



HOW TO ENCOURAGE CHILDREN OF DIVORCE

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By Linda Ranson Jacobs

03/22/2013

Last week when we talked about [the power of encouragement](#), so this week let's go deeper in the power of encouragement.



Many children's leaders actually end up discouraging the very children we want to encourage and should be encouraging. Our conversations can set the stage for discouragement by how we approach a subject or by the very words we use. When children are discouraged their fears are stirred up and their sense of failure becomes paramount in their minds.

Kids who are fresh in the divorce experience may already feel a sense of failure. They may think the reason a parent left is because they weren't good enough and they begin to measure everything they do by this plumb line. Karen

Stephens says,

"Kids can become so stressed they freeze, cry, give up, or quit trying all together ..."¹

It is the child's perception of the situation and a child's perception is never wrong because it is how they perceive things to be.

Children's leaders can begin by listening to the child's perspective. Try to determine what their perception is. Let's say a child comes into your Sunday morning group, and you are getting ready to play a game. The last time you played this game the child had a hard time understanding the dynamics of the game. This Sunday, one of the adults says,

"Remember today to follow the rules of the game. Don't be doing your own thing because your team is counting on you."

While the adult may think they are encouraging everyone, for this child you have just discouraged them by reminding them they don't fit on a team very well because they aren't good enough - just like they weren't good enough to be on their parent's team. It would be better to build up the child's confidence by reminding them of something positive they did when you played the game last time.

¹ www.ChildCareExchange.com Parenting Exchange Library, "Building Self Esteem #1 by Karen Stephens





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“Sarah, remember how last time we played this game. You were standing on one foot like this when you quoted the scripture and then you realized what you were doing and started laughing? Because you were laughing you made this game so much fun for everyone.”

Andrew Loh in the article, “The Power of Praising and Encouragement” says,

“The effort of praising is far more encouraging for your children than to praise the outcome. When you praise and encourage your children, when they are working very hard to perform best in their classes, you are actually praising and encouraging them for their effort.”²

Start thinking about how you can praise a child’s effort instead of praising the outcome.

“Hey you are beginning to get the hang of memorizing those scriptures. Your practicing them in front of your mirror is really making a difference.”

Another element of encouraging children of divorce is your body language. Children of divorce are intuitive and they read body language very well. They have to in order to survive living in two worlds. Kind and soft facial expressions will go a long way in encouraging them. A gentle touch when encouraging them may make a world of difference in how they perceive your true thoughts about them. We want to build the child’s confidence and their self-pride in their accomplishments. We have to mean and feel what we say to them. Sometimes this might mean having to pray about our own attitudes toward the child who refuses to accommodate us. Softening our voices and our touch will go a long way in reminding our bodies about the art of encouraging the child before you.

Be excited and positive when working with the child of divorce. Howard Baston, pastor of First Baptist Church of Amarillo, TX in a sermon about the power of encouragement said,

“Encouragers are pleasant to be around because they are optimistic and enthusiastic. They have a quiet self-confidence about themselves which enables them to focus on others, rather than demanding constant attention to fulfill their own emotional needs. Encouragers, by nature, are other-focused and not self-focused.”³

Many children of divorce are used to being around someone who has to fulfill their own emotional needs first and are self-focused and many of these kids want nothing to do with that at church.

² <http://www.brainy-child.com/article/praising-encouragement.shtml>

³ <http://www.ethicsdaily.com/the-power-of-encouragement-cms-15024>





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Paul, one of the greatest encouragers of the New Testament, wrote to the Colossians,

“Tychicus will tell you all the news about me. He is a dear brother, a faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord.” Colossians 4:7 (NIV)

Without saying the word “encourage” he did it through positive comments and describing what was about to happen. To both Timothy and Titus, Paul through various scriptures and commands said, “Encourage your churches.”

Can we do any less for the child of divorce?

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.

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>).

