

Single Mothers

a resource for parenting solo

7 steps for
coping with
change

Connecting
with your kids:
strategies & tips

Getting the
help & support
you need

How to talk about
the tough stuff

Single mothers tell their stories:
“I know I’m doing a great job”



contents

1	CHANGING TIMES	2
2	WARM & CARING PARENTING	12
3	HEALTHY PARENT = THRIVING CHILDREN	22
4	YOUR CHILDREN'S DAD	28
5	YOUR STORIES	36
6	HELP & SUPPORT	40



Raising Children Survey

In 2008, 480 women from around Australia took part in a *Raising Children Network* reader survey about the experience of being a single mother. Thank you to all of the women who so generously shared their experiences and who gave permission to be quoted in this publication.

LEGEND

-  Find an organisation in Help & Support pages 42–45
-  Facts & figures
-  Information

for single m*thers

**AS A SINGLE MOTHER, YOU
MAY FACE SOME TOUGH TIMES
& PARENTING SITUATIONS
THAT MANY OTHERS DON'T
HAVE TO DEAL WITH**

We hope you can use this book for support. It aims to provide practical tips on adjusting to change, looking after yourself, helping your children to cope and building positive family relationships.

The experience of being a single mother is different for everyone. This booklet acknowledges your shared experiences and stories, and the hard work and dedication required by all single mothers.





changing
{ times





f

FACTS & FIGURES

It's not surprising that life as a single mother might sometimes feel tough. Single parent families have about 47% less disposable income than coupled families; moving house and finding new neighbourhood supports is rated as one of the most stressful life events. It's estimated that from 25 to 40% of all single mothers have experienced family violence.



surviving & thriving

IF YOU'VE JUST BECOME A SINGLE MOTHER, YOU MIGHT FEEL THAT YOUR WORLD HAS BEEN TURNED UPSIDE DOWN

The change and uncertainty associated with becoming a single mother can make for some tough times. Emotions can run high: anger, sadness, frustration, fear, shock, guilt, regret, relief, hope, excitement. Your children might be on this rollercoaster ride of emotions too.

Feelings of grief and loss are part of the journey too. Grief for the dreams you once shared and the life you expected to lead. Loss of someone in your shared home who is interested in your children's everyday moments and small achievements.

It's challenging – but it can also be a time for discovering yourself and finding new directions. Single mothers talk about feeling liberated and free from the conflict and stress of negotiating with a partner. You might even feel excited about your new life.

This adjustment to life as a single mother is a phase. It's a time to make sense of things and settle in to your new life. Many single mothers talk about a turning point, a time down the track when things will really improve. You can get through these times – you will.

“When I became a parent, I had no intention of it being a ‘part-time’ activity ... I still feel grief every time my child goes to his father’s – for my child not being around but also for all those things I had expected to do as a family.”

“Having lost my partner who passed away before I even knew I was pregnant was not the way I had ever imagined my life turning out. It has been a very fulfilling and amazing experience and journey and I feel blessed in many ways. Looking on the positive side, I have been given the opportunity to spend much more time with my daughter than I would have done in other circumstances.”

adapting to changing times

i

ROUTINES & RITUALS

Routines help children adapt and feel safe and secure, particularly during times of change. Try to identify those small routines that really matter to them, such as a regular play day with a friend. Work it out with your children if they are old enough. Reassure your children that these arrangements will continue when they are with you.

It's good to keep some **rituals**. Every family has its own rituals, even if you don't think of them in that way. The way you wake your children up in the morning or what you say to them at bedtime are rituals that you can easily keep, and they will give your children lots of reassurance.

Create new routines, especially if your child care arrangements change or you need to watch the budget. If your children are old enough, try working out some new routines together. A few new routines won't be too disruptive and may make life a little smoother.



BECOMING A SINGLE PARENT CAN BE LIKE ARRIVING WITH YOUR CHILDREN IN A FOREIGN COUNTRY

You've got lots of things to do, but you don't know your way around, let alone the language or the best places to get a good meal (everyone is hungry!).

Your kids are asking you what's going to happen next and you just don't know. You're uncertain about the next step but determined to get the hang of things.

Sorting out practicalities and getting things done can be a real help when you face uncertainty. It can make you feel you have more control. But it's hard to stay on top of every little thing when you have children. And having less money and less time can make it harder to cut corners and find time for fun. The following survival tips might help in the early days.

STRATEGIES FOR YOURSELF Send out an SOS

It can be hard to ask for help, but asking for help and accepting offers of help doesn't mean that you are not coping. In fact, it's a smart thing to do for both you and your children. *Help & Support* at the end of this booklet has ideas for getting extra help and finding your way through the maze of child support, and financial and legal issues.



Sick days & emergencies

Have a back-up plan in case your children need to stay home from child care or school. That might mean talking to your employer about flexible work arrangements or finding a neighbour, friend or family member you can call on to help with child care, kindergarten or school pick-ups or meals. Talk to your children ahead of time so that they know what will happen if they, or you, get sick.

Being away from your children

This can be one of the hardest things to adjust to, and can lead to profound feelings of loss, loneliness and disappointment. Plan ahead so you can cope during times when your children are not with you. If possible, agree on the kind of contact you will have during these periods: a goodnight phone call, emails or text messages. Hiding any anxiety about these times will help your children with the transition.

HELPING THE KIDS

Talk through the changes

Your children's age will determine how much you tell them. Talk positively about the changes and give children plenty of chances to ask questions.

Let them make decisions

Involve your children in small day-to-day decisions such as the arrangement of the furniture or planning meals. Consult with your older children about how much time they will spend alone with you or their dad.

Involve kids in chores

Even young children can take on some of the household tasks, like packing away toys, clearing plates or putting clothes away. Involve everyone in discussions about dividing up the household tasks.

Two homes, two routines

Kids cope well with different routines in different houses, as long as the rules are clear and you keep things as predictable as possible. You may need to remind your children that 'in this home we do it this way.' Read more about how to manage this situation in *Your children's dad: Two homes*.

Family times

Look for opportunities to take time out and have some fun, even just putting on some music and dancing with the kids. Regular family meetings are a good way of discussing more serious issues. They can be a great way to talk about how things are going and reassure your children.



FAMILY VIOLENCE

The effects of family violence can continue to take their toll, even after you leave a relationship. Family violence can also worsen or start at the point of separation. Family violence of any kind is not acceptable. If you or anybody you know is experiencing family violence, *please seek help*.

Use the *Help & Support* section or ring the *Women's Domestic Violence Crisis Service of Victoria* on 03 9373 0123 or country callers toll free 1800 015 188.



the attitude of others

STIGMA & DISCRIMINATION ARE AN ADDITIONAL BURDEN FOR SINGLE MOTHERS

You might not be able to change how others view you, but you can be prepared for reactions and build a strong sense of pride in your family.

Try these tips

- Children often get asked about where they live or their family situation. You can help your children work out some routine replies, for example: “I live with my mum,” or “I have two homes, one with my mum and one with my dad.”
- Spend time with other single mother families: it’s supportive for you and it gives your children an opportunity to see that there are lots of other single mother families around.
- If your children are expected to ‘bring along dad’ at special community days, or make something special for dad, you could try a male friend, uncle or brother if dad is not around.
- Share books with your children about one-parent families or children who live in two separate homes, or watch movies featuring one-parent families. Ring your local library or book store for suggestions.
- Identify your family’s strengths and talk to your children about them. Strengths could include: being there for each other, being good citizens (helping the neighbours perhaps), or taking part in community events.
- Keep up social contacts as much as you can and encourage your children to invite friends over. If friendships change after you become a single mother, talk positively about the opportunities to make new friends.
- Talk to your children’s carer, teacher or year level coordinator about your change in circumstances. This will help them support you and your children.



f

FACTS & FIGURES

- In Australia, single parents head up one in five families with children under the age of 15, and the overwhelming majority (87%) are single mothers.
- In the *Raising Children* survey, 44% of participants responded that stereotypes about single mothers were often or always a concern for them.

