

The Crisis Faced by Children of Divorce

— By Sandy Sweatman

Mary was 11 when she found a love letter in her father's pocket. Unsure what to do, she showed it to her mother. While her father's affair caused the divorce, Mary believes it was her fault. Now 13, she has put up a wall to keep everyone out, is hostile towards her mother, and rebels every chance she gets. The lesson she learned from her situation is, "If I never allow myself to be vulnerable, I won't get hurt."

Like many children of divorce, Mary has taken on the responsibility for her parent's divorce. She lives in a world of, "If, only I hadn't found the letter, they'd still be together." For children of divorce, the security and stability they desperately need for emotional development is taken from them. Without help, the lessons Mary has learned will stay with her for life.

Sonja, aged nine, was happily playing a game on the family iPad when she hit a button and pornography filled the screen. In shock, she continued to watch for a few minutes before she threw the iPad down. Her father's use of pornography was one of many problems that lead to divorce, but Sonja now suffers from nightmares and can't get the pornographic images to stop playing over and over in her mind. Her grades have dropped and she struggles with relationships with peers.

Nightmares and re-experiencing the trauma are common symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress. Others include lack of interest in activities a child used to enjoy, a pervasive sense of sadness with no feelings of joy, and increased distress that displays itself in physical symptoms such as headaches and stomachaches. These symptoms are red flags that the child is in trouble and needs a safe place to express his or her feelings. Depending upon the severity of the symptoms and the effect they are having in the child's life, the child may need professional counseling to help them process the trauma.

Nigel's parents divorced when he was five. His mother moved out, and he thinks she doesn't love him anymore. He lives each day terrified his father will leave him, too. He has prayed and prayed, yet his mother still hasn't come home. As a result, he believes God doesn't love him and feels isolated and alone.

Losing a parent to divorce cuts to the very fabric of a child's identity, and the abandonment they feel contributes to a belief of not being "good enough" or "loveable enough." Some children become afraid to leave the house. Others

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IN FOCUS



Children of Divorce

— By Amy Wilson, Editor

This edition of the *Barnabas Letter* is focused upon the issues specifically faced by children of divorce.

Unfortunately, the divorce statistics for Christians versus non-Christians are shockingly similar. Some of the latest research for the USA shows that 53% of all first marriages end in divorce and these rates continue to increase for each subsequent marriage.

Additionally, 43% of all children in America are growing up without a

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become people pleasers to get love and to not lose love, which makes them targets for exploitation. Unhealthy future relationships based on fear are common.

In addition to the concerns listed above, children also face:

- Emotionally and physically exhausted parents who are not able to be there for their children at a time when they need them most.
- Children used as pawns by parents who are more interested in winning than what is best for their child.
- Parents entering new relationships. This represents a final realization that their parents won't get back together, and introduces the difficulties of having new parental figures and possibly new siblings.

Estimates indicate one of four children will live through a divorce and of those, many will see the breakup of a parent's second or third marriage. Research supports that children from intact families have better grades, better overall health, and more stable relationships in later life. On the flip side, children of divorce are almost twice as likely to drop out of high school and also twice as likely to attempt suicide.

With millions of children worldwide struggling with issues relating to divorce, we need to be God's hands and feet in their lives. So, how can you help?

- **Pray** specifically for children in your church, neighborhood, or among your children's friends.
- **Be involved.** Be an intentional aunt, uncle, or grandparent to a child of divorce. Spend time in a relaxed setting where they may open up to you. Earn the opportunity to introduce them to Jesus, take them to church, or help them with homework.
- **Be Prepared.** Compile a list of local Christian counselors and your local children's mental health clinic. ■

** Please contact CCTI for sources and resources used for this article.*

About the Author

Sandy Sweatman has a Bachelor of Arts degree in Psychology and Bible from Columbia International University and a Master's degree in Rehabilitation Counseling from the University of South Carolina. As a Licensed Professional Counselor, she worked with many adults who had never dealt with issues relating to divorce and/or abandonment by a parent. She loves working with CCTI as an opportunity to see children helped at a young age so that the cycle of trauma will be stopped at an early age. She is currently retired and lives with her husband, Carl, in Columbia, SC. They love to travel, study God's Word, and spend time with family and friends. Her favorite hobby is painting with acrylics.



