

## Say, "Help Me"

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My parents used to ignore each other and quite often quarreled. Sometimes, my father hit me because I tried to stop him from beating my mother. They were separated for 3 years, and they finally decided to get divorced last year. Because of this sequence of domestic frictions, I'm afraid that I won't be able to lead a happily married life. I'm unable to trust anyone completely, and I always become frozen with horror whenever I hear someone shouting.

Today, I'm here to let you know about the stark reality of children whose parents have matrimonial problems such as divorce, separation, or constant quarreling. This is the voice of such a child who has kept silent, unable to say, "Please help me."

Seeing hate between their parents is very stressful for children. The stress accumulates until they can't bear it any more, and many of them end up getting into trouble. Some become unable to eat anything. And others hurt people with knives. In addition, many of them suffer from life-long problems such as negative attitudes and misconceptions about failing in their own married life.

Every year, more than 260,000 couples get divorced. Various measures to prevent divorce and to help their mental recovery have been taken. In contrast, we've completely forgotten that over 270,000 children with single parent are emerging at the same time. We've never really considered that such children should be protected, so we haven't tried to establish any system to support them. As a result, all they could do was wait for the wounds to heal by themselves. We tend to pay most of our attention to the couples, but don't you think that children also need our help?

According to Ms. Kazuyo Tanase, a professor at Kyoto Women's University, this problem will have a longer lasting effect if people around these children don't deal with it properly at an early stage. In fact, I had no one to ask for help, so I struggled all by myself for a long time, and I'm suffering even today. This is the reason why I passionately want to help children who are suffering from similar problems so that they won't end up like me. So today, I'd like to propose a few ways to support these children.

To start with, public institution should provide asylums. Children have to watch their parents' fighting because there is no place where they can go whenever they need. Ms. Tanase says that separating children from their domestic troubles calms them down and aids the recovery process. And I suggest using orphanages for this because they already have the necessary staff and equipment. Actually in

Hiroshima, some orphanages accept children of divorce, and they're working well. Not only having a place to go, but also the feeling that they're always welcomed will also help enormously.

Second, gathering and introducing people who have similar experiences will be helpful, too. This is because children tend to worry too much. But if they have a chance to communicate with those people, they will learn that some of their concerns are not as severe as they think. There are things that only those who share the same pain can understand.

Third, professional counselors should be provided. We can save children with relatively little damage by two suggestions that I mentioned above. But children who are deeply damaged are easily hurt by trivial words or attitudes of others. These children need counselors who have professional skills and experience in order to cope with this problem properly. Using expert counselors have more advantages. They can accumulate and analyze children's cases, and hopefully improve their counseling by sharing the know-how using the network of counselors all over Japan. In addition, they can explain children's mental states correctly to their families. Their analysis can be used to judge whether a child should go back home from an asylum or not.

You may say that nothing will change unless children's home environment gets better. Yes, they'll still have to spend hard days. But by my suggestions, they'll be able to concentrate leading their lives regardless of their parents' troubles because they'll learn how to separate problems of their parents' and ones of themselves.

Lastly, it's imperative to spread the fact that such institutions and people are willing to offer them support, because they are meaningless if children don't know about them or fail to ask for help. Creating a toll-free number, where children can ask about the systems available, will encourage them to make the first big step toward recovery. There are also things that you can do. If you notice that people around you have this problem, please listen to their story, and tell them that they're no longer alone in their suffering. But if it's difficult to solve the problems only with your support, please introduce those institutions, support professionals and telephone consultation services.

Countless children wanted to say, "Help me," but they couldn't because no one was there for them. I myself couldn't say, "Help me," so I struggled hard and got hurt badly. All the more reason, I declare the necessity to create an environment that anyone who wants help can say, "Please help me." My experience of parental divorce has meant nothing other than pain. But by sharing my bitter experience with you, I hope that I can turn it into a key to change not only my life but also all the lives of those who want to say, "Please help me."

[Top Page](#)