

SOLE PARENTS' UNION

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Sole Parents'
UNION

Dear Families and Friends,

It's been a busy couple of months here at Sole Parents' Union Headquarters. We have set up our new office in Maroubra and are just about settled in. We have a brand new website that you can visit us on located at:

www.soleparentsunion.org.au

and we also have a blog page where you can have your say or just comment on what other people have said. The link for this is:

<http://soleparentsunion.wordpress.com>

We have a Facebook page also and would love you to join the group, have a look at us on:

<http://www.facebook.com/home.php#/group.php?gid=133130768087>

or our fanpage

<http://www.facebook.com/home.php?ref=home#/pages/Sole-Parents-Union/161561077712>

About Us

For those not familiar with our website it may be a good time to inform you about who we are and what our aims are.

VISION AND MISSION

Sole Parents' Union is a non-profit community advocacy organisation that works on behalf of all sole parents, representing their views and issues to government. We work on behalf of both female and male sole parents, share-care parents, and children.

Our vision is

To have sole parent families recognised as valid family types, and not ones in need of "fixing"

Our mission is

To improve outcomes for sole parent families and improve recognition of the issues inherent in parenting alone or across multiple households

HOW WE DO IT

We do this through working with government to improve policy for sole parent families, including in family law, social security, child support, tax and any other issues affecting families. We also work with the media to raise awareness of issues surrounding sole parenting, and improve the profile of sole parents in the media and the community.

We are represented on a number of government advisory panels, and make submissions and appear before enquiries on all matters that affect sole parent families.



Our media spokesperson is our President,
Kathleen Swinbourne.

We also have lots of information on the website on what to do if you are considering becoming a sole parent and have a link that will answer questions that may help with the transition.

My family is separating

[My family is separating — what now?](#)

is a new website set up by the Federal Government to try to provide information about separation and divorce. It provides links to information about emotional, financial and legal advice and support services.

WHAT WE CAN DO FOR YOU:

We have expert staff that can address groups or run workshops on Sole Parent Issues, Child Support Issues and any Income Issues you may have. If you are interested in any of these offers please don't hesitate to contact us on the above numbers.

***SCHOOL HOLIDAYS** can be a trying time for all parents. With the added pressure of trying to organise vacation care or school holiday activities while still juggling all the other household activities, holiday time can be stressful for a family with two parents. For a single parent family this extra stress can increase the pressure twofold. With only one person to carry the extra load that is normally taken up with the child being at school the holidays can become a very tiresome time for the single parent. There are lots of issues facing single parents.

HOW IS SINGLE PARENTING DIFFERENT? Single parents often have less support; parenting in a household where there is only one adult can sometimes become very stressful as all decisions, discipline, complaints from disgruntled children, carrying out punishments for bad behaviour, basically everything falls to one person. This can become tiresome, with the parent sometimes wishing for the support of another adult in the house to help share the load. They may

have plenty of support outside the home but it still isn't quite the same as having another adult in the house.

Children grow up faster. Children in single parent households generally grow up faster as they tend to fill the role as the other adult in the family. Children become accustomed to being expected to do more in the way of chores and helping in the day-to-day running of the household and for looking after themselves. Single parents generally tend to include their children more in conversations that they would normally share with the other adult in the house. As a result of often being the substitute for the other adult, children in single parent families tend to mature faster.

Budgets are often tighter; considering the fact that that generally speaking a single parent household means only one income instead of two, the result means that budgets become tighter and the ability to finance things such as school holiday entertainment becomes more difficult. This can lead to added stress. Children get used to moving around more; with

custody normally being shared between two parents the child/ren involved and the parents get used to the children moving between homes regularly.

All these things can add to the stress levels in a single parent household and with no one to share the load with at home it is no wonder single parenting is such a difficult task. Add to that the extra pressure that all families have at school holiday time and you potentially have one very stressed parent. Here are a few tips for handling the stress levels during the school holidays.



Remember to have some "ME" time. Take some time for yourself once the kids are in bed to do something that relaxes you and recharges the batteries. This will help you to cope better the following day. Be clear with your expectations. Let the kids know what you expect of them and discuss their expectations of you with them. That way there are no surprises and no

resultant tantrums or difficulties. Make a budget. Make yourself a budget and stick to it. If you work the holiday expenses into your budget throughout the year it will spread the pressure and may even enable you to do more once the holidays arrive. Accept help. True, outside help may not be entirely the same as having another adult in the house, but if you have a support network, make use of it! Get the kids babysat or let the parents of a school friend take them for a day and then swap there is plenty of help out there, you just have to take it when its on offer and ask for it when it's not.

I have always found it's the teenagers who are most at risk due to the lack of supervision that may be hard to avoid if you are a working parent. Here are some things to think about as you consider your options:

Leaving Older Children At Home Alone:

When is a child old enough to be left at home alone? Can you leave older children at home during the school holidays? The answers to these questions

really come down to your own discretion as the child's parent but there are many things to consider, and such a decision should not be made lightly. You can check with your state's Department of Social Services to see if there is a legal age at which children can be left alone.

Child's Maturity:

Although some social service departments will be able to give you a minimum age for a child to legally be left alone, a lot will not as there are too many other variables to be considered. First of all is the child's maturity. Each child progresses at a different pace and just because a child reaches a certain age, does not mean they have the maturity to be left unsupervised. And the same can be said for a child that is beyond their years in maturity. If you, as their parent, believe they are mature enough, why should they not be able to stay at home just because of an age requirement that is set to fit a broad spectrum of people? Even though a child may meet a legal age requirement and may have the maturity, it isn't advisable that the child care for younger siblings.

External Influences:

Children and teenagers have many things that influence them outside of the family unit and their belief system and they are highly impressionable, so it is always a good idea to remember that when considering whether to leave them unattended or not. Your child may be the well behaved, straight 'A' student, a completely trustworthy child.

However, all that could go out the window when your model child is faced with unsupervised freedom.

They may go completely AWOL and throw a big party and trash the house after crumbling to the pressure of friends, or it may be something as simple as surfing the web and getting mixed up in undesirable sites. The point is, if you're not present, you won't know and you lose one of the levels of protection we have to protect our children from the world and themselves.

Safety Issues:

There are also safety issues to consider. What if your unsupervised child is injured? While it's true that at some point we have to let our children out into the big wide world, it is also

true that it is our job as parents is to protect them until they are at an age that they are capable of doing that for themselves. And yes, chances are that if you consider your child old enough and mature enough to be at home alone then surely they are able to use the telephone to call for help if they are in trouble, but what if they are unable to? Leaving children at home alone for extended periods of time relies on your judgement as a parent. You know your children better than anyone else; you know their maturity and capability levels but ensure you consider all the possibilities before you make a decision.

Some of the options available and their advantages/pitfalls could be as follows.

Leaving children with another adult:

You may decide to leave you child in the care of another adult. This may be a grandparent or neighbour or even a nanny. Again, in leaving them with their grandparent this may prove to be financially a good option but you will have to consider any possible health issues (i.e.,

perhaps age may become an issue; keeping up with young children is a tiring adventure). You will also need to consider if the adult is trustworthy. Just because someone is an adult it doesn't necessarily make him or her reliable or trustworthy. Leaving your children with someone like a nanny can be not only costly but also hard to find one that you feel comfortable leaving your children with.

Regular Day-Care:

You may be able to place your children in a long day-care centre but many of these only cater for children up to school age so will not be a viable option if your children are older. Also if your child is in this kind of care during the school term they may enjoy the change of going to one that caters especially for the school holidays.

Whatever you decide we hope that you and your children have a safe and enjoyable break.