

# SPLIT Film Viewer's Guide



split

A DOCUMENTARY FILM BY ELLEN BRUNO



“Essential viewing for any family navigating a ‘split’... a roadmap for adults who want to help, and a portal to broach important conversations.”

– GOLD AWARD 2014 Parents' Choice

## for Parents and Professionals

to help kids and parents  
through the ups and downs of divorce

# The *SPLIT* Film Guide

## for Parents and Professionals

to help kids (and parents)  
through the ups and downs of divorce



**GOLD MEDAL WINNER!**

Parents' Choice Award

### The *SPLIT* Guide

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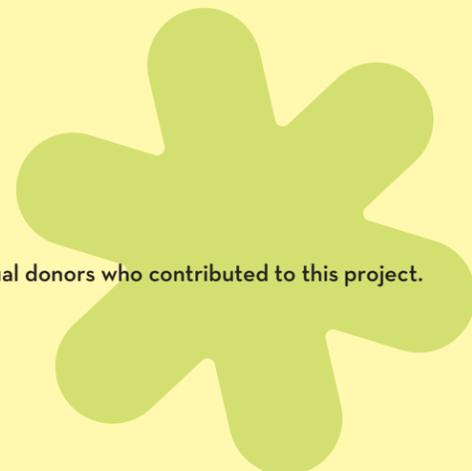
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# who is this Guide for?



## Parents, grandparents, stepparents, and extended family

This Guide was created to:

- encourage a relaxed, enjoyable, and productive viewing of *SPLIT* with kids at home.
- jump start helpful and healing conversations between parents and kids.
- help kids and parents make connections between the *SPLIT* kids and their own families.

First, watch *SPLIT* on your own without the kids. Then spend some time looking through this Guide.

In each chapter, you'll find a **talking to kids** section that offers conversation prompts to get the ball rolling. These sections are in **blue**.

And be sure to check out the list of suggested resources on page 117!

## Professionals and community leaders

This guide is for you if you are a therapist, counselor, social worker, parent educator, teacher, youth worker, family lawyer, mediator, member of the clergy... anyone helping kids and families through the tough times of divorce. Please note that while the Guide's language addresses parents and caregivers for use with their children, all of the material adapts easily for use in professional settings.

The film *SPLIT*, together with this Guide, provide great tools for your work with both kids and parents, in one-on-one sessions or in group work.

After you watch the film, look through the Guide and consider ways you might use *SPLIT* in your practice or community. Each chapter of the Guide has three sections to guide your work: **things to know**, **talking to parents**, and **talking to kids**.

Have a look at the practice suggestions on pages 121-127 for creative ways to use *SPLIT* with children and parents.

## the roller coaster of divorce

When parents separate, it's a wild ride for everyone... especially the kids. But we have talked to lots of kids who have not only survived their parents' divorce, but are stronger, smarter, and more confident because of it.

*SPLIT* offers an opportunity for you and your children to hear from twelve kids who have been through divorce and survived. The kids in *SPLIT* are wise and funny, and they tell it like it is.

Chances are, your children will relate to much of what the *SPLIT* kids share about their experiences of divorce. Kids listen to other kids in a different way than they listen to the adults in their lives. It also comforts kids to see their many feelings, fears, and surprises mirrored by other kids.

This Guide will...

- walk you through each “scene” in the film.
- give you helpful information on what to expect from kids as they face each stage of the divorce.
- suggest ways to to ask questions and begin discussions with your kids about what the film brings up for them.



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## but first, you may be wondering...

### How will this film help my child?

*SPLIT* offers your kids a hopeful message. Hearing the open and heartfelt stories of twelve children may encourage your kids to share their thoughts and feelings about divorce. The film also reminds kids that they are not alone.

Kids have lots of thoughts and feelings about divorce, but many don't know how to express them. This is often true of parents as well. *SPLIT* serves as a great jumping-off point to start these important conversations with your kids.

### Will *SPLIT* make my children sad or upset?

Kids usually feel sad when parents split up, and that's normal. But they don't always share their feelings with parents. Some kids may not feel comfortable showing how sad they are, while other kids may worry about how their feelings will affect Mom or Dad.

When kids can talk openly about the sadness they feel, it helps them feel less alone and anxious. Watching this film with your children is an opportunity to help your kids share how they feel by starting the conversation focused on the kids in the film, not themselves.

### What if my children ask me questions about the divorce that I can't or do not want to answer?

You don't have to have all the answers. It's okay to tell kids you don't have everything figured out yet, or that you need time to think about their questions before you answer them. Let the kids know that once you have details worked out, you will get back to them. Be sure not to keep kids waiting too long for an answer (maybe a couple of days but not weeks or months!).

You are in control of the conversation with your children. If some parts of your situation are too tender, or you feel there are things your children are not ready to hear, decide ahead of time what you will discuss with them and what will stay private.

Your children still may have questions. Allow them to be curious. But there is certain information your kids need to be shielded from, such as interpersonal problems in the marriage, child support, finances, and legal matters. You can say, “I understand that you really want to know that, thank you for asking. But there are some things that need to be kept between grown-ups.”

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.....  
**olivia** *When they were going through the process, I had a counselor. She was a counselor that handled kids with divorcing parents. And she told me, “Your only job is to be a kid. There’s no right or wrong things to do. You’re just being a kid. This is their own problem. You don’t have to worry about anything.”*  
.....

## Do my children need professional help?

If you feel your child is struggling with issues you can’t manage on your own, consider getting help from a therapist or counselor. Look for someone who specializes in working with children one-on-one or in a group.

You might consider seeking help if:

- Your child’s behavior shows significant changes.
- Your child is increasingly acting out at home or in school.
- Your child has become physically aggressive.
- Your child’s relationship with you has changed.
- Your child blames you for the divorce or feels he or she has to take sides.
- Your child is very resistant to spending time with a parent.
- Your child has made statements like: “I wish I could disappear forever,” or “Maybe things would be better if I wasn’t around anymore.”

If you decide that therapy is needed, consider meeting with a professional without your child first. This gives you a chance to evaluate whether or not the person is a good fit for your family. For example, if your kids are getting caught in the middle of fighting, look for someone who has experience in dealing with high-conflict divorces. For situations that involve addiction or abuse, look for a therapist who is qualified to help families cope with those issues. Don’t hesitate to interview several therapists to find the best fit for your family.

Another option is to make an appointment with a counselor for yourself. Often individual sessions with a professional can provide you with the guidance and skills you need to best support your kids.

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## A Note on Language

While this Guide will use the terms Mom and Dad, or divorce and separation, we know there are lots of different ways to be a family. Some families have unmarried parents, stepparents, adoptive parents, same-sex parents, grandparents, or other concerned caretakers.

Regardless of how your family is configured, when parents split up, it usually feels the same for kids.

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# getting started

## watch *SPLIT* first... without the kids

Make time to watch the film when your kids aren't around... after their bedtime, during the school day, or when they are with the other parent. This will give you time to have your own feelings and reactions to the film. Then, when you share the film with your kids, you can fully focus on them.

### Pay attention to *your* feelings.

Listening to children talk about divorce may bring up confusing or difficult feelings for you as a parent. Pay attention to the parts of the film that touch you deeply. Give yourself time to process these feelings. Be patient and accepting of whatever you feel.

