



Single Parenting: Common Questions Parents Ask

***I never have enough money to buy the things I want for my children.
How can I make ends meet?***

You may not have much extra money for special clothes or toys, but you can manage. First, decide if the item, for example a particular type of sneakers, is important and necessary. If it is, work on a plan for you and your child to start saving for it. This will help your child learn that it takes time to save enough money to buy something.

Another important step is to make a budget. List all your expenses on a monthly basis, for example rent, food, gas, electricity, childcare. This will help show where you spend your money. You can call your UNH Cooperative Extension County Office and ask about programs on money management to learn how to take control of your financial situation.



I feel guilty for not accomplishing more - the house should be picked up, we all should eat dinner together, I should go to Tommy's soccer games, I should stay late at work. I just don't know what to do.

Don't worry about perfection. Instead, keep in mind your child's needs and your own needs. Make running the household as enjoyable as possible. Complaining about what has to get done won't help.

Your children can do certain jobs around the house, depending on their ages. As they contribute to the family they develop a sense of being valuable.

Learn to laugh at yourself. For single parents, having a sense of humor and a positive attitude are important to feeling successful.

How can I find time for myself when I can never catch up with all the household things that have to get done?

It's important to make some time for yourself, even if it doesn't seem like there is time. Everyone functions better when they have some quiet time or time to exercise or socialize.

Decide to set some time aside just for yourself. Create a plan to make it happen. Write down what is important to you. Then, write down your schedule. Are you making time for the important things? Remember, children benefit when their parents are relaxed and happy. Make an effort to be a positive influence in your child's life.

I've tried using logical consequences for disciplining my teen but nothing seems to be working. What should I do?

Sometimes teens will test a parent's limits to see what they can get away with. Even though it might be easier to give in "just this once," stick to the behavior guidelines you've set.

Take the time and think about why your child might be misbehaving. What else is going on in your child's life right now? Did she have a difficult day at school?

Depending on the age of your child, he might be searching for her independence by testing your limits. Help develop ways for him to feel independent. For example, encourage a special hobby or activity. Or allow him to take on more responsibility for a family task. Help him become involved in a community project or volunteer work.

I know I'm supposed to try and get along with my former spouse for the children's sake, but I think I'm going to lose it—everything seems to make me so angry! What should I do?

If you're worried you're going to blow up at your former spouse, it's important to stay aware of your feelings. If you become angry, quickly take a breather and remove yourself from the situation if possible. No one should act when they are angry or upset.

Maybe you need a break from seeing your former spouse. Is there a neutral adult who can help provide a smooth link between your household and your former spouse's home?

Maybe you need to find some quality time for yourself. Is there someone who could watch the children so you can have some time for yourself or time with your friends?

Find a friend or someone to talk with about your feelings. Explore what is bothering you. Is it something that is beyond your ability to control? Brainstorm with another parent ways to deal with your anger.

Maybe after seeing your former spouse, you can write down your feelings. Then when you aren't so angry, read what you wrote and think about why you felt that way. Write down things beyond your control and things you *can* influence. Concentrate on the things that you *can* influence. For example, you can control your attitude and behavior and establish clear guidelines for your children.

Sometimes it helps to write down positive ways to handle your emotions. For example, you can exercise, take a walk with a friend, cook, garden or do some woodworking. After you write them down, put some of your own suggestions into practice.

How should I talk with my teenage son so he will listen to me? He always listened to his father more than he did to me. But now his father isn't around and I just don't know what to do.

Most teens don't talk a lot with their parents. Try to keep communication channels open by talking about things that interest your son. Show respect for your teen and respect his privacy and struggles. Choose your battles and think about what is really important. Look for positive male role models for your son—maybe neighbors, older cousins or other relatives. Continue to monitor your son. Know where he is, whom he's with, how he got there, and how and when he'll get home.

My two children are always fighting with each other. I'm running out of things to do with them.

Depending on the ages of your children, you may need to help direct their time and energy into specific, separate activities or hobbies. Watch and listen for clues to what your children enjoy. Maybe one child likes to draw and one likes to play sports. Encourage their interests.

Remember that children will act like children and may fight just because it is something to do. Sometimes they may fight with each other to get your attention.

Take time to praise them when they do something to help you such as clearing the table or helping you carry in the groceries. Try to ignore their misbehavior if they're not hurting each other. Remember to pay attention and spend time with your children when they are behaving.

