

Single Parents Come in Three Stages

Stage Three: The Emerging Stage



Moving from reality to becoming a healthy single parent.

by Linda Ranson Jacobs

In the emerging healthy single parent stage, you begin to realize that you feel better about life in general. You experience a lighter feeling, and you begin to see the humor in various situations. You feel better about yourself, your relationship with your children, your job and relationships with others. You have worked hard, and gradually you begin to realize that life is going to be okay. You begin to enjoy life.

Just like the surviving and transitioning stages, the emerging stage is a gradual realization that you have arrived. This doesn't mean that all your problems cease to exist. It means that you can better cope with whatever comes your way. You have found a balance in your life. It doesn't mean that you have the perfect job or the house you have dreamed of, but it does mean that you are content with where you are and you have a hope for the future. Possibly in your professional life you still need education or training, but you know that you are moving forward and that the Lord will provide.

You realize the trauma that put you in the position of parenting alone doesn't consume your thoughts any longer. You have processed your grief, be it death, divorce or a never-married situation. You have forgiven those who hurt you. You begin to see other people's points of view. You begin to see clearly for the first time in a long time. One single mom shared that she can remember

when she realized she was emerging and becoming a healthy single parent. She was filling out some paperwork so her teenage children could attend a church camp. It had been over five years since the divorce. When it came to the questions for information about the children's father, she couldn't remember his phone number. She said, "Do you have any idea how good that felt when I realized this man didn't consume my thoughts every waking minute? I realized I didn't have any malice for him any longer. He was my children's father, and it was okay. I had to laugh at myself and then go find my kids and ask what their dad's phone number was."

Trusting God

You have learned to trust in God with all your heart, your soul and your very being. You want to know more about God. You yearn to know more about Him. You're disappointed when the sermon ends or when you have to put down the Bible from studying or when praying to God because you have to go to work. You realize that you go to God's Word for comfort, for answers and to just spend intimate time with the Lord.

There is no timeline for how long it takes to become the emerging healthy single parent. Some single parents never make it. They forever moan and groan about their situation. Before they realize it, their children are grown, and they are still whining and complaining. For some single parents it takes years and is a slow painful process. For other

people the words in the first chapter of James become a reality within a few short years: “Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything” (James 1:2–4).

You realize that everything you have been through can be used for God’s glory. You know that you will face more trials, but you also realize that life will go on and you will survive. You have persevered and you have matured, and you have become a healthy single parent. You realize that you are a different person now.

As a healthy single parent you find yourself wanting to give back to God. The words in 2 Corinthians 1:3–5 become alive and beckon to you, “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows.”

You may find that you want to help others by working in help-type ministries in your church. Ministries such as DivorceCare allow you to give back to God. Or you may be the person whom God has been blessed with other talents, and you may find yourself wanting to explore those talents so you can serve in your local church. Maybe you are an organized person and feel more comfortable behind the scenes. Maybe you will be the one to walk alongside a new single dad or single mom. Possibly you may be the person who will minister to the children in a single parent

home. God can use whatever talents you possess.

Enjoying Your Children

In regard to your children and this stage of parenting, you realize that you really enjoy your children. You feel strong and in control. This doesn’t mean you control your children or their lives, but you are in control. You feel comfortable setting boundaries. You are fair with discipline. You feel good about decision-making and even seeking help in areas you are unsure about. For one single dad, when it came to purchasing clothes for his teenage daughter, he felt uncomfortable. He called on his mother and the women in the church to help. This single dad wasn’t afraid to ask for help.

It may be at this stage that you realize one or more of your children need help. You know that whatever the problems are, they are more than you can handle alone. You aren’t afraid to seek professional help. You are mature enough to realize your child is in a crisis. You want the best for your child. You don’t blame, but you accept the responsibility of getting help.

