

Factsheet

For single parents in England and Wales **November 2016**

Freephone

0808 802 0925

Gingerbread Single Parent Helpline

Looking after your emotional health

Being a single parent can be very rewarding but it can also have its ups and downs, and could be the most challenging job you ever do. This factsheet focuses on your wellbeing with ideas to help improve how you feel, boost your confidence and manage difficult situations. If you're worried about your child's wellbeing or are looking for resources to support your children see our factsheet [Support for children and young people](#).

This factsheet includes details of a wide range of organisations offering support to single parents. Whatever services you choose to use make sure the organisation is suited to your needs and that you are clear about any charges. The information in this factsheet is correct as of November 2016.

Recognising how you feel

No one expects you to be at your best all of the time and you may find you feel undervalued or forget that you're doing a great job. Changes in your life can be very stressful and it's easy to underestimate the burden of day-to-day responsibilities that being a single parent can bring.

Everyone worries from time to time, but problems and challenges can sometimes feel overwhelming. They can build up without you realising, especially as a busy parent.

Part of being an effective parent is looking after yourself. It can be more difficult to parent well and enjoy being a parent if you are distressed or anxious. Recognising how you feel and the possible causes is an important step to addressing your worries, but it's equally important to get help when you need it.

Common challenges

Anxiety and depression/post-natal depression

Getting help

If you're unsure if what you're feeling is depression/post-natal depression, anxiety or perhaps something else, it's worth speaking to your GP, midwife, health visitor or one of the organisations listed below.

Asking for help takes courage. It's important to remember that you're not alone and that taking steps to look after yourself will help you to look after your children.

Mind

0300 123 3393

www.mind.org.uk

Information, advice and support on all aspects of mental health including postnatal depression, common signs, self-help tips, treatment and support.

NHS Choices

www.nhs.uk

Information on what depression is, its causes, how to spot the signs, where to get help, and treatment.

Samaritans

116 123 (Freephone number)

www.samaritans.org

Provides confidential emotional support for those experiencing feelings of distress or despair, including suicidal feelings. The helpline 116 123 is available 24 hours a day and you can also contact them by email (jo@samaritans.org) or letter. In some areas face to face appointments are available.

SANE

0300 304 7000

www.sane.org.uk

Runs a national helpline offering emotional support and information to anyone affected by mental illness. Open 6pm to 11pm every day of the year. Support is also available via email and online forums.

Talking can help

Friends and family may be unaware of how you really feel. Talking to someone you trust can really help. If you don't have family and friends that you can talk to, or you would prefer to speak to someone outside of your family and friends, try social networking websites such as Gingerbread's online forums (www.gingerbread.org.uk/forum), www.netmums.com or www.dad.info, where you can chat to other parents.

You could also consider counselling. Your GP can refer you to free counselling sessions. You can also refer yourself to a private counsellor or therapist, but you may have to pay for the sessions. It is always worth checking to see if a counsellor or therapist offers reduced fees if you are on a low income.

Counselling Directory

www.counselling-directory.org.uk

The Counselling Directory is a comprehensive database of UK counsellors and psychotherapists, with information on their training and experience, fees and contact details.

BACP

01455 883 300

www.itsgoodtotalk.org.uk

The British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) provide confidential information and advice for anyone considering counselling. They can find a registered counsellor in your local area, and produce information to help you to find the right counsellor for you.

Relate

0300 100 1234

www.relate.org.uk

Relate is the UK's largest provider of relationship support to families, couples and separating parents. The website contains online guides on topics such as having a healthy divorce and helping your children cope with separation. There is an interactive tool to explore your family relationships as well as telephone and online counselling.

Bereavement

The death of a partner or loved one can be the most devastating and overwhelming experience. As well as sorting out practical arrangements and immediate financial concerns, you also have your children's needs to think about. There are organisations that can provide support, a listening ear, advice or friendship.

Cruse Bereavement Care

0808 808 1677

www.cruse.org.uk

Cruse provides bereavement counselling and support for both children and adults, by telephone, in your home or through local groups.