What can I do? I'm worried that my teenager could be using drugs.

Remember we can't control teens' use of drugs, but we can influence them in ways that will make it less likely they will use drugs. You can help to educate your teen about the dangerous effects of drug use. Use magazine articles or TV programs to open communication. Contact local agencies in your area to get written information.

Teenagers have a desire for challenges. You can help to create positive challenges in activities such as team sports, bicycling or volunteer projects.

Establish clear guidelines that emphasize your need to know where your kids are when they're away from home for extended periods. Talk with other parents and agree on certain issues such as beginning/ending times for parties and a no-drugs-or-alcohol policy.

When your teen comes home at night, be awake but don't grill him. Be aware of the symptoms of drug and alcohol use. Confront your teen when you see specific behaviors you are concerned about. For example, if your son's grades have recently gone down, if he has difficulty concentrating and can't remember things, or if he spends unexplained time away from home, confront your son.

Teach your sons and daughters that drug or alcohol use loosens sexual inhibitions and can cause them to engage in sexual behavior that violates their own standards. Learn about and discuss with your teens the new tasteless, odorless drugs that can be slipped into innocent drinks like juice or soda and are often implicated in date rapes.

Remember to stay calm, especially when you suspect your teen of using alcohol or drugs. Becoming angry will not help the situation and could alienate your teen. Seek help from your teen's school or your local community mental health agency, which will have a licensed drug and alcohol counselor on staff.

Al-Anon, a worldwide support group for relatives and friends of problem drinkers, helps many parents of teens or other loved ones with alcohol or drug problems. There are no dues or fees for membership. Meetings are anonymous; people hold in confidence who they see and what they hear during meetings. To find the times and locations of Al-Anon meetings near you, call toll-free 1-877-825-2666.

Where can I find more information about single parenting?

Most bookstores and libraries have books about single parenting. Here are some suggestions:

The Single Parent's Almanac: Real World Answers to Your Everyday Questions by Linda Foust. This easy-to-use guide offers smart advice and sound solutions for building a happy, healthy family on your own.

Single with Children by Caryl Waller Krueger. Krueger uses case studies that contain helpful suggestions about how other single parents actually cope, plus real-life stories of single parents, examples of successful single parenting, and how-to suggestions for getting it all done.

The Single Parent Resource by Brook Noel and Arthur C. Klein. This handbook covers the most important concerns of single parents throughout the country, economically presenting the issues and lavishing tips, techniques, and strategies gaining mastery over them.

Other resources:

Single Parents Association - The goal is to help single parents with their busy lives and help raise healthy and happy children. To receive a free newsletter call (623) 581-7445. Mailing address is Single Parents Association, 4727 East Bell Road Suite #45-209, Phoenix, AZ 85032. <http://www.singleparents.org/>

Parents Without Partners focuses on the social, educational, and advocacy needs of single parents. Call (561) 391-8833 for information about joining or establishing a chapter in your area. Mailing address is Parents Without Partners International, Inc., 1650 South Dixie Hwy., Suite 51, Boca Raton, FL 33432, 561-391-8833, <http://www.parentswithoutpartners.org/index.htm>

Sources:

UNH Cooperative Extension. Family Focus Parenting Curriculum.

Foust, L. (1996). *The single parent's almanac: Real world answers to your everyday questions*. Rocklin, CA: Prima Publishing

New Hampshire Community Mental Health Offices

All: Area Code 603

Region I

Northern NH Mental Health & developmental Svcs.

Tel: 447-3347

Region II

West Central Behavioral Health Services

Tel: 448-0126

Region III

GENESIS Behavioral Health

Tel: 524-1100

Region IV

Riverbend Community Mental Health Center

Tel: 228-1551

Region V

Monadnock Family Services, Inc.

Tel: 357-6878

Region VI

Community Council of Nashua, Inc.

Tel: 889-6147

Region VII

The Mental Health Center of Greater Manchester

Tel: 668-4111

Region VIII

Seacoast Mental Health Center, Inc.

Tel: 431-6703

Region IX

Behavioral Health & Developmental Services of Strafford

Tel: 749-4015

Region X

CLM Behavioral Health Systems

Tel: 893-3548

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Milford

(603) 673-2510

Goffstown

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Carroll

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Merrimack

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(603) 796-2151

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