

DEALING WITH THE EFFECTS OF DIVORCE ON KIDS

A Guide to Dealing With Feelings of Guilt

GUILT...A CONSISTENT EMOTION! The more you study children of divorce, and the more you talk to them one-on-one, the more you will find out that there is one emotion which virtually every child of divorce deals with at some point or another in processing their parents' divorce. That emotion is guilt! Almost without fail, children of divorce will tell you that, "I felt responsible for my parents divorce." Some children blame one parent or both. Some kids blame their circumstances. Some kids will even blame their brothers or sisters. Eventually though, most children of divorce blame themselves. It can be as simple as "If I hadn't fought with my brother," or as complex as, "I don't feel like I did enough to stop it," but these kids wrestle not only with the divorce itself but with an ingrained feeling that they were somehow responsible for it in the first place.

GUILT: a feeling of responsibility or remorse for some offense, crime, wrong, etc., whether real or imagined. (*dictionary.com*)

Scripture References About Guilt

Ps 46:1	2 Cor 5:17
Ps 51:10	2 Cor 5:21
Ps 103:12	Phil 3:13-14
Is 43:25	Col 3:13
Jon 2:2	Heb 4:16
Rom 5:11	Heb 8:12-13
Rom 8:1	Heb 9:14

Is It My Fault?



HELPING A CHILD WITH FEELINGS OF GUILT

- ✓ Talk to them.
- ✓ Pray with them.
- ✓ Give them an opportunity to express what they are feeling.
- ✓ Encourage them to be specific about what they think they did.
- ✓ Repeatedly assure them that they are not to blame for their parents' divorce.
- ✓ Find out what they think about the divorce.
- ✓ Help them to make sense of the divorce.
- ✓ Don't shut a child down when they are searching for answers.
- ✓ Don't tell them not to feel guilty – it doesn't help and may lead to even deeper feelings of guilt.

Why Children Think It's Their Fault

Younger children are very self-centered. The average preschooler believes that the world revolves around them and everything that happens in the world is the result of something they do. It is part of their maturing process. Accordingly, when their parents get divorced, they naturally conclude that it must have been the result of something they have done.

We condition our kids to assume that things are their fault. As they grow, we teach them by pointing out their mistakes and the consequences of those mistakes. Children learn by being told "no," and so when something bad happens, they have been trained to know that it is their fault.

Finally, many kids find it hard to blame their parents because their parents are "always right." Instead, they turn the blame on themselves and feel guilty.

INSIDE THE MIND OF A CHILD OF DIVORCE

- "If only I hadn't fought so much with my brother..."
- "If only I had kept my room clean..."
- "If only I hadn't made Mom mad that one time..."
- "If only I had been quiet when Dad was having a bad day..."
- "If only I had gotten better grades in school..."
- "If only I had behaved better..."
- "If only I had never been born..."

