

## Success and the Single Parent: Taking Care of Yourself<sup>1</sup>

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### Overview



Taking care of yourself--including taking time out for yourself--is a key element in succeeding as a single parent. You might be saying to yourself, "That's **impossible**. I don't have the time to do the things I need to do for my family right now, so how can I take time for myself?" Here's a way: Take a closer look at the word "**impossible**." If you draw a line right between "im," and "possible," you get a different meaning: "**I'm possible**." Do not let the word impossible overwhelm you. Start by seeing only the possibilities in impossible. You need to have a positive state of mind to overcome your situation Did you know? A study of successful single parents found they were careful to meet their own mental, physical,

and emotional needs while meeting those same needs for their children. Parents who tend to their own personal needs, tend to be more patient and loving with their children. For the good of your family, it is important you find time for yourself.

Reality: having full responsibility for your children and your household can leave you tired, stressed, and sometimes tearful. You have many demands made of you and sometimes may fear for your family's future. Fear, useful in some situations, can be harmful in other situations. By giving a new meaning to the word fear, you can find the energy to face situations that come your way. Practice seeing **FEAR** the following way:

#### False Experience Appearing Real

Example: Many times you and I get caught up in thinking about situations that haven't happened yet, only to discover that when they happen they aren't so bad after all. We need to know and come to grips with our fears. And to learn that our worst fears seldom come true. Everything in life depends on the thoughts we choose to hold in our minds. These thoughts also depend on our willingness to change our beliefs when they no longer work. In other words, we control our

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1. This document is FCS2144, one of a series of the Family Youth and Community Sciences Department, Florida Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida. Original publication date December 1999. Reviewed March 2007 by Heidi Radunovich, Assistant Professor, Department of Family, Youth and Community Sciences. Visit the EDIS Web Site at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu>.
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life by our thoughts. When you have a positive mental attitude, positive things will come your way. It is essential to moving ahead. Don't allow your own negative mental attitudes, negative moods, or habits create barriers and negative results.



### Friendship and Support

Taking care of yourself means respecting yourself and--yes--even pampering yourself once in a while. You need to create a balance in your life. You need to think the thoughts that will create that balance. Take your thoughts about your children. Although your children are important to you, relationships with other adults are also important. Everyone needs and benefits from having a support system--especially single parents. A circle of family members and friends can

- give you encouragement and reaffirm your self-worth
- be a sounding board to discuss ideas and challenges
- be a buffer against the stresses and strains of everyday living as a single parent.
- provide aid and help in making time for yourself.
- provide other adults who make your children feel special

### Evaluating Your Support Network

Give up the idea that you can do it all by yourself. It's almost impossible. Don't be afraid to ask for help. Ask family members, friends, neighbors. Support given to you by relatives and friends can be a source of strength to you. To make sure you have enough support, try the following exercise.

- Write your name in the middle of a piece of paper and draw a circle around it.
- Next, keep making more circles around the circle that has your name in it. As you see in the sample drawing below (Figure 1) some circles have been already done for you. Keep adding as needed.
- Write in the names of people who can give financial support: money, food, or clothing in times of need. Then write the names of people who can give you emotional support and can answer questions or give ideas about how to handle certain situations. Last, write the names of people who can give help in an emergency. Include friends, family members, professionals, neighbors, and anyone else who gives you support. (*For further details, see Activity 1*)

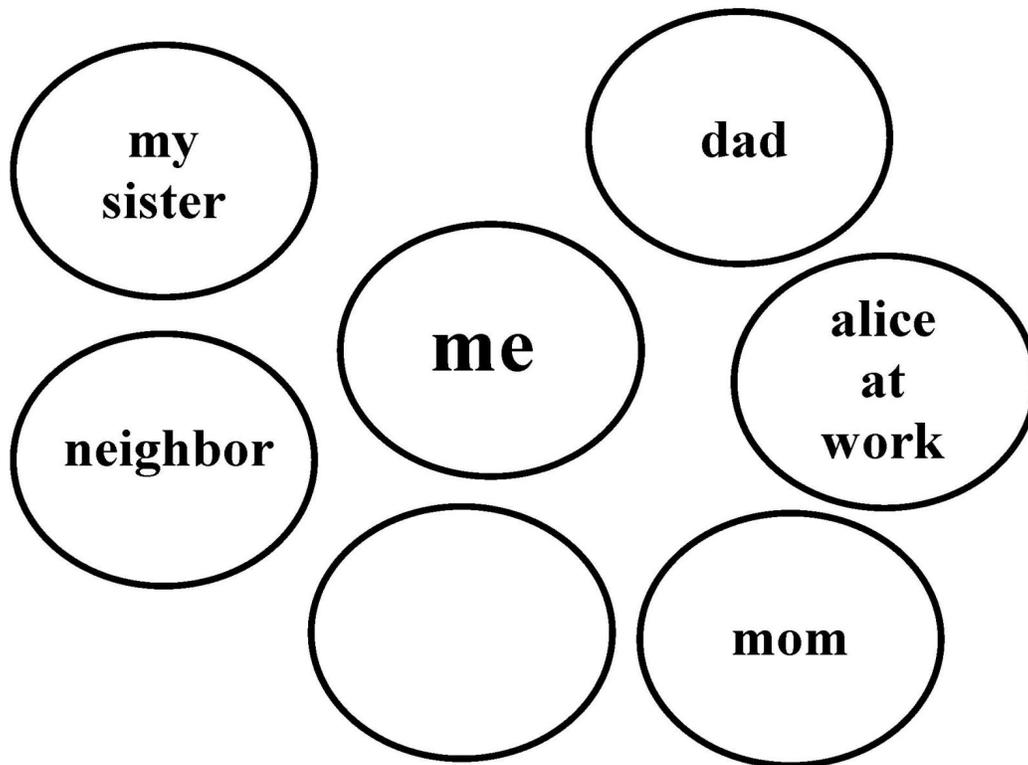
Support groups often have from 10 to 25 members. How does yours compare? If your support network is too big, you may have too many demands on your time and energy. You might think about making your support network smaller.

