

CONNECTING THROUGH RITUAL

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By Linda Ranson Jacobs

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When parents divorce, children are more likely to lose their connections with those around them. Many of us in the Christian world have known that children are born to connect. We have observed and watched as children become disconnected. Many problems facing young people today are due in large part to our failure to meet the children's most basic human need for connectedness.

Rituals help children connect with you, the leaders. Rituals bond relationships together.

Divorce brings many changes to the child. The

child loses the two-parent home and access to both parents under the same roof. The children may experience the loss of their self-esteem and their sense of well-being. They may lose a lifestyle. They lose their things, and some even lose the home they have always known. Children may attach themselves to their things, and then when those things disappear, the children get confused. Things and possessions bring a sense of comfort, control and a sense of order to a child's life.

Connecting through rituals

With the divorce rate, our families have only gotten weaker. While we may not be able to stop the divorce rate immediately, we can assist the children and go to battle for them in this world of confusion. We can make the children stronger by connecting with them.

The following information is adapted from the book *Rituals for Our Times* by Evan Imber-Black, Ph.D., and Janine Roberts, Ed.D.

What are rituals?

- Rituals are points of connections. Rituals usually involve the performance of actions or procedures in a set, ordered and even ceremonial way.
- They are social interactions that are repeated, coordinated and significant. Rituals can be daily interactions or they could be once a year, but they're repeated. They are coordinated.
- One has to know what's expected of you and when to show up for the ritual.
- Rituals offer opportunities to make meaning from the familiar and the mysterious at the same time.

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Rituals and the Child of Divorce

In the book Rituals for Our Times, the authors state,

"Rituals are a central part of life whether it be in how meals are shared together or how major events are marked. They are the lens through which we can see our emotional connections to our parents, siblings, spouse, children, and dear friends. They connect us with our past, define our present life, and show us a path to our future as we pass on ceremonies, traditions, objects, symbols, and ways of being with each other handed down from previous generations."

But why do rituals need to be replaced for the child of divorce? Rituals are a living history. They are part of our family's living history. Children of divorce lose their family's living history or at the very least that history is altered. Children need to create rituals they can pass on to their children.

Dr. Becky Bailey who wrote Conscious Discipline says,

"Rituals are the emotional glue that holds relationships together."

Since so many children's relationships become strained and even nonexistent through the divorce, they need to be able to develop new points of connections. They need to connect. And they need to connect often.

She also says that rituals soothe the lower centers of our brain. That part of the brain, the brain stem, is about fight or flight. When children are in a stressful situation or when faced with divorce or other situations, they will go into the brain stem or fight or flight mode. Rituals soothe the brain and allow the child to move into the limbic system of the brain. With empathy added by the adults around them, we can move the child on up the brain to the cortex where the child can reason and think and rationalize what is going on.

Another aim for rituals, as far as children are concerned, is predictability. Children from divorced homes need predictability. They need to know they can depend on specific things happening at a specific time. So many times they have the perception that their lives are out of control and in disarray. Predictability lends itself to security. Routines also lend themselves to security in the child's life. But unlike routines, rituals involve that special feeling of connecting with another human being.

Rituals allow us to connect with each other in an emotional, intimate way. Children in divorced homes are losing the ability to explore and take part in rituals. To our children today, rituals are quickly becoming a lost art.

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As church leaders, you can help children and single parents develop healthy rituals. This can be especially advantageous when children have to travel between two homes. In Rituals for Our Times authors Evan Imber-Black and Janine Roberts state,

"The movement of children from one household to another requires special attention to the rituals of leaving and returning, as these express more complicated issues of family membership, loyalty or unresolved conflicts between parents. Children may receive the hidden message that they are not to express sadness in leaving one household to go to another and their good-bye ritual should be swift or secretive."

As church leaders, think of ways to create rituals with the children in your groups. It might be a hello ritual or a good-bye ritual. Almost anything can be turned into a ritual of connection, if the focus is on the relationship.

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.