“It’s what you make it ... I look around now and see other ‘traditional’ families and I realise my daughter has a settled, strong family. She’s a happy, content, bright little girl.”

“With the pressure of raising a family and caring for them and yourself, working, studying, maintaining a household, maintaining friendships and other relationships – the judgements made by society really don’t make it any easier.”

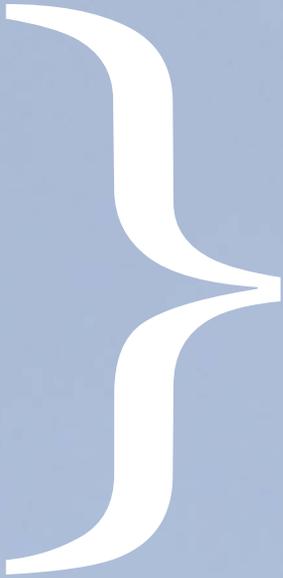
“Providing my daughter with a stable and loving home is my number one priority. I really wish single mothers weren’t negatively stereotyped so much, especially if your dear beloved child is the result of an ‘unwanted’ pregnancy outside of marriage ... I know I am doing a really great job, I love my baby so much, and I believe we are as entitled to respect and happiness as much as anyone.”

i

MUM + KIDS = A FAMILY

There is no ‘one-size-fits-all’ definition of a family; it doesn’t matter how many children or parents are involved. It will be a big help to your children if they understand that families come in all shapes and sizes – and that lots of children live with a single mum.





“I did grieve in the early days of separation but got over it when I moved into my own home and established an independent life with my children. My children are very conscious of the benefits of a happy home life.”

“Single parenting was a positive experience for me until those teenage years – [not having someone] sharing the decision making in relation to when you need to let go. My mother supported me through this ... Ultimately however you are the one still responsible.”

“Being a single mum is a journey ... Three months ago, before finally getting permanent full-time work, my answers [to this survey] would have been very different ... As my daughter has gotten older, I’ve become more confident in my parenting and enjoyed it more. I’ve begun to take pride in the job I’ve done in raising a fabulous, confident and amazing young woman.”

7 steps for coping with change

Here are some suggestions to help you navigate the early stressful days – and when times get tough down the track

- 1 Reach out for support** Your family and friends can be a lifeline. If you can't get helpful support from family and friends, try seeking out other single mothers, neighbours or parents at your children's playground, kindergarten or school.
- 2 Time to grieve** Whatever your circumstances, feeling loss and grief may be part of your experience. Recognising your loss allows you to create time to grieve and cry.
- 3 Take it step by step** In the early days, it can help to lower your expectations about how much your family can do and how many things you can get 'settled' at once. Put some things into a 'low priority' area that you don't have to think about right now. See if there are any big decisions that you can put off until the step forward becomes clearer.
- 4 Focus on what you can control** Some things will be out of your control, like decisions made by others about your children. Save your energy for the battles that are worth fighting and celebrate your own daily achievements.
- 5 Recognise your choices** No matter how limited the options appear to be, you always have choices. Even if you can't change the situation, you may be able to change how you feel and respond.
- 6 Go easy on yourself** It's easy to start blaming yourself for everything that goes wrong. You're not superwoman, so be gentle and give yourself a pat on the back whenever you can.
- 7 Dream some dreams** Allow yourself to dream a little about how you would like your future to be. Develop new goals for yourself and your children.





warm & caring
parenting



being a single m*ther

“I am able to instill a sense of values, responsibility and provide a positive role model to my children without the conflict of another parent to deal with. Hard work: yes. Lonely: often. But easier? MUCH!”

“I feel our home environment is better than it was when I was married. I make all the decisions without having to consult their father and I parent the way I want to parent, not as part of a couple.”

“There is not a one size fits all definition of being a single mother.”

“I have discovered my inner strength and trust in my abilities as a parent and as a woman.”

“Being a single mother is fabulous.”

“Being a single mother is a hard job and I don’t think it is given the credit it deserves.”

“Unless you are one, you have no idea how difficult it can be at times.”

“It never stops ... you’re working 24/7.”

“It is the best and the most frightening thing that has ever happened to me at the same time!”

“I love my children, I love being a parent, there is nothing I would want to miss, but doing it all by yourself sucks!”

“... the joy of the little boy’s face, and the support of friends, well outweighs the negatives.”

“It’s rewarding in many ways and I own my life ...”

“I am a better parent on my own.”

“I’m living my life my way.”



A single mother who demonstrates strength, resilience and determination provides a role model that will last for life. Children can develop positive attributes like independence and confidence by learning from the challenges and responsibilities that their mothers face and overcome.



how will it affect my children?

RAISING HAPPY HEALTHY CHILDREN DEPENDS ON THE QUALITY OF THE CARE A CHILD RECEIVES, NOT ON THE NUMBER OF PARENTS IN YOUR HOME

The love and care you give – along with the stability and routines that you create – have the biggest and most positive impact on your children.

You may have concerns about the impact on your children if you have separated from your children's dad or step dad. Rest assured that, with love and care, your children will adapt to separation. It is issues like ongoing adult conflict, family violence, mental health or drug or alcohol dependence that get in the way of good parenting. Partnered or not, any parent may experience these issues and children can suffer.

When problems do arise, the close bond between you and your children can act as a buffer. If not, counselling or the support of others may help.



positive relationships

HAVING A GOOD RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR CHILDREN PROVIDES THE STRONGEST FOUNDATION FOR THEIR DEVELOPMENT & LEARNING

As a single mother, you have less time. These ideas are designed to help you pay special attention to your relationship with your child even when time is short.

Children who grow up with strong and loving relationships with a parent tend to feel good about themselves. They are more likely to grow up to be caring adults who can develop their own positive relationships.

The extra stresses that you can face as a single mother can put pressure on your parenting, making it harder to show the warmth and encouragement that children need. It might also be harder to put aside space and time to actively build your relationship. The four tips opposite are things you can do quickly and easily to strengthen your relationship, even when you're short on time.

UNDER PRESSURE

Parenting on your own can sometimes mean parenting under pressure. When you have less time and more stress in your life, you tend to have less patience and more frustration. It's harder to be warm and encouraging and to pay attention at these times. When you are under pressure, you can end up being too hard or too soft.

Being too hard Nobody is perfect, and you will probably find yourself responding harshly sometimes. Instead of criticising yourself, treat this as an opportunity to think about how you could handle the situation better next time. It's time to seek help, though, if you are finding it difficult to keep your cool or are using discipline too harshly.

Being too soft It's very easy to give in to your children's demands for the sake of a little peace. You may also feel reluctant to discipline your children as they have already been through enough. Keep in mind that dealing with behaviour issues as they occur avoids problems later and teaches children about acceptable and appropriate behaviour.



“Although being a single parent is extremely exhausting and hard work, I also find it very rewarding. I have a very strong bond with my son and wouldn't change the situation in any way.”

“Raising my children has been a joy and a privilege. My only regret is I have had to work so hard and compromised my time with them. However, my strong work ethic and the importance of their good education is now paying off as all my children are working hard in their chosen careers. Their life experiences have made them very special.”

“We have been through a lot but have survived and we now have a stronger bond because of it. I am confident in my abilities to parent them on my own as they are happy and achieving well in their schooling - even my teenagers!!”



COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Community courses and support groups can help you improve your relationship with your children and reduce any difficult behaviour. They are also a great chance to share your parenting experiences and connect with other people in your area.



4 TIPS FOR BUILDING POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS

1 Make the most of everyday moments
Quality time with your children can happen anytime and anywhere: talking on the way to child care, kindergarten or school, talking over dinner instead of watching TV, playing word games on the bus or having a sing-a-long in the car.

