

SINGLE&TM **■ PARENT!NG** HARD WORK, REAL HOPE

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Cover and interior design by Roy Roper, [wideyedesign](http://wideyedesign.com), inc.

WELCOME!

In your hands you hold a rich collection of practical information to help you start and sustain a successful Single & Parenting group. Single parents represent a rapidly growing segment of our population. They need the help and hope you'll offer through the Single & Parenting group offered at your church.

The most important thing for you to know as you begin organizing your group is that you are not alone as you build your single-parent ministry. An entire team of people is standing by at Church Initiative to help you through the process step-by-step.

In addition, we've developed easy-to-access online tools, located in the Single & Parenting LeaderZone, that provide you with even more resources to help you succeed as a leader.

Best of all, there is no charge for you to talk with our consultants or access the online tools. These resources are free, and this Leader's Guide will show you how to access them.

We consider Single & Parenting to be a partnership. You, your leadership team and your church are on the front lines of single-parent ministry. Church Initiative exists to support and encourage you. We are honored to have the privilege to do so.

We'll be praying for you and your group, and we'll enjoy hearing how the Lord works through your Single & Parenting ministry.



In Christ,

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "Steve Grissom". The signature is fluid and cursive, written over a large, faint, diagonal watermark that says "SAMPLE".

Steve Grissom
Founder & President

CONTENTS (OVERVIEW)

Helpline and Online Access	1
Getting Started	3
About Single & Parenting	7
Single & Parenting Distinctives	11
Curriculum Strategy	13
How Single & Parenting Works	15
Beginning Your Single & Parenting Ministry	17
Defining Your Ministry	21
Target Audience	25
Finding and Recruiting Your Leadership Team	27
Training Leaders	35
Single & Parenting Web Resources	49
Logistics	53
Publicity	61
Ministering to Children and Teens	67
Beyond Single & Parenting	71
About Church Initiative	75
Order Workbooks and Supplies	77
Video Session Descriptions	79
Session Agendas & Discussion Questions: Sessions 1–13	81
Checklists	111
Reproducibles	121
Brochure sample	Back
Poster sample	Back

CONTENTS (DETAILED)

Helpline and Online Access	1
Getting Started	3
Check your Single & Parenting materials	
“What to do first” checklist	
How to contact us	
About Single & Parenting	7
The need for single-parent ministry	
The Single & Parenting solution	
How this ministry can benefit your church	
Single & Parenting Distinctives	11
Three-component design	
Ongoing ministry	
Christ-centered	
Biblically based	
Outreach to your community, gateway to faith	
Curriculum Strategy	13
How Single & Parenting Works	15
Video seminar	
Small group discussion	
Workbook-based personal study and reflection	
Workbook components	
Beginning Your Single & Parenting Ministry	17
What to expect	
Who will come	
Who should not come	
Prayer support	
Defining Your Ministry	21
Why are we entering this ministry?	
What form should it take?	
What support and resources do we have available?	
What kind of single-parent ministry do we see in our church five years from now?	
Why you should offer Single & Parenting on a repeating schedule	

Target Audience	25
A 360-degree view of single parenting	
Finding and Recruiting Your Leadership Team	27
What kind of group facilitators do you need?	
Identifying potential leaders	
How to find leaders	
Accountability and leadership guidelines	
Training	
Teaming Leaders	
Reaching for a high standard of excellence	
Training Leaders	35
Leader Training Video	
Snapshot: A typical Single & Parenting session	
Sample session in outline form	
Group guidelines	
Session 13 special guidelines	
Orientation/Registration Session	
Agenda for week 14 Celebration Session	
Preparing for your next 13-week cycle	
Creating a Leader Resource Notebook	
Single & Parenting Local Network Fellowships	
Single & Parenting Web Resources	49
Single & Parenting main website	
Single & Parenting LeaderZone (leaders/church staff only)	
Logistics	53
Format	
Where to meet	
When to meet	
Hospitality	
Child care	
Budgeting	
Using a Registration Form	
Staying in touch with group members	
Using the Feedback Form	

Publicity	61
Publicity – three most powerful publicity tools	
Free publicity	
Almost free publicity	
Paid publicity	
Ministering to Children & Teens	67
Beyond Single & Parenting	71
Single & Parenting as an “ecosystem”	
About Church Initiative	75
Order Workbooks & Supplies	77
Video Session Descriptions	79
Session Agendas & Discussion Questions: Sessions 1–13	81
Checklists	111
Reproducibles	121
Brochure sample	Back
Poster sample	Back

HELPLINE AND ONLINE ACCESS

Single & Parenting exists as a ministry to help you as you help others.
Feel free to contact us with questions, problems and success stories!

Phone: 800-395-5755 (US/Canada)
or 919-562-2112 (international)
Fax: 919-562-2114

Mail: Single & Parenting
P.O. Box 1739
Wake Forest, NC 27588-1739

Email: info@singleandparenting.org
Web: www.singleandparenting.org



NOTES

LEADERZONE

The online LeaderZone is a resource hub for “leaders-only.” Download Single & Parenting logos and advertising art. Need another set of Session Agendas & Discussion Questions? Find them at the LeaderZone. All reproducible pages in this book are available for download and reprint on the LeaderZone, www.singleandparenting.org/leaderzone.

LEADERS’ FORUM

Communicate easily and regularly with other Single & Parenting leaders and our Single & Parenting consultants through this online forum. You can ask questions, share ideas, make prayer requests and react to messages posted by other Forum members via web or email. To begin participating in the Leaders’ Forum, go to www.singleandparenting.org/leaderzone.

BOOKSTORE

At www.singleandparenting.org, visit the Single & Parenting bookstore for recommended books and resources on single-parenting topics to help you become a more effective leader.

