

What to tell your friends

"My parents are good people." Say that you respect both of your parents and divorce has not made either one evil.

"I am feeling..."

If your friends know how you feel, they are better able to help you.

"Please pray for our family."

All your family members need prayers.

What to tell yourself

"I am not to blame."

Nothing you did caused your parents' divorce.

"I cannot get my parents back together."

Pray for your parents, but don't try to get them back together.

"I want my parents to know I love them."

Because your parents will feel some painful guilt and grief, they need you to express your love for them.



Parent **TIP** Sheet #10

WHAT CATHOLIC TEENS SHOULD KNOW WHEN PARENTS DIVORCE



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Once upon a time, a woman and man met each other, fell in love, and decided to spend the rest of their lives together. They got married on a day that was full of love and joy, surrounded by their family and friends.

Eventually, the woman and the man had children and created a family. Over the years, the woman and the man showed their children pictures of their wedding day and told them stories about the early years of their married life.

The children heard their parents laugh as they told these stories — of the time when they were so much in love.

Now, fast-forwarding the story, we get to the part that hurts. You are one of those children — and the story does not end “... and the woman and the man and their children lived happily every after.”

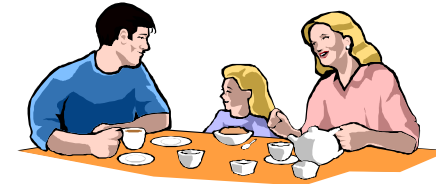
Instead, the word *divorce* has become a common part of your vocabulary, and the family of which you were once a part seems to be something altogether different.

Divorce hurts — a lot!
“Why?”
Is Not a Good Place to Start

“If I could just understand *why* my parents divorced, I don’t think it would hurt so much,” says seventeen-year-old Taylor, whose parents have been divorced for almost a year. It’s true that if we can understand why something happens, we’re often able to cope better with emotions.

Assuming that there was no abuse in the marriage or family, you, like many children of divorced parents, may never understand why your parents divorced. In fact, you parents may never be able to say exactly *why*.

Love, after all, is not a physical condition. When we’re not feel-



What is an annulment?

Perhaps you’ve heard your parents talking about getting an annulment. An *annulment* is the Catholic Church’s declaration that a marriage in the Church was not “valid.” Now the teaching and theology on this subject is extremely complex. What is important for you to know about an annulment is what it does and does not do.

An annulment does not:

- declare that your parents never loved each other
- declare that your parents were never married
- declare that you and your siblings are illegitimate children

An annulment does:

- help your parents better understand why they got married and how that reason may not have been strong enough to sustain a lifelong commitment
- help your parents experience the grace of God as they heal from the pain of divorce
- help you parents regain hope and joy for the future

this same love and compassion to everyone, especially when they are struggling with some of life's most difficult situations.

Thus, the Catholic Church offers many things that will help you to heal the pain, anger, fear, confusion, and disappointment you feel as a result of your parents' divorce. For example, going to Mass regularly and praying for healing every day will help you feel more peaceful.

Reaching out to others in need is another way to heal from your own pain — and the Church offers many such opportunities.

Ask your pastor or youth minister about teen retreats in your diocese. These kinds of experiences bring teens together to experience the powerful presence of Jesus in their midst.

Jesus Can Help

When life becomes extremely difficult, we can find great comfort in turning to our faith and remembering a very important moment in Jesus' life.

Putting ourselves in that moment with Jesus can help us realize how much he understands our own life experiences, including those of pain and sorrow.

Remember, Jesus truly understands what you're feeling in your own sadness and pain. Turn to him often in prayer and share what you are feeling with him. He wants to help you. Open yourself to his help.

ing well, we can go to a doctor, get a physical exam and end up with a "diagnosis." Then we can take medications, change our diets or our exercise routines or our lifestyles to "get better."