### Get support if you need it.

You might choose to watch *SPLIT* with a friend or relative or a small group of divorced parents. Whether you watch alone or with others, if *SPLIT* stirs up feelings for you, find another adult to talk to. Don't turn to your kids for support. Kids naturally want to make things better when their parents are upset, but remember: the goal is to support your kids in this process, not ask them to support you.

### Take care of yourself.

Dance, write, swim, walk the dog, talk with a trusted friend, see a therapist, accept help from a family member, or find a support group. Taking care of yourself makes you a stronger parent and models a healthy lifestyle for your children.

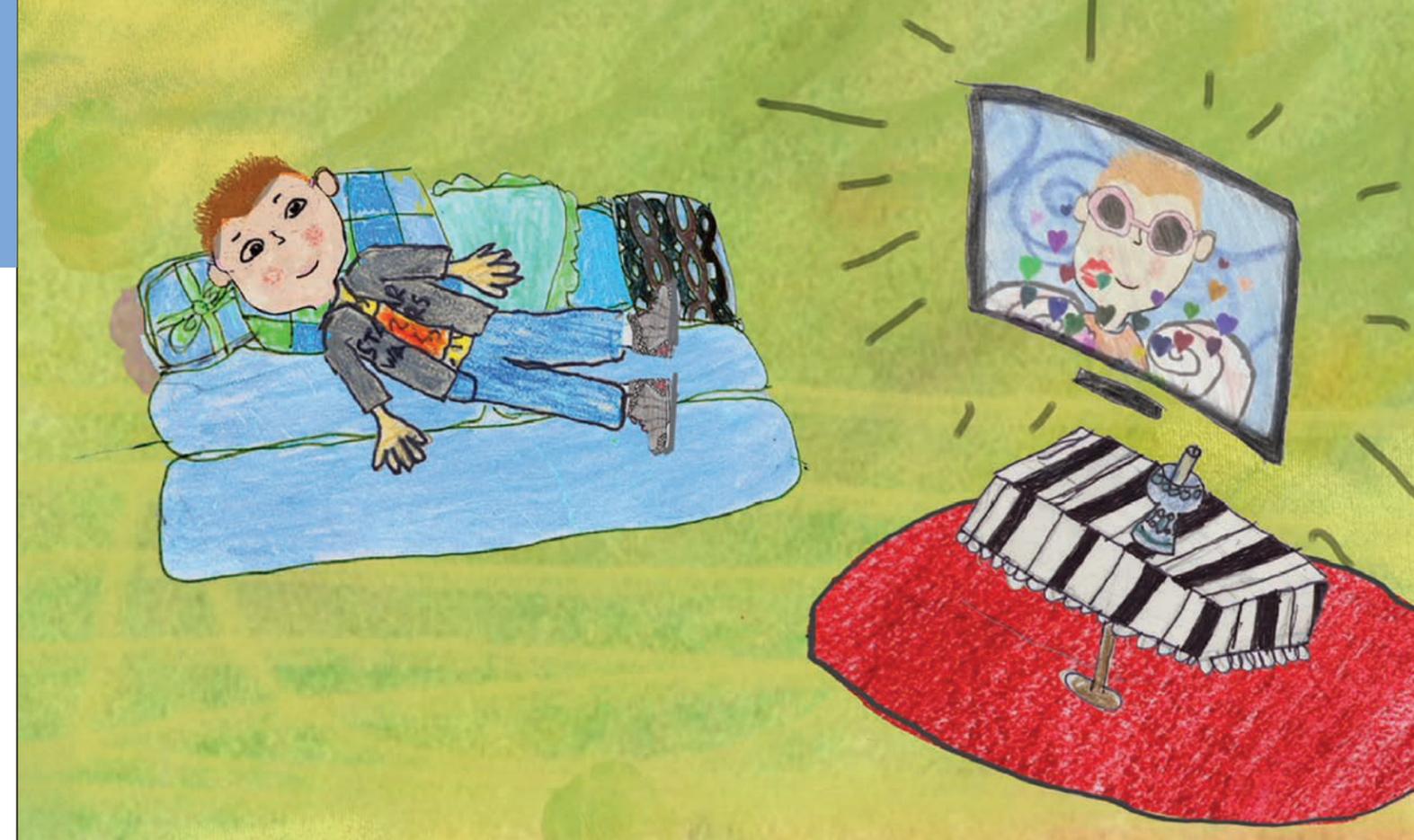
### Have a look at this Guide.

Before watching *SPLIT* with your children, take the time to look through this Guide. It will help prepare you to talk to them about the film.

We don't always know what our kids are thinking or feeling. Watching *SPLIT* with your children is a good opportunity to create a safe and comfortable place for them to share their feelings and open the door to new conversations.

And when they do start talking, be an open listener. Don't judge or contradict what they are saying... and expect to be surprised!

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## ...then share *SPLIT* with the kids

### Find a quiet time to watch.

Plan to watch *SPLIT* when the kids have some down time. Friday after school or Saturday during the day might work. Give your kids plenty of time to ask questions or talk about the film. Turn off the TV, cell phones, and other devices so everyone can focus without being tempted by distractions.

### Watch *SPLIT* with younger children.

With younger children—six- to ten-year-olds—it's best to sit in the room and watch the film together, at least for the first time. Young kids learn by doing things more than once, so after you have watched it together, it's okay to let them watch it again, either with you or on their own.

### Older kids may want to watch on their own.

With older kids—ten to fourteen-year-olds—give them the option to watch *SPLIT* on their own. If they watch the film without you, stay close by so you can be available if they have questions or want to talk. Be sure to check in with them at some point to see how they are responding to the film.

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# how to talk to your kids about *SPLIT*

## Follow your children's lead.

It's normal to want to know what your children are thinking and feeling, but don't expect them to open up right away. Resist the urge to dig too deep, too soon. Some kids may need time to think about the film; others may need to watch it more than once. Pay attention to the signs you are getting from your kids—both verbal and nonverbal—and follow their lead.

## Talk about the kids in the film.

Talking about divorce can feel awkward. Kids often talk more freely when the focus isn't on them. Instead of talking about their own experience, your kids may feel more comfortable making comments about the kids in the film. When they are ready, they may bring the conversation back to their own feelings.

Pay attention to which kids they relate to most in the film—this may be a clue to what your kids are feeling but not talking about.

## Don't rush the conversation.

Don't worry if your kids don't open up right away. Watching the film together and asking a few general questions are good first steps. This lets your children know that you are there for them and that it's okay for them to share their thoughts and feelings.

If your kids don't want to talk right after the film, give them space. Let them know you understand that divorce isn't easy, and when they're ready to talk, you'll be there to listen.

Sometimes the best talks happen when kids don't feel put on the spot, like when you're driving in the car, cooking dinner together, walking the dog, or tucking them in at night. Be sure to take advantage of these opportunities.

## Do more listening than talking.

Kids often have a lot to say when they feel they are being heard. One of the most helpful things you can do for your children is listen to them. But keep in mind: what they have to say may be hard to hear. Do your best to really listen to them without judging, changing, or correcting what they have to say.

