

JACK'S CORNER

QUESTION: We are going through a divorce. My son expresses no feelings. What is happening?

ANSWER: Withdrawal is not uncommon. Divorce forces kids to cope with adjustments that they may not be able to handle. Research now shows that kids are not as "resilient" as we once thought. (Bad news, I know.) In an exhaustive study where children of divorce were interviewed and followed for ten years (Second Chances. Wallerstein and Blakeslee, 1989), divorce was found to have lasting detrimental effects. Some results:

1. Divorce confuses a child about love. "Will love last?" "Am I really loved?" "Will I ever find love?" "Love hurts." etc.
2. Divorce shatters a child's sense of security. "How can I trust anyone?" "I must watch out for me, because I'm not sure anyone else will." "What will my world be like now?"
3. Divorce shakes a child's faith in a loving, caring and involved God. "How could God let this happen?" "Does God love me?" "Is God there?"
4. Divorce damages a child's self-worth. "I must be unlovable." "It is my fault." "If only I were a better child."
5. Divorce pulls a child in different directions. "I'm always in the middle." "I'm always made to feel uncomfortable." "I'm the go-between, and I hate it."
6. Divorce fills a child with ambivalence. "I love my parents, but I hate them for how they have destroyed my world."
7. Divorce continues to effect children at significant moments throughout life. It's never over. The hurts and memories haunt a child into adult life.
8. Divorce puts a child (statistically) at risk for problems in relationships, problems at school, substance abuse, suicide and depression.

With all this going on, school, friends, activities drop way down the list of priorities (understandably). They may act out, withdraw, or go numb. The best parents can hope for is to EASE the deleterious effects.

1. The best thing you can do is work hard to make the marriage work. (I know no one wants to hear this.)
2. Let the child know he is loved often...in words, hugs, deeds, and TIME.
3. Work for maximum stability in the child's world....school, home church, friends and family. Minimize change.
4. Keep the child out of the middle. Don't make them somehow have to choose between loyalties.
5. Let the child know what to expect as far as living arrangements, scheduling, holidays etc. and stick to it. Post a calendar with this information.
6. Make certain the child gets 9-10 hours of sleep, good food, and exercise.
7. Take care of parents' emotional issues without involving the child.
8. Familiarize yourselves with the issues of blended families. Educate yourselves on the topic of divorce.
9. Seek professional help with someone who specializes in children and divorce.

Divorce is much more than an event in the life of a child. It is a life-altering process that affects the whole child now and throughout the future.

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