

STRONGER TOGETHER

THE SINGLE MOM COLLECTIVE

An online community for
moms who are parenting
without a partner due to

*divorce, death, unplanned
pregnancy or choice.*



THE MOMCO

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STRONGER TOGETHER

THE SINGLE MOM COLLECTIVE



An online community for moms who are parenting without a partner *due to divorce, death, unplanned pregnancy or choice.*

WELCOME

DEAR MOM, I am a single mom of three kids as a result of divorce. I want to start with this information because I want you to know that I have personally experienced many of the challenges you are facing today. I know them intimately, and I struggle too.

Some of you are here because of divorce, some of you have lost your partner to death, some of you are single mothers because of an unplanned pregnancy and some of you are single parenting by choice.

No matter what brought you to this moment, I'm so glad you're here. We need each other.

About 18 months after my divorce, I participated in a divorce recovery group. It was personally exposing, rarely easy and sometimes even a bit awkward. But I wouldn't trade that experience. It helped normalize so many of the things I was thinking and feeling, provided wise counsel when I was vulnerable and gave me a community of people who could all echo "me too." What a gift. I want that for you too. It won't be comfortable every minute of every week, but I believe it will be worth it.

For this Collective, I combined my own experience with the experiences of a handful

of other single moms who are also navigating parenting, finances, grief and the weight of daily responsibilities. I discovered common pain points, similar struggles and even shared language. So I've developed this guide with real experiences, real needs and real people at the core.

In the following weeks you will consider various aspects of your life as a single mom and begin to identify the areas where you most need support. You will be surrounded by the mutual understanding of other moms who are navigating many of the same challenges you are. Though you might all come to single parenting from different paths, you will undoubtedly share a language with each other that will help you feel seen and understood.

It is my goal that at the end of your time together as a group, you will have experienced a sense of empowerment that can only come through the love and support of an empathetic community. As a result, my prayer is that you will also experience a renewed sense of hope and healing.

With love upon love,
Leeana Tankersley

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GROUP EXPECTATIONS

1. I will keep everything in this group confidential.
2. I will not judge other women in this group.
3. I will not compare myself to other women in this group.
4. I will respect myself and those around me.
5. I will not give advice or try to “counsel” or “fix” other members.
6. I will keep my phone turned off during group time and will limit distractions as much as possible.
7. I will show my commitment to the group by attending every session and doing my homework.
8. I will show up vulnerably, authentically and honestly to the group, sharing and participating courageously.
9. I will share time with other members. I will neither monopolize the discussion, nor will I be non-participatory. I will contribute, and I will allow time and space for others to contribute.

- + Introductions
- + Read Welcome Letter
- + Review of Group Expectations
- + Overview
- + Group Share
- + Ideas to Implement
- + Closing Reflection
- + Closing Silence

AGENDA

What Brought You Here?

WEEK
ONE

"You get an opportunity to lean into your weakness in a way you wouldn't have otherwise. You can show your kids that life takes unexpected turns and it's OK to mourn what you thought life would look like. You can model for them courage in the face of uncertainty, and how a unified little community can be a mighty force when they face the future together and root for each other."

-L, SINGLE MOM



WEEK 1

What Brought You Here?

INTRODUCTIONS

- + Introduce yourself by sharing your name, where you're from, the number of kids you have and their ages, and one word that describes you right now in this moment.
- + We will get to know each other's backgrounds and stories a bit more throughout this first week.

READ WELCOME LETTER

Learn about the heart and story behind the author of this Collective found on *page 1*.

REVIEW OF GROUP EXPECTATIONS

- + Read through the group expectations found on *page 3*.
- + By continuing in the group, you are committing to adhere to and uphold these expectations. If you have any questions about any of them, please ask now.

OVERVIEW

Some come to single mothering because of their own choice, some because of the choices of others, some because of tragedy, some because of unexpected events. We can be more empathetic listeners and friends when we understand the uniqueness of each other's paths.

I came to single mothering as a result of divorce. In 2017, I found out somewhat unexpectedly that my marriage of 14 years was ending. We had three young children, a beautiful home in Southern California and a full life with friends and family. The ending of our marriage put into motion seismic shifts in my life.

OVERVIEW

As a result, we all moved from California to Virginia, we sold our family home, we navigated custody and we began the complicated and nuanced work of disentangling most every aspect of our lives. It has taken years to reestablish and begin again. In fact, rebuilding is one of the hardest things I have ever done. I also believe that it is entirely possible.

In our discussion this week, we will each share a bit about our story and the reasons we are seeking support through this group.

GROUP SHARE

Take a few minutes each to share your answers to these questions:

+ What were the events, choices and circumstances that brought you to single motherhood?

+ Why do you want to be a part of a group of other single mothers? Why now? Why this specific group?

+ How has single motherhood shaped who you are today?

+ What are you learning about mothering in this current season?

IDEAS TO IMPLEMENT

+ Begin a practice of vulnerability within the group and in your trusted friendships. In other words, start allowing safe people to see your struggles and needs. This practice creates space for support.

+ If possible, try asking for help this week. Your request could be something small or something large that's been looming.

+ Other: _____

CLOSING REFLECTION

About a year into my divorce and rebuilding, I heard God ask me the very question we are discussing today: "Leeana, what brought you here?" I remember feeling frustrated, even somewhat humiliated by the question. I wanted to yell back, "What brought me here? What brought me here is nothing but loss and heartache."

But the question was about something so much more than circumstances.

What brought me here is not only the dissolution of my marriage but also the loving scaffolding of my friends, family and faith. What brought me here is

hours of prayer, counseling and the persistence of hope. What brought me here is the expansion that comes to us through surviving deep grief, expansion we never knew was possible. What brought me here is the desire to get up day after day and nurture my kids. What brought me here is the very faint possibility of what my life now looks like today.

So as you think about what brought you here, to this moment, to this group, consider the many steps along the way that kept you going, kept you moving, kept you breathing, and how you might lean into that scaffolding even more. Because, as I heard from God, "*Leeana, what brought you here will take you forward.*"

CLOSING SILENCE

+ Set a timer for one minute, and end your time together today by observing a moment of silence. As you sit in silence, take deep breaths, sealing in the empathy, care and understanding that was present today. Breathe in the truth that you are seen and you are loved.

