



MORE MISTAKES WE'VE MADE WITH CHILDREN OF DIVORCE

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By Linda Ranson Jacobs

09/28/2012

Last week we looked at the mistakes we have made when working with children from divorced homes that have out of control behaviors. This week we continue exploring mistakes of the past.



Mistake #3 – Everything Was Based On How the Adult Felt

If the teacher felt happy then all was good. Oh my goodness, do you remember the happy face/sad face signs? I am so embarrassed to share this but, since I want you to explore your mistakes, I'll share some of my worst ones. I very clearly remember one incident.

We had paper plate hanging on a chair. We had this 4 year old kid who was so out of control. The chair was set over against the wall by the bathroom. I told this little four year old,

“Does this look like a happy face? Do you think I am happy about how you acted? Well I am not happy”

I led this little kid named Justin over to the chair, and with flair I flipped the happy face plate to the sad side and commanded,

“Sit!”

Let me tell you, that incident was a wake-up call. This little 4 year old said to me,

“Well, who cares if you are happy or not.”

This little character had two parents that constantly projected their feelings onto him. He became immune to what others were feeling, and I was no exception. The chair went away after that incident. I learned that I needed to forge a relationship with this little boy. He had had a hard life.

We now know that we need to have empathy for these kids. We have to learn and come to understand how they are feeling. Instead of judging them, we have to identify and feel what they are feeling. We can look at Jesus and how he felt for the people before Him. He had compassion. Can we do any less for these children?

From current brain research, we now realize we create downshifts in the child's brain when we blame, judge, criticize and attempt to make them responsible for our own feelings of being upset. We have to take responsibility for our own feelings and not project them onto our kids.





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Mistake #4 – Framing mistakes (Dr. Becky Bailey, <http://consciousdiscipline.com/>)

For years many people who work with children have said things like,

- (1) "I'm sorry. It's not time to play (or whatever)."
- (2) "I need for you to _____."
- (3) "I want you to _____."

There are issues with each of there.

- 1. Why would the child care if we are sorry or not. The only thing statements like this did was to give the child power over us. The child might think, "Wow, I can make this adult sorry!" And many did make the adults standing in front of them very sorry.
- 2. Your brain takes you literally in what it hears. If you say, "I need for you to _____." The word "need" takes you literally to YOUR NEED and then when the child doesn't sit down, you go down the brain because your need hasn't been met.
- 3. When you say, "I want you to _____." It's the same thing. Your brain is telling you what YOU WANT.

Instead of either of these phrases simply say the NAME and then the VERB. Use an assertive voice. That is the "Hey, this is how it is" voice. An assertive voice has a self-confidence and assurance to the quality. It is not a harsh voice but is firm.

When you think about it, that's what Jesus did when He called his disciples or healed the sick. "Finding Phillip, he said to him, 'Follow me.'" John 1:43b (NIV)

Research tells us that hearing one's own name in everyday situations is an attention grabber. It causes a sudden rise in our own self-awareness. Using PET scans, researchers were able to see what happens in the brain when people hear their first name. There was an increase in blood flow to the part of the brain that plays a role in our processing of "self" (Perrin, F. et al. [2005] Neuropsychologia, Vol 43[1], 12-19).

Example when telling a child what to do:

<u>Name</u>	<u>Verb</u>
David	Walk to the circle
Kyra	Listen to the story
Sam	Finish your snack

Many adults will tack on the word "okay," and many times it sounds more like a question, "okay?" Or it might sound like, "Sam, finish your snack okayyyyyyyyyyy?"





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Don't ask a child permission to tell him what to do. When you add "okayyyyy," you'll notice the voice goes up at the end of okayyyyy, you are asking the child if it's okay for him to sit down or finish his snack or whatever.

Take "okay" out of your vocabulary. Tell them what you want. Don't ask their approval.

For some of these children when they make a mistake, just acknowledge the mistake and move on. After making eye contact, simply shrug your shoulders with the look that says, "So you blew it." There are no repercussions just some attention and validation that says,

"Hey kid, you really messed up. Now shake it off. Move on. Try again. You can do it."

Short phrases that work well with some of these kids are,

- "Oh well!"
- Another word that conveys empathy and sympathy but doesn't take ownership of the problem is, "Bummer!" with a lot of expression. In order for these things to work you will need to be able to keep your mouth quiet and not say anything more. This can be very difficult.
- What's your plan?
- Shrug of your shoulders
- You did it

Mistake #5 – Behavior charts

Have you ever noticed it is the same kids who have the bad behaviors? What is the purpose of the "behavior chart?" Because, most of the time it does not change the disruptive child's behavior. It might serve as a temporary moment, but tomorrow the kid goes right back to being the way they were.

What really changes? It might serve to get the kid in trouble with the parent when they pick them up and see the chart. It might serve to stress out the child. It might serve to let all the other kids know who the bad kid is.

As my 4 year old grandson said last summer,

"Bobby is the bad kid. He always acts bad. I know because he always gets a yellow mark. And he is the one that hits me and tries to kick me."

And as one twenty year old something young lady told me,

"When I was in elementary school if I got a red light on Monday I thought, 'What the heck. I'm done for the week so now I don't have to behave the rest of the week'...I mean where do you go from there if your deemed 'bad' on Monday?"





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Stop using behavior charts. Instead of taking all that time to form judgments and mark the charts, give your attention to working with the child. Get to know the “Bobbies” in the group because I’ll tell you what, the other kids certainly know the “Bobbies” in the group. They know who the bad kids are. Work on helping the other kids accept Bobby and empower the other kids to not be afraid of Bobby.

Next week we will finish our discussion on the mistakes we have made in working with challenging behavior children. Plus I’ll offer some new tips that will help you as you learn to help the child of divorce.

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.

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