## Consider sharing *SPLIT*.

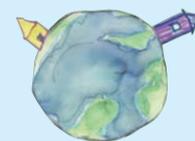
Many kids will watch *SPLIT* and want to share it with their other parent or with their extended family. Consider sharing your copy of the film or sending the other parent to [www.splitfilm.org](http://www.splitfilm.org), so they can get their own copy. Remind others to watch the film on their own first before sharing it with the kids.



## now... get the ball rolling!

Not sure where to begin? Sometimes it helps to start a conversation by asking some general questions. Look over some of the sample questions below. Pick two or three to ask your kids... and be ready to answer them yourself to get the ball rolling.

- What did you think of *SPLIT*?
- What part of the film did you like the most? Why?
- Who were your favorite kids in the film?
- Did anything make you laugh?
- Who seemed most sad?
- Which kid was most like you?
- Do you have any questions about the kids in the film?
- If you could meet with one of them, who would it be and why?
- Did *SPLIT* make you think differently about anything?



## try this... Play "fishbowl questions."

Watch *SPLIT* a second time on another day. Write down several of the questions listed above on small pieces of paper. Add in your own questions and any that your kids want to include.

Fold up each of the questions, put them in a jar or a bowl, and have everyone draw one. If you have more than one child, add a twist: the child who picks a question can choose who gets to answer it.

# introducing... the *SPLIT* kids



**trevor**  
11 years old, thinks it would be fun to have his dad around more.



**chayil**  
8 years old, takes a shower at her mom's house... and a bath at her dad's.



**jonah**  
11 years old, felt really weird when his mom's new boyfriend came to dinner.



**ehryn**  
10 years old, talks to her pet rat when she feels lonely.



**elijah**  
7 years old, has two moms who tell him they love him... almost every day!



**olivia**  
10 years old, sees a counselor who says her only job is "to be a kid"!



**eva**  
12 years old, remembers a year with seven Christmases!



**kaelan**  
9 years old, talks to his teacher when he is having a hard time.



**jane**  
11 years old, loves snakes, and wants her parents' new partners to respect snakes, too.



**thea**  
9 years old, meditates when she is feeling sad or angry.



**julia**  
6 years old, says her parents' divorce was like "when something you really love breaks."



**mateo**  
8 years old, says there is no such thing as a perfect family... or a perfect circle!

# 1



## what kids say about families

**trevor** So... let's see... I have two brothers, three sisters.

**elijah** I have two moms...  
and a little brother named Solly.

**olivia** I had a goldfish, but he passed away...  
or she.

**eva** I don't have any full-blood siblings.  
My little sister is adopted and I have  
two brothers. One of them is a half brother  
and my other brother is a stepbrother.

**kaelan** My dad has another wife. He's had three wives.  
This is his third.  
And my mom has a new boyfriend.

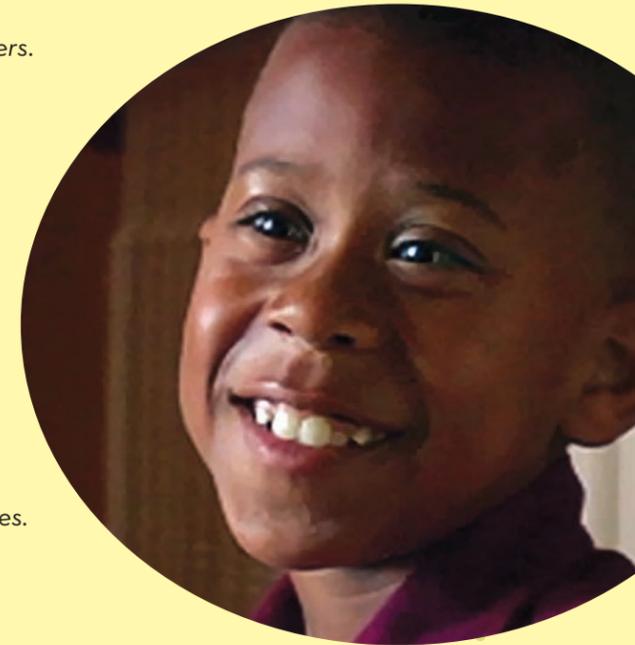
**ehryn** I think that my family is kind of different... my mom's side.  
We're kind of weird in a way, and I think that's what makes us special. We're  
addicted to chocolate. We love butter on our bread.  
We love bread. We love camping.

**jonah** We like sports... and we like music.

**chayil** We go to visit my cousins, get an ice cream, go to the park.

**jane** I think... hmm... it's like a typical family.  
But I don't have a typical family. I enjoy being special.

**mateo** Here's a perfect family.  
Well, here's the closest you can get to a perfect family:  
A kid, a little sister... they always get along. They are best friends.  
Everyone wants to marry him.  
He becomes a great tennis player, and he gets billions of dollars.  
And the girl becomes the best novel writer.  
The mom and dad are not divorced. They love each other.  
They eat pancakes every day.  
And that's the perfect family that will never happen in the world. Nobody is  
perfect. Nothing is perfect.  
Even if they make the most roundest circle in the world,  
it's never perfect.



## things to know about families

### Families come in all shapes and sizes.

Every family is different, just like every person is different. And while some families may look perfect from the outside, every family has its challenges. Reassure your kids that a family doesn't have to be "perfect" in order to be good.

### Divorce doesn't end a family—it changes it.

Even though your family is changing, it's still a family. Now, instead of having a family in one home, your child will have two homes... one with each parent. And while it may be hard to believe, this new version of family will start to feel normal very soon.

### Watch your words!

The idea of "family" is very important to a child's sense of self. Kids do best when they feel a sense of belonging with each parent, regardless of how time is shared between households.

As your family changes, your child may be confused about how to best describe their family. Use positive words to support your children's relationship with the other parent. This will help your kids, and it may also improve your relationship with the other parent!

- Talk about the "other parent" instead of the "ex."
- Avoid legal phrases like "custody schedule" or "court order." Try using terms like "parenting time," "parenting schedule," or "parenting agreement."
- Avoid using words like "visit," "visitation," or "custody." Children should never feel like visitors in a parent's life. Instead, talk about "time with Mom and time with Dad."

.....  
**mateo** *A perfect family will never happen in the world. Nobody is perfect. Nothing is perfect. Even if they make the most roundest circle in the world, it's never perfect.*  
.....



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## talking to parents about families

A strong sense of family plays a big part in how kids feel about themselves.

Ehryn says her family is "kind of weird." They are addicted to chocolate, and they love bread. Jane says she doesn't have a typical family, and that she enjoys being "special."

- + How do you think your kids would describe your family as it is now?
- + How would you describe your family?
- + Did you include the other parent in your description?
- + How can you talk about your changed family that will help your kids reshape their idea of family?

Mateo describes the perfect family.

- + What makes a family "perfect" in your mind?
- + Do you agree with Mateo when he says that no family is perfect?

Following a divorce, kids and parents are often moving in different directions at different speeds. Parents are focused on moving forward with their lives and breaking free of what used to be, while children are trying to hold tight to the family they have known.

- + How can parents strike a balance between their need for emotional distance from the marriage and their children's need to stay connected as a family?
- + What are some ways that parents can collaborate to re-establish a sense of family for kids?
- + We've all heard the term "broken family." What can parents do to help children understand that a family continues even after the marriage ends?

Children need your reassurance that both parents will continue to be a part of their lives.

- + What can parents do to support their children's relationship with the other parent?
- + How can a parent with less parenting time assure their children that they will be there for them, regardless of geographical distance and/or time between contact?