2 Be interested
Focus on your children's interests by talking about their favourite things, whether that's sport, music, books or how things work. Encourage them to talk about what they like about their favourite things – but try to avoid question and answer sessions.

3 Pay warm attention
Smile, laugh and hug your children as often as you can, making lots of eye contact. Show them that you are happy to see them when you greet them in the morning, when you collect them later in the day or when they come home from child care, kindergarten or school.

4 One-to-one
When you can, put aside some regular time to spend with each child. It could be a book before bed, a late-night chat or a game with an older child after the younger ones are asleep. Or a special outing to the park with a younger child while older siblings are at school.

your child's behaviour

MANAGING YOUR CHILDREN'S BEHAVIOUR ON YOUR OWN CAN BE MUCH SIMPLER BECAUSE YOU CAN DECIDE ON THE RULES & STICK WITH THEM

What you say goes in your home. But being able to keep up consistent rules and boundaries is hard when you are tired and stressed or your children's behaviour is particularly testing.

Stress and change can alter everyone's moods and behaviour, children included. You can expect to see some changes in your child's behaviour for a while. The ideas here can help manage your child's behaviour and encourage positive behaviours.

Catch them being good Praise good behaviour when you see it. Tell your child what it is that they're doing that you like. Six positives for every one negative is a good rule of thumb. Children catch on quickly that good deeds get noticed and appreciated.

Rules Let your children know, clearly and simply, which rules apply when they are in your care. It's OK for your rules to be different from dad's – kids can learn that different people have different rules. Agreeing on some rules at a family meeting can be a good first step. This gives everyone a chance to participate and have some ownership over the rules, which then makes it more likely that the kids will follow them.

Consistency As much as possible, stick with your rules. Try not to be too hard on yourself if you can't be as consistent as you would like. Just remind yourself to be calm and resist bargaining the next time.

Fairness Children respond really well with fair rules and fair consequences that match behaviour: for example, taking away a toy for a set time every time they are too rough with it. Try to use the same consequences when your children break the rules – for example, using time out or restricting computer use.

Keep requests to a minimum Weigh up the importance of what you need your children to do. If it's not so important, see if you can put it aside for now. Save your instructions for the important and necessary things. This will help you cut down on the number of orders that you give your children and reduce everyone's stress.

Give choices Give your child the choice, if there is a choice available. This will also reduce the number of instructions you give your child – and add to the opportunities for your child to behave well.

Consequences Ask yourself the question: "If my child doesn't do as I ask now, am I prepared to back it up with a consequence." If the answer is 'no', then consider another alternative.

During times of change, you might also see an increase in behaviours like bad moods and fighting or the return of behaviours from the past. Here are some ideas for handling these periods.

Behaviour from days past Some children might start doing things they have grown out of, like bedwetting, baby talk, not sleeping, not eating or throwing tantrums. This is a relatively common and short-lived response to stress or major change. If the behaviour does not sort itself out in a few weeks, it might be worth consulting your family doctor or maternal and child health nurse.

Bad moods & fighting

Everyone has bad moods, particularly during times of change. And times of upheaval and change can be triggers for fighting. When kids react with frustration, anger or grumpiness, encourage them to put their feelings into words and show that you are listening and understand. You can acknowledge your children's feelings or remarks, without accepting any inappropriate behaviour. For example, you might say, "I understand this makes you angry. I am happy to talk to you when you have calmed down". If they don't calm down, make sure you stick to your plan and use the strategies you have in place for such situations. Maintain your rules and boundaries around what behaviour is acceptable though, because your consistency will help your children feel more secure. See the [Raising Children website](#) for strategies on dealing with tantrums or try a parenting helpline such as [Parentline](#).





“It is an exhausting, time consuming, never ending and sometimes thankless job leaving very little ‘me’ time but at the same time it is extremely rewarding to know that your little angel is what he is and who he is solely due to the time, effort and work you put into raising him.”

“It is amazingly difficult being the one where the ‘buck stops here’ for every single thing. I have been four years a single mum and we have a happy, loving home filled with love and laughter, but it’s soooo hard to stay above it all – all the time.”

“People sometimes don’t realise how difficult it is to remain consistent with boundaries when you are the only parent and you don’t get a break. You feel like you’re always saying ‘no’ or complaining, and the children continue to push the boundaries and support each other to protest at your decisions. It’s very wearing and draining.”



MORE ABOUT RULES

- Writing down or drawing no more than **6 important rules** helps to lock them into memory.
- It will help your child if the rules are about what they can do rather than what they can’t do.
- Having a rule about ‘doing what mum says’ tends to cover most ground.

talking about tough stuff

TOUGH ISSUES OFTEN ARISE AT TIMES OF CHANGE, BUT THEY CAN COME UP AT ANY TIME SO IT'S GOOD TO BE PREPARED

Make time to talk to your children about the changes in your family & about everyone's feelings.

Create a regular space, like family meetings or chats in the car, where your children have the opportunity to talk about their concerns and you can keep them informed about any new developments. Be prepared for those tough questions about dad or the new living arrangements.

YOUR CHILDREN'S REACTIONS

Children can find it difficult to cope with their emotions. That's why they tend to 'act out' when they are upset. Allow some room for this, and reflect back to your children what you think they may be feeling: "I can see you are upset" or "I can understand that this makes you feel sad." Children can feel reassured if you acknowledge that this is a difficult time and that their reactions are to be expected. Sometimes children need someone other than you to talk to.

Encourage your children to talk to another trusted adult: a friend, an aunt/uncle/cousin or a grandparent. The important thing is that they have the opportunity to talk. If you feel your children's behaviour is getting out of control, use some positive discipline strategies. Try the *Raising Children website* or *Parentline* for ideas. When things are calm, talk to your children about their behaviour. Speaking to a professional can also help.



"... talking to my children is a fantastic way of understanding each other and dealing with any big and small issues – from when they are expected home to how much pocket money I can afford to give them, and the really big issues of their relationships, their education and job prospects."

TALKING ABOUT YOUR OWN ISSUES

Your feelings Your children are bound to see you feeling sad, angry or upset. Tell your children that you love them and that the way you are feeling is not about them. Reassure them that things will get better.

If your children are old enough to understand, be honest about what is bothering you without going into detail. For example, "I had a bad day at work today, I'm in a crummy mood" or "I blew it. I'm sorry I made a mistake." Expressing your feelings also gives kids permission to express their own.

Adult concerns It's easy to fall into the habit of discussing adult issues with your children. But burdening them with adult responsibilities and worries expects children to be mature beyond their years. Some adult problems – like financial concerns – can make children feel anxious. As a general rule, adult issues should stay out of the discussion. Creating your own support networks, with adults you can talk things over with, will make it easier for you to shield your children from adult concerns.

WHAT TO SAY ABOUT DAD

There is no simple answer to the complicated issue of what you say about dad. The strategy that will best help your children is to try to stay positive, friendly and non-judgmental, whatever the circumstances. Resist letting off steam about your children's dad in front of them. This frees your children from having to take sides and reduces the amount of conflict in their lives. Being non-judgemental also gives your children an opportunity to talk about their dad without feeling uncomfortable. If dad does not turn up for an expected visit, just stick to the facts. Say something like: "Dad is not coming today, so you and I are going to play instead."



Young children think everything revolves around them, so they may interpret events as being their fault, even when they are told it is not so. Keep reassuring your children that it is not their fault, and provide lots of love and warmth.



