

The educated single mother

[Family](#), [Divorce](#)



The Educated Single Mother “ A mother is she who can take the place of all others but whose place no one else can take. ” (Mermillod) This quote emphasizes one of the many meanings of the word “ mother”. This quote can especially relate to single mothers. When faced with the difficulty of raising a child by yourself, you sometimes have to play the role of mom and dad. Mothers may never be able to fill the void of the missing father, but given the chances, they will try. To say the least, being a parent means taking care of your child everyday, knowing everyday occurrences, and learning about them from their expressions and behavior. Raising a healthy, well rounded, respectful, and intelligent child is every mother’s goal. There is so much personal reward in learning about your child and growing with them. The reward becomes ten fold when mothers do it alone. Being a single mother myself, I have done my best to make my daughter’s life as level as possible because of her loss. My child’s father left when she was 16 months old. Her father did not run off to never return or call. He simply moved out of the house and has every other weekend visitation. He is what I classify as a “ weekend dad”. Although he is a good dad when he has her, I would not consider him a parent. I have taken the duty of a single parent running a house, working, going to school, and raising my daughter. Although I have a number of obligations, my first priority is to raise my daughter to be the best woman she can be, despite her situation. I do not want my daughter to develop emotional problems because she grew up in a single parent household. “ Emotional intelligence is a set of skills learned from early childhood on- mainly from our parents” (Neilson 5). With that said, we, as single mothers, should be educated on the development of children in single

parent households to help our children through hard times. Parents who ignore the fact that their children could suffer from the loss of their father are going to make it even harder for the children. If the parent's don't acknowledge there are problems, how is a vulnerable child going to be able to cope with the stress from their problems? As mothers, we can begin to help our children through these times by being educated about our children's development. During my research on this subject I came across a book that caught my attention unlike any other book has in a while. It was written by Neil Kalter, Ph. D., psychologist and psychiatry at the University of Michigan. The book is called Growing up with Divorce: Helping your child Avoid Immediate and Later Emotional Problems. This book is remarkable in covering all aspects of a divorce or break up involving children. It covers the different stages of divorce and how each stage affects the child at their particular stage in their development. What I found particularly valuable were the use of many different situations. When you research this material, there is an abundance of research that leads to poverty. This book contributes to everyday situations that everyday people go through whether in poverty or wealth. Regardless of economic status, some issues with divorce and break ups are inevitable. Although infants may be the most difficult to care for, helping them cope seems to be easiest when they are still so little. This may be because they don't understand about divorce or breaking up. All they know during a divorce or breakup is environmental changes. Even though she doesn't know why, she can feel that you do not have as much time to spend with her. Now you have to take care of the cleaning, laundry, shopping, and cooking alone. Also, when she spends time

with her dad it will most likely be in a place that she is not familiar to being in with him. Any change that takes place a baby's life is one that you as a mother have to help them adjust. One way to help your daughter healthfully adjust to this change is to keep her life as consistent as possible. Kalter defines consistency as "the child has a regular, predictable daily schedule of where he will be and, even more urgent, who will care for him" (74). In Kalter's book he talks about a young toddler that was having anxiety when he had to visit his father. His father was exercising visitation once a week. His parents were getting along despite the break up. The child was doing well in daycare. Therefore, his behavior lead his parents seek the help of a child psychiatrist. The psychiatrist broke it down and explained that children become familiar and comfortable with their environment and situation from physical experience, not emotional experience. It is hard for a young child to develop a bond with someone they only see once a week (86). The typical visitation schedule of every other weekend is not a good idea for children so little. If this situation took place, she would have to spend 2 days with a man that she hasn't seen in 2 weeks. This does not allow her enough time to know that she can trust this man to care for her, leaving her feeling uncomfortable. Much like the child in Kalter's book. This situation may also be detrimental to her dad developing a bond with her. Divorce is hard for everyone, even dad. If he is already having a hard time dealing with not being able to see his daughter everyday, it can be harder for him when every time she is with him, she is unhappy. This can be wounding to her dad and may harm the chance of a healthy valuable father-daughter relationship in the future (Kalter 85). A solution to this may be to allow for more consecutive

visits from her dad. For instance, he could spend 3 days a week with her. Let these days involve activities that are important such as feeding, diapering, bathing, and playing. She will experience that he can take care of her like a parent is expected. When he is rewarded with the sense of being needed from his little girl, this can make it hard for him to abandon her. This can ultimately contribute to the life long bond between her and her father. Also with children this age, it may be best to not allow over night visitation until they are a little older. Make sure you and her father have a clear understanding that this is not to punish him, but to allow for her to adjust to the changes in her primary home. Keeping a consistent routine of daily activities (wake-up time, dressing, nap time, bed time, breakfast, lunch, dinner, etc.) will help her to adjust to only having mom to take care of her. It would also help to talk with daycare providers to keep this schedule during the work week and weekend. Make an extra copy for her dad, so he can also implement the schedule when she is with him. When your daughter is use to the changes that have taken place and you feel comfortable that her dad can keep the routine at his house, overnight visits can be a good idea. One last idea for infants adjusting to any change, especially the movement between mom and dad's house is to give them familiar objects they can take with them back and forth. My daughter has a fetish for anything satin. When her dad moved out, we made sure he had one of her favorite " silky" blankets to keep at his house for when she was there in case we forgot to send one in her bag. Also, if your daughter has a favorite toy, buy two; one for your house and one for dad's house. This little extra money you have to spend will only helps your child with the changes and can lead to a better relationship

