



## A DIVORCE CARE 4 KIDS (DC4K) STORY

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By Wayne D. Stocks

January/February 2012

Back on September 14, 2011, I wrote an article introducing you to the [Divorce Care 4 Kids \(DC4K\)](#) ministry. As I wrote in that article,

*Starting tomorrow, I will have the opportunity to serve in a first Divorce Care 4 Kids group near my home. Unfortunately, at this point my church does not offer DC4K, but a local church close to my house was kind enough to let me participate in their program. I thought I would write this article before starting the program and check back after the program ends – sort of a before and after look at DC4K.*

As promised, today's article is a look back at my experience in my first 13 week session of DC4K which ended on December 22.

### A Disclaimer (or Two)

When I originally envisioned this article, I didn't expect it to be as long as it eventually turned out to be.

I thought I might hit on some the highlights and some of the things I learned from my time and be done. In the end, I decided that perhaps the best thing I could do was to give you a glimpse into our class itself so that you can see how a class like DC4K can impact the adults who run it and, more importantly, the kids who attend.

I did not take notes or even make mental notes of the things I wanted to cover in this article. I am writing entirely from memory, so some of the unimportant details may be a little skewed. That said, these 13 weeknights, over a span of 15 actual weeks, created memories that I will carry with me for a lifetime.

I do not know if we ran the class like a typical DC4K class or not (I've never been in another one to compare, and I have not had a chance to review the curriculum in its entirety). In the end though, I do believe that God worked through us to speak into the lives of these kids, and for that I am grateful. As in everything, He deserves all of the praise and glory.

For those who may read this who are associated with DC4K or run your own programs, I have tried to be as honest and forthright in writing this as I know how to be. There are things which did not work for us in our sessions and in our setting, and I have tried to be forthcoming about those things. I have no doubt that those thing might work in other settings, or with other groups of kids, so the fact that we cut something out should not be interpreted as negative review of that particular component. I am a big proponent of this program and believe that more churches should offer it to the children of divorce in their churches and their communities.

One of the basic tenets our DC4K class was built on was the idea of confidentiality. As such, I have changed the names of everyone in this article. For my fellow Safe Keepers (the name for leaders in DC4K), I trust that you will recognize many of the kids described in this article. I hope you appreciate your new identities as well. ☺



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### ***A Word of Thanks***

Before I start, I want to take a second to thank the leaders of the program I served in, the church who sponsored the program, and the YMCA who hosted the program. At this point, my church does not offer DC4K, and these people were gracious enough to allow me to serve with them in ministering to God's children. It is always refreshing to find a church that cares more about the people they are ministering to than whether or not your name appears on their membership roles. While I would love to name them and give them the credit they are due, I have elected not to in this article in order to preserve confidentiality. In addition to building wonderful relationships with the kids in the class, I was fortunate enough to get to know, and minister with, some amazing adult leaders in the class. I want to thank them for pouring God's love into these kids each and every week and teaching me as a shining example of what it means to be the hands and feet of Jesus.

### ***The Cast of Characters***

Before sharing some of the heartbreaking and heartwarming stories from the class, let's set the scene a little bit.

#### *The Leaders*

I have discovered in my years of ministering to children that oftentimes I learn as much from the people I minister alongside as I do from kids being ministered to. This experience was no different.

I found out on the first night that I was the elder statesman of this group. And, despite only living 15 minutes from the YMCA where the class was held, I was the only one who didn't live in the same town, with kids in the same school system, etc. Despite all of that, we are all brothers and sisters in Christ, and I enjoyed getting to know each of my fellow leaders.

Our DC4K group was led by a woman who is both a child of divorce and a divorced parent herself. We will call her Mary. This was Mary's second session leading DC4K. Her first session included only her own two kids and one other child. Mary's heart for these kids and passion for helping them was evident in everything that she did. God has gifted her with the organizational skills to pull off a class like this and the compassion to help these hurting kids.

Mary's husband Carl also helped out with the class. Also a child of divorce, and now a stepfather to Mary's two children, Carl's easy and laid back nature was a hit with the kids who took to him quickly. Carl is one of those people who is easy to talk to. You feel like you know him, and have known him for years, after just a few minutes of conversation. Carl is a bible school grad, and I enjoyed the opportunities we got (albeit few of them) to discuss the Bible, theology, music and smart phones.