IN FOCUS

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father. While there is not much data worldwide, there are many specific countries (especially in Europe) where the rates are higher than those of the USA.

These reports are discouraging, especially when considering that there is not much difference for the Christian community. However, as with any situation of trauma for children, the answer of hope is the same; a saving relationship with our Heavenly Father. We often do not know what to say or do for anyone who is experiencing deep grief or trauma, and this includes children of divorce. Yet, for those who suffer from trauma, there is hope in our Father's comfort.

How a person responds to trauma is a very individualized response based upon many factors. As a caregiver, we can provide Structure, Talking and Time, Organized Play and Parental Support, all which are important concepts taught in the CCTI modules. However, our ultimate goal is to pray and help the children towards a relationship with the Heavenly Father who is the Ultimate Healer. We may not know all the answers, but there is someone who does; as Romans 8:26, 27 tells us:

"In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. And He who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God," (NIV).

Our prayer is that this edition of the **Barnabas Letter** gives you a better understanding of children who face divorce as well as a wealth of resources to guide you as you seek to assist those in this difficult journey. ■

Serving Him Together,
Amy Wilson, Editor

Today's Kids of Divorce ... What I Wish People Knew

— By Kym Myers



About the Author

Kym is a child development specialist, children's pastor, and a passionate advocate for healthy kids and families. She has effectively changed the lives of thousands of kids and families through her visionary leadership of programs and mentoring for kids and parents.

Kym was the director of an award winning, nationally accredited early childhood center. She holds a Bachelor of Science in Business and an M.S. in Early Childhood Education with additional training in child trauma and crises care. Experiencing divorce when her daughters were young, Kym learned firsthand the importance of finding support for her kids to process the pain and transition that family separation brings. In addition to teaching parenting classes, leading workshops at churches, child welfare, and family conferences Kym enjoys reading, hiking, spending time with family, theatre, volunteering, and traveling the back roads of the USA.

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It is Monday morning, and Michael is sulking and uncooperative. The preteen throws his backpack at the breakfast table and begs his Dad to pick him up from school that day. Despite Michael and his Dad having a great weekend together, the transition has begun, and so has Michael's moodiness. Michael will not see his Dad for eight days.

At Eva's mom's house, there is one set of rules and different set of rules at her dad's house. She is often confused and angry, "Why can I do this, eat this, wear this, say this here, but not at my other house?" It feels like two different lives to Eva.

James is an exceptional athlete. He wants to play soccer this fall but his Dad can't afford to cover the costs since he is paying child support, maintenance, and for his new apartment. The apartment is larger than he really needs, but in order to have equal parenting, the courts require that James and his sister have separate bedrooms.

Julie liked her mom's boyfriend because he took her out to eat and bought her presents. Soon after they married, things began to change. Julie's step-dad is often angry and physically takes it out on both her and her mom. Julie wears long sleeves to school and hopes no one will notice. She is afraid to be at home.

When Jonah's parents fight, he feels stuck in the middle. He feels that if he chooses a side, then the other parent may think he does not love them. Jonah feels bad inside all the time.

Situations such as these are reality for more than one million kids living in the United States. Michael has a good relationship with his Mom, but the transition back and forth of custody is hard for him. Children personally experience the dissolution of their parents' marriage, which marks the beginning of a confusing, frightening time and a series of lifelong changes, challenges, and adjustments ranging from emotional to economic. The trauma is not just a one-time event. Triggers occur daily.

According to the CDC-Kaiser Permanente Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study, one of the largest investigations of childhood abuse and neglect and later-life health and well-being, divorce is enormously stressful for kids and is considered one of 10 adverse childhood experiences of trauma that can lead to lifelong mental and physical health problems. The abuse that Julie is experiencing is common.

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Some research has provided evidence of a five-fold increase in risk of child abuse for step-children such as Julie.

Kids of divorce who do not have adequate support experience:

- Depression.
- Higher suicide rates.
- Overwhelming emotions such as guilt, shame, anger and fear.
- Emotional and physical health issues.
- Behavior issues such as aggression, withdrawal, or acting out or feeling out of control.
- Intense stress.
- Increased drug and alcohol abuse.
- Lower academic success and higher high school dropout rates.
- Inappropriate sexual behavior and increased teen pregnancy.

