



## SUNDAY MORNING STRATEGIES: EMPATHY VS. PITY

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Welcome back as we continue our “Sunday Morning Strategies” series designed to help you to accommodate children from disrupted homes in your Sunday morning children’s ministry. This week we are looking at a simple thing that you can do that doesn’t require any additional volunteers or committee approval or an overhaul of the way you “do church.” This week we are looking at the difference between empathy and pity and why it is so important that you be able to empathize with the children from disrupted home in your ministry.

The first thing we need to understand is the difference between empathy and pity. Dictionary.com defines pity as:

*“Sympathetic or kindly sorrow evoked by the suffering, distress, or misfortune of another.”*

Pity expresses itself as “Oh, I’m so sorry for what you are going through,” or “Isn’t it terrible what it happening with little Suzy’s family.” Although it is often offered from a very heartfelt position, pity is the last thing a child of divorce or child from any other disrupted family situation needs or wants. They don’t want you to feel sorry for them. Instead of helping, pity strips the child of dignity and turns them into to someone to feel sorry for.

Instead, what a child needs in weathering the story of family transition is your empathy. Empathy is defined as:

*“The intellectual identification with or vicarious experiencing of the feelings, thoughts, or attitudes of another.”*

Put yourself in the shoes of the child you are dealing with. What would it be like for you if the family you grew up in no longer existed? What if you had to move and switch schools in the middle of losing your intact family? What if Christmas was no longer an enjoyable holiday but a stressful time where your focus was on trying to keep everyone happy? What if you had to travel back and forth between two different homes once or twice a week and never felt truly at home at either? How would you feel in their situation? If you can’t see the world through their eyes, you will never be able to relate to them. And, if you can’t relate to them, they are never going to open themselves up enough to you to form the type of relationship that will allow you to speak into their lives.