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Ellen was the third leader. Just slightly younger than me, Ellen is the mother of the third child from the inaugural class I mentioned earlier. A teacher, and not afraid to say what was on her mind, Ellen was a valuable addition to the class. Mary, Carl, Ellen and myself were the principal leaders in the classroom (though there were others from time to time as discussed below), and with a couple of exceptions, all four of us were there for all thirteen weeks.

Ellen's daughter Jenny was also a Safe Keeper in the class. Jenny's parents divorced a while back and she participated in the first class along with Mary and Carl's kids. Roughly the same age as some of the older kids in the class, Jenny was a wonderful helper and anxious to help other children like herself who had suffered through the divorce of their parents.

Alice was another adult helper who assisted with the check-in process and dealt with parents as they dropped off and picked up their own kids. She also assisted in the classroom from time to time. As the mother of a preschool aged child herself, she was very comfortable with the kids and a great help to have around.

Finally, there was Barbara. Barbara works for the YMCA and is in charge of community outreach and working through churches in the area to rebuild the Christian focus of the Y. Rarely will you meet someone as nice and welcoming as Barbara. She arranged everything at the YMCA, handled much of the publicity prior to class starting to drum up interest in the class, made arrangements to see that we had what we needed each work, helped with the check in and pick up process and dealt with parents. We could not have, in my estimation, asked for anyone better to work with at the YMCA.

### *The Kids*

We had a meeting a few weeks prior to the start of class to talk about advertising and introduce the class to new people (myself included). At that time, no one had signed up for the class. Frankly, I was worried that they might not need me or might not have a class at all. Our class started on a Thursday, and we had one final meeting on the Tuesday before. At that time, we were informed that 7 kids had signed up for the class. With six leaders as well, I was convinced that would leave us with plenty of time for some one-on-one time with the kids. In the end, we had 15 kids that I would call "regular-attenders." One of the original seven never showed up. One boy showed up for the first week and never came back (a shame it and of itself). But, in the span of about a month between that first meeting and the second week of class, we grew from 0 kids to 15 kids. Let me introduce you to "my kids."

Suzie and Haley are sisters – one of several sets of siblings in our class. They are 11 and 9 years old respectively. I hit it off with them from the very beginning. Suzie and Haley live on a large property with a lot of animals. Both are very talkative and, like typical sisters, more than willing to take little digs at one another. Haley was quick to tell me one evening when Suzie was cleaning up that she never did that at home, and Suzie was quick to tell me that Haley was cleaner but that hygiene was not "her thing." Haley is an aspiring photographer and



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brought her camera with her to class on several occasions. Suzie and Haley's last name was Frank and we often called them Big Frank and Little Frank.

At 5 years old, Valerie was one of our younger participants. Val is a vibrant and uber-friendly little girl who always had something nice to say and a story to tell. She is the type of person who lights up a room from the moment she walks in, and she gave out hugs as frequently as she talked.

Jacee is a seven year old little girl. She struck me as quiet the first time I met her, but I soon learned that, like many of the other younger girls in the class, she too would talk your ear off once she got started.

Colt and Jeremy were our second set of siblings. 11 and 9 year old brothers, Colt is at the age where he was "too cool" to be there. Most of his comments during our thirteen weeks together were laced with the sarcasm of an older elementary school boy. Jeremy on the other hand was not quite as overt with his dislike of the class. Instead, he showed boundless energy and a penchant for getting off track – way way off track. Colt and Jeremy were friends of Ms. Ellen, and she often drove them home after class.

Ella and Katy are also sisters – seven and four years old. Ella was a joy in class, and I was shocked when her mother told Ms. Mary about all of her anger problems and trouble she was getting into at school (more on that later). Ella was the girl who would answer every question and seemed really interested in all that we were doing. Katy may have been a little young for the class, but I was glad she was there. With a vibrant smile and a seemingly carefree attitude, she was a joy.

Alan is a seven year old boy diagnosed with ADHD. Each week, Alan would bring a new toy to class. We learned quickly that those toys had to be set on a table and picked up after class was over. Like many children with ADHD, Alan seemed like he was always off in some other place no matter what we were doing. In the end though, it was clear that he is as sharp as they come and was absorbing way more than we could imagine.

Lily and Rosey are also sisters ages 4 and 7. Lily is the quieter of the two sisters, but not quiet by any means. She is a joy to talk to, and I really enjoyed engaging her in conversation. Rosey was the wild one of the two with a joke and a giggle at every turn. She could be a handful at times, but that giggle had a way of just melting your heart.

