



THE POWER OF WORDS

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By Linda Ranson Jacobs

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Words can be powerful when they are used in the right context. Usage of kind words can motivate children. Unkind and cruel words can hurt children. Think of the child of divorce who comes from an abusive home. Maybe the child wasn't abused, but the spouse was - or there was a lot of shouting and crying. The words the child heard, even if the child was asleep, can negatively affect them for the rest of their lives.



In some states there is actually a law called, "In the Presence of Child." If there is domestic abuse when the child is present, even if the child is asleep, the perpetrator can be convicted. Don't believe words have power? Think again. Research was done in this area before these laws came into being. Make no mistake - negative words will impact a child's inner voice for years!

Kind and pleasant words can be a driving force when helping a child to process their parent's divorce. Commenting on the child's effort will go a long way in helping the child understand they have the ability to work through the hurt. Praising their effort doesn't mean you are praising their intelligence. It means you comment on their persistence in moving forward. It means you praise their effort to control their anger and how they are making strides in how to handle depression. It means you give them hope that life is going to get better. You are truthful with them, and when you are asked questions you don't have an answer for, you let them know you don't know.

Generic praise is the use of words that a lot of us say but which don't have much meaning. They are actually judgmental. You know the "Good job" or "Good boy" types of praise. It is your judgment that what the child did was good.

Children of divorce hear much of this kind of praise from parents. For example a dad who doesn't live with a child might make a comment such as,

"That was a good job on the spelling test. You are really smart."

or

"You are one smart kid. You must get the brains from MY side of the family."



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Not only do the words praise the child's intellect, they also serve as one more jab at the ex spouse. Plus, you have put the child in the position where the child has to be worried about always being smart enough to be worthy of the brainpower on his dad's side of the family. What if he fails a test? What then?

Trying to "happy up" the child by saying things like, "Oh come on now, you know your mom loves you. Let me see that frown turn into a smile" or "It can't be that bad" will only serve to drive the child deeper into anger or depression. You might not see these emotions come out because children of divorce are chameleons when it comes to displaying their feelings in front of adults. Many will take on the nuances of the adults around them. However, the hurts in their hearts do not change.

Incidences like these only serve to drive a nail deeper into the wall around their inner being. Healing the heart doesn't happen. Resilience doesn't happen. Coming to grips with living in two homes doesn't happen. Coming to Christ as their risen Savior doesn't happen and understanding there is a God that will never leave them doesn't happen.

Psychologist Heidi Grant Halvorson in Psychology Today (March 2013) says,

"Being praised for effort or other aspects of performance directly under your control leads to resilience, while being praised for being smart or some other innate abilities can lead to feelings of helplessness or self-doubt when a setback occurs. The ideal is to help someone think positively but realistically about achieving goals while praising their hard work. When praised for persistence, those who think the path ahead will be difficult invest more effort."

We want the child of divorce who comes to church to invest more effort when it comes to coping with the many aspects of living through the death of their once intact family. We want them to be resilient. We want them to cope well. We want them to know the true healing that comes from a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and we want them to draw close to God, the Heavenly Father who will never leave them.

Linda Ranson Jacobs is one of the forefront leaders in the area of children and divorce. She developed and created the DivorceCare for Kids programs. DC4K is an international program for churches to use to help children of divorced parents find healing within the arms of a loving church family. As a speaker, author, trainer, program developer and child care center owner, Linda has assisted countless families by modeling and acting on the healing love she has found in Jesus Christ. Linda offers support, encouragement and suggestions to help those working with the child of divorce. She serves as DC4K Ambassador (<http://www.dc4k.org>) and can be reached via email at ljacobs@dc4k.org.

Free articles and devotions for single parent families in your church can be found at Linda's website Healthy Loving Partnerships for Our Kids (<http://www.hlp4.com>).