

Stress and Single Parenthood

Stress is part of life for everyone. There are two kinds of stress, good and bad stress. No matter what type of stress you have, you have to know how to deal with it. No matter if you are a single, married, or never married parent, stress is always part of your life.

Raising children is a tough job. Unlike a two-parent family, single parents usually have to deal with work and personal issues and parenting alone. These issues can bring a lot of stressful situations into single parents' lives if parents don't know how to manage their stress.

Stress can be a trouble factor to disturb or make single parenthood more complicated or frustrating. Some of the fear, uncertainty, and loss can make you feel more stressful than others because you are not certain about your future, don't know what to expect in the future, or how to adjust and rebuild a new life without a partner.

Stress in single parenthood may continue through the basic four stages including loss, refocus, adjustment, and rebuild. These stages can take a longer time to go through depending on how you cope with changes. Like other single parents, you are not alone; you can learn ways to eliminate some of the stress in single parenthood. COURAGE is the main ingredient to help you cope with stress in a constructive way. The following are some suggestions for reducing stress:

Manage Your Anger. Anger can be controllable. Try to find anger management skills that work for you. For instance, express your feelings before you are out of control, talk to friends, take time out, walk away until you cool down, count to 10, splash water on your face, exercise, take a deep breath, take a walk, etc.

Let Go. If you and the other parent are still fighting or angry at each other, you can change your behavior to reduce your stress. That means you have choices to let it go, don't fight, don't respond to the other parent's fight or game play because it takes two to tango. Try to see the situation from a positive perspective, focus on the positive, use praise more than criticize, and respect the other parent's right to have different opinions. If you can accept the reality and let go, you will have more control of your life.

Keep a Routine Schedule. A routine schedule not only can help you know what to expect and prepare, but also feel more confident that you are in control of your life. Children can also benefit from having a routine schedule. For instance, children will feel secure about their lives and less stressful when they know what to expect next.

Ask for Help. Some single parents view seeking support as a sign of weakness or inadequacy. Actually, it will be very frustrating if you don't find someone to talk to when you are under stress or having a difficult time. There is no perfect parent. Parents need to have practical and emotional support. For instance, joining a single parent support group can be a good opportunity to support and learn from each other. It is always important to discuss your situations with others who have been through the same experience.

Don't hesitate to seek out counseling if it is needed. People who are willing to seek help can reduce their problems or stress. Asking for help and resources means you are a strong person and you know how to cope with it.

Plan Ahead. Think about what you will do and say if the absent parent disrupts your plans or disappoints the children. For instance, think about how to control your anger and talk to the other parent in a calm way, how to use appropriate approaches to negotiate with the other parent without involving the children in angry scenes or forcing them to take sides.

Set Limits. Children need to have concerned and caring adults guide them to explore and grow. If you are often under stress, overloaded, overburdened, or feel lonely, you are likely to fall into some parenting traps, particularly in child discipline. Be sure to have a good discipline plan. Clear and reasonable family rules and limits help children know what to expect. When children understand the rules, they feel better able to control their behavior.

Avoid Physical Punishment. If you are under very stressful situations or angry with your children and you just want to hit them or scream at them, please STOP. There are some other alternatives you can use. For instance, breathe deeply in and out, count to 20 before speaking, go into another room, read a magazine, take a hot bath. After you feel you are in control of yourself, then you can take control of the situation.

Find Time for Yourself. It's very important to have time for yourself to refresh, energize yourself or rest. Finding time for yourself can be time alone to listen to music, read a book, visit with friends, attend a support group or other activities you enjoy, etc. You need to have time for yourself and contact with people of your own age. Keeping in touch with your friends will help you a lot for emotional support. However, when you are taking time for yourself, you need to have an appropriate arrangement for child care. You may want to take turns with other single parents for babysitting.

Share Household Chores. Children need to build a sense of responsibility. Don't spoil your children. Children need to share housework chores with family members and learn the importance of sharing. Be sure to give children housework chores based on their developmental stages and capabilities.

Family Meetings. Family meetings can help family members discuss, share, and exchange information, ideas, concerns, joys, etc. Family meetings can help make good decisions. For instance, housework chore issues, who does what and what should be done, can be discussed and let children have their voice and choices.

Respect Your Children's Individuality. You may be angry with your children because you feel your children remind you of bad memories. Remember that your children are their own person and are not possessions and they did not cause the problem.

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