



THE CHALLENGES
AND REWARDS
OF SINGLE PARENTING

The Challenges AND Rewards Of Single Parenting

I believe that [everyone] is the keeper of a dream - and by tuning into one another's secret hopes, we can become better friends, better partners, better parents...

Oprah Winfrey (1954 -), O Magazine, June 2003

Parents are often so busy with the physical rearing of children that they miss the glory of parenthood, just as the grandeur of the trees is lost when raking leaves.

Marcelene Cox

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A. Introduction

Would it be at all shocking to you, to hear and learn that as many as ONE THIRD of families in the USA today, are headed up by a single parent (both male and female representatives)?

Personal circumstance, divorce, abandonment, even death, leaves the main custodial, remaining parent having to cope with all the care-giving, nurturing, role-modeling, challenges, rewards, obstacles and joys meant for a partnership of TWO! It can be overwhelming and wonderful, nightmarish and extremely tough – all at once. This practical, hands-on guide will take an overview of some of these and offer advice that can be used EVERY DAY!

(i) Why a book on the Rewards and Challenges of Single Parents?

Few parents are really prepared for dealing with the aftermath of the loss of a partner, let alone a fellow parent, regardless of the cause.

Oftentimes feelings of desperation, being overwhelmed and stressed out, are very typical. Single parenting demands are nothing to snuff at, they can seem like insurmountable challenges and steep hills to climb on any given day! THEY ARE NOT TO BE UNDERESTIMATED...

The challenges are very real! Luckily, so are the rewards. Yes, there are two sides to this coin! YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE AND BE A SUCCEESSFUL SINGLE PARENT. With the handy tips, suggestions and recommendations in this e-book you will discover the joys and secrets of single parenting.

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Here are just some of the major, initial challenges most single parents face :

(NOTE: you might actually recognize a few already or be able to add a couple of your very own...)

- Coping with loss (of a partner, lover, friend and fellow-parent)
- Assuming additional roles and responsibilities (being everything to everyone)
- Enabling and Adjusting to the new role and circumstances
- Providing continuity and avoiding disruption for the children and family
- Helping children cope with the situation, loss and circumstance
- Dealing and coping with own emotions and changed condition
- Battling societal prejudice and stigma of single-parent homes and care-giving
- Adequate care and fostering the needs of the children
- Maintaining self-confidence in the eyes and judging of others (stereotyping)
- Feelings of doubt, low self-esteem and inadequacy
- Balancing effective parenting with career (work/home) life
- Time and financial constraints
- Dealing with the rest of the family, step family, new romantic interests, dating and support networks

Here are some of the strategies that can help you right away as a single parent on this road/path/journey ahead:

- Learn to speak directly WITH your children NOT at them
- Loving, consistent discipline with tough rules that matter and are the same day-to-day, providing security in uncertainty are essential – communicate and execute them well in all that you do and attempt.

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- Clear communication and firm decision-making will lead the way for and in your new family unit.
- Multi-tasking and managing many different things, roles and responsibilities all by yourself and sometimes all at once too!
- Making every second count and working SMARTER, not HARDER!
- Doing more with less really counts!
- Being a committed parent EVERY MOMENT, taking all responsibility for attention and care of their children
- YOU DO NOT HAVE TO GO/TRY IT ALONE! Use and call on support and reaching out to others will keep you sane

This social and societal reality we refer to as SINGLE PARENTING - that we increasingly find ourselves in – can be highly intricate and quite complex. It deals with social, emotional and even economic pressures that needs and demands, help and support.

This guide is intended to assist single parents in their plight and challenges and focus on some real-life issues, answers and solutions to help them rebuild, live and enjoy their lives to its fullest potential.

This book came to be, for the situations and circumstances, challenges and rewards surrounding single parenting is real, complex and needs to be addressed with some practical solutions that fit, work and last.

(ii) Some introductory definitions...

- Who is really in question here?

When we are dealing with single parenting, the parties involved are what we will call the sole custodian parent and the children, as well as the different networks and contexts they find themselves in. This

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can include families on both sides, grandparents, school and neighborhood, friends and acquaintances.

- What and whom are single parents, as individuals, as a group? What do we mean by 'single parenting'?

They are the ones facing a new situation, reality and challenge, maybe even new physical surroundings and come drastic changes. By themselves, on their own, as the head of the house, the main/sole parent.

The single parent can be male or female and the reasons for being a single parent may vary greatly too. How they got to be single parents and the entry routes and reasons may differ, but the challenges are the same.

They are the ones effectively left with the task of sole parenting and all related roles and responsibilities. The lone caretaker and sole supporter. This is single parenting. Also, for example teenage girls who get/are pregnant and opt to keep the baby, not abort or marry the father.

(iii) Why the dual focus rewards and challenges?

The challenges and rewards of single parenting are intricately interwoven. They are like flipsides of the same coin.

There are different stages in this process of becoming, living, functioning and thriving as a single parent:

1. It starts out with a situational assessment and reality check.
FACING FACTS AND REALITY: Transitioning into being a single parent

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2. GETTING PRIORITIES IN PLAY AND PLACE: Structuring and organizing the new family unit, circumstance and surroundings
3. FUNCTIONING AS A FAMILY: Fostering relationships and bond, trust, honesty, disciplines, roles and responsibilities etc.
4. SOCIETY AND SUPPORT: school, family, friends, dating, family management
5. DEALING WITH SPECIFICS: Death, Divorce, Abandonment

Others depict this process as a gradually unfolding series of events in which parents must:

- Master new demands
- Help children cope and thrive (despite change, loss and adjustment)
- Coping themselves and on their own
- Moving from old to new context and reality (even uncertainty)

This is a work in progress and it will take time.

TWO KEY STEPS THAT HAVE TO BE TAKEN ARE:

Breaking with the old on the one hand, and Getting on with the new on the other. The first deals with the emotional side and the empathic responses, whilst the second deals more with direction and strategic aspects of the single parenting, road ahead.

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(i) Breaking with the old

This would mean that the single parent has to at the very least take the time and effort to...

- Address hurt and pain, loss and/or betrayal, abandonment etc.
- Dealing with very real feelings and emotions like denial, anger and protect self/children from pain, trying to focus on the positive and the memories
- Giving each other some space to work through it in their own way
- Ensure self and children are emotionally ready to confront the reality (old and new)
- Not trying to hold on, allowing to be mourning or grieve
- Help wounds to heal (own and those of the children)
- Not feel guilty or inadequate, no blaming

(ii) Getting on with the new

- Accepting and embracing the new situation and life in general
- Reject
- Accommodate and understand
- Allow room for everyone, individually and collectively to deal with this in his/her own way

OLD		NEW
Known	➔	Unknown
Certainty/secure	➔	Uncertainty/ non-secure
Old and valued	➔	New and Different
Moving out	➔	Moving on/in
Away from	➔	Towards

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Always remember that NO TWO PEOPLE ARE THE SAME. EACH OF OUR JOURNEYS AND PATHS ARE DIFFERENT. WE GO AT IT AT OUR OWN PACE...

B. SECTION I: BREAKING WITH THE OLD AND GETTING ON WITH THE NEW!

- Parenting Generally speaking - The value of a parent
- Nurturing close connections and bonds, roles and responsibilities – connections that matter and make a difference
- Solving behavioral problems and encouraging confidence – meeting children where they are
- Strategies for dealing with parenting difficulties, facing a new situation and a unique set of 'operating' principles

Breaking with the OLD and getting on with the NEW

Recalibrating, re-aligning and reorienting your life and that of your new unit family is what this single parenting cycle and journey is all about. You can see it as a chore, mountain to overcome or a wonderful journey. That is up to you. There is attitude and aptitude, persistence required for this role. It will take an inner strength, commitment and deeply rooted love for your children to make the most of this unfortunate hand you are dealt. You can be a victim of fate or you can be a magician for the future of both you and your kids!