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## talking to kids about families

*The following can be read directly to children, or can be used to guide a conversation with them about families.*

All families are different, and that's what makes life so interesting. All the kids in *SPLIT* have very different families.

+ What do you think makes people a family?

Ehryn says her family is "kind of weird." They are addicted to chocolate and love bread. Jane says she doesn't have a typical family, that she enjoys being special.

+ How would you describe our family if you were in the film?

+ What is weird about our family?

Jonah says his family likes sports and music.

+ What do we like to do together as a family in this house?

+ Are there some things you'd like to start doing together as a family?

Everyone has a different idea of what a perfect family is. Mateo says a perfect family has two kids, the parents are not divorced, and they eat pancakes every day.

+ What do you think makes a perfect family?

+ Is there such a thing as a "perfect family"?

+ Does a family have to be "perfect" to be good?

+ Do you agree with Mateo that "nothing is perfect"?



# 2

change

## what kids say about **change**

**jonah** *I thought my parents would never divorce. I was one of the kids who didn't have parents divorced and I was happy about it. They were doing well together for a long time, but then... something changed.*

**olivia** *Every day they would scream... scream, scream, scream, scream. And that was really hard for us to do anything we wanted to, like do our homework, read a book. They would just constantly keep screaming.*

**thea** *My dad said we needed to talk, so we went in the living room. And they told me they were getting divorced. I didn't know what that meant so I asked them, and they explained it to me. When my dad and mom told me, my dad cried for the first time that I saw.*

**julia** *Me and my brothers went downstairs and peeked in the kitchen, and we saw my mom and my dad fighting. We didn't want them to see us but it made us really sad. Then they just broke up.*

**olivia** *It was a big surprise, really big, and they didn't tell me until they finally decided this is what we have to do. And then he just moved. The next week he went out, and really didn't come back.*

.....  
**olivia** *It was a big surprise, really big, and they didn't tell me until they finally decided this is what we have to do. And then he just moved. The next week he went out, and really didn't come back.*  
.....



## things to know about change

### Remind your kids that everything changes.

Trees grow. Clouds move. Even rocks change over time. Some changes are so slow they are hard to see, but others come with a bang. Some changes can be a big relief, but others can be really hard.

### Change can be frightening for kids.

When parents split up, kids often worry about what their new lives will be like. Will they still see their relatives from both sides of the family? Will they go to the same school and have the same friends? Will they still visit Aunt Rose every summer or go to the same basketball camp?

When you talk to your children about upcoming changes, be sure to balance the changes with reassurances about important things that will stay the same.

### Keep kids in the loop.

It is often the great unknown that is most frightening to kids. Keep your kids informed whenever possible. Don't avoid talking about the divorce or other big changes even if you feel guilty or uncomfortable. Whenever possible, involve your children in what's happening in the family.

Here are some ways to prepare your kids for change:

- Plan what you want to say before talking with the kids.
- Give them age-appropriate information.
- Focus on your children's feelings.
- Be as clear as possible about what will change and what will stay the same.
- Whenever possible, give the kids time to adjust to the idea of what will change before the change actually happens.

If your kids have questions that you're not ready or able to answer, it's okay to tell them that you don't have everything figured out yet. Reassure them that when you have an answer, they'll be the first to know.

Keeping kids informed doesn't mean sharing every detail. Children still need to be protected from adult information like problems in the marriage, child support, legal matters, and money concerns.

.....  
**jonah** *I thought my parents would never divorce. I was one of the kids who didn't have parents divorced, and I was happy about it. They were doing well together for a long time, but then... something changed.*  
.....

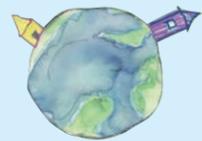
## Manage your feelings.

If you're having a tough time handling the divorce, or you have strong feelings about the other parent, get some support to help you sort out your feelings before talking to your children. You may think you're putting up a good front, but kids often notice more than we think.

## Don't change everything at once.

When life is changing, do what you can to keep some things the same for your kids:

- Whenever possible, give your children time to adjust to the divorce before making other big changes, like moving to a new neighborhood, introducing them to your new love interest, or making big schedule changes.
- Help children stay in touch with close friends, grandparents, and relatives on both sides of the family.
- Try to keep them in same school or neighborhood, and close to their other parent. Long-distance parenting is hard for kids, and parents.
- Allow the kids to continue with their after-school activities... sports, band, church groups, and clubs. Familiar routines will be a big comfort and support during the family change.



## try this... Get some new rhythms going.

Kids need to know that life will go on, so it's really helpful to create a "new normal" as soon as possible.

Think about what life was like for your children before the divorce:

- How did you and your kids spend time together?
- What kind of routines and rules did you have as a family?
- What needs to stay the same and what needs to change?
- How can you involve your children in the process of deciding some of these things?

There are many ways to reduce the upheaval in your children's lives and keep a strong sense of family:

- Eat meals together at the dinner table.
- Give kids responsibilities or ways to help out around the house.
- Make time to help them with homework.
- Get involved in a hobby or activity that everyone enjoys.



## talking to parents about change

Change can be frightening for children. The way we prepare our children for change will have a big impact on how well they adapt. The kids in this segment talk about some of the different ways their parents handled the divorce.

Olivia and Julia talk about their parents fighting and fighting.

- + What are some ways parents can protect their kids from fighting and disagreements?
- + What can parents do when they feel really angry or when the other parent won't stop fighting?

Thea says her dad cried when her parents told her they were getting a divorce.

- + How do you think it felt for Thea to see her dad cry?
- + How do you think your kids feel when they see that you're very sad?
- + What feelings should be shared with your children, and which should they be shielded from?
- + How might you protect the kids from your most extreme feelings?
- + How can you take care of yourself when you are feeling low, so that your children do not need to take care of you?

Divorce brings a lot of unexpected changes to children's lives. Olivia was really surprised when her dad moved out so suddenly.

- + How did your kids react to the news of the separation?
- + How did that feel to you?
- + Do you think your children were surprised by the news?
- + How can parents best prepare their kids for big changes like leaving the family home and/or moving to separate homes?

## talking to kids about change

*The following can be read directly to children, or can be used to guide a conversation with them about change.*

Trees grow. Clouds move. Even rocks change over the years. Some changes happen so slowly they are hard to see, but other changes come with a bang.

Change can feel really good, but it can also feel really uncomfortable... especially at first.

Olivia says her parents' divorce was a "big surprise."

- + What do you think could have made things easier for Olivia?
- + Was our divorce a surprise for you?

Even adults can feel uncomfortable or worried when things change... especially if the change is a surprise.

Thea saw her dad cry when he told her about the divorce.

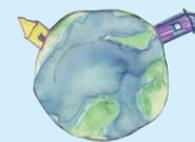
- + Why do you think Thea's dad cried?
- + How do think she felt seeing her dad cry?
- + How do you feel when one of us (Mom or Dad) is sad?

Julia and her brothers peeked in the kitchen and heard their parents fighting... and then they broke up. It made Julia really sad.

- + What do you think Julia and her brothers were feeling?
- + How did you feel when we told you about the changes in our family?
- + What would make change easier for kids?



