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"We can't control everything that happens (in life), but we can control they ways we **deal** with what happens."

> Jane Nelsen, Cheryl Erwin, Carol Delzer

PRACTICAL SOLUTIONS

## 10 Tips for Single Parents

Stop Feeling Guilty

The list of reasons to feel guilty can be endless. Guilt, however, is a waste of your valuable time. It drains your energy and makes you focus on things you usually can't control anyway.

**Stop Worrying**See guilt above. Allocate a half-hour a day for a worry session if you must—then move on to productive things.

Be More Patient With The Kids

Stresses are all around—too little money, too much to do, not enough time—especially when you're alone. Don't take your frustrations out on the kids. If you feel yourself becoming stressed, lock yourself in the bathroom and count to ten before you react.

Go On a Vate

It might not turn into the romance of the century, but you'll get to practice your conversational skills, see a first run movie that's not animated, and eat at a restaurant that doesn't give you a cup of crayons and placemat to color.

With all the responsibilities of kids, a home, and work your needs often come last. It's vital that you treat yourself well. Do something for yourself at least once a week.—read a book, see a movie without the kids, or take a bubble bath. Just remember to not neglect yourself.

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Stephanie Coontz, a family historian, has written a couple of books (*The Way We Never Were* and *The Way We Really Are*) that help to inform us about the historical perspective on family roles and functions over time. "Every kind of family," Coontz shows, "has strengths that can be fostered and vulnerabilities to be avoided."

Thus, this issue focuses on single parent families, an increasingly prevalent family form. We hope it gives you some useful information as you go about your professional work.

Charlotte Shoup Olsen, Ph.D. W. Jared DuPree, M.S.

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10 Tips for Single Parents

Having a sense of humor makes stress more manageable and puts things in perspective. Keeping a sense of humor is easier on your psyche and role models good coping skills to your children.

Are the kids clean? Well-fed? Loved? Receiving an education? Then you're doing your job. If the house is messy or the leaves not raked, who cares?

Information is empowering. Keep yourself informed about current events and write your congressman/woman if legislation comes up you feel strongly about. Learn basic home repair through community colleges and the Extension service so you're not so dependent on repairmen. Continue to upgrade your professional skills.

Get Help If You Need It

Life can often get overwhelming.

Seeking help doesn't make you weak—it

makes you smart. Don't let lack of money prevent you from seeking help if you or the kids need a counselor. Free or low-cost counseling programs may be available. Check the phone book, talk to your children's school counselor, or check the public library for help in locating a counseling service that you can afford. There are programs to help you get food stamps, free immunizations, free or low cost health insurance, and pay heat/water bills, etc. All Kansas counties are served by Social and Rehabilitation Services (SRS). Go to following website for a list of services and contact information: <a href="http://www.srskansas.org/accesspoints/Virtual.htm">http://www.srskansas.org/accesspoints/Virtual.htm</a>

Congratulate Yourself Often
Look what you're handling. You're
raising children, running a household, working outside the house and handling a thousand other things. You are CEO, coach,
driver, cook, educator and provider. You are
holding it all together. Single parenting is not
for the meek or mild. You have a lot of which
to be proud.

Adapted from Single Parent Central, www.singleparentcentral.com, which offers information and resources to single parent families. ©2000 SingleParentCentral.com

# **Extension Spotlight Lori Sporer**

Lori Sporer has been a family and consumer sciences agent with the Logan County Extension office in Oakley for 4 1/2 years. Prior to that time, Lori feels blessed to have been a stay-at-mom, enjoying a custom bridal and formal wear design business for 14 years. She graduated in 1985 from K-State with a bachelor's degree in apparel design.

The most rewarding aspect of her job is being involved with the community and providing answers to questions that residents have on "anything and everything!" Time management can be challenging with the many facets of her job. She sees her work as seasonal because it involves *Walk Kansas* in the spring, the County Fair in the summer, and inspiring county programs for the upcoming holiday season in the fall.

Lori is chair of the Logan County Community Action Team (aka Logan County *CAT*), a collaboration of agencies that serve families and children in her area. Recently, she held the first *Movie Critics Night* where eighth graders and their parents were invited to view a movie that she selected which addressed issues kids face everyday—drug abuse, alcohol, respect, neglect, abuse, good morals, setting life goals, etc. After the movie, the audience was divided into discussion groups and were led by members of the *CAT* team (local family physician, sheriff, undersheriff, local Kansas Highway Patrolmen, Regional Prevention Center and P-CAN personnel and local middle school principals). Leaders had questions to guide the discussion between the kids and their parents with the questions designed to open the door for further family discussions. The county Substance Abuse Council provided funds for the movie, pizza and drawings. What a creative event!





