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THE SINGLE MOTHER'S SURVIVAL GUIDE

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My daughters' father and I separated a few years ago and, while it was not what I had planned in life, it is a thing that happens to many couples and families. After a bit of an adjustment period, with some rather rough patches, I have actually learned a ton of new life skills and have possibly become a stronger person because of it. I thought it might be interesting to share a few things I have learned along the way: things that have made my life as a single parent a lot easier and actually quite enjoyable!

BE ORGANIZED: I think it was Courtney's husband who once told me that the reason he was so organized was because he was actually quite a lazy person (Apologies Michael, if I am quoting the wrong person). A truer word has never been spoken: a bit of organization makes life a LOT easier. Now people knowing me will laugh at this point, as I am one of the least organized people on the planet. But everything is relative and even at my very low level, being organized has made life a lot less stressful. Small things like setting the breakfast table in the evenings, getting clothes for the whole family ready at night, having a shower at night and not in the morning, ordering food online and pre-cooking dinner for the following days is important to a single-parent household. We can't just pop out quickly to the shops if something is missing nor do we have the spare time to choose an outfit for work when we are trying to dress and feed two children in the morning. At one point I started putting my girls to bed in a a pair of leggings and a t-shirt so that in the morning I just had to slip a dress on top of them and they would be ready - basically I try to come up with things that will just make life run a little bit more smoothly with a bit of forward planning.

LOWER STANDARDS: I think it's quite normal for single parents to try to do way too many things to compensate for the lack of a traditional family set-up, as we (or I) constantly feel guilty. But it's not worth it. I have tried to decide on what is important to me and what isn't. Turns out that a lot of things are not that important. My kids have turned up at birthday parties with the present wrapped up in magazine pages because I had run out of wrapping paper - nobody cared. We have had pasta with olive oil for dinner, because I didn't have the time to buy food... and the kids survived. Sometimes their clothes are not ironed and perfectly co-ordinated or their hair is not properly brushed. Sometimes guests have turned up and the beds have not been made yet or the dishes washed and stashed away. I have officially decided that this is totally ok!

GIVE YOURSELF A TIME OUT: This point is essential and yet the one most of us totally fail at. Because most single parents work full time and deal with kids and everything else, we have relatively little time for ourselves. It is very important to somehow find the time even if it seems impossible. The problem is that if we don't find some space to do something for ourselves we burn out, which is no good for anyone. I have tried many things: yoga, tennis, weekend away, massages and going out. I have not been able to keep one thing up consistently, but I have found that even just trying out new things and planning adventures has kept me a little bit more sane. The one thing that is easy to do is to simply walk for a good 20 mins with some good music on. Even if I am just walking along the metro line to work, it does clear my head!

Anyway, these are just little things that work for me. If you have other tips for what works for you, please share!

- Emilie

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