Henry and Gabby were our only brother/sister pair. Henry is 8, and Gabby is 11. I grew up with three brothers and no sisters. However, I am the father of three boys and one girl, and I find the dynamic between brothers and sisters to be fascinating. Henry and Gabby struck me as a typical brother and sister. They took jabs at one another, and Henry tried his hardest to annoy Gabby at every turn, but it was clear in the end that they were there for one another and always will be. I suspect that the divorce of their parents has only served to strengthen this bond.



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Our final pair of siblings was Cassie and Kylie. Cassie, a 10 year old girl, did not speak. I'm not exaggerating when I say that. Other than a few times where she actually talked a little bit, I imagine she said less than 50 words in the entire 13 weeks. Questions were answered with a nod or shake of the head or a shrug of the shoulders. Despite this, I felt very drawn to Cassie and was gratified when she opened up just a little bit at the end of class (more on that later). Kylie seemed a little more willing to open up and talk but often followed her sister's cues in terms of not talking.

That rounds out our class of 15 kids. In 13 short weeks, I came to know, appreciate and love each and every one of them. I waited each week with anticipation to see them again, and I miss them horrible now that our class is over. Like so many times in ministry, I thought God was putting me there to helping change their lives, and I realized in the end that he was also working through their lives to change me.

### ***The Setting***

I don't have much to say about where we had our class. I think you could put on a DC4K class almost anywhere. That said, we were particularly blessed. The YMCA provided great facilities for us to use. In their preschool wing, they had a front desk with a locking door. Behind the door was a hallway with four or five rooms on each side. Each room was a classroom with desks, white boards / projector screens, sinks and everything we could have asked for. Ms. Barbara, the YMCA liaison, did an awesome job each week of making sure that we had everything we needed. Although DC4K is an overtly Christian curriculum, and the YMCA is obviously a Christian organization (by name), I believe that holding our class at the Y made some parents feel more comfortable in dropping their kids off than they might have at a traditional church.

### ***The Story***

I wasn't sure what to expect when I walked into the classroom for the first week of DC4K. I had met with some of the other leaders a few weeks before we started and again a couple days before, but it was different that night. God had laid these children of divorce on my heart months, and even years, before. I had done the research, I'd even written about what I learned, but this was the final piece of God's puzzle – actually working hands on to influence these kids and, hopefully, help them in some small way to weather this storm in their young lives.

It didn't help that I had a nasty cold for the couple of days leading up to the first night, and by the time 6:30 rolled around and it was time to start, I sounded like a cross between James Earl Jones and dying frog with something caught in his throat.

In the two days between our pre-class meeting on Tuesday and walking in the door on Thursday night, our class had grown from 7 kids to 9 confirmed, and a strong maybe on number 10. In the end, we would have 14 on that first night. I didn't know exactly what to do that first night. There were no defined roles yet, and there was the hustle and bustle and confusion that always come with the start of a new ministry which is not to say that the



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class was not well planned. Ms. Mary did an awesome job of planning and coordinating each week. So, I did what I know best. I talked to the kids. After sitting down with a small group of them for a few minutes, all those feelings of nervousness and apprehension slipped away.

In the first five or ten minutes of that class, I learned something so basic and simple you wouldn't think God would have needed to remind me of it. You see, I had been reading study after study and book after book and article after article about the children of divorce for well over a year. I knew about all of the hardships they face and how divorce can leave an indelible impression on their young lives that will haunt them well into adulthood. I knew all of the statistics and the reactions and the doomsday scenarios. I realize that first night of DC4K, within about 10 minutes, that I had unwittingly formed a picture in my head of sullen forlorn children wondering aimlessly and focused solely on how their parents had singlehandedly destroyed their lives. It turns out that children of divorce are, first and foremost, just children. No doubt, their worlds have been turned upside down and they face an uphill battle in terms of dealing with the changes and ramifications of a decision that they had no part in, but they are still just kids. They are kids who like Justin Beiber, watch Phineas & Ferb, dress up for Halloween, don't like chores, go to school (sometimes begrudgingly) and like to play outside. God reminded me, in a very tangible way, that these are just kids. They need help and support and ministry to help them navigate the bumpy roads of their parents' divorce, but we cannot, and should not, define them by that divorce. They are more than the product of their parents' divorce. They are God's children, and that was what we were there to remind them.

