



Piecing It Together

ESSENTIAL SKILLS FOR SINGLE PARENT FAMILIES

MANAGING YOUR PARENTS

Living in a single parent family, you have a wonderful opportunity to build a strong relationship with your mom or dad. At times, you will have your parent all to yourself. Take advantage of this one-on-one time together. Talk to your parent about your day and his or her day, too. Show love through your actions and words. Parents need that kind of support.

Living in a solo parent home has probably helped you in a variety of ways. Chances are, you're more independent, self-sufficient, reliable, and responsible than most other children your age. You have to be.

Family life is always a challenge. There's no question about that. But it can be a lot easier if you learn a few simple skills for managing your parents. "Managing Your Parents." Sounds interesting, doesn't it?

ESSENTIAL SKILLS

- # 1. Pitch in with chores
- # 2. Show love
- # 3. Ask for what you need

VIDEO SUMMARY: In scene one, a young teen and her mom are in the kitchen putting away dishes. Mom is pleased that her daughter volunteered to help out. The daughter knows that when she pitches in with chores, her mom's mood is better. Scene two shows another daughter running the vacuum cleaner. She elects not to take a phone call because she wants to finish her work first. Scene three shows the two teens talking about wanting to go to their school dance and how important it is to ask for what you need. Teen commentators then offer a number of suggestions.

Essential Skill # 1

PITCH IN WITH CHORES

Pitch in with the chores. . . . Doesn't sound like much fun, does it? But look at it this way. You have to do a certain amount of work around home anyhow. That's just the way life is. So why not take charge of the situation and turn it into a positive?

Assert your leadership. Offer to help your mom or dad out. That way, you'll have more say-so and control over what you do. Parents love it when kids take the initiative and pitch in with household chores.

Parents—especially single parents—need extra assistance around home. With schedules that are often hectic, they truly appreciate a little extra help. Your assistance can make home life run a lot



smoother. It will also help your mom or dad feel better. And that's good news, because a happier parent makes for a happier home!

Here are a few idea-starters for helping out with household chores:

- Pick up after yourself. Your mom or dad will like it when you take responsibility for yourself. Being responsible builds trust and appreciation.

***Choose to be positive.
Your attitude about doing chores
makes a huge difference.
When you keep a positive
attitude, you feel better, you
make fewer mistakes, and you
have more energy.***

- Parents also like it when kids keep their rooms clean. When your mom or dad sees your clean room, he or she knows you are an organized person who cares about where you live.
- Do a "five-minute surprise." Take five minutes to do something unexpected, like putting the dishes away, sweeping out the garage, or vacuuming the living room. Or help fold the laundry, using it as an opportunity to talk with your parent. The five minutes will be over in a flash, but the results and good feelings will linger.
- Offer to make dinner once in a while. Your mom will probably be delighted. (She might pass out from shock!) Making dinner will give your mother a welcome break from her routine.
- Suggest to your dad that you'll be glad to make a list of the chores you are expected to do. This will prevent confusion and fussing over who is responsible for what chore.
- If you have a brother or sister, set an example through your helpful behavior around home.
- Use your creativity. Figure out better and quicker ways to get things done. For example,

let's say you want to clean up your room but you're short on time. Set a timer for 10 minutes and do everything you can to get things in the best order possible during those ten minutes.

Remember, getting things done around the home is a family affair. Sharing a home means sharing with the chores, too.

Essential Skill #2 **SHOW LOVE**

Showing love means more than an occasional hug or thank you. While that's a good start, we need to express our love often and in a variety of ways. More than we realize, our parents thrive on our love. We need to regularly show and tell our moms and dads how much we love them.

Ask yourself: What does my mom or dad really like? How could I surprise my father? What are some little things my mother might appreciate?

Every parent is different. Express love in ways that fit with your mom or dad's personality. Terrica's mom might feel very loved when given a single wildflower picked from the roadside. Marquee's dad may be an action man of few words. For him, tossing around a football with his son may be a good way of sharing love. Another parent might light up when you holler "I love you!" as you go out the door for school.

Look for ways to include your mom or dad in your world. This is particularly important as you grow into your teenage years. Many parents find it a little scary as their children move into the teen years and become much more independent.

Spend a little time every now and then talking with your mom or dad, sharing your feelings and what's going on in your life. This is an important way of showing your love, and it's a great way to build trust between you and your parent. The more you understand and trust one another, the happier you both will be.



Another excellent way to show your love is to help your parent have fun. Sometimes our moms and dads get too serious.

