

Gingerbread

Single parents, equal families



All aboard: activities and events to help build a community where you are

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Welcome !

Welcome to Gingerbread's first ever events and activities guide! We've created this guide because we regularly hear from single parents about the lack of community around them and that cost was often a barrier to creating fun, memorable experiences for their children or meeting and socialising with people in their local area.

Whether you're looking to avoid the costs of a bad coffee just to have some time with other parents and their kids or the extortionate entry fees to attractions, we wanted to pull together some ideas of no or low cost activities single parent families can do together, with other single parent families, or even as part of a Gingerbread friendship group.

We want you to use this guide in the way that works best for you – you can try the ideas that stand out to you, or just use it for inspiration.

We encourage you to reach out to people around you. We all know how daunting it can be to ask someone if they'd like to picnic in the park or bring their kids around for a day of board game fun, but we believe it takes one person to start a conversation and get people talking and spending time together; effectively building a community.

We also challenge you to be open! It's easy for us to tell people to reach out, but it's equally important to remember to be open to people who do, and make an effort to get to know them and understand their needs and any signs that they might need a bit of support. You can learn more about supporting the single parents in your life [here](#).

We hope you'll find this guide intriguing and useful.

With love, energy and community spirit,

Team Gingerbread

Our top tips

The ideas in this guide are things you can do with your family or with other families. For example, you might decide you want to do a scavenger hunt for your kids, or you might want to team up with other parents nearby to put on a scavenger hunt for all your kids to take part in together.

Open it up

If you are planning to host an event open to single parents, put some thought into:

- How you can make the event as welcoming as possible so everyone feels included in the activities
- Making your event a supportive space so if guests wish, they can safely talk about the issues they face with each other
- Having as much fun as possible! If you're organising a coffee morning, think about how you can build in some activities to bring some fun to the table.
- Ensuring the event space is accessible, easy for most people to get to and the timing works for most people. Learn more about accessibility [here](#).

Ask a friend to bring a friend

We have found that one of the best ways to meet new people is to invite your friends to an event and ask them to bring along one of their friends, that way everyone there has the chance to get to know new people!

Finally, do your research!

This guide is very much a starting point for you. There are so many no or low cost things to do wherever you are in the country, a bit of research can help you find a multitude of activities to do in your area. Get Googling or do it the old-fashioned way and ask those around you for recommendations.

We hope the ideas in here will help you organise events and do activities which create magical moments for all involved. If you have any thoughts on how we can add to this guide, do get in touch by emailing campaign@gingerbread.org.uk.

Lights, camera, action!

Let's get into it! The following events and activities are things you can do as a family, with one of two other people, or you can organise a time and place before inviting other single parents, friends, your neighbours, and your wider family.

Get to a Gingerbread group!

Of course, we could only start this guide with a nod to Gingerbread's local groups. We have over fifty local friendship groups for single parents across England and Wales. They are a great space to get offline and meet other single parents in your area. Run by volunteer coordinators, they put on events such as coffee meet-ups, trips to museums, craft days and so much more.

[Find your nearest group](#)

If there isn't a group near you; we'll support you to get one up and running! Drop us an [email](#).

Chat to your neighbour

We often hear about how few people actually know their neighbours. Maybe you have a great relationship with your neighbours or perhaps you'd like to get to know more people near where you live. Start small by stopping to speak to a neighbour next time you see one of them or dive in and invite a neighbour you might say the odd hello to around for a cup of tea.

Anyone for dinner?

The Gingerbread team is in firm agreement that dinner is our favourite meal of the day! It's the meal we usually have the most time for and can be as elaborate as we like. Whether you want to make a fancy dinner for you and the kids or host another family too, we put dinner high up on our list of things to do with people you care about to foster connection.

Why not have a go at planning and hosting a dinner for you and three other friends or neighbours near you? You could set yourself the challenge of cooking something for as cheap as possible, or make it a 'potluck' and ask each person to bring a dish.

