



10 DISCIPLINE ANSWERS TO SHARE WITH SINGLE PARENTS IN YOUR CHURCH

By Linda Ranson Jacobs

11/09/2012

Single parents come to me all the time asking for help in disciplining their children. Remember they are parenting alone and there is no one in the house with them late at night or on a day-to-day basis to help them parent their children. It can get overwhelming to say the least.

Here are ten examples of some of the kinds of questions I get about parenting alone. Sometimes single parents need a more in-depth answer depending on variations such as age, developmental abilities or other situations. For our purposes here these answers are short and to the point.



Please feel free to share with the single parents in your church.

1. What do I do when my toddler screams at me and I can't get him to pick up his toys?

Toddlers respond to singing and playing through a situation. Mad faces and loud voices scare toddlers. He may be reacting to your tone of voice or look on your face. Calm down and sing. Make up your words and use a familiar tune like Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star.

Brain research shows that when toddlers and young preschoolers get scared a lot of time they turn their fear into something funny. That's why the more upset a parent becomes the more a toddler runs away laughing and giggling. That tends to upset the parent more and then the toddler laughs more. It becomes a vicious circle. Parents stop take a deep breath, calm down and start over whether it is trying to get a little head into a shirt or the child into bed. Play the toddler through the situation

2. How do I handle it when my son's 3rd grade teacher calls me to tell me he hasn't turned in his homework for a week? And it was the week he was at his dads.

Listen to the teacher. Calm down your fears and worries. Approach your son and ask him what he thinks he can do to get his homework in on time - even when he is at dads. I would not confront dad mainly because a 3rd grader needs to take responsibility for his actions. Give your son some choices on what he thinks the consequence should be next time. Decide on your consequences and then follow through at your home.





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3. My 14 year-old girl wants to date and I say no, not until your 16 but her dad said, "Sure, you can date when you're at my house." How do I handle that?

You can't control what goes on at the other home. You can set your boundaries for your home. Tell your daughter you trust her to make wise decisions but in your home there will be no dating until she is 16.

4. My 4 yr old wants to know where her daddy is and I don't know what to say.

Most preschoolers live in the moment. So give him an answer for that moment in time. "Daddy is at work" or "Daddy is at his house." They really aren't asking about the divorce/separation but are wondering where daddy is.

5. Eating dinner at my house is a nightmare with my 4 year old. He won't stay at the table with the older two kids and me to eat.

Before dinner, when everyone is calm, explain that you will all be eating at the table. Also explain that when anyone leaves the table it means they are through eating for the night. Get your 4 yr old to help by setting the table or whatever. When he gets up, take his plate, dump the food and put the plate in the dishwasher. He is done eating for the night. No warning needs to be given, just actions taken.

6. My kid is a whirlwind kid. He won't sit still at school, runs at day care, fidgets during church. Help!

Your child might be using frenzied activity to keep his mind occupied if there is something bothering him like a recent divorce. Try engaging him in active physical activity like running, shooting hoops, jumping rope, etc. explain you think he is trying to keep his mind occupied and you want to help him. Show him how to journal or draw pictures to keep his mind busy. At church, always have back up markers, paper and pencils! And have a lot of sugarless bubble gum to chew. This will give him something to do with his mouth.

7. My child is so very angry. She screams at me all the time and tells me she wants to go live with her dad but her dad is the one that left. He doesn't want her living with him.

Many times kids are worried about you abandoning them also so they will test your limits to make sure you aren't leaving them. In a calm moment explain that no matter what, you are not going to leave her and that you are there to stay. Next, tell her that the judge decided that for now she needs to live with you.

Develop a code of some sort (like pulling on your ear) and explain when her voice starts getting loud her body is telling you she needs to be reassured she is safe with you and you will give her the "code". If it were me, I'd pull on my ear, wink and give her a half smile.





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8. My 14 year old is sneaking out of the house to see her boyfriend that I have forbidden her to see. She won't listen to me and now she is skipping school

There are more issues than sneaking out of the house and skipping school. First of all get her to a counselor. Second change your parenting style. Sit down and write out your boundaries. Notice I said "boundaries" and not rules. Teens hate "rules". Ask her what she thinks her consequence should be for each boundary. Pray, think about it and tell her you'll get back to her. Then write out an agreement with the boundaries and consequence for each. Pray, pray, pray. Have her sign the agreement.

9. My three kids fight all the time. How do I bring peace into this house?

Tell them you are the Safe Keeper* and they are to help you keep things safe. Fighting is not safe. When they start fighting don't ask, "Who started it?" "Why did you hit your brother?" "What are you fighting about now?" Say, "Fighting is not safe. What could you do that would be safe." Or "Fighting is not helpful. What could you do that would be helpful?"

You might need to get three journaling books and when they continue to fight, separate them into different rooms and have them write out their side of the story. This time alone will calm them down and give you a moment of peace. You don't even have to address the fight after the journaling episode unless you just want to. Remember, though, don't ask the "who, why or what" questions.

*Dr. Becky Bailey, Conscious Discipline, <http://consciousdiscipline.com> 800-842-2846)

10. I have one child that tattles all the time on his brother. It is driving me crazy. How can I get the tattling to stop?

When he tattles say, "Are you telling me this to be helpful or hurtful?" If he says, "Helpful." You say, "How is telling me this helpful?" If he says, "Hurtful." You can say, "In our house we don't hurt people. What could you do that would be helpful?"

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 DC4K Ambassador (<http://www.dc4k.org>) and can be reached via email at ljacobs@dc4k.org.





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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>).