That first class was a time of getting used to one another. We started by having each of the kids and the adults in the room introduce themselves. It was here that I learned that I would be the "old guy" in this ministry. We moved quickly into a brief overview of what safe keepers are. We also explained our weekly feelings chart to the kids. The feelings chart is a listing of emotions, and each week the kids have to identify themselves with one of those emotions. It helps them to identify and name what they are feeling. Our original feelings chart got lost somewhere around week three or four and Mary and Carl made a new one that used pockets and popsicle sticks which each of the kids' names on them. Although I totally appreciate the goal of the feelings chart, I did note that 95% of the time kids simply dropped their popsicle sticks in the "happy" pocket and didn't give it much thought.

We also started our weekly Alphabet Stretches led by Jenny. Each letter of the alphabet is used to teach kids how to stretch and breath to relieve stress. While these stretches represent a great way for kids to relieve some of the stress that comes with their circumstances, we had trouble getting the kids to participate in the stretches and cut them out about mid-way through the session to allow more time for other activities.

Like most nights, we watched the two videos that come along with the curriculum. The first is called "Kids Like Me" and tells the story of a group of neighborhood kids who decide that, for fun, they are going to put on a production of the story of Moses. Throughout the 13 weeks, we get to see inside the struggles of these kids, most of whom are from divorced parents and one of whom feels a little guilty that she is not. From thinking one of them had run away, to dealing with anger and guilt, to forgiveness, the series covers a multitude of topics



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that kids might face with living through their parents' divorce. The second video is of Uncle Bill, the friendly neighborhood ice cream shop owner and various kids. Each week, Uncle Bill helps a child deal with an issue related to their parents' divorce by telling a Biblical story. The video are decent enough. They can be a little cheesy in places, and I was afraid some of the older kids might be a little put out by that. Furthermore, other than getting the kids to answer some "memory questions" about what they had seen, we didn't have a whole lot of luck getting them to share their own personal experiences. That said, they all seemed to look forward to the videos each week and many listed them as one of their favorite things at the end of the class.

My "part" in the class was to read the weekly story from the book "Stories for Kids in Divorce" from DC4K. This book is an exceptional resource for kids going through divorce though we did face some difficulties with it using it in our classroom. For the first three weeks or so, we simply read the story and went through some of the questions with the kids. Starting in week 4 or so, I had to do some editing of the stories to fit them in our allotted time frame. Some of the younger children were also getting lost in the length of the stories. Starting in week 7 or 8, we found ourselves skipping the story altogether in order to allow time for other activities, and in week 10 or so, we made it official by cutting the story from our time together. I think this resource would be a great read for upper elementary age kids, but because of its depth, it is a little above younger elementary age kids.

For Week 1, we also did the "Storm in a Bottle" activity reminiscent of the storms in so many of these children's eyes. We finished each week with prayer time and a secret handshake.

By the time our class was over on week one, my cold medicine had worn out, and I was worn down. I was grateful that God had let me be there, but I was ready to go home and get some sleep as well. I still wasn't quite sure what to make of this whole experience. While we were waiting for parents to come, I struck up a conversation with Suzie and Haley. It turned out that they live on a large property with many animals that they took care of. We chatted about school and their chores and normal kids stuff. When mom picked them up, I overheard her ask them how class had been. It was clear from the way she asked the question that Suzie hadn't wanted to be there in the first place. I heard her respond to her mother, "I kinda like that guy" as she nodded her head in my direction. It was one of those moments that God affords us every now and then in ministry that just melts your heart and reenergizes your commitment. As I made the 25 minute drive home, I was ready and pumped for next week to come around.

We received word between week one and week two that two new kids would be joining our class. Henry and Gabby were going to be joining us. I found out during week 2 that Gabby and Suzie were friends and the Henry and Haley also knew each other. While it was good that they had friends and people they knew in the class, it seemed to cause all of them to close up a little bit in terms of sharing information and their own experiences. The theme for Week 2 was that "God Loves Children in All Kinds of Families." Week two was also the week that we lost our first kid. Olly, who had been then for Week 1 didn't show up for Week 2 and never came back again. When a child drops out of the class, you feel kind of like the shepherd with a hundred sheep who lost one. You

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want to go in search of the lost sheep. In this case though, we have to continue to pray and trust that God will lead Olly and his parents to the resources they need.

