
SINGLE PARENTING

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Grieving the Loss

Transition to Single Parenthood

Becoming a single parent is a challenging and difficult process regardless of how the situation arises. Even if the alternative to being a single parent is less than desirable, a normal part of becoming a single parent family includes experiencing feelings of loss, anger, sadness, and confusion. While loss and grief are natural parts of life, our society does very little to prepare us for them. It is not unusual for each person in the family to experience the loss of a parent quite differently. Adults in the family will experience the loss of the individual both as a co-parent and partner. Children experience the loss of a parent and also of a defined household. People within a family often experience these emotions with a great deal of intensity particularly in the first year of becoming a single parent family.

Realize that this **process will take time** and give yourself permission to take the time to process and express these emotions (either by talking to friends, journaling, or seeking out support services).

Here are some tips for riding through the grieving process:

- 1) **Children and adults experience and express grief very differently** from each other. Children may appear to be unaffected one moment and then become extremely angry with you the next. This occurs because children do not generally have the same verbal or emotional recognition skills as adults and therefore are not able to identify what they may be feeling. This, in turn, makes it difficult for a child to know what to do to deal with what they are feeling. The more you can talk openly with your children about the feelings you are experiencing the more it will help them identify what they are feeling.
- 2) **Do not date** during this time of loss. Dating or starting another relationship too soon causes

Long Distance Parenting

Staying Connected

There may be times that you will be separated from your children due to a variety of difficult circumstances. If you are faced with a lengthy separation from your children here are some strategies that may help to keep you connected through these rough times. The following ideas are adapted from **Healing Hearts: Helping Children and Adults Recover from Divorce** (by Elizabeth Hickey and Elizabeth Dalton).

Send letters, notes and postcards often. Also give your children a stack of stamped self-addressed envelopes and ask them to write you back.

Write a story for your child using your child's name as the main character. Make the story reflect the positive traits you see in your child.

Use Technology to stay connected:

Invest in a webcam and set up a computer for your child to talk to you over the web. (Can also read a bed time story to your child this way) More frequent contact will help you stay a part of your child's daily routines.

For younger children use a digital recorder to record favourite songs that you have sung together (e.g. fun action songs or soothing lullabies). It is better if you sing the songs yourself. Even if you don't love the sound of your voice, your kids will! Use a digital camera to tape yourself reading a bedtime story that your child likes. Then download the story onto to your computer and either email it to your child or put it on a dvd that your child play at bedtime. Take pictures of your new surroundings and send these to your child to help them still feel part of your life. ♦

confusion for both the adult and children in the situation. Dating also takes time and energy away from allowing yourself to grieve. This is also an opportunity to take time and reflect on what you would like in a future relationship, and how you will know when you have found a partner that you can create this with.

- 3) **Do socialize.** Try not to isolate yourself for extended periods of time. Socializing can take place through a variety of structured and unstructured activities. Read on in the newsletter for organizations that can help with this.
- 4) **Try not to engage in battles** with your ex-spouse that result in putting your children in the middle (e.g. giving children notes for the other parent, stopping visitation without good cause, maligning the absent parent in front of the children). This only leads to continued anger and confusion for everyone.

Do get information from the library, self-help groups, mental health services, or online. The more informed you are about what to expect as part of this process the less fearful you will feel, and the more you will be able to offer your children.♦

When to Get Help

Is Counselling Necessary?

Most of the time families are able to cope with difficult situations that can be created by single parenthood. There are some times however when counselling can make a dramatic difference. Some times when counselling is useful is if there has been any violence or abuse as part of the history of the family. Other issues that can make the grieving and letting go process difficult include loss of a spouse through sudden death, as a result of an affair, or through abandonment. These circumstances can create large emotional obstacles for both the adult and children left behind. A counsellor can provide a safe atmosphere for family members to work through difficult feelings and find constructive ways to express these feelings. This allows

individuals in the family to move on to the important goal of rebuilding a healthier family.

If you or any member of your family is experiencing severe sleep problems, depression, loss of appetite, outbursts of extreme anger, anxiety or panic attacks then get help immediately! While it is normal to experience strong emotions and feelings of loss, the aforementioned symptoms can severely affect your ability to function as a family and need to

Support and Parenting Resources

Parents without Partners offers online support, articles, discussion forums and some local groups. For more info go to www.pwpcanada.com

Separation and Divorce groups.

Social service agencies and some private therapists offer therapeutic seminar based groups to assist adults in their transition to being single again. Check in your community to see if anyone is offering this service or feel free to email me (address below).

Bereaved Families of Ontario. This organization offers self-help groups for parents and children who have lost a loved one through death. For more info go to www.bereavedfamilies.net

BOOKS

Growing Up With Divorce: Helping Your Child Avoid Immediate and Later Emotional Problems.
By Neil Kalter

Rebuilding: When Your Relationship Ends .
by Bruce Fisher and Robert Alberti

The Boys and Girls Book about One Parent Families. By Richard Gardner.

Helping Your Kids Cope with Divorce the Sandcastles Way. By M. Gary Neuman

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