

# How Can the Single Mom Do It?

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More and more moms are finding themselves left without a spouse and handed all the responsibility of raising a family. A recent news report stated that the number of single-parent households has actually doubled in just the last 20 years. For most single mothers, that means working a job full-time and parenting full-time. That's quite a load, to say the least.

From watching my single mother as I was growing up, and from witnessing the lives of many women who are in that situation now, four things stand out as essentials if you're going to succeed, not just survive, as a single mom.

**1. Strive to have a positive attitude.** Attitude is everything. It affects both mental and physical health, and it largely determines whether you succeed or fail. People who think they can, usually can. People who don't think they can, usually can't—whatever the issue at hand, whatever the demand. You must have a positive attitude if you want to succeed.

But single moms can become weighed down with emotions that are like strikes against them when it comes to choosing their attitude.

One strike can be anger. Anger because they're alone. Anger toward their ex-husband. Anger because the world isn't fair. Anger because they have to struggle at a job and then go home and be both a mom and a dad to their children. Anger because people just don't understand the unrelenting demands that pull at them day in and day out, all week and all weekend.

A second strike may be resentment. Unresolved anger can become resentment toward others. Very often it's misdirected and becomes aimed at parents, friends, or churches who may not have had a role in events or any power to sway them. Resentment hurts both the person who feels it and those around her.

Sometimes we feel as if we *deserve* to carry around bitter feelings. Letting go can feel like saying, "It really doesn't matter so much." But we feel just the opposite. It *does* matter so much. And it *hurts* so much. But not dealing with anger and resentment is like covering a boil, hoping it will simply go away. It won't. It will only fester, grow, spread, and erupt in other places. And the pain will only increase.

You don't really *deserve* to carry around your anger and bitterness. You *deserve* to be free of it. Letting it go doesn't mean it didn't matter. It just means it isn't worth the cost of hanging on to the infection. Striving to have a positive attitude is like sunshine and fresh air. It's cleansing. It lightens your load. It strengthens and renews health. That's what you really deserve.

Julie is a young, single mom and the sweetest person you could ever meet. You look at her and think. *The husband who abandoned her should have his head examined. She didn't deserve that.*

When her husband first left, Julie was overwhelmed with grief and the responsibility of caring for her two early-teen children alone. She struggled with feelings of rejection, fear, and devastation.

Her turning point toward renewed health and successful living came, she says, when she decided to lay aside her anger and despair and take positive responsibility for providing a secure home for her children. She knew it wouldn't be easy, but she was determined to do the job and do it well.

Julie realized she couldn't do the job alone, however, so she got involved with a support group through her church. From other members she learned coping skills and gained understanding help. For her emotional health, she went to counseling and took classes. She even got training to help other women in the same situation.

It was difficult for Julie to quit blaming her former husband for her struggles and take this kind of responsibility. It required some heavy-duty anger resolution. But in the process, she became free to enjoy life again.

Julie works hard to provide a healthy environment for her kids, being there for them when she's not at her job, making financial sacrifices to give them opportunities for development—and all with a positive outlook on life. She has also found mentors to give them a constant, healthy male presence. She made the kids' daytime caregiver a friend of the family so she's not just "the sitter." And for the children's sake, she has tried to maintain as good a relationship as possible with their father. Julie's life as a single mom takes extra effort day after day. But with determination and a positive attitude, she's making it.

The same can be true for you. Take heart. Strive to have a positive attitude. Get help in doing that if you need it. But begin to look at your situation in a different light, and make something of it that will count.

**2. Refuse to give in to comparisons.** Comparisons can be deadly. First, they're usually shortsighted and incorrect. You never see the whole story. You don't know what other people may be dealing with. Anyway, we're each unique. None of us is alike, so why are we always comparing ourselves to one another?

When we make comparisons, we begin to have expectations. And often, those expectations are unreasonable. Just as a poor family can't expect to have a house and car as nice as those of their more-well-to-do neighbors, you can't expect to produce the same energy and creativity around the house as your married, stay-at-home friend next door. That's just not realistic. The best advice is to use your mental and physical energy

determining how to make the most of your situation, not focusing on comparisons or expending all your efforts trying to match someone else's standard of living.

A friend went flying in a small plane with his son. Something happened aboard the plane that caused it to go down. Our friend, Mick, survived. His son did not. As a result of his loss, he often says, "Things wouldn't be so hard if we didn't expect them to be so easy."

Things won't be so difficult for you as a single mom if you don't expect them to be easy. Refuse to make the comparisons. Refuse to buy into the expectations of keeping up with someone else, of having everything they have. The truth is, you won't be able to do everything. You may not have all you want or once had. But that's okay. Our lives are not measured in our abundance of things.

**3. Never give up.** When you give up, you quit fighting. When you quit fighting, you lose. Never give up, because only by hanging in will you win.

Determination is necessary to overcome any obstacle, any challenge, any handicap. Whenever something doesn't work out, you have to try again. Maybe from a different angle, maybe in a different way, but you have to keep trying.

I used to play tennis with June. June had only one hand, so tennis was a big challenge for her. Imagine learning to toss the ball in the air and then hit it with a racket, all using one hand. That's how she served. It wasn't easy. It took more energy than the normal way. But she never gave up, and she became an excellent player.

**4. Nurture your soul.** All of us need a resource outside ourselves. And everyone needs to go to that source for nourishment and refreshment. Nurture your soul. Refresh it. Don't neglect the needs of your innermost being. For our family, our source has been God Himself.

Back in that little migrant shack, my mother nurtured her soul from the Bible every day. When there was no soap for the washing machine. Mom would remind us that God would provide. When things were especially hard, she would rehearse for us how good God was, how He would never leave us. When my father became abusive and she was in physical danger, she would reflect on God's promises and remind us that He knows all things. Though we had almost nothing, she would assure us we had all we needed.

Imagine the inner strength she must have had to endure those hard days. That strength remained constant because she nurtured her soul. And imagine the foundation it gave her three children. We saw what really mattered. We saw how to lay a foundation to support us against anything we would ever face in life. We learned where to go for our own inner strength. And what security and emotional stamina that built into us!

How can the single mom do it? It's not an easy road. Strive to have a positive attitude. Refuse to give in to comparisons. Never give up. And nurture your soul. For my mother,

that meant reading her Bible, believing God was big enough to deal with her problems, and then choosing to live like it. I pray these will be your resolutions too. They work!

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