

# What Our Children Need From Us

Jeff Parziale Ph.D., M. Div.

Divorce is hard on children; few dispute this. The irony is that the very people who have hurt our children are the ones who can and must help them heal—that would be you and me. We hold the key to our children's pain, but also to their healing. The problem is that we too grew up in homes that were non-nurturing and perhaps even outright dysfunctional. Consequently, much of our relationship behavior has been impacted by our own past. Poor relationship choices and divorce are symptoms of this past.

Individuals growing up in dysfunctional homes adapt self-protective strategies to survive. Over time, a child's view of the world and his or her definition of "normal" forms around the false perceptions that develop because of this self-protective "survival" mode. Most parents who divorce and remarry are emotionally wounded and still see life through the filter of their self-protective self. OK, here's the punch line: until we acknowledge and work through this, we will unconsciously encourage the same self-protective mechanism in our children. The unfortunate truth is that most of us never come to identify, understand or accept our woundedness. We cannot effectively nurture ourselves and therefore we cannot give this gift to our children. Affairs or changing partners will never accomplish this—only personal growth.

Let me suggest ten growth areas that will make a difference in the lives of our children. By role modeling healthy change and growth, we can impact our children and create healthier relationships for ourselves.

First, we must develop the ability to unconditionally love ourselves and others.

Second, we must learn the art of healthy self-care; to nourish and nurture ourselves.

Third, we must replace the expectation (and fear) of abandonment with faith in God and in ourselves and a sincere trust in a few others.

Fourth, we must learn to not be driven by our fears; particularly the fear of relationships.

Fifth, we must transform self-doubt into self confidence, and believe ourselves as competent and worthy.

Sixth, we must develop the ability to fully feel and express all our emotions (within limits), without guilt or shame, and become comfortable with others doing the same.

Seventh, we must learn to not only tolerate but to embrace change, uncertainty and conflict.

Eighth, we must live life in the present.

Ninth, we must strengthen our ability to form genuine attachments to healthy people and to not fear intimacy.

Finally, we must discover that life has intrinsic value and that we can experience true freedom and peace. God says we are valuable just because we are.

I am convinced that the greatest gift we can give our children is to become healthy ourselves. Let's get started. **Jeff Parziale Ph.D., M.Div. is the Director of InStep Ministries.**