

Raising Children Alone

One of life's greatest blessings and sources of joy is being called somebody's parent. But if you find yourself raising children alone, you know better than anyone else that parenting is a job meant for two. That's why Dr. James Dobson calls single parenting "the toughest job in the universe." Few understand the loneliness and emotional hurt many single parents carry or how exhausting the role can be. So, how can you be hopeful and experience joyful success as a parent despite more challenging circumstances?

PRIORITY ONE: Keep your child's best in mind

Every parent is called to lay aside his or her own interests for the children. That calling takes extra commitment when you're going it alone. You may still be working through the painful circumstances that led to becoming a solo parent, or deal with an ex-spouse who is a negative influence on the children, or who tries to turn them against you to cause even more pain.

Regardless of the emotions your specific circumstances may be causing, you are called to place your child's needs above your own. Give them as much stability and nurturing as possible within your limitations— even when they don't seem to appreciate the sacrifice you're making. Be assured, the Lord receives your selfless caring as an act of worship to Him because it reflects the spirit of Christ who "made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant" (Philippians 2).

Being a servant includes doing your best to maintain a Christ-like attitude when you go through the headaches of court appointments, seeing your ex with a new romantic interest, juggling financial challenges, maintaining a home, or having people ask awkward questions about your family.

Putting your children first is also a priority if you don't have custody— if you are limited to small windows of time together. Those times are your opportunity to show love and influence and not to get caught up in disagreements over parenting differences. In your visitation, in your support, and all other connections, your first priority is serving the needs of your children.

PRIORITY TWO: Choose good relationships

Few people understand the load you carry. You're likely to be under stress with extra work and the constant demands of parenting. You know how your loneliness and desire to be loved can lead you toward relationships with the opposite sex that may be harmful, only adding to the uncertainty and anxiety. If you are not ready to marry, be very cautious about dating during this season of life. You want healthy Christian friendships that can help you face this emotional maze and make wise decisions through it all. You need to be a part of a community of believers committed to forgiveness, redemption, and growth. Your children also need the support and modeling of other Christians. God can make your next chapter better than the last.

PRIORITY THREE: Become intentional

Be careful not to see yourself as a "second class" parent. Raising children alone is harder, but the goal is the same for you as it is for two parent families - to nurture Christian faith and values in your children. That means becoming intentional about building a strong relationship, modeling Godly character, and creating occasions for meaningful interaction about life's most important truths. Remember, it is no accident that God gave you the blessing of children. He also is eager to give you the grace to be the parent they need.

GOING FURTHER - Resources

Recommended Book

Successful Single Parenting (by Gary Richmond, a single-parent pastor) provides practical help and Biblical principles for balancing your needs with those of your children.