Like the previous week, we received word that another child would be joining for Week 3. Unfortunately, that never materialized, and by week 3 we had more or less settled in with our regular 15 children. In week 3, we addressed dealing with feelings of anger. The children were clearly starting to get a little more comfortable with the Safe Keepers, and us with them. As we worked through workbook activities and played games, we chatted about life and worked on furthering that relationship that would allow us to speak truth into their lives.

God began to really work on the hearts of several of our leaders following the night of Week 3. Mary and Carl had a conversation that night and sent out an e-mail asking for any suggestions for changes in the format of the class. Specifically, they were wrestling with how to incorporate more one-on-one time with the kids to give them more of an opportunity to connect. Likewise, God had been working on my heart, and I had been praying about how to make some suggestions without seeming critical of the way they were handling the class.

In hindsight, I know that they would have been receptive to suggestions, but given that I was new to the ministry I wasn't ready to risk ruffling feathers. In the end, God worked it out and laid the same thoughts and ambitions on all of our hearts. The long and short of it was that we decided to combine some of the things we had been doing to save time and allow for some more one-on-one time in small groups. We also moved some of the Q&A following the movies to a small group format and shortened the stories from the book. Our goal was to create more time for leaders to get to know what was going on in the kids' lives and more time for kids to open up about things they were struggling with. I'm not sure we ever perfected this, but I for one was grateful for leadership that was willing to reevaluate and make changes at God's prompting, for the betterment of the ministry and in the best interest of the kids.

As I was preparing for Week 4, it happened. For the first time in my personal experience with this ministry, I got the e-mail that both infuriated me and ripped at my heart. Mary sent out an e-mail a couple of days before our Week 4 class letting all of us know that she had heard from Cassie and Kylie's mother. They had gone to visit their father in prison earlier in the week. That visit had ended with their father yelling at them and telling them that he never wanted to see them again. In an instant, my heart broke for those girls. As quickly as God had reminded me on night one that these are still just kids, he reminded me that they are kids in a painful situation facing realities that no kid should have to face. For the first of several times related to this particular DC4K, I was reduced to tears.

Suddenly, everything made more sense. In prior weeks we had joked around about the fact that Cassie would not speak in class and about how quiet Kylie was. What had seemed like a personality quirk suddenly made perfect sense. How would you react if your father told you he never wanted to see you again? What if you were 10 years old?



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My time in DC4K changed from that moment. I was more driven with more resolve. So many of the kids in our class had been let down by one or both of their parents, and it became my goal and passion to replace that – not with my own love or caring, though I was willing to give them that too, but with the love of a Heavenly Father who will never leave them and never forsake them. God opened my eyes in that moment in a whole new way to the need for Him in these children’s lives. I resolved to do whatever I could do to open their eyes to Him and to be the hands and feet of Jesus to these kids.

The air was little heavier the night of Week 4 at DC4K than in previous weeks. The reality of the hardships of divorce had hit home in our little class in a very real way given the situation with Cassie and Kylie. The theme for Week 4 was, “God’s plan for Me,” and it was important for all of us to remember, given the circumstances, that God is always in control even when things seem very bleak, and out of the ashes of a broken home and broken lives, God alone can lift us up.

Week 5 marked the second week of our “assigned” small groups. I noticed the kids beginning to open up more and more as they got to know us and know one another a little bit better. God has a way of working things out in terms of timing, and the theme for Week 5 was “I am not alone.” Our activity out of the workbook for the week was designed to help the kids understand that other kids in their class were sharing similar experiences, and it really seemed to get the kids in my group talking to one another a little more.

Following our Week 5 class, Mary was talking to some of us about a conversation she had had with Ella and Katy’s mom. According to their mother, Ella was having problems in school and they were having all kinds of problems with her attitude. Several of us had noticed a pattern over the couple of weeks prior that Ella’s mom would focus on very negative things in her initial interactions with Ella when picking her up. We heard things like, “I hope you’re being better than you were when I dropped you off,” and “Your attitude better have changed while you were here,” instead of “Hello” or “How was class?” Other leaders shared that they had had conversations with Ella’s mom where she had expressed that she sometimes wished she could just get rid of Ella. Ellen also told us that Ella had shared with her that her mom wouldn’t let Ella see her dad even when she was supposed to. All of this came as quite a surprise to all of us as Ella had been nothing but delightful in our DC4K class.

