



Freephone

0808 802 0925

Gingerbread Single Parent Helpline

Factsheet

For single parents in England and Wales **November 2011**

Looking after your emotional health

Being a single parent can be very rewarding but it will also have its ups and downs and it may be the most challenging job you will ever do. This factsheet focuses on the wellbeing of parents, there are ideas to help improve how you feel, boost your confidence and manage difficult situations. If you are worried about your child's wellbeing or mental health, are looking for resources to support your children or are not sure how to talk to them about difficult issues see the Gingerbread factsheet *Support for your child in difficult situations*.

Gingerbread cannot recommend individual organisations or services. In this factsheet we have included details of a wide selection of organisations offering support to single parents. Whatever services you choose make sure the organisation is suited to your needs and that you are clear about any charges.

The information in this factsheet is correct as of November 2011. For more information, contact the Gingerbread Single Parent Helpline on 0808 802 0925. Calls are free from landlines and most mobiles.

In this factsheet:

- Ideas to help you manage better – page 1
- Separating from a partner – page 5
- Sharing parenting responsibilities – page 5
- Bereavement – page 6
- Overcoming domestic abuse – page 6
- Depression – page 7
- Support for carers – page 7

Recognise how you feel

No one expects you to be at your best all of the time and it can be easy to feel that your role is undervalued and forget that you are doing a great job. Key changes in your life can be very stressful and it is easy to underestimate the burden of day to day responsibilities that being a single parent can bring.

All parents worry but from time to time but problems and challenges may feel overwhelming and sometimes they build up without you realising, especially if you are a busy parent.

Part of being an effective parent is looking after yourself. It can be more difficult to parent well and enjoy being a parent if you are distressed or anxious.

Recognising how you feel and the possible causes is an important step to addressing your worries but it is equally important to get help when you need it.

Ideas to help you manage better

Everyone has their own ways of coping, here are some ideas:

Celebrate your successes

Children do not come with an instruction manual and no one gets it right all of the time but there will be things that you have done really well and that need to be celebrated. Try making a list of all the things you have done in the last week, highlighting the ones that have given pleasure or help to your children – you may be surprised at what you have achieved. If you feel you need someone to chat to or need advice and information on parenting issues, contact Family Lives. For more information on supporting your child see the Gingerbread factsheet *Support for your child in difficult situations*.

Family Lives

0808 800 2222

www.familylives.org.uk

Confidential, free information and advice on a range of parenting issues including discipline, eating habits and bullying.

Look after your body as well as your mind

Eating well and looking after yourself can really boost your mood. Eating well doesn't have to be expensive, the Gingerbread factsheet *Money top tips* has lots of ideas from single parents on saving money on your shopping and cooking on a budget.

If you are feeling down or overwhelmed exercise is often the last thing you feel like, but it may be the best thing you can do. It does not have to be something very energetic or take up much time. A brisk ten minute walk or a game in the park with your children can work wonders.

Try not to make your exercise goals too difficult but ease into it gradually so that you can build up the time and effort to suit your own abilities. Look around your area to see if there are any low cost or free exercise classes. It can also be a great way to meet other adults.

Smoking

Giving up smoking can have huge physical benefits as well as saving money. Giving up smoking can be very hard but many people can do it with support.

Quit

0800 00 22 00

www.quit.org.uk

Quit is the UK charity that helps people give up smoking. Advice and ongoing support is available via the helpline or website. One to one counselling is also available via Skype.

Drugs and alcohol

At times of stress it can be easy to turn to drugs and alcohol as a way of coping. Drug and alcohol addiction can have a major impact on you and your family. If you are using drugs and alcohol to help you get through the day or you feel you may be addicted to either then talk to someone now.

Alcoholics Anonymous

0845 769 7555

www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk

Offers help and support if you think you have a problem with drinking and can help individuals to recover from alcoholism. Information is available by phone or email. A list of local meetings is also available on the website.

NHS Choices

www.nhs.uk

Practical information on all kinds of addiction and where to get help and support. There is also a parent's story of getting help for alcohol addiction.

FRANK

0800 77 66 00

www.talktofrank.com

Provides advice and support on drug and alcohol use. Supports individuals as well as concerned family and friends. Service is available 24 hours a day, every day of the year. Speak to an adviser by phone or email via the website.

Do something just for yourself

Looking after the needs of your growing family can take all of your time and energy. Try to get some time to yourself every now and again to recharge your batteries, reflect on things or simply take time to sit and relax for a few hours. All busy parents need some adult time away from children, housework and chores. If you have friends who are also parents perhaps you could trade childcare for an afternoon or evening. The children will entertain themselves and you can return the favour on another day.