GETTING STARTED

CHECK YOUR SINGLE & PARENTING MATERIALS

Please begin by doing something very basic, but important—check the contents of your Single & Parenting materials shipment. We've packed it with care, but we want to make sure you have everything you'll need for your ministry:



- **FIVE DVDS (WITH CASE)**
 - Discs 1–4 containing 13 Single & Parenting video programs
 - Disc 5: Leader Training Video and promotional videos
- **LEADER'S GUIDE:** Instructional and promotional leader training materials, plus Session Agendas & Discussion Questions for each session (each primary leader will need a Leader's Guide; make sure you also have a copy to share so that all leaders have the opportunity to read it)
- **PARTICIPANT WORKBOOKS:** Each leader and participant will need a copy; please note that workbook pages are protected under U.S. copyright law and may not be photocopied
- **PUBLICITY BROCHURES AND POSTERS** for mailing, distributing and bulletin boards
- **STURDY, POLY CARRYING CASE** for easy storage and transport of Single & Parenting materials

If you are missing any of these items, please contact us, and we'll quickly send you the needed materials.

Additional Leader's Guides, workbooks and publicity materials can be purchased by phone (800-395-5755) or at www.singleandparenting.org/leaderzone.

30-DAY SATISFACTION GUARANTEE

NOTES

The Single & Parenting kits are sold with a 30-day guarantee. If you are not satisfied with your purchase, return it to us for a refund (excluding shipping charges). The 30-day return policy does not apply to items purchased in addition to the kit. Returns for other materials will be accepted only if they are damaged or defective.

PROPER CARE OF THE DVDS

Proper care of the DVDs is important. We suggest you play the first few minutes of each of your DVDs to verify that the disc content corresponds with the label and that the DVD audio and video are present. If you encounter any difficulties, attempt to play the DVD in an alternate machine to determine if your equipment is functioning properly.

Please hold DVDs by the edges only; do not place your fingers on the back side of the disc. If you can see fingerprints, dirt, smudges or small scratches, use an approved DVD cleaner to keep the DVDs running smoothly. Deep scratches can ruin the media.

“WHAT TO DO FIRST” CHECKLIST

Now that you have inspected your Single & Parenting materials, you may be wondering where to begin, what to do first. Here is a strategy for digging into the material in a logical, helpful sequence:

- **VISIT THE SINGLE & PARENTING WEBSITE:** www.singleandparenting.org. Explore each of the sections. They will provide an excellent overview of the ministry. Pay particular attention to the Start a Group section, which includes excerpts from each of the 13 videos and highlights on the featured experts. In addition, watch the promotional videos online. Explore the Bookstore (Personal Help Store) for recommended books and resources on single-parenting topics that will help you become a more effective leader. Visit the Single-Parent HelpCenter, which contains a wealth of information that will help people who participate in your Single & Parenting group.
- **VIEW THE WATCH ME FIRST! (LEADERS ONLY) video** located on Disc 1.
- **VIEW THE LEADER TRAINING VIDEO (DISC 5).** This video summarizes the best path to becoming an effective Single & Parenting leader. Leaders who follow the steps outlined in this video material have gone on to have successful and effective ministries. Watch the entire video. Pages 135–140 have an outline and discussion guide to use when training your leadership team with this video. Using this outline and discussion guide will make the training much more effective and help create a bond within your ministry team.
- **READ THIS LEADER’S GUIDE** and become familiar with its contents. It is the “resource of resources” and will direct you to the material and answers you need. It will explain what to do and how to do it. Be sure to take notes in the margins and highlight points to remember.
- **LOG IN TO THE LEADERZONE AT** www.singleandparenting.org/leaderzone.

IMPORTANT

It is **ESSENTIAL** that you view your DVDs within 30 days of receipt to confirm quality. We will be happy to replace any defective DVDs within 30 days after you have received your Single & Parenting kit. Replacement cannot be made beyond this 30-day period.

It's important that each current leader and future leader connected with your Single & Parenting ministry have access to the LeaderZone. The LeaderZone serves as the online epicenter for Single & Parenting leaders. It is a password-protected website exclusively for leaders and church staff. The LeaderZone provides resources leaders need to be successful! It is filled with downloadable resources and articles, advertising materials and a rich depository of additional information to help you lead your Single & Parenting group. Also, be sure to explore the online, moderated Leaders' Forum where you can interact daily (via internet and email) with other Single & Parenting leaders around the world and see how they deal with questions and situations. In the Library/Articles section, be sure to read the articles found under "Library Categories" in the category "Attention New Leaders."

- **BUILD A LEADERSHIP TEAM.** Reread pages 27–33 in this Leader's Guide as you begin to assemble your team. Check out the articles on the LeaderZone in the Library/Articles section, in the categories "Leader Recruitment/Selection" and "Leader Training."
- **READ THE PARTICIPANT WORKBOOK** and become familiar with this vital piece of the Single & Parenting ministry. Each leader and participant will need his or her own copy. This is one of the most important tools you can provide to your group members to help in their single-parenting journey. It is essential for leaders to model the use of the participant workbook each session.
- **PROMOTE YOUR GROUP MEETING** on our free, Find a Group online search engine on the main Singleandparenting.org website. People in your community and church need to know your group exists. This free promotional tool enables website visitors to search by zip/postal code, city & state or country to find the Single & Parenting group nearest them. Your free listing includes all the details potential group members need to know, such as when and where your group meets, cost to participate and whom to contact for additional information. Plus, it automatically displays a short preview video! To customize your online listing and promote your ministry, go to the LeaderZone, My Church section, and follow the guidelines on that page.
- **CONNECT WITH THE SINGLE & PARENTING HEADQUARTERS TEAM.** Our consultants and support team members are experienced and qualified in helping leaders succeed as they start and sustain a Single & Parenting group. Remember, there is no charge for this help. It is yours for the asking!

One of our consultants will be contacting you soon and assisting you as you launch and grow your group for a successful future. We have a **Welcome!** email letter to send you containing lots of tips for leading a Single & Parenting group. Our Customer Service Associates are dedicated to helping you with your orders and general inquiries. Feel free to call or email anytime, Monday–Friday, 8:30 a.m.–5:30 p.m. (eastern time), 800-395-5755 or info@singleandparenting.org.

www.singleandparenting.org

- Learn more about Single & Parenting
- Visit the Single & Parenting bookstore
- Explore the Single-Parent HelpCenter
- Find Single & Parenting groups around the world

HOW TO CONTACT US

Single & Parenting exists as a ministry to help you as you help others.
Feel free to contact us with questions, problems and success stories!

