



THE POWER OF ENCOURAGEMENT AND CHILDREN OF DIVORCE

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By Linda Ranson Jacobs

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Have you ever thought about the power of encouragement? Most of us try to encourage children that come to our church. We do this because maybe we want to build confidence within the child. We want to promote a relationship with the child so we can help them eventually foster a relationship with Jesus Christ. We want to stimulate them spiritually so they will learn how to develop a life of faith. We want them to keep them coming back to church. Encouragement has a lot of power for the child of divorce, particularly if the parents are still in the warring stages of the divorce process.

There are many ways to encourage children of divorce. But before we think of ways to encourage children let's think about what encouragement actually is. Dr. Becky Bailey in her "Conscious Discipline" book says,

"Encouragement is basically a dose of hope."¹

If ever there were a people group in local churches that need a dose of hope on a regular basis, it would be the children of divorce.

Encouragement means building a person up or fostering their self worth.

*"Therefore **encourage** one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing." 1 Thessalonians 5:11 (NIV)*

Everyone needs encouragement. All through the New Testament it talks about encouragement. Even Jesus encouraged his disciples. Think about that for a minute. Why would a person need encouragement if they were in the presence of Jesus? Life still presented problems, questions and day-to-day living even for the disciples.

Karen Stephens in the article, "Encouraging Words Build Children's Confidence"² says,

"Parents can encourage children to have faith in their ability to learn. That faith will fuel fortitude as children plug away at perfecting the many skills they'll need as adults."

¹ <http://consciousdiscipline.com>, 800-842-2846, "Conscious Discipline" Dr. Becky Bailey (Loving Guidance)

² www.ChildCareExchange.com Parenting Exchange Library, "Building Self Esteem #1" by Karen Stephens





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She goes on to talk about how communication and talking to children can be ways to encourage children and build their learning abilities. When divorcing parents are in the warring stage, they may not have the skills or understand their children need. It is important that church leaders can stand in the gap during this time.

Giving children a dose of hope, helping children navigate problems, questions and day-to-day living in two homes and helping them learn and retain information all require children's church leaders to learn the art of encouragement. We don't have to do it alone though. God has given us the Holy Spirit to help us.

*"Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace and was strengthened. Living in the fear of the Lord and **encouraged** by the Holy Spirit, it increased in numbers." Acts 9:31 (NIV)*

As you embark on thinking about how to encourage the child of divorce, start with prayer. Ask the Holy Spirit to show you how each individual child of divorce can be encouraged.

One of the ways many people think about encouraging children is to praise them for acts and deeds well done. I want to caution you about praising some children. There are many children that when praised will set out to prove you wrong. This is especially true of many children of divorce. They have set out to protect themselves and in doing so they have built an invisible wall around them. When one tries to penetrate that wall by praising them, the praise becomes a threat to tearing down that wall.

The negative self-talk can go something like,

"My dad left and I trusted him. I loved him. I needed him but he left me anyway. Now I will no longer trust any adult that tries to get close to me. It hurts too much."

Inadvertently, when they hear praise they set out to show you they aren't worthy of any praise.

Praising can also mean you are judging them with adult judgments. While we don't intend to be judging them, we really are when we use wording such as, "That was a good job on the singing today." We mean no harm by it but, to a child who is floundering with adult relationships, it comes across that way.

It is better to simply describe what they did. "When you were singing a while ago you were standing up tall like this. (Imitate how they were standing.) Your mouth was open wide and I understood every word you sang." For many of us it will be hard not to tag it with something like, "Good job" but please refrain. Instead, if you have to tag it say something like, "That was helpful." Encourage their abilities but don't judge them according to your adult perspective.





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When adults continually pit children up against adult opinions and judgments, we create children that do things only to please the adult. These are the sweet little Susie's who grow up trying to please everyone but themselves and God.

Particularly for children whom have to live in two separate households, it is not fair to them to try and live only to please the adults in their lives. Are you beginning to see how stressful it would be to live like this? We want children to make decisions and do things based on what it feels like under their skin and in their hearts. We want them to come to the decision to be obedient to God and His mandates because they honor the Lord and because in their hearts it is the right thing to do. Also, because they have developed a conscience they can hear loud and clear and they know right from wrong.

Peers can greatly influence in the wrong direction. This is particularly true as children move into their teen years. That is why we need to teach kids to do something because it feels right and good in their skin, and not to do it just because someone said to do it.

*“But **encourage** one another daily, as long as it is called ‘Today,’ so that none of you may be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness. Hebrew 3:13 (NIV)*

Now I want to encourage all of you to be a “Barnabas” as you work with children of divorce.

*“Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means “son of **encouragement**”) Acts 4:36 (NIV)*

By your actions and words of encouragement, you might be the one that can erase the negative talk inside their brains. You might be the one that begins the tearing down of that wall they have built around them. You might be the one person that is the safe go-to-person for the hurting child.

*“After Paul and Silas came out of the prison, they went to Lydia’s house, where they met with the brothers and sisters and **encouraged** them”. Acts 16:40 (NIV)*

There is power in the blood and power in encouragement!

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





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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>).