Between Week 5 and Week 6, Mary sent an e-mail to Ella’s mom. She was kind enough to share that e-mail with the rest of us. In it, Mary shared in detail about her own story and her experiences with her kids following divorce. I was touched by her openness and willingness to share her own story to try to reach out to a parent of one of the kids in our class in order to help that child. I was encouraged by the level of commitment and compassion of my fellow Safe Keepers for these kids in our class.

We also found out between Weeks 5 and 6 that Suzie and Haley, who had missed Week 5, would also be missing some upcoming classes for various reasons. It was one thing to have a child not come back after one week. It was quite another to face the prospect of these kids who you have started to form relationships with not come back at all.



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Week 6 afforded me the opportunity to remember to celebrate the little things. The kids were excited for trick or treat which was coming up the next week, and I spent some time talking to each of the kids at my table about their costumes, their favorite candy, and all things related to Halloween. The kids were very willing to share. We were having a great conversation, but Cassie still refused to open up or even talk at all. She would participate in answering Yes/No questions, but anything more than that still met with a shrug of the shoulders.

When she wouldn't share what she was dressing up as for Halloween, I made a deal with her. I would guess her costume by the end of the night or she would promise to tell me what she was dressing up as. When she agreed (by nodding of course), I proceeded to guess some of the most silly and outrageous costume ideas that I could think of. I couldn't get her to talk to me, but many of my suggestions drew smiles or that elementary school girl role of the eyes that says, "you're crazy." At the end of the night, it was time for Cassie to make good on our deal, and she did tell me that she was dressing up as a butterfly and looking forward to it. It was good to hear her voice. Sometimes, it is the little things from which we must draw encouragement, and I was encouraged just to get her to talk for a minute.

Also during our Week 6 class, Mary took some time to talk to me about Ella during our movie time. Her mom had talked to Mary a little more about the situation and explained that Ella was having anger management problems. Mary wanted to know if I was aware of any resources she could suggest to Ella's mom to help her with that problem. Again, I was a little surprised because we had not seen any indications of anger from Ella during our class, but I let Mary know that I would have a look and get back to her. It was that conversation that jump started our [Dealing With the Emotions of Divorce](#) series on [DivorceMinistry4Kids.com](#) as I spent that week putting together the first installment in that series on [Dealing with Anger](#).

Ella and Katy were the last two to get picked up that night after class. As Ella's mom picked her up, there was the now usual exchange between them about Ella's attitude. As her mom began to run through the list of Ella's "problems," Ella finally broke down and began to respond/unload. The two of them went back and forth for 10 to 15 minutes as Ella shared how she felt that her mother loved her little sister more and how she didn't like her mother's new boyfriend. Ella's mom reacted defensively and by lashing out even more at Ella.

Mary mediated the situation as best she could. I was impressed by her patience and compassion. I'm certain that I could not have showed the same had I been in her position. Because of the setup of the room a couple of us were "trapped" by the situation unfolding in the hallway, and there was little we could do other than listen. Finally, as Ella stormed out of the building and her mom was still talking to Mary, I excused myself and went outside to make sure that Ella was ok. As I drove home that night, my heart broke once again for a little girl who clearly just wanted a little attention and love from her mother but whose mother was so caught up in her own situation that she couldn't even see how much her child was hurting.

The following week, we had to cancel our class as it conflicted with the local trick or treat night. It was strange that night not to be driving out to see our kids, but in the end it worked out well as it allowed us to end our class just before Christmas which was kind of special. When we came back two weeks later for Week 7, the theme



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was “Developing New Relationships.” It was great to see the kids again and hear their stories from Halloween and trick-or-treating.

One of the funnier stories (there were many) from our class actually happened during this week. During our discussion of new relationships following the “Kids Like Me” DVD, we were talking about step parents. Alice, one of the leaders, shared that her mother had just gotten remarried. One of the kids asked how old she was, and Alice shared that her mother was fifty years old. To that, Suzie replied,

*“Fifty? That’s old! How did she get a man?”*

It was a good moment, and we all got a laugh out of it, especially those of us who don’t view fifty as all that old anymore.

In Week 8, we discussed a topic which is very real to many children of divorce but oftentimes I think overlooked by others. The theme for the night was “Developing Money Smarts,” and we talked to the kids about handling money well and why things often change financially following parents’ divorce. We introduced “chores” that the kids could do to earn money in class and a store that they would be able to spend the money at on the last night of class. Suzie and Haley missed class again which was, unfortunately, happening more and more frequently.

