

Anchors for helping the Children of Divorce

A Parents Guide from www.childrenafterdivorce.com

The problem with trying to help children adjust to life after divorce (or single parenthood of any kind) is that so many other problems keep “Interfering”. Parents/Grandparents who have no ANCHORS will find their children drifting away...often far away...often into serious trouble. Following are the “anchors” we have chosen as most likely to help parents/grandparents stick with their hurting children just when the need is greatest.

Guaranteed Daily Personal Time. If a child (any child) knows WHEN he will have some time with a parent he will learn to save his problems and emotional needs until that time comes. *Not knowing exactly when you will see mom or dad makes giving up and acting out very attractive alternatives ...too attractive for a child who is hurting.* The key to making personal moments work is taking just two minutes before meeting to prepare your thoughts and focus on the feelings of the child...make it his time not yours. Even if your body is there children are quick to tell when your heart is not. This is so important that most of our website www.childrenafterdivorce.com is dedicated to helping parents make **brief but dependable** special times to BE with their children. Our favorites are cooking, whistle while you work and our Dad’s page. For non custodial parents a scheduled phone call whether it is daily, weekly, monthly or once a year is an absolute minimum...just so the child knows the schedule.

Loss of parental attention is at the top of the list of indicators for suicide among white teenage boys (*and most probably ALL the children of divorce*) But it can be dealt with. The key whether you are a very busy custodial parent or a very guilty non custodial parent is making sure the children know WHEN their next emotional contact will be.

Dream Time. Shared dreams...plans for the future...are much better gifts than ANYTHING you can buy with money. The first and most important part of giving a child a future, a dream, is setting him free of the past...helping him to forgive, to release the temptation to blame himself, one or both parents or God. Asking forgiveness is not taking the blame for the past it is clearing the way for the future. Our favorite approach is “Honey, love is not easy it is very very hard. Will you forgive me for not knowing how to love your father/mother enough to stay married? Stick with it until the child forgives YOU for even the smallest offense even if the other parent was Attila the Hun or Lucretia Borgia.. Asking forgiveness for not getting it just right is something each of us should do each day. Having the strength to do so with a child is a sign of true character...not shame or guilt. It will also help them get over the idea that you might give up on them next.

The next step is asking the child what he/she would really like to do...something that takes less than four hours. Lay down...look at the clouds or light a scented candle and close your eyes while you think about it. Having a fresh dream once a month can help restore a child’s sense of hope with the future made more secure. Our favorite pages on this site are...the miracle of the penny, helping children with anger, goals, and our blessing pages. Believing that things will get better (faith) is one of the strongest resiliency factors for any at risk child...especially the child of divorce. No child learns

this without adult help. It is a matter of perspective and they have none because they are so very young. Only your child will know what his dreams are. When a dream is just not within your power suggest that together you come up with something new... which is what dreams are all about...adaptability and faith.

Written permission to love your other parent/grandparent...one written promise from mom and one from Dad. Trying to be two people, a separate personality for each parent, causes a child great internal STRESS, anxiety, digestive problems, a general decrease in a child's health quotient and probably contributes significantly to attention deficit disorder. Put your permission in writing and give it to each child. Having done this you are safe from any chance that your child will blame you for being the bad guy/gal and grow bitter toward YOU. "Love" should not stop with divorce. If it does it may never take hold again and the cycle of divorce and blame will continue from generation to generation affecting even your grandchildren and future generations. Children NEED very much our permission to forgive and to love deeply and freely both their parents and eventually their spouse.

Friends night...nearly 60% of all custodial divorced parents move within the first year after the divorce. For adults moving is stressful. For a child it is a world shaker. Combine the loss of their friends and school with the loss of parental attention and you have a formula for intense suffering...and acting out. Having your children's friends to your home at least twice a month, game night costs nothing and may give your child the only true joy he has all week. Our second nomination for providing your child a support group is church attendance and prayer partners. Ask your pastor if there is a senior saint who might pray with your child for just five minutes once a week. There is something about prayer that makes people instant friends. A second thought on the subject of prayer is to teach your child "The Lord's Prayer". The first two words "Our Father who art in heaven" can be changed to "My Father who art in heaven". When it comes to setting up a support group no one should leave God out. We hope you can visit our sister website www.teachustoprayer.com and give the Lord's Prayer Coloring pages the attention they deserve.

Something to do...Nothing to do is the complaint of all children but it is a crippler for the children of divorce and makes all their other troubles worse. The best activities are always the ones that involve a parent or grandparent. Second best are hobbies and or pets. One of the best low cost pets is a parakeet...if your child is old enough to care for one. They provide personal interaction and warm up to human companionship very quickly. Teaching a bird to talk can fill hours and hours of time. They can also be a shared interest with an absent parent. Other choices are check out a book on making paper airplanes or pick up a model airplane or car kit. Leggos and other construction toys can keep most children busy for hours. Libraries are filled with books on learning to draw or paint. Reading is another option. Bird feeding and photography are also great choices. The one

thing they all have in common is protecting your children from the endless muckathon of network television. Helping your child develop an INTEREST is the best insurance that he/she will always have “Something to Do. The key to finding just the right thing is to watch your child for clues as to what he or she MOST enjoys and focus on it.

Regular Church Attendance combined with deep personal faith is arguably the number one resiliency factor of all ...restoring at risk children to physical health, a normal lifespan, academic proficiency and emotional balance. It could be the most important ANCHOR of all, well worth the extra effort of getting around on Sunday morning. God grant that your children/grandchildren don't have to do without this anchor or any of the others...modern life offers far to many risks...far to many to think you can get by without **ANCHORS.**

PS. Our website www.childrenafterdivorce.com offers a great collection of activities to share with children. Just browse through the “Resource Pages”. We very much recommend the companion to this article “Anchored to God”.