected by your mood and attitude. They will need your praise and your love through hard times. 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 a proper diet, and getting enough rest can help you better deal with stress. Visit your own doctor on a regular basis. Ask your pediatrician not only about help for your child, but also about help for yourself.

A word about...child support

In a divorce, separation, or unplanned pregnancy, both parents have a continuing financial obligation to the child. If you have custody of your child, seek child support. According to the US Department of Health and Human Services, millions of single-parent households do not receive child support. In some cases, one parent doesn't want money from the other parent. In others, the parent may not be able or willing to pay or perhaps cannot even be found. Many times, the parent with custody simply does not try to get child support.

Contact your state child support enforcement agency for guidelines on what parents must pay for child support. If your child's other parent has disappeared or won't cooperate, your state or local government may be able to help.

For more information, contact:

Department of Health and Human Services

Office of Child Support Enforcement

370 L'Enfant Promenade, SW

Washington, DC 20447

202/401-9373

Web site: www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/cse/index.html

The information contained in this publication should not be used as a substitute for the medical care and advice of your pediatrician. There may be variations in treatment that your pediatrician may recommend based on individual facts and circumstances.

From your doctor

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American Academy of Pediatrics
PO Box 747
Elk Grove Village, IL 60009-0747
Web site — <http://www.aap.org>

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