

CO-PARENTING THAT HURTS KIDS

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By Linda Ranson Jacobs

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Co-parenting among divorcing couples is becoming more popular. For many children this is a good thing. This means they get to have both parents making life-long decisions for their welfare. It means children can still have family connections with both sides of the family.

If both parents can put aside their squabbles and think about what is best for their children, then co-parenting is a good option. If parents can keep conflict to a minimum and not inflict adult conflict on the kids then co-parenting might benefit the children. When family can be held to a high standard for all involved then co-parenting can be a viable choice.

Let's face it children develop attachments to both parents. That is as it should be. When a divorce happens and the parents can no longer live together the children still love both parents. They want to be with both parents. Like one little girl said, "I didn't get a divorce!"

It is when the above can't be worked out those children in co-parenting situations will suffer. If parents want to raise children in the middle or in between their two homes, then it would be prudent to develop some rules or guidelines. Even then there will be some parents that won't adhere to "rules" or guidelines.

I have a friend who is co-parenting two children. One is a preschooler, and the other is in elementary school. Both kids dearly love their father, and the divorce has been difficult. Things started out pretty good with the co-parenting. As job schedules changed and the dad began to travel more and more, co-parenting has become difficult.

On the dad's time with the kids many times he flies the kids with him on business trips on the weekends. While it is good the dad wants to include his children, it is not always good for the kids. Having to sit in a hotel room with a strange baby sitter while dad is out entertaining late at night causes much stress on the kids. The kids complain there isn't a lot to do in a hotel room for days at a time.

Many times when the kids come home late on Sunday night, they are exhausted. They haven't slept well in strange hotels. They have eaten mostly junk food and it seems like they come home sick a lot. And if the elementary age child had a homework assignment it didn't get done as he left town on Friday as soon as school was out.

Dad's values are changing and going in the opposite direction of the moms. With a possible wedding in the dad's future, the children are even more confused and the co-parenting is becoming more difficult

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None of the things the dad is doing could be considered exactly harmful or hurtful but in the long run it is hurting his children. However, his kids will feel the effects of this arrangement later in life. As they approach their teen years, visitation may become burdensome to the point they may not want to visit the other parent. Co-parenting in this situation is difficult at best.

What can churches do to help?

- Host a single parent class on Sundays
- Allow the single parent to draw strength from stories about single parents in the Bible.
- Tell others in the church or in the class to encourage the co-parent who attends your church.
- Text the co-parent when children are sick or the co-parent has to miss church.
- Find helpful articles and resources with tips and hints about co-parenting and about parenting alone.
- Listen to the co-parent's stories and empathize with him or her.
- Pray without ceasing for the kids in a co-parent situation.
- Listen to the kid's stories without making any judgments. Just listen!

What have you done to help someone who is co-parenting in an uncooperative co-parenting situation?

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>).