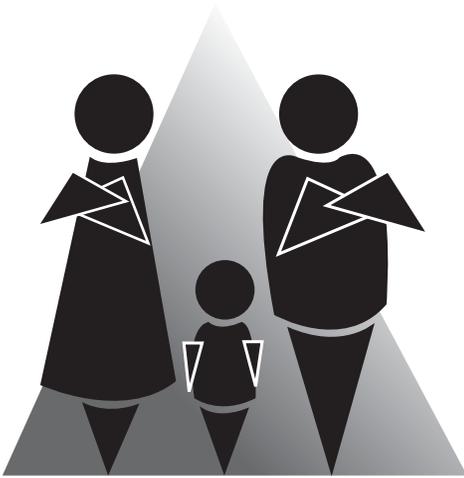


EXTENSION PROGRAMS

- Agriculture and Forestry
- Community Leadership
- Economic Development
- Environmental Sciences
- Family and Consumer Sciences
- 4-H Youth Development
- Natural Resources



Are Your Children in the
MIDDLE
 of Your Conflict or Divorce?

Friendship and Support

Do you feel isolated and alone? Do you want more adult friendships? Although children are certainly important, they can't substitute for relationships with other adults. Everyone, including single parents, needs and benefits from having a circle of close friends. Having this support system:

- makes it easier to handle problems
- provides a buffer against stress
- leads to a more positive parenting experience
- is a source of strength

Children also benefit when parents' emotional needs are met. Parents tend to be more patient and loving with their children. Studies show one of the most important factors for effective single parenting is having a strong support network of friends. It takes energy and time to build relationships, but it's worth it!

Ten Important Tips for Parents

- Take care of yourself.
- Build a community of friends, co-workers, support groups and other single parents.
- Ask for help.
- Share the care of your children with others.
- Give each child time alone with you each day.
- Don't take your anger out on your children.
- Be honest with your children about the changes in your life.
- Recognize that you can't be both parents.

- Share the job of parenting with the other parent.
- Remember that there is no such thing as a perfect parent.

Thinking About Who You Can Turn to for Help

All of us need help at some time. There are a variety of ways we receive help. One of the challenges of parenting on your own is overcoming isolation.

Write down who provides the following types of support for you.

Who provides emotional support - someone to talk to, share problems? _____

Who helps to handle stress? _____

Who reminds you that you are cared for and valued? _____

Who do you talk to about specific needs such as where to get bargains for children's clothes, what doctor to choose, how to handle discipline, where to apply for food stamps? _____

Who answers questions or gives suggestions about personal, legal or medical concerns? _____

Who can help you find other services or information? _____

Who can help with concrete support such as money, food and clothing? _____

Who can help with emergency assistance, transportation or childcare? _____





Are Your Children in the MIDDLE of your Conflict or Divorce?

Friendship and Support

Do You Have Enough People Supporting You?

This exercise will help you think about the size of your group of friends.

1. Write your name in the middle of a piece of paper and draw a circle around it.
2. Next, write the names of people who provide emotional, financial or other types of help to you. The names of people who provide the most support should be written closer to your name on the paper. Include friends, family members, professionals, neighbors and anyone else who provides support. You now know how many people make up your support network. You also know how strong your support network is by seeing how close your name is to the other names on the paper.

3. Next draw lines between the names of the people on your paper who spend time together. This will help you see how connected your network is. Most people have between 10 and 25 people in their group. How does yours compare?

If your circle is too small, think about people you would like to get to know better. Think of places where you might meet interesting people.

If your network is too large, it becomes difficult to stay connected. You may have too many demands on your time and energy. How might you reduce the size?

How are people in your network connected to you and each other? A closely knit group may expect you to do things their way. A tightly connected network may provide more support, but it may also have too much control over you. Can you add some new members? Can you introduce some members to each other? How can you change your support network to fit your needs?

Giving and receiving support is tied to positive family health and well-being. As important as it is to be supported, it's just as important to support others. Is there anyone you could support?

Ways to be a friend might include offering to watch a neighbor's children for a few hours, bringing dessert to someone who might need an added lift or telephoning someone to let them know you're thinking about them.