8 TIPS FOR ANSWERING TOUGH QUESTIONS

- 1 Keep it simple** Long complicated explanations and details can confuse young children, and expose them to more than they need to know. Be clear and simple: “Your dad and I love you and we are going to take care of you – but it works best for our family if your dad and I live apart.”
- 2 Find out what your children know already** If your child asks you a difficult question you might simply ask, “What have you heard?” This helps you find out what they have understood – or misunderstood.
- 3 Provide reassurance** A child’s question can often be hiding something they are worrying about. Ask your children what they are worrying about. Reassure them with simple phrases that show you care and have their best interests at heart.
- 4 Honesty is the best policy** Children need reassurance first and foremost, but they are also entitled to know what is happening.
- 5 Listening hard** Answering questions is also about listening. Acknowledging your children’s feelings, without expressing your own opinion, will encourage them to talk.
- 6 Keep talking** Be prepared to answer questions a number of times – children often keep thinking about an issue.
- 7 Give yourself time** Sometimes you won’t know how to answer a tough question. Give yourself time to think about it, perhaps even consult other single mothers, friends or family members. Let your children know that you will get back to them. If it’s a question about dad, and you have relatively good communication with your children’s father, consider letting dad answer.
- 8 Getting help** You are not on your own. There is a range of professionals who can advise and help you.







healthy parent



thriving children



keeping healthy

KEEPING UP WITH YOUR CHILDREN IS DEMANDING

The stronger you are – both mentally & physically – the easier it will be for you to cope with the ever-changing demands of your life as a single mother.

Keeping healthy not only means being active and eating right, it means giving yourself time out and opportunities for fun and support. It means looking after yourself physically and mentally so that you have the 'emotional fuel' to look after your children. It's also reaching out for the help that you need.

Being healthy is good role modeling for your children too. While you will need to cut corners sometimes, continuing to do so over the long-term can impact on your health, wellbeing and ability to parent. It's much better for your children if you keep your own needs in mind.

Your children's health

Children are very resilient and will survive periods when their parents are sad, down or not coping well. However, the longer you are upset or depressed by the upheaval of life as a single mother, the greater the risks to your children's health. Everything that you can do to protect or recover your own health is an investment in your children's health and happiness. It's all part of creating a healthy and loving environment for your children, and modelling healthy habits for them too.

YOUR HEALTH

Healthy food gives you the fuel to get things done and the energy to make things enjoyable. Look at the *Go For Your Life* website for healthy eating and recipes, and lots of simple things you can do with your kids to put a good meal on the table on a small budget.



FACTS & FIGURES

People who exercise regularly are generally less anxious and less depressed. A little moderate exercise every day can help beat the blues.

Physical activity keeps you physically and mentally fit:

- Feel-good chemicals (called endorphins) released in your brain from physical exercise give you a natural high
- You feel a greater sense of control
- You are temporarily distracted from your worries
- You have more energy and you sleep better
- Your self-esteem, body image and self-confidence are improved

Small steps towards good health

- Build physical activity into your day – every little bit makes a difference.
- Walk as much as you can. Get off the train or tram one stop early so you can walk part of the way, or join a walking group.
- Go harder and faster with your normal daily activity to give your heart an aerobic workout. For example, when you walk, pick up the pace a bit. Walking the kids to school might be slow, but you can go faster on the way back. If you get keen, you could time yourself and set goals. The same applies to housework.
- Take part in activities with your children, whether it's pushing the swing or playing with a ball at the playground, or playing an energetic game of hide and seek.



As one single mother from the *Raising Children* reader survey wrote: "For many women, the toll on their mental health from having to cope with a marriage breakdown and then raise children without support is immense." Seek counselling and support if you are feeling blue or have any concerns about your mental health.





getting the support you need

PARENTS WHO GET THE SUPPORT THEY NEED ARE GENERALLY MORE RELAXED & HEALTHIER

Support can come in the form of practical help to lighten the work load, or emotional support to help you cope with parenting alone.

WHERE CAN I FIND SUPPORT?

Make new links in your local area

Community groups may help you make fresh connections in your neighbourhood. Local papers, councils and libraries often have information about local groups. Neighbourhood houses, playgroups, toy libraries and the maternal and child health nurse can also be valuable sources of support and advice.

Make connections with other parents

Having children is a ticket to getting involved in the community and making new friends at first-time parent groups, playgroups, kindergarten, school or sporting and leisure centres.

Support groups Groups for single parents can be especially helpful for sharing ideas, feelings and experiences with others in the same boat. Support groups also exist for parents who have children with a disability or chronic illness.

Get connected to the internet

The internet is a great place for information about support services. Local libraries offer free access to the internet. Libraries and neighbourhood houses also run internet courses.

Green PC sells refurbished computers and provides low-cost internet access and support to families on low incomes.

Connecting to online forums, chatrooms & social networking sites

Going online can help you get connected with other single mothers from Australia and around the world. Many single parent groups have forums or chatrooms connected to their sites.

- A forum is like a noticeboard: someone posts a topic and others can contribute to the discussion.
- A chatroom allows you to type in messages in 'real time' to others who are online at the same time.
- Social networking websites, like *Facebook* and *MySpace*, give you a chance to network with individuals and join groups.

WHAT KIND OF SUPPORT DO I NEED?

Quality not quantity It makes no difference whether you have a few close friends or a large group of friends. Both are equally as good for your emotional health and wellbeing, as long as you feel you're getting the support you need.

Giving & receiving support

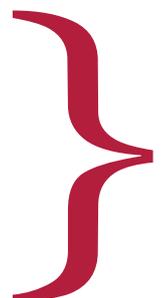
Reaching out for support can be hard. Saying yes when support is offered can also be hard. You might feel like you should be able to cope on your own, or that you are putting people out. But people like to help out, and it's actually good for them. When you give and receive support, you get extra benefits, like feeling good and forgetting about your own problems for a while, and seeing things in a different light.

Not all support is good for you

People who are critical or unhelpful or even hostile can have a bad effect on your self esteem. Don't hesitate to cut off ties in situations that are causing you distress. Counselling services can help you talk this through.

Developing new friendships

Friendships change and can get lost in the process of separation and divorce. It can be harder to stay in touch with friends who don't have children when your child care duties have increased. Finding ways to keep in touch with people and developing new relationships is good for you and your family.



“I have the endless support of my family and friends, which has become one of the most valuable resources in getting over the separation and facing the future as a single parent.”

“At times the being on your own is exhausting and overwhelming. There is no-one to celebrate the achievements and share the disappointments ... With each day you come to realise that you need family and friends around for support, encouragement and a sounding board.”

“Without the respite I would not have been as calm a caregiver as I have managed to be. Isolation and children is a bad mix for any caregiver.”

“It’s enjoyable when you are getting enough sleep and support but the constant changes and shared parenting mean that everything is not how I would have it. It is also fine to have support but I am at the stage where I am starting to feel bad for asking for help because people have been helping me ever since my husband left 2 years ago.”

“Regardless of any other differences or similarities, no-one understands being a single mum like another single mum.”



Support makes it easier to deal with the ups and downs of family life and to feel more confident as a parent.



FACTS & FIGURES

Parents who get support use more positive parenting strategies, are better able to cope and are more consistent in parenting decisions.





your
children's
dad





when dad is involved

DAD MAY HAVE A DIFFERENT PARENTING STYLE FROM YOU

This might take some getting used to, especially if it involves different values or beliefs.

As long as your children are safe and secure, then different approaches and styles can work – they can even help your children to understand that different rules apply for different situations. One way of dealing with this is to think about the difference between a preference (*I don't like my two-year-old eating sweet biscuits*) and an essential parenting practice (*My child needs insulin*).

For some dads it might take a little time to get the hang of a one-on-one relationship with their children, especially if they have not been the main carer. They might need to learn practical care on the job. Some dads might also want to be involved by visiting the child care centre or kindergarten, maternal and child health service, attending parent teacher evenings or getting copies of notes and records.

When dads live at a distance, children will still benefit from regular email, phone and letter contact. Dads might also like to receive drawings or photos of your children. Whatever the level of involvement, children benefit when dad is up-to-date with their interests and keeps in communication.

If it's not possible to make plans or share decisions with the children's dad, or if agreements are consistently broken, some contingency plans will help your children:

- Have a plan in place for the times that dad might cancel or not turn up for an access visit.
- Protect your children from any heated discussions or arguments you might have with their dad.
- Encourage your children to develop relationships with other trusted adults – extended family, friends, teachers, neighbours or sport coaches.