with her father. This can be helpful for a young child of any age, not only infants. I sometimes wonder how something so beautiful and perfect can be so mean and unruly. I'm talking about toddlers. I don't think that the terrible 2's start at 2. I think they can sometimes start at 1 and go until about 3 or 4. They should just rename them terrible toddlers. However, no matter what severity your child experiences these terrible episodes, you love them unconditionally. Those beautiful baby features tied with the sweet hugs and "I love you", it's easy to be in love with them. It makes it even easier when it is just you and her all the time. You can include her in everyday activities such as cooking and eating dinner, running errands, watching TV or a movie together, shopping, sleeping in the same bed, or just puttering around the house. You don't have to focus any attention on anyone else except your little girl. I think all single mothers can relate to these examples. I was shocked when I read that all this attention and affection sounds like a good thing, but it can actually be a problem. It's labeled in the book as an enmeshed relationship between mother and daughter (Kalter 152). Another example Kalter uses is a little girl named Sarah and her mother who is involved in this kind of relationship with her daughter. The daycare noticed the delays Sarah was having in her large muscle development, the lack of involvement with peers, and the almost adult like relationship she had with the daycare workers. The daycare mentioned it to Sarah's mother, but she was insulted and felt they are "attacking" her relationship with her daughter. She did agree to have a doctor observe Sarah, but would not volunteer to discuss anything with a psychologist. After watching Sarah he concluded, conveyed to the workers, and encouraged them to explain this to

Sarah's mother: The need preschoolers have to carve out their own identity apart from their parents. This requires a great deal of practice in interacting with peers as well as their parents' permission and encouragement to emotionally invest in relationships outside of the home. When a lonely or anxious mother spends a great deal of time with her daughter, she is sending the message that she needs her daughter to stay closely involved with her. (152) Enmeshing relationships underlying issue is the mothers well being. If the mother is going to raise a healthy child, she needs to be healthy herself. You give your daughter a sense of responsibility to make you feel happy that is not her responsibility as a child. When your child may become older she may feel that socializing with her friends will make you upset because she is not spending any time with you. This can be looked at as just a very caring child, but all children need friends and to learn how to socialize to be healthy. Be aware of how you feel and be able to handle your own problems like an adult. Do not rely on your child to make you happy. Life is the other way around; your job is to make them happy. When the doctor in Sarah's situation talks about a "parent's permission and encouragement to emotionally invest in relationships" this can include a relationship with her father. If she has this feeling that it is her responsibility to make you happy, she may feel loving her dad would be betraying you. By giving her freedom to experience loving her dad while maintaining a healthy relationship with you can help immensely to raise an emotionally healthy and independent young lady. For those of us, myself included, dealing with this, it's helpful to know that this can be reversed. An idea to help your child get back into the flow of being around other children, visit your local YMCA and sign them up

for classes that might interest them. Go to www.ymcaswil.org to see a schedule of events that are starting in the area. While your child is in their activity, you can meet other parents that may be in your same situation. This situation benefits both you and your child. You could also plan for a group of co-workers to go out after work. If socializing and making a life for yourself besides your child might be too hard for you, you should consider talking to a health care professional to help you overcome your need for your daughters attention. If this is the case, there are obvious underlying issues within yourself that need to be resolved in order for you to allow your child to grow emotionally strong. Whatever it is that you choose to do to cope, take care of yourself, so you can take care of your child. Along with the topic of socializing to make you happier, comes the topic of dating a new man and the impact it has on your child. With younger children they may not understand who this new man could be. However, when your child gets old enough around preschool and elementary age, she will begin to understand who this man is and how his role can change things. If your family has consisted of only you and your daughter since she was an infant and you have not spent anytime of her life being your own adult person, dating may come as a huge shock to her. A common question when a mother starts dating is when should she introduce a new man to her child? Ava Siegler, Ph.D. is director of the Institute for Child Adolescent & Family Studies in New York City. In her book *What Should I Tell the Kids?*, Siegler puts the child-meeting-new-guy issue simply. She says, "Keep your social life private until it becomes a love life" (181). No one wants their child to get attached to another man and then something happen to the relationship and now this

