

How To Find Help for the Single Mom

By Cindy Cook

OK, so you're a single mom. Maybe you've been one for a while. Maybe you just joined the club. Regardless, you're going to need some support, financial and emotional.

Thanks to the awareness of the problems inherent in single parenting, there continues to be an increasing amount of resources available. Besides financial (college scholarships or grants and other forms of financial assistance), one can find emotional support as well. Even if one's money situation is solid, the stress of coping with the kids alone and on a daily basis can become excessive.

Making these life changes as easy as possible on the kids is mom's greatest challenge. It may be heartening to know that, according to a Cornell University study, kids in single-parent homes tend to do as well emotionally and scholastically as those in homes with two parents. (You can find this study in the April 2004 issue of The Journal of Educational Research.)

The study found that the mother's levels of education and ability are the most significant factors for the success of their kids. Also important are family income and the quality of the home environment.

The financial side of things . . .

An increasing number of single mothers these days are going back to school to earn a degree or certificate in an attempt to improve their earning power. If you're new to this, be encouraged by the fact that there are many different sources of financial aid for the would-be college student.

Start searching at your school(s) of choice. Check the financial aid office and your public library for all possible data regarding aid for that specific institution; you'll likely find some monies aimed specifically at single parents. Read each entry fully to be certain you qualify. More than one person has applied for a loan, scholarship or grant only to discover later that they needed to be of a particular ethnic group or the child of a graduate of that school. So, don't rush through your research.

Also, to save on housing, check your local classifieds as well as online for other single mothers looking to share a home. Ideally, you could pool resources and have someone nearby who truly understands what you're going through.

What was that about emotional support?

The anxiety resulting from all this responsibility – for the kids, for the bills, to yourself – can get heavy. While it's natural to get tired and annoyed, unrelieved anger can be dangerous for you and your kids. As we all know these days, anger and fear can be expressed in a number of ways, some obvious, some subtle. Among the latter are verbal and emotional abuses, both of which can leave permanent scars.

To avoid these darker potentialities, seek out support groups for single parents. Also, if you have medical coverage, you and your kids could attend family counseling. In addition, there are some great self-help books available at your local bookstore or library.

A few last words . . .

For more information about where to go for help, contact your local family services agency. The knowledgeable people there can help you obtain various forms of aid, including counseling, housing, and help with utility costs and food, if you qualify.

The big point is you're not in this alone. You're doing the most important -- and the most difficult -- job in the world: being a mother. Being a single mother is even tougher. With that in mind, don't hesitate to ask questions, ask for advice, or even for assistance.

After all, unlike a lot of men, we know how to ask for directions, right?