FACTS & FIGURES

In Australia, 51% of children from single parent families see the non-resident parent at least once per fortnight.

dealing with conflict

CHILDREN DO ADAPT TO SEPARATION

It's ongoing conflict between parents that hurts them.

When parents disagree they can still use good communication strategies such as listening carefully and speaking to each other respectfully so they can resolve their differences. These strategies are valuable life skills for children.

But when parents use tactics such as fighting, swearing, name-calling, or physical or mental abuse to resolve conflict, this is likely to lead to distress and difficulties for your child.

Tips to protect your children from conflict

- If you have to have a hard conversation with your ex partner, or you think things might get heated, do it somewhere where your children cannot hear you.
- Try to stay polite and respectful in your dealings with your children's dad. Have quick chats in public places, such as your child care centre, kindergarten or children's school or crèche, where it can be easier to stay polite.
- Speak or write to your former partner directly, rather than asking your children to be messengers.
- If it's hard to talk, try using SMS, email, or a shared journal (*a diary or book about your children that travels between houses and includes important information about your children*).
- When you do communicate, keep the focus on your children's accomplishments and needs. Your children will feel reassured knowing that both parents are interested in their wellbeing.
- Avoid asking your children intrusive questions about their dad, or asking them to withhold information from their dad.
- Acknowledge your children's feelings and affection for their dad.
- Share with your children the good parts of the relationship with your former partner.
- Talk to an adult friend, not to your children, about any problems you may be having with their dad.



both parents

KEEPING DAD INVOLVED IN CHILDREN'S LIVES CAN BE ONE OF THE TRICKIEST ISSUES FOR SINGLE MOTHERS

"It is important that children can have the opportunity to establish their own relationship with birth parents. The focus should be on the relationship; not the living arrangement."



"It's good for the boys to see their dad and I need the 'mental peace' to have a break."

"My ex-husband makes a great part time parent ... with the help of his mum and dad whose house they all stay at whenever he has the kids! This is the only way he can cope, but he loves them and they him so it works and gives me a break!"

"Shared parenting can work provided both parents work together, however, most parents I know who have split up do so because they disagree about many things, including how they parent. My experience is that as time goes on and both parents move on with their lives, the shared parenting becomes less stressful than it is in the beginning."

"My ex-husband and I ... believe our child's welfare is the biggest priority, so we still communicate regarding continuity of routine, discipline, etc. We may be apart but we are still both his parents."

two homes

KIDS COPE WELL WITH DIFFERENT ROUTINES IN DIFFERENT HOUSES, AS LONG AS THE RULES ARE CLEAR IN EACH HOUSEHOLD & SOME THINGS STAY PREDICTABLE

A place for me Children need a place they can call their own and a space for storing their things in both homes. This can be created even if they don't have their own bedroom.

Be organised Have some basic clothing and personal items in each home to save children from taking things backwards and forwards. When children are young, and even when they get older, they might have a special item/a blanket/ or toy that goes everywhere with them. This item may need to move between homes.

Stay flexible As children grow older, they will have extra school, social and maybe even work commitments. This might make it harder for them to move from one house to another.

Children are different If your children are feeling confused and anxious about moving between two houses, talk to the other parent and try to work out a solution.

Family events Special social and cultural events can be difficult when they are celebrated in two separate homes. Talk to your children about the arrangements in advance and let them know that this is an opportunity for them to maintain their connections with extended family.

When children don't want to be there It is very hard to deal with a situation where your children don't want to go to dad's or come home to you. For some children this may be a temporary feeling that goes away once they are back in routine. For others, such as very young children, separation may be quite traumatic. You might also be dealing with older children who are reluctant to go to dad's because of their busy social calendar.

If you feel that your children are safe and secure, but they are still asking to come home, difficult as it may be, reassure your children that you will be home waiting when they return or will pick them up by a set time. Young children can better understand the passage of time if you refer to familiar events like lunch or dinnertime.

When your children are settled back with you and feeling calm, try to find out why they felt distressed and provide lots of reassurance. If possible, try to work out a solution with your children's father.

You might even need to examine your children's care arrangements to make sure their needs are being met – and remember their needs will change as they grow and mature. If your children's reaction is related to not feeling safe or secure, you will need to get advice and support to see you through these times. Try the [Women's Legal Service of Victoria](#), phone 03 9642 0877 or 1800 133 302.

When your children move from one house to another, they might go through an 'emotional jetlag'. They might be unsettled and grumpy coming back from their other home. The secret is to plan ahead for the unsettled period and allow time where possible to be available to help your children make the adjustment.



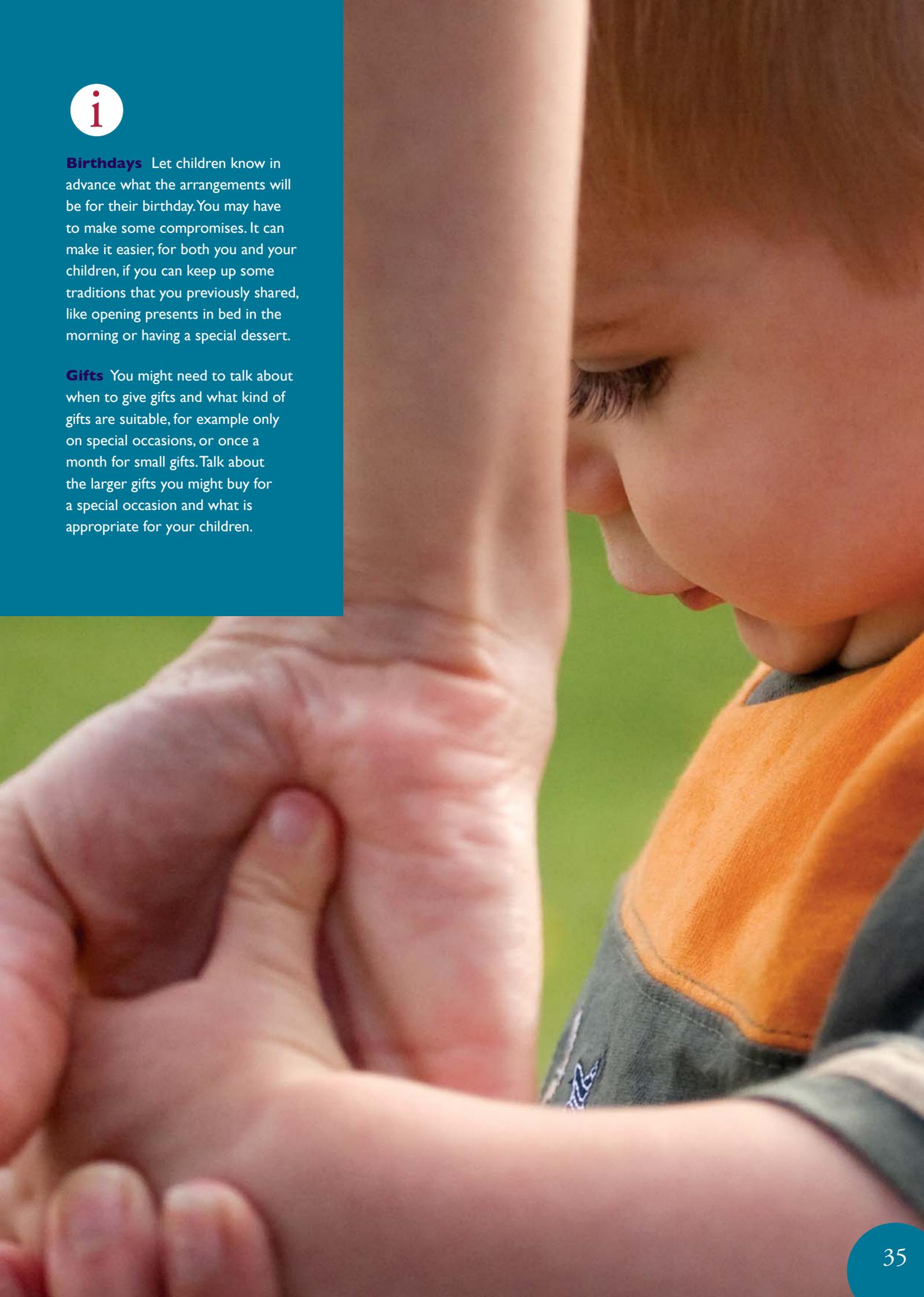
Here are 5 tips to deal with these times and help your children adjust.

