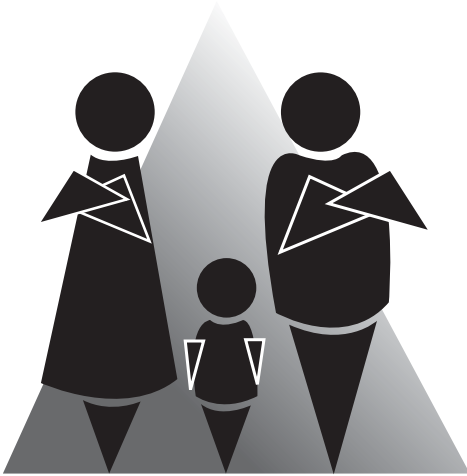


**EXTENSION PROGRAMS**

Agriculture and Forestry  
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4-H Youth Development  
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# Are Your Children in the **MIDDLE** of Your Conflict or Divorce?

## Help! I Feel Overwhelmed!

### Do you feel you...

- are trapped by the isolation, never-ending housework and care-taking?
- are drained by the needs of children?
- are doubtful about your ability to stand the course of life as it is headed?
- have no control over what happens to yourself or your family?
- have no time in the day for yourself?
- try to do too many things?

These are all common feelings for single parents.

### Stress and Parenting

All parenting involves stress. Some stress can be good. Yet, when we have too much stress, it keeps us from being healthy and happy. For example, too much stress affects our thinking. When this happens, it is harder to solve a problem.

How we see or perceive an event causes us to feel stressed, not the event itself. If we change how we view an event, we can reduce our stress. For example, your separation or divorce may cause you a great deal of stress. If the source of stress is within your control, you can take action to change the situation. If it's beyond your control, you can learn to accept it or find ways to minimize its physical and emotional impact. Experts agree that high levels of stress over long periods tend to be paralyzing and reduce the ability to cope. It can lead to serious illness or

depression. Your stress can be reduced if you look at some of the positive parts of this life change.

Perhaps you'll decide to go back to school and get the degree you always wanted. Perhaps your children will learn to be more responsible. Perhaps your household will be more peaceful and calm.

Thinking clearly and staying healthy involve managing stress and time. It's important to balance your time and priorities. Also, allow some time for yourself.

Check ideas from the list below that could help you manage your stress. Write down on your family calendar what you do each day to manage stress.

### Exercise.

Have specific goals. For example, walk 30 minutes three days a week. Or, do 20 sit-ups a day and stretch for 10 minutes.

### Relax.

Set aside some quiet time to read or plan goals. Even 15 minutes a day can help you relieve stress.

### Talk to yourself in a positive way.

Say to yourself whatever helps you to calm down. "Some day I'll laugh about this..." "Every cloud has a silver lining..." Work on having positive attitudes. Write down other ways you could view stressful situations.

### Don't try to do too many things.

Write down daily and weekly schedules. Do you have enough time for what is most important to you?

### Develop friendships.

Talk with other parents; join school or community activities.







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

## Help! I Feel Overwhelmed!

### I have some control

- my child's behavior

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### I have little or no control

- the relationship my ex-spouse has with his new girlfriend

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Now look at your list. Do you spend time and energy worrying about things you can't control? Take control over things you can change. Let go of the others.

### Feeling Loved and Valued

You are certainly important to your children. Still, this isn't the same as having caring relationships with adults. We all need to feel supported. Think about these questions:

- ▶ **Who are the people who help you to feel good about yourself?**
- ▶ **Who reminds you of your strengths and abilities?**
- ▶ **Who listens to you?**

Everyone needs to feel appreciated. With many demands and limited time, it's easy not to take the time to think about these questions. But, single parents must build friendships into their lives. Their emotional needs must be met so they can meet the needs of their children.

## Care of Self

Taking care of yourself is necessary for successful single parenting. A recent study found that successful single parents do these things.

**1. Accept responsibility and challenges.** Successful single parents have positive attitudes. They focus on solutions to problems, not the problems. They accept and handle their feelings of anger in positive, non-violent ways.

**2. Make parenting a priority.** Children are a very important part of life. Successful single parents know the needs of their children and try hard to meet these needs.

**3. Use consistent, nonpunitive discipline.** Successful single parents focus on teaching their children, not punishing them. They provide rules children can obey.

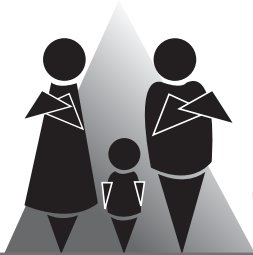
**4. Have open communication.** Successful single parents share what they think and feel with their children, family and friends. They talk often with others, such as with teachers and childcare providers.

**5. Respect each family member's personality and special interests.** Successful parents recognize and help develop each child's interest or skill.

**6. Take care of themselves.** Successful parents may exercise, have quiet times or talk with others.

**7. Have traditions.** Family times, holidays, birthdays and vacations are all special times for a family celebration.

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

### Help! I Feel Overwhelmed!

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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