

Dr. Pickhardt is the author of Keys To Single Parenting, available from his website at <http://www.carlpickhardt.com/>

STRENGTHS OF THE SINGLE PARENT

Carl Pickhardt Ph.D. © 2002

Even today, the unjust stereotype is still sometimes invoked: a single parent presides over a broken home that produces troubled children. Unless single mothers and fathers disbelieve this popular prejudice, they are in danger of doubting their adequacy and undercutting their confidence as parents. It's not the number of parents in a family, but the quality of parenting a child receives that matters most. A home is only "broken" when healthy family interactions break down. As for producing troubled children, in my counseling practice they seem no more likely to come from single parent homes than from dual parent families.

What is true is that single parents, because they have no parent partner with whom to share the daily child raising load, must absorb additional family demand and support additional responsibility. However, by rising to this challenge, custodial single parents develop significant strengths that merit recognition and appreciation. Consider just a few of the common strengths they often seem to possess.

1) SINGLE PARENTS ARE HIGHLY COMMITTED.

Taking their family responsibilities very seriously, single parents vote with their actions, doing more as parents now that they are parenting alone thereby increasing dedication to the welfare of their children.

2) SINGLE PARENTS ARE CLEAR COMMUNICATORS.

With much to talk about and limited time to talk, busyness causes single parents to speak directly and to the point, not hesitating to speak up when difficult issues need to be addressed.

3) SINGLE PARENTS ARE FIRM DECISION-MAKERS.

Accepting that parenting often requires taking stands against what children want for their best interests, single parents are not afraid to make tough and unpopular rules stick.

4) SINGLE PARENTS ARE WELL ORGANIZED.

With so much to do and one parent to do it, single parents create efficient systems to manage so much responsibility.

5) SINGLE PARENTS MANAGE DIVERSE FAMILY FUNCTIONS.

Parenting alone, single parents expand their traditional role to include family tasks the absent parent used to do.

6) SINGLE PARENTS CREATE A NETWORK OF SOCIAL SUPPORT.

Knowing parenting alone does not mean going it alone, single parents are willing to reach out and build social support on which the family can rely.

7) SINGLE PARENTS HAVE CLEAR PRIORITIES.

Knowing that children are a third order priority (single parent welfare first, family welfare second, and child welfare third), single parents know that unless they take care of themselves and the needs of the family, the welfare of their children will not be secure.

8) SINGLE PARENTS VALUE FAMILY VALUES.

Because there is no marriage partner in the home, single parents focus a lot of attention on their relationship with children, the value placed on that relationship having a lot to do with the quality of family life.

9) SINGLE PARENTS ARE GOOD AT MAKING ENDS MEET.

For most single parents, learning how to stretch a dollar seems to come with the territory, a skill that children in these homes are often lucky to learn.

10) SINGLE PARENTS GIVE CHILDREN CLEAR EXPECTATIONS.

In order to be able to count on each other, single parents create a family system in which children know what to expect of their parent and in which their parent knows what to expect of them.

11) SINGLE PARENTS TEACH CHILDREN RESPONSIBILITY.

Knowing they cannot do every routine task that needs to be done, single parents are good at delegating self-management and household help to children who early on learn to carry more responsibility, drawing self-esteem from being significant contributors to the welfare of the family.

12) SINGLE PARENTS ARE REALISTIC ABOUT SETTING LIMITS.

Because single parenting is an overdemand situation, single parents tend to be realistic about the limits of what they can do, saying "No" to themselves and children when doing more would drive them into doing too much.

Rising to the challenge of parenting alone, single parents tend to parent very well.