

Sesame Street Tackles Divorce With Pre-Schoolers

Recently, *Sesame Street*, a much beloved children's television show, aired a segment on the subject of divorce. The show has never shied away from tackling controversial subjects. In fact, when the show first aired in November of 1969, it was intentionally directed at minorities living in the inner city.

The show was instantly popular and gained universal appeal. Many adults today count it as one of the first things that come to mind when they try to remember what childhood was like. So, when *Sesame Street* tackles a subject relevant to our current culture and presents them in a child-friendly fashion, media wise people should take careful notice.

In 1992, it was estimated that 40 percent of children would soon live in broken homes. *Sesame Street* made their first attempt at talking to children about divorce and segment had a disastrous testing with children. They didn't know where the puppet character would live and wondered if his parents didn't love him anymore. They cried and became confused. They wondered if their parents would end up getting divorced too. *Sesame Street* pulled the sketch and never spoke of divorce again—until now.

In this new segment, Abby Cadabby, a cute pink fairy, tells Elmo and the adult human actor, Gordon, that she lives in two different houses, one with her daddy and one with her mommy. When Elmo questions why, Gordon explains what divorce is. Abby Cadabby says her parents went through some grown up problems; problems that “couldn't be fixed.” The scene cuts to a real boy going through the same problem. He says he was sad he couldn't see his dad every day, but he could always talk about how he feels to his mom. He also says that the pain gets easier over time.

Sesame Street talking to children about divorce is not uncalled for, it's just difficult. They claim to not talk down to children on controversial issues and the more information a child has the better, and, yet, that's not entirely true. They do withhold certain information from children, but that doesn't mean the child is unaware. They may speak of divorce, but the reasons, the "grown up problems," are never mentioned. More often than not if a child is aware their parents are going through a divorce, they are also aware of why and that will have a profound effect on the child as well. Also, *Sesame Street* never mentions God, faith, Jesus Christ, or going to church as a solution.

Abby Cadabby admits that for a long time she thought she was going to be really sad and really mad forever; however, she got used to the changes over time. This time when the segment was tested, it received more positive views from its 7-year-old audience. It's important to note that all of the children who were tested came from parents that were either divorced or separated and already had experience with the issue. One wonders if any religious parents were consulted. It also would be interesting to see how children from intact nuclear families perceive the concept of divorce via this medium.

The *Sesame Street* divorce segment is available online so that parents can choose to watch it when they feel their child is ready or not have their child see it at all. For any parent who's ever been through a divorce, it's important to make the child understand that it's not the child's fault, they will always be loved by both parents, and they can always share their feelings. Beneath it all though, lies something more disturbing, the potential to teach a child complacency about divorce. As Jessica Bennett of Tumblr Storyboard/ wrote, the Abby Cadabby divorce sketch "wasn't magic but it felt like it had the blessing of a certain pink fairy." So, therein lies the subtle danger.

Do we want to give divorce a blessing? Do we want to instill

in children from a very young age that if you have marital problems that cannot be fixed you can solve them by getting a divorce? It seems we are teaching children about divorce before we even try to teach them what marriage is. By the time their young minds are able to comprehend what goes into making a complex system like marriage work, they've heard so many divorce stories the idea of getting married seems horrifying.

Parents should be grateful that we have quality programming like *Sesame Street* to help them guide their children, but we must always keep in mind that while *Sesame Street* is an aid in raising a child, it is by no means a substitute. There's no greater influence on a child than a wise parent being constantly in a child's life teaching them patience, love, forgiveness, perseverance, and reminding them that, while people do sometimes get divorced, God intended marriage to be forever.