

## Flying solo

For time-crunched single parents, strategy meets spontaneity

By Janis Hashe  
Photos by David Andrews

### E-mail from single parent Carol Davidson of Chattanooga:

"Here's a little exchange I had with a girlfriend of mine related to your article and my interview.

**Carol:** I just had an interview for a local magazine about time management strategies for single parents.

**Ex-Friend:** Why? Did they need a 'before' example?

Ha. Ha. Ha."

Carol, mother of nearly-6-year-old Nick, knows she hasn't got the time-management thing down to a science. But she does have one of the major coping components, mentioned by parents and experts alike: A sense of humor, coupled with an ability

to roll with the punches.

In fact, three strong themes emerged from the interviews for this article. To get a handle on the mass of time demands, single parents need to make use of their networks, must create schedules, lists and calendars—and have to know "when to fold 'em" with grace and humor if, as is sometimes inevitable, Shinola happens.

### Networks work

"Even newly divorced people do not need to create an entirely new support network," points out Jeanne Halbert, Ph.D., head of [optinresources.com](http://optinresources.com), a group that assists in building social networks, and a professor of sociology at Louisiana State University. "You still have friends and family, and those ties can be augmented by new ones that you can find through support groups, church, at work or through organizations you already belong to."

She notes that while many single parents may be reluctant to ask for help, creating the request as an exchange ("I could watch Matt on Thursday afternoon; could you watch Sara on Friday morning?") means that you are offering help as well. Even just sharing picking up and dropping off children can be a huge help for working parents.

"I do have several people who can help me with Sydney when I go out of town," says Candace Davis, who balances the needs of her 8-year-old daughter with a demanding job here in Chattanooga. "I always offer to help with their children in return." She often takes groups to the Tennessee Aquarium and the Creative Discovery Museum.

George Dennis, who shares custody of 4-year-old Emmett, takes him and neighboring kids to the studio of an artist friend. "My friend loves being around kids and welcomes them. Emmett watches me parent other kids and learns from that," George says. In return, his neighbors and friends can help when he needs to make an important business call or return e-mails.

Some parents, like Carol Davidson, do face extra challenges when creating networks of help. "Nick has type 1 diabetes, and he needs a trained babysitter. Some people don't offer to help because they are scared of the responsibility—but the biggest gift in the world they could give me would be to overcome their fear," she says.

Another part of your network: Your child.

"Ask for help around the house," says Elaine Shimberg, author of *Blending Families* and the upcoming *The Complete Single Father*. "We tend to under-use our kids because we don't want to 'burden' them. Instead, we make them feel they aren't capable or an important part of the family."

"Sometimes,  
you just have  
to wing it."

*Carol Davidson, single parent*



Single parent Carol Davidson says on weekends she tries to plan a week's worth of meals for herself and her "nearly-6-year-old" son, Nick.