Way Foundation

www.widowedandyoung.org.uk

Membership is available to widowed men and women under the age of 50, although they do have a group for those widowed after this age. Activities include local social groups run by volunteers, group holidays and activities for both adults and children. Their website contains a list of useful books and resources for adults and children coping with bereavement.

Domestic abuse

It's very important to get support if you are experiencing domestic abuse, including physical abuse, emotional and psychological abuse and threats or harassment.

Help and support is also there for you if you have left an abusive partner and would like to access help to recover from your experiences.

Below are some organisations that offer information, support and advice for anyone affected by domestic abuse.

National Domestic Violence Helpline

0808 2000 247

www.nationaldomesticviolencehelpline.org.uk

The freephone 24 hour National Domestic Violence Helpline is run in partnership between Women's Aid and Refuge. It is a national service for women experiencing domestic violence or their friends and family. A language translation service is available.

Refuge

www.refuge.org.uk

National domestic violence charity, providing services including the domestic violence helpline, a network of refuges across the country and advocates for those going through the court process.

Women's Aid

www.womensaid.org.uk

National charity working to end domestic violence against women and children. Supports a network of over 350 domestic and sexual violence services across the UK.

Welsh Women's Aid

0808 8010 800

www.welshwomensaid.org

Provides advice, information and details of local support for women and children experiencing domestic abuse in Wales.

Men's Advice Line

0808 801 0327

www.mensadvice.org.uk

Confidential helpline for men who have experienced or who are experiencing domestic abuse. Provides emotional support and practical advice. They also produce a booklet for men experiencing domestic abuse covering topics about how to make yourself safer, where to get legal advice, how domestic abuse affects children and information for gay and bisexual men.

Galop

0800 999 5428

London: 0207 704 2040

www.galop.org.uk

Provides support for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people experiencing domestic violence. Information includes safety plans and sanctuary schemes.

Separating from a partner

Separating from a partner is a huge life change, particularly when you have children. The following organisations and resources offer practical and emotional support for you and your family. There are also details of organisations that offer mediation services, which may help you to communicate with your child's other parent and reach agreements about difficult issues.

The Gingerbread guide to [separation](#) includes lots of useful advice and information on getting peer support, sorting out your finances and living arrangements, as well as getting support for yourself and your children.

Gingerbread Single Parent Helpline

Freephone 0808 802 0925

www.gingerbread.org.uk

Contact the Gingerbread Single Parent Helpline for free information on the practical aspects of separation including child maintenance, benefits, tax credits, debt, employment, education and housing.

National Family Mediation

0300 4000 636

www.nfm.org.uk

This is a local network of not-for-profit family mediation services, which offers a practical approach to resolving disputes between separated or separating couples. Mediation can help individuals reach joint decisions on issues associated with separation such as children, finance or property.

Money Advice Service

0800 138 7777

www.moneyadviceservice.org.uk

Impartial information to help parents going through divorce or separation deal with finances. Information includes splitting finances and possessions, dealing with the family home and tips for managing money.

Sharing parenting responsibilities

Sharing parenting responsibilities with your child's other parent can be difficult. You may each have a different style of parenting or different ideas about where your child should spend their time. The organisations below support parents who live apart and aim to help you to reach agreements about the arrangements for your child.

The Gingerbread factsheet [Making arrangements for your children](#) may help you to make effective arrangements for your child. For more information on contact between your child and their other parent, see also our [frequently asked questions about contact arrangements](#).

The parent connection

www.theparentconnection.org.uk

The website supports parents through separation and parenting difficulties. It can also be used by parents who are worried about their relationship but have not split. There are a range of resources including articles, videos and support to develop a new parenting relationship after separation, along with practical ideas to overcome problems.

Advicenow

www.advicenow.org.uk

Advicenow provide lots of information on your rights and the law. They have a number of information guides and support on child arrangements such as a [survival guide to sorting out arrangements for your children](#).

