

Are the Children the Real Problem in Your Blended Family?

Part 5: Children in Pain

We continue with our series of articles looking at the reasons that some children have trouble adjusting to the new home environment, and things parents/ stepparents can do - or should avoid, to help their children and stepchildren want to be a part of the new family.

Divorce is very ugly! We understand why God says, *"I hate divorce!" (Malachi 2: 16)*. It tears people apart --- including our children! It creates wounded people and strained lifestyles. Divorce or death of a spouse almost always fractures people's future --- their visions, dreams and plans. Your children's dreams have also been shattered!

We led the singles/ single again ministry at Healing Place Church in Baton Rouge, LA for 12 years. Whenever we held a singles service, some single parents would bring their children with them, and Mrs. Sherry May, our Children's Church pastor, met with these children to help them work through the pain of broken homes.

How Children of Divorce Feel

We met with Sherry to find out what these children are saying and feeling. Here are a few questions, comments and thoughts that some of the children have verbalized to her:

- "My parent left home because they did not love me enough to stay."
- Parents do not try hard enough to reconcile. "Why don't they try one more time?"
- "I feel responsible for the divorce. It was my fault."
- "They argue about me."
- "Why are they mad at me?"
- "When will my Mom stop hating my Dad?"
- "When will my Dad stop hating my Mom?"
- "Why did they divorce?"
- "No one asks me how I am feeling." "I am waiting for someone to ask me if I am OK."
- "When will I stop hurting?"
- "Why do I have to be the 'go-between'?"

Comments from Sherry:

- Some young sons who become the "man-of-the-house" after divorce resent being their Mom's protector.
- Many are given too much responsibility for their age, and then are punished or feel guilty when they fail.
- Many are shocked by the announcement that their parents are divorcing. They did not see it coming, or they did not think the issues were that serious.
- Children of divorce go through the same grieving process as they would the death of a parent.

Can I Fix It?

Children of divorce take the experience very personal. They focus on themselves, what they think they did to cause the divorce, and what they can do to fix the crumbled family.

It is a very emotional time for children, and there is both short range and long range fallout --- they may feel a few or all of these: sadness, anger, fear, rejection, guilt, at fault, abandoned, helpless, hopeless, anxiety and emptiness. As these emotions are not dealt with, the child can experience oppression or depression.

Long term, the emotions shift from anger to manipulation of one parent against the other. As their parents remarry, they often resist emotionally connecting to the new family.

Things in Common

Every child has a different story --- no two situations are alike. Yet all children who have experienced divorce or loss of a parent have these things in common:

They do not have much to celebrate!

They must have hope!

They must have healing!

They need to experience true, unconditional love!

They need security, which produces confidence in their lives!

They need a peaceful, loving environment to be reestablished!

They need a solid loving family as a role model for their future!

They need the cycle of divorce to be broken in their lives!

Just like their parents, children of divorce need restoration in their lives. God has a prosperous plan for your children. God wants to use you and your new family as an instrument of hope and healing in their lives.

How Parents Can Help

Unfortunately, parents are often not in touch with the *magnitude* of hurt that their children are feeling. We may realize they are hurting, but we likely do not understand the depth of the hurt.

Please realize this! Children will often talk to someone else before they will open up to their own parents because they do not want to risk angering, hurting, or alienating their parents. If you are not communicating with your children, or they will not open up to you, consider having them talk to a friend, pastor, children's church leader, or professional counselor.

Some children have a very difficult time coping with adversity, or with their negative feelings. They have a dream or goal to reconcile his or her natural parents, and do not know how to let go of impossible dreams. A professional counselor could be very beneficial in those situations.

It is your responsibility to help your children work through their negative feelings. They did not ask for the divorce or choose to lose a parent --- they are victims of the broken home. If the issues the children struggle with are not resolved, the issues will continue to rise up and affect you and your new family.

In Isaiah 61:1-3, the prophet Isaiah was speaking of the coming Messiah, Jesus Christ. It reads,

*"The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on Me, because the Lord has anointed Me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent Me to **bind up the brokenhearted**, to proclaim **freedom** for the captives and **release** for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of **the Lord's favor** and the day of vengeance of our God, to **comfort** all who mourn, and **provide for those who grieve** in Zion --- to bestow on them **a crown of beauty** instead of ashes, the **oil of gladness** instead of mourning, and a **garment of praise** instead of a spirit of despair.*

Wow! What a gift from heaven God gave us! Jesus came to do these things for us, and our children. Our responsibility to our children is to help them tap into that source. We are God's hands, feet and voice to our hurting children.

Here are some ideas to help you become an instrument for God's healing:

- Apologize to your children for the divorce. You likely did not intend to produce the hurt in your children. You may have done everything to try to reconcile the marriage. *Yet, your apology may be the only one they will ever get.*
- Commit to them that you will not put them through another divorce. This will help break the cycle of divorce in their lives.
- Take a closer look at your children, and recognize their emotional state.
- Allow your children to vent and express themselves, while maintaining respect for each other.
- Ask them how they are feeling. Show concern for their hurting heart.

- Help them to set new realistic goals and dreams.
- Tell them the goals for your new family.
- If needed, seek professional counseling – a third party can often bring clarity and a new perspective.
- Pray for and with your children everyday!

As you do these things, do them with the character of Jesus Christ. What is the character of Christ?

Galatians 5:22 says, *“But the fruit of the Spirit (of Jesus Christ) is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.*

Your children are precious and priceless to God!

He wants to bring them healing, wholeness and abundant life!

God cherishes you and each of your children!

Draw close to God, and God will draw close to you!

If you follow God, God will bring success to your marriage, family and your parenting!

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