More and more families with children are single-parent families. According to the 2013 Kids Count in Nebraska Report, "while Nebraska families are predominantly married-couple families, the 31 percent of families headed by single parents cannot be ignored. Since 1970, in Nebraska, the 'nuclear family' of a married couple with children has being moving towards more diverse family groups and households.”

In Nebraska, 95,049 children are living in single-parent families, 28,202 living in cohabitating-couple families, 310,853 living in married-couple families and 23,663 living in other living arrangements (2010 U.S. Census).

Children living in single-parent homes have a greater chance of living in poverty, Poverty rates indicate family structure is a factor as follows: 8.5 percent of children living in a married-couple household are in poverty; 45.8 percent of children living in single-mother households are in poverty; 22.5 percent of children living in single-father households are in poverty (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012 American Community Survey, Table B17006).

Research highlights the need to focus efforts on understanding the outcomes of single parenting and identify ways to help families and children be successful in these situations.

The involvement of extended family and community support makes a major difference in the children's social and emotional growth and development. When everyone works together to do what is in the best interest of children, it sets children up for success.

Multi-Generational Homes

According to the 2013 Kids Count in Nebraska Report, 18,319 Nebraska kids live with a grandparent who is the head of household. Grandparents share their homes to provide a safe and secure place for those they love. This can also develop stress for grandparents, parents and their children living under the same roof.

Research indicates parent-grandparent conflict presents a risk to children's behavior, especially to social development (Barnett et al, 2012). Guidelines may need to be established to help this situation. If you are living in a multi-generational home, use this checklist (Chen, 2010, University of Missouri Extension) to help children thrive:

- resolve conflict in a positive manner
- communicate any household issues
- establish expectations and house rules
- establish financial responsibilities
- have separate and shared space
- respect each other’s privacy
- establish routines, family rituals and traditions
- be flexible
- be kind to each other

Safety Checklist

It is natural for parents to feel protective when their child is being cared for by another person. Here are practical strategies for co-parents and caregivers to create safe, secure, loving homes for young children:

- parents and other caregivers know how to calm a crying baby and know to NEVER shake a baby
- parents and other caretakers know how to recognize signs of illness
- the home has a complete first aid kit
- the home has a list of emergency telephone numbers near the telephone
- the home has a safe, age-appropriate place for the child to sleep
- infants are placed on their backs to sleep
- infants sleep alone in their cribs and do not sleep with toys, stuffed animals or pillows
- the home is child/baby proofed (electrical outlets covered, safety latches on cabinet doors, cleaning supplies and other dangerous objects stored out of reach, choking hazards are out of reach)
- televisions are positioned high or bolted to the wall so they do not get pulled over
- medicines are in original container and in a locked cabinet out of child's reach
- the home has working smoke detectors
- the home has a working fire extinguisher
- parents and other caretakers have a fire escape plan
- a car seat, booster seats and/or seat belt are always used when riding in the car
- children are never left alone in the car
- children are always supervised when they are in or near water
- parents and other care-takers have healthy, age-appropriate food

As a parent, you are responsible for:
- being a leader in your household
- being a positive role model to your child
- putting your child's needs ahead of your own
- offering warmth, love, empathy and support to your child
- being involved, aware, consistent and nurturing
- developing honest and trusting relationships
- accepting the challenges presented to you
- finding a balance between care for others and care for self
- communicating and cooperating with your co-parent
- respecting and encouraging the bond between your child and your co-parent
- continuing to learn to be a good parent

(Custody and Co-Parenting Issues)

Custody issues are typically associated with parents who are getting a divorce. However, many parents who were never married are also involved in custody issues.

Court-Mandated Classes

Most states, including Nebraska, require parents in the process of custody, divorce or paternity proceedings to take a co-parenting educational class. Since 1999, University of Nebraska–Lincoln Extension has provided a research-based education class designed to help parents cope with custody and divorce. In the “Co-Parenting for Successful Kids” class, parents learn to keep their children safe and out of their conflict. In 2013, over 2,000 Nebraskans participated in the class, either on-site or online.

Of these participants, about 20 percent were never married, with many of them never having been in a long-term relationship with their co-parent. Most are young parents with children under the age of five. Like all parents, they want the best for their children. These parents have unique educational needs, which are somewhat different from parents whose children have lived in a two-parent home for an extended period of time.

Responsibilities of Co-Parents

Are you a co-parent? If so, you are permanently connected to the other parent through your child. Your parental responsibilities do not end even if your relationship with the other parent ends. As you proceed through the experience of custody, focus on your child's best interest.

- be flexible
- have separate and shared space
- establish expectations and house rules
- communicate and cooperate
- accept the challenges presented to you
- negotiate a balance between care for others and care for self
- communicate and cooperating with your co-parent
- respect and encouraging the bond between your child and your co-parent
- continue to learn to be a good parent

(Custody and Co-Parenting Issues)