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## Parenting on your own

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### Summary

- Single parent families are now the fastest growing family type across Australia.
  - Children raised by one biological parent are generally just as happy as children raised by two.
  - Help from extended family and friends can help strengthen any family.
  - Seek support when facing the challenges of single parenthood.
  - Parenting on your own can be rewarding.
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A person can become a single or sole parent for many different reasons. You may have chosen to start a family on your own, you may be separated or divorced, or your partner may have died.

As a sole parent, you may worry about whether you can create the happy, healthy family environment your child needs. The good news is: you absolutely can.

Facts about single parenting:

- Children raised by one biological parent are generally just as happy as children raised by two.
- A sole parent can provide the secure emotional base, clear boundaries, love and warmth that children need.
- Children can thrive with one loving role model.
- Spending time together is the real key to a happy and mentally healthy child.

Family types are increasingly complex. Regardless of whether you're a sole parent, part of a two-parent family, or one of the myriad of diverse family types, you can feel positive about your parenting if:

- you're confident about your parenting most of the time
- you're concerned about being a good parent
- you call on family and friends to support you in your parenting.

There's lots of ways a family can look, and a loving home created by one parent is a perfectly valid one.

### You're not alone – single parenting statistics

Single parent families are now the fastest growing family type across Australia. Over the next 20 years, single parent families are expected to increase by up to 70 per cent.

In 2011, of the 42 per cent of households in Victoria that contained children, just over 10 per cent were single parent households. In 2012 across Australia, 15 per cent of all families contained only one parent – and 81 per cent of these were single mother families.

One reason for the increase in single parent families is the growing number of single women in their 30s starting a family on their own. Other reasons are the more traditional ones: separation, divorce, and death of a partner.

While single mothers are more typical, fathers also parent alone.

### Parenting practices are key

According to the Australian Institute of Family Studies, when it comes to child outcomes, parenting practices are more important than family structure (who's in the family).

Positive parenting practices might include:

- establishing two-way communication that is loving, understanding and patient
  - sharing activities and time together
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- supporting and encouraging each other
- showing affection
- accepting the differences between family members.

Of course, this is not always easy when outside factors, such as support and finances, place pressure on the family dynamics.

## The challenges of parenting on your own

There are many challenges when parenting on your own.

### Managing everything yourself

Apart from money pressures, as a single parent you may find it difficult managing everything on your own. Not having that second pair of hands can be hard. If you're parenting a child with special needs, the demands on your time and energy will be greater.

This is where a strong family or social network can really help. If you're struggling or need a break, could another adult in your child's life step in for a while? Or could you access some **respite care**?

### Being there for your child

Showing warmth and assurance to your child is always important for your child to feel safe and secure. But sometimes it can be difficult when you're on your own, particularly if you're tired at the end of a long day, or you're concerned about making ends meet. It may be especially challenging if you're dealing with your marriage breakdown or partner's death.

You may like to try these tips for making your child feel special and safe.

- **Make everyday moments special** by spending time together while you're doing routine things. Playing games (like eye spy) in the car, talking while hanging out the clothes, or turning the TV off during dinner all contribute to quality time with your child.
- **Show you're interested in your child** by asking them about their favourite books, movies or computer games. Chat about their friends at school or their new hobby. Ask to be shown how they're playing a game.
- **Give lots of positive attention** by showing your delight at seeing your child, smiling and hugging them frequently, and being engaged when they talk to you.
- **Carve out one-on-one time**, even in a busy day. It doesn't have to be long or complicated: you could simply read to your child before bed, or go for a walk together.
- **Give lots of praise and encouragement**, especially if your child is coping with new family arrangements.

### Helping your child adjust

If being a sole parent is a new arrangement for your family because of separation, divorce, the death of a partner, or for other reasons, your child will feel the effects of the change in their home structure. This is especially so if they have to change schools or move house as well. Give your child time and support them to adjust to their new way of life.

Try to spend quality time with your child, and be supportive of their relationships with the other adults in their life. It can help your child to have another trusted adult to talk to – such as a teacher or friend – who can offer support and understanding.

If your family or child has experienced a significant loss or trauma, and you feel they need more support, seek advice and assistance from a parenting helpline, family and relationship service, or your GP.

### Coping with stress

Parenting under stress can be challenging. Maybe you find that you are too strict at these times, or maybe you are too lenient. Try to be kind to yourself and think about how you could handle things better next time.

It isn't easy dealing with stressful situations on your own, and everyone has their breaking point. If at any time you fear you may hurt your child, contact **Lifeline** or a **parenting helpline** for help, and remember, you are not alone.

## Dealing with your own feelings

It's easy to let your adult thoughts and feelings spill out, particularly when dealing with stress (such as financial worries, going through a marriage breakdown, or losing your partner). But it's important to keep adult feelings separate from your child.

Don't involve your child in your problems. They may feel unable to help or anxious. Instead, talk to a friend, family member or a [parenting helpline](#).

## Taking care of yourself

Taking good care of yourself is crucial. **Eat well** and get plenty of **rest** and exercise, even if it's just for 15 minutes a day.

Take time away from your child when you can, to refresh and recharge. Your child needs you to be strong and healthy.

Some other tips for taking care of yourself include:

- Try to stay positive and see the lighter side of life.
- Make times regularly for fun with friends.
- Find ways to manage your **stress**.
- Use your support networks. Don't be afraid to ask for help.
- Explain to your child that sometimes you need adult company.
- If single parenting is new for your family, try not to feel guilty about your new arrangements. Guilt doesn't help anyone or solve anything.
- Take new relationships slowly, and talk to your child about them as appropriate. Listen to how your child feels and reassure them how special and important they are to you.

Read more about [help and support as a single parent](#).

## The rewards of parenting on your own

Single parenting may be challenging, but it also offers rewards. If becoming a single parent was your choice, you may enjoy the freedom of being able to make your own decisions and set your own direction in life.

Single parenting can allow you plenty of time with your child, which can be very beneficial to both of you. Your bond is likely to be strengthened, particularly if you use consistent, positive parenting practices.

## Remember...

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- Seek support when facing the challenges of single parenthood.
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## Where to get help

- [Parenting Research Centre](#) have produced a may be a useful guide to mothering on your own.
- Single fathers may find the [MensLine Australia](#) service valuable.
- [Parentline](#). Tel. 132 289
- [Parenting lines in other states](#).

- **National Council for Single Mothers and their Children** Tel. (08) 8354 3856 or 1800 758 150
- **Relationships Australia** Tel. 1300 364 277
- **WIRE Women's Information** Tel. 1300 134 130
- **MensLine Australia** Tel. 1300 78 99 78

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