- 1 Create routines for when your children come home such as eating a snack together, or looking at future events on the calendar.
- 2 As part of the routine, create an opportunity that always helps your children get back into the ways of your home: for example, they always unpack their bags when they arrive home.
- 3 Give your children a chance to unwind and adjust. Be there for your children and take your cues from them, whether they want to do a quiet activity like read a book, or do something physical like play outside.
- 4 Keep the lines of communication going, but avoid asking too many questions about their time with dad. Your children may want to talk about their time with dad once settled.
- 5 Avoid hand-over times when your children are tired, such as bedtimes.

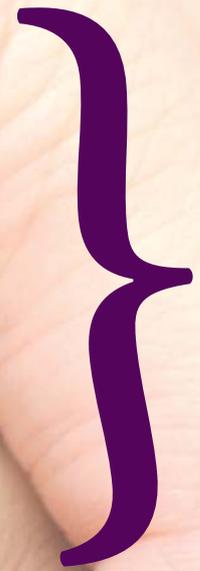


Birthdays Let children know in advance what the arrangements will be for their birthday. You may have to make some compromises. It can make it easier, for both you and your children, if you can keep up some traditions that you previously shared, like opening presents in bed in the morning or having a special dessert.

Gifts You might need to talk about when to give gifts and what kind of gifts are suitable, for example only on special occasions, or once a month for small gifts. Talk about the larger gifts you might buy for a special occasion and what is appropriate for your children.



your
stories



My beautiful daughter turns 10

"I am a single parent to my beautiful daughter who turns 10 in 3 weeks. I separated from her father just after her 1st birthday for a number of reasons. I am currently single, having had one short term relationship since we separated 9 years ago. I love being a Mum, and juggle fulltime work, my university studies and family life very well. Admittedly sometimes things get a little tough, but overall we both do very well. I have a very close relationship with my daughter, and we love spending time together. I don't think we would be as close if I were in a relationship. Also, I think my daughter has learnt a lot of things that children in two parent households may not necessarily learn, and she is certainly more independent, secure and emotionally intelligent than many children I know who live in two parent households. I think we need to focus more on the quality of parenting rather than who is or isn't doing it. Parenting is a difficult role regardless of the family structure."

Being a single mother is easy

"I find that if your children feel safe, secure, loved and in an environment that they trust, that you will have well balanced children. My children show respect for others, understand healthy eating habits, have a good sense of humour and are well behaved most of the time, they are both quite independent and have great personalities. They know the rules and aren't confused or playing me off with anyone else. I find that being a single mum is easy. It is the financial side that is difficult where we are struggling every day to make ends meet and it isn't getting any easier. But that is where our good values in life come from and that is what makes myself and my children better people. Both my children and I are respected members of our community."

I read many parenting books

"What I find the most difficult is that I work really hard to get my kids into a steady routine. I read many parenting books, speak to various professionals about what is best for my kids, make sure they have many others in their life that love them and they feel they can turn to and much more. The problem being that even though their Dad does the best job he is capable of doing, the kids always come back overtired, out of routine and if I have just helped them through a cold or flu during the week, it is usually worse again by the time they come back. Therefore I have to begin my hard work all over again. I feel that their Dad is just their biological father and takes no responsibility in the raising of our children so at the moment I am absolutely exhausted from lack of sleep, an overwhelming sense of responsibility and from trying so hard to make sure that I am doing enough to compensate for their Dad not being around."

An intense relationship

"As a single mum I feel solely responsible for the raising of my child, consequently when things are not working out too good, or my child has bad days, I blame myself or stress about finding solutions. Having no-one else to turn to I have created a plastic bubble in which my child and I now live. The lack of social interaction outside of school, not ever going out after 5pm and constantly having to be switched on to interact with a child is nothing short of maddening. But I feel I can't complain, my child has to put up with just me as well and the two of us create an intense relationship that draws every bit of my emotion and energy."

My saving grace is regular exercise

"It is the toughest job in the universe. I work full-time to continue my career development (although that is in a holding pattern re advancement because I am a single parent), I worry about my future and I try to be very involved with the children and their days and their issues. Home from work is like a whirlwind - homework, cooking, cleaning, talking to kids, getting them to bed, and then to turn around and try to do anything much at 9pm and beyond is very difficult. I am constantly behind with the housework, constantly tired, and yet constantly trying to give the best to work and to the children. It's like being a mouse trapped in a wheel. When I do have time to myself, I'm generally trying to do some of the things that I cannot do with the kids around. What I feel like I should be doing is sleeping for a week! But for my own psychological health, I try to go to the films or catch up with girlfriends. My saving grace is regular exercise which I do at home or at lunchtimes. Without the health and energy benefits of exercise, my lifestyle would be unsustainable, and I often wonder whether it is in any event ...

Being a single parent is truly an exhausting lifestyle, and then when issues regarding the kids are raised, I often lay in bed at night worrying and trying to sort my way through the issues. There are support networks but you can only rely on your friends so much, and not at 1am in the morning. Yet most people would observe that I do a really good job with parenting the children (who are wonderful!) and keeping my life and work together. From my perspective, I feel like I have so many things going through my head from work related details and issues, to substantial issues with the kids, to excursions and notices of this and that from the school, and trying to communicate daily and effectively with the children, I find it difficult to remember a lot of details of things and have to write a lot of stuff down. I could work less which would negatively affect my career even more than taking days off for sick children does and other school commitments interruption to work commitments, but I work to secure my own financial future and to provide financial security for the children."

Support from others is vital

"I believe I am a confident, self assured woman who is a good mother and raising two great people. Believing in my abilities to parent well and make the right decisions for my family helps me to stop questioning myself, thus create a stable environment for my children to grow. I am fortunate to have great support systems in place as this gives me a place to go if needed. Support from others and trusting your own abilities to parent well and make the right choices for your family are vital for any parent, single or not. I also ensure communication between myself, children and their fathers is open, honest and readily available to all."

I am indeed very fortunate

"I was a naive and immature 22 year old, 8 months pregnant in a foreign country when my boyfriend of 12 months left me. I returned home to my parents and noted the negative impact (actual not perceived impact) my 'unmarried status' had upon their social life and standing within the community. The first four months were the hardest, no job, no car, no money, socially isolated and no hope for the future. I was spiralling into the depths of depression. It was by sheer chance that an older friend moved from interstate, who had more liberal views and encouraged me to work night duty at a local hospital, she asked my parents to care for my 4 month old son. I am sure this saved my life and helped make me a better and more capable parent.

I was surprised that there was still stigma attached to sole parenting in the 1980s. I encountered numerous people who were surprised when they found out I had a child as I did not fit the typical 'unmarried mother' stereotype and they were not shy in expressing their opinions about this. I was fortunate to have a very supportive family and my son spent a lot of time playing with my youngest brother who was 13 at the time. They are still very close. My son also spent a significant amount of time with my friends children whilst I was working.

I am concerned that a whole generation of young boys (and girls) are growing up without much contact with their fathers. I believe it is important to have both a male and female influence (and role model) in shaping these young lives, influencing the people they are to become. I have many friends who are single parents both male and female, and I have witnessed the impact, particularly on boys, of being denied a strong role model. This is a concern my friends raise quite frequently as they are dealing with the consequences of a lack of a male role model, lack of attention and closer supervision of their teenagers as they all work long hours and have to juggle the demands of family and home by themselves and the impact that electronic babysitters (play station and the like) have upon their children.

