

THE PAIN OF COMING FROM DIVORCE

Shloime Dachs

After years of heartfelt soul searching, only recently have I felt ready to confront the period in my life when my family was going through a divorce.

I remember being 13 years old and all of a sudden I didn't want friends coming to my house, nor did I want to visit them. It was such a painful time for me that I couldn't focus or deal with the questions. I'd sit at our table staring at the empty space like it was a question mark. I didn't feel equipped to face reality. I was in total denial, at least to my teachers and friends.

I was afraid of what everyone would think, and I didn't want to have the image of a boy who comes from a broken home, even though sometimes a broken home is when people stay together. But everybody sees you as if you're some sort of freak.

I was embarrassed to reach out for help — a big mistake. That's why today I plead to parents to reach out and be more open about it. It's a lose-lose situation when families going through divorce are hesitant to ask for help and, at the same time, people in the community aren't as proactive on this issue as they should be.

Everyone knows someone who is going through divorce. It's distressing and hard to deal with. I witness firsthand the children who come to OHEL, a community service organization where I serve on the Board, and tell stories of getting picked on and feeling helpless.

The implications of divorce upon children are quite serious and must be confronted early. Even after divorce, the main priority has to always be the child, so there's some establishment. It's true that children growing up in single-parent homes are far more likely to

experience social, behavioral, educational problems at school and in their adult lives. It doesn't have to end up that way.

The stigma on children of divorce is an unfair one; it all ties in to the attitude of the parents. Sure, there have been many children that turn out damaged from the process, but it's up to the parents to take action, seek and help and keep the children occupied with activities such as sports or picking up a hobby.

I was at an OHEL meeting and a divorced mother was speaking about the stigma facing her son and how poor his chances were of becoming "normal." As an OHEL board member I jumped up and told her that it was possible for a child of divorce to be successful, be "regular" and one day be a good father — and that I am a prime example.

Jewish families are breaking apart more and more, especially younger couples. Younger people are often encouraged to take lessons in how to maintain a healthy marriage earlier on. The Jewish tradition of family has an especially meaningful message in this broader cultural climate. It teaches social responsibility through relationships to others. Family, following the Book of Genesis, is the building block for society. Constructing family is the ultimate goal in Orthodox societies, and no one wants to be looked upon as a failure.

Divorce often results in poverty, and women can have it the hardest. Not only is it hard on women and children financially but also may experience the feeling of ostracized or judged, even by their friends. Going through a divorce can stop invitations from coming and the phone from ringing.

Shloime Dachs one of today's most popular superstars in the Jewish music scene. He has spoken publicly about being a child of divorced parents at the 88th National Convention of Agudath Israel of America in 2010 and is closely associated with the OHEL children's home and family services, both as an active board member and as a volunteer performer at hundreds of concerts for residents of OHEL's community homes.