

SINGLE PARENTS: strategies for success



Being a single parent can be stressful. After all, raising a child is tough work! Without someone else to share the load, things may feel twice as hard.

The U.S. Census Bureau says 11 million households with kids under age 18 have a single parent. These tips can help you and your children lead happy and healthy lives, together:

- **Let your kids talk.** Have a family meal or some time each day to talk with your kids. Ask them about school and activities. Young children may appreciate some quiet playtime with you or reading a book together. Let them talk about their feelings, both positive and negative ones.
- **Get support.** Family, friends and support groups can be very helpful for single parents. Talking to other adults is a great way to get helpful advice and lower your stress level.
- **Don't worry about buying "things" for your kids.** Most kids just want time with their parent. Your attention is one of the best gifts you can give them.
- **Find good child care.** You may need some time for yourself, away from your kids. A reliable babysitter or daycare is a great way to give you a break from caring for your kids. Try a new hobby, take a walk, or go out with a friend when you get the chance.
- **Keep a schedule.** As much as possible, keep each day close to the same schedule. A consistent bedtime, wake time and meal times can help kids feel secure. Kids like routine because they know what happens next.
- **Don't turn to your kids for support.** It can be hard when you feel like you need to talk to someone about your feelings. You may be tempted to say things to your kids about work stress or your former spouse or partner. Avoid this, as it adds stress and worry to a child's mind. Try to keep it to yourself and "vent" to an adult friend instead.
- **Work on discipline with your former spouse or partner.** Having the same rules and parenting strategy is important if kids spend time at more than one house. Try to talk with your child's other parent about ways you can work together to raise healthy and confident kids.
- **Keep an eye on your mental well-being.** If you are feeling helpless or hopeless, or if you have anxiety or panic attacks, talk to your doctor. Your mental health is an important part of taking on the stress of being a single parent.

Source: American Academy of Pediatrics