



George Dennis, who shares custody of his 4-year-old son, Emmett, balances work and solo parenting by swapping child care duties with family friends.

Write it down—in pencil

For divorced parents, “create an interim, and then a solid, schedule with your ex,” suggests Allison Schwartz, life coach and time-management expert at alliumcoaching.com. “Write a schedule for you and your kids for the week. Kids love structure, and you will benefit, too. Include a slot for family time: cooking, a hike, pizza and video night.”

Setting boundaries with an ex-spouse regarding schedule changes is sometimes difficult, but essential. The experts agreed it isn't in your best interest—or your child's—to allow constant changes and disruptions. There are times you will need to say, “That just doesn't work for me and Ryan.”

“Make lists, and you will see some things that you really do not need to do,” says Elaine Shimberg. “Ask yourself, ‘What is the best use of my time right now?’”

In a similar vein, Allison Schwartz recommends writing down your weekly schedule and looking at where you spend your time. “What priority does each of these activities have, on a scale of 1 to 10?” she says. “It's really likely some of the ones, twos and threes could be eliminated.”

Carol Davidson creates a schedule for the week, and she and Nick sit down together and plan out a week's worth of meals. “I keep the schedule on the computer and try to stick to it,” she says ruefully.

“Single parents often feel guilty and end up trying to give their child everything, like it's their birthday all the time,” adds Allison Schwartz. “But it's OK to limit the number of activities a child participates in.”

“Most of Sydney's activities are within school hours,” Candace Davis says. “But I have had to say we cannot take on one more activity.”

“I come from a divorced family, and I remember always worrying if my parents were happy.”

George Dennis, single parent

If Mama ain't happy . . .

Don't be embarrassed to ask your social network to help you find some time for yourself, says Jeanne Halbert. “None of us operates effectively if we're stressed and overwhelmed. If you can find the help you need, you'll be healthier and happier and work your way through the relentless tasks much more efficiently.”

“You need an evening to call your own,” agrees Elaine

Shimberg. “Don't become a martyr to your children.”

“I'll take an hour for myself each night after Sydney goes to bed,” says Candace Davis. “Even on weekends when she has her friends over, I can find a few minutes for myself.”

A happy parent ultimately means a better atmosphere for the child, says George Dennis. “I come from a divorced family, and I remember always worrying if my parents were happy,” he says. “So I think it's very important that he sees me when I am happy. Parents need to try to be happy themselves to create happiness for their child.”

Part of that contentment may come from accepting that the ups and downs of family life are normal—not parenting failures.

“I am walking through life one step at a time, and some days it works, and some days it doesn't,” Carol Davidson admits. “The key is how resilient you are, how you readjust and keep going. Sometimes, you just have to wing it.” ❧



Candace Davis, mother of 8-year-old Sydney, says after a full day of work and single parenthood, she tries to find time for herself.

Keep Tips from e parents

- Use the calendar to organize your schedule.
- Schedule activities like to do.
- Plan your errands in a circle to save time.
- Use the Internet for supplies.
- Buy gifts in advance; stock up on kids' birthday supplies.
- Frozen vegetables, in moderation, can be a lifesaver.
- Let the kids in.

Moral

Feeling overwhelmed? Here are some tips and moments to your day that can help you.

<http://singleparent.com>
<http://singleparent.com>
www.parentsworld.com
www.singleparents.com

and the 50-year-old (now online):

www.parentswith.com