Parenting Plans

0870 600 5522

www.tsoshop.co.uk

The Parenting Plans publication *'Putting your children first – A guide for separating parents'* helps parents and carers reach agreement about contact arrangements for their children following separation and divorce. Copies can be obtained from TSO by visiting the website or calling the helpline quoting the publication's ISBN number 978-0-117037-61-8.

Separated parents' information programme

www.cafcass.gov.uk

The separated parents' information programme is a national course offered to parents who are going through the courts to decide arrangements for their children. A handbook to accompany the course is available on the Cafcass website and gives useful information, even if you're not attending a course. The handbook covers the court process, how it can affect you and your children, your emotions and ways to improve communication with your child's other parent to help your future parenting.

Parenting challenges

If you are concerned that your child is troubled by something but is not telling you or you are worried by their behaviour there are services that can help you. You can find details of these in the Gingerbread factsheet [Support for children and young people](#).

You may also want to speak to Family Lives:

Family Lives

0808 800 2222

www.familylives.org.uk

Confidential, free information and advice on a range of parenting issues including discipline, eating habits and bullying. Their website includes information articles, parents' blogs, live chat and confidential email support.

Caring for someone else

If you are a full-time carer, you may feel like you have no time to take care of yourself. Your health and emotional wellbeing is just as important, not least because it will help you cope better with the demands of being a carer. The organisations below offer advice to carers on a wide range of issues both practical and emotional.

Carers Direct (NHS)

0808 802 0202

www.nhs.uk/carersdirect

Free, confidential information and advice to carers including help with legal issues to do with your caring situation, money, work, study and your wellbeing. The website has stories from other carers and a forum to share experiences and support.

Carers UK

0808 808 7777

www.carersuk.org

Support and practical information for carers, including parents of disabled children. This includes advice on money, respite care, your rights at work and family relationships. You can also share experiences and get support from other carers via the website forums.

Carers Trust

0844 800 4361

www.carers.org

Provides advice and support to carers including looking after yourself, getting help, taking a holiday and bereavement. You can use the website to find a local carers group and chat to other carers online through discussion boards and forums.

Managing money

Our factsheet [Making ends meet](#) has lots of advice on budgeting, as well as ideas from single parents on saving money.

If money challenges start to build up it's human nature to put your head in the sand and hope that they will disappear, especially if you are juggling a busy life. However, the quicker you deal with debts, the easier they are to resolve.

For a guide to managing finances and debt, see our factsheet on [Dealing with debt](#).

There are lots of places where you can get free, independent advice on debts and budgeting. Some organisations are listed below.

Citizens Advice Bureau

Consumer helpline: 03454 04 05 06

www.citizensadvice.org.uk

Information and advice on a range of issues including benefits, employment, debt, housing, immigration, and consumer issues.

Step Change Debt Charity

0800 138 1111

www.stepchange.org

Provides independent debt counselling and debt management plans. No charge for services.

National Debtline

0808 808 4000

www.nationaldebtline.co.uk

Free, confidential debt advice over the telephone. Factsheets and sample letters also available via the website.

Ideas from single parents

You might find reading articles written by single parents helps you to feel more supported. You can read their stories in the [single parent life](#) section of our website. Lots of the stories are about getting through tough times, coping with challenging situations and dealing with all types of feelings.

Everyone has their own ways of coping, here are some ideas from other single parents to help you manage better, along with information about organisations that can help.

Celebrate your successes

Every family has its ups and downs. Try not to compare yourself to others, and remind yourself that you are doing a great job looking after your children. No parent gets it right all of the time, but be sure to recognise that there are things you've done really well and that these should be celebrated. Try making a list of all the things you have done in the last week, highlighting the ones that have given pleasure or help to you and your children. You may be surprised at what you have achieved.

If you need someone to talk to, or need advice and information on parenting and family life, Family Lives can help.

Family Lives

0808 800 2222

www.familylives.org.uk

Confidential, free information and advice on a range of parenting and family issues.

For more information on supporting your child see the Gingerbread factsheet [Support for children and young people](#).

