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Single Parenting of Teens

Sometimes the best way to care for someone is to learn how to take care of yourself. This is the good news about single parenting your teens. This means that you have to exorcise the frontline monsters of guilt, fear and shame that are commonly associated with the job of single parenting. This is how it happens.

Take a good hard look at your situation. Put on your glasses so you don't miss anything. You are searching for hidden demons remember. You need to focus and concentrate. You need to not desert yourself in your hour of need.

How do you find yourself in this situation, fighting the conviction that half the team is AWOL, your defenses are down and people are looking at YOU to take charge? Are you capable of answering that question without apportioning blame? Can you, just this once, breathe and forgive life, yourself and others for the challenges you now face?

Being a single parent, surviving being a single parent and succeeding at single parenting is going to take all the compassion you can muster. You see the gap where another partner in parenting should be? Fill that gap with compassion, starting now, and starting with you. No-one is under-rating the job you now face. This is exactly why you cannot waver in your understanding and commitment. And, yes, it is that simple. Start with yourself. Feel sorry for yourself - in a good way. This is how a single parent doubles their output. You've got to feed the fount first. I'm sorry; this means that --right now, right this moment -- you come first. Deliciously so. We have to fix you. Until the fount of life for this particular family unit is receiving from a nourishing source it will be incapable of sustaining its dependents and that's ultimately what it is all about.

So you've looked at yourself and you've evaluated your situation like a kindly maiden aunt would. You're standing there right next to yourself holding your hand and whispering words of encouragement in your ear. You're one big brave person, that's what you are. I have seen families with the full complement of parents loudly proclaiming in anguished tones that a team of concerned parents, or perhaps a gang, would be more suited to the gargantuan nature of the task of bringing up teenagers.

You are legendary, standing there on the top of the hill with only yourself beside you. What you are attempting to do would make Odysseus opt for another dip in the treacherous ocean. Perhaps you're getting the gist of it. It all starts with you. As a single parent of teens it is supremely important that your offspring know that they don't have to worry unduly about you. They will of course have to practice consideration and compromise and respect, but they will not have to take on the extension of your own guilt, shame and fear.

So that is really where it begins, with an apparently selfish act. Isn't that strange and paradoxical? Because this is your best way to give. This is the ONLY way that you will genuinely be able to juggle the wholehearted loving you have to do to single parent successfully. You see the strange and wonderful result of this apparently selfish act is going to carry on giving right down to the cherished little toes of your traumatized teens. They need you, and they need you to be whole.

Once you have gotten over your reluctance to heal yourself, or at least begun the lifelong task, you will be able to pay real quality attention to the needs of your teenagers. Here are just some ways to care for yourself:

-Reach out for help. Sometimes it is as close as the nearest book written by someone in your situation who has survived, even triumphed. You are building your capacity for faith.

-Hang out with people who are living, breathing examples of survivors you want to emulate. Join a support group of single parents so that you can whine and let off steam and try to estimate what is normal in the home.

-Use ingenious ways to rise above your problems. In other words take the indirect route to the solution. Sleep on insoluble problems. Learn to rely on your sub-conscious capacity to work miracles. Go for walks, take your kids. Let the outdoors distract you.

-Take long, ritualistic baths. Light candles. Breathe.

-Sing outside, sing in church, sing in the shower.

-Dance in all the above places.

-Forgive yourself in all the above places and also at night alone in the dark. Forgive everyone. Forget about the family that isn't. Think of the one that is.

Before you know it you will have birthed a generosity that you can shine on your teens and it comes from the right place. Not from self-sacrifice and martyrdom but an inner abundance that has an infinite source. Now you can work with your children.

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Now you can listen to them without becoming distracted by your own unmet needs. This is the truth. When you face a challenging task like single parenting teens you need to be wise and you need to start in the right place. A wise single parent models taking good care of herself for her children to see. A wise single parent dares to believe in a source that gives without restraint. A wise single parent can get so good at this that many dual parent families could learn from him or her.

Gail W.
Boulder, Colorado

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If you are interested in schools that can help troubled teens, contact a representative from Lifelines Family Services.



Lifelines Family Services Offers information on: Troubled Teen Boot Camps, Military Schools, Specialty Private Boarding Schools, Wilderness Programs, and other options for Troubled Teens.

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