Accept some help

Do not be afraid to accept offers of help and support from family or friends. Even an hour of babysitting can give you time to sit down and collect your thoughts, have a bath in peace or catch up on some housework – whatever helps you to clear your mind.

If you do not have family or close friends nearby, or if you feel more able to talk to someone outside of your family, contact an organisation such as Home-Start.

Home-Start

0808 068 63 68

www.home-start.org.uk

A network of volunteer parents who can visit you at home for a few hours each week. They provide practical and emotional support, including a listening ear, help with the children and a chance to meet other parents in similar situations. The service is free and confidential.

Contact a family

0808 808 3555

www.cafamily.org.uk

If you are a parent of a disabled child, the organisation Contact a Family can put you in touch with other parents of disabled children and provide details of local events.

Meet like-minded people

Some problems are common to all parents and some specific to single parents. Whatever issues you are experiencing you can be sure that there are others out there who are going through similar difficulties to you and who would also find it useful to share their thoughts.

You may also wish to try social networking website such www.netmums.com or www.dads-space.com, where you can chat to other parents and get advice and support on a range of issues. Search around to find one that suits you.

Gingerbread membership

0800 018 4318

membership@gingerbread.org.uk

Consider becoming a Gingerbread member or joining one of our local groups. If there is no group in your area our membership team can help you to set one up. Many groups organise regular meetings, social events and days out for both you and your children.

National Association of Family Information Services

www.nafis.org.uk

Contact your local Family Information Service to find out about facilities for young children in your area. They should have details of parent and toddler groups and other activities where you will have the opportunity to be around other parents.

Find your local Family Information Service by searching online. Alternatively, look in your telephone directory or ask at your local council.

Get out and about

Look out for free entertainment, activities or educational events in your area for both you and your children. These are just as much fun as things you have to pay for and it gets you out of the house, gives you all a change of scene as well as something to talk about. Events are often publicised in your local library, newspaper or Family Information Service (see above).

Also see Gingerbread's *Summer Top Tips* provided by single parents for ideas of entertaining your children during the school holidays.

Consider a break away

The Gingerbread *Holidays* factsheet contains details of companies that provide holidays just for single parents and their children as well as a list of organisations that provide free or discounted breaks for children away from their parents. The factsheet includes details of organisations that cater specifically for children with additional needs as well as tips for a successful trip. To request a copy contact the Gingerbread Single Parent Helpline.

The grass is not always greener

Just as you are probably very good at putting on a smile and a brave face to strangers – and maybe even family and friends – so are others. Try not to imagine that everybody is coping better than you are as it is likely that they are not.

Every family has its ups and downs and the face people put on in public is not always a true reflection of how they feel. Try not to compare yourself to others and remind yourself that you are doing a great job looking after your children.

Talking can help

Friends and family may be unaware of how you really feel. Talking about how you really feel with someone you trust can really help. If you don't have family and friends that you can talk to or you would prefer to speak to someone outside of your family and friends, try social networking websites such as www.netmums.com or www.dads-space.com, where you can chat to other parents.

You may also wish to consider counselling. Your GP may be able to refer you to free counselling sessions, although provision of services differs from area to area. You can also refer yourself, although you may have to pay for the sessions.

Counselling directory

www.counselling-directory.org.uk

Online directory of registered counsellors and psychotherapists. Use the website to search for a counsellor near you and get information on how to recognise when you might need counselling and what to expect.

BACP

01455 883 300

www.bacp.co.uk

The British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) provides confidential information and advice for anyone considering counselling. They can assist you to find a registered counsellor in your local area and produce information to help you to find the right counsellor for you.

Counselling Ltd

www.counselling.ltd.uk

5 Pear Tree Walk, Wakefield, West Yorkshire WF2 0HW

Counselling Ltd is a charity with a network of trained counsellors who offer free sessions to those on low incomes. Services are usually provided free to those receiving certain benefits. If you are not receiving benefits, you can still apply by providing details and evidence of your household income, such as wage slips or bank statements. Availability of free sessions depends on your location and local demand. Visit the website or write for more information.

Relate for parents and families

0300 100 1234

www.relateforparents.org.uk

The Relate for parents and carers service offers advice and support to separating parents. The website contains online guides on topics such as having a healthy divorce and helping your children cope with separation. There is an interactive tool to explore your family relationships as telephone and online counselling.

