

FAMILY AND SELF CARE AFTER DIVORCE

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Divorce is far away from the dreams of the newly married. The concept of custody battles and financial hardship does not enter the romance of the early married relationship. Yet divorce happens. The heartbreak impacts the marital pair and the whole extended family. Divorce is especially hard on children. According to Judith Wallerstein and Sandra Blakeslee, the impact of divorce on children damages trust issues far into their adult life.

So if divorce comes, what can you do for your children? What gives them the best chance?

1. Take special care of yourself. This is a must. It is not a luxury. If you are not at least minimally rested as the parent of custody or otherwise, you will not have the spiritual or emotional energy to do the following.
2. Take time in prayer with your kids. Get real with God. Do not spill your adult fears during this time of prayer with them, but allow them to share their feelings and how they are doing with God. Do not over respond to their concerns, like "Oh NO...they are wrecked and it is my fault" ...with either inside or outside expression. Tell yourself if you are hearing and fearing their pain, that you will take your fears to the Lord in private prayer or prayer with friends who are adult. In other words, allow them to be real in the parent child prayer time. Your concerns must be shared with God at another time.
3. Be ready for the tough questions. They will come. Your children will be watching Mom and Dad, and if parents are healthy enough to tolerate tough questions, you as adults will be investing in the child's well being if you are able to answer honestly without tearing anyone down. (Squelch your loved ones from tearing your ex-spouse down.) You may want to think through what you will say to things like: "why, why, why; will, you marry again; what's wrong with you that you chased (Mom or Dad) away; why did you mess up my life (your life, Mom or Dad's life, this family's life); is this my fault?" All of these are legitimate questions they may have, even if they are based on misconceptions. Though they may not be asked for years, you can bet these questions or some like them, are inside of your kids.

4. You will need support. Though your kids will be handy, do not turn one or all of them into your main source of physical or emotional support. They need time doing age appropriate activities. Forcing adult responsibilities on them can be very unconscious. Take time, perhaps even now, to ask God if you are doing this. If so, God will guide you to adult support if you ask. Most of the pressure to be Mom or Dad's support is unspoken and hidden from adults because there is so much to do. It is hard to see what you may be doing, but take courage and truly look at whom you are turning to with your responsibilities. If it is inappropriate, you will have courageously taken a look into a place where God would like to help you.

5. Believe that God has a future and a hope for each child and yourself. (Jer. 28:11) Despair and guilt may lead you to believe otherwise. Fight this lie. You personally are loved beyond what you are able to imagine by God. You do not have to go around with a big "D" on your head in your mind and/or spirit if you are divorced. God loves you. Walk in that truth. Your children and you have new opportunities every day to serve Him and to be healed by His loving presence. Find a good place to be around believers who are positive and supportive. If there are shaming people in your circle at church or constantly in your social life, find ways to limit their influence on you. Jesus did not allow for anyone to shame another in His presence, especially those who failed in some way. He was kind and directive to those who felt the pain of the outsider. He will not fail you.

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