

SINGLE MOMS – DOING LOCKDOWN ALONE

Being a single mom is challenging at the best of times. Take a world-wide pandemic and a national lockdown and add to that the already stressful position of being a single mom and it just seem like too much to handle.

If you're feeling overwhelmed, stressed beyond your imagination and like you cannot cope with having your children home for an entire five-week lockdown without school and the usual distractions, it's okay. You're normal. A whole new range of worries and pressures may be on your mind, such as job security, financial income and how to manage working from home while having your children at home. And then of course there's that old, familiar, nagging issue of being alone, of being a single mom.

Rather than trying to cope with this web of darkness on your own, remember that you don't have to. There's always a family member, friend, colleague or even a mental health professional who can support you through these challenging times.

Here are some tips for getting through the lockdown:

Stick to your regular routine. Lockdown is no excuse for routines to be thrown out the window. Now, more than ever, it is important to stick to them. This is important for your children, but for you as well. Without a routine we can feel as if we are slowly losing our sanity. Night becomes day, meals are skipped, treats are in surplus. There's no real need to even get dressed, so there are day and night pajamas. While it is okay to make room for some adjustments to a structured routine, everyone should try to wake up and go to bed on time and meals should take place at regular hours. Set up a time-table for the day starting with breakfast, any house chores your children can help you with, school time, rest time, activity time, etc. The routine and timetable should be discussed and drawn up with your children - this helps to give them a voice and they'll be happier to go along with it. A routine will also help you with working from home and establishing necessary boundaries so that your children understand that while mommy works they have something else to do, like online schooling.

Take a break. Listen to yourself. If you are feeling like the sound of Thomas the Train and that remote control car will drive you over the edge, take a five minute break, even if that means allowing five more minutes of screen time. Trying to push through can result in an outburst that you do not mean to have.

Acknowledge the sense of accomplishment. So far it has been 4 weeks of lockdown, we have at least another one to go and even then there are no guarantees. At the beginning or end of each day acknowledge what you have achieved. Four

weeks of lock-down, home schooling, entertaining kids, providing meals, laundry, housekeeping, and more. Each day is a huge achievement and it's important that you validate yourself.

Maintain contact with family, friends, neighbours. Stay in touch with your support system via video calling, phone calls and messaging. Allow your children to stay in contact with their support systems too. For younger children set up virtual play dates with their friends and encourage your older children to stay in regular contact with their social circle too. Of course you also need to ensure that your children have ample time to phone their dads as well. Lockdown is not a time to emotionally separate your children from their dad.

Keep your children informed. Remember that children are perceptive and resilient and need to be kept informed as much as adults do. Tell them what's happening is its age appropriate to share. Talk about the world wide situation, the situation in our country and the situation for you and your family. Encourage them to ask questions. They have fears too and sometimes it may difficult for them to ask as they may not have the words or want to burden you.

Think about what the lockdown has provided for you. Focus on your newfound inner strengths and skills. You have possibly become aware of strengths you never knew you had. If not, it's a good idea to reflect upon your day or even the week that was and focus on what you have accomplished. It's okay to acknowledge that some days are harder than others and on those you begin to wonder if you are a good mother. Facebook may highlight those feelings especially when you see how your friends are making perfect home-made cookies with their children and re-arranging their neat and colour-coded bedrooms while in your house everything seems a mess - cookie dough on the ceiling and your children's bedrooms are the messiest they have ever been. Acknowledge these feelings, and then help yourself by re-framing them and rather focusing on what you have accomplished, the quality time you are having with your children (regardless of the cookie dough on the ceiling which gave you all a good laugh and created an unforgettable memory). It may be helpful to reflect on the day that was before you go to sleep and in doing so focus on three strengths that helped you get through it. That's how you an end your day off on a positive note, focusing on your strengths and abilities as a single mom.

Remember that this lockdown is temporary and will pass. Being a single mom is a huge achievement in and of itself, so add another feather to your cap. You deserve it!