Phone: 800-395-5755 (US/Canada) or 919-562-2112 (international)
Fax: 919-562-2114

Mail: Single & Parenting
P.O. Box 1739
Wake Forest, NC 27588-1739

Email: info@singleandparenting.org
Web: www.singleandparenting.org

Office hours: Monday–Friday, 8:30 a.m.–5:30 p.m., eastern time

ABOUT SINGLE & PARENTING

Single & Parenting is a network of single-parent care groups meeting around the world. Our goal is to help you, in the context of your church, to lead an effective, weekly group that helps single parents with the many challenges they face.

NOTES

THE NEED FOR SINGLE-PARENT MINISTRY

Single parents come into the position of parenting alone a number of ways: divorce, separation, death, adoption, abandonment, legal guardianship or a father or mother who chooses to raise a child on his or her own. Adults who parent alone have a unique set of struggles that married people and people without children do not fully realize.

Single parents are stretched thin taking care of daily responsibilities typically shared by two adults. They are responsible alone for nurturing a child into adulthood, providing a sufficient income and caring for all aspects of a home.

While often exhausted and overwhelmed, they deeply desire to raise their children in the best way possible—and worry that they cannot. Financial stresses are common. Maintaining a house and car is a barely manageable task. Being available for their children as often they would like is typically impossible. They wonder, “Where is the hope and the rest I so desperately need?”

Who will help ease the load of single parents? Who will come alongside the family and be a mentor to the children? Where can single parents receive trusted advice about finances, car and home? When do single parents get a break? Who will tell the single parents that they are doing a good job, that they are loved and never alone? Who will explain to them how to truly realize the indescribable gift of hope and peace through Christ?

A local, church-hosted Single & Parenting group provides a way to answer this call.

THE SINGLE & PARENTING SOLUTION

The Single & Parenting program was created as a strategic tool equipping churches to help single parents:

- A** Who attend your church (inreach)
- B** Throughout your community (outreach)



Single & Parenting is specifically designed to minister to single parents coming from a variety of life circumstances, including:

- **DIVORCED**
- **SEPARATED**
- **WIDOWED**
- **NEVER MARRIED**

The easy-to-implement, video-based design of Single & Parenting makes it simple for lay leaders to start and maintain an ongoing, effective ministry.

The program consists of:

- **COMPLETE TRAINING MATERIALS**
for church lay leaders and other leadership team volunteers
- **PROMOTIONAL TOOLS**
- **VIDEO SEMINAR TEACHING** on single-parent issues
- **WEEKLY, ONGOING, LAY-FACILITATED DISCUSSION/CARE GROUPS**
- **TAKE-HOME WORKBOOKS** for group members. This workbook includes a short, daily Bible study for personal application and reflection

The Single & Parenting strategy solves several problems inherent in conducting a successful care ministry:

STAFFING

Recruiting and maintaining a qualified lay leadership team is typically easier when teaching is not a requirement. Single & Parenting provides teaching segments on video, featuring experts with credibility and experience in ministry to single parents. Significantly, the Single & Parenting program is intentionally designed to place a minimal time burden on pastors and church staff members.

Also, as your Single & Parenting ministry matures, you'll begin to create an environment for developing new leaders. Group members who exhibit substantial growth and personal healing may be able to assume leadership roles, creating a self-perpetuating ministry. Be sure to watch for potential leaders in your group and ask them to pray about possibly leading a Single & Parenting group in the future.

BIBLICAL TEACHING

Great care must be taken in blending biblical instruction with practical guidance to create a program that effectively meets the needs of people who come to your church for help and support. The Christian experts on the video seminars address the emotional, spiritual and practical needs of single parents with foundational, biblical teaching. And the Single & Parenting workbook exercises direct participants to God's Word as the ultimate parenting and life manual, helping them apply the learned concepts to their daily life.

ONGOING FORMAT

For a single-parent ministry to be effective, it must be an ongoing program, providing a place where parents in your community can get help at any time. Taking that first step to ask for help is difficult. With Single & Parenting's weekly format, your church will never need to put off a single parent taking that step. By running your Single & Parenting groups three times per year, your church will be known as a place where help is available. Single & Parenting sessions are designed to be "self-contained," and we recommend that your group remains open, meaning that a person can join your group at any point during the 13-week cycle.

TRAINING

We have developed many tiers of training to help you lead your Single & Parenting group.

This Leader's Guide contains detailed information on how to start and sustain a single-parent ministry, recruit lay leadership and promote the ministry. The Leader Training Video gives great insight on what it takes to run an effective ministry and equips lay leadership to effectively facilitate this ministry.

The Single & Parenting LeaderZone is an extensive website for leaders and church staff, providing a rich resource of leadership training tools (www.singleandparenting.org/leaderzone). The LeaderZone features:

- **A LEADERS' FORUM** to ask questions, share advice and receive leadership tips from other leaders and from Single & Parenting's personal consultants
- **OPPORTUNITIES TO MEET AND SHARE** with other Single & Parenting leaders in your area to form a Local Network Fellowship
- **HELPFUL LEADERSHIP ARTICLES** located in the Library/Articles section of the LeaderZone

Remember, free ministry help is available via phone and email. Single & Parenting's full-time consultants stand by to answer questions and provide ministry guidance. See page 46 for contact information.

PROMOTION

Single & Parenting has produced a complete package of print, online and video promotional materials for churches to use in publicizing the program in their communities. On the LeaderZone, see items in the Promotion Tools section. You'll find additional resources in the Library/Articles section of the LeaderZone website in the "Publicity" category.

HOW THIS MINISTRY CAN BENEFIT YOUR CHURCH

Single & Parenting is a powerful ministry that not only serves single-parent families, but also helps your church. This program can bring about effective outreach, evangelism,

www.singleandparenting.org/leaderzone

- **New leaders** – please log in
- **Leaders' Forum** – posted lately?
- **Free online leader resources & promo tools**

church awareness and church growth.

OUTREACH AND INREACH INCREASES

Single & Parenting is an effective outreach tool in your community. Single-parent families are found in nearly every church and community. You may be surprised to find that the majority of participants in your group come from outside the church.

