



Piecing It Together

ESSENTIAL SKILLS FOR SINGLE PARENT FAMILIES

PERSONAL GROWTH & ENRICHMENT

A single father put it this way: “You gotta be kidding! Take time for personal growth? Hey, walk in my shoes for a few days, and then tell me where I’m supposed to find time for myself.” It’s not hard to understand what this father is talking about. Arranging time for our own personal growth and enrichment can be a real challenge.

The good news is that there are ways to feed your personal growth that require little or no extra time. We’ll share a couple of skills that will help you do this. But, you still need to carve out time just for yourself. So we’ll also share some thoughts and suggestions that will help you in scheduling personal time.

ESSENTIAL SKILLS

- # 1. Embrace life one day at a time
- # 2. Focus on the positive
- # 3. Make time for yourself

VIDEO SUMMARY: In a kitchen scene, two single parents, Greg and Kathy, talk about the importance of helping out one another. Several other solo parents reflect on the benefits of taking time for themselves. Then, specific suggestions are offered for using the Essential Skills highlighted on the left.

Essential Skill # 1 **EMBRACE LIFE ONE DAY AT A TIME**

The demands of single parenting can be endless. It’s easy to become overwhelmed, particularly when we spend too much of our energy living in the past or future. Taking life one day at a time is a “must” for your single parent survival kit.

Embracing life one day at a time is also an invaluable personal growth skill—a skill that doesn’t require any extra time or energy on your part. In fact, when you get really good at it, you’ll find that focusing wholeheartedly on the task at

hand actually relieves time pressure and increases your personal energy.

Recalling fond memories is a pleasure; we need to learn from past challenges. Carefully planning for the future is just as important. However, most of us spend far too much energy living in the past and future. We regret what did or didn’t happen. We worry about the future. We lack faith, stress ourselves out, and set a poor example for our children. All the while, the precious opportunities of the moment pass by half-noticed.

The goal is to take one day, one hour, one moment at a time. Doing this is not easy. It’s a



skill that takes practice, discipline, concentration and faith. The world's greatest athletes know the importance and joy of living fully in the present moment. They call it being in the "zone." The more they do this, the more successful they become. It works the same way with the world's leading business executives, and it will work for you, too.

Living fully in the "here and now" offers additional benefits: You are free from resentment. You can no longer be oppressed by mistakes from the past, no matter who made them. Every moment is new, and each relationship fresh.

By giving your full attention to the present moment, you automatically take good care of the future. You also lighten your load, enjoy life more, and become much more effective in whatever you are doing.

Here are some tips for living life one day at a time, one moment at a time:

- Set daily goals and work toward finishing what you have set out to do.
- Break big tasks down into smaller chunks. Say to yourself: "During this hour I'll enjoy doing the best I can with the task at hand."
- Don't focus on past mistakes. Learn from them and move forward.
- Know that you can handle anything if you take it one moment at a time. Anticipating what you think is going to happen in the next minute or the next week causes you to feel burdened. Stop living in the future.
- When you find yourself rushing, take a few big, deep breaths and slow yourself down into the present moment. You'll accomplish more and do it better.

- Occasionally focus for a minute or so on breathing easily and gently, letting your belly softly expand with each in-breath. If you are spiritually inclined, offer a prayer for those around you, or give them a smile, a word of encouragement, or a kind thought.

The Gratitude Attitude. When feelings of fear, stress, frustration or depression start to creep in, practice the Gratitude Attitude. Here's how you do it.

Simply take a few moments and delight in the blessings that surround you—the fresh air, the warmth of the sun, the early morning singing of birds, your health, your many talents, the funny things your children do, the friendship of a family pet, the beautiful people in your life . . . even the problems that stretch you and bring out your inner strength.

Taking a few moments to focus on your blessings and express thanks will soften your worries and bring you into the present moment. If you're already feeling good, a dose of the Gratitude Attitude will help you feel even better. Make every day Thanksgiving Day. This wonderful habit of counting our blessings leads into our second personal growth and enrichment skill.

Essential Skill # 2

FOCUS ON THE POSITIVE

Abraham Lincoln said it well: "Most folks are about as happy as they make up their minds to be." A positive attitude is a choice. It starts inside you, and it can make all the difference in the world.

Focusing on the positive is a skill. The more you practice, the better you become. Don't, however, misuse positive thinking as an excuse to avoid areas of pain or challenge that need healing. Have the courage to confront your problems directly and look for the lessons they contain.



Instead of covering up painful emotions, experience them and learn from their rich wisdom.