Look after your body as well as your mind

Eating well and looking after yourself can really help to make you feel better. For more information on this, see the mental health charity Mind's page on ['Food and mood'](#). NetMums' [Guide to cooking on a budget](#) is packed full of useful tips and ideas on keeping costs low and nutrition high.

If you are feeling down or overwhelmed exercise is often the last thing you feel like, but it may be the best thing you can do. It does not have to be something very energetic or take up much time. It can also be a great way to meet other adults.

Look around your area to see if there are any low cost or free exercise classes. You can search for exercise classes and facilities in your area online via the [NHS fitness activities search page](#).

Smoking

Giving up smoking can have huge physical benefits as well as saving money.

Smokefree NHS

www.nhs.uk/smokefree

Smokefree is a public health campaign website with lots of advice and support to help people give up smoking.

Drugs and alcohol

If you are using drugs and alcohol to help you get through the day, or you feel you may be addicted to either, you can talk to someone from any of the organisations below for support and advice.

Drinkaware

www.drinkaware.co.uk

Independent alcohol advice, information and tools.

Drinkline

0300 123 1110

Run a free, confidential helpline for people who are concerned about their drinking, or someone else's.

NHS Choices

www.nhs.uk

Practical information on all kinds of addiction and where to get help and support.

FRANK

0300 123 6600

www.talktofrank.com

Provides confidential advice and support on drug and alcohol use. Supports individuals as well as concerned family and friends. Service is available 24 hours a day, every day of the year. Speak to an adviser by phone or email via the website.

Do something just for yourself

Looking after the needs of your family can take all of your time and energy. Try to get some time to yourself every now and again to recharge your batteries. All busy parents need some adult time away from children, housework and chores.

It's worth contacting your local Family Information Service to find out if there are any crèches, day-care centres or other local childcare provision that may help you get some time to yourself.

Family and Childcare Trust

www.familyandchildcaretrust.org/childcare

Contact your local **Family Information Service** to find out about facilities for young children in your area.

Accept help

Don't be afraid to accept offers of help and support from family or friends. Even an hour or so of babysitting can give you time to sit down and collect your thoughts, and do whatever helps you relax. If you don't have family or close friends nearby, or if you feel more able to talk to someone outside of your family, contact an organisation such as **Home-Start**.

Home-Start

0116 258 7900

www.home-start.org.uk

A network of volunteer parents who can visit you at home for a few hours each week. They provide practical and emotional support, including a listening ear, help with the children and a chance to meet other parents in similar situations. The service is free and confidential, and available for parents with a child under the age of five.

Contact a Family

0808 808 3555

www.cafamily.org.uk

If you are a parent of a child with a disability, Contact a Family can put you in touch with other parents and provide details of local events.

Meet like-minded people

Some challenges are common to all parents and some specific to single parents. Whatever issues you face you can be sure that there are others out there who are going through similar experiences and who would also find it useful to share their thoughts, feelings and experiences. Gingerbread has [local groups](#) run by single parents and an [online forum](#).

You may also wish to try websites such www.netmums.com or www.dad.info, where you can chat to other parents and get advice and support. Search around to find one that suits you.

Gingerbread membership

0800 018 4318

www.gingerbread.org.uk/bepartofit
membership@gingerbread.org.uk

Become a Gingerbread member and start chatting to other single parents in our online forums, or joining one of our local groups and meet up face-to-face. If there is no group in your area Gingerbread can help you set one up. Many groups organise regular meetings, social events and days out for both you and your children.

Family and Childcare Trust

www.familyandchildcaretrust.org/childcare

Contact your local Family Information Service to find out about facilities for young children in your area. They should have details of parent and toddler groups and other activities where you will have the opportunity to meet other parents, including single parents. Find your local Family Information Service by searching on the website, or contact your local council for details.

Get out and about

Look out for free entertainment, activities or educational events in your area for both you and your children. Events are often publicised in your local library, children's centre, newspaper or Family Information Service (see above).

