



HELPING CHILDREN MITIGATE THE LEGACIES OF DIVORCE

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By Linda Ranson Jacobs

09/02/2011



The past two weeks we have examined some of the [short-term](#) and [long-term](#) legacies of divorce on children. In this article we will look at ways you can help children in your church lessen the impact of some of these issues.

Do Something

Many children's leaders have shared that they tend to hold back or shy away from children of divorce simply because they are afraid of making things worse for the child. Next time you face such fears, think to yourself, "How much worse can anything be than to watch the two people in the world you love the most split up and live in two separate households?" The worst thing you can do is to do nothing at all. Don't let your fears keep you from ministering to these kids.

Pray for the Child of Divorce

At the top of the list of things you can do to help children of divorce has to be prayer. God's guidance is paramount if you want to positively impact these children. Next, don't be afraid to jump right in there and help these children. Make sure you check out the recent series here on Divorce Ministry 4 Kids which included 100 Ways to Pray for Children of

Divorce.

Search for Ways to Help

If at all possible take a few minutes to watch and study these children in your church. Watch the interactions between the child and the parent. Be careful not to be judgmental, but look for ways you can intervene to make things better between the parent and child. Do you realize that many single parents are barely holding it together and they feel uncomfortable at church?

I observed a scene in our church this past spring between an eleven year old and her mom. I saw the mom's shoulders sag and watched as she sighed heavily. I stepped in between the two and said,

"I'm so happy you are both here today. What an honor to be able to give you guys a hug."





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As I squeezed both of their shoulders in a little hug, the daughter smiled and took off for class. As the mom thanked me I said,

"You know I'm only a phone call or email away if you just need to talk to someone."

We have exchanged emails several times and she knows I'm here when she needs me.

Make a Connection

Sometimes these kids just need someone to recognize they are troubled and stressed. It might be a pat on the back, a hug or even something as simple as a fist bump or a high five. Just something that allows a child to connect with a calm and caring adult. Touch is important to these children. Many are starved for adult attention and touch. We forget that many of their parents are at war with each other. They are distracted and probably unaware they are not hugging their children regularly. Or, maybe dad is the one that always did the fist bump and now dad is gone. For that child that ritual needs to be replaced.

For my own son one of his dad's friends and a deacon in our church reached out. Every Sunday he would put his hand on my son's shoulder and say,

"Hey Son. How you doing son?"

When Brian told me about it I asked how long Mr. Harmon had been doing that. He said,

"Oh, for many months now. And he does it EVERY Sunday."

I don't know to this day if Mr. Harmon knows how much he helped my son simply by taking a few seconds to connect with him.

Help Them to Feel Safe

There are several reasons for some of the short-term legacy issues. For example, behavior problems can have several contributing factors. Children who don't feel safe may have challenging behaviors. Help these children feel safe by telling them they are safe when they are with you. Use the story of how the shepherd in the twenty-third Psalm takes care of his sheep and how he keeps them safe. Tell the children that you will be their shepherd and you will keep them safe.





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Identify Emotions

Not being able to label one's feelings is another issue. Help these children put a label on their emotions. Recognize how scary it is to feel something and not be able to put a name to it. Every so often, describe what a child's body looks like and put a name to that emotion. For example,

"You are clenching your jaw and your hands are in a tight fist and your face is going like this. It looks to me like you might be angry today."

Or,

"Oh my, your shoulders are all hunched over and your mouth is going like this (imitate child's mouth) and you are walking with your head down. Your body is telling me you might be sad."

Offer Choices

Children don't get divorced – adults do. However, many times the child feels like they got the divorce. Everything is out of their control. For these children let them know you care by giving them choices. These choices should be very matter of fact types of choices.

"Do you want to sit at this table or the one at the back of the room?"

"Do you want to hang up your coat or keep it on?"

While these kinds of choices may seem silly to you, to a child of divorce they shout,

"You matter!"

It puts them back in control of something in their life.

Become the Hands and Feet of Jesus

None of these ideas will take up much of your time. It's more of an effort than anything else but to a child of divorce it could be a life-changing experience. To that child it's about caring, sharing, observing, loving and simply being there for them. You become the hands and feet of Jesus to these children.





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The Outcome of Your Efforts

The choices you make today in ministering to children of divorce can affect them for the rest of their lives. If the child of divorce finds...

...**attention** from church leaders, it might very well prevent that teen girl from getting pregnant.

...**value** at church, it might prevent that teen boy from committing suicide.

...**someone who cares** for them at church, it might prevent a young adult from turning to drugs or alcohol.

...**safety** at church and with church leaders, it could lessen the stress and overwhelming confusion that leads teenagers into delinquency.

...a **loving church leader who models** love for his wife and values his marriage, it might prevent a child of divorce from divorcing as an adult.

...just **one person who takes the time to be there**, it might encourage a young adult to turn to the Lord

About a year ago I was talking to a children's minister. He shared with me that he is an adult child of divorce. Each of his parents had been married several times so there had been a lot of steps in his family. When he was a teenager there had been one man that reached out to him. This man didn't do anything spectacular or out of the ordinary. He simply accepted this young man into his world. He said this man loved his wife; had a great marriage and family and a good relationship with his kids. He attended church and was a leader in the church. In other words this man modeled what a Christian man and a Christian home looked like. My friend said he decided early on that that was the kind of life he wanted for himself. All it took to change the life of a child of divorce was one man who loved the Lord and who reached out. You can be that person for the child of divorce in your church starting today!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: 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. More great articles about how to successfully minister to the child of divorce in your church can be found at Linda's website [Healthy Loving Partnerships for Our Kids \(HLP4\)](http://HealthyLovingPartnershipsforOurKids.com). Linda also offers support, encouragement, and suggestions to help single parents and those working with single parent children. She can be reached by e-mail at Linda@hlp4.com.

