

SINGLE PARENTING: ONE-PARENT FAMILIES

PROGRAM SUMMARY

This program opens on a scene “in limbo”, where a “not-yet-born” boy is asking to be sent to a “regular family.” It’s pointed out that “regular, typical families” (Mom, Dad and some kids) is no longer the usual situation; almost half of today’s children live with a single parent. Tips on some ways to try to handle problems common to single-parent households are presented in this program.

MAJOR MESSAGE

Whether the absent parent is not present because of death, divorce, separation or desertion, children often tend to blame themselves for that absence: whatever the situation, the parent in charge needs to find ways to make the child (or children) understand and “feel OK” about the family situation. To do this requires frequent, thoughtful, frank talking, back and forth, concerning both the child’s (children’s) fears or worries, as well as the family’s ongoing plans and needs. Even very young children will benefit from frequent, patient discussion with the single parent, for this helps build a sense within children of really having an active role in building a family that offers love and support. Some particularly anxious children may need outside counseling, as well as constant parental support, especially when the loss or absence of the second parent is recent.

KEY POINTS

For most children, loss or change that results in a two-parent family becoming a single-parent family is devastating, whether caused by death, divorce, or desertion. For children, perhaps death, in its finality, tends to provoke the most intense, immediate feelings of loss. The single parent shouldn’t discourage the child’s grief, or hide personal feelings of grief. Sharing feelings and mournful thoughts through discussion appropriate to the child’s age can help both parent and child work through the stages of loss

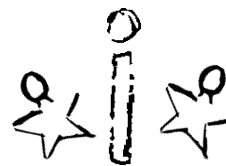
- (1) denial;
- (2) anger;
- (3) depression;
- (4) bargaining; and
- (5) acceptance.



When divorce occurs, both parents suddenly have new roles: the “family” changes drastically. Before and during divorce, parents should define

- (1) how their lifestyles will change;
- (2) how they will develop and maintain a consistent pattern of discipline/rules/expectations for their children;
- (3) how to handle probable occurrences, such as children trying to play one parent against another; and
- (4) how to plan and operate a management system that fosters the children’s needs best while living between two households (if custody is shared), or during limited visitation.

Any single parent soon realizes that playing two roles (mother and father) is doubly difficult: even so, the parent and child (or children) should think of themselves as a “one-parent family” - **not** a “broken home.” Seek some outside sources that might help, be it counselors, friends, relatives, church, YMCA. Involve yourself and children in the wider community whenever possible, to promote new adjustments and maintain balance.



WHILE VIEWING

The program presents a few examples of children playing one parent against another. List one or two examples (you may wish to jot them down).

REFLECTIONS

Think about one of the ways a child in the video played one parent against another. Thoughtfully analyze the situation. Could the parents have prevented this from happening? Work out an answer by yourself, or with others.