



Single Parenting STRESS

■ 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.

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- **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.
- **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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