Galleries / museums

A classic entry in guides like this! There are hundreds of museums and galleries around the country covering a range of subject areas. So many of them have free entry and often hold child/family friend days. We love [this Money Saving Expert guide](#) which rounds them all up.

Get crafty

We really enjoy getting stuck into a good craft activity here at Gingerbread, from scrapbooking and sewing to card making. Using existing supplies to bring a group of people together is a great way to get our creative juices flowing and create beautiful pieces of art! There are endless craft activities you can get stuck in with the kids or friends (or all together!) – just Googling 'craft activities' brings up over half a billion results – do your research and get crafty!

Baking

Cakes, scones, breads and so much more – mastering baking brings with it immense deliciousness and joy. Rummage through your cupboards to see what you already have before buying (or asking a neighbour) for any missing supplies. Get your recipes for various baked goods:

- [Baking mad](#)
- [BBC Good Food's Cakes and Baking](#)

Local library / storytelling

We love storytelling at Gingerbread (check out our [Single Parent Stories](#)). Many of our team have fond memories of going to the library – a fun, free activity where you get to be with your friends or family while immersing yourself in a different world. Libraries are a great place to discover thousands of books and many have a regular events calendar. Find your local library [here](#).

If you enjoy telling stories as well as reading them, have a go at organising your own storytelling event, either with friends or for your family.

The [Society for Storytelling](#) is a great place to learn more about storytelling and find events.

Bird watching

Is it a robin, a sparrow, a starling or something else entirely? Birdwatching can be a lot of fun for people of all ages; find a local woodland and arrange an afternoon walk to see and hear the birds. We love [this RSPB guide](#) to birdwatching.

Spot the tree

Continuing on the theme of nature, going for a wander to identify flowers and trees can get both children and adults' brains flexing. There are a multitude of guides available online to help you identify trees, flowers and shrubs correctly.

- The Woodland Trust have some [great information](#) on British trees.
- They even [have an app](#) to help you check if you've made the right identification.
- The Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland are [great for identifying wild flowers](#).

You can also get the kids excited to go out tree spotting [with this quiz](#).

Walk this way...

If walking is your thing, being more intentional with it can be a fun way to spend time with people important to you or to meet new people who could become important to you! Plan a day and time you and the kids will be walking, the route you're going to take (it can be in your nearest woodland or around town), text a few friends and invite them to join you.

You can make any walk you're doing more fun by playing games along the way, ideas include:

- **I spy!** - That traditional game that everyone knows!

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- **Count that colour** – Before heading off, each person on the walk picks a colour, during the walk they spot the number of things in that colour – think flowers, cars, front doors! The person, who spots the most number of things in their colour, comes up top.
- **Rock-y!** - Along the way collect as many unusual rocks as you might spot – think different colours or unusual shapes.

You can also find a walking group near you and join in with their activities. [Find your nearest walking group](#) and if you want to take your walking a bit further, you could [give Nordic walking a go](#).

...Swim that way

Swimming is not only mega fun but it's a great skill to have. Whether you've never been in a pool or are an expert swimmer, getting in a pool is a great way to spend an afternoon. Costs to access pools vary around the country so do a bit of research on what's available where you are.

[Find your local pool](#) and check out [The Outdoor Swimming Society](#) for lidos and wild swimming in your area.

Outdoor gyms

Outdoor gyms have been popping up all over the place in the last few years. They are a great way to keep fit while enjoying being outside. You could use them as a chance to teach your kids about fitness or get a regular date in the diary with friends for a trip to flex your muscles. [Learn more about outdoor gyms](#) and find your nearest one.

If you want to do more exercise together, [check out the 'This Girl Can'](#) project for ideas on things you can do to fit in a little bit more physical activity into your week.

Ping Pong

Continuing on the theme of outdoor sporting activities, why not give ping pong a go? You could even come up with little tournaments to play with your friends or make it a goal to master the game. [Find a free table near you](#).