You find yourself wanting to spend time together as a single parent family. You do silly and fun things. I remember one night my daughter had a girlfriend over, and they started watching *The Planet of the Apes* movie marathon. They invited me to sit down and watch it with them. We stayed up the entire night watching those movies, eating and laughing. Around 2:00 in the morning my son left the three of us on the floor and moved to the couch to sleep. Sometime around 4:30 in the morning I drifted off into dreamland. Late the next morning I woke up on the floor next to my daughter and her friend, who were sound asleep. I sat there for several minutes

enjoying the peace and contentment of having my children around me.

Because I wasn't concentrating on my problems or dwelling on the "Oh poor is me" syndrome, I had more time to really look at my children. I became aware of who they were spending time with. I made it a rule to get to know who their friend's parents were. If they were going to spend the night someplace or go to a house for a party, I called and got to know the parents. I got details for the get together that was about to take place. I tried to find out the boundaries these other parent's set for their children. If their boundaries were very different from mine, I had to make a decision if my children could spend time in that household. In the least it meant sitting down with my child and reviewing our moral and spiritual values.

Personalizing Your Household

By now you and your children have set up a routine that fits your household. You realize this routine changes as kids get older and their activities change. But changing the routine and daily schedule is okay because you and your children have learned how to adapt to situations. Your family has developed some healthy rituals. You have started new traditions and restructured some old family traditions. You may find you like getting together with other single parent families. In general, family time together has taken on a new meaning. You take time to pray with your children. You can share openly with your children, and they come to you with their problems, not so much for advice but to just talk.

When I got to this stage, I found that not only did my children want to talk, but they wanted to bring other kids home to talk to "their mother." I remember one incident in particular with my daughter. Late one night

she came into my room and said, "Mom, there is this girl at school, and she has really big problems. She thinks she might be pregnant, and she can't talk to her mom. I told her that I could talk to you about anything. Is it okay if I bring her home one night? Mom, she really needs an adult to help her."

Healthy single parents look ahead at what they desire for their children. They no longer live just to get through the moment, but they begin to look at the big picture in regard to their children. I worked hard at teaching my children financial responsibilities. I started when they were in elementary school. We collected store coupons, and with the money we saved using them, we took small trips such as going to the county fair together. When they entered middle school, they had to budget their weekly monies to include their tithe, lunches, school supplies and entertainment. In high school both children worked to be able to purchase their clothes and do extracurricular activities. Along with budgeting their finances, they learned to budget their time. They developed work ethics and learned about contributing to the welfare of others.

One Saturday shortly after my son graduated from high school, I heard a knock on the front door. When I opened the door, one of my son's friends was standing before me. I explained that my son wasn't home. This young man said, "I didn't come to see Brian; I came to visit with you. I was wondering if you could help me. See I have been a friend of Brian's for a long time, and I have watched how you raised him. He knows how to budget his money, and he knows how to budget his time. I don't know how to do either one. Can you teach me?"

Did these things happen overnight? No it took years and perseverance. It took me becoming healthy myself before I could help my

children. I had to emerge out of the circumstances that surrounded me. I had to decide what I wanted for my children. I had to pray and determine the Lord's direction in my life. I searched the Scriptures for words and stories of encouragement. I also found solace in many of the stories in the Bible. These stories helped me to continue parenting my children.

Examples from the Bible

When I think about single parents in the Bible who had it rough and emerged from their trails and hardships, I think about Naomi. Many of you may not look at Naomi as a single mom, but to me she was a real hero. Naomi's story is told in the book of Ruth, and while the book of Ruth focuses on Ruth and her love for her mother-in-law, Naomi, it also brings Naomi from despair to hope and happiness.

In this book in the Bible, Naomi, her husband and two sons have to leave their homeland and move to a foreign land (Ruth 1:1). While living in this new country, her husband dies leaving her with two sons (Ruth 1:3). Imagine being Naomi and living at a time where a woman had no way to make a living. Her sons married, and after about ten years they also died. Naomi now had to support herself and her daughters-in-law. When Naomi heard that the Lord had come to the aid of people in her native country, she decided to move back home (Ruth 1:6).

