

THE SINGLE FATHER

by Jane Wan

There is much stereotyping about single mothers, especially in Asian countries, but what is the general perception of single fathers? Does the single father bring up his children in the same way as a single mother?

In recent years, the number of single-parent families has been growing, which has caused much controversy as many of us typically view a family with two parents.

While much focus has been placed on single mothers, single-father families are a small but growing segment of our society today.

Generally, single-father families may result from the death of a spouse, divorce, adoptions, abandonment or from couples who are never married by choice.

The Perception Of Single Fathers

The social image of single fatherhood is difficult to establish as it is a relatively recent phenomenon.

Generally, single fathers are older, educated, live with older children, and are in a better financial position as compared with his female counterpart.



The role of a single father is difficult, as he has to play a dual role, both professional and domestic.

He is also perceived as a typical workaholic who is likely to be less attentive to his children's needs.

However, according to Geraldine Tan, a psychologist with Centre of Effective Living, the idea of a single father brings about sympathy and respect in Singapore.

Society in Singapore generally favours a paternalistic view of the home environment. For a man to bring up a child alone, he is generally 'looked up to' and even encouraged to remarry to obtain help to look after the children.

Many fathers are working flexible hours to spend more time with their children, and they actually end up being more attentive than they were when there was a mother in the household.

A Single Father's Roles And Challenges

According to Darryl Pure, a renowned American psychologist based in Chicago, single fathers need just as much help as single mothers.

The single father will have to shoulder the children's personal needs besides his own. There is a need for him to prove himself at work and be financially stable to support himself and his children.

The single male also has to play the dual role of a father and a mother. He has to commit much time to interacting with his children, and taking care of their emotional needs.

The traditional view that the male parent is the child's protector and provider has in some ways shaped the expectations of fathers and their roles.

Especially for a man who has lost his spouse either through death or divorce, his fatherhood path may be very difficult at the beginning.

Society in Singapore generally favours a paternalistic view of the home environment. For a man to bring up a child alone, he is generally 'looked up to' and even encouraged to remarry to obtain help to look after the children.

According to Geraldine Tan, a man may be better at playing with his children or teaching them problem-solving methods.

She says, "With the loss of his wife, he may need to learn how to play the nurturing role. This may be a source of difficulty, as he is hardly exposed to this area."

"Some men are more able to adapt than others, but many may feel frustrated as they have only been exposed to the harsh corporate world, and if they allow themselves to 'soften' it may be a sign of weakness," adds Geraldine.

Perhaps there is no right or wrong in terms of how a single father looks after his children, as long as he is guided by his natural instinct of unconditional, paternal love.

Also, men's nurturing capabilities are generally not determined by genetic endowment or gender identity.

There are single fathers who have in fact proven themselves very capable at playing both parental roles.

Many fathers are working flexible hours to spend more time with their children, and they actually end up being more attentive than they were when there was a mother in the household. **SC**

Literacy Tips

Literacy, *lɪtərəsi*: the art of being fluent in a language, including expressive and receptive competency in the language, reading, writing, spelling and all aspects of verbal and written communication.

Most children use words to express meaning and to make sense. While words need to make sense, learning how to decode them or working out how to pronounce them, involves a procedure that doesn't seem to make sense. Syllables don't make sense by themselves, do they?

Similarly, when your child learns to separate the first sound from a word, that first sound doesn't make sense either. It's just a sound.

While phonemes are meaningless sound utterances, your child needs to attend to the initial phonemes of words (first sounds) by being able to not only identify them, but to manipulate them by subtracting or adding first sounds to words.

Say the word *chair*. Help your child get the first sound /ch/ and elongate the diphthong *air*. Have your child access the /ch/ and the /air/ sounds and ask, "What word remains if you take the /ch/ from *chair*?"

The answer is *air* (a new word). Using this approach, children are challenged to attend to the initial phonemes of words even as they come to realise that the presence or absence of the initial phoneme can result in two different words.

As your child gains an understanding of what happens when the first sound is removed from the word, gradually work up from the easier initial consonants to more difficult ones.

Here are some examples for you: beat (eat), bend (end), band (and),

boil (oil), bone (own), bus (us), care (air), case (ace), cold (old), cow (ow), game (aim), lake (ache), part (art), pat (at), pit (it), pitch (itch), poke (oak), tall (all), and towel (owl).

These activities are pre-phonics and important to increase your child's phonemic awareness. Play this game verbally, using it not only as a means to increase phonemic sensitivity, but as a vocabulary builder as well.



Tony Earnshaw & Annabel Seargeant
Educational Psychologists