

Strengths of Single Parent Families

Can single parent families still be strong, healthy families? Of course they can! Sure, there are some drawbacks, but the following are some positive aspects that may be a result of being in a single-parent family setting.

Children who grow up in single parent homes learn to assume responsibility. Children of one-parent families, out of necessity, must assume more responsibility at home. They quickly learn to appreciate the things that parents work hard to provide.

Children in one-parent homes have realistic and cautious views of marriage and family life. Adolescents in single parent homes know how very difficult it is to keep a family going. Their experiences can give them a healthy respect for marriage and relationships. They may plan to delay marriage and to select a mate very carefully. They may also realize that they should prepare themselves to be capable of supporting a one-parent family both emotionally and financially for they know this is a real possibility.

Children and parents in single parent homes develop self-reliance. Because the children have only one resident parent and that parent is probably employed, they will often be at home alone. As long as safety concerns have been addressed, children can learn to enjoy being on their own and can take care of their own needs. Being able to be content alone as well as with other people is a value adjustment.

Self-concepts are strengthened. Initially, many single parents and their children experience a severe drop in their economic and social standings as well as in self-concepts. Most experience guilt feelings and a sense of hopelessness. However, overcoming their negative concept is, in itself, a proof of inner strength. Much of the earlier help is from forces outside the family, as many single parents and their children are helped by support groups and counseling. But most of the future strength comes from within the family. As family members recover, they develop self-esteem that makes them grow both individually and as a family.

Children in single parent families gain a special understanding of adults. Children who grow up in single parent homes know that adults need help from others. Because their parent does not have a spouse, the child is often confided in and the child develops empathy and an ability to comfort the parent, as long as the parent doesn't go over-board and expect the child to take care of all the emotional needs of the parent. Single parents still need friends of their own for support.

Parent-child relationships are strengthened. Children and parents who weather the crisis of becoming a single parent family, usually find that their relationship is strengthened. As they experience the joys and frustrations of one-parent home life, they become more loving, communicative and supportive. They are mutually dependent upon one another. This creates an especially strong parent-child bond.

Source: Ohio State Extension.

The Relationship With Your Ex Spouse

When you have children, divorce doesn't always mean the end to dealing with a difficult spouse. Children are an enduring link to the ex-spouse who often wants to participate in all the events of the child's life. An ex-spouse is a reality the single parent must cope with - - whether you are the custodial, non-custodial, or joint-parent. Every time you phone to check on visitation for the weekend, every time you pick up the children at your ex's house, you are reminded that your child's other parent is still a big part of your life.

The ex can be a problem even when your relationship is very cordial. Children often take the cordiality as a signal that you may get back together. And if that's unlikely, it can complicate matters. You can avoid these problems by observing some dos and don'ts:

Y Be businesslike. When you speak over the phone or in person, be formal and aloof.

Y Be courteous at all time without hanging on your ex's every word.

Y Keep phone calls short and to the point.

Y Be aware of any problems your child may have. It may be appropriate to involve your ex if the solution requires cooperation. Sometimes children misbehave to force the divorced parents to deal with each other.

Y Do be available on a dependable, reliable basis.

Y Do make visits enjoyable rather than looking at it as a time to impress or persuade your child or ex spouse.

Y Don't argue with your child (or your ex) over what your ex may have told your child.

Y Don't try to cut down the child's positive image of the other parent.

Y Don't try to persuade your child that you are always right and your ex is always wrong, or that you are the good parent and he or she is the bad parent.

Y Don't use your child as a pawn in a power struggle with the ex. The child has a loyalty to both parents, and that loyalty should be respected.

Y Do work to get rid of feelings of grief, bitterness or attachment that keep you from dealing constructively with your ex or keep you from getting on with your life.

Y Don't send messages to your ex through your child, whether verbal ("Tell him to be on time next weekend") or nonverbal (dressing your child in clothes that are too small just to make a point).

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Keeping a Balance

It's tough trying to do everything, be everything to everyone, and keep everything in balance. It's important to remember that you are only one person. Here are tips to help you balance work, family, and your personal life as a single parent.

- ' Come to grips with the fact that you are only human. Don't be too hard on yourself.
- ' Take time for yourself.
- ' Decide what is and what isn't important in your life and live accordingly.
- ' Have at least three ways to reduce your stress.
- ' Recognize and accept your limits.
- ' Be adaptable and flexible.
- ' Develop a long list of baby-sitters.
- ' Seek and accept help.
- ' Develop a budget and stick with it.
- ' Find a way to separate the past from the present.
- ' Have a sense of humor.
- ' Communicate openly and honestly with your children.
- ' Listen carefully to your child's feelings.
- ' Develop a list of time-savers that work for you.
- ' Plan your day or week.
- ' Set goals for yourself and work towards them.
- ' Understand that all children misbehave from time to time.
- ' Let your children see that you have a life of your own, too.
- ' Be selective about involving your dates in your child's life.
- ' Eliminate clutter.
- ' Create some private time for yourself.
- ' Maintain structure and routines for your children.
- ' Check your attitudes from time to time.
- ' Enjoy your children
- ' Enjoy your life-stage.

If you are interested in receiving a free six-part newsletter for single parents or a five-part learn-at-home packet on single parenting, contact:

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