Get some time away

The Gingerbread [Holidays](#) factsheet has details of companies that provide holidays just for single parents and their children, as well as a list of organisations that provide free or discounted breaks for children away from their parents. The factsheet includes details of organisations that cater specifically for children with additional needs as well as tips for a successful trip.

Improve your skills

Improving your skills can give your confidence a boost, whether it's to learn something new, develop an existing interest or for work purposes. Many adult education colleges offer reduced fees on both leisure and career related courses if you're claiming benefits, tax credits or qualify for a concession.

If you are interested in further study see our online guide to [education for single parents](#). It has lots of information on fees, finances and living costs, as well as support you can get if you are in receipt of benefits or tax credits.

If you are planning to go back to work in the future or want to progress at work but do not feel you have the skills you need, look for free or low cost training to improve your CV on the [National Careers Service website](#). They also provide free advice on jobs and training.

If you're claiming benefits speak to Jobcentre Plus about what help they can offer if you're interested in training to help find paid employment. They may provide support with the cost of training or childcare while you're on a course if it will help you to get a job.

The Gingerbread video [Moving into work](#) can tell you more about the help available for single parents who are looking for work, and what to consider before you make the transition into work.

Gingerbread also offers training courses for single parents. Visit [our website](#) to find out more.

The National Careers Service

0800 100 900

<https://nationalcareersservice.direct.gov.uk/Pages/Home.aspx>

Free advice on careers, skills, training and work.

Careers Wales

0800 028 4844

www.careerswales.com

Free careers information and advice for young people, adults and parents in Wales.

Learn Direct

0800 101 901

www.learndirect.co.uk

Information on training, courses and qualifications. The service can help you find the right course and advise on qualifications for careers. Online courses are also available on topics such as maths and English.

Get involved in your community

Doing voluntary work for a few hours a week can be really satisfying. There are many ways to volunteer. You could try something that will help your CV when you come to look for work, or choose something that has always interested you, or is just for fun.

When you don't feel at your best, voluntary work may sound like the last thing you would want to do, but once you get started it can be a real boost to your self-confidence. Making a regular commitment to volunteer gives you a focus away from your role as a parent and the chance to meet new people.

Here are some organisations to help get you started:

Do-it

www.do-it.org.uk

National database of volunteering opportunities throughout the UK. Also includes information on volunteering overseas, employee volunteering and residential opportunities.

Time Bank

www.timebank.org.uk

You can register with time-bank to have your skills and interests matched to volunteering opportunities in your area.

Volunteering England

www.volunteering.org.uk

Search for your local volunteer centre on the website or by calling the helpline.

Further help and information

Gingerbread Single Parent Helpline

Freephone 0808 802 0925

www.gingerbread.org.uk

Provides free, confidential advice for single parents. No matter the challenge – around your finances, contact arrangements or help you could receive – our trained advisers are here with tailored advice that works for you.

One Parent Families Scotland Lone Parent Helpline

0808 801 0323

www.opfs.org.uk

Run by our partner organisation, One Parent Families Scotland, the Lone Parent Helpline provides free confidential advice and information for single parents in Scotland.

More from Gingerbread

The following related Gingerbread factsheets for single parents are also available:

- > [Action to take when a relationship ends](#)
- > [Making arrangements for your children](#)
- > [Help when you can't agree](#)
- > [Support for your children and young people](#)

Download them from [our website](#) or call 020 7428 5400 to request them

Become a Gingerbread member

Membership is available to single parents in England and Wales. Join a community of thousands of single parents who benefit from the mutual support, free advice and information provided by Gingerbread. You can also meet other single parents at one of our local support groups.

Visit our [website](#), call 0800 018 4318 or email membership@gingerbread.org.uk

Gingerbread
Single parents, equal families

Gingerbread, the charity for single parent families, is registered in England and Wales as a company limited by guarantee, no. 402748, and a registered charity, no. 230750. The Gingerbread Single Parent Helpline is supported by the Department for Education, HMRC, The Big Lottery and other funders and is accredited by the Helplines Partnership.

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