

E-mail group helps single parents

Through e-mails and meetings, single parents can receive support

By Kristina Rudinskas
Student Activities Reporter

Single parents make the lunches, tie the shoes, do the dishes and make the world turn for their children. And they do it alone.

Carol Kinch and Michele Lukowski face those challenges everyday and are trying to help other single parents tackle those difficulties and discover mutual support through the single-parent support group.

The group, which formed at the end of last quarter, allows single mothers and fathers to communicate via e-mail.

"Single parents need to have a good support system, people they can talk to and rely on," said Lukowski, who has a 19-month-old daughter. "When you feel overwhelmed and things get out of hand, you may only have one or two people who can help you out. You can get stuck sometimes."

Single parents can ask questions, voice concerns and help each other with advice through e-mail messages.

"Schedules are always changing; we always have stuff to do," Lukowski said. The e-mail group allows single parents to reach out and find help when they have the time rather than a scheduled meeting every week, she explained.

The group sometimes meets informally on Friday afternoons

at the Spencer View Family Co-op, Kinch said. They are planning a social event, such as taking their kids to the coast or the zoo.

"Single parents can feel pretty isolated — when they don't know other people they can be really isolated," Kinch said. Kinch is the mother of two-year-old twins and is studying at the University for her master's degree in special education.

The group maintains an informal dialogue between members, Kinch said. They have no facilitator — it's more like coffee talk or friends getting together, she explained.

After talking, the group realized they all had similar difficulties in dealing with the other parent who is not part of the children's lives by either refusing to participate or demanding too much involvement.

"It was all different, but similar experiences," Lukowski said.

The group recently met with a representative from University Legal Services to discuss issues important to single parents, including custody issues and child support.

"We're in the process of starting up and finding what people really want," Kinch said.

Problems for single parents can range from finding babysitters when their children are sick to getting advice during emergencies.

"You're playing both roles emotionally," Kinch said. "You have to make sure you spend

enough time with your kids and make sure they are getting their emotional needs met."

A good attitude is important for single parents, Kinch said, because you can't feel sorry for yourself or say "this isn't fair." It is important to take the precious time you do have and spend it with your children, she said.

"I still get wrapped up to get the dishes done, but then you stop, put everything down and get down on the floor and start playing," Kinch said. "Your kids are happiest when you give your attention to them."

Lukowski and Kinch hope the group can blossom into something useful for single parents struggling to balance school and family life.

"It's important to have somebody to lean on," Lukowski said. "When the kids are sick, there's someone to watch over them. It's to create a group of people that, when you say 'help,' somebody would respond."

The group is open to everybody regardless of whether they are single parents. Interested persons can subscribe to the group via e-mail at makasha@gladstone.uoregon.edu.

One of the most important things new single parents can do is stay in school. Lukowski encourages future single parents to get a degree to better provide for their children.

"It's a hard road, but there's always a way to do it. There's no better opportunity to be able to provide for your child."

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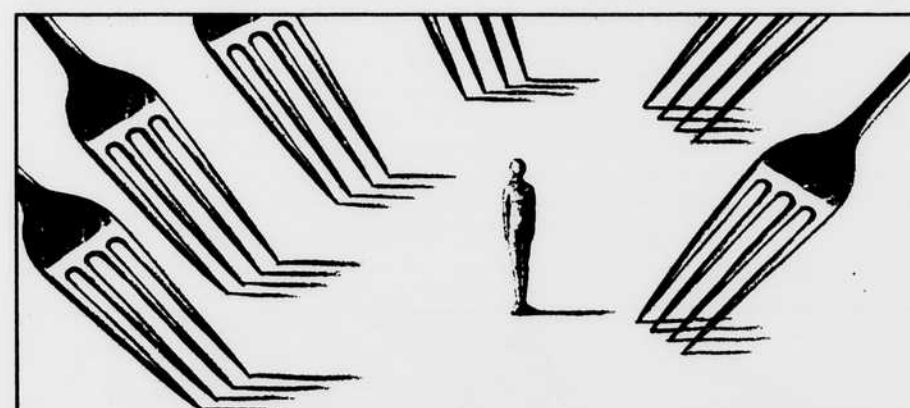
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Wednesday, February 25, 10 a.m. – 3 p.m.

Thursday, February 26, 11 a.m. – 2 p.m.

- Eating disorders screening
- See the life—size Barbie
- Get free massages
- Giveaways for aromatherapy, bath oils, candles, and flowers
- Plus people you can talk to and information you can use

Shared Secrets Theatrical Presentations
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Thursday, February 26, 7 p.m. – 8 p.m.

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