

# New Generation of Marriages Doomed to Fail



*The divorced of yesterday and today affect the marriages of tomorrow. This article explains why and how you can help stop this doomsday prediction.*

by Linda Ranson Jacobs

About the time our society gets complacent and thinks they have repaired the homes of America, the divorce rate is going to skyrocket. This time the shattering of the institution of marriage will come from the inside. It will come from the open festering wounds and the deep scars left on the children. Unless we help the children heal and overcome the adversity of their experience with divorce, they too will divorce as adults. Divorce is cyclical.

As a single parent, you have to decide what you are going to do to help your children avoid the pitfall of divorce. Let's take a minute to look back at what brought us to the point we are at today and how you as a single parent can help your children.

In the '70s divorce headed like a speeding bullet straight toward the families of America. This bullet tore into families, shattering them to pieces and leaving serious open wounds. Society was left with wounded and hurting children. We were told the children were resilient. The children would survive. But we weren't told at what price the children would survive. Now the paradigm for schools, churches and other social programs are children of divorce and children with never-married parents. Maybe you are a second generation with divorced parents. Your parents divorced, and even though you swore your children would never go through the

heartache of their parents separating, here you are, raising your children alone.

The children from this group have been on the increase since divorce became so prevalent, and for the most part they have been grossly neglected. Many of the youth problems our society faces today—such as increased substance use by teens, early teen pregnancy, mental health disorders, teen suicide and now elementary-age children's suicide attempts—are the result of divorce. Many children are left with wounds that never heal but are covered with bandages and left to fester. Other wounds, while they may heal, leave deep scars. These scars are etched on hearts forever.

Society in general and churches don't want to admit this shift in what is now considered the new normal for our nation's youngest population; nevertheless, the breakdown of marriages continues to negatively impact our society. As the children of yesterday become the adults of today, the breakup of their once-intact family is still haunting them.

## **Healthy Marriage Initiatives Forget the Children**

It is exciting to watch as churches and other groups jump on the "save the marriages" bandwagon. Many state governments are joining with our president in the healthy marriage initiative. While one can applaud

this effort, it is also disturbing because these groups are missing a very important piece of the picture.

I can hear all the senators and the clergy saying, “How can you say that? With all that we are doing, how can anyone even think that?” My answer: “Because you are leaving the children out of the picture. You have millions of children who have already experienced their parents’ divorce. It is estimated that over a million children a year experience their parents’ divorce. The majority will also experience one or both of their parents’ second divorces.”

While many experts and researchers may not agree with me, I have firsthand experience working with the children. For years I took care of these children. On a day-to-day basis I lived with the children as their single parents worked long hours trying to survive. Child care programs are full of children processing their parents’ divorce. Where do you think the children go when single parents have to work? They go to child care, or they stay home alone. Most of the elementary-age children on state assistance in my child care spent more hours in child care on a yearly basis than they spent anywhere else, including public school. I have watched as these children hurt, raged, went into depression, became confused and tried to survive. Very few had outside help; they only had our on-site counselor and my staff. They were expected to just survive and thrive.

Many states are saving marriages now, but what will happen six, eight, ten years from now? If the children who experienced the divorce of their parents marry—and statistics show they are more likely to cohabitate—will they be able to commit to the marriage? Will they be able to overcome the example set for them by the parents? How will they know how to be married or how to partner with

someone else in a long-term commitment? Will they carry the anger and bitterness into the marriage? The questions are numerous; the answers are few.

### **Be Part of the Solution**

I so much believe in helping our country’s children to have hope for a better future, that in 2002 I resigned all of the statewide committees I served on. I sold my business and left Oklahoma to move to North Carolina to write a program for churches to use with children experiencing their parents’ divorce. DivorceCare for Kids was released in July 2004. We are receiving tremendous feedback from churches as well as parents, grandparents, school counselors, teachers and even the children themselves about how much this program is helping. Children with never-married parents are also benefiting from DC4K as they come to understand the issues they face. The current paradigm is being helped in the over 1,000 churches that have been equipped with DC4K. But what about the millions of children these churches are not accommodating?

While there have not been many programs in the past to help children overcome the devastation of the breakup of their once-intact family, there are now programs currently available. But are they being supported? Is anyone willing to help the single parent pay for these programs?

If you are a single parent, go to your church leaders and ask for help with the children in your community, in your church and possibly in your own family. If your church has a DC4K program and you can’t afford to register your child, ask for a trade off. Pray for the Lord to reveal to you ways you could support your church to trade off the registration fee. You can change the divorce cycle. Start with your own children.

If you are not a single parent, then rally to their defense. Support them and love them and their children unconditionally.

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