City farms

We had no idea just how many city farms there were around the country until we sat down to research this guide! From community allotments such as [this one](#) in Moss Side, Manchester to [Vauxhall City Farm](#) in South London, there are city farms and growing projects all around the country for the public to enjoy.

Our favourites include:

- [Bath City Farm](#)
- [Sow the City, Manchester](#)
- [Vauxhall City Farm](#)
- [Moss Side Community Allotment](#)

Find your nearest city farm or growing project via the umbrella body which supports the people who make them happen: [Social Farms & Gardens](#).

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Street Art Projects

Around the country, there are numerous street art projects – from looking at art to contributing to it! Fancy exploring the world of street art near where you are? A good place to start is [Global Start Art](#).

Clothes swap

We had a go at hosting a clothes swap in the Gingerbread office recently – it's a great opportunity to clear out your wardrobe, get rid of things you no longer want and get some exciting new pieces.

For ideas on hosting your own swap, clothes or otherwise, you can either [Get Swishing](#) or check out [Love not Landfill](#).

Cinema treats or DIY film club!

Trips to the cinema don't have to be expensive. With offers popping up all the time, we recommend searching Google for 'cheap cinema tickets' to see what's available on a budget at a big screen near you.

You could also host your own film club – choose a film, pick a date and invite other single parents and their kids around. You could ask everyone to have a look in their cupboards for snacks to contribute or head down to your local pound shop to pick up a few bits and bobs.

DIY spa day

Taking time out to relax and pamper ourselves with some skincare or beauty treatments can help us reenergise substantially. This could look like putting aside an entire day to do head to toe beauty treatments or setting aside an hour to do a face mask and giving your feet a good soak. Whatever works for you!

Get your game on

Have a go at organising a board game day with your kids and a few friends and their kids. Ask everyone to rummage around their homes for any board games they have, pick someone's living room and enjoy an afternoon of fun getting acquainted with new games.

Picnic

Team Gingerbread loves a good picnic! Whether it's a picnic for you and one little person or you your mates and their mates and their mates etc., a picnic is a good, cheap way to meet-up with friends to share good food and enjoy the sun whilst the little 'uns run around. We have found a good strategy that works for creating a space in which you can catch-up with friends and make new ones is to invite a few friends and ask them to bring at least one other person.

BBQ

In the office, we're divided when it comes to corn on the cob but we agree there is BBQ food that everyone can enjoy! Have a go at planning a BBQ in the summer for friends and family – get creative with decorations and food – what are the things you have in the freezer you can use up, can you make a list of all the things you need and allocate items to guests to bring and do you have old craft items you can use to challenge the kids to make decorations for the day?

Treasure hunt / Geocaching

One of the loveliest things one of the Gingerbread team has had done for them in the workplace is a treasure hunt! It showed care and love, and was a fun way to bond as a team.

We found some useful resources to help you create a treasure hunt for your loved ones:

- [11 tips for creating an awesome treasure hunt](#)
- [How to Plan a Treasure Hunt for Kids](#)

If a treasure hunt seems like too much work, you could do a scavenger hunt instead – pull together a list of things you'd like participants to hunt and split them into teams to go find them! Set a timer for teams to come back by and the team who's found the most items on the list wins!

Taking treasure hunts a bit further, you could also try Geocaching! Described as the world's largest treasure hunt, you download an app and you're essentially ready to go. Learn more about Geocaching [here](#) and get started on your hunt [here](#)!

Last but by no means least on our list of hunts, orienteering! Excising your brain and body, orienteering is an excellent activity which people of all ages can take part in. [Find an orienteering course](#) near you.

What parents told us...

We asked single parents what activities they do with their kids to learn new things, experience new adventures and meet new friends. Here's what they told us.

One of our local friendship groups has put on coffee / play meet ups in church halls, park / play area meet ups, camping trips, climbing experiences for kids, a picnic, and a garden party!

