

# Single Parent Success Stories

How Cy-Fair's single parents keep their families strong and healthy and find time for themselves

Cy-Fair mom Robin Allen with her daughter Katherine and son Jake



Ask Cy-Fair parents Danielle Haggard, Robin Allen, and Nathan Castillo about the typical single parent, and they'll tell you there's no such thing. It could be the mom of your daughter's best friend down the street or the dad who coaches your son's basketball team. There are approximately 13.7 million single parents in the U.S., all of whom manage their lives and families from day to day without a spouse for support.

To their children, Haggard, Allen, and Castillo strive to be role models they can look up to, and to the rest of us, these three Cy-Fair parents are unsung heroes who amaze and often leave us asking, "How do they do it?"

### Creating Strong Family Units

Even though single parenting presents unique challenges, Haggard, Allen, and Castillo agree the benefits they enjoy as parents outweigh any hardships. Haggard is mother to daughter Samaya, 3; Allen has two children, Jake, 14, who is autistic, and Katherine, 12; and Castillo has two young boys, Justin, 6, and Andrew, 4.

For Allen, developing a close relationship with her children has been one of the best aspects of single parenting. "When I was working a stressful job, Katy said she wanted her happy mommy back," says Allen. After leaving the stress of the job behind, Allen says she began to volunteer at her daughter's school. The two became very close, and now, Allen sees more trust in their relationship. "We talk about anything," she says. "We're two peas in a pod."

Raising a child without disagreements about philosophies or punishments makes life easier for Haggard and Castillo. "I get to instill the core values, like good manners, in them, as well as the things that are more important to me," says Castillo. "I can make a difference there, because of the amount of time I have to be with them. I don't miss a second of their evolution into young men, and I'm very thankful for that."

### A Day in the Life

Imagine your busiest day of the week. Then imagine doing it every day, and you have an idea of a day in the life of a single parent. There's never a moment to be wasted. For all three of these parents,

mornings are the typical race to get everyone dressed, fed, and out the door on time. "After work, we try to go to the pool or park," says Haggard, on how she and her daughter spend quality time together. After Samaya is in bed for the night, Haggard can sometimes find time for herself by reading a book or watching TV.

After school, Allen sees that Katherine does her homework and she helps Jake with his life skills before they all eat dinner together. "I really don't have time for myself, until the kids stay overnight with their dad on Thursdays or every other weekend," she shares. But thanks to a promise she made her daughter, Allen does spend one evening a week attending a yoga class. "I also like to cycle to stay fit," she adds.

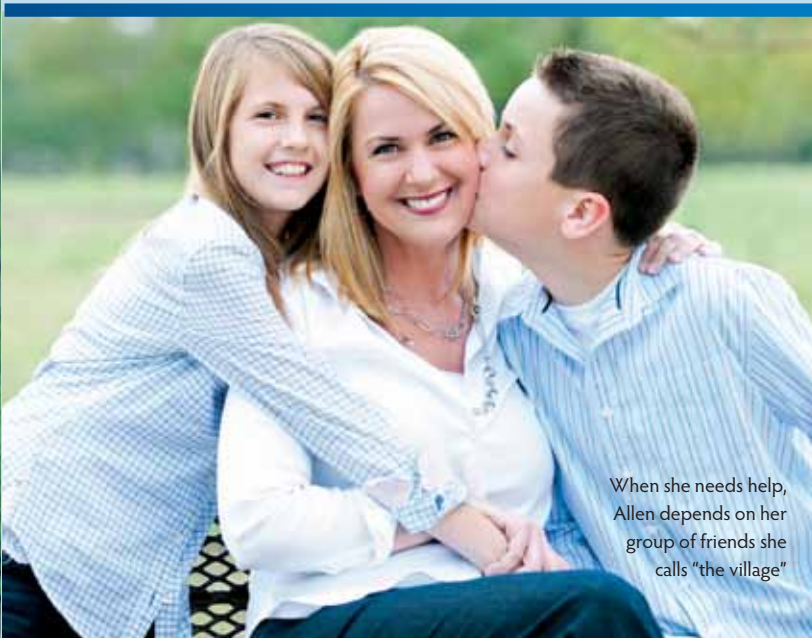
In the Castillo household, evenings are filled with playing, dinner, enjoying TV, and bedtime at 8 p.m. Any "me" time Castillo finds in the evening is used to catch up on email or watch TV shows he has recorded. He says he maintains a very rigid schedule for the boys. "They do better when they have a schedule and know what's expected of them," he explains.

