

How to Talk  
to Children  
about

**DIVORCE**

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# Introduction

“How do I talk to my child about...?” This is not an uncommon question among parents as well as teachers and catechists. Abstract concepts, hard-to-broach subjects, and sensitive issues all require a particular kind of language that gives a child enough information without being overly complex or confusing. The same is true for many aspects of our faith.

This series of books provides parents as well as teachers and catechists with a range of questions about these topics. Each one offers terminology relatable to a young child’s experience as well as family activities to stimulate further conversation and comprehension. In sharing these responses, you are likely to find yourself more than capable of talking to your child about these and other topics of faith and practice.

# Why do people get divorced?

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## **For your information**

If you are reading this booklet, divorce is or will soon be impacting your life. Understanding why divorce is sometimes the solution to marital discord is challenging for an adult, and it can seem especially confusing to a child. They, too, want to understand why, and explaining the answer is a delicate dance. While they are asking *why*, you are most likely asking *how*. How do I help my children understand?

Divorce happens for many reasons. In some marriages, an infidelity has taken place. In others, disagreements on finances, raising children, and setting future goals cannot be resolved. In some marriages abuse is a factor. In many struggling marriages there are significant communication problems. Trying to answer the question of why people get divorced is difficult because every split is different. It is something only those going through it truly understand. It is personal and unique to each couple. Divorce is the result of a series of events and conflicts that have weakened the love and unity of the relationship to a state of disrepair. The one thing nearly every divorce has in common is that it can leave a family feeling a sense of brokenness and confusion.

Having this talk with children requires thoughtful planning. It's a sensitive subject that will stir up emotions, and they will be full of questions that you will need to be prepared to answer. Talking to them about why people get divorced will almost certainly be followed by: Why are YOU getting divorced? Discussing first why "people" get divorced will help get the second conversation started.

Purchase some flat rocks from your local craft store. Using a permanent marker or paint pen, write “Jesus” on one side of every rock. On the other side of the rocks write inspirational words such as Faith, Hope, Love, Peace, Compassion, Believe, Gratitude, Courage, Strength, Kindness, etc.... Place the rocks in a bowl.

When you are asking *why*, reach into the bowl of rocks, pull one out and pray about *how* Jesus would direct you with that word while holding it in the palm of your hand.

### **Talking to children about why people get divorced**

Be curious with your children. Ask them why *they* think people get divorced and what *they* know about divorce. This will give you the opportunity to help them change any unhealthy views they have on the topic. For example, if a child believes that people get divorced because they hate each other, you could offer up other perspectives such as, “I understand why you might think that, but I want you to understand that divorce doesn’t equal hate. When people get married, they love each other very much. Sometimes the love between moms and dads changes but it doesn’t mean they don’t love each other anymore.” Fill in the gaps and reassure them that even though the love between you and your spouse has changed, the love between you and your children will never change.

### **Pray together**

**PSALM 147:3** He heals the brokenhearted, and binds up their wounds.

*Heavenly Father, life sometimes presents us with experiences that leave us questioning and wondering why. Guide us on our path to understanding.*

# Preparing for the conversation

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## **For your information**

No one enters marriage or starts their families believing that someday they will be having this conversation. It's a difficult time for all involved and a time that will require just as much care and thoughtful planning as it did getting married. Telling your children about your divorce will be one of the most difficult conversations you will have, and one that they will certainly never forget.

When children hear that their parents are divorcing they often feel confused, angry, sad, and insecure. Some children experience guilt, and they blame themselves for the breakup. Even in the rare case that a child feels relief that their parents are divorcing, it still brings on feelings of insecurity and anxiety about what their new life and future will look like. The way you approach and prepare for it will make a difference on how the news will be received and the impact this life change will have on your children.

## **Talking to each other before talking to the children about divorce**

As you begin planning, the most important thing to remember is that your children need to feel confident and secure that they still have two parents devoted to loving them more than anything. Agree that during the conversation with the children, any differences, anger, or brokenness you may have between each other will be kept for private moments.

Things to consider before you have the conversation with your children are:

- Take some time to imagine yourself in their shoes. What kind of environment will provide the most comfort? How do you anticipate them reacting to the news? What kinds of questions do you think they will have? Are your children anxious about change or are they confident?

Write a heartfelt letter to your children reassuring them that they will always come first and have two parents who love them unconditionally with all of their hearts.

- Plan a safe and comfortable environment for the discussion. Wherever you decide to have this conversation, be sure it is private and free from distractions.
- Set a date and time when everyone is available. Try to schedule this discussion a couple of weeks prior to a parent moving. Children will need time to settle into the idea of mom and dad living separately.
- Plan what you are going to say and be sure that both of you are participating in the conversation. Rehearse the conversation together beforehand and decide who will discuss various topics. If one of you handles emotions better than the other, agree to that parent dealing with emotional moments.
- Be prepared with the logistics of the divorce. The more information you can give about logistics, the better.

### **Pray together**

**ISAIAH 41:13** For I am the Lord your God who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, Do not fear; I will help you.

*Loving God, direct us in our time of brokenness. Remind us that your hand is always reaching out to help us.*