HOMEWORK

What was something from this week's meeting that you needed to hear? _____

Make a note of one high and one low you experienced this week that you can share with the group at the next meeting.

High: _____

Low: _____

Choose **three positive things** to say to yourself about your mothering, and write them below. Repeat them to yourself when you are at a red light or when you open the refrigerator. Practice filling your mind with healing truth about yourself!

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

Breath Prayer

Breath prayers help to reset our nervous systems, focus our busy hearts and minds and calm our bodies. Breath prayer is an ancient practice that uses the breath to pace your prayer.

On the inhale: God, I rest . . .

On the exhale: . . . in your peace.

Pray this breath prayer as you are falling asleep at night. Pray it if you feel particularly anxious. Pray it anytime and anywhere when you need a reset.

WEEKLY SCRIPTURE MEDITATION

Consider reading and/or writing down the following Scripture verse to support and guide you each week of this group. You can write it in your journal, put it on a note card in a prominent place in your home or simply read it a few times in the morning and evening. I believe these words of love and hope can be a companion to you as they have been for me!

JEREMIAH 29:11, THE MESSAGE

I'll show up and take care of you as I promised and bring you back home. I know what I'm doing. I have it all planned out—plans to take care of you, not abandon you, plans to give you the future you hope for.

NOTES + JOURNAL

- + Highs and Lows from the Previous Week
- + Homework Review
- + Overview
- + Personal Writing and Reflection
- + Group Share
- + Ideas to Implement
- + Closing Reflection
- + Closing Silence

AGENDA

What Have You Lost? What Have You Gained?

WEEK
TWO

"I struggle to be able to successfully 'do it all' solo and have to remember to show up as a friend would for myself. I am definitely too hard on myself. I have to consistently surrender to the next right thing. In times of major overwhelm, I lean on my faith and am learning to trust myself even with uncertainty."

-S, SINGLE MOM



WEEK 2

What Have You Lost? What Have You Gained?

HIGHS AND LOWS FROM THE PREVIOUS WEEK

At the beginning of our group time for the remaining weeks, each of us will share one high and one low from the previous week. This can be absolutely anything. It provides us with an opportunity to witness each other in our difficult moments as well as in our triumphs.

HOMEWORK REVIEW

- + Share something that you needed to hear from last week's meeting.
- + Share something that was meaningful to you from your homework assignments.

NOTES + THOUGHTS

OVERVIEW

In general, motherhood brings with it a full spectrum of losses and gains, and in single mothering this spectrum can be even that much more intensified and nuanced. In our discussion this week, we will identify some of the more poignant losses and gains, and share those with the group.

About a week after I found out I was getting divorced, I felt a nudge to write down the five stages of grief on a sticky note and put them front and center on my desk where I sat every day. Some mornings I would wake up with all kinds of negotiating tactics running through my head, ways I could bargain our marriage back together.

Some days I would wake up and feel like I could barely move. Other days I would want to burn the entire house down. And still other days I was so overwhelmed with shock, I could not get my head around the reality of my circumstances.

Grief is tricky in its many faces and stages. It's incredibly helpful to normalize the many different expressions of grief. As we talk more about the stages of grief in today's discussion, begin to think about your relationship with grief and where you are in the process.

PERSONAL WRITING AND REFLECTION

Take about five minutes to complete this first exercise:

Make an inventory of all your losses in single parenting. **What have you been required to let go of?** This inventory might include relationships, possibilities, opportunities, possessions and so forth.

Take about five minutes to complete this next exercise:

Make an inventory of all your gains in single parenting. **How has God met you, provided for you and shown up for you in motherhood? What have you held on to?** This inventory might include relationships, institutions, shifts in identity, rituals, perspectives, character traits and so forth.

GROUP SHARE

With your group, share a few of the things you wrote down under each exercise.

When we go through loss of any kind, we experience grief. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross offers us five stages of grief that she developed in her groundbreaking book, “On Grief and Grieving.” They are:

GRIEF	ANGER	BARGAINING	DEPRESSION	ACCEPTANCE
--------------	--------------	-------------------	-------------------	-------------------

We don't always move through these stages linearly. And we typically don't go through one stage once and for all. Grief is a winding path, and we revisit these stages in new ways as we go through new experiences.

Which stage of grief has been the most difficult for you? Why?

Which stage of grief would you say you are in right now? How do you see it manifesting in your life currently?

In 2019, Kübler-Ross' coauthor, David Kessler, went through the devastating loss of his only child. He revisited the five stages of grief he had originally researched with Kübler-Ross and added a sixth stage to the grief cycle: *meaning*.

Where have you experienced meaning in your single mothering journey?

What do you need to continue to let go of? What do you need to continue to hold on to?

IDEAS TO IMPLEMENT

- + Write the five stages of grief on a sticky note and put them where you can see them regularly (on your bathroom mirror, car dashboard, phone lock screen, refrigerator or your computer monitor). Allow these stages to remind you that your reactions, needs and varying moods are all a very normal part of grief.
 - + Consider joining a grief support group if you feel stuck in processing your grief.
 - + Read “On Grief and Grieving” by Elizabeth Kübler-Ross and David Kessler.
 - + Other: _____
-

CLOSING STATEMENT

David Kessler wrote, *“The grieving mind finds no hope after loss. But when you’re ready to hope again, you’ll be able to find it. Bad days don’t have to be your eternal destiny. That doesn’t mean your grief will get smaller over time. It means that you must get bigger.”*

Observing our losses and gains can feel like an exercise in futility, but this intentional work is one of the ways that grief can actually expand us instead of simply reduce us. The work you have done this week, and your continued commitment to honoring your losses and gains, will be essential in growing instead of getting stuck.

CLOSING SILENCE

- + Set a timer for one minute, and end your time together today by observing a moment of silence. As you sit in silence, take deep breaths, sealing in the empathy, care and understanding that was present today. Breathe in the truth that you are seen and you are loved.

HOMEWORK

What was something from this week's meeting that you needed to hear? _____

Make a note of one high and one low you experienced this week that you can share with the group at the next meeting.

High: _____

Low: _____

Name something you admire about yourself. Write a sentence or two about why you admire that particular trait.

SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

Nature Walk

Set aside 10 or more minutes to go outside and walk. This can be alone or with your kids or a friend. As you walk, find three things that are beautiful to you. Anything! Be intentional about noticing.

WEEKLY SCRIPTURE MEDITATION

Read and/or write down the following Scripture verses to support and guide you each week of this group.

LAMENTATIONS 3:22-23, ESV

The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.

- + Highs and Lows from the Previous Week
- + Homework Review
- + Overview
- + Personal Writing and Reflection
- + Group Share
- + Ideas to Implement
- + Closing Reflection
- + Closing Silence

AGENDA

Why Are We So Hard on Ourselves?

WEEK THREE

"Being a single mom means...you're going to be overwhelmed. There's no way around it. However, it can be done. You're probably going to be asking for help a lot more (find a trusted babysitter or fellow mom). You're probably going to be more discerning with your time and activities. You're probably going to get really creative with how you figure out certain things (and maybe life in general)."

-L, SINGLE MOM



WEEK 3

Why Are We So Hard on Ourselves?

HIGHS AND LOWS FROM THE PREVIOUS WEEK

Share one high and one low from your week. This can be absolutely anything. It provides us with an opportunity to witness each other in our difficult moments as well as in our triumphs.

HOMEWORK REVIEW

- + Share something that you needed to hear from last week's meeting.
- + Share something that was meaningful to you from your homework assignments.

OVERVIEW

As women, we are notoriously hard on ourselves. Of course, there's nothing wrong with having high expectations, award-worthy capacity or the ability to juggle a lot. But what happens when we can't keep it all going, or when we need a break? Are we able to be a good friend to ourselves, or do we begin to bully and badger ourselves when we are at our most vulnerable?

When we expect ourselves to be superhuman, we often end up feeling subhuman. If I can't do it all perfectly, then I must be flawed in some way. This is a really hard way to live, expecting something of ourselves that no one else does.

As my single mother used to say to us when she'd had enough, "I can't do it all." And she was right. We weren't designed to. The key is learning to be gentle with ourselves on the days when we feel like we are underperforming, adjusting our expectations based on how we are doing emotionally, physically, spiritually, mentally, hormonally.

Most of us already have some pretty loud Soul Bullies yelling toxic messages to us inside our heads.

We do not need to join that choir. This week we will talk about the ways we're hard on ourselves, as well as some practices for being a better companion to ourselves, especially when we need it most.

PSALM 18:16-19, ESV

*He sent from on high, he took me;
he drew me out of many waters.
He rescued me from my strong
enemy and from those who hated
me, for they were too mighty for
me. They confronted me in the
day of my calamity, but the Lord
was my support. He brought me
out into a broad place; he rescued
me, because he delighted in me.*

God sees you when you're drowning in chaos, shame, worry and overwhelm. He is reaching toward you, ready to pull you out of the various waters you are lost in and set your feet in a wide-open field. All of this is motivated by his love for you.

PERSONAL WRITING AND REFLECTION

Take about five minutes to complete this first exercise:

Write about an area of your life where you are perpetually hard on yourself.
When you are struggling, what are some of the messages you hear about yourself?

Take about five minutes for this next exercise:

If you were sitting with a dear friend, someone you absolutely love, and she was struggling, what would you tell her?

GROUP SHARE

+ Share your findings from each of the above exercises with the group. Our goal is not to be perfect. Our goal is to be a friend to ourselves, no matter how we are performing on any given day.

+ Share something beautiful you see in yourself. Then share something beautiful you see in the woman to your right.

+ Let's talk about toxic messages:

What is the source of the messages you believe about yourself? In other words, where did they come from, who gave them to you?

Why is it easier to believe a lie about ourselves than the truth?

What is one thing you can do this week to be a better friend to yourself?

IDEAS TO IMPLEMENT

+ Make a plan to implement your "one thing" you can do this week to be a better friend to yourself that you brainstormed above. How will you implement that one thing? Do you want accountability?

+ When you find yourself bullying or badgering yourself, take a deep breath and say, "I am choosing to be on my own team right now." Then decide what shifts you need to make in order to do just that.

+ Other: _____

CLOSING REFLECTION

When I feel depleted, overwhelmed, and failing, I close my eyes and visualize Jesus holding me up.

CLOSING SILENCE

+ Set a timer for one minute, and end your time together today by observing a moment of silence. As you sit in silence, take deep breaths, sealing in the empathy, care, and understanding that was present today. Breathe in the truth that you are seen and you are loved.

HOMEWORK

What was something from this week's meeting that you needed to hear? _____

Make a note of one high and one low you experienced this week that you can share with the group at the next meeting.

High: _____

Low: _____

Here is a phrase you can use to help you stay on your own team:

There is always a hand reaching toward me. There is always grace available. There is always a chance to begin again.

SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

The Welcoming Prayer

Name one thing about yourself or your life that you are continually wanting to change, something that makes you abundantly frustrated with yourself, something you might even prefer to eradicate entirely.

Take a few minutes and welcome this thing about yourself or your life. Sit with it. See if there's anything it wants to tell you, anything it needs you to know. Sitting with it, welcoming it in in God's presence, helps reduce its power.

Here is a prayer you can repeat. This prayer is meant to cease our striving and lead us into surrender.

THE WELCOMING PRAYER

God, today I welcome _____ even though I would rather reject, ignore, or bully it. In your presence, God, I welcome the very things that I need to surrender to you. I will not avoid the things that are nagging at me. I welcome them, open my hands, and place them in your care. Amen.

WEEKLY SCRIPTURE MEDITATION

Read and/or write down the following Scripture verses to support and guide you each week of this group.

PSALM 145:8-9, ESV

The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

The Lord is good to all, and his mercy is over all that he has made.

NOTES + JOURNAL

- + Highs and Lows from the Previous Week
- + Homework Review
- + Overview
- + Personal Writing and Reflection
- + Group Share
- + Ideas to Implement
- + Closing Reflection
- + Closing Silence

What Do You Need?

WEEK
FOUR

"My greatest struggles are in the areas of self-care, finances and managing a home — for example, having the right tools easily accessible when the fire detectors go off in the middle of the night."

-A, SINGLE MOM



WEEK 4

What Do You Need?

