Five Things Divorced Parents Can Do to Reconnect with Their Kids

by Jim Burns, Ph.D.

Divorce is painful, sometimes necessary and never easy.

Even what society might consider to be a "good divorce" comes with a high price.

The reason is clear. Spouses may divorce from one another – but parents will always be parents to their sons and daughters.

After custody issues have been settled, new residences are established . . . and that's when the *real* work begins.

If you're the spouse who moved out, you have a dilemma: what to do about visiting your children, because doing so means seeing your ex-spouse again.

Avoiding the kids to keep from seeing the "ex" is not the answer. Sadly, though, it's an option many parents – especially fathers – exercise.

Maybe that describes your situation right now. You've keep up on your financial obligations to your kids . . . you just don't see them all that much – if at all.

Well, that's not good, either. But fortunately there is a way you can make amends and begin rebuilding a relationship God never intended to be severed.

1. **Forgive Yourself** This might sound a bit selfish, but you'll never be able to begin re-establishing a bond with your kids until you forgive yourself for letting the situation get this far in the first place. Acknowledge what you did, ask God for forgiveness – then move on.
2. **Talk to Your Ex-Spouse** Chances are the kids aren't the only ones your absence has hurt. If you've just "disappeared" after the divorce, you've left your ex with the lion's share of the responsibilities rearing *your* kids. Talk to him or her. Apologize. Ask for a clean start.
3. **Chart a New Course** Just because you're the father of your children doesn't automatically make you their "dad." Your life changed dramatically as a result of your divorce . . . and so did theirs. Be ready to meet them where they are.
4. **Talk with Your Kids** Don't just apologize (that's a given). Let them tell you how they're feeling. They probably have some anger to express . . . so let them get it out! Learn how to be a good listener. But most of all – be there to listen!
5. **Follow Through** Kids need consistency. They need you to be there for them. If you have limited custody – say, one weeknight per week and two weekends a month –

keep those days sacred. Do everything in your power to keep that time special for your kids. Then, show up . . . and don't overindulge. Make the situation work as best as it can *for your children*. They should be the top priority.

A number of outstanding books have been written on the subject. They include . . .

- *Divorced Kids: What You Need to Know to Help Kids Survive a Divorce* by Johnson and Rosenfield
- *Growing Through Divorce* by Jim Smoke
- *Children and Divorce* by Archibald Hart

It's going to take some work. But, if you really want to restore a relationship with your kids after a divorce, now's the time to start!