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### try this... Get ready for change

Olivia was surprised when her dad suddenly moved out. When preparing your kids for a big change like a parent moving out of the family home, think about how you have helped your children handle other changes in the past.

For example, if your kids were transferring to a new school, how would you get them ready for that change? What would you do to prepare them for their first day? Instead of just dropping your children off at the new school, you might set up a tour of the school or talk your kids through what the first day might look like. How could you take a similar approach to some of the changes your kids are going through now?

Think about a new change that is coming up for your family. Write down at least three ways you can help your kids prepare for this change.

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# 3



## what kids say about feelings

**jonah** *When my mom told me they were getting divorced, I ran into her room and I trashed everything. I was thinking that I hated my whole family. That was about it. I just kind of was thinking of... hate. I just hated everything.*

**olivia** *I just burst into tears and I got really emotional. I just cried... cried through dinner. I just was really sad.*

**jonah** *It was like... why would they do that if they knew it was going to be hard for me and stuff?*

**elijah** *The night that they told me I was a little sad and I had a bad dream. It was scary, like one of the moms going away forever.*

**julia** *It's like something that you really love like breaks and you can't put it back together... kind of.*

.....  
**julia** *It's like something that you really love like breaks and you can't put it back together... kind of.*  
.....



## things to know about feelings

### There will be lots of feelings.

Anger, sadness, and fear are the most common—and perhaps the strongest—emotions that kids experience when their parents separate. Some children may feel a sense of relief, while others may get very quiet and leave you guessing what they are feeling.

There are lots of reasons why children may have a hard time sharing their feelings with parents. Often kids don't know how to express what they feel, while others may try to protect their parents from more upset or hurt.

Kids may also feel confused or conflicted if their feelings are not in line with those of their parents. Some children may welcome a bit more peace in the household, while you are still reeling from the fallout of the separation. Reassure your child that it's okay if their feelings are not the same as yours.

### Let them have their feelings.

Let your kids know it's okay for them to feel whatever it is they are feeling. They may even have very different feelings from one moment to the next. That's okay, too. Your job is to give your children the space to have their feelings without being judged, corrected, or interrupted. Encourage them to talk, and to ask for help when they have strong feelings. And when they do talk, really listen to what they have to say. And remind them that you love them.

(For more tips on how to really hear your kids, have a look at chapter 13: **talking**.)



### try this... Lead by example.

Kids often learn more from what we do than what we say. If you want your kids to know how to deal with difficult feelings or how to face challenges, lead by example. Let them see you paying attention to your emotions, taking bad days in stride, managing conflict with integrity and turning to others for support when you need it.

While this big change may feel overwhelming for you and your kids, you will all be learning new skills and strategies that will serve you well in life and make you more confident, capable people.



### Help kids with their feelings.

You can help your children manage and move through difficult feelings by encouraging them to express their emotions in healthy and acceptable ways.

To help children with sadness, suggest that they:

- Talk to someone they trust.
- Draw or color how they feel.
- Write in a journal.
- Talk a walk.
- Sit in a safe/favorite place and think about things they love.



To handle anger, it is helpful for children to:

- Exercise.
- Step away from situations that cause strong feelings.
- Talk to a parent, friend, or counselor.
- Breathe deeply and count to ten to calm themselves.
- Go outside or take a walk.
- Draw or write in a journal.
- Sit in a safe/favorite place and think about something that helps them calm down.

### Don't take it personally.

It's normal for kids to feel angry or upset when parents split up. In order for them to move through these feelings and get to the other side, they need to know that you understand. Let your kids know that it's normal to feel angry and that you are willing to listen. Then help them come up with some healthy ways to handle their anger. *And do your best not to take your child's anger personally.*

### Feelings change over time.

The ride through divorce is like a roller coaster—for both adults and kids. What your children feel today may be very different from what they will be feeling next week or next month. Let your kids know that it's normal to have ups and downs as they go through the process. Also, reassure them that just as life changes, so do feelings, and in time things often get much better.

### Remind them you will always love them.

Divorce shows children that love doesn't always last. Your children may wonder, *If my parents can stop loving each other, will they stop loving me?* Kids need to know that the love you have for them is a "forever love"—different from the kind of love you once shared as a couple. Assure kids that you will always love them.

## talking to **parents** about **feelings**

Focus on giving your children the space they need to have their own feelings about changes in the family... including the really hard ones.

Olivia said she burst into tears and was really sad when she learned that her parents were separating. Jonah said he trashed his mother's room, and he felt like he "just hated everything."

- + How did you feel when you heard Jonah's reaction to the divorce?
- + How did your kids react to the news?
- + If you haven't told them yet, what can you do to prepare for their reactions?

The kids in this section talk about feeling sad, angry, and worried.

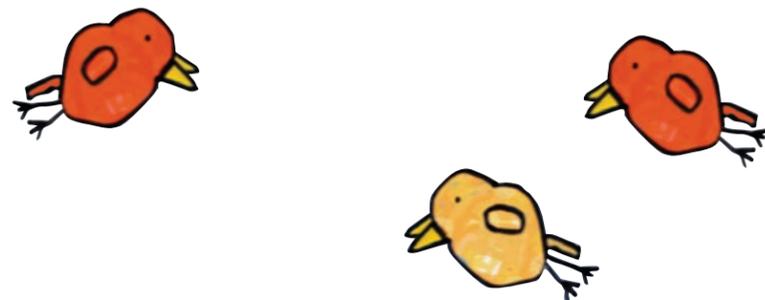
- + If you were one of Jonah's parents, what are some ways you could help him manage his anger?
- + What might be some healthy ways to help Olivia and Julia handle their sadness?
- + How comfortable are you with your children's anger or sadness?
- + Is one of these emotions harder for you to handle than the other?

How parents feel about the divorce may be very different from what their kids are feeling.

- + What are some things you can do to keep your feelings separate from your child's, so that you can truly support your kids?
- + What kind of supports do you need to have in place so that you can really be there for your kids?

Elijah says he had a dream about one of his moms going away forever.

- + Have your children ever expressed a similar fear about losing one parent?
- + Are you able to support your child's relationship with the other parent?
- + How can you let your children know that you will support a loving and consistent relationship with the other parent?



# talking to kids about feelings

*The following can be read directly to children, or can be used to guide a conversation with them about feelings.*

Divorce brings up a lot of big feelings. Sometimes you might feel really angry, and other times you might feel sad, afraid, or a little confused. It's okay. These feelings are normal, and most kids have these feelings when their families change.

If you didn't have some of these feelings, then you might be a little strange!

## The truth about feelings is:

**You can't stop them**, no matter how hard you try. So don't fight them. Let the feelings come and let them go.

**Ignoring your feelings doesn't make them go away.** When you let yourself feel your feelings and then let them out, you will feel much better. But you do need to make good choices about how you handle your feelings. While it's okay to be angry at your brother, it's not okay to hit him. A better choice might be to walk away and cool off, talk to a parent, or take the dog for a run.

**Feelings change.** Every feeling passes sooner or later—some sooner than others. But they all move on eventually.

**You have the right to feel any way you want.** Kids don't have to have the same feelings as their parents do. It's okay to feel happy, even if your parents are sad or angry. And it's okay to still feel sad when your parents begin to feel happier.