What Do You Do When You Feel Lonely?

Lonely feelings are natural. Still, being single doesn't mean you'll always feel lonely. There are many ways to cope with feelings of loneliness and help you adjust to your new role.

Look at this list. What do you do when you feel lonely?

Circle each item you use.

1. listen to music
2. write
3. work or study
4. exercise
5. walk
6. work on a hobby
7. read
8. play a musical instrument
9. cry
10. sleep
11. sit and think
12. do nothing
13. overeat
14. take tranquilizers
15. watch television
16. get drunk or high
17. call a friend
18. talk to a health care provider or therapist
19. visit someone
20. volunteer to help others
21. go out and meet new people
22. call or visit an old friend
23. join a club or organization
24. spend money
25. go shopping
26. go for a drive

First, look at the number of circles you drew around items 1-8. This shows how often you ease loneliness with useful activities you do alone. It's often hard to feel comfortable spending time alone. As a sense of security develops, single parents find that time alone can be a pleasure.

Now, look at your responses to items 9-16. This shows how often you deal with loneliness by doing very little that is positive. Be careful. This behavior can become destructive after awhile. If you're trying to forget or escape, you'll have a harder time getting over your loss. You may feel useless, depressed or have physical problems. Turning away from the world and people can increase loneliness. There will be times when you will need to cry or sleep, but don't let this become routine.

Next, see how often you've circled items 17-23. This shows how often you deal with loneliness by becoming socially active. Keep in mind that **looking** for friends may not work. We tend to make friends when we get involved in projects or ideas we care about. This is how we meet people with common interests and values. Also, don't be afraid to ask for



Are Your Children in the MIDDLE of your Conflict or Divorce?

Friendship and Support

help when you need it. Offer your help to others as well.

Last, look at your responses to items 24-26. This tells you how often you deal with loneliness by distracting yourself. Shopping or taking a drive won't get rid of loneliness for long. Still, once in awhile, these activities can prompt us to take action and feel better.

Making New Friends

Sometimes it's hard to know where to meet new people when you have limited money, time and energy. Here are some ideas for making new friends.

- ▶ Join community activities and meet your neighbors.
- ▶ Plan dinner exchanges with friends. For low-cost entertainment, have a meal at your house, then rotate to homes of others in the group.
- ▶ Participate in PTA, or volunteer to be a group leader or chaperone at one of your children's activities or clubs.
- ▶ Form babysitting cooperatives. If you're short of money, trade babysitting time with other parents, or exchange a service instead of money. It's important to spend time with adults once in awhile, without your children.
- ▶ Join a church or synagogue of your choice. You'll meet people with a similar philosophy or values and find activities for adults and children.
- ▶ Join a singles group, such as Parents Without Partners.
- ▶ Take classes, attend seminars or lectures.
- ▶ Work on a joint project with another adult or child.
- ▶ Start a new hobby or recreation.

Grandparents as Support

Are older adults involved with your family's life? Children benefit from encouragement and support from a variety of people who care for them. Grandparents provide another supportive adult in both children's and single parents' lives.

A grandparent figure doesn't have to be a blood relative. Your family can "adopt" an older adult as a grandparent - maybe a neighbor or a friend's relative. This involvement will enrich the life of the older adult and your life.

Grandparents can provide:

- ▶ another adult who makes your child feel special
- ▶ time and affection
- ▶ someone to read with
- ▶ great stories of the past
- ▶ a sense of how things used to be and how they are
- ▶ a tie to another generation

If you are interested in more information on this and other related topics, please call your local LSU AgCenter parish office. Below is the list of topics in the "Are Your Children in the Middle of Your Conflict or Divorce?" series.

A Child's View of Divorce
The Business of Co-parenting
Coping with Stress and Change
Costs of Raising Children
Custody Issues Today
Dating Issues
Disciplining Children
Friendship and Support
Help! I Feel Overwhelmed
Loss of a Relationship
Managing Income and Expenses
Not Enough Hours in the Day
Separating Your Finances
Sharing Parenting
Talking with Your Children
Talking with Your Children About Money
Talking with Your Children -- Communicating Within Your Family: Active Listening
Visitation Do's and Don'ts

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