



Daddy Doesn't Live Here Anymore

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How You Can Minister to Children, Parents of Divorce

Once upon time, the church was thought of as a perfect institution, never touched by the crises of the world. In recent years, churches have found that Christian families are not immune to the problems confronting the rest of the world. One such problem is divorce.

Many things have changed in our society throughout this century. One major change is in the family. Divorce was seldom heard of in years past. Recently, divorce has become a common occurrence. More families than ever before are being affected by divorce. Even faithful church families are experiencing the crisis of broken marriages. Think about the children in your Sunday School department. How many of them have been affected by divorce?

The effects of divorce in the lives of children may have a variety of expressions. To understand why children respond to divorce in the ways they do, try to recognize the emotions behind their actions. Some children feel they caused the divorce, thinking "If I had only been better, Mommy and Daddy would still be together." Other children may feel afraid of losing the parent who still lives in the home. Some children may have a hard time displaying their true feelings for either parent for fear of what the other parent might think. Divorce also can cause children to feel as though they are an added burden to an already stressful situation.

These feelings can lead to anger, guilt, and depression in the lives of young children. These emotions may lead to behaviors atypical to the child. Such behavior may include regressing to earlier stages of development (baby talk and thumbsucking, for instance), frequent complaints of aches and pains or unusual demands for attention. Recognizing that actions may be rooted in feelings can help us minister to children from families living through divorce.

Making the Most of Your Ministry Opportunities

As you seek to help a child of divorce cope with her new situation in life, do not allow inappropriate behavior to be excused because of the crisis. Inappropriate responses to life's difficulties need to be met with care and support. Begin by affirming the child as a person of worth. Assure the child that she is accepted and loved.

Children of divorce often need role models of the same sex as the parent who does not live in the home. Children often need a listening ear. Sharing your phone number with a child who is experiencing a divorce can help. Praying for and with the child can be an important way to show love and support.

Many divorced parents need relief, support and encouragement. Inviting a child and his parent to lunch, baby-sitting and assisting with household and yard chores are a few ways to minister to parent and child simultaneously. In some cases, it may be necessary for a child and/or parent to visit with a qualified professional such as a pastoral counselor or mental health professional. Ask your pastor for advice when such a situation occurs.

In all your dealings with parents and children of divorce, remain a confidential, caring Christian friend.