“Everyone that we meet there is friendly and kind”
A parent on the National Trust

A parent told us that a National Trust membership offers great value if you can travel. The Family and Friends Railcard gives big savings on rail travel when travelling with kids and you can buy it with Tesco Clubcard points. Another parent added that she finds her membership brilliant and her four children aged between 9-18, each always find somewhere to go with the National Trust. The National Trust's family membership offer also includes a one-adult option so very handy for single parents!

Another parent based in the West Midlands, finds it relatively easy to do things locally which are great fun and free. For example, one weekend, they had a ballooning festival. She keeps a close eye on free events nearby such as picnics in the park, visiting animals, going on walks – all things easy to do in the countryside. There is also a local junior parkrun every Sunday – aimed at getting young children active and meeting new friends. In the winter it gets a bit harder but there are soft play sessions at garden centres such as Wyevale, which are very cheap and the children love it. She also tries lots of arts and craft things, getting together with other parents and their children can be so much fun.

“We enjoy wandering along the Southbank or Covent Garden watching the buskers and actors. The Museum of Childhood in Bethnal Green is also a great place – small enough for children to wander freely with interactive displays and activities. Everyone we meet there is friendly and kind”
A London-based parent

One parent says the best thing she did was sign-up her family for the local junior roller derby group. As a single parent with no family in the area, it's been a good way for the kids to meet friends and it's quite cheap (cheaper than what she pays for swimming). Mum herself has become involved in the group meeting other parents and even joining the adult intake to learn to skate so she can attend roller discos too. She finds the skating groups to be very inclusive and welcoming.

Our favourite suggestion (we know we shouldn't have favourites but wait for it) on this list has to be gardening, one parent summed it up best 'gardening is the best therapy. The sense of achievement

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is invigorating, and the beauty of the garden gives immense satisfaction and pleasure'. We know not everyone has access to a garden or balcony but there are community gardening projects all around the country. Find your nearest one [here](#).

FAQs

In this section, we answer some of the questions which might arise from going through this guide. If you have a question which isn't answered below, please email us at campaign@gingerbread.org.uk and a member of the team will be able to help you.

There isn't a Gingerbread group near me...

So you'd like to get involved with a Gingerbread group but there isn't one near you. You should start one! We're serious, if there isn't a Gingerbread group in your area and you'd like there to be, we will support you to get a group up and running. Get in touch with us at groups@gingerbread.org.uk for an initial conversation.

Some of this is a bit obvious...

So you might think this is just a long list of 'things to do' and in some ways it is, however, we hear time and time again from parents who feel stuck for ideas on what to do with their kids that don't come with a hefty price tag so we thought we'd make it that tiny bit easy by gathering a few ideas in one place.

Are you trying to get people to fundraise for you through this guide?

The primary purpose of this toolkit is to get Gingerbread groups more active and to give individual single parents ideas for things they can do with their kids or in their community. It isn't a fundraising initiative, however if you'd like to discuss fundraising for Gingerbread, you can email us at fundraising@gingerbread.org.uk.

I'm actually looking for support...

If you are a single parent or someone supporting a single parent, we have numerous [detailed information pages](#) on our website to help you navigate a range of issues.

We also run a [helpline](#), staffed by a highly trained team who are on hand to offer guidance relating to a number of issues. You can get in touch with them on the free number 0808 802 0925 to talk through your situation.

Finally, [our online forum](#) is a great way for parents to connect and build community online.

Useful links

To finish, we wanted to share some links we thought might be useful...

- [Let's Mush](#) – an app specifically designed to help single mums build community where they are.
- [Frolo](#) – continuing on the app theme. Frolo is an app designed to support single parents to meet other single parents where they are.

Gingerbread covers England and Wales. There are other organisations which support single parents in Scotland, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

- In Scotland, [One Parent Families Scotland](#)
- In Northern Ireland, [Parenting NI](#) (not single parent specific)
- In Ireland, [One Family](#).

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