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As a SINGLE PARENT YOU enable and empower this family!

It is of utmost importance that you sort out for yourself what your situation exactly is, be realistic and plan for success, NOT FAILURE! Compromise is not an option. Results matter and you will get you and your family through this.

Having realistic expectations is part of the answer and solution. Lots would say it is part of a 'get your ducks in a row' , getting your house in order phase of this process. It requires that you and your kids set out to rebuild and strengthen your life, your family, your future...

YOU WILL BE SHAPING IT TOGETHER!

Communicating clearly during this time, addressing expectations, fears and establishing some form of security, platform and certainty is essential.

Breaking with the old situation, circumstance and context, might bring with it some unpredictability, loss, insecurity, confusion...

The new situation may bring with it anxiety, excitement, possibilities, anticipation and a fixed routine, security and clear messages, open communication channels and nurturing support will see you and your family through this transitional phase of your life

(YES IT TOO WILL PASS!)

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We spoke about expectations earlier. There are THREE elements present here in dealing heads-on and hands-on with this transition:

- What you believe will happen – how you predict your life, family and future will be from here on moving forward
- What you want, desire to happen – which reflects your ambitions for you and your family
- What should happen – dealing with your expectations of what needs to/can/might occur

As an example, some teenage moms opt not to give their babies up for adoption. They choose to be mothers and the sole parent and custodian of this little life. It takes lots of understanding and loving care to raise a child/family.

For them predictions, ambitions, expectations, might take somewhat of a back seat for/to other pressing priorities. Finishing school, getting an education, while raising a baby/child on their own is a big responsibility and task to take on. YET, IT IS DONE AND QUITE POSSIBLE WITH SUPPORT NETWORKS AND A CLEAR-CUT PLAN TO SUCCEED! Putting you and your family FIRST, is a priority, regardless of your single parent situation.

One of the biggest problems single parents face as well, is dealing with the loneliness, alienation and isolation they sometimes experience. Stress and depression are real risks here too. Keeping your attitude positive and setting priorities, goals and working towards them every day really help too.

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Pay close attention to the small and immediate details, where to live, what to eat, how to provide and care for your young family, social assistance, support groups, cooperative baby-sitting, parent support, education, medical and financial, even special needs that need to be addressed with urgency!

TIP # 1 FOR SINGLE PARENTS: NEVER FEEL GUILTY ABOUT ASKING FOR HELP!

Single parent should take care NOT expect too much from themselves or from their kids/family. Being, keeping others and staying realistic is essential. Nobody is perfect, so try and keep the guilt at bay... avoid I should have, could have, or I will, I should... I have to, which just increases your stress and anxiety in these circumstances.

Try and depersonalize issue and tasks at hand and focus in setting up and organization your family to the best of your ability, quick and provide the security and stability, certainty and comfort you all crave and deserve.

TIME TO MOVE ON...

Watch for suppressed anger and emotions and allow yourself and your kids' time to work through the transition, challenges (and rewards!) this new situation, circumstance and context brings with it.

YOU DID NOT PLAN IT, BUT YOU CAN COPE WITH IT, LEARN AND MASTER IT!

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In these type of situations and relationships, our behavior and actions can take any of the following "faces", identities and tones:

- Expressive
- Protective
- Corrective

If can sometimes be a combination of all three and is so easily misunderstood or underestimated. In a single family, keeping the communication lines open can again be BOTH challenging and rewarding, BUT IT IS ESSENTIAL! This is where you learn and practice to deal, express and handle your emotions and those around you. You are in a situation that you might feel is unwanted, unasked for and undeserved. Voicing this to your kids is not acceptable, fair or right.

Model how to deal with anger and emotions. Teach your kids the difference between getting angry and staying angry. Rather invest your energies in making and building a BETTER LIFE together for you and your family! It is better use of your energy, time and effort, than dwelling on the past or negative emotions, blame or verbal tirades.

Protest and rebellion from kids are often very common. This is their way of coping with things and quite normal. They did not want it, expect it and have to accept all the changes, NEW situation, rules, adjustments etc. It is a huge task for them. They have to be provided with the environment in which they can handle and address this on their terms.

Talking to your kids and discussing with them how they feel are great ways to be proactive about this. Reestablish control in your household, make it safe, secure and predictable. Enable and empower your kids to voice and speak their minds, even if they are angry.

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The parent is still the one with the last say and try to be fair, allowing them to vent their anger and frustrations as well, to an extent that you are comfortable with. Openly discuss emotions and feelings and do not judge or criticize.

Listening without getting defensive is key too. As a single parent you are not the 'silver bullet' cure for everything that ails your child. Not even the loss, hate, guilt, resentment, blame and judgments that they so easily swirl at you - know that they do not mean it! This is their way of working through it.

Try and focus on Freedom from old things, hurt, pain and Freedom to and for new things, possibilities. Try and have a healthy balance and when you are all ready to move on and forward, you will know. YOU WILL ALL BE READY FOR IT AND EMBRACE IT!

Fears, insecurities and unknowns have to be dealt with too. They can be very real for all parties involved in this family unit going through transition right now. Routines and family-special moments can all help you through these difficult times. Breed familiarity and comfort within unfamiliarity and unknown.

TIP # 2: THERE ARE NEVER REALLY RIGHT OR WRONG ANSWERS, JUST DIFFERENT POINTS OF VIEW! FIND SOME COMMON GROUND AND ALWAYS MOVE CLOSER AND TOWARDS ONE ANOTHER THROUGH WORDS AND ACTIONS.

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C. SECTION II

- 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.

Finding the financial means (food, boarding/housing, transportation, food, clothing and providing necessities of life,

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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.

You have some priorities and pressing, immediate issues and concerns to deal with right away. Getting your new family set up and their needs taken care of. Physical, emotional and as whole individuals, as well as a collective unit.

- Where will you live?
- Where will you sleep?
- What will you eat? Do you have money for food and clothes?
- Where will the money come from to take care of and provide for your family?
- Do you have any help and support from family and friends?

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- Do you need temporary assistance (housing, food, part-time job, baby-sitting, support, transportation etc.)
- Can you work? DO you have a job, skills, do you need training, education or a part-time job as well?
- What is the financial situation? (more on this a little later)

You need to be asking the tough questions right away, stepping up and making decisions that will affect you and your kids. It will occupy a lot of your time up front and as you get thrust into this situation. In most cases single parenting 'happens'. It is not planned for or chosen (unless a pregnant teenager opting to keep the baby). In most cases it is unexpected, tragic and unfair, leaving you to respond, despite the fact that you feel your whole life has come to an end. The way things were will never be again. You have lost everything you hold dear and are not sure exactly how to proceed from here.

However, this is the exact time for decisive action and life-altering decisions. The timing might not be optimal for you, but you are the main decision-maker and champion of this family now. It is time for you to step up to the plate. Getting your family back on track, one by one and as a whole is your top priority (this includes you!).

Mitigating risks to your family and setting the stage, preparing the road forward, where you will live, what you will do now/next and explaining it to the kids (depending on their age and maturity of course). You are surveying the effects and aftermath of these events and the impact on your family.

