



WHEN CHILDREN OF DIVORCE PLAY THE “BUT” CARD

By Linda Ranson Jacobs

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BUT

“But Dad wouldn't do it that way.”

“But mom lets us have it.”

“But dad said if we didn't want to go to bed early we don't have to. He said so.”

“But mom said we have to do our homework as soon as we get home. She said if it's a problem for you to call her.”

Children who make the above statements might be confused about whose authority they are supposed to follow. Another scenario is they might be trying to play one parent against the other.

When a single parent comes to you, the children's minister and expert on children, what will you say to them about children manipulating their divorced parents? Here are some thoughts and some sample conversations you can suggest to the parents in your church.

At first when children are learning to live in two households they can get confused about exactly whose authority they are to follow on what days.

Before the separation perhaps dad's say was final. Now mom is going to have to establish authority in her home without dad.

Or maybe dad left the disciplining, assigning chores, etc. up to mom before the separation but now dad has to get organized and set boundaries for his home.

After kids get used to the parents living in separate homes they are pretty quick to realize there is a game they can play. And that game is called “Let's pit one parent against the other so can get what we want”. The winning card in this game is the “but” card.

“But mom, dad lets us.....”

“But dad, mom said.....”





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Kids of divorce become pretty perceptive in their thinking.

- They perceive when parents are at war with each other.
- They perceive when one parent has decided to move on with their life and start dating.
- They perceive when one parent is stressed.
- They perceive when a parent is distracted with work or other problems.
- They perceive what they can get by with at each parent’s home and they use it to their advantage.

Unfortunately many single parents fall unknowingly into this crazy game.

- It might be they don’t want their kids to stop loving them or liking them.
- Perhaps they are one of the many single parents that try to be their child’s friend.
- Perhaps the single parent has guilty feelings for putting their child through the trauma of divorce or separation.
- Maybe they don’t get to see their child often enough and they think if they just give the child what they want it will be okay.

Whatever the reason single parents fall into this trap, when possible they need to communicate with the other parent about the rules and boundaries they have set in their home.

A lot of single parents don’t have the luxury of being able to communicate with the other parent. Once the divorce has taken place, all communication with the other parent comes to a screeching halt. These single parents are going to have to be strong and determined to parent their children alone.

A conversation might go something like this, “Sweetie I appreciate that you and your dad have a good time at his house. I understand he lets you stay up late but at our house we have to get up early so I can get you to school.” Then with an assertive voice, “We will stick to our routine of going to bed at a reasonable hour in this house.”

If children continue to say things to try and sway a single parent’s thinking then the next conversation might need to go something like this, “I’m glad you get to spend time with your mom. But when you come home to my house, we need to talk about things in our home. I don’t want to hear about what your mom allows you to do at her house.” And this conversation must be said with authority.

What suggestions do you have to trump the “but” card?



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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>).