Mary was out for a prior obligation on Week 9 which left Carl to head up class for that week. The topic was “It’s Not My Fault.” A couple of the other Safe Keepers were also out that week leaving us with a limited number of leaders. We played a game with bandanas and bean bags this week where the kids tried to pass the bean bags to one another using the bandanas held at either end by a child to throw them. It started out kind of slow, but the kids seemed to pick it up by the end. Week 9 was our last week before Thanksgiving, and there was to be no class the next week for the holiday.

Over the Thanksgiving week, we received word that Barbara’s parents’ house had caught fire early Thanksgiving morning, and our prayers went out to them and Barbara’s family. In my years in ministry, I have always been amazed at how easy it is to connect with those who you are working with when you share a passion for ministry. In a couple of short months, meeting for only a couple of hours each week, it is amazing how God can build relationships amongst the members of His family in such a way that you really feel their losses and celebrate their successes. One of the great joys of working in DC4K, second only to meeting our kids, was meeting and getting to know a great group of leaders.

We reconvened after Thanksgiving for Week #10. As we headed into Week 10, the fact that the end of our class was fast approaching really started to set in. As exciting as the prospect of sending these kids on their way with, hopefully, some new skills to bring to bear on their situation and a better knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ and the healing power of God was, it was also bittersweet to begin to realize that our weekly meetings would soon be over.

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The topic Week #10 was “Telling My Parents How I Feel.” We had a fairly full class as most of the kids were there, and it was great to hear about how they spent their Thanksgiving Holidays. There were, of course, some stories of kids who missed spending the holiday with one parent or another, but for the most part this group of kids seemed to have a good holiday.

We did have one slightly disturbing moment in Week #10 that reminded me that these children of divorce have a tendency to “grow up quicker” than children from intact families. At one point during our discussions, the conversation turned to school, and Suzie explained that her grades were better now because she had figured out that if you “flirt with the math teacher, you get a better grade.” She’s in fifth grade, and it was eye opening to me to hear someone her age say something like that. Unfortunately, Week 10 was the last week that Suzie came to DC4K as she started basketball the next week and could no longer make it. We also found out during week 10 that Suzie and Hayley’s parents might be getting back together. They were both excited about that prospect, and I pray for their sake that it happens. I also pray that they are not further hurt by their parent’s talking about getting back together if it does not happen.

The theme for Week 11 was forgiveness. We spent some time talking about how holding on to a grudge poisons the person who can’t forgive and included an object lesson wherein we cleaned pennies. We decided during this week to put together a refrigerator magnet for the kids that would have all of the phone numbers and e-mail addresses of the Safe Keepers.

As Week 12 approached, Mary sent out an e-mail explaining that she was trying to condense the last couple of weeks into one-and-a-half classes to leave us plenty of time in Week 13 for a graduation ceremony and a celebration. We started Week 12 in a very small room compared the rooms we had been used to because the preschool that uses the building during the day was having their Christmas program. Not only was the room smaller, whoever teaches in their during the day uses every inch of available space, so things were cramped.

As class was scheduled to start, we only had three kids there, and it looked like it was going to be a very slow night. One of the nice things about not having as many kids was getting an opportunity to spend some one-on-one time with them. For example, I found out that Henry was a real lady’s man. He told us all about his girlfriend and everything he like to do for her. I thought he was weaving tall tales, but Gabby backed him up on it, and I know enough about brothers and sisters to know that she would have ratted him out if he had been at all exaggerating.

I also had the chance to talk to Gabby a little more who opened up about a counseling sessions she had coming up at school later that week. She was nervous about it and just wanted to talk about it for a few minutes. Her father was coming to the counseling session because, in her words, they “had some things they needed to work out.” I found out that the school counselor had suggested it. Gabby was excited about the prospect of working things out, but she was also extremely anxious that her father might not be too happy about it. I reassured her that it was better in the long to get things out in the open regardless of the short term responses and let her know that I would be praying for her. Talking about it seemed to ease her nerves a little bit.