HIGHS AND LOWS FROM THE PREVIOUS WEEK

Share one high and one low from your week. This can be absolutely anything. It provides us with an opportunity to witness each other in our difficult moments as well as in our triumphs.

HOMEWORK REVIEW

- + Share something that you needed to hear from last week's meeting.
- + Share something that was meaningful to you from your homework assignments.

OVERVIEW

Navigating our needs can be vulnerable; asking for help can seem weak or bothersome. In today's conversation, we want to identify some of our areas of greatest need.

In the New Testament Scriptures, there is a story of a man who was paralyzed (Luke 5:17-26). He heard that Jesus was in his town healing people, and he wanted to go see Jesus. His friends took him on a stretcher to the house where Jesus was healing, but when they got there, the house was packed with people.

In fact, it was so full the friends couldn't get the man into the house to see Jesus. But instead of going home dejected, they hatched a brilliant plan. They took their friend up to the rooftop of the house, took some tiles off the roof and then lowered their friend down, down, down until he was right in front of Jesus and couldn't be missed. The paralyzed man was healed that day, and one of the main reasons why is because he was willing to acknowledge his need.

We all want to be one of the friends on the four corners of the stretcher, coming up with an ingenious strategy and saving the day. None of us wants to be the guy on the stretcher — vulnerable, exposed and completely lacking control. I mean, can you actually imagine being lowered through a roof on a stretcher?

But one of the hallmarks of mothering, especially single mothering, is need. So this week, we want to identify some of our greatest areas of need as well as what is standing in the way of us reaching out for help or support.



At one particularly difficult point in my divorce, the kids and I were in the Lake Tahoe area visiting family. I stood alone on the bank of the Truckee River, kids back at the house with Grammie and Grandpa. I stood there holding the entire weight of the situation as if the only way we were all, and I mean all, going to make it through was if I put everyone on my back and hiked us out.

How can I change things? How can I create a different outcome? How can I save these people I love from having to be in pain? Over and through the rush of all that river water, I heard, "Leeana, it's not all up to you."

- LEEANA TANKERSLEY

PERSONAL WRITING AND REFLECTION

Take about five minutes to complete this first exercise:

Write down your top three areas of greatest need: financial, childcare, getting a break, household help, spiritual nourishment or guidance, parenting advice, mental health support, friends/community, employment, housing, handyman/home maintenance, carpooling, one-on-one time with each child, emotional support/therapy, taking care of your own health and wellness.

Take about five minutes for this exercise:

What are some of the barriers keeping you from getting help in these areas?

GROUP SHARE

- + Share your findings from each of the above exercises with the group.
 - + How does knowing you need help in certain areas make you feel? Are you uncomfortable with the fact that you need support?
-

- + What keeps you from reaching out for help or support in general?
-

- + What is one step you can take to get the help you need?
-

IDEAS TO IMPLEMENT

- + Ask for one favor a week. A ride for a child. A home repair. A grocery pick-up. A library book return. Make it a personal mission to get more comfortable with asking for help.
- + Purchase a simple tool set for yourself to have on hand at home (hammer, screwdriver, tape measure, level, etc.).

CLOSING REFLECTION

Personally, one of my greatest struggles is earmarking funds for help or maintenance. I believe I can piecemeal my time and energy together and get everything done satisfactorily. Or, at least, I believe I should be able to. But when I put a line item in my budget for housecleaning, I'm just a nicer person. Period. I am kinder to myself and to everyone around me because my home environment isn't quite so chaotic.

Dedicating money to your needs may not be an option right now (though, you might consider how you could shift spending so that your income is creating more practical support, and therefore less stress for you), but you can think creatively about how you might be able to trade help with a neighbor or friend.

The responsibilities and stress of single mothering are very real. Be ruthlessly honest with yourself about how you might be able to ask for and accept even just one act of support per week.

CLOSING SILENCE

- + Set a timer for one minute, and end your time together today by observing a moment of silence. As you sit in silence, take deep breaths, sealing in the empathy, care, and understanding that was present today. Breathe in the truth that you are seen and you are loved.

HOMEWORK

What was something from this week's meeting that you needed to hear? _____

Make a note of one high and one low you experienced this week that you can share with the group at the next meeting.

High: _____

Low: _____

Take one action step this week. Call a handyman, make an appointment with a therapist, trade childcare with another mom, set aside 30 minutes for meal planning or make an appointment with a financial planner. One small step can help you.

SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

Listen

Set your phone timer for 10 minutes and write down the question, "God, what do you want to say to me?" Then, listen and record what you hear.

WEEKLY SCRIPTURE MEDITATION

Read and/or write down the following Scripture verses to support and guide you each week of this group.

MATTHEW 11:28-30, ESV

Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

NOTES + JOURNAL

- + Highs and Lows from the Previous Week
- + Homework Review
- + Overview
- + Personal Writing and Reflection
- + Group Share
- + Ideas to Implement
- + Closing Reflection
- + Closing Silence

AGENDA

Are You (Or Your Child) Navigating Big Feelings?

WEEK
FIVE

"Feeling alone is the thing that is the scariest. And not so much in the sense of missing companionship (although that is really hard too), but feeling like the weight of holding up my family is solely on my shoulders. Finances, the emotional well-being of my kids, keeping up with everyone's schedule and school and sports obligations, along with my own sanity and mental health. It's a lot."

-L, SINGLE MOM





WEEK 5

Are You (Or Your Child) Navigating Big Feelings?

HIGHS AND LOWS FROM THE PREVIOUS WEEK

Share one high and one low from your week. This can be absolutely anything. It provides us with an opportunity to witness each other in our difficult moments as well as in our triumphs.

HOMEWORK REVIEW

- + Share something that you needed to hear from last week's meeting.
- + Share something that was meaningful to you from your homework assignments.

OVERVIEW

Let's discuss big feelings and how you're coping with them. Is loneliness living at your address? Are you exploding inside with anger? Are you experiencing depression? Has resentment set up shop in your soul? Is fear your closest companion?

As we discuss big feelings, let's also consider the pitfalls of coping with them in unhealthy ways. Alcohol abuse, overspending, illicit sex, drug use and other risky behaviors can provide short-term relief to our overwhelming emotions, but they will not deliver anything beneficial long term. This week, we'll talk about big feelings as well as healthy coping mechanisms when we need to reset.