"I look at my position in a "season light", because depending on the time of the year and what is on the calendar, my programming and work revolves around what's going on in the county at that point in the year. I truly love how the seasons evolve and inspire me with ideas."

Lori Sporer

On a more personal note, Lori has been married for 21 years to her junior high, high school, and college sweetheart. Troy is a K-State graduate in agronomy and is involved in his family's heavy equipment/construction business. They have two daughters. Savanah will be a K-State freshman and cheerleader this fall and Abbey will be a high school sophomore at Oakley. Lori enjoys quilting, baking/cooking, home decorating and says, "Believe it or not, I am a HUGE football junkie!" She is also the coach for the local high school dance team. The family and their black Labs, Jazz and Rita, spend many hours in the summer at a lake, water skiing, jet skiing, and having evening campfires with friends. They also snow ski in the winter. Lori hopes to be a FCS agent for a few more years and wants to enjoy her girls and the family because, "I realize how precious this time in our lives is!"

#### PERSONAL INVOLVEMENT

## **Successful Single Parent Families**

"Looking back, what kind of advice would you give other single parents?"  $\hfill\square$ 

The parents who answered this question, all without partners for several years, shared their insights as well as their experiences. "Tell them not to worry," said one. \( \subseteq ''\) Tead all those statistics about the problems of kids raised by one parent, and it scared me...but my kids turned out just fine."

#### Jennifer's Story

"I thought I'd have to be some kind of superwoman! I was 21, with 3 babies and no money. My husband left. My parts were still mad because I'd quit school when I got pregnant. So I figured I had to do it all myself—job, kids, school, everything! I didn't think I would survive. But Jennifer did survive. She got her GED, went to college, and is now a gifted teacher, with unusual empathy for the troubled teens she works with. Her children are thriving, too. How did she do it?

#### Prioritize

"Put your energy into what's really important, and don't worry about the rest," Jennifer advised. □ By "the rest" she meant cleaning, going to meetings, and some of the social stuff. You have to be there for your kids. □And you have to work to feed them. □ But you can use short cuts, like parpared foods. □ You don't have to do everything you used to do.

#### Get Support

#### Maria's Story

Maria, who had 3 young children when her husband died, remembered feeling terribly lonely. The hardest part, she said, was "having all the responsibility, making all the decisions, solving all the problems, alone."□Reseathers call it "task overload, responsibility overload, and emotional overload."□ In other words, too much to do, too much to worry about, and too little time!□Add to that (for most single parents), not enough money. In time, Maria learned to ask for help.□ She found a support grup and a babysitting co-op, and formed a pot-luck supper club with three other families.□

Because parent stress inevitably spills over onto the children, support from friends, relatives, or mental health professionals helps the whole family. Among the least stressed single parents are those with another adult living in the household (friend, relative, or another one-parent family) to provide companionship and share the burdens.

#### Spend Time Together, Have Fun

Family life can get chaotic. It helps to maintain a predictable routine and to schedule in family time, whether it's working, playing, or just hanging out together. It to have at least one meal together each day. One family actually enjoys their Saturday morning clean-up-the-house routine. They take turns making up a list of chors, choosing what music to play while they work, and deciding where they'll all go for lunch when it's done.

#### Celebrate Family Traditions

Rituals and traditions can be the glue that holds a family together. 

They don't need to be elaborate; some of the most treasured are the simplest. 

One mother and her teenaged daughter take a quiet walk together after dinner every night. 

It helps to keep your ties to extended family. 

If yours is far away, create a "chosen" extended family of friends and celebrate holidays and birthdays with them. Sometimes, after a death or divorce, it makes sense to start a new tradition.

#### Carla's Story

Carla divorced just before Thanksgiving, when the family had always hosted a formal dinner. That year she and her teenaged boys helped cook and serve dinner at a local shelter instead. The experience was so satisfying it has become a new Thanksgiving tradition for them.

#### Don't Go Overboard

#### Tim's Story

"When my wife left," said Tim, "I felt sorry for the girls (teenagers), not having a mother.□I didn't give them any chores to do.□I did everything, plus my job. I was tired all the time, too tired to follow through on discipline, so they got away with a lot.□And I went overboat on gifts, even though I couldn't afford to."□After a while, Tim said, he learned that "showing love is different from spoiling," and the girls learned to share responsibility for the well-being of the family.

#### Let Kids Be Kids

Sharing the workload is fine—as long as it is balanced with friendships, activities with peers, and support from adults. ☐But experts caution us not to treat children like partners or adults.

