

QUESTIONS MIDDLE SCHOOLERS MAY ASK (OR WANT TO ASK) ABOUT DIVORCE

It's important that your middle schooler processes their feelings about your divorce, but not every kid will do that the same way. You may find it difficult to get your kid to open up—don't take their hesitancy personally. Your middle schooler is experiencing a myriad of emotions, many of which they aren't able to name yet.

While you shouldn't pressure your kid to talk to you, there are a few strategies you can use to help the two of you communicate.

First, anticipate what they're thinking. On the next page are a list of actual questions middle schoolers have asked about their parents' divorce. With these in mind, make plans to start the conversation.

- 1. Create a non-threatening environment.** Timing is everything if you want your middle schooler to respond well—or if you want them to respond at all! Avoid days when they're overtired, distracted, or especially anxious. Approach them casually, and try to display a calm, positive exterior. To put them at ease, here are some options:
 - Take your middle schooler on an extended drive—somewhere at least 20 minutes away. Have them leave their technology at home so you have their full attention. (That may also mean that you leave *yours* at home, too!)
 - Spend time with your middle schooler doing something that they enjoy. Play a game of one-on-one basketball, a hand of Spades, or browse the aisles of a store together.
 - Give your middle schooler permission to write a question on a sticky note and put it somewhere they know you will read it. This would be a good option for kids who feel awkward asking a question face-to-face.
- 2. Give an invitation to talk.** Begin by asking a lighthearted or neutral question. "What's something funny that you've seen lately?" Or, "Who is your closest friend right now?" After you've both warmed up, give an invitation to talk about the divorce.
 - » "Do you have any new questions about your dad/mom and me?"
 - » "What's one thing that worries you about our family right now?"
 - » "You won't hurt my feelings if you need to say or ask something hard about what's going on with our family."
 - » "I can't imagine what you're going through, but I want to be there for you. Can you talk about what you've been thinking or feeling lately?"
 - » "Is there a thought you keep having over and over again that you'd be willing to share with me?"
- 3. Manage your reaction.** However they respond—even if they don't want to talk right then—make sure you affirm them and the way they're processing. Honor them if they do not want to talk, if you push then they will feel trapped and flee even further away! If you didn't get the response you were hoping for, don't give up. Keep trying (maybe at a different time), and keep the conversation going. This isn't a "one-time" discussion—it's a topic you'll need to revisit over and over again, in this phase and in the phases to come.

Some of the questions on the following page may seem obvious to you, but they may be a basic question your middle schooler is processing. These were collected from over 15 different small group leaders/middle school ministry leaders who have been working with middle schoolers for years.

- Who knows about the divorce?
- Can your parents be divorced without your friends finding out?
- Can I be mad at my parents?
- Is divorce wrong?
- Who am I going to live with?
- Do you know why people get divorced?
- Where will I go to school?
- Are we still a family?
- Is it going to be ok?
- Who is going to keep the dog?
- Is there something I can do to stop it?
- Did I do anything to make my parents get divorced?
- Does this mean I have to move?
- Will I still have my own room?
- Will I have one or two of everything?
- Will I have the same rules at both houses?
- Do you think we're ever going to have "family time" again?
- Does this mean we won't spend Christmas as a family this year?
- Do you still celebrate anniversaries after a divorce?
- Do you still celebrate Mother's Day/Father's Day after your parent's divorce?
- Can you still eat dinner as a family if your parents are divorced?
- How do you spend time together as a family after a divorce?
- How do you celebrate birthdays after a divorce?
- When will things go back to normal?
- Do you know why people get divorced?
- How do you get over feeling so sad about it?
- How can I help my sad parent(s)?
- Will my friends judge me for my parent's divorce?
- Is divorce even a big deal? Why do people get so upset about it?
- What happens if my older brother chooses to go with my dad and I stay with my mom?
- Do I have to be mad at my dad just because my mom is?
- What if I don't want to live with the parent I have to live with?
- Am I going to be split up from my siblings?
- Do you have any pointers on how to get back to normal?
- Can parents be divorced but still act married at school stuff?
- Is it okay for me to feel differently about the divorce than my siblings?
- How do I know who I can talk to about my parent's divorce?
- How do I tell people I don't want to talk about my parent's divorce?
- Is divorce okay if one parent cheated on the other?
- What do I do if I feel caught in the middle of my parents?
- Is it normal to feel relieved about my parents getting divorced?
- Does this mean my parents will get remarried to other people someday? Will I have step-parents?
- Will I get to spend half the time with mom and half the time with dad?
- Do I need to tell my teachers or my coaches my parents are getting divorced?
- What do I say to my friend whose parents are getting a divorce?
- Why are my parents fighting in the first place?
- Why didn't God answer my prayers for my parents to stay together?
- If mom/dad loves God, why are they leaving our family?
- Why would God allow my parents to get divorced?
- Is God okay with my parents getting divorced?
- How do I not get mad or upset about my parents getting divorced?
- What does the Bible say about divorce?