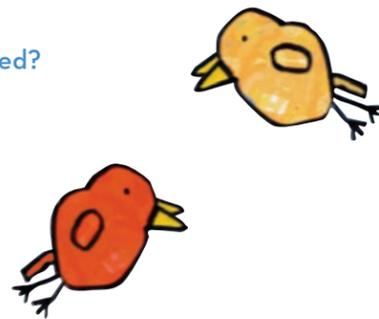
**Find someone you trust.** Everybody needs someone to talk to from time to time. If you can't talk to your parents, find someone you trust to help you sort through the tough stuff.

When Jonah's parents told him about the divorce, he ran into his mother's room and trashed everything.

- + Why do you think he did that?
- + Did you ever want to do something like that?
- + What can kids do when they are really angry or frustrated?

Jonah said he felt like he hated everyone and everything.

- + Why do you think he felt that way?
- + Do you think he really hated everything?
- + Do you ever feel really angry like that?
- + What do you do when you are really angry?



All the kids in *SPLIT* had different feelings when they heard that their parents were separating. Jonah was angry. Olivia was really sad, and she cried right through dinner.

- + What do you think Olivia was feeling?
- + What are some things kids do when they are sad?
- + What helps kids when they are sad?

Sometimes divorce feels unfair to kids. Jonah wondered why his parents were getting divorced even though they knew it would be hard for him.

- + What do you think about what Jonah said?
- + Do you think divorce is unfair to kids?
- + What do you think divorce is like for parents?

Some kids worry about losing a parent, or not seeing enough of one of them after a divorce. Elijah had a dream that one of his parents went away forever.

- + Do you ever worry about one of us leaving forever?
- + Are there other things you worry about?

Julia said it felt like something she really loved had broken and she couldn't put it back together again.

- + What do you think she meant by that?
- + Do you ever have the feeling that something is broken and you can't put it back together?



.....

**jonah** *When my mom told me they were getting divorced, I ran into her room and I trashed everything. I was thinking that I hated my whole family. I just kind of was thinking of hate. I just hated everything.*

.....

# 4



## what kids say about **wondering**

**ehryn** *I just really want to know why they got divorced. I would ask, "Mama, what happened in between you and my dad?", or "Mama, did my dad hurt you, your feelings? Did he break your heart, or did you break his heart?"*

**elijah** *All I know is that they separated. I don't really know why. Parents have different reasons for separating and our parents only had one... but I don't know why.*

**jonah** *Sometimes I feel like it's my fault my mom moved out because they were really fighting before. I thought maybe that I was sort of hard on my mom because sometimes I'd go on my dad's side of the problem. But it wasn't that, I don't think.*

**thea** *Sometimes I think that because I'm mad or mean, or did something bad to them, I think it's my fault that they're divorced.*

**eva** *There were just a lot of problems that I had just no idea about. And I was making up questions and answers in my head... thinking, like, really bad things. I told my mom, "I really want to talk about this." And she sat me down and told me everything that was going on. And even though it wasn't that great, I still wanted to know what was happening.*

.....  
**eva** *There were just a lot of problems that I had just no idea about. And I was making up questions and answers in my head... thinking, like, really bad things.*  
.....



## things to know about wondering

### Kids want to make sense of things.

Kids are curious, and they often know a lot more than we think they do. When something big happens, they want to understand why it happened. Without some explanation, their imaginations can run wild trying to make sense of it all. The answers they dream up may be more upsetting to them than the real thing.

### Invite their questions.

Whenever you talk with your kids about the separation or related changes, be sure to ask them if they have any questions. Tell them that you want to hear all of their questions, even the hard ones. And remember that it's okay to tell them when you don't have an answer. Divorce can be confusing for everyone.

### There may not be a magic answer.

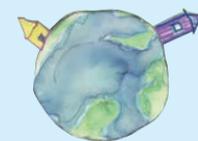
When it comes to explaining "why," you will probably never be able to completely satisfy your child's desire to know. Kids may keep asking "Why?" or may want more details than you are comfortable sharing with them. Try to keep the explanation of the separation simple, honest, and consistent... and remind them that some things are for parents only.

### Tell them it's not their fault... then tell them again.

Many kids feel responsible for the problems between their parents. Tell your child that they did nothing wrong, and the divorce is not their fault. A divorce is between parents. It is not a child's job to fix things. Reassure your child again and again that they are not to blame.



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### try this... Find comfortable words.

Even though divorce is more common than ever, kids still struggle with feeling different. They can worry what others think about their changing family.

Spend time talking to your kids about what they might want to share with others. Suggest a short simple explanation that feels okay for your family, like:

*My parents are separating and they're still working things out.*

Or: *I have two homes. Part of the week I live with my mom and the other part with my dad.*

Tell your kids that it's okay if they do not want to talk about the separation with people outside the family. Let them know that it's okay just to say, "Thanks for asking, but I don't want to talk about it right now."

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## talking to **parents** about **wondering**

Thea and Jonah both talk about how they felt responsible for their parents' divorce... how they felt it might be their fault in some way.

- + Why might kids feel the divorce is their fault?
- + What can parents say or do to help their children understand they are not to blame?
- + Have you told your children that your divorce is not their fault?
- + What have you said or what more can you say to let your kids know that the separation was not their fault?

Ehryn says she really wants to know what happened between her parents.

- + How much do you think kids need to know about why their parents separated?
- + What are some things that kids are better off not hearing?
- + What reasons did you give your kids for your separation?
- + What might your child still be wondering about?
- + What are some things *your* kids are better off not knowing?
- + Have you asked your kids if they have any questions about the separation?
- + Are there more things you can talk to them about now that would help them make sense of the separation?
- + Have you spoken to the other parent about having a consistent reason, for the children's sake?



.....  
*elijah Parents have different reasons for separating and our parents only had one, but I don't know why.*  
 .....

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## talking to **kids** about **wondering**

*The following can be read directly to children, or can be used to guide a conversation with them about wondering.*

Most kids wonder why their parents separated. Some kids are afraid to ask their parents what happened. Others ask, but they don't get very good answers.

When your questions don't get answered, it's easy to imagine bad things, make up answers, or think that it's somehow your fault. But divorce is never, ever, ever a kid's fault.

So, if you have questions, it's time to get up the courage to ask them, so you get the story right.

Ehryn says she really wants to know what happened between her parents.

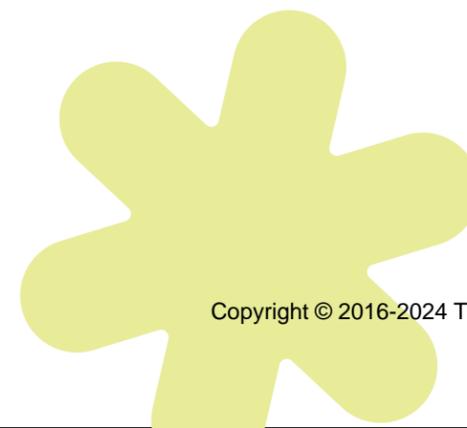
- + What do kids want to know when their parents separate?
- + Do you have any questions about what happened in our family?

Lots of kids like worry that the divorce was their fault. Jonah says he sometimes feels the divorce was his fault because he took his dad's side in a fight. Thea wonders if it was her fault because she got mad or did something bad.

- + What do you think about what Jonah and Thea said?
- + Why would a kid think the divorce is their fault?
- + Have you ever wondered if our divorce was your fault?