### Overcoming Obstacles

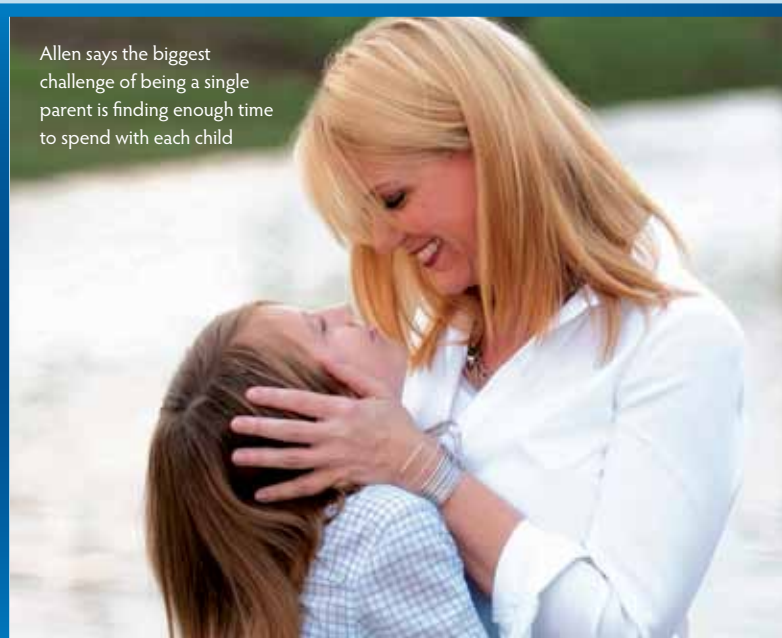
From finances to a lack of a social life, single parenting has its challenges, which these three Cy-Fair parents have learned to navigate like pros. Haggard says her biggest expenses - preschool and rent - can cause stress from time to time. But she manages and even makes sure there is money for Samaya to enjoy her gymnastics class. "You want your child to be able to participate in everything, without suffering just because her mom's a single parent," Haggard says.

Allen says her biggest challenge is finding enough time to spend with each child, based on their needs. "Sometimes if they need extra time, you just can't spend it with them," she says. Allen admits her situation is especially challenging with the time she has to spend with an autistic child.

For Castillo, not having time to spend socially with friends can wear him down. "Also, keeping up a good energy level is hard," he says. "I'm exhausted at the end of the day. No matter how much sleep I get, I feel like it's not enough."



When she needs help, Allen depends on her group of friends she calls "the village"



Allen says the biggest challenge of being a single parent is finding enough time to spend with each child

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## Wisdom for Newbies

For new single parents, the biggest piece of advice all three offer is to accept support wherever you can find it. “Even if you’re a confident, independent person, you need a great support group; someone to call when you have a sick baby, someone to talk to if you’re not successfully potty training your child, someone to tell you your child is okay,” says Haggard. “You need a shoulder to cry on.”

Patience, Haggard adds, is a virtue you must possess, as well. “Kids will be kids, and when they are, there are no breaks,” she says. “It’s a 24/7 job.” And finally, Haggard says, “Find ways to have fun – your fun is with your child. I like to play dolls and have tea parties with Samaya.”

“Accept help,” advises Allen. “I realized I couldn’t do everything on my own, and I was isolating myself and my kids. Since I have no family here, I came to depend on a group of five friends and their kids called “the village.” If I ever need anything, I can call any one of them for help at any time.”

Castillo agrees with Haggard and Allen. “Don’t be too prideful,” he says. “Accept help. It doesn’t make you less of a parent. I have a huge family, and it takes all of us to take care of these kids. I am so thankful for them, since there’s no way I could do it on my own.”

And finally, says Haggard, “Don’t let it wear you down. Single parenting is fun - not a struggle or a chore. Make it what you want it to be. Find ways to make it exciting.” **CFM**

*PAM MESTAYER is the mother of six grown kiddos and a great daughter-in-law, and has four awesome grandkids who occupy most of her time.*

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Cy-Fair mom Danielle Haggard's biggest challenge as a single parent is managing finances

Haggard and her daughter Samaya spend quality time together by going to the pool or park after school

“You want your child to be able to participate in everything, without suffering just because her mom’s a single parent.”

- Danielle Haggard



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# SINGLE PARENT SURVIVAL TIPS

The good news is you are not alone. There are approximately 13.7 million single parents in the U.S. raising 21.8 million children. Here are some quick tips to help you make the most of each day.

**PRIORITIZE MEALTIMES** – No matter what you serve for dinner, make it a priority to sit down at the table together and share the highs and lows of the day.

**USE SHORTCUTS** – After bath time, dress your preschooler in tomorrow's play clothes for bed. They rarely get dirty while sleeping and you'll save 15 to 30 minutes of dawdling and fussing in the morning.

**WORK TOGETHER** – Do all you can to communicate and get along with the other parent. Your child will benefit from parents who are partners and not enemies.

**ACCEPT HELP** – Don't be afraid to rely on your support systems, including friends, neighbors, and relatives, who can provide relief. Join a single parent support group to meet others in the same situation.

**BE CONSISTENT** – Follow through when it comes to time-outs and discipline, even when you're worn out. Your child will benefit from structure and from knowing what to expect.

**HAVE FUN** – Dress up in crazy outfits, sing a silly song, play games, or go on a picnic. These memories will outlast all the day-to-day schedules.

**FOCUS ON THE POSITIVE** – Reward your child for helping with chores, getting good grades, going to bed on time, or getting ready for school using fun incentives. Stickers, charts, and stamps are a big hit.

**TIME FOR YOU** – Don't forget to schedule time for you. If you're frazzled, there will be nothing left to give to your child.

- By Katrina Katsarelis



Nathan Castillo keeps his sons Justin and Andrew on a strict schedule to manage single parenthood.



Castillo and his sons Justin and Andrew enjoy some downtime at the beach.