The lives of most single parents are filled with challenges. Problems that come to you can be understood to have a purpose. No matter how painful, they contribute to your learning and growth. They are opportunities in disguise. So take heart; try not to be discouraged.

Expect things to work out for the best. And do everything you can to make it happen that way.

Look on the bright side. Acknowledge the bad things in life, but *choose* to focus on the positive. Develop a “can do” attitude. Become a possibility thinker. Believe in your children and their dreams. Expect good things to happen; and make it a habit to focus on what you and your children are doing well. The more skilled you become in seeing positive traits in others, the more these qualities will blossom within them and in you.

The following are some suggestions for building your positive thinking muscles:

- Give yourself a pat on the back for hanging in there and being a great parent. Think about all you do for your children. Feel the satisfaction that comes from being a devoted parent. Now take time to let the good feelings soak in.
 - Talk with two or three people you know who have great attitudes about life. Ask them to share the secrets to their peace, love and joy.
 - Think about your single parent family and list as many “positives” as you can.
 - Focus on a recent problem you have struggled with in your life. Identify at least three positive things you learned as a result of your experiences surrounding this problem.
 - Welcome challenges as opportunities for learning and growing.
- Talk to yourself encouragingly and kindly, and frequently visualize yourself reaching goals that are important to you.
 - Accept responsibility for your own happiness: It’s not what happens to you that causes you to feel and act in the way you do, it’s what you *choose to think and believe* about what happens that determines your feelings and actions.
 - As much as reasonably possible, surround yourself with positive and supportive friends, co-workers and family members.
 - Wherever you are, focus on what is noble and positive so that you can absorb these qualities. Behold beauty everywhere.

Essential Skill # 3

MAKE TIME FOR YOURSELF

Do you love your children? Do you want the best for them? Then you’ve got to carve out personal time for yourself. (*Now go back to the beginning of this short paragraph and read it again—slowly, thoughtfully. It’s that important!*)

When you take time to nurture yourself, you feel better. You’re calmer, more energetic, more creative. You’re more fun to be with, and you’re a better parent, co-worker and friend. By your example, you teach your child an important lesson on self-renewal and giving your best to those around you.

Take responsibility for creating time for your personal enrichment. The following suggestions will help you get the ball rolling:

- Using a calendar, schedule in chunks of time just for you. Do this a month, or even a year, in advance. If your children are old enough to understand, tell them what you are doing and why. Then stick to your plan.
- Do something just for you. For example, take a hot bath. It’s relaxing, gives you time to think,



and reduces stress. Or set aside time to read a fun or inspirational book, or to watch a favorite television program.

***Making time for yourself
is not selfish; it is healthy
—for you and your children***

- Give a friend or family member the opportunity to spend a morning, evening or entire day with your children. Use the time to do whatever your heart desires.
- Build in a little period of quiet time early in the morning or at another time when you are fresh. Use this quiet time in a way that feels good to you, perhaps to relax and enjoy nature, to put your day in perspective, or to commune with God.
- Be adventuresome. What would you love to do? Let yourself dream; then follow your heart and take some risks. Give your home a fresh look, launch into a hobby that fascinates you, or explore new people, places and ideas.

We all need time for ourselves—time for recharging our batteries and nourishing our souls. Time for doing what brings us peace and joy, time for personal reflection and enrichment. Make it a point to give yourself this gift of personal time. Guide your children in similarly taking a little time here and there for themselves.

Embrace your life one day at a time. Focus on the positive. And make time for yourself. Each of these skills is essential to your personal development.

Remember that you can use your life as a single parent as a course for personal growth and enrichment. It doesn't take extra time. You don't need to look anywhere else. It's right there in front of you, each and every day—the frustrations and disappointments, the opportunities and joys. It's in that bear hug from your little boy and the sparkle in the beautiful eyes of your teenage daughter.

Family life is a training ground for the development of love. This is particularly true in single parent households where unique challenges test the character and skills of all family members.

When you meet these challenges with a positive attitude, you grow personally and develop invaluable life skills. Your days seem brighter and new possibilities open up. Most important of all, your capacity to love deepens and expands.



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NOTES:

Personal Action Plan

Think about Personal Growth and Enrichment and the three target skills: *Embrace Life One Day at a Time*, *Focus On the Positive*, and *Make Time for Yourself*. Now zero in on one of these areas and choose one small but important change you really want to make in the next few days. Visualize yourself successfully following through. Tell a supportive friend or family member about your goal. **Write your action plan in the space below.**

Beginning Date _____

Signature _____