



THE KIDS ARE HERE AGAIN!

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By Linda Ranson Jacobs

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The other day I was walking along the beach in the early morning when I happened upon a dad and son. The little boy, who appeared to be about 4, was frolicking in the waves and splashing water everywhere.

I could tell as I approached the scene what was going on. I've seen it so many times before. Probably because we live in Florida, where there are nice beaches and a lot of fun activities to do with children, we have a lot of parents bring their children here for a fun time. I can usually spot a single parent with their visiting children right away. They seem to flood our area during the spring and summer.

I knew that this was a noncustodial parent who had his son visiting for a few weeks. I knew because the dad was not interacting much with the son. He had a more or less bored look on his face. If the truth were told, the dad probably doesn't have much of a relationship with his son.

He doesn't have a clue what his son likes to do. He doesn't know what his son likes to eat. He doesn't know how to communicate or talk to his son. In fact his son is really a stranger to him. In many situations like this, the child has been primed to be excited to get to visit his daddy. And children being children will get excited to go to the beach or Disney World or any child like place where kids are treated special.

I've come to realize over the years that when two people divorce and one parent moves a long distance away, the relationship of the child and non-custodial parent suffers. Unless the long distant parent makes a concerted effort, a parent child relationship doesn't develop. They are connected through blood only.

The long distant parent moves forward with life. Day to day activities, work and probably a new relationship begin to absorb the parent's attention. The far away child is never forgotten but many long distant parents don't develop that parent child relationship the way it should be developed.

Many long distant parents feel obligated to stay in touch and do the holiday and two-week summer visitation routine. As children grow and become entrenched in their own world, the far away parent is simply that – far away.





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For children to develop a relationship with their parent it takes:

- Spending time together
- Doing things together
- Learning about each other's likes and dislikes
- Talking and communicating regularly
- The child being able to depend upon the adult to keep them safe
- Creating memories
- Unconditional love

It becomes meaningful when a child feels protected and secure when in the presence of the adult

Long distant parents don't have to stay distant. I've seen many long distant parents continue to be active in their children's lives. Years ago, I had three children in my child care in Oklahoma whose dad lived in Arizona. This man went out of his way to continue the relationship he had with his three children.

One year at Easter he surprised them by showing up a day earlier than the kids expected him and he showed up in an Easter bunny costume. Do you have any idea how special that was to his three kids? They knew that their dad went out of his way and was and out of his comfort zone. This dad had his kids' respect.

I never saw that "bored" look on his face when his kids were with him. The look on his face was one of pride. It was a look of love. Every so often I also saw the look of agony and hurt when he had to tell them goodbye again. The kids never saw that look, as it would pass only between him and me. He kept it together for his kids, but I wonder if many times he let the tears fall as he drove back to Arizona.

This dad and many other long distant parents work at creating memories. I had a man tell me the other day "No one can take the memories away." This was a man who didn't grow up with his birth father. He grew up with a man who adopted him and treated him like his own son. But the man had memories from when he was 3 and 4 years of age and spent time with the birth dad's family. Those memories are finely etched in his brain.

If you work with single parents, encourage them to make memories. If you know any parents who are long distant parents, help them learn how to create a relationship with their kids.

If you need tips read "[When a Parent Lives Out of State... How Does That Parent Connect with the Children?](#)"

What are some suggestions you have to help a long distant parent stay connected to their children?





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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>).

