



Emotional Overload

Many single parents say they deal with a variety of emotional issues that you might describe as “extra baggage.” Some examples include:

- Self-pity
- Depression
- Guilt
- Anger
- Envy
- Fear
- Severe money problems
- Loneliness and isolation
- Frustration
- Exhaustion

These issues present such a challenge because they undermine your daily functioning and emotional well-being. But they can be managed successfully so that you manage your family in a positive way.

10 Ways to Speed Your Recovery Process

Becoming divorced or widowed and then facing years of single parenting is a shock to anyone who experiences it. You will need to take steps to recover and heal. Here are some suggestions:

1. Some churches, synagogues, counseling centers, and therapists offer free and low-cost divorce recovery workshops and grief support groups. Look for them in the newspaper and Yellow Pages. If you don't see any listed, call a few places that may be able to refer you.
2. Look for local peer support groups and networks.
3. If you have access to the Internet, search for support services in your area.



4. Also on the Internet, look for chat rooms or bulletin boards where single parents post messages and share ideas.
5. Find library books for kids about divorce and single-parent families, and read them together. Take the time to talk about how they relate to your situation and encourage your kids to talk about their feelings.
6. Find a support group for children of divorce.
7. Tell your children's teachers and the school psychologist that you are a single-parent family. Let them know that you welcome feedback and suggestions on coping with your circumstances.
8. When you are ready, investigate groups like Parents Without Partners for single adults. You need to be with other adults who have similar interests.
9. Learn to help your kids talk about what is happening to them.
10. Learn conflict resolution and problem-solving skills.

Single-Parent Survival Strategies

In addition to recovering from the loss of a partner, you will need to take action to survive and thrive in the coming years. The following strategies provide a starting place.

1. Watch out for too many changes in your life as you recover from both the loss of your spouse and the resulting changes in your life circumstances. Change causes stress, and you have enough right now.
2. Realize and accept that you must get help with your single-parenting responsibilities. It is unrealistic to think that you can do it alone.
3. Manage your own emotions so you will be able to help your child manage his or her struggle. Learn as much as you can about how children respond to divorce, the death of a parent, or life in a single-

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compliments of Dr. Jonathan Isaacson,
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parent home. Do not expect your child to respond the same way you do. Take your child's developmental stage into consideration when responding to his or her behavior.

- Give your children permission to talk to you about their feelings.
 - Keep appropriate boundaries.
 - Don't give in to the temptation to let your child take care of you.
 - Let your children be children.
 - Avoid burdening them with your feelings and the facts of the divorce or death of your spouse.
 - Find another adult to be your sounding board.
6. Let people help you.
 - If it is impossible to reciprocate, say so.
 - People know that your life isn't like it used to be.
 - Don't let your inability to reciprocate prevent you from accepting what people willingly offer.
 7. Let go of your need for perfection. You will have much more stress if you don't lower your expectations.
 8. Even though you are unable to be present as much as in the past, your children still need adult supervision. Look for ways for other adults to look in on your kids when they are home alone, even when they are teenagers.
 9. Just because your child appears to be handling his or her emotions well, don't assume that he or she is okay. Some kids respond to parent loss by becoming overly responsible or by closing down their emotions. They may need to hear, *"Tell me how you're feeling."*
 10. While it is important to listen and accept your children's feelings, it is equally important to set limits on behavior.
 11. Cultivate your ability to be flexible and find creative ways to solve problems.
 12. Learn to set priorities. Do the most important things first.
 13. Trust your gut feelings. Pay attention to your instincts and act on them.

14. Simplify as many things as possible in your life. You cannot afford to keep it complicated.
15. Find an outlet for your anger. If a friend is not available, look for a minister, rabbi, or professional counselor. If money is an issue, look for a therapist who will see you for a low fee.
16. Teach yourself to let go of guilt. You don't have time for it, and it's not necessary.
17. Focus on issues you have control over. If something is beyond your control, try not to worry about them.
18. Create a ritual to mark the change in your circumstances. This could be a funeral for your spouse or a ceremony to acknowledge your divorce.
19. Keep a private journal in which you express your feelings. Be sure to keep it in a private place where your children won't find it. A journal provides a place to express anger, sadness, loneliness, and fear—all of those feelings you feel every day as a single parent.
20. Remind yourself that recovering from divorce or the death of a spouse will take time. Your recovery will happen on its own schedule, and it will happen. You will get through this intact.
21. Learn to be assertive. You can't say yes to every request, whether it is from your family members or people in the community who want your time and resources. If you give it all away, you will have nothing left for yourself.
22. Find ways to take care of your body. Get regular checkups and make time to exercise. You need rest now more than ever. Watch your alcohol intake.
23. Find someone who will listen to you. Sometimes you have to ask, for example, *"I need a sounding board right now. Can I have 15 minutes of your time?"*
24. Rent a sad movie and let yourself cry (when the kids aren't around). Crying allows you to release the sadness that you are sure to feel.
25. Do at least one fun thing for yourself every week.
26. In your private journal, make a list of all the things you're afraid of.
27. In your private journal, make a list of all the things you worry about.
28. Get together with other single-parent families. Sharing times with people facing similar issues can make you feel normal.



Dr. Jonathan Isaacson is a licensed clinical psychologist, specializing in pre-marital and marriage counseling. He also specializes in helping singles choose healthy partners and loving relationships. With proven and timeless principles and strategies, you can create a loving marriage that will last a lifetime. Dr. Isaacson guides his clients to resolve couples distress and overcome challenges. He offers programs on marriage/relationship enhancement that includes a couple's personality and relationship profiles. Dr. Isaacson helps individuals overcome psychological and emotional problems which only become exacerbated in a relationship. He is the Director of **The Marriage Clinic** in Beachwood, Ohio and can be reached at **216-292-4500**.