#### Anita's Story

"A therapist told me that lots of kids with one parent have to grow up a little faster than is good for them," said Anita. "I didn't plan it that way, but my daughter sort of took care of me, and my son (who was only 11) acted like the man of the house. I found myself telling them my problems and asking their advice. I left them alone a lot. They seemed so matur, but inside they were scared of the responsibility. They weren't really as grown up as I thought."

#### Keep the Other Parent Involved

#### Ann's Story

Ann has been a single mom right from the start. "One of the hadest things for me is to let my son's father (and his family) be involved, because I'm still mad at him," she confessed. "I try not to "badmouth" him or keep them apart, because I can see it's good for him to know his dad."

Ann's instincts are right. Research has shown that children are more successful when both parents are involved in their lives.

#### The Good News

Strong families share certain characteristics—good communication, regular time together, shared family traditions, and access to community support. Whether headed by one parnt or two, any family is capable of developing these traits and raising healthy, happy, competent children.

#### A Caring Community

A caring community can make a big difference to one-parent families. Neighbors can help with car pools or swap babysitting. 

Relatives can take the kids on outings when Mom or Dad is exhausted. 

Employers can adopt family-friendly policies like flextime and family leave.

Schools can provide child care for meetings and conferences, schedule events at times convenient for employed parents, and keep both parents informed about the child. Agencies can offer support groups; adopt sliding scale and flexible payment plans; schedule evening and weekend hours; and provide accessible, affordable child care, afterschool, and summer programs for kids. These strategies are especially helpful to single parents, but they make sense for all families.

By Georgia Lewis, http://www.thefamilyworks.org/Parenting/SinglePa.htm. Georgia Lewis is a Parent Education Specialist with Montgomery County Public Schools. ☐ She is a single pænt with 7 children and 5 grandchildren.



### **Single Parent Research**

The following are some excerpts from a famous study about the role of men and the need for stability in single-parent homes. The overwhelming message of the findings suggest that stability in single parent and/or two parent homes is the key to helping children and that fathers have an important role in two parent and single parent homes.

Excerpts from
"Men in the Family:
Associations with Juvenile Conduct""
By L. Alan Sroufe & Susan L. Pierce
University of Minnesota Extension Services

The role of fathers, and men more generally, has been relatively neglected in the study of child development. Few studies of father-child relationships exist compared to the studies of mother-child relationships. This paper summarizes what the empirical research literature has established about family factors related to juvenile conduct problems and about children's adjustment to changes in family structure. It concludes with a study of Minnesota families over two decades.

#### ADOLESCENT CONDUCT PROBLEMS

As juvenile crime rates have risen over the past few decades, researchers have sought to understand the development of aggression, juvenile conduct disturbances and adult criminality in order to plan early intervention strategies (Rutter, 1997). Multiple factors have been implicated, including poverty, harsh parental treatment, family disruption, and inadequate parental monitoring. Patterson and his colleagues (Patterson, 1982; Patterson, Reid and Dishion, 1992) have outlined a pathway for adolescent male delinquency that begins with coercive family processes, in which parents' harsh discipline and ongoing criticism ("nattering") lead to child aversive behaviors, which temporarily deter parents but, ultimately, lead to even greater parental coercion, with the process escalating cyclically. It has been found that parental aggression toward the child is a better predictor of child aggression than even

measures of aggressive traits in parents, countering an explanation of child aggression based on shared genes with the parents. This coercive cycle leads to poor social skills in the child and low academic achievement, leading to associations with other aggressive, unsuccessful peers and, finally, to adolescent delinquency.

#### FAMLY FACTORS

Based on information from an extensive longitudinal study, Farrington (1995) identifies six predictors of adolescent delinquency. Three are family factors: poverty, antisocial parents and poor parenting skills. Several longitudinal studies of child development have found similar antecedents of delinquency (Dishion, French, and Patterson, 1995; Rutter, 1997). Across studies, the family predictors of juvenile conduct problems are parents' family management techniques (poor supervision and harsh discipline), parental criminality, poverty and single-parent homes.

#### MONTORING

Parental monitoring can be defined as the degree to which parents are aware of their children's activities, behaviors and whereabouts and who they are with outside of the home. In adolescence, antisocial behavior and court reported delinquency has been linked to low parental monitoring (Lytton, 1990; Dishion et al., 1995). Because child supervision or monitoring and

single-parent homes are so often related to children's conduct disturbances, researchers have hypothesized that single mothers have difficulties monitoring and regulating their child's behavior. Testing this hypothesis, Chilcoat, Breslau and Anthony (1996) found that mothers who had never married were twice as likely as married mothers to be in the lowest monitoring group.