In addition,

- 50% of families move into poverty.
- High numbers perpetuate the divorce cycle.
- And they experience 120% increase in physical, emotional, or educational abuse or neglect.

Adults without close or personal divorce experience simply do not understand that kids of divorce are deeply wounded. Children do not innately possess the tools to independently process, (nor just get over) the anger, fears, and stress they are internalizing. I was divorced when my daughters were young. It became the norm to send my daughters to school with a tummy or head ache. Little did I know that their somatic symptoms had nothing to do with colds, eye problems, or food allergies. It was only when my older daughter went to counseling that we discovered these physical symptoms were how both of my children were processing the emotional trauma of the divorce.

While divorce may be commonplace in the United States, our children's gatekeepers (family court, schools, and doctors), and significant adults in their lives (family, community, and teachers), could change the trajectory and positively influence generations of families to come. A paradigm shift is needed to prevent children's early behavioral reactions from becoming life-long problems. I wish that people knew the stories of kids of divorce. If they did, perhaps real change would begin.

The mission of **Kids 24/7** is to support, honor, and empower kids of divorce through age-appropriate preventive intervention programs for kids, community advocacy, and parent education. Kids, ages 5-18, process divorce-related concepts and problems like anger, grief, and fear through peer-supported, age-segmented small groups. Through these coaching programs, kids see that they are not alone, clarify misconceptions, and build problem-solving and coping skills that enhance positive youth development and lifelong emotional health. Parents learn practical tools to increase parent-child communication and strengthen family relationships. ■

Visit us at www.kids247.org.

OUT OF THE MOUTH OF BABES



Dedicated to children who hear their Father's voice

Out of the Mouth of Babes

Anonymous

I was blessed to grow up with parents who never divorced, but I watched how my best friend struggled with her own parents' multiple divorces throughout her life. I watched as she would say, with guilt, that she could only get together every other weekend because she had to be at her dad's house the other weekends. Since she only got to see him four days out of the month, he was very protective of their time together, which meant no friends allowed. As our friendship progressed into our high school years, my friend's dad suddenly became "the cool dad" who wanted her to bring friends with her during their weekends together. He bought her the newest sports car when she turned 16, took her and two friends on a three-day cruise for her birthday (lucky me!), and took us on multiple weekend excursions. My friend admitted to me that her dad was only doing these things to try and make-up for all he had missed throughout her life. My friend was like a different person on these weekends with her dad, trying so hard to be perfect and make everything else perfect for those brief times with her dad. I watched as we entered college together, and she embarrassingly told me that she was going to be a new sister (again) at the age of 22 because her dad's third wife was pregnant. She worried, "Will everyone think the baby is mine since I'll be old enough to be his mother?" Meanwhile, her Mom was experiencing her second divorce, and my friend felt divided to complete her college degree while being there for her mom as much as possible emotionally. Thankfully, our friendship has continued for the more than 20 years since college. However, I've had to watch what the effects of being a child of multiple divorces has had on my friend over the years. My friend runs herself ragged during holidays trying to go to all the events for the multiple families, in addition to her husband's, in hopes of not showing favoritism to either parent. She was diagnosed at the age of 30 as having bipolar disorder. As I have watched her life, I have to ask if the multiple families and learning to interact with a new step-mom or step-dad, while living up to the terms of the divorce agreements during childhood, did not lead to her diagnosis? Due to this diagnosis, along with what she has gone through during her lifetime, she and her husband have decided to not have any kids. Her biological sister has also decided to not have children, while her 30-year-old half-sister does not want to marry due to fear of commitment. I have seen first-hand how the effects of her parents' choice to divorce have affected my friend and her families throughout her entire life, and I pray that anyone who ever considers this as an option would take the time to see what long-lasting effects could develop because of those choices. ■



Broken

— By Nancy Hance

In February, I suffered the first broken bone of my life ... a small bone in my foot. As I was healing from this, the Lord began to teach me about brokenness. In Isaiah 61:1-3 (the passage Jesus read and said was fulfilled in Luke 4:18), one of the things He was anointed to accomplish was binding up the brokenhearted.

