

Restoring the Family of Divorce



After a spouse leaves the marriage, many times the parent who is left alone with the children feels like he or she doesn't belong to a family any longer. But that's not true. With the Lord's help even families with only one parent can become strong, healthy, functioning families.

by Linda Ranson Jacobs

This year many children will have been thrown into a new lifestyle—that of living in a divorced home. Most of you are not prepared to deal with all the issues that come with the breaking apart of an intact family. This is a tough time for you, but don't despair; you can do this single parenting thing.

Successful single parenting doesn't just happen. It takes courage, gumption, fortitude, resilience, staying power, grit and stamina. As a single parent, don't buy into the hype and the statistics that say your children are going to fail. Learn how to help your children survive. Learn to help yourself not only survive but also thrive.

When I first became a divorced parent, my prayers to God were so pitiful. I am embarrassed to say that the focus of my prayers was "Oh God, don't let my daughter get pregnant. Don't let my son get involved in drugs, and help them both to graduate from high school." I shudder to think what would have happened to my children if I had held on to that attitude. God was merciful to me, and He led me to His Word and began to teach me how to be a parent. He revealed to me that I

wasn't going to be parenting alone. God was going to be parenting with me.

Each child will process the divorce in his or her own way and time. We know that healing deep wounds takes time, and the same is true for the wounds of divorce. One of the best ways to help your child is to help yourself. It's called the "airline theory." If you've ever flown on an airplane, you will remember the short speech on safety precautions at the beginning of the flight. You are told to place the oxygen mask over your face first and then to help your child. If you pass out, who will help your child? The same thing holds true for single parenting. Allow the Lord and His people to be your oxygen mask. Get enrolled in a DivorceCare class at your local church, and register your children in DivorceCare for Kids.

More than likely, the routines you had established before the divorce have all but disappeared. It's important to sit down and establish some consistent routines. Routines lend themselves to security. You may have to work longer hours. The children may spend more time in child care or with babysitters. If the children are old enough, ask for their ideas and incorporate them in writing. Adults and children need the security of routines.

Children need to feel safe. Most children of divorce need reassurance that they are safe. Tell your children repeatedly they are safe. My own son was worried that someone was going to break into the house at night. I took him around to all the doors and showed him the locks. We put a steel bat in the sliding door and had him try to open it. We talked about calling 911 and when and how to use it. Be sure to always let your children know your schedule and how you can be reached when they are at school and other places. You might even invest in cell phones and develop a special signal to use when a crisis is developing.

Develop new rituals. If a little girl's daddy kisses her on the forehead each morning when he leaves for work, to her this becomes a ritual. It is a point of connection for her. When Daddy moves out, the ritual disappears. Replace this ritual as soon as possible. It can be as simple as developing a special handshake when saying good-bye. Brainstorm ways to connect with each child.

So many elements of a child's life are lost in the transition from a two-parent family to a divorced family. By educating yourself as a parent, making changes slowly and staying connected to God, you can empower your children with a reasonable expectation of successful entrance into adulthood. Without the overwhelming barriers that accompany many children of divorce, your children can grow up tall and strong in the Lord.

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