



DEALING WITH THE EMOTIONS OF DIVORCE

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By Wayne D. Stocks

11/28/2011

Divorce brings a multitude of change and chaos into the lives of children. That change and chaos breeds all sorts of new and strong emotions that children are often ill equipped to deal with on their own. Many of these emotions will be entirely new to these children, and most have not developed enough to deal with them by themselves. Further compounding the problem is that many parents are also ill equipped to help their children deal with the emotions they are experiencing because the parents are also drowning in a tidal wave of emotion.

Some of the common emotions that a child might feel related to their parents' divorce include:

- Anger
- Anxiety
- Chaos
- Confusion
- Denial
- Depression
- Embarrassment
- Fear
- Grief
- Guilt
- Loneliness
- Loss
- Obligation
- Powerlessness
- Rejection
- Sadness
- Shock
- Stress
- Torn
- Vulnerability
- Withdrawal



As those who minister to, and work with, children, we have to be in a position to help children to recognize and deal with the emotions that their parents' divorce has caused to well up inside of them. Failure to deal with these emotions head on will only allow them to fester inside of the child only to boil over at some later point. Starting this Wednesday, and once a week for the next several weeks, we are going to have a more in depth look at the emotions many children feel when their parents get divorced. Every child is different, and the mix of emotions that they feel will differ. However, our goal with this series is to provide some basic information that can be of assistance to those who work with children and also to parents when it comes to helping children deal with certain emotions.





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Our hope is that this series of articles will equip you to respond appropriately to the emotions experienced by children of divorce and help them to process through them. Appropriately naming and dealing with emotions caused by a divorce will go a long way to helping a child adjust to their new post-divorce life. Although they will likely experience these emotions for their entire lives, in some form or another, we can lay the groundwork for effectively understanding and expressing those emotions.

Before we delve into methods for dealing with specific emotions, there are some general points to understand and remember about the emotions children feel in dealing with their parents' divorce:

1. The single most important thing you can do to help any child dealing with these emotions, and specifically to help children of divorce, is to get them talking about what they feel. Speaking about these emotions takes away some of the power that the emotion has over their lives. Part of speaking about these emotions is helping children to name the emotions they are feeling. Create a safe environment where kids will feel free to talk about what they are feeling.
2. All kids will react differently to their parents' divorce. Just because you have "been down this road before" and seen a child of divorce react in one way, you should not expect all children to react the same way. Every child is unique, and every child's reaction to the divorce of their parents will also be unique. Even if you have gone through the emotions and pain of seeing your own parents divorce, you should not expect that a child will react the same way you did.
3. Not all kids will react immediately to the news of their parents' divorce. Some of these emotions will appear days, weeks, months and even years after the actual divorce. You should be prepared to help a child of divorce deal with their emotions for the long term. If you tell a child, "I will be here to help you through this," understand that you are making a long-term commitment.
4. Many kids will react to the news of their parents' divorce by circling the wagons and trying to protect their parents. One way they do this is by pretending that everything is fine and that the divorce is not impacting them much at all. You should never tell a child they should feel something that they are not feeling, but you should also be leery of the child who pretends nothing is wrong. Oftentimes, these are the children who are hurting the most but are just unwilling to share that.
5. Many children will feel the same emotions related to the divorce over and over as they go through each stage of their lives and development. Unlike the grieving process involved in the death of a loved one, children of divorce are forced to relive the grieving process every time they switch homes and as they go through each developmental stage of life.
6. Some children will deny their own emotions in an effort to convince themselves that they are not hurting. Again, your role is not to tell the child that they should feel bad, or to make them feel bad, but you should be aware that denial of emotions is a possibility.