You are in the initial stage, still reeling from shock at the implications and ramifications in all probability, yet the best thing you can do is **MOVE ON!**

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You have to realize that your role and position in this family has changed FOREVER AND IMMEDIATELY! You know that, your kids know that, but that will not make it any easier. The demands on your time, energy, life, privacy, priorities, means and more will be at the ultimate and in overdrive. JUST REMEMBER, You do not have to cope or fight this battle alone. YOU DO NOT HAVE TO DO EVERYTHING YOURSELF! Loving care and support are all around you – take advantage of it and set yourself up for success nor failure.

It can also mean 'freedom' to and extent, to explore and build your family, your life, your future. The road ahead might not even be crystal clear to you yet.. on the contrary quite likely it is foggy and clouded in uncertainties, worries and stress! THIS IS YOUR TIME TO SHINE.

Basic family commitment do have to come first now. Beware of the impulse to indulge in 'denial and escapism' clubbing, working out or shopping until the 'pain' goes away. Avoiding the real issues, will not make them go away.

All the household responsibilities will now fall on your lone shoulders (you can mobilize the kids to help, engaging them in a positive way and rewarding their participation (within means and moderation of course!).

There are FIVE keys identified to get you through this first 'hurdle' or phase if you will:

- Moderation
- Speed
- Goals
- Standards
- Limits

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Too much or little of anything is not good for you. Try to strive for a balanced lifestyle – even amidst all this change, turmoil, personal changes, family life challenges and demands. Do not go overboard, do not stress and worry unnecessarily. Plan and take appropriate action and **DO NOT TRY TO DO EVERYTHING AND GO IT ALONE!**

The pace of your life will change inevitably. There is now one of you doing the work meant for or divided by two before. You do not have to however go at it full speed ahead 24/7. It is **MORE** important that you stay healthy, energized, happy and there for your family, than burned-out, tired, fatigued and/or worse fall ill!

There will be **MORE** things to pay attention to than you will ever have time for. Accept that you will not get to everything!

Increase the time for everything or decrease the demands made on your time, or find innovative, creative ways to engage the kids and get them to help and prioritize. They will love 'building' the new family life together.

Setting goals and targets, priorities and putting things in broader perspective are all ways you can deal with this pace, stress and demands on your time and energies. You are in control of your destiny. You make the choices. What standards and quality of life are you setting for yourself, your children and this family? What timeframe do you have in mind to do what exactly? Where does this family want to be in say tomorrow, next week, in 3 weeks, after 1 month, within 3 months, at 6 months, or 1 year from now? These questions help you focus on process **AND** progress and brings balance and perspective to your situation.

It can help you out tremendously. We will even recommend you write them down and track to see where you are going. It is motivational to

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see often how far you have indeed come. Focus your energies on the things that make a difference and positive impact on your life and the life (and happiness!) of your family and loved ones! Setting limits and knowing your own limitations are important too. Boundaries and 'wits end' so to speak have to be considered as well. You are in the end only human and no super-hero single parent. NO-ONE IS EXPECTING THAT FROM YOU EITHER! It is perfectly all right to take a break once in a while as well and have some fun.

Coping with stress, keeping spending and expenses at bay, budgeting and planning your financials to a tee, taking good care of yourself and your family on all levels (physically, emotionally, mentally, totally!). Taking good care of yourself that you are able to take BETTER care of others. Not trying to cope alone and by yourself but taking advantage and building the social and support networks around you that you will need.

Always remember that you are the parent in the house and what that means. The weight and pleasure of this task will weight on your shoulders and heart always. Promise and commit to yourself that you will not overreact when faced with problems, set-backs or crisis. Stay level-headed and ask when you need help or assistance.

- **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

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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

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FORGET THAT. Encourage their self-sufficiency 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?

Communication lays a solid and important foundational element and nature to the family relationships and unit. It strengthens it and deepens the bonds, connections, trust and intimacy you share. Making it a home of comfort, reassurance and shared love.

Modeling effective communication as a parent is a refined skill.

Showcasing what you would like to see and be treated can help give 'voice' and coping skills to your kids to deal with expressing how they feel, what they need, want, desire, fear, are anxious about. It will make them more brave to open their mouths and hearts and you will all benefit from this open platform sharing in the family.

Negative communication like sarcasm and ridicule hurts and should not have a place in your home from or directed towards anyone. Kids will mimic what we do. If we do see behavior or expression that is inappropriate, we have to start in our own backyard and change our own ways FIRST! What example are you setting for your kids?

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SIX KEYS TO UNLOCKING COMMUNICATION IN YOUR NEW FAMILY:

Expressing thoughts and emotions openly and honestly and sharing experiences, fears, uncertainties, feelings, memories, pain, hurt, loss, concern, worries and more. It is healthy to talk about how and what we feel, need, desire and want – even what we miss. It helps us heal and reach out, bond and connect with each other MORE.

Explaining things , making them clearer and leaving no room for misinterpretation, manipulation or misuse. Sharing our opinions, beliefs, perceptions, interpretations, points of view with each other, helps us look at things from each others' and different perspectives (even multi-angles or from opposing sides). This brings us calm focus and the ability to solve problems, not emotionally over-react just because we are upset per se.

Asking questions, probing for understanding is a great way for family-member to reconnect, celebrate a life and plan a future!

Confrontation of unacceptable behavior, language or treatment is also important and it cuts both ways parent to child and child to parent (and yes, throw in sibling rivalry here too!) Respectful disagreement and speaking up when you feel that you have been wronged in any way is imperative.

Resolution and resolving of issues, hurt, pain, distances, problems and even disagreements can be mighty powerful.

Not everything in the family has to be about fighting and arguments. Create an environment that encourages, rewards children to speak up and model good behavior that makes them confident to voice what they have to say. Create a risk-free, safe environment where open communication and honesty is encouraged and valued. You are in

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effect enabling and empowering your kids, preparing them better for life, their future and adulthood.

Repressed anger, silences and punishment can have quite the opposite effect on them. They will detach, not say what is on their mind, defer to others, be followers and just accept things for what they are, without probing, questioning or verifying if the information is correct and reliable, worthy of being followed. Plan to set your kids, yourself and your family on a good path. Not only to recovery, but coming together as a unit, preparing for life, now, here and now, but also for the future, what lies ahead and whatever life might still throw at you. Speaking their minds, with respect of course for each other, themselves and you should be encouraged.

Family values are shaped as time passes by. The single parent is not the embodiment and 'enforcer' if you will of these values, authority and discipline. Norms, rules and guidelines for behavior needs to be laid down, boundaries set and some 'security' and known lines in the sand so to speak drawn. Kids need to know what is acceptable and what is not. As the single parent you will state, shape and build these into your daily lives and routines. IT IS UP TO YOU TO ESTABLISH WHO AND WHAT YOUR NEW FAMILY IS, BELIEVES AND HOW THEY TREAT EACH OTHER AND THOSE AROUND THEM. You will set the pace and the nature of these 'family rules'. This is where kids will not learn right from wrong.

Again, there are FIVE KEYS to unlock this phase of the transition.

They are as follows:

- Stating clearly any demands, rules and orders with authority and consistency
- Setting limits and boundaries for them to live by, obey and use
- Probing and asking lots of questions

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- Discussion, conversation and confrontation (if required and necessary)
- Discipline and consequences if they are not adhered to (also reward if they are stuck to and good outcomes need to be celebrated)

All of a sudden, when dealing with your kids there is no 'backup' It is because you say so and they have to accept it. It will not always be smooth sailing and sometimes kids will act out, rebel and not want to listen to you at all. Kids do not like NOT getting what they want and parent do NOT like NOT being listened to. This can be a recipe for disaster or a perfect opportunity for some great discussion and communication, bridging the gap so to speak and finding some common middle-ground both sides of this loving family equation can live with.

