

Families: Single Parenting and Today's Family

Over the past 20 years single-parent families have become even more common than the so-called "nuclear family" consisting of a mother, father and children. Today we see all sorts of single parent families: headed by mothers, headed by fathers, headed by a grandparent raising their grandchildren.

Life in a single parent household - though common - can be quite stressful for the adult and the children. Members may unrealistically expect that the family can function like a two-parent family, and may feel that something is wrong when it can not. The single parent may feel overwhelmed by the responsibility of juggling caring for the children, maintaining a job and keeping up with the bills and household chores. And typically, the family's finances and resources are drastically reduced following the parents' breakup.

Single parent families deal with many other pressures and potential problem areas that the nuclear family does not have to face. Some of these are:

- Visitation and custody problems;
- The effects of continuing conflict between the parents;
- Less opportunity for parents and children to spend time together;
- Effects of the breakup on children's school performance and peer relations;
- Disruptions of extended family relationships;
- Problems caused by the parents' dating and entering new relationships.

The single parent can help family members face these difficulties by talking with each other about their feelings and working together to tackle problems. Support from friends, other family members and the church or synagogue can help too. But if family members are still overwhelmed and having problems, it may be time to consult an expert.

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