Improve your skills

Improving your skills can also give your confidence a boost. If you are planning to go back to work in the future or want to progress at work but do not feel you have the skills you need, look around for free or low cost training to improve your CV or speak to a careers adviser.

Free advice on jobs and training is available from the government's careers service, Next Step. For information on training and courses contact Learn Direct.

If you are claiming benefits but would like to do some training to help you get back to work, speak to your Jobcentre Plus about what help they can offer. They may provide support with the cost of training or childcare while you attend a course, if it will help you to get a job.

The Gingerbread factsheet sheet *Moving from benefits to work* can tell you more about the help available for single parents who are looking for work.

Next Step

0800 100 900

www.nextstep.direct.gov.uk

Free advice on careers, skills, training and work.

Careers Wales

0800 100 900

www.careerswales.com

Free careers information and advice for young people, adults and parents in Wales.

Learn Direct

0800 101 901

www.learndirect.co.uk

Information on training, courses and qualifications. The service can help you find the right course and advise on qualifications for careers. Online courses are also available on topics such as maths and English.

CSV

020 7278 6601 (training)

Provides free work and employability training courses, including specialist courses to help unemployed adults back to work.

Get involved in your community

If you are not working right now, doing voluntary work for a few hours a week can bring you into contact with people in a way that is satisfying.

There are many ways to volunteer. You could try something that will help your CV when you come to look for work or choose something that has always interested you, or is just for fun. Volunteering at your child's school, your local children's centre or youth club may also be an option but discuss with your child first, especially if they are older, to check that they are comfortable with you being there.

When do not feel at your best, voluntary work may sound like the last thing you would want to do but once you get started it can be a real boost to your self-confidence. Making a regular commitment to volunteering gives you a focus away from your role as a parent and the chance to meet new people.

Here are some organisations to help get you started:

CSV

020 7278 6601 (general enquiries)

020 7278 6601 (training)

www.csv.org.uk

Can help you to find volunteering opportunities throughout the UK.

Do-it

www.do-it.org.uk

National database of volunteering opportunities throughout the UK. Also includes information on volunteering overseas, employee volunteering and residential opportunities.

Time Bank

www.timebank.org.uk

You can register with time-bank to have your skills and interests matched to volunteering opportunities in your area.

Volunteering England

020 7520 8900 (general enquiries)

www.volunteering.org.uk

Search for your local volunteer centre on the website or by calling the helpline.

Separating from a partner

Separation does not just affect married couples who divorce, many non-married parents also separate for a variety of reasons. You are not alone but you may feel like you have been abandoned or that you have failed your family. These feelings may affect how you feel about other aspects of your life such as your ability to get a job, to study, to make new friends or to be a good parent.

The following organisations and resources offer practical and emotional support for you and your family. There are also details of organisations that offer mediation services, which may help you to communicate with a former partner and reach agreements about difficult issues.

Gingerbread Single Parent Helpline

Freephone 0808 802 0925

www.gingerbread.org.uk

Contact the Gingerbread Single Parent Helpline for free information on the practical aspects of separation including child maintenance, benefits, tax credits, debt, employment, education and housing.

National Family Mediation

0300 4000 636

www.nfm.org.uk

This is a local network of not-for-profit family mediation services, which offers a practical approach to resolving disputes between separated or separating couples. Aims to help individuals reach joint decisions on issues associated with their separation such as children, finance or property.

Money Advice Service

www.moneyadviceservice.org.uk

Impartial information to help parents going through divorce or separation deal with finances. Information includes splitting finances and possessions, dealing with the family home and tips for managing money. Information is for unmarried couples, married couples and civil partners.

Sharing parenting responsibilities

Sharing parenting responsibilities with your child's other parent can be difficult. You may each have a different style of parenting or different ideas about where your child should spend their time. The organisations below support parents who live apart and aim to help you to reach agreements about the care of your child.

The parent connection

www.theparentconnection.org.uk

The website supports parents through separation and parenting difficulties. It can also be used by parents who are just worried about their relationship but have not split. There are a range of resources including articles, videos and support to develop a new parenting relationship after separation, along with practical ideas to overcome problems.

Parenting Plans

0870 600 5522

www.tsoshop.co.uk

The Parenting Plans publication *Putting your children first – A guide for separating parents* helps parents and carers reach agreement about contact arrangements for their children following separation and divorce. Copies can be obtained from TSO by visiting the website or calling the helpline quoting the publication's ISBN number 978-0-117037-61-8.

