

INSIGHTS

by Michael Grose - No. 1 parenting educator



Fathers flying solo

“More dads find themselves in the role of single parent these days – and they’re doing things their way.”

The number of solo dads has increased over the last decade. How men cope with their sole fathering role depends on a number of factors, including their previous parenting experience, the age of their children, the factors that led to becoming a single dad and the relationship with their children’s mother (if they’re single due to divorce).

Perhaps the biggest challenge for most single dads is that they have suddenly been transformed from being a secondary parent, following the lead set by their former partner, to a primary parenting role taking responsibility for their children’s well-being, including the decision-making that parenting entails, even if just for a few days while the kids are on an access visit.

1. Work in unison with your ex

Being a solo dad is doubly hard if you are at loggerheads with an ex-partner so look at ways that you can work together by keeping your children’s best interests at heart. Avoid mixing partner and parenting issues when working out parenting arrangements with your children’s mother. Parenting together involves **compromise**, so be prepared to give and take on areas such as children’s education, discipline and chores.

Stand your ground over issues that obviously concern your children, rather than fight over philosophical differences that have little actual impact on children’s wellbeing and happiness.

2. Work out house rules and stick to them

If your kids live in two households then it’s important that you consider how they make the **transition** from one home to the next. Take it slow and give them time to settle in. If possible, have some alignment and consistency between the two households in areas such as bedtimes, television-watching and mealtimes.

Be firm with your kids if they don’t follow the house rules. Kids respect parents who set boundaries and stick to them.

3. Dads do it differently

Men parent differently to women so don’t try to be a mother clone. Dads are more **activity-based** and do a lot of their teaching and communication through games and being active with kids.

I was an at-home dad when my kids were young and they soon adapted to the differences between their mother’s way and my way of doing things. For instance, my daughters worked out that I couldn’t do their hair, but they knew I was always up for a game before school. So they quickly got themselves ready each morning so we had enough time to fit in an outside game before walking to school.



4. Understand child development

Many single dads struggle to work out suitable standards of behaviour for their children at different ages and stages of development. This knowledge usually comes with experience, so it helps to form **networks** with dads and mums of children of a similar age to yours. This gives you the chance to swap ideas, and work out what’s normal and what’s not with your kids.

As a rule of thumb, most parents are fairly strict with their first born child and relax their rules with later borns. It also helps to remember that boys mature more slowly than girls.

5. Make the most of your time with kids

Be yourself and avoid the temptation of being the fun guy who provides children with heaps of wonderful experiences, avoiding mundane experiences. **Balance** activity with downtime and resist being your children’s home entertainment. Establish some rituals that your kids look forward to such as, sharing a meal or special game.

Keeping your children’s best interests at heart when making decisions about their welfare, is perhaps the best maxim to work by, and don’t be afraid of a few mistakes along the way. Your kids will usually forgive your mistakes when they know that you are fully committed to their wellbeing.

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