Work towards conforming, compliance, obedience, respect, love and trust and you provide security for your family and life-rules to live by now and in the future. Discipline can be hard for a single parent, but when it is necessary, do not let 'guilt' stand in the way of doing what is right, fair and acceptable.

You are not in this family to win a popularity contest, this is about being the parent, not merely the friend! You give direction and shape to the lives of your children – no-one else is going to do it for you or on your behalf. You need to personally embrace the fact that you are now the sole 'leader' and provider of this house, which included the authority and discipline aspects of parenting. **THIS DOES NOT MEAN CONTROLLING OR MANIPULATING YOUR KIDS TO DO YOUR BIDDING AND BEND TO YOUR WILL!**

It has to be from a position of love, care and respect. Giving your permission to 'rule their lives' , consenting to the adult in the house,

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through careful supervision, guidance, structure and pro-active, positive exchange and dialogue is the best.

You will oftentimes find yourself explaining and persuading, giving some feedback. Guard against criticism and judgments.

Insisting that things get done (like chores and homework) can be hard on and for both parties. It is not necessarily nagging, but it needs to be done, repeated and enforced.

Consequences for actions, discipline and/or punishment is the hardest thing for any parent to do, yet it is almost most important for children to learn. DO NOT EVER PHYSICALLY HURT YOUR CHILD! It instills fear and mistrust. Deprivation is negative, reparation and the chance to make things right again to be encouraged.

Dealing with discipline can be a challenge. Curbing freedoms and taking away privileges (like video-games or computer access for example) has been shown to be effective in the short-term. Making discipline a pleasure not a chore and using it as a positive experience to bring you and your children closer together is the task at hand for the single parent – regardless of how agitated and angry you might be at what has transpired.

Establishing the roles and responsibilities, as well as the acceptable behavior guidelines, boundaries and actions make it easier to operate and function as individual within this family and out in the real world, together. Remember to not be ambiguous or inconsistent. Be clear and purposeful in your punishments and communications. Lead by example and do not have double standards.

YOU DO NOT HAVE TO RULE YOUR HOUSE WITH AN IRON FIST!

Discipline can be done in loving, caring, yet strict and firm way.

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IT IS NOT ABOUT SHOWING THEM WHO IS BOSS OR AN EXCUSE OF TREATING YOUR KIDS BADLY! YOU DO NOT HAVE AN EXCUSE OF PERMISSION TO DO SO JUST BECAUSE YOU ARE THE PARENT!

Getting your children to a comfort zone, prepared to deal with life and taking care of themselves requires fostering some sense of responsibility, self-pride and independence, self-sufficiency. As the single parent it is now up to you to equip them for living their lives. What a wonder, what a weighted task! It is here, at their home base and in this risk-free, safe environment that life-skills are practiced and come to fruition.

Creating the right atmosphere, security and environment for them to thrive in is what is important. Picking up your stuff, doing your homework, helping with the chores in and around the house, getting to and from school for example are all great ways to practice these responsibilities, skills and freedoms.

Letting go and allowing them these freedoms involves risk and letting go. This can be extremely hard on single parents who instinctively want to shield, guard and protect their kids from any more hurt, pain or failure. You have to empower, not debilitate your kids. Allow them to experiment and live their lives. They have to be able to learn to be self-sufficient and do things for themselves (make their bed, breakfast, get dressed themselves, pick out their clothes and more.) You can worry – all parents do, but it should not interfere with the lives and activities of your kids. There is truth in the saying IF YOU LOVE IT LET IT GO FREE! Discussions on consequences and possibilities are essential to unlocking the secret of working together and not only

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finding yourselves at opposing sides of the fence, battling each other and getting nowhere fast!

Always coming to their immediate defense, rescuing and bailing them out is not the answer. Accountability, consequences, aftermath are all part of growing up. You have to allow your kids to go through these things, even if it is hard for you! It is the only way they will learn the difference between right and wrong, that decisions and choices are responsibilities and freedoms, with rights!

Mishaps and accidents do happen, how you deal with it, not blaming, letting them cope and rectify the situation if they can, will give them coping skills for life, developing into well-rounded individuals and human beings. Operating independently and by/for themselves is very important (if age appropriate of course) It will help you out tremendously balancing the loads and demands on time, energies and help your family to get done what has to be done and live and enjoy your lives to its fullest potential! YOU HAVE THE RIGHT AND MEANS TO MAKE THIS A HAPPY HOME!

Stop trying to be everything for everybody and DO EVERYTHING FOR THEM! This behavior is not helping them to be able to help themselves and others. Rather ask yourself how and what you can do to boost their confidence and build or refine their life-skills. Naturally we want to nurture, foster and protect, we have to learn to let go and have them try (even fail) for and by themselves. It is the only and best way to equip them not only for living their lives in this new family unit today and move on, but also for their lives and futures ahead.

Honesty, truth, safety, intimacy are all qualities you have to strive for in your family. It is up to you and your kids to create the atmosphere and environment that you want. You enable, control and orchestrate your lives, living conditions and emotional well-being. You opt how to treat yourself and each other. Being truthful and earnest goes a long way to strengthen the bonds and connections in your family. Lying

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undermines all of the above! NEVER LIE TO YOUR KIDS (not even convincing yourself that you are protecting them by doing so!) They will lose all respect for you as a person, parent and human being. Ensure that you have all your facts straight before acting. DO not be misled by half-truths or outright lies – probe and ask question, to ensure you do not give permission or say no, when you should not have. There are many reasons for kids to lie to you and they do it seemingly so easily these days! It happens, there is no denying it. Sometimes it is meant to avoid painful consequences, hurt, anger. Your kids might not be feeling so good about themselves or what they have done, covering up, not wanting you to know, being involved in something they do not have permission for or know is wrong.

Kids can be master manipulators. Beware and not taken in by these, look for evidence and confront when necessary. Always letting them know that you love them and want to trust them, that it is the behavior you do not condone. THERE IS NO PLACE FOR MISLEADING EACH OTHER AND SUSPICION. Get the communication channels open and encourage sharing openly when problems or challenges come up. Rules set by parents help and assist children to develop into well-rounded, decision-making, self-sufficient adults, without it, it will simply NOT HAPPEN. Parents do not necessarily like making or enforcing rules, but they are an essential part of your kids growing up. You are shaping their future and writing on the slates of their lives, whether you want to or not. Kids do not like rules (even if they know it is for their own good) They might rebel or try to push the boundaries, make you feel guilty and/or even retreat or give up! DO NOT QUIT!

You are all that they have. Without you there will be no guidelines, no boundaries and no learning taking place to prepare them for life in the real world. The rules of the house and family that you lay out, need to be respected, followed and adhered to. You need to make it clear and stick to them consistently.

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Be sympathetic and understanding, yet lovingly firm and stick to your guns! (figuratively speaking)

The home and family is also where we learn to treat ourselves and others with respect. You set the tone and behavior in your own home. We like routine, habits and repetition. It is how we learn and master. We are creatures of comfort and habit. You can use these to set up your new family rules quite easily. Practice makes perfect. Assign chores and see that they get done – that simple. Involve and engage your kids in family life. Do not try to do everything yourself or go it alone all the time. Allow them to help out, build their confidence and thrive in the space and new context that you are shaping and creating together.