If, however, if your support network is too small, think of ways to make it larger. Are there any people you would like to know better? Think of places where you might meet people of similar interests. Try to choose friends who are positive about life, those who see a glass half-full and not half-empty. Don't forget the importance of having friends and family members help you. They can listen to you from the heart and they can make your load in life easier.

### Tips for Taking Better Care of Yourself

There are many ways to improve how well you take care of yourself. Read these suggestions and add any of your own that you can think of. Make a decision to try at least five tips. Circle the ones you will try out.

- For low-cost fun, plan and rotate dinner exchanges with friends.
- Trade babysitting time with a friend or exchange a service instead of money. Use the time to see a movie, visit a friend, take a long walk, exercise.



- Join a singles group, such as Parents Without Partners.
- Visit places of worships until you find one that fits you and your children. (If you already belong to the right place for you, get more active). Get involved in the different activities for adults and children. The built-in support can literally be a life saver.
- Take up something you used to do well: knitting, sewing, sketching.
- Participate in community activities, get to know your neighbors.
- Take time to exercise, eat healthy foods, and rest.
- Learn to laugh at yourself.
- Never say "I give up" to yourself-- or to your children.
- Keep a positive thought journal. Buy a blank book and each night before you go to bed, write down five things you can be grateful about that day. Some days it will be easy to list five things and other days it will be very hard. That's

okay--real life is not perfect. (*For further details, see Activity II*).

- On 3"x 5" index cards write positive statements you can read in time of need. Put the cards in handy places or just carry them with you. Possible statements:

- "Each day I am getting stronger and stronger."
- " I can do it."
- "I am responsible."
- "The past is gone, I can only change the future."
- "Tomorrow will be a better day."
- "Never think down--always think up."
- " My attitude determines how successful I will be."
- " I will focus on the positive in every situation."

- "Today is a present. I will use this gift wisely."
- Visualize what you want. Form a picture in your mind of the way you want to be or what you want to have and do. Keep this image in your mind as you work toward your goal. Imagine yourself achieving it.
- Act as though you are what you want to be. This will give you confidence and help you believe in yourself. It will help you have the feelings and attitudes you will need to be successful. Every time a negative thought comes to your mind, say to yourself "cancel" and change it to a positive thought. (If you prefer, wear a rubber band on one wrist, when you hear a negative thought in your head: pull on the rubber band enough to zap your wrist.) Our consciousness holds only one thought at a time: make it a positive one.

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**What's Next?**

If you are still having a hard time making time to take care of yourself, take a harder look at where your time is going now. For several days keep a log or list of how you spend your time, hour by hour. Then find and circle those things you will stop doing in order to make time for yourself.

If you feel guilty, change your thinking. A little guilt is better than a lot of anger because you never have time for yourself. Being apart from your child/ren for a short time can renew your desire to have a loving relationship with them. Remember, life can be hard, but it can be easier when handled with patience and determination.

Your county Cooperative Extension Service can give you more information. There are publications and packaged programs available to you. If the Cooperative Extension office doesn't have the information you need, someone there will help you find the necessary resources. Contact your local Cooperative Extension office for educational help.



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**Activity I My Support Network**

Write your name in the center circle. Fill in the surrounding lines with the names of those who give you support. Add lines if needed.

### Financial Support



### Emotional Support



### Emergency Support



### Career Support



#### Activity II: Five Things I Am Grateful About Today!

Make a commitment to buy your own journal and give yourself a pat on the back when you write regularly.

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My Notes and Observations:

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