Single Parenting

Parenting is a tough job. It can be even harder when parents are in the position of raising children on their own. The number of single parent families has doubled since 1970 with approximately 33% of American families being run by single parents. The circumstances leading to single parenthood include situations such as death, separation, divorce, imprisonment, and even military and job leaves. The challenges of a single parent include finances, discipline, and household chores. Below are a few tips for single parents to guide them in this journey.

Adjust Your Attitude
Children do better when single parenthood is viewed as a positive option rather than a negative situation. Attempt to see the benefits of being a single parent by enjoying the autonomy and independence in your future. You may realize that you are capable of doing more than you ever thought possible and that you have skills you did not know you possessed.

Be The Boss
Create firm boundaries so there is a clear sense of your role as the parent in the family. Often a single parent makes the mistake of allowing children to become equals or peers. This can lead to serious problems in that children do not know their limits and may take on more responsibility than is age appropriate. Using consistent discipline and relying on logical and natural consequences provides clear expectations for your children.

Ask For Help
Often parents can feel overloaded with all the responsibilities of taking care of their children alone. Asking for help from family, friends, and other single parents, as well as assigning the children appropriate chores can help alleviate some of the overload. Children who help with household chores can learn more quickly to be self-reliant, solve problems, and accept responsibility for their actions.

Give Yourself Credit
The job of parenting is difficult for two people, much less for one. Recognize that you are doing your best and don’t allow your children to manipulate you into feeling guilty about the situation. Remind your children that the family is a team with everyone working together. You may not receive credit from your children for the effort you put in, so it is important that you praise yourself for a job well done.

Create A Stable Environment
Children need to feel stability and security within their family. While these are important needs for all children, they are especially important for children who have experienced a separation from or the loss of a parent. Children need to feel protected, as well as nurtured. Hearing that you love them and are proud of them is important for their sense of security. Some children may need more affection and attention than other children, so it is important to know your child’s needs.

Part of creating a stable environment is to have predictable routines and schedules for your children to follow. Flexibility within the routine is also important because it will teach your children that life is not always predictable, but can continue to be stable and secure. Finding a healthy balance will be the key.
Take Care of Yourself
Often single parents are attempting to balance the needs of all their children, and rarely take the time to meet their own needs. It is crucial for your children’s well-being to have a parent who takes care of him or herself. You may need a break from all the demands made on you and it is critical that you take that break. Asking other parents to trade babysitting or if possible hiring help will allow time for yourself. Paying attention to your diet, exercise, stress management, and sleep schedule will model for your children the importance of self-care. Other activities for self-care may include relaxation, yoga, meditation, taking a walk, reading a book, calling a friend, or taking a nap. Remember that a stressed out parent results in stressed out children.

Develop a Support System
Being a single parent can be a lonely job. Create a network of people who can provide you support, companionship, child-care, etc. It is ok to be choosy and select individuals who you know will be reliable, trustworthy, and caring. Single parents with supportive networks usually feel better and demonstrate to their children it is ok to ask for help. Support groups are an excellent way to connect with other single parents who may share many of the same circumstances as you.

Regardless of how mature your children may appear do not confide in them as if they are your peer. A common mistake of single parents can be to rely on children for emotional support and to not realize they are hurting their children until after the fact. Find other adults for support and companionship, and allow your children to be children.

Communicate Effectively
Learn to communicate effectively and solve problems as a family while demonstrating that you are still the boss. Set realistic goals as a family and work together to achieve them with the children having some input. Having regular family meetings not only allows for time to communicate; it also conveys that family is important.

Forgive
Let go of grudges against your child’s other parent, who is now absent from both of your lives. Realize that holding onto feelings of anger will not change your situation and often will consume a tremendous amount of energy that could be devoted to creating a positive environment for your child. Your child can sense your disappointment and/or dislike of the other parent and this negative attitude can be potentially harmful for your child and his or her relationship with the other parent.

Be Informed And Connect With Others
As a single parent it is important to seek out support. The following internet resources can provide helpful information and a place to stay connected with other single parents:

Single Parents (www.single-parents.net)
Resource offers single moms and single dads articles containing advice on raising their children.

About Government Help for Single Parents (singleparents.about.com/cs/governmenthelp)
Learn about US, Canadian, and UK government help for single parents using these resources and guides.
Single Parents Network (singleparentsnetwork.com)
Access forums, chat, articles, related links, and a social club for single parents.

Single Parents Online Network
(www.singleparentsonline.net)
Find resources on topics relevant to single parents and connect with others via the chat boards.

drSpock.com-Single Parents (www.drspock.com/topic/0.1504.233+AgeM2_12+cbx_families,00.html)
Contains a collection of articles and resources on topics related to single parenthood.