I began to ask the Holy Spirit about broken hearts, and He showed me that there are different degrees of damage that our hearts (emotions and thoughts) can sustain. Hearts can be shattered like broken vases. They can be bruised ... the wounds not breaking the surface, but bleeding inside. Or a heart can have an open wound that is in danger of bleeding out. A shattered or cracked bone has to be stabilized and immobilized so that it can have time to heal without further trauma and

usually that involves keeping weight off of it. An open and bleeding wound, however would have to have a compress to first stop the bleeding for healing to begin. I found the following helpful definition of the Hebrew in Strong's Concordance:

Bind: khaw-bash: to wrap firmly, to compress, to stop, to rule or govern.

I have a dear friend going through a painful divorce, and I see her efforts to care for the broken hearts of her five children. I know, though, that her own heart is broken and needs time to heal. Quite often caregivers are called on to help others while their own pain is ongoing. So, what can I do to help my friend?

This lead me to this verse: “Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven” (Matthew 18:18 KJV).

I am able ask the Father to bind my friend's heart to his heart so she can receive healing. I can pray and ask the Holy Spirit to loose her mind from the lies of the enemy telling her she is a failure and unlovable. I can pray for her to have quiet times (that seems impossible in the natural but God specializes in the impossible), and I can agree with her concerning her children and their broken hearts. And maybe, somehow, I can lift some of the weight off of her while she has a chance to heal.

Prayer: *Thank you, Holy Spirit, for your great ministry to the brokenhearted. Thank you for gathering us in your arms and holding us close to your heart when we are wounded. Your love is what heals us! Far stronger than all the trials in this life is your great love and care for us. We love you beyond words. In Jesus' great name, Amen.* ■

About the Author

Nancy Hance is a musician, composer, song writer, poet, and the author of “A Weighty Matter” published in The Source—an award-winning magazine focusing on Christian women in the workplace; Flights of Fancy—stories, reflections, and life lessons learned during her career as a flight attendant; and a fiction short story entitled “Framed”. She was part of a team that began ReSeven Women's Ministries, a retreat ministry that has helped thousands of women get away from life's demands and refocus and be refreshed. Over the last 21 years she has served as the music leader and is on the ministry council and Board of Directors for ReSeven Women's Ministries. She currently teaches piano to 20 students from her home in Monroe, NC, where she lives with her husband of forty-six years so they can be close to their children and grandchildren.



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Healing and Hope for Children in Crisis

NEWS
EVENTS
RESOURCES

CCTI would like to thank our
authors for this edition who provided
a wealth of wonderful resources!

Books

Divorce for parents and kids

- ***Putting Children First***
by Dr. JoAnne Pedro-Carroll
parents
- ***Parenting Apart***
by Christian McGhee parents
- ***Divorce is not the End of the World***
by Zoe and Evan Stern
preteen & older
- ***I Don't Want to Talk About It***
by Jeanie Fraz Ransom ages 4-8
- ***Living with mom and living with dad***
by Melanie Walsh ages 2-6
- ***Two Homes***
by Claire Masurel ages 2-6
- ***Was it the Chocolate Pudding?***
by Sandra Levins ages 3-8
- ***When Mom & Dad Separate***
by Marge Heefaarid ages 3-12

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- Up to Parents <http://www.uptoparents.org/Default.aspx>
- Kids 24/7 helping kids of divorce <http://www.kids247.org/>
- Kids Turn <http://www.kidsturnsd.org/wordpressktsd/>
- Parenting Apart <http://www.divorceandchildren.com/divorce-app/>
- Children After Divorce www.childreinafterdivorce.com
- Crosswalk.com (site name) <http://www.crosswalk.com/family/parenting/10-things-parents-need-to-know-about-kids-and-divorce-11605671.html>
- Christian Broadcasting Network <http://www1.cbn.com/parenting/helping-kids-handle-divorce>
- Divorce Care 4 Kids <https://www.dc4k.org/>



For Information On:

- **CCTI Curriculum—**

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- **Other Resources**

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