#### FAMLY STRUCTURE

The risks to children raised without fathers have been noted for decades. Researchers generally agree that those risks include increases in aggressive and antisocial behavior, as well as other problems.

#### THE MINESOTA STUDY

Low-income Minnesota families were followed for over 20 years. Mothers were enrolled in the study in 1976-77 through public health clinics while pregnant with their first child. At the time they gave birth, mothers ranged in age from twelve to 37 years old. Most of the mothers had household incomes at or below the poverty line. Forty percent of these mothers had not completed high school and 60 percent were unmarried. Because we have collected extensive information from these families at twenty time points across nineteen years, we can go beyond the simple comparison of two-parent and single-mother homes. As the following data shows, "singleparent" homes are not alike. The number of men and the duration of male residency vary widely.

#### NEW CORRELATIONAL DATA

Because our data is so extensive, we have been able to rate family disruption based on the number of men the mothers dated, the number who lived in the home, and the number of moves in and out of the home. We used five categories: stable two-parent, stable one-parent, mildly disrupted, very disrupted and extremely disrupted home.

#### MONITORING

We found that teens from intact homes were monitored most by parents. Furthermore, in single-mother homes, teens were monitored most when the home was disrupted least by family transitions.

#### ASSOCIATIONS BETWEEN HOME DISPLIP-TION AND SIGNIFICANT ADOLESCENT CON-DUCT PROBLEMS

Analyses of our data show that the relative stability or disruption of the home during early childhood (ages 2-6) is highly related to conduct problems in adolescence:

#### PERCENTAGE OF CHILDREN WHO LATER SHOWED CONDUCT PROBLEMS

Stable Two-Parent Home	8%
Stable One-Parent Home	22%
Mildly Disrupted Home	26%
Very Disrupted Home	39%
Extremely Disrupted Home	62%

Further analyses revealed that the level of family stability or disruption predicted conduct problems for boys even after accounting for the effects of parental monitoring, life stress and the child's aggression level in kindergarten—all of which were also related to later conduct problems.

#### CONCLUSION

The 167 children in our study are young adults today and most of them are Minnesota citizens. Because our sample was drawn from a low income group, it is not representative of all young adults, but there are thousands of young people in our community who have been raised in homes like the ones described above. Past research has shown that children do best when they are raised

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## **Single Parent Resources**

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#### Research & Extension

## The WonderWise Parent <a href="http://www.ksu.edu/wwparent">http://www.ksu.edu/wwparent</a>

Developed by Chuck Smith, Kansas State University Programs for your community

- Art Awareness
- Basic Parenting
- Fireworks Anger Management
- Nurturing Conscience in Children
- ParentShare

Courses to take online and more

## University of New Hampshire Extension <a href="http://ceinfo.unh.edu/Family/Parent/PARSP.htm">http://ceinfo.unh.edu/Family/Parent/PARSP.htm</a>

The Single Parenting series:

- Building Strong Families
- Common Questions Single Parents Ask
- Communicating Within Your Family
- Custody Issues Today
- Dating Issues When You Have Children
- Disciplining Children
- Friendship and Support
- Helping Children Cope With Death
- Help! I Feel Overwhelmed!
- Loss of A Partner
- Loss of A Relationship
- Not Enough Hours In The Day?
- Sharing Parenting After Divorce
- You Are A Family

## University of Florida Extension <a href="http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/">http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/</a>

Success and the Single Parent series (includes materials written in Spanish):

- Positive Parenting—Understanding Children's Behavior
- A Flash of Time
- Taking Care of Yourself
- Positive Parenting—The Communication Puzzle
- The Money Crunch

Single Parent Research
by their parents (except in

by their parents (except in families characterized by discord or abuse); divorce and remarriage are stressful experiences for children. Our research shows that children are getting too little fathering (mean of 5.3 years per child) and their homes are disrupted by too-frequent changes in mothers' partners. The emerging data on the consequences of raising children in highly-disrupted homes is confirmed by our findings. Children are put at increased risk for negative outcomes, including conduct problems, when the adult residents in their homes are not stable. In our sample, as in others, early aggression, monitoring and life stress are associated with conduct problems. The family disruption/stability measure that predicted conduct disturbances in our study, which was a rating of the child's familial experience between the ages of 2 and 6, could be used in conjunction with measures of child aggression, for early identification of the children at greatest risk. Further, very recent data, including ours, suggests that some of the association between singlemother homes and delinquency may be mediated by low levels of adolescent monitoring.

NOTE: Entire article and bibliography available at: http://www.extension.umn.edu/distribution/familydevelopment/components/7286-03.html