DIVORCE
CONVERSATION GUIDE FOR PARENTS

FINDING THE RIGHT WORDS CAN BE DIFFICULT WHEN TALKING TO A CHILD ABOUT DIVORCE—especially when you're the parent and you're processing your own hurt. We hope you never need this conversation guide, but in the event you or someone you know finds yourself going through the pain of divorce, we want to help by giving you some words to say and not to say to your child.

WHAT TO SAY

WORK TOWARDS CONSISTENCY.

- "We might not be married anymore but your mom (dad) and I are committed to parent you together."

Consistency is one of the most important parts of the process. Try to keep the same schedule, rules and privileges at both houses. Keeping things consistent will help your child feel like some things are normal, even in the midst of so much change.

GIVE CONTROL.

- "I'd love to have you help me decide how we will decorate your new room. It might be a new house, but I want you to feel comfortable in it."
- If a particular holiday is too hard for them say, "Let's think of a new tradition we can start together."

Give your child control when appropriate and let him make decisions whenever possible.

SHOW COMPASSION.

- "I can imagine that you feel really sad and/or angry about the situation."
- "You didn't have a choice over what has happened, but you can choose how you will express your feelings."
- "We can talk through healthy ways you can process and deal with your feelings."

Give your child some extra room to process the changes. It's hard for everyone and often children don't know how to express this in a constructive manner. Some children act out and others keep it all in, but neither is a place to camp out for long. All feelings are acceptable, but not all forms of expression are. So if they are acting out consistently, consider consulting with a child or teen therapist.

CULTIVATE FAITH.

- "God loves us and we can hold to the promise that He is close to those who are hurting."
- "Even though divorce wasn't a part of God's plan when He created marriage, we know that He is here to walk with us as we heal from the hurt we're experiencing."

Help your child deepen their faith by talking with God about their struggles. Surround them with strong Christian mentors who can help them ask the hard questions that they might not talk about with you.

WHAT NOT TO SAY

- "Your mom (dad) might follow through with rules, but I'll let them go at my house."
- "You'll stay at my house every other weekend and you'll just have to deal with it. It isn't the same anymore, but that's just part of our life now. Do you think I'm happy about moving to a smaller place?"
- "Pull yourself up by the bootstraps and move on. This is hard for all of us and I can't handle your tantrums and disobedience right now. I'm devastated that your father/mother left me but do you see me not going to work or yelling at you?"
- "The divorce is your mom/dad's fault. I'm too angry to talk to him/her so you'll need to pass along this message to him/her."
- "God allowed this to happen. If God cared, He would have rescued our family from divorce."

It's best not to talk about certain issues in a divorce with your child. Things like custody, child support and lawyers need to be communicated privately between adults. Kids need to be kids, not mediators, therapists or messengers between two parents. If you find yourself talking about your spouse to your child, take the opportunity to model mature responsibility by taking care of your pain through individual counseling or a divorce support group.

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