

7 Survival tips for single parenting

Raising a child is like an ocean voyage – full of raging storms, rough waves, and occasional sunny tranquility. It's hard enough with a partner, but when you're doing it alone, the difficulty rises to a whole new level.

Yet parents all over the world are successfully and joyfully raising children by themselves. Just because you're steering a one-person kayak rather than a two-person canoe doesn't mean you can't handily navigate the tumultuous waters of parenthood. These tips can help smooth your journey.

1. Take care of yourself

While a trip to a luxury spa would certainly be nice, self-care in the early days of parenting is more about paying attention to your basic needs. These are all too easy to neglect, especially if you don't have a partner to spell you.

"I had to pay attention to make sure I was even eating enough," says Rachel Sarah, author of the book and blog [Single Mom Seeking](#). "I also learned the importance of getting enough sleep, which meant forgoing a lot of chores. My place was a mess, but I just had to let that go."

Sarah also incorporated small chunks of exercise into her life whenever she could. Instead of driving to the grocery store, she'd plop the baby in the stroller and walk.

2. Join forces

Being the lone mom or dad on a playground full of parenting couples every Saturday morning can get old pretty fast, as can being stuck at home every evening with only your colicky baby for company.

Finding moms and dads in similar situations can be a lifesaver. "My friend's husband worked late, and the two of us would get together for dinner. Sometimes both our babies would be crying, but at least we were going through the witching hour together," says Sarah.

If you're having trouble finding buddies, consider joining a single parent support group. Contact your local women's center, mothers' club, dads' group, YMCA, or church, to find other single parents in your area. And if there isn't an existing group to join, try starting your own.

3. Build a community

A strong community can provide emotional support and a sense of belonging – the perfect antidote to the isolation brought on by solo parenting.

Don't just focus on other single parents. The more varied your community, the richer it will be. "Having a diverse social circle is very important," says Alexandra Soiseth, author of [Choosing You: Deciding to Have a Baby On My Own](#).

If you're on the introverted side, building a community can be tough. You may need to push yourself into social situations. For example, join a church or, find structured playgroups, or attend weekly story time at your local library. And remember, meeting new people gets easier with practice. "I used to be a lot shier," says Sarah. "At first, I was ashamed to even tell people that I was a single mom. But I had to get out of that rut. I had to become more social

out of pure necessity."

4. Accept help

For some, this is easier said than done. "Sometimes I feel like I don't deserve to feel overwhelmed, since I chose to become a single mother," says Soiseth. "But I try to remember that this doesn't change the fact that I need help."

Soiseth was so overwhelmed in those first sleep-deprived weeks with her daughter that four days into her parents' visit, she delegated all the laundry and cooking to them. As she discovered, babies have a magical way of bringing people closer. "My relationship with my parents has grown so much," says Soiseth.

5. Move past "couple envy"

"I used to feel envious of friends who had kind, involved husbands, men who actually *wanted* to be with them, who *wanted* to pitch in," says one mom who prefers to remain anonymous. But as she learned, it's all too easy to get caught up in the illusion that everything would be perfect if you just had a partner.

"The reality is that everyone has problems, even married people," she says. Five years later, she has found that being a single mom comes with its own advantages. "I find it much simpler to only have to think about one other person's needs," she explains.

Constant envy can turn into resentment and bitterness, which is a drain on your energy. Focus instead on things in your life that you're grateful for – including your married friends.

6. Plan ahead for urgent situations

It's midnight, your toddler has a fever, and you're out of ibuprofen. Or you have a virus yourself, and you're too busy throwing up to care for your baby. Without another adult in the house, what do you do?

It's important to be prepared for these types of situations. Find out if there's an emergency babysitting service in your area – while these services can be pricy, they can often provide help fairly quickly.

In addition, develop an "emergency list" of friends and family members you know you can call on. "Once, at 4 a.m., I was so sick that I couldn't even feed my baby. I knew my friend Lyde would be up, since she runs every morning, so I called her and she came right over," says Soiseth.

7. Get creative about childcare

"Cultivate a babysitting network," says Soiseth, who admits that she pays more for babysitting than for housing – and says it's worth it.

But in addition to the traditional babysitting arrangements, Soiseth suggests being open to less conventional ideas. For example, she arranged for a student to live with her during her baby's first year. The student provided childcare in exchange for rent. Soiseth also shared a babysitter with a friend in the afternoons.

Another good idea is to trade childcare with other families, as Sarah did on numerous occasions. "My friend would

watch my baby while I did errands, and I'd watch her baby while she and her husband had a date," she says.

Trade-offs provide a free break for you and a playdate for your child – what's not to love about that?

Another single mom took childcare sharing to a new level – a fifth-grade teacher, she split her job with another teacher and new mom (this is often called "job-sharing"). While one teacher was at work, the other watched both babies. This allowed both moms to continue working, afford childcare, and have more time with their child.