We provide you with a number of tools to help publicize your group throughout your community. You can find them in the Publicity section on page 61. While Single & Parenting will be an effective outreach tool, it will also become an essential ministry within your church.

CHURCH AWARENESS GROWS

Single & Parenting serves as an effective inreach tool to single parents inside your church.

Single-parent families are sometimes unintentionally marginalized in churches today. Many church programs are geared toward two-parent families. Small groups are often led by couples and cater to couples. Single parents are sometimes pointed in the direction of the singles' ministries; when in actuality, single parents have very different priorities and concerns than a single person with no children.

As a result of your Single & Parenting ministry, your congregation will gain a greater awareness of the need to affirm and accept single parents. They will begin to understand that single-parent families can be whole, complete families that don't meet the stereotypical description of "broken" or "incomplete." Church members will have the opportunity to build relationships with single-parent families, just as they would with two-parent families. Single parents will be encouraged to become more integrated in the broader context of life in your church.

CHURCH ATTENDANCE RISES

When people from outside the church experience the practical help and acceptance found in your Single & Parenting group, they will want to discover more about what goes on in your church. Those who view the Single & Parenting videos, participate in the discussion and do the daily Bible study will develop a hunger to learn more about what the Bible has to say about their life. Many parents will want to become involved in your church for the sake of their children.

LAY-DRIVEN DESIGN HELPS PASTORS

Even the most conscientious pastors and church staff are unable to come alongside every family in their church and offer continual care and guidance on a personal level. Through the weekly, ongoing ministry design of Single & Parenting, lay leaders with a heart for single-parent ministry can provide that consistent help and care. As your program grows, it can become self-sustaining. You will be able to identify mature group members who can be recruited to become part of your leadership team.

SINGLE & PARENTING DISTINCTIVES

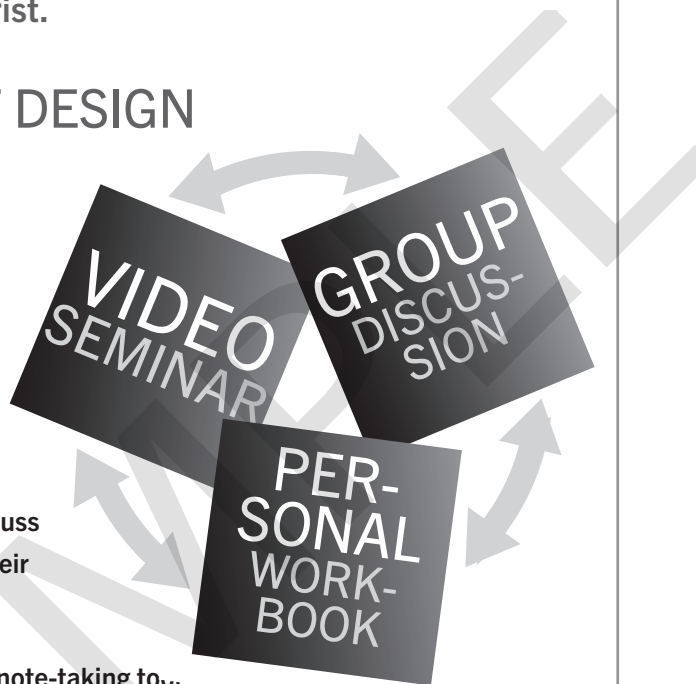
Through our research and our experience in equipping thousands of churches worldwide for support and care group ministries, we have developed the Single & Parenting program around a set of key distinctives. We have seen this ministry model help many people find healing through Christ.

NOTES

THREE-COMPONENT DESIGN

Single & Parenting is built around three components: video seminar, small group discussion and workbook.

- THE VIDEO SEMINAR PORTION offers expert teaching on topics important to single parents.
- THE SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION segment allows participants to discuss how the video concepts relate to their own experience as a single parent.
- THE WORKBOOK provides a video note-taking tool and a daily Bible study for personal application.



All three components are intertwined and essential for promoting effective results in your group.

ONGOING MINISTRY

The Single & Parenting program consists of 13 weekly sessions, designed to be repeated in regular cycles throughout the year. Participants are encouraged to attend more than one 13-week cycle. Our experience shows that they will absorb new levels of information as they continue to grow. In addition, participants will benefit from sustained interaction with their group, which becomes much like a family for most group members.

CHRIST-CENTERED

We stress the importance of a relationship with Jesus Christ as the foundation for single parents to build their lives on and the importance of modeling this relationship for their children.

BIBLICALLY BASED

The Bible is presented as a source of real-world, practical answers to tough issues, such as the struggles faced when raising a child alone and the resulting emotions, frustrations and fears.

OUTREACH TO YOUR COMMUNITY, GATEWAY TO FAITH

Single parents in your church and community will welcome the opportunity to find practical help and a place to connect with other single parents. Whether a single parent has never attended church, or fell away a long time ago, your Single & Parenting group may be the draw that person needs to step into your church and hear the gospel message.

CURRICULUM STRATEGY

“I WANT TO MAKE SURE MY KIDS TURN OUT OKAY.”

As we began work on Single & Parenting, we wanted to know, “What is the primary issue single parents want the curriculum to address?” So we asked them.

Almost every parent we asked said something to the effect of: “I need to know how to make sure my kids turn out okay.”

We designed the Single & Parenting materials to address that concern from a Christ-centered perspective. Over the course of 13 weeks Single & Parenting helps parents Stabilize, Realize, Customize and ultimately Thrive.

