Maintaining Mental Health as a Single Parent During COVID-19

Meta description: The COVID-19 global pandemic has taken its toll on everyone and everything this year. Learn how you can take steps to maintain your mental health as a single parent during this trying time.

Much of the focus when it comes to the COVID-19 pandemic, which has been one of the defining factors of 2020, is physical health. We've heard a lot about possible symptoms, long-term effects, death rates and how to best protect yourself and those around you. But what about mental health? This pandemic has meant a huge shift in daily life, changing everything from how we grocery shop to how we do our jobs, and nothing has been left untouched. As a single parent, it can be even harder trying to deal with all the changes, uncertainties and struggles alone. If you feel like your mental health has taken a hit in 2020, you're not alone. Find out more about how the issues surrounding the pandemic are affecting mental health and what you can do to make sure you're taking care of yourself.

How the Pandemic Has Affected Mental Health

Both the [World Health Organization](#) and the [Centers for Disease Control](#) have noted that the pandemic and the measures people are being asked to do to combat its spread is having a serious mental health impact for many people. At the very forefront, there is the fear that comes from a new virus making its way through the human population. When the virus was first discovered, scientists didn't yet know what its effect might be, how it spread or how long the incubation or recovery periods might be. Understandably, this led to many people experiencing fear and anxiety as they worried whether they would get infected or what would happen to the people they loved.

As scientists began to understand more about the virus, the world started to go into action to contain it and slow the spread. In the United States, this led to travel bans, mandatory business closings, K-12 schools being moved to remote learning and stay-at-home and quarantine orders. There were also areas that experienced widespread food and supply shortages. These major changes happening all at once only increased the anxiety and fear for many people, and for those who were now experiencing issues getting basic necessities, the mental health toll was even more severe. The closings also meant that many people were out of work, creating financial catastrophes — and even more stress — in the process.

Another key piece of the mental health aspect of COVID-19 is that quarantine measures and stay-at-home orders meant that many people were also suddenly extremely isolated from their support systems, such as friends, family members (who may have also acted as child care),

churches and counselors. This isolation sparked an increase in anxiety and depression. For many, it was a double-edge sword, with less support but more expectations and pressure when it came to working from home and trying to take care of children and home responsibilities while also being available for video conferencing during business hours.

Even as many people have returned to work or started to adjust to life with the virus, there is still a large amount of uncertainty that looms ahead. How will this affect my co-parenting? What will school look like in the fall? What will happen when flu season comes around? Will there be a vaccine? Not knowing what's coming down the road can be just as anxiety producing as dealing with something that is happening now, and all of this takes a huge toll on mental health.

Particular Struggles for Single Parents

While virtually no one has been left unchanged by the pandemic, single parents have been one of the hardest hit demographics when it comes to how much their lives have been disrupted. Single parents are usually the sole incomes for their households, which means if they were laid off or furloughed because of business closings, it had serious financial implications for their families.

Single parents also rely on school and daycare for childcare, so even those whose employers stayed open may not have been able to continue working because of childcare issues. Those who were able to work at home remotely now faced the stress trifecta of taking care of children, working from home and trying to maintain the house — all alone as the only adult.

Single parents have also faced [outside pressure](#) about taking children with them to grocery shops and not being able to juggle everything perfectly all the time. All of this can lead to chronic stress and anxiety as parents try to make sense of the information coming from the government and news media sources and try to make decisions that are in the best interests for the safety and well-being of their children. This has led many to put their own well-being, mentally, emotionally and physically, on the back burner — as single parents so often do.

Tips for Taking Care of Yourself

It's clear from all sides that COVID-19 has had serious mental health implications for many people. However, it also looks like this virus is going to be around for at least the near future, so how can single parents continue to take steps to protect their mental health as we continue to see what the future will bring? These four tips can give you a starting place to start prioritizing your mental health on a daily basis.

1. Take an Inventory of Responsibilities

No matter what your children may think, you are not Superman or Wonder Woman. You cannot do it all — or at least not well — and realizing this is the first step toward less stress and better

mental health. Carve out some time to have a meeting with the CEO of your family (that's you), even if it has to be early in the morning before the kids wake up, late at night after they're in bed or on your lunch hour. Make a list of everything (yes, everything!) that you have to do. Don't forget things that may not be every day such as scheduling car maintenance or having a quarterly performance review with your boss. Consider organizing the list by home, work and child-related responsibilities, so you have a big-picture overview of everything that is on your plate right now. If this seems overwhelming, that's because it probably is! But in the next steps, we're going to discuss how to start trimming this list back into something more manageable.

2. Remove and Delegate Whatever You Can

Chances are, as a single parent, you already had a lot on your plate before a global pandemic arrived on the scene. If you feel like you're running around trying to keep a million plates spinning, it might be time to let a few drop — even if that means that they shatter. Take that list you made from the above step and see if there is anything you can delegate to someone else or remove altogether.

For example, if you have school-aged children, they are more than capable of helping with the household chores. Small children can dust baseboards and wipe down surfaces, while older kids can do dishes and laundry. This might seem small, but it could be enough to build some space into your life. You may also find some things on this list that you don't actually *need* to be doing. Maybe you have a standing call with your sister on Friday mornings that is just a rehash of everything COVID that is doing more harm than help.

3. Recognize That Your Self-Care May Not Look Like Someone Else's

Self-care is a buzzword of the 21st century, but it is actually something that can make all the difference in your life. It's easy as a single parent to always put your own needs and personhood on the back burner, but this isn't healthy. It's important to make time for yourself to help you recharge so you can better be there for the rest of your family.

Social media and society would like to tell you that self-care should be hour-long bubble baths, expensive massages or a new painting hobby. However, this isn't necessarily true. What you're really trying to do with self-care is to come out of it feeling like you have a little more clarity and energy. Maybe this *does* mean a bath or massage for you, but it could just as easily mean watching your favorite TV show with snacks you don't have to share or writing short stories for fun.

4. Remember That These Are Extraordinary Times

No matter how hard you try, there will still be things that fall through the cracks or days where you feel like you can't keep going. It's important to remember that this is a major, once-every-hundred years event, and it's OK — and totally normal even — to be struggling. As

long as your children are healthy and reasonably happy, you're doing a fantastic job, and that's something that deserves to be recognized and celebrated.