man is out of the child's life. That can be traumatic for a young child who is already growing up without their father. In an interview with Monica Gamble, a mother of 4 year old little girl, Kaylee, Monica said: I left Kaylee's father when she was 18 months. I did not want to date again. I just wanted to focus on my life with her and no worry about anyone else. After a few months and getting over the split with her father, I was kind of bored. I started hanging out with old friends. I had dated a few guys, but nothing really serious. Then I met J. R. After a few dates, I knew that he was a great guy and that this was going to work. I decided to let their meeting be at the park so it would be comfortable for her. Monica had a great idea to have the two meet in a place that was comfortable for her daughter; instead of those awkward first meetings of sitting in a room just looking at each other. If all introductions go well, the next step in the dating process for a single mother may be the hurdle of making your child still feeling involved. Even with the best of intentions some mothers may feel they are including their daughters, but don't acknowledge their daughter's signs of distress from the change in their relationship. You are going to be occupied with another person in your life, but make sure you keep your children's feelings in the front of your mind when it comes to your dating life. Your daughter has growing up her whole life with your undivided attention, now she has to share you. One way to avoid this situation is to include your daughter in activities with you and your boyfriend. Make sure it is an activity that all 3 of you will be actively playing a role in; or, an activity that he and she can play together with you watching and encouraging. She will still have the comfort of you being present, but have that interaction with him. Also, make sure you do not change any of

your regular activities that you had previously before you starting dating him. If Wednesday night was your night to read books and order pizza, do not change it. Keep your plans with her and make sure she knows you always have special time for her and her alone. This concretely shows your daughter that you still love her. Depending on the relationship your child has developed with their own father, they may feel insecure about liking some other man; they may feel they are betraying their dad. When children reach around 6-8 years old, they begin to develop guilt and they being to realize others have feelings (Children First 4). This could lead to a competition between affection for her mother's boyfriend, who she likes, versus the loyalty to her own dad. There may not be any evident signs that this is bothering her, but if there is the slightest, discussing this issue with your daughter and letting her know that liking more than one person is okay and there are different kinds of love. In any situation with children who are early elementary age or older, try talking to them about their feelings about whatever it is that is bothering them. They could just be confused about the way they feel because they have not felt that emotion before. You can help them figure out what it is that is bothering them, reassure them its okay to have those feelings, and help them overcome them. While on the subject of communicating with your child, after your child comes home from a visit from his dad's, do you assume the role of an interrogator? For example, do you ask questions such as, " What did you guys do this weekend? " followed by, " Was it just you two, or was anyone else there? " These questions can start out to be genuine interest and turn into being nosy. Asking questions because you are genuinely interested in your child's experience over the

weekend is okay. Asking questions to get into the life of your ex is not okay. The time your child spends with their father is important and precious to them. Interrogating them for information (that is some times none of your business) is wrong because you are invading the privacy of their relationship with their dad. Your child may already feel she is in the middle, don't make it worse. This is kind of similar to when you walk through the door from work and you are bombarded with a messy house and the famous question, "What's for dinner?" I can remember this being a daily routine for my mother when my brother and I were children. She just wanted to be able to walk through the door, take off her shoes, and relax and reflect for a minute without having to think about her next task. Children are the same way, especially after a visit with their father. Give children this cool down time to reflect before and after their visits. M. Gary Neuman, L. M. H. C. and Patricia Romanowski suggest in their book *Helping Your Kids Cope with Divorce the Sandcastles Way*, "Children usually need periods of "emotional decompression". Simply playing with or talking to the child before and upon his return can relieve the child's anxiety, build trust in both parents, and generally smooth the transition [from visits with other parents]" (285). Again, from my own experience, I am so excited to see my daughter when she comes home that I am guilty of smothering her in this way. It makes more sense that I should back off and let her adjust to being home. She can take some time to reflect on her time with her dad and now tie it into her life at home. Overall, this time can help her reflect and recognize that life will be okay with separated parents. Do not interfere with your child's way of thinking about the other parent. By giving them the opportunity to develop

their own thoughts will be beneficial for you and them. If you cloud your child's judgment of their father with your own feelings and your child ends up feeling the opposite, you can potentially harm your relationship with them. As hard as it can be, letting them mature and develop their own thoughts about life is a gift. Either by choice or chance, we are mothers. Either by choice or chance, we are single mothers. Either way, single or not, we have a duty to raise our children the best that we can; to provide for them and to protect them. You can fulfill this duty with ease by educating yourself on their development. Younger children need your physical support. Older children need your emotional support and guidance. Ultimately, as parents, we have created this difficult situation. The least we can do is to spend time gaining knowledge of the impact and situations that may occur in our children's lives and be prepared for them. Works Cited Kalter, Neil. Growing Up With Divorce: Helping Your Child Avoid Immediate and Later Emotional Problems. New York: The Free Press, 1990. Neuman, L. M. H. C., M. Gary, and Patricia Romanowski. Helping Your Kids Cope with Divorce the Sandcastles Way. New York: Random House, 1998. Nielsen, Linda. " Fathers and Daughters; Why a Course for College Students?". College Student Journal 35. 2 (June 2001) : 280. Academic Search Premier. EBSCO Southwestern Illinois College Library, Belleville, IL. 16 October 2007. <http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/detail?vid=6&hid=115&sid=1ad44267-365e-42ac-9220-451b61841f27%40sessionmgr107> Siegler, Ph. D., Ava L. What Should I Tell the Kids? A Parent's Guide to Real Problems in the Real World. New York: Penguin Books, 1993.