



EVEN MORE MISTAKES WE'VE MADE WITH CHILDREN OF DIVORCE

By Linda Ranson Jacobs

10/12/2012

This week we conclude our discussion of the mistake we've made when working with the child of divorce and their out of control behaviors.

Mistake #6 – Time Out

We sent kids to time out to “think about what they had done”. Here's probably what really happened during that time.

Teacher:

Gage you go to time out. And you think about what you did.

Gage's self talk:

Sure I'll think about hitting that girl, and I'm gonna think about hitting again tomorrow too. She took my blocks when you weren't looking so tomorrow I'm gonna hit her again when you're not looking! I will NOT get caught tomorrow.

Or Gage's self talk:

What did I do wrong? I don't know what I did. How am I supposed to know what I did?

Or:

Yeah right. Like I'm going to sit here quietly. Ha, ha. I'll get your attention lady.

Gage then proceeded to sit under the chair, around the chair, picked up the chair, etc. And what happened? He got our attention all right.

Today we realize that some kids need time away. They might need to take a break to calm down. Many teachers are encouraging children who are getting out of control to take a break. You can set up a special place, like a





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beanbag in a corner, and allow children to take time away to rest. It is not a place to think about what they have done wrong or report back how they are going to handle things differently next time.

One kindergarten teacher I know had a child with RAD (Reactive Attachment Disorder). She kept a hula-hoop in her room, and when this boy started getting out of control he could get out his hula-hoop. He could have anything in the hula-hoop that would fit within the circle of the hoop with him in it. The other kids knew that was his place and they left him alone when he was in there.

Another kindergarten teacher I worked with in North Carolina kept a beanbag under her desk. She would pull it out when a kid said they needed to take a break or when she thought a child needed to take a break. Taking a break is not meant as a punishment. As adults we take breaks don't we?

Sometimes little kids need to take a break especially if they are coming from a divorced home. Their minds might be on overload just wondering and thinking about whose house they are going to after school. Sometimes they might need to block out the world around them so they can calm themselves. Too many environments, places to be and people to please might just be too much for these little minds.

Mistake #7 – Not Working Together

None of us can do this alone. In the past most of us felt compelled to try and handle these kids by ourselves. We might have felt like a failure if we couldn't get a child under control. We might have felt pressure by other volunteers, leaders or ministers to do our job.

If you have a challenging child, you may have to tag team that child. In other words find another person you can tag for a moment. Maybe that means you switch groups for a few minutes or the child goes and visits another room. Or maybe the children's minister gives you a break or allows the child to come with them. It might be something as simple as just walking around the church visiting other classes.

In my child care one time we had to call the police when a single mother abandoned her child? ([Aaron's Story](#)) After his mother had been found, and he knew she had been found, one day he was having a very bad day. His teacher brought him into me and said,

"Miss Linda, I think Aaron needs some special time away from our group."

And what she didn't say but I could tell was she needed some time away from Aaron. We had rocking chairs in our office so Aaron got a teddy bear and spent some time rocking and looking out the window. Then we had a little tea party together. This all took only about 15 minutes, but he was in control the rest of the day. We both





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accommodated him and tag teamed him. His teacher got a short reprieve, which enabled her to have a softer and more loving approach to him the rest of the day.

Share your stories with each other. Venting and sharing is important so you don't hold all these feelings inside. Besides, when you share sometimes you can come up with other solutions to try. Ask others for their opinions, ideas and suggestions. Just do it when there is no one else around. Do it on the phone or in the children's minister's office and not in the hallway or the classroom.

Other Ideas for how to work with hurting children

Mirror Talk

Sometimes when children come to you to report that someone is not being fair with him or not meeting his need at the moment, it is because they want your attention, your help or they just want to know that you are there to support them. One way to assess the situation is to use "mirror talk". Mirror talk is when you simply repeat back to them what you hear them saying. After you get into the situation you can ask a thought provoking question or let the conversation die out on its own.

Here is an example that happened with my grandchild when my daughter was deployed to Afghanistan.

Gavin: "Nana, Gabriel took my ball."

Me: "Gabriel took your ball?"

Gavin: "Uh-huh, he said he needed it and it was his ball and I didn't ask to play with it."

Me: "Gabriel said he needed the ball and it was his ball and you didn't ask to play with it?"

Gavin: "Uh-huh. But I just wanted to play with his ball."

Me: "You want to play with his ball? Do you still want to play with his ball?"

Gavin: "It's okay. I changed my mind. I don't want to play with it anymore."

What is your agenda / What's Your Plan?

Think about what your agenda is in different discipline situations. Is your agenda to teach the child how to be in control or to punish the child for his actions? Your agenda should be dealing with the child's behavior





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and helping the child to focus on how he or she could have handled a situation differently. What's your plan? In other words, how are you going to do that? For some situations turn the "What's your plan" over to the child. Get them time to think about what they could do differently or what they could do in the moment. When a child has caused chaos in your class ask her what her agenda is.

"Cierra, now that you have knocked over the chair, what's your plan?"

When my daughter was deployed to Afghanistan, the then three year old began to whine constantly. He could do nothing because he was whining all the time. He couldn't think things through. It was as if when something happened his mind went blank, and all he could do was whine.

I understood that his entire world had come crashing down when his mom left. However, since she was going to be gone a very long time, I wanted to help him and teach him to think through situations. Otherwise her deployment was going to very long for all of us. I began asking him, "So, what's your plan?" when things would happen.

After she had been gone for about six months one day I spilled some juice. I was standing there looking at the mess contemplating getting down on my knees to clean it up when I heard this little voice say, "So Nana, what's your plan?" Lesson learned and passed on!

Never ask a child a question to which you know the answer

In other words, don't walk over to the messy art table and say, "Did you do this?" if you know the child did. Many times you will be setting the child up to lie. Simply state the facts and describe what you see. "Wow, what a mess. There's paint on the floor." Then continue on with a helpful line of conversation. "Deidra, let me help you clean up the art table. You pick up the chalk while I'll get started on picking up the paper?"

They think, "If I act bad enough"

I have said to many children,

You can believe that I care so much for you that you are here to stay. The more disruptive you are, the more your body is telling me that you want my help. And since I respect you, like you and care deeply for you I will oblige!

Kids of divorce use their behavior to speak for them. As leaders and Godly examples of His love, we must find appropriate and loving ways to help them deal with the hurts they face on a day-to-day basis.





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Through prayer and devotion to God, we can find the answers we need. They might not always look like traditional methods of disciplining children. And you will get the nay sayers who think you should be punishing these children, but please don't cave into pressure. Think more along the lines of accommodating the hurting hearts the Lord places before you..

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. Linda offers support, encouragement and suggestions to help those working with the child of divorce. She serves as Advisor and Ambassador to DC4K, DivorceCare for Kids, (<http://www.dc4k.org>) and can be reached via email at ljacobs@dc4k.org.

Free articles and devotions for single parent families in your church can be found at Linda's website Healthy Loving Partnerships for Our Kids (<http://www.hlp4.com>)

