



Single Parenting: Help! I Feel Overwhelmed!

Do you feel you have no control over what happens to you or your family? Have no time in the day for yourself? Try to do too many things? These are all common feelings for single parents. The parenting role is an ongoing, round-the-clock commitment.

Stress and parenting

All parenting involves stress. Some stress can be good. Yet too much stress keeps us from being healthy and happy. For example, too much stress affects our thinking and makes it harder to solve problems.

How we see or perceive an event causes us to feel stressed, not the event itself. If we change how we view an event, we can reduce our stress. For example, your separation or divorce may cause you a great deal of stress. Still, your stress can be reduced if you look at some of the positive parts of this life change. Perhaps you'll decide to go back to school and get the degree you always wanted. Perhaps your children will learn to be more responsible. Perhaps your household will be more peaceful and calm.

Thinking clearly and staying healthy involve managing stress and time. It's important to balance your time and priorities. Also, allow some time for yourself. Check ideas from the list below that could help you manage your stress. Write down on your family calendar what you do each day to manage stress.

- **Exercise.** Develop specific goals. For example, walk 30 minutes, three days a week. Or, do 20 sit ups a day and stretch for 10 minutes.
- **Relax.** Set aside some quiet time to read or plan goals. Even 10 minutes a day can help you relieve stress.
- **Think about how you see and react to events.** Work on having positive attitudes. Write down other ways you could view stressful situations.
- **Don't try to do too many things.** Write down daily and weekly schedules. Do you have enough time for what is most important to you?
- **Develop friendships.** Talk with other parents; join school or community activities.
- **Make time for loved ones.** Share a cup of coffee with a friend, read with your child, talk on the phone, or e-mail a relative.
- **Meditate.** Find a meditation method that fits your own belief system. Many studies show that a daily meditation practice can reduce stress and improve physical, emotional and mental health.
- **Join a yoga class.** Regular yoga practice can improve both physical and psychological health.



Feeling good about yourself

Feeling good about yourself is an important part of being a successful parent. It won't happen overnight. Still, you can work toward being your best by:

- finding out what you enjoy
- identifying your strengths
- learning there are things in life you can't control
- finding time for yourself.

You may want to feel better about yourself in one area of your life. If so, develop a plan to build your skills in that area. The following examples might be helpful.

Physical activities

Goal To make a change in eating habits, exercise, or relaxation.

Plan Eat only healthy snacks between meals. Take a walk at lunch. Soak in the tub on Saturday evenings after the children are in bed.

Interpersonal relationships

Goal To change communication style.

Plan Start to use "I" statements. "I feel worried when you don't call me at work when you get home from school. I think you might be in trouble. Please call me tomorrow when you get home."

Goal To develop more friendships.

Plan Think of activities I would like to do. Join one religious or community group within the next 2 months.

Household chores

Goal To make household chores less stressful.

Plan Try one new recipe every two weeks. Break large tasks into small ones, for example, clean two windows a week rather than trying to clean all the windows at one time.

Parenting

Goal To increase parenting knowledge and spend time with children.

Plan Read to my children at least once a day. Attend a parenting class within the next 3 months. Hold family meetings with my children each week to discuss problems and schedules.

Employment

Goal To be more productive at work.

Plan Set specific goals with my supervisor. Spend 10 minutes or less each day talking to my coworkers. Get to work on time each day.

Personal

Goal To make time for myself.

Plan Do one thing a week I enjoy. Spend at least 10 minutes a day in my garden. Get up 20 minutes earlier each morning so I can watch the morning news on television before I wake the children.

Control issues

At times we all feel that chance decides our future. While there are things in life we can't control, we can manage some. Think carefully about what you can control. What can't be controlled? Write down some the frustrations and difficulties you face in each of the three headings below.

I have much control

For example: *Showing my children I love them through hugs, kisses, and words.*

I have some control

For example: *Making sure my children eat nutritious food.*

I have little or no control

For example: *The relationship my ex-spouse has with his new girlfriend.*

Now look at your list. Do you spend time and energy worrying about things you can't control? Take control over things you can change. Let go of the others.

What can I do to feel loved and valued?

You are certainly important to your children. Still, this isn't the same as having caring relationships with adults. We all need to feel supported. On a piece of paper, write answers to these questions: Who are the people who help you to feel good about yourself? Who reminds you of your strengths and abilities? Who listens to you? Everyone needs to feel appreciated. With many demands and limited time, it's easy not to take the time to think about these questions. But, single parents must build friendships into their lives. Their emotional needs must be met so they can meet the needs of their children.

Taking care of myself

Taking care of yourself is necessary for successful single parenting. A recent study found that successful single parents do the following things.

- *Accept responsibility and challenges.* Successful single parents have positive attitudes. They focus on solutions to problems, not the problems. They accept and handle their feelings of anger in positive, nonviolent ways.
- *Make parenting a priority.* Children are a very important part of life. Successful single parents know the needs of their children and what to expect of their children at different ages. They try hard to meet the needs of their children.
- *Use consistent, nonpunitive discipline.* Successful single parents focus on teaching their children, not punishing them. They provide rules children can obey.
- *Have open communication.* Successful single parents share what they think and feel with their children, family, and friends. They talk often with others, such as with teachers and child care providers.
- *Respect each family member's personality and special interests.* Successful parents recognize and help develop each child's interest or skill.
- *Take care of themselves.* Successful parents take care of themselves with exercise, healthy eating, enough sleep, quiet times and talking with friends.
- *Have traditions.* Family times, holidays, birthdays, and vacations are all special times for a family celebration.

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