Most kids have pretty wild imaginations. Eva was making up answers to all the questions she had about her parents' divorce, but then she felt much better when she finally asked her mother about what really happened.

- + Why can it be hard for kids to ask parents about these kinds of things?
- + What would make it easier for kids to talk about the changes in their family?
- + What would make it easier for you to talk about the changes in our family?



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# 5



## what kids say about **what happened**

**kaelan** *I think they were just having too many fights and they wanted to stop having fights, so they moved to separate houses.*

**jonah** *My mom got someone that she liked, and my dad had someone that he liked....*

**olivia** *They weren't that happy, and my dad had a really bad problem.*

**thea** *Sometimes I think it's my mom's fault, and sometimes I think it's my dad's fault. But sometimes I just think it's meant to be.*

**ehryn** *I was only three at the time, so I really did not know what was going on... so it was kind of hard to understand everything.*

**jonah** *It used to have a lot of questions... but after time, they just sort of unfold. And some that you really want to know, you just sort of forget about them, because you know they are not going to be answered.*

.....  
**ehryn** *I was only three at the time, so I really did not know what was going on... so it was kind of hard to understand everything.*  
.....



## things to know about what happened

### What should I say?

It's hard to tell your kids that you are getting a divorce. It's even harder to explain why, especially if parents have very different explanations and feelings about what happened. Your children, however, are really paying attention to everything going around them, and they are probably trying very hard to make sense of what is happening. They hear the arguments and feel the tension at home. So when you don't give them answers, they will likely create their own stories.

### Keep it simple.

Your kids want to understand what happened, but be careful not to give them more than they can handle. Don't share details about personal issues, problems in the marriage, legal matters, or child support. This information can lead to anxiety, confusion, and fear. Most of all, your kids want to hear that everybody will be okay and that you will continue to love them.

Kids do best when parents give them a reasonable, non-blaming explanation for the divorce. For younger children (6-8 years old), you can say something like:

*We both love you very much. It's just that we two (or Mom and Dad) aren't happy living together, so we've decided to live in separate homes. We will always love you and we will always be family.*

Older children might need to hear something like:

*Sometimes in a marriage, feelings change. Usually it's not just one big thing but lots of small things that start adding up. We know it's probably hard for you to understand. You may even be wondering why we can't just fix it. We want you to know our decision to split up wasn't easy. We understand this is difficult. We're sorry this is so hard for you.*

Be sure to tell them:

- what divorce means.
- where they will live and go to school.
- when and how they will see each parent.
- what will change and what will stay the same.

Kids who were very young when the split happened may need to rethink the divorce. What made sense to them when they were three may no longer work when they are twelve. Keep in mind that, though they may be older, it doesn't necessarily mean you should bare your soul and tell them everything. Even older children will still need a buffer from the details of your relationship. Although logically they understand more, emotionally they may not be prepared to handle certain information.

.....  
**jonah** *I used to have a lot of questions but after time, they just sort of unfold. And some... you just sort of forget about them because you know they are not going to be answered.*  
.....

Kids also benefit from hearing the same message from both parents whenever that is possible.

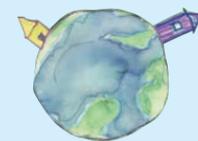
### Stay away from blame.

Although you may have strong feelings about your separation, resist the urge to place all the blame on one parent. Telling children that the divorce is one parent's fault leaves them feeling confused and caught in the middle, and it increases their anxiety and discomfort. Placing blame may make kids feel like they need to take sides.

### It's okay not to have all the answers.

There will be some questions that you cannot answer for your kids. If your kids keep asking for details you feel they shouldn't have, you can say something like...

*I know it's hard to understand why this happened, and you probably still have some questions. I will do my best to answer your questions. And you need to know that there are some things about the divorce that are just between Mom and Dad.*



## try this... Think before you speak.

Explaining the "why" of a divorce involves striking a delicate balance. While children need a reason, they also need to be protected from adult information and issues. If you're unsure about what information you should share, ask yourself:

- What feelings do I have about the divorce or about the other parent?
- Do I want to share this information because I need to tell it or because my child needs to hear it?
- How will sharing this information help my child?
- How might it hurt them?
- Will this information improve my child's relationship with the other parent or damage it?

## talking to **parents** about **what happened**

Jonah said he used to have lots of questions for his parents about their separation, but he realized over time that some of his questions would never be answered. Sometimes it can be hard for parents to know where to draw the line between saying enough and saying a bit too much.

- + How much information do you think kids should have?
- + How much do your kids already know about what has happened?
- + What did they see or hear?
- + How can you talk honestly to children about the separation without speaking badly of the other parent?

Olivia shares that her dad had a big problem. In some families, addiction, infidelity, or domestic violence play a part in the divorce.

- + How much information do you think kids should have when there are issues of violence, addiction, or infidelity?
- + How can parents get help in knowing how much information to share and how to support their kids in these situations?

As children grow and change, they may have new questions and concerns about the divorce. Ehryn was only three when her parents split up, and she didn't really understand what was going on. But as she got older she wondered if her dad broke her mom's heart, or if it was the other way around.

- + Are there things you have not told your child about the circumstances of the divorce?
- + Will you tell your children more of your story about the divorce when they are older?
- + What are some issues that might come up for children who don't remember when their parents were together?



### try this... What's the story?

Write the story of your divorce in four lines.

Now write the story again, without placing blame on either parent.

Make a list of what you think your children need to know about the divorce and a list of what would be hurtful for your children to know, even if you feel it is true.

Now write your story again, in a way that feels true for you but also keeps your child's best interests in mind.

## talking to **kids** about **what happened**

*The following can be read directly to children, or can be used to guide a conversation with them about what happened.*

Parents separate for a lot of different reasons. Some parents fight a lot and hope that if they separate everyone in the family will have a more peaceful life. Sometimes a parent has a problem with drugs, drinking, or a hot temper. Some parents just grow apart and want different things in life.

When parents separate, it's natural for kids to want to understand what has happened in their family... and it's okay to ask questions. But keep in mind: you may not get all your questions answered, and you may not get the answers you want!

Even though it is your family and you may feel that you deserve to know everything, some things are really just for parents. And sometimes parents themselves don't even understand what happened to their marriage, so it's hard for them to answer your questions.

Kaelan says his parents were fighting a lot, so they moved to separate houses to stop the fighting.

- + Can divorce ever make things better for kids?
- + What are some ways that things might get better for kids when their parents separate?

Thea doesn't know whose fault the divorce is. Sometimes she thinks it's her dad's fault... and sometimes she thinks it's her mom's. And sometimes she thinks it was just meant to be.

- + Have you ever felt like Thea?
- + What do you think Thea means when she says "it was meant to be"?
- + Sometimes there are not enough answers in the world for such big changes. Jonah still has lots of questions that have not been answered, but now he realizes he will probably never get all the answers he wants.
- + Is it hard for you to understand our divorce?
- + Do you still have questions that I can try to answer?
- + How would you describe what happened in our family?

Sometimes kids are really young when their parents split up, and so they don't remember much. Ehryn says she was three when her parents divorced, so she didn't understand what was going on.

- + Do you think divorce is easier on younger kids or older kids?
- + When a divorce happens and kids are really young, how do you think parents can help them?