Teaching them to have a balance between self-interest and the interests of others is extremely important. We do not have or give permission to be treated or treat other badly. We need to be sensitive, compassionate, compromise when necessary and give back, treat others like we would like to be treated. Fair and acceptable behavior and treatment of others will be front and center in a multiple child household, but is also just as important for a one-child family! If they do not learn it at the knee of their single parent, where will they?

Foster two-way communication, open and honest exchange and good connection, giving and receiving, with trust and respect. Do not allow kids to be selfish and get away with it. Do not let your kids walk all over you, take advantage of your good, forgiving heart and hold them accountable for their actions.

Actively seek some middle-ground when required when there is conflict or difference in opinion about something. Learning to

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compromise, even share and being unselfish are all part of life-lessons in the family home. Finding your family's unique way of dealing with things can be quite the unifying principle "This will be our way of/for dealing with things, OK?" generates buy-in and compliance, acceptance and practice. Teach kids that not everything in life is about instant gratification. You can not always get what you demand and want. Life does not work that way. Help them save for something special for example, as opposed to just buying it because they are asking for it.

Consideration and compassion for others need to be taught at home too. There is no-one else that will be looking out for the emotional well-being of this family. It is up to all of you. Pushing each others' buttons, soft or weak-spots to get your way is unacceptable and this needs to stop before turning into abuse, bullying or even worse, permanent distrust or abuse.

With everything that you do and enforce in the home, you are actually shaping their lives and futures. REMEMBER THAT AND MAKE IT A GOAL EVERYDAY TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE AND GIVE THEM A CHANCE TO BE ALL THAT THEY CAN BE!

- 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

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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" approach 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 selfishness need 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.

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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!

Standards - sometimes children think they are on equal footing with the adults in their lives (in this case, you as the single parent) and they think they can set the rules and tone in your house. You are the adult and you set the tone and pace. This has to be made clear and adhered to with respect and obedience. Beware of being self-critical, a perfectionist and expecting too much of your kids. When they fail to live up to these expectations or fail they can easily get depressed and feel undervalued, even unloved.

Sharing – with peers again is a learned behavior, you shape over time. A playgroup, relatives of own peer and age group are all important. Context and opportunity to practice and master this skill has to be provided on a regular basis. Kids have to learn to share and not always have their way.

Separation – growing apart and growing up is part of life. You foster their confidence and willingness to let go by giving them the space to develop and become who they are. Do not smother or over-protect your kids. Foster their independence and help them become self-sufficient. **ENCOURAGEMENT ALWAYS GOES THE EXTRA MILE!**

Family live is like a social contract, flowing from both above and below. It is about mutual connection, permission, love, care and respect. Everyone in this new family will have the right and aspiration to be themselves and live their lives. This can sometimes cause friction in the household, especially if there is more than one child involved. **NEVER COMPARE YOUR KIDS WITH ONE ANOTHER!** Be fair to all collectively and to each individually. They each have their own special

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qualities and are unlike each other. Do not pit them against each other and help them cope individually with the changes in their lives and relationships. When kids fight it is often hard to stay neutral, even resolving it can be challenging in itself. Parenting books and sites offer great tips on how to deal with 'sibling fighting and rivalry'

Each and everyone is responsible for a conflict and has a role to play in it – be fair always and get all the facts before leaping into action, outcome or discipline. NEVER TAKE SIDES. Teach them that it ONLY takes ONE to stop a fight! (and that it does not have to be you) Again, these coping skills and emotional maturity is fostered in the home and family.

DO NOT WASTE ANY TIME OR EFFORT ON WHO STARTED IT! Refuse to play the blame game and get the 'difference' resolved

A golden rule of thumb is to not arbitrate but separate! Avoid even seemingly fostering or leaning to one kid more than the other, this can easily lead to resentment, rebellion and loss of respect.

Open discussion, channels and communication should always be accessible and preferred.

Monitor all behavior, interaction, exchanges and potential for conflict, avoid and do not tolerate bullying or abuse (even verbal, emotional or physical!)

SAFETY always comes first – remove the threat of violence and equip them with the expression and opportunity to 'voice' their discontent, true feelings and problems to you and each other and get things resolved. DO NOT LET CONFLICT SIMMER, RULE OR THREATEN TO TAKE OVER YOUR HOUSEHOLD AND FAMILY. Everyone will be emotional and handle situations differently. Some take longer than others to

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cope with sudden change, loss, new things and people around them etc., Allow each of your kids the breathing space and room to work through things at their own pace.

Role-models from outside the family can be a great way to foster your kids' growth and independence. Pick someone you trust to 'fill' these entrusted shoes. It will never 'replace' the missing parent, but it will provide the opportunity to learn valuable life-skills and form a special bond and connection with someone else as well.

Models and stereotypes affect lives of our kids, peer-pressure and social demands can be overwhelming. They will always need someone to talk to and it might not always even be YOU! If you want to protect your kids against bad influences and getting the wrong idea about life, roles and responsibilities, acceptable behavior and choices, an outside role-model (family-member, friend or Big Brother /Sister might help). Playing team sports can also be a great way of interacting with others and building a trust relationship with another adult, like the team coaches, referees etc. Encourage making connections with others, while always teaching kids to be safe when it comes to strangers. Who to trust and what not to allow.

Do not allow the television, computer or other 'games' to encroach on family time. It is not another member of the family. Have a TV-free night, where you play board-games, do a fun activity as a family together for example, talk, listen, share, laugh and have FUN!

Also be alert as to what children are watching, what the message and 'entertainment' is teaching them about life, themselves, how to treat others etc. How is it influencing them? Are they spending more time with it than with you, each other, living their lives, interacting, speaking, listening to you and each other/others? DO NOT LET TV BE

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AN ESCAPE OR SAFE-HAVEN! IT DOES NOT RULE YOUR LIFE! Take back the control and attention of your family time!

- **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.

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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.

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.

Freedoms, rights and privileges are to be appreciated not demanded and expected, or taken for granted.

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- 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.

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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! 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.

- LOSS OF A PARENT (divorce, death, abandonment)

When kids and parents go through this tumultuous turbulent transformational time in their lives, there is a lot of things happening at once. It is up to the sole custodian parent to be their solid rock and foundation, secure, safe and soft spot to land and fall, rely on when they need it.

For divorced parents redefining the family unit and strengthening those ties is of utmost importance. Take the time to include and encourage all members of the family (old and new – if deemed appropriate).

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Being respectful and sensitive to the kids' needs and not merely dismissing, bad-mouthing or fighting with the non-custodial parent should be strived for. Set a good example regarding forgiveness and civility. Transition family management (spending time at the other parents house, supervised or unsupervised visitation, living and visiting between two homes and even taken harsh tones with each other can all make kids uncertain, uneasy and feel displaced). Do everything in your power to mitigate and minimize the impact.

When it comes to the death of a parent, grieving and mourning the loss is important for the healing process. Recognize that only did you lose a life-partner, but your child has lost a loving, caring anchor in his/her life/lives. Remembering and cherishing the good times and memories, celebrating the life passes are all natural and to be advised, approached with sensitivity and done slowly.

In the case of the abandoned parent, it is advisable to first pay close attention as to the financial and physical needs and requirements of the family. Can you sustain and provide for your family? Do you have care, love and support from family, friends and a support network? What is your plan of action for moving forward? Keeping positive and believing in yourself and your own inner strengths, capacity and abilities, will see you through, if you stick to your plan and goals for you and for your family, you are well on your way to regaining and reclaiming, rebuilding and enabling your life.

