



BRINGING A DIVORCED FAMILY TOGETHER AT CHRISTMAS

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By Linda Ranson Jacobs

12/16/2011



Many times in children's ministries at Christmas time you will hear children of divorce voice their concern about Christmas and their missing parent. These children may express the desire for the missing parent to come home again. Your first inclination might be to jump in and try to help this family celebrate a Merry Christmas with everyone together again. I would caution you to be very careful in attempting an endeavor like this.

There are many reasons this should not happen. If it is the first Christmas a family

has been separated, children may be exhibiting sadness and apprehension about the approaching holidays. Some might even beg their parents to celebrate Christmas together. Many times this is done in the hopes that their parents will remember how much they used to love each other. Kids will be dreaming and maybe even conniving about how to "help" their parents fall in love again.

Sometimes it is one of the parents who may be unduly influencing the child. For some children they may be getting pressure from the parent that was left. That parent may be feeding the child ideas so the child will try and convince the other parent to return home just for the holidays or just for one day – Christmas.

Some divorced parents may come to you asking for your help. They may say it's best for the kids if the other parent will just return home for the holidays. Keep in mind that the family unit the kids have known has changed. The kids may be getting used to a new schedule and routines. While they may want the other parent to come home, they have been learning how to live in two different homes. If the parent comes home, it will mean another change for the children to experience. And then, what happens if (and generally when) the parent leaves again right after Christmas?

Some perceptive children will be worried about forcing a parent to return when the parent really doesn't want to be there. Kids who have experienced a separation of their parents can sense when there are further problems between the parents. While we all want to see marriages saved, it is up to the couple to invest in their marriage.

What can you do as a children's minister or children's worker? Empathize and listen to the hurting children. Tell them you are sorry their parents are divorced at Christmas and you understand how upsetting this can be. Share





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a personal experience of a loss and how it affected you. Share things you did to help yourself including turning toward the Lord during the crisis.

Find a special book or a story about a divorced family at Christmas. If you need a story, read the story attached at the end of this article titled [Two Homes for Christmas – Really Two Homes?](#), or print it and send it home with the child. I wrote this story because I was teaching a DC4K class, and I wanted to do something special for the kids at Christmas. I wanted to give them something they could connect with. It is a true story about my kids at Christmas shortly after my divorce. Every time I've read it to kids, it sparks a wonderful discussion about how they have handled Christmas in the past. It also gives them ideas about how to handle Christmas now in a positive light. This story was originally published at www.hlp4.com/?q=node/156 and is available there in a downloadable and printable form.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: 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. More great articles about how to successfully minister to the child of divorce in your church can be found at Linda's website [Healthy Loving Partnerships for Our Kids \(HLP4\) \[http://www.hlp4.com\]](http://www.hlp4.com). Linda also offers support, encouragement, and suggestions to help single parents and those working with single parent children. She can be reached by e-mail at Linda@hlp4.com.





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Two Homes for Christmas – Really Two Homes?



Every year right before Christmas, Julie and Brian's mom would plan their Christmas decorating party for their family. But this year, Julie told her mom she didn't feel like they had a family anymore. Since their dad had moved out, Julie and Brian didn't feel like celebrating Christmas. Christmas meant being happy and buying presents and things.

Their mom said she understood how they felt but she was planning a Christmas decorating time anyway. She said this year their family was different. It would just be the three of them celebrating Christ's birthday. She told them,

"After all, it is still the celebration of Jesus' birthday. Don't you think Jesus deserves a celebration?"

She told Julie and Brian they would do things a little differently this year, but no matter how they felt, she was still having a Christmas celebration.

The evening came to set up the Christmas tree and put out all of the decorations. Mom made some special apple cider and cookies and put the cookies on Christmas plates. She carried all the boxes with their ornaments and Christmas decorations downstairs and started opening the boxes. Brian and Julie were mumbling and grumbling about putting up the tree. Mom heard them say things like,

"Why do we have to do this? It's not Christmas without Dad here!"

And,

"Some Christmas this is going to be when we don't have any money to buy presents,"

And,

"Are we ever going to have another happy Christmas?"





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Mom was trying so hard to be joyful, but the kids were not trying very hard to be happy. They were sad and angry about Christmas. Mom was unwrapping nativity scenes and putting them in the same places she always did. Julie was hanging ornaments on the tree. All of the sudden, Brian unwrapped the family wind chime. It had always been a tradition to hang the family wind chime on the front door. Hanging the wind chime on the front door meant that it was officially Christmastime in the Arnold household.

The family wind chime was a cute little ceramic house that had four people attached to it. All the people were dressed in winter clothes, and they looked like they were caroling together outside someone's house. There was the dad, the mom, Julie, and Brian standing right next to Julie. The little carolers had their names written under them.



As Brian stood there holding the wind chime, everyone froze. The three of them stood still for several seconds staring at it. Brian finally said,

"Uh, Mom, what about this? What are we going to do?"

Their mom just stood there staring at the name of the father who no longer lived in their house. All of a sudden Julie ran out of the room yelling,

"Hold on, I've got an idea."

She came rushing back with the scissors and handed them to her mom. Immediately her mom knew what to do. She reached up, grabbed the string and snipped the cute little father character right off the wind chime.

"Well, it's just the three of us now. Might as well make the most of it."

With a dramatic sweep of her arm, she opened the front door and hung the now-very-crooked-and unbalanced wind chime on the front door. As they all looked at it, they began to laugh. Brian said,

"Mom, that looks stupid."

Julie said,

"Nah, it's okay. It adds a little character to it."





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All they could do was laugh at how silly it looked. Brian said a few more comments, and they all laughed harder. Julie screeched out another silly comment, and they laughed even more. By this time the mom was laughing so hard that she had to sit down.

Mom looked around the room and said,

"You know, kids, it's time we started some new traditions. Let's get busy and move that tree to another place in this house. And let's change where we put the nativity scenes. Hey, Brian, would you like to take the father caroler up to your room and keep him in a special place? Or you can take him to your dad's apartment if you want. Your dad is still your dad even if he isn't here for Christmas. Let's also take out some of the ornaments, and you can take them to your dad's and put them on his tree if it's okay with him."

They got busy hanging their Christmas stockings in a different place. Mom let the kids take some tinsel to hang up in their bedrooms. Mom hung some big Christmas balls on her ears, and they looked like giant earrings. Julie made a necklace out of some of the little tiny ornaments. They even put tinsel on Snickers their dog. Snickers wasn't very happy about that!



Brian and Julie decided they could make this first Christmas without their dad living at home a good Christmas, or they could make it a sad and angry Christmas. They decided to do their best to have a happy and joyful Christmas. They both wanted to sing in the Christmas play at church; they decided to play Christmas music on Christmas Day; and they decided to

concentrate on it being a birthday celebration for Jesus and not just a day for them to get presents. Yes, they really did have two homes for Christmas, and you know what? It turned out all okay!

"And she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn" (Luke 2:7).

--- The End ---