Here’s a brief overview of how those four objectives relate to Single & Parenting’s content:

STABILIZE (SESSIONS 1–4):

Before making huge changes in the way they relate to their children, single parents need to stabilize. This involves resetting their expectations for themselves and their children and reducing the chaos they experience. In Sessions 1–4, participants discover:

- They’re not alone; other single parents face equally challenging circumstances
- How growing up in a single-parent home affects children
- Simple steps they can take to encourage their children to obey
- The importance of taking care of themselves spiritually and physically
- How to build a strong financial foundation

REALIZE (SESSIONS 5–8):

Single & Parenting also helps participants realize what God has to say about parenting and their emotions. Understanding His perspective on these issues lays the foundation for single parents to deal with the recurring challenges they face. They learn:

- What parenting goals they should have
- The importance of allowing children to learn from their mistakes
- What their emotions are trying to tell them

CUSTOMIZE (SESSIONS 9–10):

NOTES

Here are a few other ideas central to Single & Parenting:

- God loves our kids more than we do. So it makes sense to do what He recommends about parenting.
- There are no guarantees in parenting. We do our best, trusting God with the results.
- Despite our flaws and failures as parents, God loves us more than we can comprehend.
- God’s love for us (as opposed to feelings of guilt, fear, worry, etc.) is the best motivation for our parenting.
- God is a perfect parent. We can learn a lot from Him.
- Go after your child’s heart. The best shot we have at producing good kids is to touch what motivates them. The Bible calls this the heart.

Every child is unique. Wise parents customize their parenting to the unique needs of their children. In Sessions 9 and 10, they learn biblical parenting principles they can adapt to suit their children. For example:

- Why giving out consequences and being consistent isn't enough
- Why it's important to address a child's heart
- Other options they have for responding to a child's disobedience
- What they can learn about parenting from reflecting upon how God relates to us

THRIVE (SESSIONS 11–13):

In addition to challenges with their children, single parents face many other issues that can sap their energy or get them into trouble. The last three sessions help parents thrive in spite of:

- Conflict with another person
- Difficulties in co-parenting
- The various temptations and pitfalls associated with dating and single sexuality

Stabilizing, Realizing, Customizing and Thriving—the four stages of Single & Parenting. Understanding this progression will help you be a more effective leader.

HOW SINGLE & PARENTING WORKS

Your weekly Single & Parenting program will be built around three components: (1) video seminar, (2) small group discussion and (3) workbook-based personal study and reflection. Encourage your participants to be committed to all three key aspects in order to grow and heal.

VIDEO SEMINAR

At each session your group will view a video on DVD featuring personal stories of single parents, insights from Christian experts on single-parenting topics and segments that show how to handle common parenting challenges. The videos average 40 minutes in length. We encourage you (and your leadership team) to watch every session before beginning your ministry, take notes in the video outline in your workbook, encourage group members to use the video outlines, and refer to your notes during the group discussion time.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

After the video you'll bring participants together for a small group time to discuss what was seen on the video and what's going on in their lives. If you have more than 8 participants, consider breaking into smaller groups. Ideal group size: 6–8 participants with two leaders (male, female) allows for all to talk and for more questions to be addressed.

Use the Session Agendas & Discussion Questions on pages 81–109 to help guide the small group time and facilitate discussion. It's also important to take time to “catch up” on the trials and successes experienced by members during the week. This sharing will help them organize and clarify their thoughts on what is happening to them personally and will allow others to understand how they can help each other along the way.

Take time to discuss the “Hopework” exercises in the workbook to see how they have helped group members throughout the week.

WORKBOOK-BASED PERSONAL STUDY AND REFLECTION

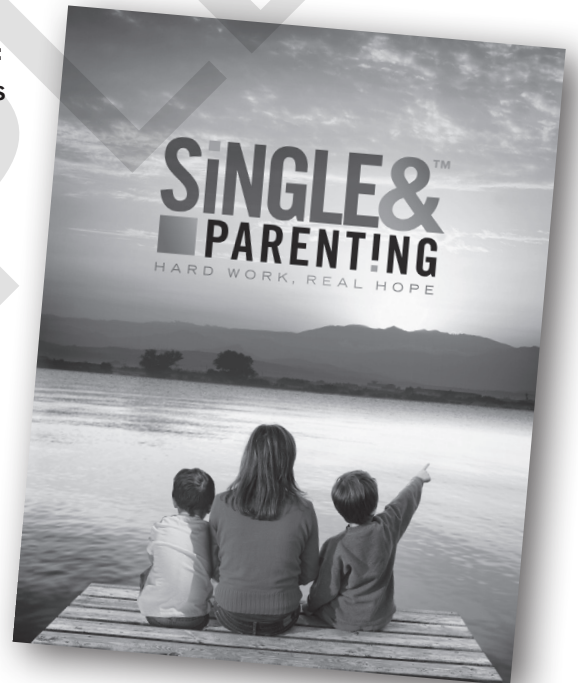
During the week participants are to complete the Hopework exercises in the workbook, which introduce biblical truths that can transform their daily lives as a single parent. During the group meeting, your group will discuss the Hopework. The Session Agendas & Discussion Questions (pp. 81–109) offer suggested questions to facilitate this time.

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You will need to model for the participants how important the workbook is for personal growth and parenting strategy application. Use your workbook to take notes during the video, reference the Scriptures and promote the Hopework exercises.

NOTES | WORKBOOK COMPONENTS

- **LIST OF RESPECTED EXPERTS** on the video, who share information on topics related to single parenting. Many have been single parents themselves.
- **REST FOR SINGLE PARENTS** is a gospel presentation introducing single parents to the rest, peace and strength that God offers to everyone through a personal relationship with Jesus.
- **NOTE-TAKING OUTLINES** correspond with the weekly video seminars for participants to take notes while viewing the videos.
- **HOPEWORK WORKBOOK EXERCISES:** The daily Scripture verses, questions and reflections will guide single parents to a place of rest and hope in Christ. Completing the exercises can make a real difference in their personal growth and effectiveness as a parent. Encourage participants to spend time each day on them.
- **SINGLE-PARENTING RESOURCE CENTER:** This page lists Single & Parenting resources for participants.
- **BUDGET WORKSHEET:** Participants can get started on the path to financial freedom using this tear-out worksheet.
- **THANK YOU and INVITATION CARDS** are perforated postcards in the back of the workbook that members can fill out and send to friends inviting them to attend a group and to church leaders to thank them for hosting Single & Parenting. It's especially helpful for your church leaders to see the fruits of this ministry through the comments on the cards.
- **CARE CARDS:** In the back of the workbook are 13 Care Cards. Have members tear out a perforated card each week and place it where they will see it often throughout each day. Consider doing a "group tear" at the end of your group meetings where everyone tears out the card for the week.