Separated parents' information programme

www.cafcass.gov.uk

The separated parents' information programme is a national course designed by cafcass and delivered by local organisations. It is offered to parents who are going through the courts to decide issues of child contact. A handbook to accompany the course is available on the cafcass website and provides useful information even if you are not attending a course. The handbook covers the court process, how it can affect you and your children, your emotions and ways improve communication with your ex-partner to help your future parenting.

Time for children

www.cafcass.gov.uk/PDF/TimeforChildren.pdf

This booklet is produced by cafcass and offers practical advice and information on how to arrange positive contact between parents and children. It covers topics such as working out how much contact is best for your child and making plans that suit them. Copies can be downloaded for free from the website.

Bereavement

The death of a partner or loved one can be the most devastating and overwhelming experience. As well as sorting out practical arrangements and immediate financial concerns, you also have your children's needs to think about. There are organisations that can provide support, a listening ear, advice or friendship.

Cruse Bereavement Care

0844 477 9400

www.cruse.org.uk

Cruse provides bereavement counselling and support for both children and adults, by telephone, in your home or through local groups.

National Association of Widows

0845 838 2261

www.nawidows.org.uk

This organisation offers friendship and support to men and women who have lost their partners through bereavement. Their confidential telephone befriending service can put you in touch with other members who are willing to listen and offer support. Other activities include social events and holidays. A booklet called *Losing your partner* is available from the website and covers topics such as dealing with the initial shock and practicalities, your emotions, being widowed with young children and rebuilding your life.

Way Foundation

0300 012 4929

www.wayfoundation.org.uk

Membership is available to widowed men and women under the age of 50, although they do have a group for those widowed after this age. Activities include local social groups run by volunteers, group holidays and activities for both adults and children. Their website contains a list of useful books and resources for adults and children coping with bereavement.

Overcoming domestic abuse

Living with an abusive partner can chip away at your self-esteem, often gradually over a long period of time. This can make it hard to deal with day to day situations of being a single parent. It will take you time to recover from being in this type of relationship so try not to be too hard on yourself.

Below are some organisations that offer information, support and advice for single parents dealing with domestic violence.

National Domestic Violence Helpline

0808 2000 247

www.nationaldomesticviolencehelpline.org.uk

The freephone 24 hour National Domestic Violence Helpline is run in partnership between Women's Aid and Refuge. It is a national service for women experiencing domestic violence or their friends and family. A language translation service is available.

Refuge

www.refuge.org.uk

Women's Aid

www.womensaid.org.uk

Welsh Women's Aid

0808 8010 800

www.welshwomensaid.org

Provides advice, information and details of local support for women and children experiencing domestic abuse in Wales.

Broken Rainbow

0300 999 5428

www.broken-rainbow.org.uk

Provides support for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people experiencing domestic violence. Information includes safety plans and sanctuary schemes.

Men's Advice Line

0808 801 0327

www.mensadvice.org.uk

Confidential helpline for men who have experienced or who are experiencing domestic abuse. Provides emotional support and practical advice. They also produce a booklet for men experiencing domestic abuse covering topics about how to make yourself safer, where to get legal advice, how domestic abuse affects children and information for gay and bisexual men.

Depression/post-natal depression

Around one in four British adults will be suffering from feelings of anxiety or depression at any one time so it is not uncommon. Depression is a serious illness, can affect anyone at any time and may leave you feeling very sad or low for long periods of time.

Some common indicators of depression are anxiety, trouble sleeping, extreme tiredness, changes in appetite, lack of motivation and being unable to take pleasure in activities you used to enjoy – although these are not the only symptoms.

Post-natal depression is a form of depression that can occur after child birth. It usually develops soon after childbirth but can start several months or even up to one year following childbirth. Around one in every ten mothers will develop post-natal depression. It can happen to anyone, even those who have had positive experiences with their other children and there is no single cause.

It is particularly important to take good care of yourself after you have had a baby as the demands on you at this time are high. Uncontrollable feelings of anxiety, tiredness or irritability are common. These feelings can be short-lived and often referred to as the 'baby blues'. However, if these feelings are more deep-rooted or persistent, they may be signs of post-natal depression.

Getting help If you are unsure about whether what you are feeling is depression it is worthwhile speaking to your GP, midwife or health visitor or one of the organisations listed below. They will not think any less of you for seeking their support.

Asking for help takes courage but taking steps to look after yourself will help you to look after your children and enjoy your baby.

Mind

0845 766 0163

www.mind.org.uk

Information and advice on all aspects of mental health including postnatal depression, common signs, self-help tips, treatment and support.

NHS Choices

www.nhs.uk

Information on what depression is, how to spot signs of depression, causes, where to get help and treatment. Information on post-natal depression including causes, prevention, treatment and real life stories.