- Easing this transition, trying to make it easier all falls on your shoulders. You can enable and empower your family to leave the old situation, context and life behind and embrace the new.
- Parent and child share a life together no matter what, stress, strengthen and build the bond and connection that you do have.

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- Anger has a place, but in moderation, modeling good positive emotions and behavior is key, not blaming or fighting in front of kids are essential.
- At no point should children ever be used as weapons, go-betweens, bargaining chips or leverage in disputes between parents.
- Make every moment that you do have with your child count, matter and make a difference.
- Do not fret over all the time you do not have to spend with your child.
- Children are not parents' emotional supports, you are theirs.
- Encouragement and acceptance, honesty and trust has to be fostered and allowed to grow over time.
- ultimate goal should be to raise, a happy, healthy, and well-adjusted child.

Letting go of bitterness, regret, not being able to forgive and forget, blame and the like (negative energy, emotion and outbursts) is of extreme importance.

Write down your emotions through journaling, seek counseling, a willing ear to vent or soundboard that you trust and get these feelings and emotions out of your system. Make lots of room for love, devotion, laughter, joy and shared moments with your new family, in your new surroundings, circumstance with the future inviting you along for the ride.

Seeking support from other single parents in your area, community and surroundings will help you cope and realize that you are not the only one (although it feels like that sometimes) and that others can understand, encourage, support because they KNOW what you are facing, going through and what lies ahead. These support networks can be invaluable. Childcare, baby-sitting and play-dates can be arranged this way too.

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Experts advise parents in any of these situations to focus on THREE key areas:

TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF, IN ORDER TO TAKE CARE OF OTHERS
Health, balance, emotional stability, strength are all required. Join a support group and tap into the social networks, circle of friends and family that you have to help you out. Pursue your career/work, retrain or educate yourself in order to provide better for you family.

FOCUS ON GETTING IN PLACE SIMPLE, REGULAR ROUTINES AND STABILITY

Make connections, talk and exchange often. Make every moment you have as a family count. Mealtimes are great opportunities for these (breakfast, lunch, dinner) some, any or all will do (if you can). Have simple dinner menus (Mac and cheese is fine, with some steamed veggies (fast too!), homework, bath and bedtime.

GET HELP! ASK and LEAN ON OTHERS!

Supportive loving care, kids need to know that they are safe and loved at all times.

Here are some more practical advice and handy tips for single parents:

Single parenting is a delicate balancing act. It does call for sensitivity and definite planning, as well as well-executed consistency and strategy. Surviving and thriving are BOTH possible and some days either will do!

Paying close attention to all these added tasks and responsibilities of the sole parent and provider can prove to be really tough. When the going gets tough, the tough gets going! Take a positive, hands-on approach and take control. Claim not being a victim of your

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circumstance and start by getting up a little earlier every morning, taking some time for yourself.

Remember Keeping up with the details of daily living can be hard to do. Multi-tasking can help, but it can also drive you stir-crazy if it starts to obsessively rule, structure and direct your life.

Single parenting in any situation, regardless of what got you there/here, has no one trusted recipe, solution or one-size fits all. Your family and circumstances are unique. NO TWO JOURNEYS ARE THE SAME. However, you can customize solutions that fit, work and are successful for you. Ease up on yourself and your kids. This will take time. Find solace and peace in the fact that this phase too will pass.

- **PLANNING AND ACTING SMART! SAVING TIME AND EFFORT!**

Family unique time-savers for everyday tasks - see how creative you and the kids can be in coming up with these. Make them your own custom-solutions. Have and stick to a plan and routine to provide stability and security amidst all the change, loss, instability and uncertainty.

Prepare larger meals that you can freeze some, have for lunch for work and school and get some more time to spend with the kids, as opposed to living off junk food or spending hours in the kitchen. Making your own ready-to-eat, individual portion size meals and well as frozen family meals over the weekend can save you lots of time during the week. Plan your errands, gasoline and energy, avoid having to run back and forth all the time.

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Allowing kids to be part of the household and do their part is a wonderful way of engaging them, making them part of orchestrating this new life and future that you are building.

- REMEMBER AND REDISCOVER WHO YOU ARE. YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO GIVE YOURSELF PERMISSION TO HAVE A LIFE OUTSIDE OF YOUR WORK AND KIDS!

Join a single parents club, co-op and baby-sitting circle. Ensure you eat and stay healthy, doing things that you enjoy. Friends, night out, gym, shopping for something for you, having your nails and hair done.

Having and allowing yourself time for yourself, with no kids, interruptions or demands – a quiet hour after the kids' bedtime, or a soak in the tub.

It is important that you take good care of yourself and your needs as well, while taking care of others.

- EVERYONE IN THE HOUSEHOLD MATTERS AND HAVE RIGHTS, ROLES, RESPONSIBILITIES AND CONTRIBUTIONS TO MAKE.

Every child need their parent's individual attention (especially in a household with multiple children).

Spend regular quality time with each child.

Allow time for expression and conversation. Trade ideas and discussions. Have some fun together and make every moment count. Do things that the two of you enjoy doing together. Ensure some special one-on-one time with each child. You will be pleasantly

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surprised at how deep that bond and connection will get. Be the pillar they deserve and allow them to be the support and loving care base that you need.

- NEVER LIE TO YOUR CHILD! BE HONEST AND DO NOT SUGAR-COAT THINGS THINKING YOU ARE PROTECTING AND SHELTERING THEM

Always treat kids with honor and respect. Be upfront with them and address any concerns or questions that they might have right away and to the best of your ability.

Bear the age, maturity and readiness of your child in mind, regardless of your answer or topic you are discussion.

- ALLOW YOUR KIDS TO BE THEMSELVES.

Foster their unique and personal individual identity and independence. Assigning tasks and responsibilities are a great way of keeping them involved and engaged with the family life as well.

Allow them their 'freedom', they have a right to a life outside of you and home, with friends and other families with whom they can relate to and might need to mingle and spend time with. Role models do not have to physically live in the house with you to have an impact on your child's life.

- SURROUND YOURSELF WITH SOCIAL NETWORKS AND SUPPORT

Do not hesitate to reach out, make connections and get the help that you need. There are numerous single parents' groups around welcoming newcomers with supporting, loving care and open arms.

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YOU WILL NEED IT! Trusted work-friends or other acquaintances can help you cope better. (maybe even get ride-clubs, baby-sitting etc. taken care of)

- NEVER BE TOO PROUD TO ASK FOR HELP!

There is no need for you to try and be super-mom, great at everything, all alone. This is not a survival match or ego-trip. There is no reward to the 'perfect' single parent (THERE IS NO SUCH THING OR TITLE SORRY!) lean and rely on others when you need to. You might even get the opportunity to return the favor some day.

- INJECT LAUGHTER, JOY, HAPPINESS back into your lives and HAVE SOME FUN!

A balanced and relaxed lifestyle will go a long way keeping you in a positive spirit and frame of mind – setting you up for success and results, achieving your target of getting your family back on track and set for the future.

The road does not ALL HAVE TO BE HARD! Single Parenting is one of the most rewarding activities and could be a blessing in disguise, IF YOU CHOOSE TO EMBRACE AND MAKE THE MOST OF IT!

IT IS NOT ABOUT BEING THE PERFECT SINGLE PARENT, IT IS ABOUT PROVIDING LOVE, CARE AND SUPPORT YOUR KIDS NEED!