BEGINNING YOUR SINGLE & PARENTING MINISTRY

The tools in this Leader's Guide, plus those on video and web, will help you launch an effective ministry. If you are new to single-parent ministry, don't let these materials overwhelm you. You'll learn as you go—by your successes and mistakes. The most important thing you can do is get started. There are single parents out there who need your ministry.

In this section, we will share some key principles important to the success of a single-parent ministry. You'll find flexibility to form a ministry that fits your church and community. We encourage you to experiment and innovate and then share your experiences so others can learn and benefit.

WHAT TO EXPECT

You may be wondering what kind of response to expect if you announce the availability of a Single & Parenting group. Every church and community is different. There's no precise way to predict how many or what type of people will come to your first group. Factors such as the demographics of your church membership, the availability of other single-parent help groups in your community and the effectiveness of your publicity will have an effect on attendance.

Even with these variables, it is possible to offer some guidance about what to expect:

■ YOUR SINGLE & PARENTING GROUP WILL DRAW PEOPLE FROM OUTSIDE YOUR CHURCH

It will not be unusual for the majority of your participants to come from outside the host church. Some people will not be active in any church. Others will come from churches where there is no single-parent ministry. Very significantly, many of your group members may not be followers of Christ, creating an extraordinary outreach and evangelism opportunity.

■ **YOUR GROUP SIZE IS LIKELY TO BE SMALL WHEN YOU BEGIN** If only one participant or a small number of people show up at your first session, be encouraged! These are the people God has led to you for ministry.

Your Single & Parenting program will likely grow larger over time. The keys to growth are consistency, prayer and a warm, accepting environment. As word gets out that practical help and support are available, people will be drawn to your program. The most effective publicity for your Single & Parenting group will be word-of-mouth invitations and testimonials from your current participants and "alums." They will be a constant source of referrals for you. Your group will likely grow larger over time, and you may develop the need for multiple small groups.

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- Learn more about Single & Parenting
- Visit the Single & Parenting bookstore
- Explore the Single-Parent HelpCenter
- Find Single & Parenting groups around the world

The nice part about a small start is that it lets you and your leadership team fine-tune your program and work on the rough spots.

■ CHURCH MEMBERS WILL REFER PEOPLE TO YOUR GROUP

Everyone knows a single parent. Many people don't know how to effectively help that single parent and will be glad to learn there is such a ministry in their church. Be sure to publicize Single & Parenting effectively within your congregation.

■ EXPECT TO BE ESPECIALLY BUSY AT FIRST

Every new project, whether it is a start-up business or a new ministry, needs a "champion," someone who is passionately committed to seeing it through to success. It's likely you are that person in the initial phase of your church's Single & Parenting program. Be sure to create a leadership team to help you as your group begins to grow.

■ EXPECT TO BE STRETCHED, CHALLENGED, FATIGUED AND OFTEN BLESSED!

Ongoing care ministry can be emotionally draining. If the Lord has called you into this ministry, He'll sustain you through it. Best of all, as you help others, you'll find that you are being deeply blessed, fulfilled and refilled.

Anticipate testing, trials and temptations. This phenomenon is not limited to single-parent ministry. If you are effectively doing the work the Lord leads you to do, you are likely to face some opposition from the enemy. Paul addresses this issue in Hebrews 12:1–2 and suggests an antidote of perseverance. In verse one he urges: "[L]et us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us." In the second verse, he gives us a focal point: "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus."

WHO WILL COME

You may be wondering what kind of people to expect when your group begins. The single parents in your group may be divorced, separated, widowed, never married or legal guardians. No two groups will be identical, but the following mix is representative of many groups:

■ CHRISTIANS

Some of the people who come to your group will be strong, mature followers of Jesus Christ. Others will be Christians who may have drifted away from the church and have not grown in their faith; their participation in your group may be the catalyst for spiritual growth and renewed church involvement.

■ NON-CHRISTIANS

A significant percentage of your group may have little or no church background and do not have a personal relationship with Jesus. The stresses of parenting alone will often open them to spiritual solutions and the kinds of help available through a church. Single & Parenting gently points participants toward Christ as the source of help and hope through their trials and for their children, too.

■ “ALUMS”

Group members are encouraged to repeat 13-week cycles. As a person repeats the sessions, he or she will hear the teaching on the video seminars from a new perspective and benefit from levels of information that may not have been relevant at an earlier point. As a leader, you must be able to differentiate between people who are genuinely benefiting from the repetition and those who may be staying for other reasons. In most cases, a person should not participate in more than three 13-week cycles (unless you are preparing that person for a leadership role).

■ SINGLE PARENTS FROM A VARIETY OF LIFE CIRCUMSTANCES

All single parents should be welcomed, no matter what circumstances created their single-parent status. It's very likely your group will include a mixture of people who are:

- Divorced
- Separated
- Widowed
- Never married

The Single & Parenting material is carefully designed to simultaneously meet the needs of single parents from each of these categories. The overarching principles presented in the material are universally relevant to the single-parenting experience, and will be helpful no matter what occurred to create the single-parent status of each of your group members.



WHO SHOULD NOT COME

Some people will come to your group for the sole purpose of meeting other single parents of the opposite sex. The other group members will immediately sense this and either put up their guard or welcome the opportunity. In a split second, your group becomes an unsafe, uncomfortable place for people seeking genuine help, hope and encouragement. We encourage you to share the Group Guidelines Agreement (page 125) each time newcomers arrive at your group. Clearly communicate that these are guidelines for acceptable behavior in your group and that anyone who does not comply will be asked to leave.

PRAYER SUPPORT

Don't underestimate the importance of prayer to your ministry. Focused, organized prayer support of your Single & Parenting ministry is essential. We view prayer as the “jet fuel” that keeps your program going.

We encourage you to pray with your leadership team each week before or after each session: pray for one another, the participants, newcomers and the ministry. We also suggest you organize an outside “prayer support team” of church members to pray for the ministry. The prayer team could meet regularly for prayer and/or have team members individually intercede for the ministry.

