

PRESSING ON...

"I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus." Philippians 3:14



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Single Parenting STRESSES

by Joy Bocanegra, MA, LCPC

Single parenting can feel heavy and overwhelming without a partner to share the load. So much responsibility. So many concerns. It's hard, but it can be done and done well. Let's look at some ways to lighten the load and manage stress.

Letting go of Worry

This is a good place to look to God. Bring him your worries and concerns and ask for help. He loves you and wants you to come to him. Zephaniah 3:17 says, "The Lord your God is with you, he is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing." Think about that. He takes great delight in you and rejoices over you with singing. Let that soak in and feel his love. You are not alone. He is with you and wants to help you. Whether it's a discipline issue, health concern or lack of after school care, pray about it and look for his provision. He answers prayer in all sorts of ways, so be open to creative solutions. Set aside a few minutes to think about what you can do about a specific concern and jot down any ideas that come to mind. Do the things you can do and then turn everything else over to God.

Prioritize

If you're feeling like there is too much to do and not enough of you, it's a good idea to prioritize and simplify. Don't expect yourself to be a superhero. As human beings, we all have limitations and that is by God's design, so it's good. Ask yourself what the top priorities are and rank things in order. Meals are important but they don't need to be elaborate. To save time, try cooking less often and making larger portions when you cook, so you'll have leftovers for later in the week. Bedtime stories and cuddling are more important than a spotless house so let something go and give yourself grace. When you've got several things of equal importance think about what could wait and what really can't. Spreading things out through the week or month will help things feel more manageable.

Delegate

Giving your children age appropriate chores helps them and you. They learn life skills and take on beginning responsibilities and you have less to do. For example, younger kids can help with sorting laundry, folding clothes or setting and clearing the table. They can put their toys and other belongings away when they are finished with them. As they get older, dishes, vacuuming and taking out trash might be chores you give them.

Take Care of Yourself

Practicing good self-care is imperative. Like giving yourself the oxygen mask first on the airplane, you need to take good care of yourself and then you will be better able to parent.

- **Recovery Work** - Whether divorce or death brought you into single parenting, doing the work of recovery helps you process your pain and loss. This is important to your health and well-being. When we don't process our emotions, they tend to cause problems in our health and in our relationships. Individual counseling, reading books, and journaling are all means of help in recovery work. Support groups can be helpful too. Check with churches and hospitals for divorce recovery or grief groups in your area.
- **Relax and De-stress** - Time alone to get centered is hugely important. Take ten or fifteen minutes each day wherever you can fit it in. First thing in the morning or after kids are in bed may be good times. Sit quietly and begin with your eyes closed taking three or four slow, deep breaths. Breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth. Pay attention to how the air feels in your nostrils and in your chest. Notice any sounds or smells. What is your body saying to you? How do you feel? Journal thoughts and feelings. Talk with God about those thoughts and feelings. If you are able to be in nature when you do this it adds its own calming element.

- **Eat Healthy** - Make fueling your body important and choose nutritious foods like fruits, vegetables and proteins. Don't skip meals!
- **Sleep** - You may be tempted to burn the candle at both ends, but if you do, you'll get burned. Sleep is extremely important to our overall health. You will feel better, think more clearly and are less likely to get sick when you get proper rest.
- **Exercise** - You don't have to go to a gym to exercise. Walking, biking and swimming are good exercises. Borrowing work out DVD's from your library or finding work outs on YouTube are low-cost ways to exercise. Exercise is not only good for your body but it helps the brain work better so you think more clearly. Endorphins are released when we exercise which elevate the mood.

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Marital Therapy ...Alone?

"The more you invest in your marriage, the more valuable it becomes." ~ Unknown

■ by Debi Mitchell, MS, LMFT

"Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better. It's not." ~ Dr. Seuss

Many people greatly desire to improve or save their marriages. They know traditional marital therapy won't occur but hesitate to voice this in individual therapy. Eventually, the question echoes: "Will marriage therapy help if my spouse won't come?"

Any successful therapy depends on multiple factors. Individual marital therapy's success increases significantly when we choose our committed will, concentrated thoughts, and changed behaviors.

Committed Will

We tend to judge commitment by our spouses' willingness to attend counseling. We need to be careful, though. We can be committed and unwilling- or unable- to attend. Generally, this stems from two different types of commitment:

- Courageous
- Confining

Courageous Commitment

Google dictionary gives many synonyms for one type of commitment including *dedication, devotion, loyalty, and faithfulness*. This type of commitment runs deep. Do we dedicate ourselves to our marriage and spouse—spirit, soul, and body—even when we are unhappy? Do we faithfully demonstrate loyalty to our spouse, even when others make fun of traits we don't even like?