The truth is that we all need some basic strategies for coping when our feelings take charge. I have a therapist friend who always says, "Feelings are like small children. They need to be supervised, because if they're not, they'll find the matches and burn the house down." I love this. Our feelings are not final, and they do not always need to be in control.

The best way to diffuse big feelings is not by ignoring them, but by acknowledging them and validating them.

PERSONAL WRITING AND REFLECTION

Take about five minutes to complete this first exercise:

What is one big feeling you have experienced recently? Write about the feeling and how you experience it.

Take about five minutes for this next exercise:

Try validating your feeling by filling in the blanks:

It makes sense that I am feeling_____ because_____

_____.

GROUP SHARE

- + Share your findings from each of the above exercises with the group.
- + When your child has big feelings about something, what helps him or her move through those feelings? What doesn't help?

+ What are some ideas, principles or resources that have helped you deal with big feelings in your household?

+ What are some unhealthy ways you have dealt with your feelings?

+ Brainstorm with the group some healthy coping mechanisms.

IDEAS TO IMPLEMENT

+ Look at the work on the four temperaments by Kathleen Edelman, “A Grown-Up’s Guide to Kids’ Wiring” and “I Said This, You Heard That.” Understanding how we are wired and how our kids are wired will give us essential information when we are trying to decode our own and our kids’ big feelings.

+ Develop a better understanding of your own triggers. What causes you to escalate, get angry, disproportionately react to a situation? Often our triggers are about powerlessness in our earlier years. Better understanding what causes us to be reactionary can help us navigate our own big feelings and, in turn, be more present when our children are experiencing big feelings.

+ Other: _____

CLOSING REFLECTION

I remember a time when I was entirely overwhelmed. In fact, the overwhelm was so palpable and physiological that it was hard to breathe. I decided to go for a walk in the woods behind my house, and here is what happened.

“‘I need a plan. Tell me what to do,’ I say. ‘I need to know how to organize my life. I need you to tell me what to do about everything. I need to know about work and money and chore charts and how to keep the car clean and the future. I need answers to a hundred questions.’

You don't need a different plan, Leeana. You need a different posture.”

What I did next was weird and also needed. I felt like what I was being asked to do was lay down right there in the fallen leaves. So I did. I stretched out on the ground, arms by my side, palms up, like a yoga corpse pose. I stayed there and prayed and breathed and listened and watched. I stayed there until the tears came and the knot went slack in my chest.

It took a lot longer than I would've liked, but my entire nervous system began to shift. All the urgency that had been so demanding began to dissipate. All the energy behind all the things that previously had to be figured out somehow released its grip.

If you are dealing with big feelings, particularly the big feelings of anxiety and overwhelm, consider trading another new plan for a new posture. Lay down on your back, arms at your side, palms up, and surrender.

This could be the beginning of your next deep breath.

CLOSING SILENCE

+ Set a timer for one minute, and end your time together today by observing a moment of silence. As you sit in silence, take deep breaths, sealing in the empathy, care, and understanding that was present today. Breathe in the truth that you are seen and you are loved.

HOMEWORK

What was something from this week's meeting that you needed to hear?

Make a note of one high and one low you experienced this week that you can share with the group at the next meeting.

High: _____

Low: _____

Do you need to reach out to a professional to help you process feelings — either for you or a child? Working with a therapist or a counselor can be one of the bravest things we do. Do not wait to get the help, guidance and support you need. Make the call this week.

SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

Letting Go

Practice letting go of feelings or coping strategies that are not serving you. Purchase a bottle of bubbles at the Dollar Store (get your kids involved too!) and blow bubbles in your yard or driveway or at the park. As you blow the bubbles, imagine letting go of any heavy, toxic or unhealthy emotions from your body and watching them float, float, float away.

WEEKLY SCRIPTURE MEDITATION

Read and/or write down the following Scripture verses to support and guide you each week of this group.

1 JOHN 4:18, ESV

There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love.

- + Highs and Lows from the Previous Week
- + Homework Review
- + Overview
- + Personal Writing and Reflection
- + Group Share
- + Ideas to Implement
- + Closing Reflection
- + Closing Silence

AGENDA

Is Money Managing You?

WEEK
SIX

"Letting go of our family home was one of the hardest decisions I have ever made and one of the best. I so desperately wanted to preserve the kids' continuity and normalcy, but the house would have left me saddled with expenses I would not have been able to afford long term. The loss of the house was hard, but being under constant financial strain would have been harder."

-E, SINGLE MOM

WEEK 6

Is Money Managing You?

HIGHS AND LOWS FROM THE PREVIOUS WEEK

Share one high and one low from your week. This can be absolutely anything. It provides us with an opportunity to witness each other in our difficult moments as well as in our triumphs.

HOMEWORK REVIEW

- + Share something that you needed to hear from last week's meeting.
- + Share something that was meaningful to you from your homework assignments.

OVERVIEW

We all need budgeting tools, education around money management, and an understanding of taxes, debt, saving and investing. Financial insecurity can lead to many unwise decisions, precarious situations and lots of stress. We need to be empowered around managing and making money.

But where do we start? Which plan or philosophy do we follow? How do we let other people in to such a personal and vulnerable part of our lives?

While this is certainly a personal topic, money is one of the top stressors for parents in general, and even more so for single parents, so we need to be intentional about our financial literacy and security.

After my divorce, I did two things that really helped me financially. First, I showed all of my financials to a trusted family member who helped me start getting a plan for the future. Second, I asked a trusted friend to go with me to see a financial planner. She was a second set of eyes and ears and someone I could talk through things with after each meeting and beyond. This was very vulnerable, allowing two other people to have complete access to my financial situation,

but it was also very freeing. I was able to develop a solid plan with all the facts on the table.

Let me take this opportunity to say that financial planners are not simply for those who have “arrived” financially. Financial planners can help you get out of debt, create a plan for saving, help you invest and educate you on the foundations of financial health. So don't wait until you feel like you've got your finances together to reach out for this kind of support.

My divorce also meant selling our family home. I heard someone very wise say that many women try to hold on to the family home in order to preserve their kids' comfort, but then they are strapped with a financial burden that they can't actually afford to take care of. I did not want to sell our home, and I still miss it many days, but I know it was the right decision to let it go. I am now in a home that I can afford — both the mortgage and the maintenance.