A good way to provide specific information about your group’s prayer needs is to regularly send a list of prayer requests to the prayer team. Requests could include:

- The Lord will bring people to your Single & Parenting group.
- Group members will find help and hope.
- Group members will grow closer to the Lord.
- People who don’t have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ will be open to a relationship with Him.
- The Lord will protect and guide your leadership team in your Single & Parenting ministry.
- The Lord will protect your Single & Parenting program, participants and leadership from attack and oppression.

For more ideas on building prayer support, be sure to read the LeaderZone article “Prayer Support,” Library/Articles section, “Attention New Leaders” category.

PRAYING FOR YOUR GROUP MEMBERS

You will also become aware of individual needs in the lives of group members and their families. You can share these needs with your prayer team as well, being careful to maintain confidentiality. Through prayer, your church can have a significant impact on the lives of the people who participate in your Single & Parenting group.

DEFINING YOUR MINISTRY

Before dealing with the specifics and logistics of single-parent ministry at your church, it's important to step back and evaluate some key questions:

- Why are we [you and your church] entering this ministry?
- What form should it take?
- What support and resources do we have available?
- What kind of single-parent ministry do we see in our church five years from now?

Take a few minutes to evaluate the material in this section, then attempt to answer these questions within the context of your church and personal ministry skills and goals. You can use the “Defining Your Ministry” worksheet found on page 123 of this Leader’s Guide to record your answers.

WHY ARE WE ENTERING THIS MINISTRY?

Single parents are found in almost every church and community, and single parenting is tough: physically, mentally, emotionally and financially. Single parents typically bear the burdens of caring for a household and family on their own. With such a weight of responsibility, they can become overwhelmed and exhausted, and at times, anxious and despairing. The church has a biblical mandate to serve and care for one other as the Lord has cared for us.

Beyond this basic foundation, there are many other reasons your church might begin a single-parent ministry:

- You have single parents within your church membership whom you’d like to minister to.
- You see single-parent ministry as a tool for community outreach.
- You see single-parent ministry as a tool for evangelism.
- Single parents in the community have approached your church, and you do not have anything in place to help them.
- There is little or no help for single parents in your community.
- As a pastor or church staff, you see the needs of single parents, and although you’d love to minister to each one personally, you are already overburdened and would appreciate the help of a lay-led ministry team to meet this need.

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- New leaders – please log in
- Leaders’ Forum – posted lately?
- Free online leader resources & promo tools

- Your church offers DivorceCare and/or GriefShare, and your leadership sees the opportunity to extend these ministries by offering additional help to those group members who have become single parents because of their divorce or grief experience.

By clearly articulating the reasons you are launching a single-parent ministry, you'll be able to more effectively plan the steps necessary to achieve your goals.

WHAT FORM SHOULD IT TAKE?

There's no single strategy for single-parent ministry. Some churches hold occasional help ministries for single parents, offering an afternoon of free babysitting, car maintenance or financial planning. Although many churches have ongoing singles groups, these groups are not comprised solely of single parents and do not address their unique concerns.



Single & Parenting materials have been optimized for use in a weekly format, providing an infrastructure for an ongoing ministry.

Single & Parenting is designed to be part seminar/part discussion group. The seminar portion (on DVD) contains biblical teaching on single-parenting issues. The small group time allows discussion of the video teaching and sharing of what's going on in members' lives. We believe a seminar format

that does not include small group discussion is less effective than the combination. Conversely, a discussion-group-only format fails to provide teaching on important subjects and focus for the group dialogue.

We suggest you establish a goal of maintaining a year-round, ongoing schedule. You may want to sit down with your calendar and plan an annual cycle. The 13 Single & Parenting sessions can be scheduled three times per year (leaving time for breaks between sessions). Many participants will repeat the material one or two additional cycles. This can be beneficial because they will hear the material from a different perspective as they experience personal growth and will benefit from the continuing contact with a supportive group.

If your church is offering additional support group ministries like DivorceCare, DivorceCare for Kids (DC4K) and/or GriefShare, you will want to consider coordinating your 13-week Single & Parenting schedule to coordinate with those complementary groups.

A weekend seminar/event can effectively draw people into your ongoing program. Ideas for conducting a weekend workshop are found in the Logistics section on page 53.

WHAT SUPPORT AND RESOURCES DO WE HAVE AVAILABLE?

It's important to have the support of your church before launching a single-parent ministry.

The Defining Your Ministry Worksheet (p. 123) will help you look at issues such as:

- ☐ Do you have the support of the pastor and other church leadership?
- ☐ Who will provide ongoing leadership and oversight?
- ☐ What obstacles do you foresee?
- ☐ Is this ministry clearly a part of the Lord's plan for your church?

Launching a ministry without proper support and resources could lead to an ineffective ministry or failure of your program. However, it's also true that many new ministries begin with what appear to be inadequate resources and support, relying on the Lord's creative provision. If the Lord has called you and your church to launch this ministry, we encourage you to proceed in faith!

WHAT KIND OF SINGLE-PARENT MINISTRY DO WE SEE IN OUR CHURCH FIVE YEARS FROM NOW?

Your first Single & Parenting group might consist of three people. That's okay. You'll find blessing and encouragement from leading this kind of group.

Even if your group begins with a larger number, it is important to develop a ministry vision for the future. You may want to think about questions such as:

- ☐ How large can our program get?
- ☐ How can we involve group participants in other parts of church life (if they are not already involved in a church)?
- ☐ Do we want to offer child care for group participants?
- ☐ Should we develop a program for the children?

This can be a stimulating exercise as you let your imagination run free to envision possible future directions for your ministry. Ask the Lord to begin to reveal His plan for the direction single-parent ministry should take in your church. Out of this "dreaming," you can develop three or four key long-range goals to help guide your intermediate steps. Use the Defining Your Ministry Worksheet on page 123 to help guide your planning.

WHY YOU SHOULD OFFER SINGLE & PARENTING ON A REPEATING SCHEDULE

After conducting several 13-week Single & Parenting group cycles, you may ask the question "Is it time for something fresh?" This is a natural response, especially when you can quote

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sections of the videos by memory! We encourage you to continue using this material. To each participant it's new, relevant and potentially life changing. We recommend participants attend the 13-week cycle at least twice but not more than three times.

Organizations like Weight Watchers and Alcoholics Anonymous have learned the value of continuously repeating timeless principles to continually new audiences. This consistency has helped them develop a credible and trustworthy reputation.

