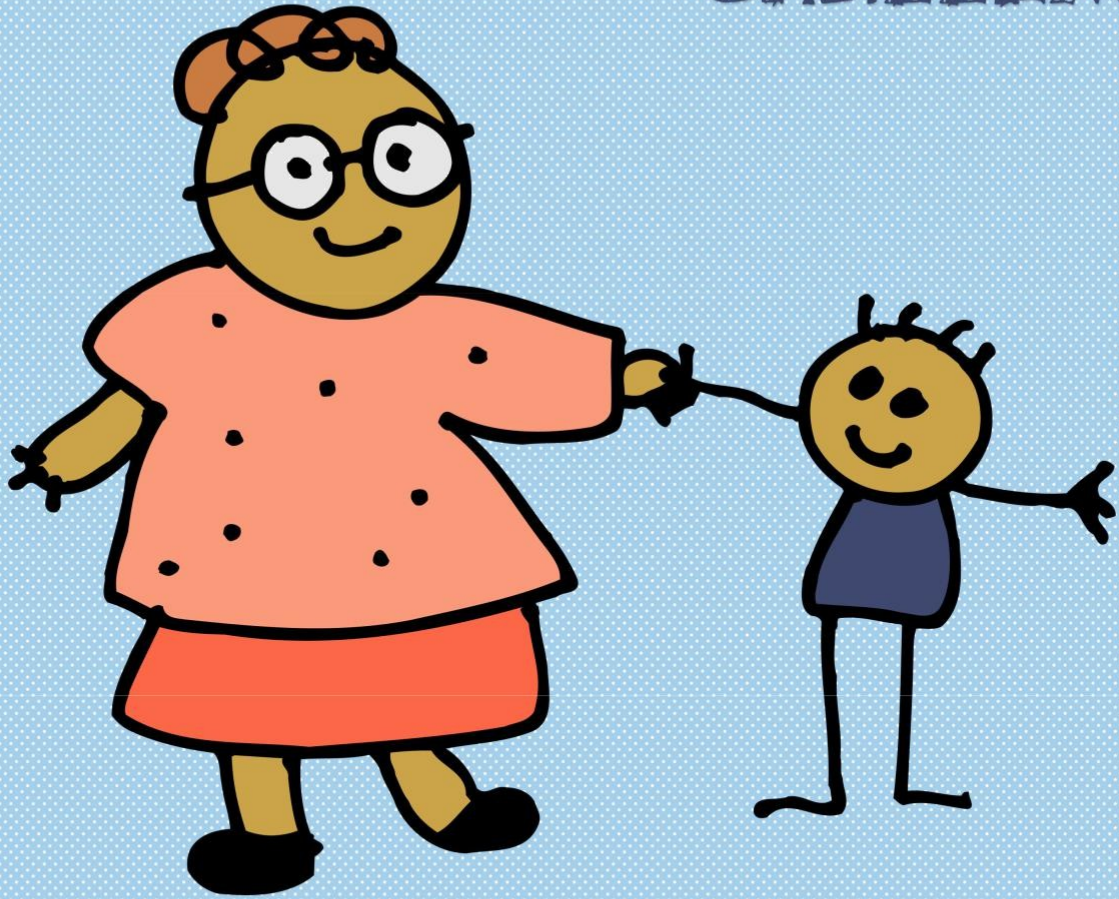


OVERCOMING
SINGLE PARENTING
CHALLENGES



PARENTS ARE OFTEN SO BUSY
WITH THE PHYSICAL REARING
OF CHILDREN THAT THEY MISS
THE GLORY OF PARENTHOOD

Overcoming Single Parenting Challenges

Potty training secrets

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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.

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.

- ✎ 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

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

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.

(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

Known
Certainty/secure
secure
Old and valued
Moving out
Away from



Unknown
Uncertainty/ non-
secure
New and Different
Moving on/in
Towards

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!

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!

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!)

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. 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!

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.

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. 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.

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,

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 crumbling 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?
- 🔓 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! 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

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

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