

Learning Activity #5

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Connect: Teaching resilience early on is crucial to a child's emotional development, especially since roughly 40-45% of marriages end in divorce (Berk, 2018). Some factors that promote a resilient child in the face of divorce are empathy, education, and positive relationship building. For a child to feel safe expressing feelings, they need to know that their parents understand and empathize with these feelings. The need to feel secure expressing a wide range of emotions, and have that expression met with sympathy and understanding as well as examples of positive coping mechanisms. If this does not happen, the child may internalize these emotions which can lead to lashing out verbally or physically, self confidence issues, and attachment issues later in life. Children also need to know that the event is final. According to Berk, "fantasies of parents getting back together can prevent children from accepting the reality of their current situation: (Berk, 2018). Children need to know what to expect from their parents divorce, they need to know that it was not their fault, and have realistic expectations of their future. Without this, the child can refuse to accept the situation which would not allow them to grow from it.

Finally, the parents need to promote positive relationship building and lead by example. If parents promote animosity, children will not be able to adjust to the situation and this could hurt their emotional development. They may feel torn and pressured to pick a side, animosity towards one parent if the other groomed them to feel that way, and may feel that they are simply used as a pawn. Divorce is extremely hard for a child to accept at any age but by ensuring both parents treat the other with respect and lead by example, children have a much better chance at positive emotional development.

Apply: Claire has educated her daughter to not speak to or take candy from strangers in the hopes that this would quell the likelihood of sexual abuse. Unfortunately for Claire, strangers are not likely the perpetrators of sexual abuse. In most cases, it is actually someone the child trusts such as a family member, a close family friend, or an educator. Claire should instead focus on teaching her child the warning signs of a sexual predator, and encourage trust and open

communication. Claire should advise her daughter to be wary against people that request her to keep secrets, and alert her mother if anyone tries to bribe or threaten her in exchange for keeping a secret.

Reflect: I had the components of a relatively challenging childhood as my dad was career military until his retirement in 2018, my younger sister is on the autism spectrum, and my mother has struggled with body image issues and eating disorders all of her life but my childhood was tame for the most part. My family is very open and honest in communication and fully supports talk therapy (both individual and family based) which I believe led to my somewhat normal childhood. As I grew towards the end of middle school though, things did change for a few years. My dad had been deployed overseas to Iraq twice already, had lived in Germany and South Korea, and was asked a third time to go overseas to Afghanistan.

At this point, my sister was in the worst stage of her behavioral issues and my mom was working less at the hospital (a job she loved) because she had to take care of us every time my dad deployed. My mom told my dad she didn't want him to go, but that wasn't a possibility so my mom served my dad divorce papers. At the time, I was devastated and so angry at my mom because my dad and I were very close but my parents sat down to explain the reasons behind it and my dad empathized with my mom and didn't condemn her for her decision. They sent my sister and I to therapy and went to therapy themselves and were able to reconcile their differences and stop the divorce proceedings. Before the issue was resolved, I was starting to lash out at school and at home and I cried all of the time. I was confused, angry, and self-conscious that my friends had perfect families and now mine was ruined. I felt so alone, and I'm so thankful that my parents handled the situation the way they did because had they not sent us to therapy and lead by example, I imagine that my life would have had a much different outcome.

References

Berk, L. E. (2018). *Development through the lifespan*. Boston: Pearson.