



6 THINGS EVERY CHILD OF DIVORCE NEEDS

By Wayne D. Stocks

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Every child of divorce is different and unique, and how you work with and for that child must be tailored to their personality, circumstances and environment. That said, there are some common things that all children of divorce need. If you work with kids, you need to be prepared to offer these to them. Likewise, as the church, we must work to ensure that our ministries and our congregants are equipped to offer these six basic needs to children from disrupted families.



1. LOVE

The first thing every child of divorce needs, indeed every child for that matter, is adults in their life who love them and model the love of Christ for them. While a divorce will not cause parents to love their children any less, it will cause children to question whether their parents still love them. On top of all that, the emotions and stress that comes along with a divorce takes time away that parents might otherwise spend with their kids and may leave parents emotionally drained and incapable of adequately expressing their love for their children. As a result, children from disrupted families are often left with a love tank on empty and desperately seeking attention and affection. Find appropriate ways to show the child of divorce that you are there for them and that you love them. Demonstrate the sacrificial love of Christ to them and for them. Read 1 Corinthians 13 and challenge yourself to show them love as defined in that chapter. You may be the one person in the life of a child from a disrupted family that keeps that child from seeking love and attention in destructive places.

2. HOPE

Next, the child of divorce needs hope. Stuck smack dab in the middle of a situation they had no say in and faced with overwhelming chaos and confusion from all the changes going on in their family and in their lives, the child of divorce can easily lose hope. The people who sheltered them and loved them and cleaned up so many of the messes of the outside world are now bringing those very messes into the child's life, and it's easy for the child to assume that things will never get better. Be the voice of hope to that child. Mourn with them the loss of the way things used to be, empathize with them for the way things are, but above all give them hope that things will get better and it won't always be this way. Even if it seems hollow to them, or to you, reassure them that God still loves them and He will see them through this.

3. TRUTH

You should never ever lie to any child, but that is especially true for the child of divorce. For kids already struggling with the idea that the adults who they trusted the most in the world have let them down, it is essential that they only get the truth from you. Answer their questions in age appropriate ways, but strive to answer them as honestly as possible. If you don't know the answer to their questions, be honest about that





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too. Try to help them find answers, but if you can't or you just don't know, be upfront with them about that too. Finally, never promise anything big or small that you won't (or might not) follow through on. You don't want to end up on what will seem like an ever-growing list of grownups who have let them down.

4. **ESCAPE**

Divorce can become all-consuming for all parties involved, and that includes the kids. While you should encourage kids to deal with their emotions related to the divorce and the resulting circumstances, it is also a good idea to give them time away from thinking about and dealing with the divorce. You can provide opportunities for them to just be kids again and escape from the stress and the fighting and everything else going on in their home. Remind them in word and deed that it is ok to be happy and to laugh and to have fun. So many kids stuck in the middle of the destruction of their family feel guilty when they take time to enjoy themselves. Remind them that not only do they have nothing to feel guilty for, but they need to take time to unwind and have some fun.

5. **TIME**

"Time heals all wounds" is an old cliché and can cause a lot more harm than good when offered as flippant comfort to a hurting child. That said, like most clichés, there is some truth behind the idea. When divorce is new to a child, the wound is fresh and things seem like they will never get any better. The pain seems like it will never end and grief seems like an endless process. However, as time passes, and the child moves through the stages of grief, time alone will help to dull the pain a little bit and offer hope that things will not always be this bad. Understand in working with children from disrupted homes that sometimes what they need most is just time – time to adjust, time to grieve, time to accept, time to hurt and time to heal. Don't pressure a child of divorce to process the things going on in their life any quicker or slower than they are willing and capable of doing it.

6. **CHRIST**

There are plenty of practical things you can do for, and offer to, the child of divorce, but there is none more effective or eternal than a relationship with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Ultimate hope and healing comes through a saving knowledge of Christ and the transformative power of a life lived for and through Him. Yes, you should provide them with practical tools and knowledge to help them deal with the fall out of living through the divorce of their parents. No, you should not use their personal tragedy as an opportunity to coerce them into a relationship with Christ. But absolutely yes, remind them that they have a Heavenly Father who will never leave them or forsake them – an Eternal Physician who can heal all their wounds – a Great Comforter who will wipe away every tear – and a Loving Savior who knows what is best for them and offered himself up on the cross because he wants a relationship with them.