Some consider this commitment level silly, but I consider it courageous. In the story of Jesus walking on the water (Matthew 14:22-34), courage describes Peter stepping out of the boat. Peter ignored the storm to walk on water; I imagine the other disciples thought Peter's level of commitment was foolish. Marital therapy works best when both

commit courageously to the marriage and each other, even when only one attends.

Confining Commitment

For some, courageous commitment morphs into another type of commitment. Merriam Webster's online dictionary describes it as "an engagement or obligation that restricts freedom of action." In other words, courage transforms into a ball and chain. It becomes resentment-building work.

What about when one spouse courageously commits while confining commitment describes the other spouse? Confining commitment affects our spouse's will and supplies little motivation to work. As long as we ourselves have courageous commitment, we slowly help our spouse increase both the belief in and the will to work on our marriage.

Concentration of Thoughts

According to Dictionary.com, "concentrate" means "to focus one's thoughts." The game *Concentration*

involved flipping two cards, trying to make the most matches. We focus on the details of each cards placement. Our moves affect their moves and vice-versa, but we cannot control which cards our opponents will choose to flip. Marital interactions imitate that game.

Peter began walking on water by focusing on Jesus. He ignored the storm and howling winds. Like Peter, though, we begin to sink when we change our focus from our calling to the crashing waves surrounding us.

Individual marital therapy focuses on what WE can control, namely our own thoughts and behaviors that contribute to the marital problems. In his book *Messed up Men of the Bible*, Dave Samples noted, "After...thirty years of marriage, I've concluded that the only thing I can control is my attitude. Everything else is fantasy...A sure sign of when I'm trying to control things, people, or circumstances is that I get frustrated, develop a bad attitude, and usually end up angry."

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- **Take time with other adults** - Every parent needs a break from children. Time with other adults can help you feel recharged. Meet a friend for coffee or participate in a small group or class you are interested in. Doing things you enjoy helps reduce stress.

Single-parenting is difficult and filled with many stressors but using the strategies above can help you feel calmer and more confident about your role as a single-parent. You'll be better able to do what you need to do and enjoy life along the way. ■



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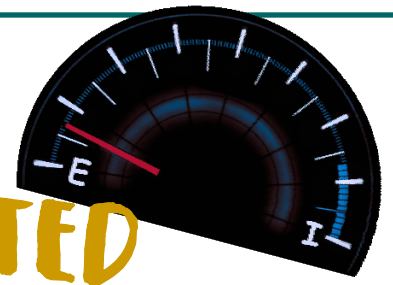


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Parenting Introverted vs. EXTROVERTED Children



■ by Katie DeYoung, MA, LCPC, LMHC

Parents, have you ever experienced the following thoughts: I wonder if my daughter is spending too much time in her bedroom, should I be worried? I am concerned because my son is constantly engaged in some sort of activity and is unable to just sit and be by himself. These concerns reveal a fear that a child may be experiencing developmental or emotional issues. Rather than seeing excessive time spent in one's room or the inability to be alone as automatic cause for concern, I would like to point out the possibility that these behaviors may stem from a child's personality.

Having a better understanding of the personality traits of extroversion and introversion will provide some clarity on the above-mentioned concerns and situations. These specific traits are helpful in learning about how people see their world and also how people are best able to recharge. Thankfully God did not create everyone the same; he created various personality traits in order for his creation to glorify him and show him to the world in countless amazing ways. In hopes of providing a useful parenting resource, this article will define the traits of extroversion and introversion and then will apply this information as it relates to one's own personality and parenting style.

Extroversion

Society today often compares extroverts with being a kind, fun, and outgoing group of people. As a result of this stereotype, I feel that extroversion can be seen as a "healthy" trait that many individuals seek to acquire. While this comparison may give an accurate description of some extroverts, it fails to address the core issues. Putting aside these assumptions and stereotypes, here is what you need to know about the extroverted child.

- An extroverted child pays attention to his outer world.
- When emotionally drained, an extroverted child recharges by being around family and friends.

This social aspect provides a necessary component to figuring out what makes this particular child thrive. On the opposite end of the spectrum, having "alone time" can prove to be very tiring for the extroverted child.

