

DEALING WITH THE EFFECTS OF DIVORCE ON KIDS

A Guide to Dealing With Feelings of Withdrawal

WITHDRAW: to remove oneself from some activity, competition, etc. (from dictionary.com)

WITHDRAWAL...A COMMON DEFENSE MECHANISM. One thing that is common to the vast majority of children of divorce is that they wish things could go back to the way they were. They long for the time before that moment when mom and/or dad told them they were getting a divorce or, worse yet, just walked out without saying a word. Children react to this in a variety of ways. Some children get angry and begin to lash out at their parents, at siblings, at other authority figures or at the closest available person. Some children tend towards overachieving as a means of coping. Most children end up blaming themselves at some point another. Then there are children who cope with this news by simply withdrawing. They may withdraw physically by giving up close friends, cherished hobbies and physical activity. Or, they may simply withdraw emotionally – turning inside and masking any expression of the emotions eating them up from the inside out. Either way, it is important to engage the withdrawn child. Help them to express their emotions. Life will never be the same for these kids, but you can help them to return to things which were important to them prior to the divorce.

CHILDREN OF DIVORCE AND WITHDRAWAL

Rather than face what is going on in their lives, many children of divorce will simply withdraw from the things which had previously been important to them including:

- Parents
- Friends
- Family Members
- Favorite Activities
- Hobbies
- School Activities
- Life in General

ONE-ON-ONE TIME

One of the best things you can do for a child who is showing signs of emotional or social withdrawal is to spend some time alone with that child. One-on-one time with the child will show him/her that they are important to you and “worth” your time. It will also provide you with an opportunity to engage them in a conversation about what they are feeling and going through.

SPENDING TIME ALONE VS. WITHDRAWAL

There is value in spending time alone, and the child of divorce may relish time to just be by themselves and not deal with the chaos that has come into their lives. Jesus often took time to himself. However, if the child always wants to be alone or never chooses to engage with other children, that might be a sign of an issue. A child may no longer find joy in the same things as they grow and mature, but if they no longer enjoy any activities, that is a sign of a greater problem.

Scripture References About Withdrawal

Ps 16:18	1 Cor 13:4-8
Ps 27:10	Gal 6:9
Pr 27:6	Phil 2:4
Is 49:15-16	Hb 10:24-25
Mt 7:12	1 Pt 4:8
Lk 14:25-27	1 Pt 5:7
Jn 15:13	1 Jn 1:7

*Many children of divorce spend a lot of time by themselves. Unfortunately, this combined with the stress of divorce can lead to more extreme types of withdrawal. Consider the following finding from Elizabeth Marquardt in her book *Between Two Worlds*: “If there is any single experience the unites children of divorce it is our feeling of loneliness as children. One of the most striking and far-reaching findings of the national survey is that just over a tenth of young people from intact families can identify with the experience ‘I was alone a lot as a child,’ whereas close to half of us from divorced families can. That’s an extraordinary threefold difference.”*