PERSONAL WRITING AND REFLECTION

Take about five minutes for this exercise:

+ What is your current relationship with money? What are some of the messages you are carrying with you about money and/or your management of money?

GROUP SHARE

+ Share your findings from the above exercises with the group.

+ Share any tips or tricks that have helped you with money management.

+ The time it takes to parent children and the time it takes to financially provide for children can be at direct odds with one another. How are you managing the parenting/providing time division?

+ Have you made any mistakes with money that you'd be comfortable sharing with the group? How you have/or are taking steps to resolve those mistakes.

IDEAS TO IMPLEMENT

- + Reach out to a trusted and financially savvy friend or family member and ask them if you can buy them a coffee and discuss finances. Prepare for the meeting by identifying your specific questions ahead of time and bringing any needed documents or figures to help inform the discussion.
 - + Make an appointment with a financial advisor.
 - + Download a spending tracking app to begin looking at the ways you are spending your money. You might be surprised!
 - + Implement one tip or trick you've learned from your group this week.
 - + Other: _____
-
-

CLOSING REFLECTION

Money can be a subject of shame – how we're spending it, how much we do or don't know about managing it, how little we have, how we've accumulated debt, how much we make. However, don't let shame keep you from getting the support you need.

Reaching out for help is a sign of courage, not cowardice. Shame wants to sideline us and keep us locked in a perpetual cycle that never gets us anywhere. Even if it's just one small step, a single step can help you break a message of shame when it comes to your relationship with money.

CLOSING SILENCE

+ Set a timer for one minute, and end your time together today by observing a moment of silence. As you sit in silence, take deep breaths, sealing in the empathy, care, and understanding that was present today. Breathe in the truth that you are seen and you are loved.



I know what it's like to not be able to figure out how it would be possible to put any of the pieces back together again. No matter how you look at these parts, you cannot figure out how they will add up to any kind of new life. I understand. In the midst of great upheaval, we long for sweeping clarity. You know as well as I do that putting life back together again is an unfolding that typically happens one small increment at a time.

- LEEANA TANKERSLEY

HOMEWORK

Make a note of one high and one low you experienced this week that you can share with the group at the next meeting.

High: _____

Low: _____

What is one area of your finances that you need to take charge of? Debt, saving an emergency fund, investing for the future, income, budgeting, giving?

What is one step you can take this week toward taking charge of this area of your finances?

SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

Gratitude

Write down a list of everything you are grateful for today. This can be huge provisions or small moments. Gratitude helps remind us that we are part of a larger story.

WEEKLY SCRIPTURE MEDITATION

Read and/or write down the following Scripture verses to support and guide you each week of this group.

ROMANS 12:1-2, ESV

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

- + Highs and Lows from the Previous Week
- + Homework Review
- + Overview
- + Personal Writing and Reflection
- + Group Share
- + Ideas to Implement
- + Closing Reflection
- + Closing Silence

AGENDA

What Is Self-Care?

WEEK
SEVEN

"Being a single mom means...setting healthy boundaries around your time and focusing on your priorities"

-A, SINGLE MOM



WEEK 7

What Is Self-Care?

HIGHS AND LOWS FROM THE PREVIOUS WEEK

Share one high and one low from your week. This can be absolutely anything. It provides us with an opportunity to witness each other in our difficult moments as well as in our triumphs.

HOMEWORK REVIEW

- + Share something that you needed to hear from last week's meeting.
- + Share something that was meaningful to you from your homework assignments.

OVERVIEW

Self-care is a billion-dollar industry these days, but do we really understand self-care — what it means and how to make it happen? Let's discuss the nuances of self-care — looking back at Week 4 — and determine a self-care plan that fits your needs, your lifestyle, your limits and your health and wellness goals. We've all heard the phrase, "Put your oxygen mask on first." Is it actually possible? Spoiler alert: Yes, it is possible, but it's about much more than pedicures.

Self-care is about tending to all parts of ourselves — our mind, body and spirit — in ways that are restorative. Self-care is about integrating practices into our lives that help us to be more present, more grounded and more rested. It doesn't have to cost a dime, but it will require intention and investment. Let's get started.

Here is a great concept that a therapist friend gave me: "I have a lot of things I need to take care of. One of those things needs to be me."

She said that women get the message all the time that they need to "put themselves first," which is entirely impossible and unrealistic when you are a mother. As a result, since they can't put themselves first, they neglect themselves entirely. Her wisdom is to remember that you are

one of the things you are responsible for. You are on the list! I like this approach.

Another way of thinking about this is to visualize your life's responsibilities divided into a pie, making sure that your own care and nurturing is one of the pieces of the pie.

Some of my foolproof self-care practices include:

- + Waking up before anyone else in the house so I can have even just a few minutes of hot coffee and quiet before the chaos ensues.*
- + Taking hot showers in the dark just to relax, not because I need to get clean.*
- + Moving my body – yoga at home, walking, stretching, lifting weights in my basement.*
- + Adjusting my expectations of myself and my productivity during seasons of sadness, hormone surges, exhaustion or increased busyness.*
- + Paying for housecleaning periodically.*
- + Taking a nap almost every day.*
- + Staying connected with friends in other states through Marco Polo.*

PERSONAL WRITING AND REFLECTION

Take about five minutes for this exercise:

+ How do you define self-care?

+ Do you feel like self-care is worthwhile? Why or why not?

+ When it comes to self-care, how would you rate yourself and why?

GROUP SHARE

- + Share your responses with the group.
- + Do you have any rituals or practices that regularly help you refill your own tank?

- + How do you make time for self-care?

- + How do you care for your mind? Your body? Your spirit?

IDEAS TO IMPLEMENT

+ Once a week, set your phone timer for 20 minutes. Use those 20 minutes to do something for yourself. Rest, walk, read, shower, eat real food, drive by a beautiful stretch of nature. The goal is to increase the frequency of this from once a week, to twice a week, to hopefully, at some point, every day. Just 20 minutes. You can do it!

+ Remember that fun and rejuvenating are two different things. Just because you do something fun — a late night concert with your besties might be fun — that doesn't always mean it's rejuvenating. Be sure you are mixing in activities that are restful and restorative as well.