Naomi encouraged her daughters-in-law to return to their families before she left. One daughter-in-law, Ruth, chose to stay with her mother-in-law and move with her. Even though Naomi lost her sons, she loved her daughters-in-law. Throughout the book of Ruth, Naomi struggles. The Bible doesn't go into all the daily events and details of her life, but we do come to understand she has great

struggles. She is left alone in a strange country with no spouse. She moves back home and eventually is able to assist her daughter-in-law in marrying again. At the end of the story Naomi is rewarded with a grandson. We are left with the impression that Naomi is content with her life, "Then Naomi took the child, laid him in her lap and cared for him" (Ruth 4:16). What a joy this must have been for Naomi. She persevered and struggled, and after her trials she had a place to call home, a place where she was well cared for and loved by her family.

Maybe you single dads are saying, "Okay, so Naomi was an example for you because you were a single mom, but how do you expect me to relate to her?" A good example for all of you single dads is Jesus. Take time to study how He dealt with and interacted with His disciples. He loved them unconditionally. He taught them. He modeled character traits He wanted them to have. He guided them and spent time with them. He developed an intimate bonding with them. He may not have been their father, but He fathered His disciples in every way. In a sense Jesus wanted His disciples to grow strong and tall in their faith and their ministry. He knew the trials and tribulations they were going to face, and He wanted them to be ready. He planned and prepared them for what was ahead.

My long-range goals were for my children to become healthy functioning adults in our society. I wanted them to have a deep relationship with Jesus Christ. I wanted them to fall in love with the person God had prepared for them and marry and start a family of their own. As the single parent in our home, I had to prepare, teach and model the traits that would inspire them. It is your responsibility to do the same for your children.

I Made a Lot of Mistakes Along the Way

Every once in a while I would lose my temper or fall apart. When this happened, I would go back to my kids and apologize. I remember one time that I completely lost it. It had been a very busy and long, long week. I had put in mega hours at the job only to go home to a house where everything seemed to be falling apart, including the clothes dryer. The dryer door had broken a week before. Since I had absolutely no extra money, I had to figure out how to get the dryer door to stay closed so we could dry our clothes. My son found that by putting a steel bat in the door and propping it up just right that the door would stay closed and our clothes would dry. Until I could come up with some extra funds, the bat in the door would have to work.

On this one night when I was so tired, I dragged myself home weary to the bone. After we had dinner, I proceeded to try and dry some clothes. I put the bat in the door and just about the time I got to the door, the bat fell down and the door came open. I maintained my cool. I tried this several times, and each time just when I would walk into the next room, the bat would fall. I could stand there for several minutes and that bat would hold, but the minute my foot stepped into the other room, that bat would fall. All of a sudden when the bat fell, it seemed life and the dryer were just too much to handle. I grabbed that bat and began banging on that stupid dryer. I just lost it!

My kids came running to see what was happening, and when my daughter saw me hitting that dryer, she started backing up with her arms stretched out as if to protect her brother, and she said, "Whoa, Brian, let her go! Let her go! Better the dryer than us!" They both started laughing and dramatizing backing away. When I thought about how stupid I must have looked, I started laughing,

too. We laughed and laughed that night. During the laughing, I apologized for losing it. As adults my kids love telling this story to other people, and believe me they tell it often. I, on the other hand, would like to forget the entire incident. It is not one of my finer moments in parenting!

What I'm trying to say is that we are all human. We can only do the best we can do. Emerging as a healthy single parent whether you are a single dad or a single mom, or you are a custodial or non-custodial parent, means you parent your children as God parents you. You put aside your frustrations. You sacrifice. You teach your children. You hurt when they hurt. You watch them make mistakes, and you stay beside them and help them learn from their mistakes. You honor and respect your children. You love your children unconditionally. In the end when your children become adults, you let them go. It's at this point you can become friends with your children. You can now take pride in them and their accomplishments.

Matthew 11:28–30 says, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

As an emerged single parent, your burden is light because you have taken His yoke upon you.

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