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More children showed up as class rolled along, and by the time we moved back over to our regular room, we were up to about eight kids. We worked on a “Kindness Plaque” project. Each child and Safe Keeper has a kindness plaque (a piece of construction paper with yarn attached at two corners to make it into a necklace of sorts). We went around the room and had each child and Safe Keeper signed everyone’s kindness plaque saying at least one kind thing about them. It was a lot like yearbook day in junior high when you hand your yearbook to people so they can write whatever they want in it. We finished the plaques during Week 13 so that as many kids as possible could write on them.

In the hustle and bustle of the classes, I didn’t really sit down to read what each of the children had written until I got home after Week 13. When I did, the emotions welled up inside of me like never before. I laughed on more time at Lily who, in her typical goofy fashion, had signed her sister Rosey’s name to everyone’s plaque. My heart was touched by Henry who wrote simply, “You are my best friend.” I chuckled at the one young girl who didn’t quite understand the idea and wrote, “I can’t go to the zoo. I like to go to the zoo.” I relished comments like “You Rock!” and “I love you Mr. Wayne.” Our time together had just ended, and I already missed these kids (and these adults) who I had not even known just four months earlier. I rest comfortable in the knowledge that they are in the hands of a benevolent God who loves them more than we could ever hope to, but at the same time mourn the passing of our weekly time together. I hope they will take advantage of the phone and e-mail list and get in touch with me at some point. I hope, years from now, to hear that they are doing well – to hear that through the love of Jesus they have overcome the circumstances that were thrust upon them. In my mind, and in my heart, they will always be “my kids.”

Week 13 started like any other, but the mood was a little bit different in the room. There was an excitement in the air as Christmas was just three days away, but there was also a sense of finality. It was not they we would never hear from these kids again – I hope we will, but our weekly committed time with them was drawing to a close. The kids all had an opportunity to spend their money at the store which was a big hit, and we watched the last installment of the video. However, we had scaled back so far to make sure we had enough time left for graduation that, for the first time in 13 weeks, we had about 30 minutes left over. The nice thing about have class at the YMCA was that we were able to go down to the basketball courts and just play around with the kids for 30 minutes – no agenda, no lesson, just good old fashioned fun. I ended up playing basketball with Cassie. She was obviously comfortable on the basketball court, and in that setting she opened up and actually started talking a bit during our game of Horse. I found out that she really liked basketball and that she used to play but had recently stopped. After 13 weeks of trying, sometimes a little too hard, it was heartwarming to actually have a conversation with her.

I brought my camera to Week 13 to capture some moments as well which led to great fun with Gabby who, as I found out, hates to have her picture taken. Try as she did to avoid the camera, I let her know that I would get some pictures of her before the end of the night, and sure enough I did. We had a lot of fun with though as she tried to cover her face, and I tried to take picture without her noticing. All in all, it was just a fun night.

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As our final class came to a close, we invited the parents back into the room for a graduation ceremony. Each of the children was presented with a gift (a bible) and a certificate for completing the class. That was followed by a social time with drinks and cookies. It was nice to have an opportunity to talk to some of the parents one-on-one about their kids and what a blessing they had been to me and the other Safe Keepers. During the course of the party, I overheard that Cassie and Kylie's mother was considering taking them to the church that sponsored the class. That was great to hear, and I pray that those girls continue to learn about their Heavenly Father who will never leave them and never forsake them.

When we talked to Cassie's mom about how quiet she had been, her mom said offhand, "You should see her on Facebook. She's not that quiet on there." We jumped at that opportunity, and at least three of the Safe Keepers from that class are now friends with Cassie on Facebook. It has been nice to be able to keep up with her there in the weeks since class ended.

I also found out from Gabby's mom that Gabby is planning on coming to our class again next year, but this time as a Safe Keeper herself. She was such a joy in class and a great help with the younger kids, so I am looking forward to seeing her again when the next class starts.

As I drove home that night, I talked to God. I thanked him for the opportunity to serve His kids in that way, and I prayed that He would keep them and protect them as well as all of the other Safe Keepers in the class. There was no doubt that those kids had impacted my life more than they will ever know, and I hope that God worked through me to impact their lives in some small way as well. It has been over a month now since our class ended, and every Thursday night I still think back on our DC4K class. I am looking forward to starting up again later this year.

### ***How Do I Find a DC4K Group in My Area?***

Go to <http://www.dc4k.org/findagroup> and enter your zip code, or search internationally, to find a group in your area.

### ***Is DC4K Related to Divorce Ministry 4 Kids?***

No, but we share many of the same goals. Find out more on our [About Page](#).