+ Identify which area of your life needs the most care right now: caring for your physical body, stimulating your mind, attending to spiritual needs, supporting your mental health. Prioritize self-care activities that focus on this area of your life.

+ Other: _____

CLOSING REFLECTION

We can convince ourselves that in a world this big, this fast, the winners are the ones who can move even faster. But I'm not convinced this is actually what any of us want. Don't neglect the sun hitting a sleeping child's face. The way it highlights the freckle below her bottom lip and shows off the length of her lashes. Watch how the sun rises and sets every day without any breach in its rhythm. Watch how dogs love their people and waves break and leaves turn and skies shift. Whatever you do, don't neglect the small wonders, as they hold the possibilities we must welcome, a way we hold on to hope anyway.

CLOSING SILENCE

+ Set a timer for one minute, and end your time together today by observing a moment of silence. As you sit in silence, take deep breaths, sealing in the empathy, care, and understanding that was present today. Breathe in the truth that you are seen and you are loved.

HOMEWORK

Make a note of one high and one low you experienced this week that you can share with the group at the next meeting.

High: _____

Low: _____

Commit to one self-care practice this week. Track how you feel after integrating this practice into your week.

SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

Write a Letter

Write a letter to yourself, explaining what you see when you step back and look at your life, yourself, your gifts and talents, your challenges, your victories. Be an observer of your own days and hours and report back what you witness. Reflect truth and grace to yourself.

WEEKLY SCRIPTURE MEDITATION

Read and/or write down the following Scripture verses to support and guide you each week of this group.

ISAIAH 30:15, ESV

For thus said the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel, "In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and in trust shall be your strength."

NOTES + JOURNAL

- + Highs and Lows from the Previous Week
- + Homework Review
- + Overview
- + Personal Writing and Reflection
- + Group Share
- + Ideas to Implement
- + Closing Reflection
- + Closing Silence

AGENDA

What Is Your Family Brand?

WEEK
EIGHT

"Being a single mom means...having grit and gallons of grace. Lots of resiliency."

-S, SINGLE MOM



WEEK 8

What Is Your Family Brand?

HIGHS AND LOWS FROM THE PREVIOUS WEEK

Share one high and one low from your week. This can be absolutely anything. It provides us with an opportunity to witness each other in our difficult moments as well as in our triumphs.

HOMEWORK REVIEW

- + Share something that you needed to hear from last week's meeting.
- + Share something that was meaningful to you from your homework assignments.

NOTES + THOUGHTS

OVERVIEW

Single parenting is nonstop, full time and often overwhelming. The tasks and responsibilities are endless, and we can so easily get lost in all that needs to get done and forget the most important thing we can offer our kids: love.

Let's reconnect with our love for our kid(s) by thinking through how we show and how they receive love. Let's remember that in the midst of doing and going and providing, the thing they need most from us is to know they are loved.

No matter what your family looks like, in addition to love, every family needs a set of values — a family brand! This week will focus on writing your family values and talking through ways to integrate what matters most to you into your home and parenting.

When I was struggling, my brother Trey sat me down and reminded me that our family is awesome and I am awesome but when I allow toxic people to mistreat me, when I let shame overwhelm me, when I don't have healthy boundaries, I'm not on brand.

"Leeana, you're awesome," he said. "Now get on brand."

He was so right, and his words have stuck with me. Is this behavior, this belief about myself, this way of relating to others on brand? If not, I need to course correct.

Let's consider what values we might want to reinforce with our own children.

PERSONAL WRITING AND REFLECTION

Take about five minutes of quiet time for this exercise:

+ List three things you want your family to be about.

We are . . . (or) We will be . . .

Write some additional thoughts next to each of these values. Choose words, phrases, even images that reinforce your three points above.

GROUP SHARE

+ Share your proposed values with the group.

+ What are some values you grew up with that you have chosen to include in your own family? What are some you've added or changed?

+ Who are some of your influences as a mother? How have they impacted your parenting?

+ What are some ways you have or will integrate your values into your home?

IDEAS TO IMPLEMENT

+ Read your values to your kids. Talk with them about what family values or a "family brand" means. Invite them to share their own perceptions of what they think your family is about and what values they think are important.

+ Put a copy of your family values somewhere prominent in your home, and don't be afraid to return to the list often for guidance and reminders of your priorities.

+ Other:

CLOSING REFLECTION

I remember a time when I was entirely overwhelmed. In fact, the overwhelm was so palpable and physiological I have a dear friend that used to yell the following out the door after her high school kids when they would leave for a party: “Don’t drink the punch, stay with your buddy, and remember who you are.” Her kids were raised in “The Lion King” era, obviously.

We think our kids are dismissing us or ignoring our attempts at imparting values, but I often wonder if more is landing than we (or they) even realize.

My friend’s daughter came back to her years later and asked if they could get matching “Remember Who You Are” tattoos, which of course she did immediately. So, at 55, my friend got those famous words tattooed across her shoulder while her daughter got the same words tattooed across her ribs.

These family mantras can help provide guidance when we lose our way. And chances are, they just might stick around for longer than we could have ever imagined.

CLOSING SILENCE

+ Set a timer for one minute, and end your time together today by observing a moment of silence. As you sit in silence, take deep breaths, sealing in the empathy, care, and understanding that was present today. Breathe in the truth that you are seen and you are loved.

HOMEWORK

Make a note of one high and one low you experienced this week that you can share with the group at the next meeting.

High: _____

Low: _____

Share your values that you wrote down in today's exercise with your kid(s). Ask them to contribute their own values. Decide on a few together that will be your family brand. Post those words or phrases on a letterboard, a poster or on the fridge for all to see!

SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

Light a Candle

Purchase a candle to represent each person in your household. You can find inexpensive white sanctuary candles at the Dollar Store.

Light a candle for each child in your care as well as for yourself. As you do, say a prayer for each person. When you are ready, extinguish the candle with love.

WEEKLY SCRIPTURE MEDITATION

Read and/or write down the following Scripture verses to support and guide you each week of this group.

PROVERBS 3:3, ESV

Let not steadfast love and faithfulness forsake you; bind them around your neck; write them on the tablet of your heart.

