



CHILDREN OF DIVORCE AND RITES OF PASSAGE

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By Linda Ranson Jacobs

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This past weekend my step-grandchildren were visiting us. The eleven year old can't wait until she turns twelve years of age. Know why? So she can get a Facebook page. She also can't wait until she is sixteen so she can get her driver's license.

Her parents are smart in declaring rite of passage of certain things. Many kids in our world today are impatient and can't wait or don't understand the rite of passage. Wikipedia describes rite of passage as:

"...a ritual event that marks a person's transition from one status to another."

A rite of passage helps a child feel special or accomplished in some way whether that be age, talent or maturity.

When I owned my school age program we incorporated many rites of passage. If you were a kindergartner, you had to wait until you were in first grade to earn money credit to purchase treats at the snack bar. If you were in kindergarten or 1st grade, you had to wait until 2nd grade to be on one of the animal committees. You could only be the manager of an animal committee if you were in 5th grade. And so it went - grade after grade.

One rite of passage that every kid in our program waited for was the privilege to sit in the loft. In one of our rooms was a loft that sat pretty high up off the floor. One had to be ten years old to be able to sit in the loft. Those kids would count the days until their birthday so they could sit in the loft. It was a big deal to be able to climb up the ladder to the loft and sit there over looking the room. On the morning of someone's tenth birthday, I knew I would see him or her sitting in that loft.

- It was a silly thing!
- It was a fun thing!
- It was a special thing!
- It was a powerful thing!

Many children of divorce miss out on experiencing rites of passage. Divorce fractures families and many times family traditions and rites of passage are lost. It might be something such as experiencing the first camping trip with grandpa, or getting to visit a cousin in another state the summer of your 13th birthday. It could be the first shopping trip with a grandmother or getting a first pedicure with a special aunt.





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Some rites of passage aren't clearly laid out, but a child just knows that something special is going to happen regarding an event. For example, some grandparents will purchase a savings bond or set up a trust fund for a grandchild. When the child graduates from high school or college they get to cash in the savings bond or have access to the trust fund.

Many girls just know that when it comes time for their first big dance, mom will be there to take them shopping. Or a teen boy knows when its time to start shaving dad will be there to cheer him on. If the teenage girl doesn't live with the mom, the shopping trip never happens. If the teenage boy doesn't have a father in the home, he learns how to shave on his own. The teen doesn't get that special bonding time with the parent. No one feels accomplished or special doing these things alone.

One family had a rite of passage about Christmas. When a child graduated from high school, they were included in the adult only Christmas party. After the divorce, the extended family didn't invite the child to the Christmas party. What a disappointment after having waited all through high school to be considered adult enough to attend the adult only Christmas event!

In other situations, the divorce has changed the finances in the home. So while a child might look forward to that senior trip throughout middle school, by the time they make it to their senior year in high school and their parents have divorce, there isn't enough money to fund the long waited for senior trip.

A child's behavior might be another reason a rite of passage is lost. Many children of divorce have problems with school. It is not unusual for kids to lose a grade, drop out or be reassigned to an alternative school. The senior year comes along, and the teen is in alternative school and there is no senior trip in alternative school.

Rites of passage are important to kids. Help the child of divorce understand why they might have lost a rite of passage. Work with the child to create a different passing of an event. Pray about ways you can allow the child of divorce to experience a rite of passage at your church.

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. You can find additional articles from Linda on her blog at <http://blog.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>).

