

Breaking the Multi-Generational Cycle

Our Children need a Safe Environment

By Rick R.

Early in my first marriage I could easily rationalize all my alcoholic behaviors. These things meant nothing to me, at the time, but *that all changed the day that I became a father*. It didn't change my behavior, but it *did affect my conscience*. From that day forward I felt guilty about my inability to be a good father and as a result, my only son developed problems as bad as, or worse than my own. My wife and I separated and were divorced within two years of his birth, and I got sober one year after that and have been sober ever since. My current wife of fifty-three years and I have done everything we could to be *supportive of my first wife* and my son from a distance and as he turned ten years old, she asked us if we would take custody of him, since she was still having difficulties of her own and we understood and gladly accepted her offer. This was the right thing to do but it didn't solve my son's problem. *He was damaged and the die was cast*. He struggled with drugs and alcohol problems into his late forties and is now in the program, *sober for ten years and doing well*. From this experience and from the observation of the newer members that come to us while in the process of a divorce or a marriage *influenced by alcohol or drugs*, the children are often emotionally damaged and have very *little chance of evolving into healthy adults*. Some of the symptoms I've read about are as follows: Children of alcoholics **endure chronic and extreme levels of tension and stress**. At times, children of alcoholics **may begin to feel as though they are responsible for the problems and are likely to develop problems with drugs and alcohol themselves**. These are just a few of the things that I and my family have experienced firsthand and it was not a pretty sight. There were many sleepless nights in sobriety wondering where my son was and fearing the worst. It took many years of anguish before he finally surrendered, and we finally had some peace of mind. My experience concerning this situation is to give some perspective on this matter to minimize the emotional damage to the children when the parents either divorce or reconcile their marriage. Divorces are messy with the pain and disappointment of a failed relationship and my divorce was no different. Fortunately for us, I realized that *my child would be witness to how I treated his mom* and from that day forward I have not been critical about her in or out of his presence. I only talk understanding and compassion and I taught him that same principle, and in time, she came around to the same way of thinking, and we all moved on with grace. When my grandson was born, the same thing happened when his mom and dad separated and my wife and I had a the chance to provide virtually all of his daycare, and we had the opportunity to shield him from most of the trauma by providing him with a safe environment, with love and comfort, explaining to him that they were good people but they have problems and we cannot judge them but we can help them when they are ready. The most vital part was the *safe environment*. We had the opportunity to walk him through these things with compassion and understanding. I am happy to say that he just completed his first year of college at the age nineteen with virtually no signs of emotional damage, no drugs or alcohol, no smoking of any kind and very mature. He talks to us freely about all subjects. We can break the cycle, but we must get our priorities straight as soon as possible, consider the damage to our children, put the past behind us and we must be strong enough to forgive. Every minute counts if we want to break the cycle.