Single & Parenting will continue to make available new and supplemental materials to assist you in single-parent ministry, but the core teaching on these videos is foundational. If it's working in your church, if you are seeing single parents find hope, rest and encouragement, keep going!

TARGET AUDIENCE

Single & Parenting is designed for virtually all single parents:

- Divorced
- Separated
- Widowed
- Never married

It should be noted that the program is not geared for teenage single parents. Clearly, teen pregnancies are at epidemic levels and there is a tremendous ministry need. As we developed Single & Parenting, however, it became clear that it would be difficult, if not impossible, to combine this age group with the remaining single-parent population and still create an effective ministry tool. If you encounter young teens facing the challenges of single parenting, attempt to direct them to local ministries and resources that can help.

A 360-DEGREE VIEW OF SINGLE PARENTING

Throughout the 13-week program, your group members will view videos featuring personal stories of single parents and insights from Christian experts explaining how to handle challenging single-parenting situations. Group members will identify with most, if not all, of the personal stories of the single parents on the video. Potentially, some participants may feel they can't relate to some of the stories and insights because of the nature of their situation. That's where you as a leader can make a huge difference.

Because of the inevitable spectrum of experiences represented by people who attend your Single & Parenting group, you and your leadership team will need to be sensitive and discerning of your group makeup. You'll want to make sure everyone feels welcome and appreciated, no matter what his or her background is.

ALL FORMS OF SINGLE PARENTING ARE ADDRESSED IN THE DVD VIDEO SESSIONS. That means your group members will hear information that addresses scenarios unlike theirs. For instance,

- Widows hear information about separated, divorced and never-married single parents
- A divorced or separated single parent will hear information from a widow/widower perspective
- A never-married single adult learns information about both divorced and widowed single parents

So the question in the mind of the participant may be, "How do I relate to what I'm

NOTES

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NOTES

hearing since the perspective being shared is not the same as mine?”

It is essential for you to stress that while the video discusses many different scenarios experienced by different group members, the underlying concepts are relevant and vital to ALL single parents.

As a leader, prepare your Single & Parenting group members to look for ways to make application of the content each session. No matter what led to their current single-parent status, the information in Single & Parenting is important and potentially life-changing to each group member. Help each group member make the needed connections to his or her personal circumstances.

FINDING AND RECRUITING YOUR LEADERSHIP TEAM

One of the most important things you can do to ensure the success of your Single & Parenting group is to find, recruit and train the right leadership. Warm, caring, mature group leaders (whom we call “facilitators”) set the tone for the group discussion time that follows the video seminars. Having the right group facilitators will help group participants feel welcome, comfortable and free to share their feelings and thoughts.

If your church is just beginning a single-parent ministry, you may be serving as administrator, group facilitator and snack caterer. If that’s the case, this section can help you get started in building a leadership team. As your group begins to grow, ask the Lord to help you identify people who can assist you in leadership. To prevent burnout, remember, never do ministry alone! If possible, always have someone serving with you. Remember the model that Jesus provided us in Luke 10:1–3, when He sent disciples out “two by two.”

Ideally, you’ll have a team of four (two men, two women). At a minimum you should have two people on your team. Whatever you do, don’t try and start this ministry alone.

If you are a pastor or lay leader overseeing this ministry, you will also find help here as you build your single-parent ministry team for your church.

WHAT KIND OF GROUP FACILITATORS DO YOU NEED?

The people leading the group serve as facilitators, guiding and shepherding the group. These facilitators do not need to be teachers or counselors (in fact, assuming these roles in a group setting is counterproductive). The primary role of the Single & Parenting group facilitators is to create an atmosphere of warmth, caring and trust in the discussion group. Group facilitators must also encourage discussion about what was seen on the DVD and a time of personal sharing about what is going on in the lives of each group participant.

You can begin your Single & Parenting group by recruiting a leadership team: a group primary facilitator and co-facilitator. One person can lead a group, but a team is preferable. You won’t be able to survive as a leader for very long if you don’t recruit and train people to help lead your Single & Parenting program.

As your program grows, ask other people to join the team and help with tasks like administration, publicity, food, registration, etc. (See page 127 for additional Job Titles & Descriptions.)

NOTES

Adapt the structure of your leadership team to meet the needs of your program and church. There's no best way to organize these kinds of responsibilities. Create an organization that works effectively for you!

IDENTIFYING POTENTIAL LEADERS

Effective leaders come from all walks of life. The right leadership will be the glue that brings together all the elements of the Single & Parenting program. A wrong selection of leadership can really hurt your program. The Leader Candidate Form (p. 131) and Potential Leader Questionnaire (p. 145) will help you identify potential leaders. Also, check out the Recruitment Letter for Potential Leaders on page 157.

Characteristics to look for in potential leaders:

■ PROFESS A PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP WITH JESUS CHRIST

Single & Parenting identifies a personal relationship with Jesus Christ as the foundation for hope. Leaders must be able to model the hope and peace that comes from knowing Christ.

■ DEMONSTRATE SPIRITUAL MATURITY

Leaders should be mature Christians with a consistent walk. New believers can be recruited to help with administrative and support tasks but should not lead a group. We suggest your leaders be active, participating members of your church. Remember, these leaders will be representing your church to many people who may not attend church.

There may be occasions where it is desirable to place someone from another church in a leadership role in your Single & Parenting program. If you're considering such a person, discuss it first with your church leadership to ensure you have their support.

■ HAVE BEEN A SINGLE PARENT (OR WAS RAISED IN A SINGLE-PARENT HOME)

The Lord has a desire to take our difficult experiences and turn them and use them for His glory. This is seen in the experience of the Apostle Paul: "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God" (2 Corinthians 1:3–4).

People who have been a single parent have an intimate understanding of the needs of other single parents. They will have a special sensitivity as they interact with group members. It is encouraging for group members to see someone who has faced many of the same struggles, fears and hardships and who exemplifies a life of peace, joy and inner strength.

It is not essential that leaders have been single parents, or children of single parents, provided they demonstrate a sensitivity and calling to such ministry, but your best success will be in finding people who have experienced single