A little lighthearted goofing around can lighten their load. A from-the-heart smile can do wonders, too. Or how about a good 20-second shoulder rub?

Showing love is an important part of “managing your parents.” Try some of these ideas:

- Use words to express your love. For example, “I’m glad you’re my dad,” or “Thanks, Mom, for helping me with my homework.”
- Compliment your parent. “Mom, you’re really good on the computer.” Give your dad a pat on the back and follow through with words of appreciation or kindness.
- Let your dad know that you honor his opinions and are willing to listen to what he has to say. He’ll do the same for you. Showing respect earns respect and is a vital part of building a loving relationship.
- Hug your mom when you say good-bye in the morning or when you say good night. She will return the favor, and both of you will feel loved.
- Be willing to participate when the family needs help or is working on a project together.
- Expect the best from yourself. What a marvelous gift of love to your parents! Make things happen. When you succeed, your parents will feel that they have succeeded, too.
- If your parent seems overwhelmed or stressed out, reach out with a helping hand or a gentle touch. Your mom or dad will feel better just knowing that you care.

- Give your parent space from time to time when you sense he or she needs a few moments of quiet and solitude. This is just one more example of “love in action.”
- If you are spiritually inclined, keep your mom or dad in your prayers. Modern research underscores the power of heartfelt prayers and loving thoughts.

Essential Skill #3

ASK FOR WHAT YOU NEED

Asking for what you need may sound easy, but many of us aren’t exactly sure how to do it. Without paying close attention, we might ask for too much at the wrong time or in the wrong place.

Think beforehand if you are asking for a “need” or a “want.” Most parents are very willing to meet all your needs, and many of your wants. If your want is totally outrageous, forget it. However, if you think your request is reasonable and deserves to be heard, go ahead and present your case. It really helps if you can tell your parent the “why” behind your request.

Knowing how to wisely ask for what you need is an important life skill. It will help you not only with your mom or dad, but also at school, with friends, and throughout your adult life.

Help your parents see things from your point of view. To do that, sit down and talk to them on a regular basis. Equally important, try to put yourself in your parent’s shoes. Do your best to see the world from inside your mom or dad. As you learn to do this, your understanding and sensitivity will grow. Your sense of timing will improve, too.

You'll know when it's a good time to make a request and when it's best to wait a while.

If money is tight, you may not feel comfortable asking if you can have a friend spend the night because it means that your mom will have an extra mouth to feed. You may feel like asking for what you need will add to the family stress and you are not sure you want to do that right now. Occasionally it's best not to ask. Most of the time, however, it's wise to go ahead and talk about what's on your mind.

Asking for what you need doesn't have to be difficult. The following steps may help you discover that you CAN ask for exactly what you need.

- Just say what is on your mind. Having the courage to express yourself helps to build mutual understanding and respect between you and your parent.
- Be open, direct and honest when asking for what you need. Clear communication prevents misunderstanding and develops trust.
- When speaking to your mom or dad, look them in the eye and give them your full attention. If you were in their shoes, you would expect the same.
- Ask for what you want using a tone of voice that is pleasant and respectful. Yelling out, "Hey, I want Jimmy to spend the night Friday" will probably not give you the response you are looking for. Instead, try getting your mom's attention and saying something like, "Mom, is it okay with you if Jimmy comes over next Friday to spend the night? I'll help pick up after both of us if it will help you." Speak to your mom or dad in the way you would like to be spoken to. You're much more likely to get what you want.
- Plan ahead. Consider what you want to ask for. You might even want to jot down your thoughts and think about them before making your request. This can be particularly helpful if your request is a major one.

- If you are worried about adding to household stress, offer to compromise. "If we walk to the game, can you pick us up after it's over?"
- Be respectful and polite even if you don't get what you ask for. Arguing about the decision your parent has made will not help you with future causes. Respecting decisions shows maturity.

Pitching in with chores, asking for what you need, sharing a smile or gentle touch, and simply saying, "I love you" will all go a long way in creatively managing your parents. By putting ideas like these to work in your home, your relationship with your mom or dad will become stronger and more fulfilling.

Things will go a lot more smoothly for you and home will be a much more pleasant place to be. Your parents will be more eager to trust your judgment and support your activities and dreams. Best of all, many of the benefits will last a lifetime.



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NOTES:

Personal Action Plan

Think about Managing Your Parents and the three target skills: *Pitch In With Chores*, *Show Love*, and *Ask for What You Want*. 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 _____