SANE

0845 767 8000

www.sane.org.uk

Runs a national helpline offering emotional support and information to anyone affected by mental illness. Open 6pm-11pm every day of the year. Support is also available via email and online forums.

Samaritans

08457 90 90 90

www.samaritans.org

Provides confidential emotional support for those experiencing feelings of distress or despair, including those which may lead to suicide. The helpline is available 24 hours a day and you can also contact them by email or letter. In some areas face to face appointments are available.

Support for carers

If you are a full time carer for someone else, you may feel like you have no time to take care of yourself. Your health and emotional wellbeing is just as important, not least because it will help you cope better with the demands of being a carer. The organisations below offer advice to carers on a wide range of issues both practical and emotional.

Carers Direct (NHS)

0808 802 0202

www.nhs.uk/carersdirect

Free, confidential information and advice to carers including help with legal issues to do with your caring situation, money, work, study and your wellbeing. The website has stories from other carers and a forum to share experiences and support.

Carers UK

0808 808 7777

www.carersuk.org

Support and practical information for carers, including parents of disabled children. This includes advice on money, respite care, your rights at work and family relationships. You can also share experiences and get support from other carers via the website forums.

The Princess Royal Trust for Carers

www.carers.org

Provides advice and support to carers including looking after yourself, getting help, taking a holiday and bereavement. You can use the website to find a local carers group and chat to other carers online through discussion boards and forums.

Parenting challenges

It is difficult to bring up children without the help of another adult and someone to share decisions with. You may find it hard to know if you are doing it right. Setting boundaries can also be a challenge, especially if your child's other parent has a different parenting style. If you have friends who are also parents, try to find out how they are dealing with particular situations and what their tips are. You may also want to speak to Family Lives

Family Lives

0808 800 2222

www.familylives.org.uk

Confidential, free information and advice on a range of parenting issues including discipline, eating habits and bullying. Their website includes information articles, parents' blogs, live chat and confidential email support.

If you are concerned that your child is troubled by something but is not telling you or you are worried by their behaviour there are services that can help you.

You can find details of these in the Gingerbread factsheet Support for your child in difficult situations or you can get details from the Gingerbread Single Parent Helpline.

Tackle financial problems.

It is human nature to put your head in the sand and hope that financial worries will disappear, especially if you are juggling a busy life. However, the quicker you deal with debts, the easier they are to resolve.

There are plenty of places where you can get free, independent advice on debts and budgeting. Some organisations are listed below or see the Gingerbread factsheets *Money matters* and *Managing household bills*.

Citizens Advice Bureau

www.citizensadvice.org.uk

Information and advice on a wide range of issues including benefits and tax credits. Check your telephone directory for your local bureau or find details on the website.

Consumer Credit Counselling Service

0800 138 1111

www.cccs.co.uk

Provides independent debt counselling and debt management plans. No charge for services.

National Debtline

0808 808 4000

www.nationaldebtline.co.uk

Free, confidential debt advice over the telephone. Factsheets and sample letters also available via the website

Further help and information

Gingerbread Single Parent Helpline

Freephone 0808 802 0925

www.gingerbread.org.uk

Free information and advice on a range of issues including maintenance, benefits, tax credits, debt, employment, adult education, legal rights and holidays.

One Parent Families Scotland Helpline

Freephone 0808 801 0323

www.opfs.org.uk

Run by our partner organisation, the Lone Parent Helpline provides confidential advice and information for single parents in Scotland.

More from Gingerbread

The following related Gingerbread factsheets for single parents are also available:

- > Action to take when a relationship ends
- > Contact between your child and their other parent
- > Moving from benefits to work
- > Money for further education
- > Money for higher education

Download them from our website or call 0808 802 0925 to request them from the Helpline

Become a Gingerbread member

Membership is available to single parents in England and Wales. Join a community of thousands of single parents who benefit from the mutual support, free advice and information provided by Gingerbread.

You can also meet other single parents at one of our local support groups.

Visit our website, call 0800 018 4318 or email membership@gingerbread.org.uk

Gingerbread
Single parents, equal families

www.gingerbread.org.uk
255 Kentish Town Road, London NW5 2LX
Tel 020 7428 5400 Fax 020 7482 4851

Gingerbread is registered in England and Wales as the National Council for One Parent Families, a company limited by guarantee, no. 402748, and a charity, no. 230750. The Gingerbread Single Parent Helpline is supported by the Department for Education, HMRC and other funders and is accredited by the Helplines Association.