But falling in love and falling out of love are not physical experiences. People don't necessarily know *why* they feel love or why they stop feeling love. Love is a mystery of the human heart that simply cannot be scientifically examined and understood..

Even if you know the facts about certain details of your parents' relationship, you still may not have answers to *why* they divorced.

First of all, you don't know all the facts. Your parents shared many years and experiences before you were old enough to be aware of their relationship. Plus, they have shared personal details of life that you simply will never know.

Second, interpretations of facts vary from person to person. One person may look at a married couple and conclude that the couple has a "good marriage" because they never argue, and they are involved in so many things as a couple.

Another person may look at that same couple and conclude that they do not have a "good marriage" because they don't deal with their problems and they aren't developing their own individual interests. Yet, this person saw the very same relationship as the first person.

As you try to cope with the reality of your parents' divorce, the best place to start is with yourself. You are your parents' child; you are a child of God. You are still deeply loved by your parents; you are still deeply loved by God. You are not divorced.

Yes, important things about your life are different — and many of these things are extremely upsetting to you. Unfortunately, life very often turns out to involve things we



totally do not like but must deal with — which means that you have a great opportunity here.

As you adjust to the fact that your parents are divorced, you have the opportunity to take a major step along your personal growth toward maturity: taking care of yourself during tough times.

Keep doing the things you've always done that are healthy and wholesome. Eat well and exercise, remain responsible to your commitments, and go to church regularly. Avoid using your parents' divorce as an excuse to behave irresponsibly or immorally.

Although major details about your life have changed, deep inside, you are the same great person you've always been. Nothing is "broken" about you, your parents, or your life. Rather, things are merely different. Seek out a trusted adult to talk with you about anything you find especially difficult.

Your Church Can Help

When people are deeply hurt emotionally, they need healing — and the Catholic Church is a place that offers support and healing to the hearts and souls of people who are hurting.

Yes, the Church has lots of rules and teachings — rules and teachings that can seem demanding and sometimes hard to live by. But all of its rules and teachings come from the core teachings of Jesus and a wise understanding of human

Understanding your parents' pain

- Your parents' dreams have been shattered.
- Your parents know that you are hurt and confused, and they want to help you as much as possible.
- Your parents have many legal details to keep track of, and that can be extremely frustrating for them at times.
- Your parents need you to encourage them to remain healthy.
- Your parents need you to remain supportive of *both of them*.
- Your parents need your prayers.

strengths and weaknesses. They are for the good of every individual. One of the teachings of the Catholic Church is that marriage is a lifelong commitment, that when a man and a woman pronounce their vows on their wedding day, they are entering a sacred partnership between themselves and God. In support and respect for this sacred bond, the Church honors family life. It recognizes that the family is a reflection of God's awesome love and power in the act of creation.

So just imagine the privilege you have of being part of God's creation, of having a mother and a father, of being a child of a woman and a man who love you a great deal and who were called by God to be your parents.

The love you have for your parents and the love they have for you is truly a great gift from God. The Church also respects the sacred role of the individual human conscience, and it offers many guidelines for forming a mature and moral conscience. It also respects the fact that, with a mature and moral conscience, people often make difficult choices that may not be in keeping with Church teaching.

With regard to marriage, the Catholic Church also recognizes how it can seem difficult, even impossible, for people to bind themselves together for life. Remember that the Church is all about the love and compassion of Jesus. Who welcomed everyone into his circle of friends. The Church offers

Scripture tells us that when good friend Lazarus died, Jesus wept when he saw how sad everyone was who had loved Lazarus as he did.

(see John 11:35)

- Thank about that scene and reflect on it for a few minutes. Picture Jesus with tears in his eyes, feeling sad and hurt.
- Imagine yourself trying to comfort Jesus. What would you do for him? What would you say to him?
- Now reflect on your own feelings of pain and loss about your parents' divorce.
- Imagine Jesus comforting you, knowing exactly how you feel. What do you think he would do for you? What would he say to you?