Introversion

On the other hand, the word "introversion" has an entirely different implication. The assumption is that introverts are quiet, withdrawn individuals who refrain from social interactions at all cost. More dramatically, it may be that introverts are seen as socially awkward or social outcasts. Putting aside these connotations, let's unravel the truth about introverts.

- An introverted child focuses on his/her inner world.
- Alone time is where the introverted child rests and gets re-energized for the day ahead.

Personal engagement (being in their own head) is a way for introverts to flourish in their personalities. With this said, it can be draining for the introverted child to interact with a group of people (small or large). This does not mean that introverted children hate spending time with family; it may just be tiring for their personality.

Now What?

To varying degrees, one of these personality traits is present within all individuals of all ages. As a parent, it is important to recognize which personality trait you most identify with as a way to better understand yourself, recognize how you view the world and know what is needed for you to re-energize. I also want to make clear the fact that no trait is better than the other. There is no right or wrong way to approach life as it relates to extroversion and introversion.

With that said, parents need to identify where on the spectrum of extroversion and introversion they fall into. With their own personalities in mind, parents can best move forward into gaining a clearer view of their children's behavior. It may be tempting to parent your child out of your personal feelings and experiences as an extrovert/introvert. However, doing so will not benefit your child. Be a learner of your child and allow them to flourish in their own unique personality. The beauty of this "flourishing" can be seen, for example, in Christian men and women who have owned their personality traits and have become great preachers (more extroverted) and writers (more introverted). Everyone has a role to perform in the body of Christ and our personality traits can uniquely qualify us for certain ones.

Still have concerns? Let me wrap up by sharing some final thoughts. Having a healthy balance between alone time and spending time with other people seems to be the best solution. The Bible speaks to this balance by providing examples of when Jesus performed miracles with large crowds of people, when Jesus fellowshiped with a small gathering of close friends and when Jesus went off alone to pray. Jesus was intentional to spend time alone during the busy years of his ministry. He also did not shy away from breaking bread with hundreds of people. So, encourage your introverted child to participate in family time, recognizing that, although your child may enjoy time with family, it can also be a draining experience. Help your extroverted child in developing the necessary skills he will need to spend time alone.

God has made us all different. Ask yourself these questions. Who are the extroverts in my family? Who are the introverts? How do these personality traits impact my family's dynamics and how each member might flourish? Can some of my previous areas of concern be answered by taking my child's personality trait into consideration? Taking a moment to recognize how God has uniquely shaped you and how he has uniquely created your son or daughter will equip you to help them flourish. ■



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Our Mission Statement

Promoting health and wholeness through professional counseling, consultation and education from a Christian perspective.

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Individual marital therapy works when focusing on accountability and self-change because we control only ourselves.

Change of Behavior

Our actions generally begin for good reasons. Yet as the world changed around us, we continued to respond the same way. Our choices, or habits, gradually become dysfunctional. For example, one-year-olds point and babble when they want something. We know a problem exists when a ten-year-old does the same.



We can commit to our marriages, concentrate on our own contributions to the problems, and still not change. Peter changed, at least a little. He lived because he realized his error, refocused on his solution, and then did something. He called out to Jesus.

Change occurs when we practice our therapy information at home, and I do mean practice. We practice change much like exercise. Few walk into a gym and bench press 200 pounds the first workout. Complete, consistent change occurs with God's guidance and help on a gradual basis-- unless God intervenes with a miracle.

The Bible gives a multitude of reasons and areas for work (Corinthians 4:12-13, 7:32-24; Galatians 6:9; James 1:2-4). A few of these areas include:

- **Demonstrating love** (1 Corinthians 13:1, 1 Peter 4:8)
- **Practicing forgiveness** (Matthew 18:21-22; Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 3:13, 19; 1 Corinthians 13:5)
- **Building good communication** (Proverbs 12:18, 15:1, 18:21; Ephesians 4:15; James 1:19)

Individual marital therapy succeeds because we practice the changes learned: how to love more unconditionally, forgive more fully, and communicate more effectively. And, with God's help, we do these through commitment, concentration, and change.

Warning: After Successful Individual Marital Therapy.

Individual marital therapy's success creates its own issue. When we fail to maintain our self-focus, we can believe our spouses reap the benefits of our efforts. If we allow this belief to fester, resentment builds and gains strength.



It takes two to make a marriage work. Remember that in the end, you both had to commit, concentrate, and change to reap the benefits. ■

Arise, for it is your task, and we are with you; be strong and do it. -- Ezra 10:4

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