



THE INCREDIBLE AMAZING BRAIN IN CHILDREN OF DIVORCE:

Page 1 of 3

PART 2 - EMPATHY

By Linda Ranson Jacobs

01/27/2012



This week we continue our discussion of the incredible amazing brain in children of divorce. There is so much to know about the brain but for some reason those of us in the church realm haven't connected with the world of science to learn about how this research can benefit the children we work with in our children's ministries. Today the topic of empathy is an exciting one to me because as I read and understand the Bible. I see that Jesus brought empathy into the world full force.

Empathy is the ability to feel what someone else is feeling. It is the ability to place oneself in the situation a child or another person is experiencing. For the child of divorce, empathy is you in their life experiencing the break up of the intact family.

When you look at a situation from another person's perspective it gives you the ability to share their feelings.

Empathy is far different from sympathy. Sympathy is feeling or expressing pity or sorrow for a distress or pain that someone is experiencing. Upon learning of the death of a loved one of a friend, we might say, "I am sorry to hear of your loss." We have sorrow for them. Empathy is different because with empathy you are not just reacting to the emotions of someone else, you feel the same emotions they do.

Children of divorce need your empathy not your sympathy!

Many adult children of divorce will tell you they didn't like it when people felt sorry for them or pitied them. Many times it drove them deeper into themselves, and they refused to share, explore their feelings or open up.

When children of divorce (and other children in crisis or trauma) come into your church groups, they want you to understand what they are feeling. You might say they want to transfer the hurting heart, the sadness, the sense of depression, the fear or the anger to you. The key to perceiving their feelings lies in the ability to be able to read nonverbal clues such as tone of voice; facial expressions, gestures and body language. (Daniel Golman, "Emotional Intelligence" (Bantam) pg 96)

Let me share a personal experience with you I had at the elementary school where I volunteer after school with the chorus.





THE INCREDIBLE AMAZING BRAIN IN CHILDREN OF DIVORCE: PART 2 - EMPATHY

By Linda Ranson Jacobs

01/27/2012

The new semester brought new children into the chorus. One obviously distressed little girl approached me. Her face was red, she was wringing her hands, and tears were forming in the corner of her eyes while her shoulders were hunched over. The first thing I did was to make a quick observation of everything physical that was going on with her. The next thing was to place my hand on her shoulder and lean into her.

Then I said softly,

“What seems to be the problem.”

She explained that her mom told her not to come to chorus that day because mom had an appointment. She had forgotten, and now she didn't know how she was going to get home. I added empathy. I placed myself in her little eight-year old body and thought immediately how I would feel if I were she. I thought the best thing to do was take her to the office and have the secretary try to reach her mom.

As we walked to the office using my soft voice I said,

“Seems to me that you are really upset.”

I told her to breathe deeply, and we stopped and I demonstrated how to do that.

“What is causing you to be so upset?”

She said she was scared. I told her that I was a safe keeper (more on this concept later) and I was going to keep her safe. I smiled at her and put my hand on her shoulder as we walked.

In other words I had empathy for her. Eventually we were able to find out she was supposed to come to choir, and she had gotten mixed up with another day's situation. She then was able to sing her heart out like the other kids.

Many of us would have approached this girl with a quick fix and said something like,

“Oh come on now. You'll be okay. Your mom will find you. Don't worry. Now go back to your seat and sing with us.”

Or we might try to “happy up” the child and make her laugh or smile.

When I read the New Testament, I can visualize how Jesus had empathy for many people. For the little children, he pulled them up on His lap. He felt the hunger of the crowd and fed them. He drove out the demons. He





THE INCREDIBLE AMAZING BRAIN IN CHILDREN OF DIVORCE: PART 2 - EMPATHY

Page 3 of 3

By Linda Ranson Jacobs

01/27/2012

healed those with leprosy. He cried with Mary and Martha when their brother Lazarus died. On and on He cared for the people.

“He took up our infirmities and carried our diseases.” Matthew 8:17b (NIV)

He wasn't wimpy or coddling to them. He really cared about them.

“When Jesus had finish saying these thing, the crowd were amazed at this teaching, because he taught as one who had authority” Matthew 7:28 (NIV)

In a later article, we are going to talk about what happens in the brains of children when empathy is applied. There is so much more to discuss about the brain. But know that, for some kids of divorce, you might be the only empathetic Jesus voice they hear this week.

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.