I faced other challenges, my son was dropped at the bus stop at 6.45am, caught a train and alighted three stations later, waited alone for 45 minutes at another bus stop before travelling to school from the age of 9. The school was aware of this and would call me if he did not arrive and my manager would let me go and find him without docking my pay. This happened about 4 times in three years however although infrequent was distressing none the less and the anxiety until 9am was always there in the background. Coming home was straight forward. He would call me as soon as he got in. I would get home from work at 6pm and my son would have the prepared dinner in the oven for me to serve as soon as I walked in the door. Consequently he is a very capable and resilient adult however I still feel a twinge of guilt that he could not have the 'normal' childhood that his classmates and I had. It may be worth surveying adults who have grown up in sole parent families to measure their perceived impact of growing up in this environment.

We did not have money for luxuries. My son could choose one special treat once a month eg movie, Happy meal, take away pizza, visit to the museum etc. We lived from pay to pay and it was not unusual to run out of bread, milk or money a day or two before the next pay. I always ensured his sandwiches for school were made and frozen so he always had lunch. It was only three years ago that my income increased significantly, 35%. Now I have a higher income, I can not afford to join a health fund as I will have to pay a huge excess as I am well over thirty! With an ambitious savings plan and debt reduction strategy in place, I believe it will take years for me to reach financial security.

I have been very lucky to have a supportive family and friends, consistent strong male role models for my son and a lack of parental conflict from early in my son's life. Not many of my friends have been so lucky. My son has turned out to be a caring, capable and well adjusted human being, what more could I ask for? I am indeed very fortunate. Thank you for the opportunity to share some of my experiences."





help

&

support



help & support

THIS SECTION WILL HELP YOU FIND SERVICES THAT CAN SUPPORT YOU

Not all organisations are listed here, so consider going to your local council, single mothers organisation or government helpline to find more resources. A good starting point is your local doctor, maternal and child health nurse or local community health service. Neighbourhood houses are also good 'help and support' points, providing social activities, courses and referrals: your local council, the Raising Children website, or Parentline can point you in the right direction.

Three great contacts for getting information on parenting, looking after yourself and finding other support are:

Parentline

Phone 132 289

Website www.parentline.vic.gov.au

Maternal & Child Health Service

Phone 132 229

Raising Children Network

Website www.raisingchildren.net.au

Parentline

Parentline provides a Victoria-wide telephone counselling, information and support service to parents and carers of children aged from birth to 18 years. Parentline staff are from a wide range of professional backgrounds and have many years experience working with families. Each State and Territory has a parent helpline. See the *Raising Children website* for details.

Parentline's professional counsellors are able to explore a variety of issues that impact on parenting and relationships. Parentline respects the confidentiality and right to privacy of callers.

Parentline staff believe no-one knows their own child like their parents, and parents have many strengths. Parentline is there to assist parents clarify their own strengths, and can also share ideas and insights with parents from their professional experience. They can also provide contact details and referrals to other parenting services and community services across Victoria.

Parentline operates 7 days a week and 365 days a year between the hours of 8am and midnight, Monday – Friday and 10am – 10pm Saturday and Sunday.

Phone 132 289

Website www.parentline.vic.gov.au

Maternal & Child Health Service

The Maternal and Child Health Service is a free service for all Victorian families with children aged 0–6 years. The service offers support, information and advice on parenting, child health, development and behaviour, maternal health and wellbeing, child safety, immunisation, breastfeeding, nutrition and family planning. Parents can also join groups that provide health information, and an opportunity to meet other parents in the local area. Contact your local council for referral to a local service. Telephone support is also available though the Maternal and Child Health line - a 24-hour telephone advice service.

Phone 132 229

The **Raising Children website** has information and support for parenting of children aged up to 8 years. It also has an online forum.

Website www.raisingchildren.net.au

EMERGENCY CONTACTS

Poisons Information Centre

Phone 131 126

Medicines Line is a national service offering telephone advice on prescribed and over-the-counter medications from Monday – Friday, 9am – 6pm.

Phone 1300 888 763

Nurse on call is a telephone health line giving immediate health information and advice 24 hours a day, 7 days a week for the cost of a local call from anywhere in Victoria. Calls from mobile phones may be charged at a higher rate.

Phone 1300 606 024

Ambulance Victoria provides ambulance services to metropolitan and country Victoria. You are covered for services if you take out a subscription, have a health care card or are a member of a private health fund that provides cover.

Phone 000 Emergency

Freecall 1800 648 484 Membership

Freecall 1800 248 859 First Aid

Website www.ambulance.vic.gov.au

The Salvation Army provides emergency accommodation and crisis services for women who are homeless or have experienced domestic violence.

Freecall 1800 627 727 Crisis Help

Website www.salvationarmy.org.au

Translation & Interpreting Service

Phone 131 450

CONNECTING WITH SINGLE MOTHERS

Council of Single Mothers & their Children

is a statewide community organisation run for and by single mothers and their children. They provide telephone support and counselling, referral and advice to single mothers throughout Victoria. Telephone interpreters are available.

Phone 03 9654 0622 Support

Phone 03 9654 0327 Administration

Freecall 1800 077 374 for country callers

Website www.csmc.org.au

Email csmc@csmc.org.au

The National Council of Single Mothers

is a self-help group set up to fight for the basic and essential rights of all sole parent families. The Council was formed to act as a national voice for

the existing network of state based councils in Australia. It offers an online chat forum where mothers can share stories, information and provide support and an email discussion list. The website has information regarding child support, fact sheets and links to other relevant websites.

Website www.ncsmc.org.au

Prisms is a national organisation providing support and resources to independent single mothers after separation. They also have an online forum and an advice section with information written by experts on a range of relevant legal and parenting topics.

Website www.prisms.com.au

Parents without partners is a nation-wide organisation offering a range of benefits for members, including access to a bi-monthly magazine, member forums, and social activities run for parents and their children. Membership is open to mothers and fathers who are widowed, separated, divorced or never married, regardless of custody arrangements.

Phone 03 9852 1945

Website www.pwpaustralia.net

SingleParentdom is a free online network run by single parents. It offers stories of inspiration, links to relevant websites, and a list of local single parent groups.

Website www.singleparentdom.com

The **Single Parent Australia** website provides access to online forums so you can chat online to other single parents, including single mums, mums to be and working single parents.

Website www.singleparentaustralia.org.au

The **One Parent Family** is an online forum for single parents to communicate about a range of topics.

Website www.theoneparentfamily.yuku.com

FINANCIAL, LEGAL & HOUSING

Centrelink has information on and services for financial and other forms of support from the Australian government.

Phone 132 850 Employment Services

Phone 136 150 Family Assistance Office

Website www.centrelink.gov.au

Child Support Agency (CSA)

is an Australian government agency with information and services for child support payments. It also has a list of free community information sessions and a number of relevant publications that can be downloaded or ordered as hard copies.

Phone 131 272

Website www.csa.gov.au

CSA Community Services

Directory allows parents to locate local services that can provide assistance with a range of family issues including counselling, legal advice, housing and health.

Website <http://csd.csa.gov.au>

The Victorian Legal Aid Service

provides legal support and advice.

Phones are open from 8:45am – 5:15pm, Monday – Friday.

Phone 03 9269 0120

1800 677 402 for country callers

Website www.legalaid.vic.gov.au

Women's Legal Service of

Victoria offers free telephone advice 10am – 1pm, Monday; 6:30pm – 8:30pm, Tuesday and Thursday; and 2pm – 5pm, Wednesday. A drop-in service also operates 9:30am – 12pm, Thursday. They also offer a court service for intervention orders at the Melbourne Magistrates Court from 9am – 1pm, Monday – Friday.