The Challenges AND Rewards Of Single Parenting

There is nothing quite so special than the share moments with your kids, even if they are challenging, especially if they are rewarding.

There is really true value in being a connected, dialed-in, hands-on, pro-active parent showing interest in the life of your child. As a single parent, you are the one they will be looking to and up at, for answers, guidance, security and the weight of this on your shoulders can easily have you feeling somewhat overwhelmed, unprepared and even anxious.

DO NOT BE! Allow yourself to live and enjoy your life with your kids, regardless of the upheaval, challenges and obstacles. Parenting is hard work, but the life-time worth of shared milestones, bond and connection is priceless and highly rewarding.

From partnerships, alliances to conflict and battle. All will form part of the story of the lives of parent-child/children = FAMILY! It is inevitable. parental love and acceptance, guidance and parenting per se can be layered, multi-faceted and complex, even more-so if you are doing it by yourself!

We yell, we feel helpless, at the end of our rope sometimes, yet we love our kids to the end of the earth and want what is best for them always. We want to connect and reconnect with them throughout difficult times, good times and bad, uphill and downhill. We want to smile, cry, hide and encourage, even celebrate, worry and play with them! They are undeniable part of our lives and existence and we want to make the most of every moment we have with them. Single parenting sees us often over-emphasizing all of the above and losing sight of the fact that we are in this together. We have to recognize that we can learn a lot seeing and looking at things through the eyes and perspective of a child.

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Parenting is not all about chores, its is also about playful enjoyment and celebration of family life, each other and your interaction.

Play, from the earliest days of baby and parent is the way of choice for us to engage and interact with each other. This does not have to change necessarily. Although life is no game and can throw some terrible punches at us, we can get through it together. They who play together stay together! Foster this closeness as opposed just doing your own thing alone as a single parent. You do not have to 'isolate' yourself and your family due to your situation. You can and should GO IT TOGETHER.

Here are some guidelines for single parents to make the most of your family life and situation. They might seem general at first glance and it will be up to you to find practical ways to put them into practice in and for your family.

Rule # 1 : IT IS A GREAT THING!

- Value being and having a single parent
- Rediscover and redefine your family life, roles and responsibilities.
- Tackling the new and uncertain future ahead together with gusto.
- Make it a partnership and dynamic team effort. DO NOT BE A LONER OR ISOLATE!

Rule # 2: LIFE GOES ON!

- Foster closeness, bond and connection
- This goes for you and your child/children
- Estranged spouse, divorced parent, family, friends, new role-models, support groups, school etc.
- Set the rules and stage for success, socializing and contact with others – you are not an island – DO NOT GO IT ALONE OR EVEN

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TRY TO! IT IS NOT WORTH IT... ASK FOR HELP WHEN YOU NEED IT!

Rule # 3: FOSTER CONFIDENCE, NOT POWERLESSNESS

- Enable and empower yourself and your family to succeed
- Individually and as a new family unit
- Everyone allowed to deal/cope with situations at their own pace, time and in their own way NO TWO JOURNEYS ARE THE SAME

Rule # 4: MAKE EMOTIONAL RECOVERY A PRIORITY FOR ALL OF YOUR, INDIVIDUALLY AND TOGETHER TO MOVE FORWARD

- Single parenting is a skill-set that develops and refines over time
- Make it a priority to be the caretaker of all areas and aspects of family life, including feelings and emotions – they are real and should not be denied!

Rule # 5: BE ENGAGING, INVOLVED AND FAIR

- Spend time with your kids as often as you can and make every moment count!
- Enter boldly un-chartered waters where you and/or your kids have never been before and embrace your new status and life as a new family

Rule # 6: ALWAYS ACCESSIBLE AND AVAILABLE

- Remember the old, without dwelling on it, embrace the new, discovering it together
- Be the helping hand when your kids need it (even when they/you think they do not!)
- Connect with other peers and adults, family and friends
- Be spontaneous, honest and have some FUN together

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Rule # 7: BE THE ROCK AND PILLAR OF STRENGTH (TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF FIRST, SO YOU CAN TAKE CARE OF OTHERS (BETTER!))

- When things are rough, changing and unfamiliar, dangerous, engaging and tune in to the needs of you personally and those of your child/children (whether only child or multiple children).
- Everyone in the family matters – make it so!

Rule # 8: TRY AND SEE THIS FROM DIFFERENT ANGLES AND FROM YOUR CHILD'S PERSPECTIVE AS WELL

Rule # 9: REESTABLISH LASTING CONNECTIONS, BONDS AND TIES THAT DEFINES WHO THIS FAMILY IS AND WHAT THIS FAMILY WANTS, SET PRIORITIES AND HAVE A PLAN

Rule # 10: Encourage confidence and have some fun, rebuild and strengthen one-step at a time, laugh together, empower and engage your family

Rule # 11: Sometimes follow your kids' lead, let them take on roles and responsibilities and share the load

Rule # 12: Take charge when necessary and discipline accordingly, consistently and fairly

Rule # 13: Learn to love what you hate and try new things together, set boundaries and guidelines that make sense to all of you

Rule # 14: Accept that emotions, roles and people change and that strong feelings, even disagreements are part of life (their and yours)

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Rule # 15: Sometimes rethink and revisit what you are doing as a single parent – rethink the way you are disciplining, cool off, use good judgment

Rule # 16: Always tell the truth! Be honest, trust and respect each other.

Rule # 17: Respecting each others being, preferences, sharing and socializing with others are all important lessons to learn in the family and at home to prepare better for life

Rule # 18: Recharge your own energies and load your batteries, take time and space for yourself to better help and support others

Rule # 19: Make the most of every opportunity to show your family that you love, care, support and champion their best interests

Rule # 20: BE YOURSELF! Nothing more is required. You do not have to be a super-single parent, hero, warrior or champion... just you. The loving parent that your kids want and deserve to have!

You will surely be able to come up with a couple of your own rules, guidelines and family-set of play/game-rules, add your own identity and family flavor to. MAKE IT A TEAM EFFORT! It does not all have to be an uphill battle. Being and becoming a new family is an exciting journey, even if it starts out a little rough... make time for each other and remember that you are never traveling down this path alone. Many have come before you and many will still yet come..

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YOU MIGHT BE A SINGLE OR LONE PARENT, BUT YOU ARE NOT EVER ALONE...

The ONE issue that seems to come up most as a concern for single parent, regardless of situation, is discipline. Armin Brott (also known as 'Mr. Mom' offers the following advice and tips for single parents on dealing with this issue:

- Be consistent EVERYDAY, even moment. This is the true key to success. They should know what is coming, why it is coming, happening. It is all about boundaries, expectations, guidelines, accountability and consequences.
- Keep doing what you were doing before (if it was working, fair and known to be effective and consistent of course) Discipline that is predictable and inescapable is best. If the other parent is still involved in some way, shape or form, and the kids moving between homes, have a consistent plan and agree upfront to back each other up on how you'll enforce limits.
- House-rules are great. Establish and enforce reasonable limits. Everyone needs to know what exactly is expected.
- Link consequences directly to the behavior and punishment should follow, suiting the 'crime'.
- Your child needs discipline and boundaries, they might resist or rebel, but they will not love you less for sticking to your guns and enforcing discipline.
- Also pick your battles wisely. Some require urgent and strict intervention and really matter (for example regarding health,

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safety and the like). Others are less important even trivial. Do not waste your time on these.