- + Highs and Lows from the Previous Week
- + Homework Review
- + Overview
- + Personal Writing and Reflection
- + Group Share
- + Ideas to Implement
- + Closing Reflection
- + Closing Silence

AGENDA

How Will You Keep Building Community?



WEEK
NINE

"The most essential part of this journey is support. You cannot do it alone."

-L, SINGLE MOM



WEEK 9

How Will You Keep Building Community?

HIGHS AND LOWS FROM THE PREVIOUS WEEK

Share one high and one low from your week. This can be absolutely anything. It provides us with an opportunity to witness each other in our difficult moments as well as in our triumphs.

HOMEWORK REVIEW

- + Share something that you needed to hear from last week's meeting.
- + Share something that was meaningful to you from your homework assignments.



OVERVIEW

Almost twenty years ago, I decided I wanted to live intentionally with a handful of women who I believed wanted the same thing. So, I handpicked these women, invited to join me in a weekly group meeting, and we began sharing our stories and our lives. We were in all different stages of life and had different spiritual backgrounds, but we all had one thing in common: a desire to grow.

The group has been through several iterations since that original contingency. We are now scattered all over the country and the world, and many of our lives look very differently than they did then. But we have kept our connection and our commitment to each other, even if it happens over Marco Polo now more than in person.

Investing in these women, and allowing them to see me in both my vulnerabilities and my vitalities, has been a sustaining throughline in my adult life.

We were created to live in community, yet stress, shame and comparison can keep us isolated from each other. I hope you have seen the importance of mutual support through your time together in this group. And I don't want it to end here.

In this week's conversation, we'll consider a plan for continuing to build supportive community in your life.

PERSONAL WRITING AND REFLECTION

Take about five minutes of quiet time for this exercise:

+ What have you learned about community from this group?

Do you have a supportive community outside this group? If so, how can you continue to invest in that community? If not, how can you begin to build it?

GROUP SHARE

+ Share your responses from your writing with the group.

+ Sometimes making friends requires us to “go first.” Have you ever had to “go first” in your relationships? What was that like for you? How did it turn out?

+ What will you need to let go of in order to invest in meaningful community after this group is over?

IDEAS TO IMPLEMENT

+ If you have one, share a next step you are going to take to invest in community once this group is over.

+ In some of my darkest moments, miraculously, \$5 would show up in my Venmo from a friend who was thinking about me and wanted to treat me to a coffee. It's such a small gesture, but it was always so meaningful. If you know a fellow single mom who could use encouragement today, and you can afford to send the \$5, surprise her with a Venmo treat. A little goes a long way.

+ Other: _____

*With all the
letting go there
is to do in life,
sometimes it feels
really, really good
to have someone
who will hold on.*

- LEEANA TANKERSLEY,
HOPE ANYWAY

CLOSING REFLECTION

As we close our 9 weeks together, have each person in the group share one thing she is taking with her from your time together.

CLOSING SILENCE

+ Set a timer for one minute, and end your time together today by observing a moment of silence. As you sit in silence, take deep breaths, sealing in the empathy, care, and understanding that was present today. Breathe in the truth that you are seen and you are loved.

SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

Reach Out

Reach out to someone this week. Maybe a fellow single mom from this group or from your community. Maybe a family member or a friend who you need to reconnect with. Consider starting a chat over Voxer or Marco Polo. Share a detail about your own life and let the person know how much you appreciate him or her.

WEEKLY SCRIPTURE MEDITATION

Read and/or write down the following Scripture verses to support and guide you each week of this group.

PSALM 94:14, ESV

For the Lord will not forsake his people; he will not abandon his heritage.

CONSIDER THESE NEXT STEPS WITH MOMCO...

- + Participate in a *Working Mom* or *Fierce Love* Online Meetup.
- + Go through the leadership training to lead a Stronger Together group.
- + Listen to the MomCo Podcast Moms Unscripted and discuss with a fellow mom.
- + Attend an upcoming MOMCON event, MomCo's annual conference.

RESOURCES

APPENDIX

BOOKS

It's Not Supposed to Be This Way
by Lysa TerKeurst

The Lazy Genius Way
by Kendra Adachi

You Are a Badass at Making Money
by Jen Sincero

The Money Saving Mom's Budget
by Crystal Paine

Money-Making Mom
by Crystal Paine

The 5 Love Languages of Children
by Gary Chapman

The Body Keeps the Score
by Bessel van der Kolk

Option B
by Sheryl Sandberg

Let Your Life Speak
by Parker Palmer

The Fringe Hours
by Jessica Turner

I Said This, You Heard That
by Kathleen Edelman

A Grown-Up's Guide to Kids' Wiring
by Kathleen Edelman

Hope Anyway
by Leeana Tankersley

PODCASTS

The Lazy Genius

The Crystal Paine Show

Moms Struggling Well

Coffee and Crumbs

Raising Boys and Girls

Risen Motherhood

Don't Mom Alone

Moms Unscripted

CLASSES AND GROUPS

DivorceCare | www.divorcecare.org

Single & Parenting | www.singleandparenting.org

GriefShare | www.griefshare.org

ALANON

Celebrate Recovery

APPS

Takyl

Mint

CROWDSOURCING

Keep a list here of the resources mentioned by the other moms in your group.



MORE FROM THE AUTHOR

LEEANA TANKERSLEY is a single mom of three, author of six books, and a hope warrior. In addition to serving as the Managing Editor for The MOPS Magazine, Leeana is a cohost on the MOPS podcast, Moms Unscripted. She is the co-founder of The Finding You Project, which provides resources and community for women who feel lost in their lives for any reason. Leeana and her kids live in Central Virginia. Learn more about her work at www.leeanatankersley.com and www.thefindingyouproject.com.

IG @leeanatankersley | FB @tankersleyleeana | IG @findingyouproject

BOOKS

Hope Anyway (2021)
Finding hope after loss

Always We Begin Again (2019)
A collection of 100 short daily readings
written to help you begin again

Begin Again (2018)
How to step into the next, new moment
when life feels tight

Brazen (2016)
Finding your voice

Breathing Room (2014)
What do to when you feel like you
have lost yourself

Found Art (2009)
A memoir of living in the Middle
East

www.thefindingyouproject.com