Phone 03 9642 0877

Freecall 1800 133 302 for country callers

Email justice@vicnet.net.au

Women's Information & Referral Exchange (WIRE)

offers information, support and referrals for women, as well as free computer classes and a job club for women who wish to build skills. The phone support service is open from 9am – 5pm, Monday – Friday, and the walk-in service from 10:30am – 5pm, Monday – Friday.

Phone 1300 134 130

Website www.wire.org.au

Visit Ground Floor, Queen Victoria Women's Centre, 210 Lonsdale Street, Melbourne

COUNSELLING & SUPPORT

Parentline

Phone 132 289

A Victoria-wide telephone counselling, information and support service to parents and carers of children aged from birth to 18 years.

Family Relationships Online

provides all families (together or separated) access to information about family relationship issues, ranging from building better relationships to dispute resolution. You can also ring the *Family Relationship Advice Line* or attend a *Family Relationships Centre*: call the advice line or visit the website to find your nearest centre.

Freecall 1800 050 321 Family Relationship Advice Line

Website www.familyrelationships.gov.au

Lifeline is a national 24 hour counselling service.

Phone 131 114



help & support

COUNSELLING & SUPPORT (continued)

Suicide Helpline

provides 24 hour support.

Phone 1300 651 251

Kids Help Line is a free, confidential and anonymous, telephone and online counselling service specifically for young people aged between 5–25 years.

Freecall 1800 551 800

Website www.kidshelpline.com.au

Beyond blue is a national organisation working to address the issues associated with depression, anxiety, and substance misuse. It provides information about symptoms, and where to get help, including information on postnatal depression.

Infoline 1300 224 636

Website www.beyondblue.org.au

PANDA offers support, information and referrals to anyone affected by post and antenatal depression and other mood disorders. The website offers information and fact sheets as well as links to other organisations. The telephone helpline is open from 9:30am – 4:30pm, Monday – Friday.

Phone 1300 726 306

Phone 03 9481 3377 Administration

Website www.panda.org.au

Maternal & Child Health Service

The Maternal and Child Health Service is a free service for all Victorian families with children aged 0-6 years. The service offers support, information and advice on parenting, child health, development and behaviour, maternal health and wellbeing, child safety, immunisation, breastfeeding, nutrition and family planning. Parents can also join groups that provide health information, and an opportunity to meet other parents in the local area.

Contact your local council for referral to a local service. Telephone support is also available through the Maternal and Child Health line- a 24-hour telephone advice service.

Phone 13 22 29

There are **Mother/Baby Units** in all major hospitals, offering counselling and psychological support to new mothers and their children. Contact your local council for contact details for your local hospital or try the *Raising Children website* www.raisingchildren.net.au.

FAMILY VIOLENCE

Women's Domestic Violence Crisis Service of Victoria is a 24-hour telephone crisis support service, also providing referrals to safe accommodation.

Phone 03 9373 0123

Freecall 1800 015 188

Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention & Legal Service
Freecall 1800 105 303

Enough Campaign A Victorian government website with information on new family violence laws and contact details for those who are experiencing family violence and want to seek help.
Website www.familyviolence.vic.gov.au

Domestic Violence Resource Centre provides referrals and information on domestic violence from 9am – 5pm, Monday – Friday.

Phone 03 9486 9866

Website www.dvirc.org.au

Immigrant Women's Domestic Violence Service is for immigrant women who have experienced domestic violence. It is open from 9am – 5pm, Monday – Friday.

Phone 03 8413 6800

Website www.iwdvs.org.au

Centre Against Sexual Assault (CASA) is a 24-hour telephone crisis support, counselling and information service for people who have been sexually assaulted as adults or as children.

Freecall 1800 806 292

PARENTING SUPPORT & EDUCATION

The **Raising Children website** has information and support for parenting of children aged up to 8 years. It also has an online forum.

Website www.raisingchildren.net.au

Triple P is an internationally recognised parenting training program. The website has information and program locations.

Website www.triplep.net

MyTime is a free support group providing local support for mums, dads, grandparents and anyone caring for a young child with a disability or chronic illness.

Freecall 1800 889 997

Website www.mytime.net.au

LOOKING AFTER YOURSELF

The **Go for Your Life** website provides information about healthy living options, diet, exercise and general wellbeing. Specific sections are provided for teenagers, young adults, seniors, children and families.

Website www.goforyourlife.vic.gov.au

The **Better Health Channel** website offers healthy options for meals and snacks, as well as a recipe search tool. It also contains helpful articles on preparing meals, including cooking tips for busy people.

Website www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au

Gymlink provides a list of local gyms and leisure centres. Many centres offer child care facilities.

Website www.gymlink.com.au

The **Holidays With Kids** website has a section devoted to travel ideas and advice for single parents.

Website www.holidayswithkids.com.au/single_parent_travel

GETTING ONLINE

GreenPC is a service aiming to provide low income earners with internet-ready computers at low cost. To be eligible you need to hold a current health care card or be able to verify your low income.

Phone 1300 306645

Website www.greenpc.com.au

Email vic@greenpc.com.au

Visit Brotherhood of St Laurence Building, 462 Geelong Road, West Footscray

Computerbank offers recycled computers equipped with software. To be eligible, you must have a concession card. They are open from 10am – 5pm, Friday and 1pm – 5pm on Saturday.

Phone 03 9600 9161

Website www.vic.computerbank.org.au

Visit 483 Victoria Street, West Melbourne

WORKING SINGLE PARENTS

Work Savvy Parents is a free website targeted at working parents or parents planning to rejoin the workforce. It provides links to job search resources, workshops, and information regarding government payments and how these may be affected when returning to work.

Website www.worksavvyparents.com.au

Careermums is a national online jobs board, specifically designed to connect mothers with employers who offer flexible work hours suitable for working single parents.

Website www.careermums.com.au





ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This publication was funded by the Victorian Government Department of Education and Early Childhood Development.

Thank you to the Council of Single Mothers and their Children, the advisors to this publication, to Kate West from Prisms, and to the many women who responded to the Raising Children survey.

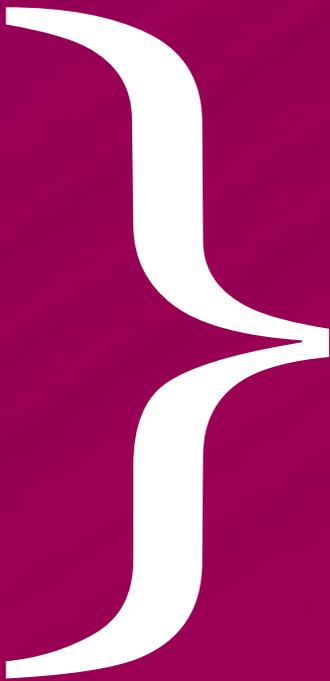


PHOTO CREDITS

iStock, Yazolino Designs: 1

Susan Gordon-Brown: 2-3, 6, 8-9, 12-13, 14-15, 19, 22-3, 27, 30

Nayeem Kalam: 21

Mark Stephens: 45

Sabine Schneider: 48

Dreamstime.com: Michelle De Kock cover, Rmarmion 4-5, Photoeuphoria 7, Jose Manuel Gelpi Diaz 11, Nikolay Mamluke 17, Yurchyk 25, Nataliya Hora 28-9, Monkeybusinessimages 33, Jason Hawkins 35, Dengyinchai 36-7, Thomas Perkins 38-9, Mikael Damkier 40-41, Guido Cosentino 43, Gordan Poropat 46-7

Thank you also to families and friends of the PRC for sharing such wonderful photos of their children

Designed by Giulia Macario

Produced by the Parenting Research Centre

© Parenting Research Centre 2009

www.parentingrc.org.au

Available from Council of Single Mothers and their Children : phone 03 9654 0327 or email csmc@csms.org.au