- Give limitations and choices.
- Encourage your kids to be self-sufficient and independent. They still need structure and routine.
- Understand your child's behavior. Figure out why they do what they do. Ask yourself whether they want...
 - attention
 - to be in control
 - to get back at you for something you did
 - they're frustrated
 - they just want to give up
 - to be left alone

Stop treating symptoms and behavior and get to the real underlying problem and ensure your intervention does not let it linger, remain or get worse with time.

Ask and spend time with your kids, observe and show interest. Discipline does not have to create caveats and tension in and on your home-front and family life. It can be another enabler in how this new family deals with each other, copes with change and challenge and prepare for life and future... THEIR FUTURES!!

Other major areas of concern are dating and getting back in the saddle, upon which we offer the following advice:

Allow yourself and your family the time to heal and address, cope and deal with all the new changes, challenges and rewards as you redefine

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yourselves, individually and collectively BEFORE introducing new factors and individuals into the equation.

Do not let your kids control or influence you in making the decision to date or not. Their reactions, rebellion and even disapproval are all normal reactions. It should however not refrain you from exploring your options, going out and getting your life back on track.

DO REMEMBER HOWEVER TO KEEP THE CHANNELS OPEN and accept their emotions and reactions for they are real and you want them to know that you also understand how they feel.

Allowing yourself time to mend and coping with your new status and events that have transpired, like being abandoned or going through infidelity or divorce, even the loss of a spouse through death, can create real turmoil in your life and emotional well-being. Try to understand and probe your own feelings and be honest about your needs, wants and desires. Hurt, anger, not caring or obsessing about it anymore, will take you through the cycles needed to get back on your feet. IT WILL HOWEVER NOT HAPPEN OVERNIGHT!

Be careful not to just abandon all common sense with this new sense of 'freedom', as you will be allowing whomever you involve in your life, into the lives and home of your child/children and family as well. Be realistic in your expectations of yourself, your kids and others. Your emotions may be a little raw still and regaining your self-confidence is key before committing to any longer-term relationship again. Having a happy life for you and your family will come over time and taking it one-step at a time is the best remedy and strategy you can have. Arranging for the occasional night out on the town, for drinks, clubbing or a night on the town, is a great way to also get your life back in balance and back on track and when you are ready for the dating scene again, it will be there for you ready to explore at your leisure

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and discretion. Always bearing in mind that your family interests do come first. The reward of a new start is your silver lining. YOU CAN MAKE THE MOST OF YOUR NEW LIFE! In your free and special moments set aside just for yourself, take the time to surround yourself with positive influences that add value to your life and whose company you enjoy.

Do things that you like and enjoy and set specific goals for yourself within certain time-periods. Do not to get things all back together instantly or even quickly. This process takes as long as it takes – DO NOT RUSH IT OR INTO ANYTHING HASTILY!

Parenting is not easy on any given day and being a single parent can seem almost dauntingly impossible. We hope that the insights shared in this guide, provide many single parents with some basic and practical suggestions to tackle life and their new family, their futures by the horns!

May you too desire to raise happy, healthy, well-adjusted children in a loving, caring NEW family environment. build healthy, mature relationships develop your child/children's self-esteem, and relate, connect and bond with your kids, disciplining and fostering them in accordance with their unique personalities and the family 'rules' you all adhere to and decided on together.

A well-worth read is Single Parenting for Dummies. We would recommend you get a copy today!

Whether you're already a single parent or soon to become one, this warm, friendly guide will be a source of encouragement and ideas. Packed with proven solutions to most of the challenges single parents face, it show you how to:

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- Balance work and family life
- Develop strong relationships with your kids
- Help kids adjust to the trauma of divorce
- Manage your time—and money
- Develop a successful co-parenting plan
- Deal with dating and remarriage
- Raise happy, healthy well-adjusted kids
- Know when to seek professional help and how to find it

Drawing upon their own experiences and expertise and the experiences of single parents whose stories they share throughout the book, psychotherapist Marion Peterson and bestselling self-help author Diane Warner, cover all the bases, including:

- Adjusting to single parent status
- Managing your time and sharing resources with other single parents
- Avoiding the five biggest single parent money mistakes
- Keeping close to your kids and considering their point of view
- Developing a co-parenting plan and making sure all parties stick to it
- Dealing peacefully with stepparents and former in-laws
- Keeping your cool when resolving parenting problems
- Staying physically and psychologically fit

Yes, you too can raise happy, healthy well-adjusted kids while keeping your sanity and your health in tact.

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Conclusion

As the sole parent you have to cope with many aspects, layers and details of raising, strengthening and re-orchestrating your family, life and future.

Feeling tired, cranky and over-extended, with priorities and commitments staring at you every day. It all comes with the territory of being a single parent (especially in the early stages).

Anger, fear, exhaustion, all of these things that make us human and not infallible. It will in all probability cross our path(s) on this trek.

Know this: YOU ARE NOT ALONE! Get support and help and tap into the love and care around you!

THIS JOURNEY YOU DO NOT HAVE TO TAKE BY YOURSELF!

Yes, there are challenges, but the rewards of being the main champion and influence in the life of your child/children and family, as head of the house, partner, collaborator, mother/father, taxi-service, coach, psychologist, flag-bearer...every day will bring something new. The roles, tasks and responsibilities may seem endless, but so too are the joys and cherished memories you are making together every day!

Regardless of the uphill battles, conflicts, fights, tears, hurt, pain, days you feel like quitting, giving up or throwing in the towel, there will be celebration, joy and excitement, shared life moments that no-one will ever be able to take away from either of you! We wish you and your family all the best. **BE THE BEST SINGLE PARENT THAT YOU CAN BE! BE THERE FOR YOUR KIDS EVERYDAY, EVERY MOMENT! PREPARE AND EQUIP THEM FOR LIFE AND THEY WILL THANK YOU FOR IT.**

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(yes... maybe not now or right away, but eventually and FOREVER!)

D. References, Resources, Online Links and Support Groups

Cohen, L.J. (Ph.D.) (2001): The Ballantine Publishing Group New York & Canada. ISBN 0-345-44286-5.

Pickhart, C.E. (Ph.D.) (1989): Keys to Single Parenting, from Barron's Parenting Keys. USA, ISBN 0-8120-9331-3.

Silverstein, H. (1989): Teen Guide to Single Parenting. Franklin Watts, Belgium. ISBN 0-531-10669-1.

Other worthwhile reading recommendations to get you started on your journey

Karst, P. The Single Mother's Survival Guide

Book, N. The Single Parent Resource

Hardin Gookin, S. Parenting for Dummies

Klumpp, M.A. The Single Dad's Survival Guide : How to Succeed as a One-Man Parenting Team.

Faber, A. How to Talk So Kids Will Listen & Listen So Kids Will Talk.

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MORE Online sources of information on parenting in general:

[iVILLAGE](#) - Get parenting tips, styles and other parenting information.

[The National Parenting Center](#) - Support site for parenting.

[Parenting.org](#) - Answers questions about parenting.

[Parenthood](#) - Information regarding parenthood and parenting.

[Parenting Special Needs](#) - Parenting children with special needs.

[Parenting.com](#) - Abundant information on how to be a good parent.

[Parenthood.com](#) - Helping families grow.

[About.com](#) - Helpful advice, key links, and invaluable info from experts.

[ParentingAdolescents](#) - Get answers to questions on parenting teens.

[BBC.com](#) - Info on how to become perfect parents.

A Mecca of information for single parents await at:

[parentsworld.com](#)

[parentsworld.net](#)

[parentsworld.org](#)

[parentsworld.ca](#)