



HOW DO YOU KEEP A DIVORCED FAMILY IN CHURCH FOLLOWING THE DIVORCE?

By Linda Ranson Jacobs

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Nationally the majority of divorcing families leave the church. Some might stay and in rare situations both partners try to stay involved in the same church. But for the most part after a divorce, the family fades away never to be seen at church again.

Some of the research on adult children of divorce shows that many children are almost as disappointed with the church for their lack of empathy and neglect as they were at the parent who left the home. What can a church do to help the divorcing single parent family stay connected to the church?

#1: Learn and understand what is going on in the family

What do church leaders really know about divorcing families? Many know that divorcing families are messy. They know there is usually some fighting going on between the two people. They know there are many problems associated with the divorce. But how many really know what the problems are? What are the problems related to? I'm not saying you need to know all the lurid details but it does help to have an understanding of the situation.



Recently a single mom in my group complained because she had some visitors from the church come to her door. She told me that when she opened the door there stood two men. They had their "church shirts" on. You know the ones with the church logo and name. But that didn't quell her skittish feelings. She didn't feel comfortable letting two men into her house on a dark evening. Of course the men meant no harm but she felt uncomfortable with the situation.

One reason a divorcing mom might feel uncomfortable is because if she is in the middle of a messy divorce she doesn't know if the ex is having someone watch her comings and goings and who is visiting her home. Entertaining two strange men on a dark night might not bode well in a court hearing. How many church leaders would ever think about that issue? Not many. A simple act of letting a new visitor know they are welcomed in the church can cause undo stress and anxiety on the part of that visitor based on their circumstances.





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#2: Love on them

I mean truly and earnestly love on them. Accept who they are. So what if they come to church not dressed like most of the women in the church? So what if they don't measure up to the other businessmen in the church? They need you, and they need for you to care. If it were your own brother or sister experiencing a fractured family situation you would be there for them. Be there for your Christian brother or sister. They don't need for you to stare at them. Many divorcing people become perceptive and they learn to read the looks on faces. They recognize the look of judgment on former friends' faces, and that judgment hurts. Turn your feelings and your judgments over to the Lord. Let Him be the judge of their sins.

Ask if they want a hug. Some people from fractured families want to be hugged while others want to steer clear of anything physical. I had one single dad that always said "no" and backed away when I would ask if he wanted a hug. One afternoon he spent three hours at my house talking about his teenage son. Evidently he now feels more comfortable receiving a hug from me. I had another older man tell me that to this day he remembers the first time he visited a church I attended in Oklahoma. He said he was a stranger and feeling very alone and lonely at that church until I asked if he needed a hug. He said it was that one short hug that made him feel comfortable in the church.

#3: Listen to their eyes

What are their eyes telling you? If you look closely you can see the hurt in their eyes. Many won't make eye contact with you or they will look into space when talking to you.

I didn't realize that I was doing that during my divorce. It was that I just hurt so much that I was afraid if I looked at people when I was talking they would see how much I was hurting. Second thing was I was afraid I would start bawling. I felt like I was always on the verge of tears and I was afraid if the tears started I wouldn't be able to stop.

#4: Learn to recognize the broken hearts

You can see it in how they carry themselves – beat down and depressed. They may sigh a lot. Learn to recognize those sighs. Others will let the divorce define who they are. In other words their entire being is based upon the divorce. Instead of going through a divorce, the divorce becomes who they are. They eat, talk and sleep divorce. These people especially need to remember the love of the Lord and that Jesus Christ suffered and died for their sins. They need to be prayed for. Find a scripture and put that person's name in the scripture and pray it upon them.





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#5: Fractured families need practical helps

Always remember to include child care when hosting church activities. Single parents have no one at home to watch the kids when there are meetings at church.

Provide respite days for grandparents parenting again especially if they are single grandparents. A respite day would be when the children are whisked away to another home for the day or weekend in order to give a tired grandmother and or grandfather a break.

Provide testimony times when people from fractured families have an opportunity to tell their stories. Everyone has a story. Some have a story with a testimony about how God brought them through the rough patches. These storytelling times give people a chance to develop understanding. They also give opportunities for friendships to develop.

If you don't want to start an entire single parent ministry, think about alerting and educating your adult teachers and leaders what it's like to parent alone. If you have a single dad attend your church, it's okay for him to go to the men's class or small group. Encourage that group to welcome that single dad and even possibly address some of his concerns with the group.

If you have a single mom the same holds true for her. She needs to be welcomed and the ladies need to embrace her with loving arms. Too many times the single mom feels judged and left out. Ladies from two-parent homes can extend the hand of friendship to the lonely single mom.

If you host parenting classes or the head minister preaches on discipline, remember the single parent. If at all possible make a couple of comments to include the single parent. Recently I was at a children's minister's conference and one of the keynote speakers stopped in the middle of his talk and said, "Being a single parent must be the toughest job in the world. I don't know how they do all that they have to do." Just those few words felt comfortable and reassuring to me. It said to me that this minister was beginning to understand the role of being a single parent and what a hard job it is.

Allow everyone a chance to be part of the family of God. Allow everyone to contribute to the family of God and to feel comfortable and free to worship and praise a mighty God.

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



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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>).