

5 tips for single parents to kick off the year with a new attitude

By Sheila Fields

Someone once told me “change is good.” I countered with “change is scary.” He said, “You need to go with the changes in life in order to grow.” I pulled the covers closer, snuggled next to him, and changed the subject.

Well, that man’s address has changed and there are no more philosophical pillow talks, but his words ring true. Change, an unavoidable fact of life, needs to be embraced if we are to grow into the people we are meant to become.

I am healing from a major life change: a recent second divorce. My first marriage ended ten years ago when my husband walked out, leaving me holding the baby and his two brothers. I’d like to state for the record that I am not a proponent of divorce. Marriage is a great blessing between two people.

Anyway, this recent change is both old and new. Both gut wrenching and a relief. Both negative and positive. Anyone reading this column who is a single parent is well aware of the negatives. Being single in a couples world. Being up all night alone with a sick child. Never enough money or time or energy. Things breaking at home that duct tape won’t fix. Loneliness.

Enough of the negatives. It’s a new year of new beginnings, fresh starts, clean slates, new lives.

My October birthday ushers in a contemplative time for me during the last quarter of the year. I can choose to mope and whine and weep – of which I’ve done a fair share – or I can choose to embrace my new situation and make the best of it.

So, roll up your sleeves, slice some lemons and let’s make a batch of the sweetest lemonade we can. Here are five tips that are helping me navigate a new course in life. Perhaps they can help you too as we begin a wonderful new year.

1. Keep a positive attitude.

A good attitude can be a lifesaver. Do you ever awaken feeling completely overwhelmed by responsibilities? Perhaps your ex is late with child support and the mortgage or rent is due. You have a plumbing problem that is going to be expensive to fix. Your son’s teacher has called again because he’s being disruptive.

On mornings like this, I have felt like I hate my life. But, I’ve learned that a negative attitude makes everything worse. I’m not saying be an ostrich and pretend life is a bed of roses, but just trust that somehow you will be given the strength and provision to handle everything that comes your way. And then just do the next thing.

2. Don’t become isolated.

No woman is an island. You can’t do this by yourself. Reach out to friends. Join a support group. Go for counseling if you can afford it. When we share our burdens with another, the load is lightened. Don’t be afraid or too proud to ask for help. Being a parent is hard work; doing it on your own can seem impossible at times. We need each other.

3. Have some fun!

Along with reaching out for help, reach out for the joy of fellowship with others. Plan something just for fun. Don’t wait for the other person to call you – take the initiative.

My sons went to Disney World with their dad, stepmom and baby sister over Thanksgiving break. Ten days with no kids. What’s a single mom to do?? I scheduled a massage, had dinner with a friend, and even organized a skating trip to the rink in Newburgh. A bunch of us had a rollicking good time laughing,

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falling and helping each other up again. I can’t stress how important it is to relax, have fun and laugh.

4. Learn to appreciate solitude.

Shortly after my husband and I separated, I dreaded being home alone on alternate weekends when my boys were with their dad. At first, I slept over at a girlfriend’s. Then, I filled my mornings, noons and nights with activity. I came home one Saturday exhausted but unable to bear the empty house. So I convinced another girlfriend to brave the wintry night and go out for a cup of tea.

Over time, I’ve stopped running away from my life and have begun accepting my times of solitude. I now enjoy my weekends alone. I can devote uninterrupted time to a favorite hobby, read a book in one sitting or take a long soak in a hot tub without hearing the boys disagree over whose turn it is on the computer.

I have found a healthy balance of activity and stillness that is both energizing and restorative. What do you love to do, that you haven’t had the time for, that will nourish your soul?

5. Ahh, sweet freedom – enjoy it!

In the past, I thought of singleness after divorce as a prison sentence. Now, without being wanton or cavalier, I’ve learned to rejoice in the freedom that my singleness brings.

This fall I painted my bedroom the exact shade I wanted. Three years ago I had to compromise on the color choice. Some weekends, I don’t feel like cooking dinner, so I don’t. One night I wanted to listen to the music of James Taylor and I did – loudly. It disturbed no one. My point is, wherever we are in life, we need to choose to be content, living in the moment and receiving the joy.

Life as a single parent is tough. It takes a long time and hard work. This year I’m choosing a new attitude – one based in faith and hope. Even though events in my life have at times been awful, I’m going to walk bravely into my new life. Won’t you join me?

Sheila Fields lives her new life in Wappingers Falls with her three sons.

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