# 6

## wishing

### what kids say about **wishing**

- elijah** *If I could change something, what I would change is make the moms go back together, because that's my number-one wish.*
- trevor** *I wish my dad could live with us. It'd be fun having him around.*
- olivia** *Can we just rewind and live in the same house and the same old world?*
- thea** *Sometimes I feel like I could go back in time and fix it . . . some of my dreams were that.*
- elijah** *"Well, that's not going to happen, but you can still wish it." That's what they usually say.*
- jonah** *Sometimes I just really, really ask and I purposely cry to make them go back together. But it doesn't work. It really doesn't work!  
You feel sort of powerless, but it's just not your ball of wax. It's theirs. You can't really change it because you're not really in it. You're their son or you're their daughter. But you just can't really do anything about it.*

.....  
**thea** *Sometimes I feel like I could go back in time and fix it... some of my dreams were that.*  
.....



## things to know about wishing

### Kids often want their parents back together again.

Lots of kids wish they could “rewind” to a time when their parents were together. Even if some things get better after the split, many kids still want their parents to be together again.

It’s normal for kids to wish that their parents will get back together. And it’s a wish that may not go away for a very long time.

### Kids often try to fix things.

Kids can also spend a lot of time and imagination looking for ways to fix things and get their parents back together again.

In order to fix things, kids might try to:

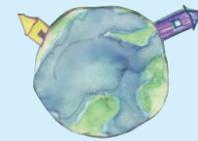
- Promise to behave better and be “perfect” children, so that their parents won’t argue.
- Act out or misbehave, so that parents will put aside their issues and focus on them instead.
- Feel sick (stomach aches, headaches, anxiety attacks), so that parents will come together to care for them.
- Create reasons for parents to see each other (for example, leaving items they need at the other parent’s house or asking if parents can visit each other’s homes).

If you’ve noticed your kids trying to fix things between you and the other parent, help them understand that wishing is normal, but they can’t change what has happened. Kids need to understand that their parents’ choice will probably not change. They also need to know that their parents’ love for them will never change.

.....  
**olivia** *Can we just rewind and live in the same house and the same old world?*  
.....



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### try this... Make a wishing box.

Find a box to hold wishes. Decorate the outside of the box with your child, and make a “Wishes” label. Inside, your child can put small objects (stones, sticks, beads, etc.) or strips of paper for each of their wishes.

You or your child can write a description to keep inside the box, perhaps using the following template:

*I am a wishing box and I can hold every one of your wishes. Some of your wishes will come true and some will not, but all of your wishes are real and important. You can add new wishes or take away old ones whenever you like. These are yours to keep forever.*

Once in a while, take out the wishing box and ask your child to tell you about some of her wishes.

### Let your kids be kids.

Kids will often try to fix the marriage. When that doesn’t work, some kids try to manage the divorce. They may take on adult roles like trying to keep the peace or working out complicated logistics. Remind your children that their job is to be kids, and that your job is to be a parent. And be sure that you look to other adults or professionals when you need help—and not to your kids.

### Keep the good memories.

Life before the divorce is a part of who our children are and where their life story began. This is especially important for children who were very young at the time of the divorce. Resist the urge to erase that chapter of their lives.

Talk to your children about the happy times: their birth, how you chose their names, or some of their special “firsts.” Help them put together a photo album or set aside special keepsakes for when they are older.

The good memories will provide a sense of stability and continuity for your children through the many changes ahead.

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## talking to **parents** about **wishing**

Some of the kids in *SPLIT* wish that things could go back to the way they were before their parents separated. Even if some things get better after the divorce, kids may still wish for their parents to get together again.

- + Do you think your children feel this way?
- + If so, what have you seen or heard that makes you think this?
- + What could you do or say to help your kids understand that wishing is normal but they can't change what has happened?

Jonah talks about crying on purpose to get his parents back together... but it doesn't work.

- + Have you ever noticed your kids trying to fix things between you and the other parent?
- + What are some ways parents can help kids handle their sad feelings?

Jonah talks about feeling powerless about his parents' divorce, but he says, "It's just not your ball of wax."

- + What do you think Jonah means by this?
- + What can make kids feel powerless when parents split up?
- + How can we help our kids understand that it's not their job to fix the marriage or manage the divorce?



## talking to **kids** about **wishing**

*The following can be read directly to children, or can be used to guide a conversation with them about wishing.*

Wishing and hoping are a normal part of divorce. When things happen that we aren't so happy about, we hope they will change. But it's important to remember that kids don't cause a divorce, and kids can't fix a divorce... no matter how much they wish they could.

Elijah says his number one wish is for his parents to get back together.

- + What is your number one wish?
- + What are some of your other wishes and hopes?

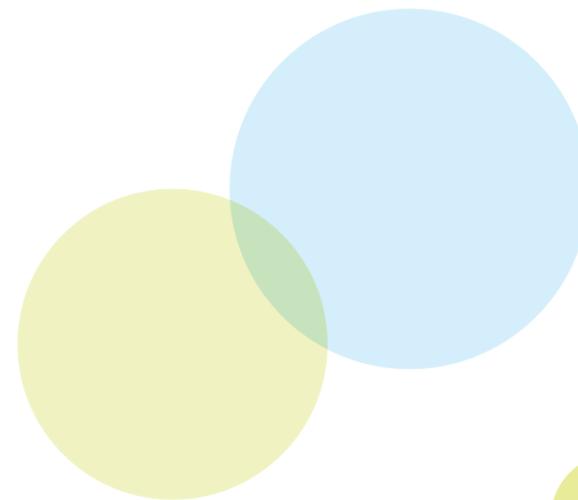
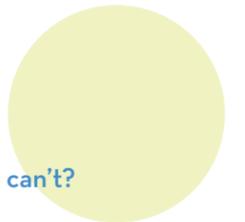
Thea and Olivia wish they had magical powers to go back in time and fix things between their parents.

- + If you had magical powers, what would you change?

Jonah says he cries sometimes to get his parents back together. He says he feels powerless when he can't change things... but he realizes that it's not his "ball of wax," it's his parents'.

- + What do you think Jonah means by this?
- + What are some ways kids try to fix things?
- + Can kids fix a divorce?
- + How does it feel when you really want to change something but you can't?

Even though you can't change things, it's important to talk about how you feel. Talking about your feelings will help your parents know how you feel. When parents know how you feel, they can try to make things better for you.



# 7



## what kids say about **moving on**

- elijah** *For me at the beginning it was really scary... and then you feel a little bit better.*
- thea** *A lot of things are going to change in your life because you are going to have to live in separate houses.*
- jonah** *When I went to school and I told my class, a lot of kids just kind of helped. I don't know how to say it... they just were there for me in a way.*
- jane** *Even if you have to live in two different houses, it really is all fine.*
- julia** *I was kind of surprised about what kind of house it would be. And I wasn't sure if I was going to share a room with my brothers... but then we did.*
- jonah** *I didn't really like it at first because I was sad about getting a new house. But then after a while it was sort of cool. I really liked my new room. We had a nice new bunk bed.*
- jane** *I don't have my own room at my dad's house. I just have my own bed. And so that's a little annoying. But life goes on.*

.....  
**elijah** *For me at the beginning it was really scary... and then you feel a little bit better.*  
.....



## things to know about moving on

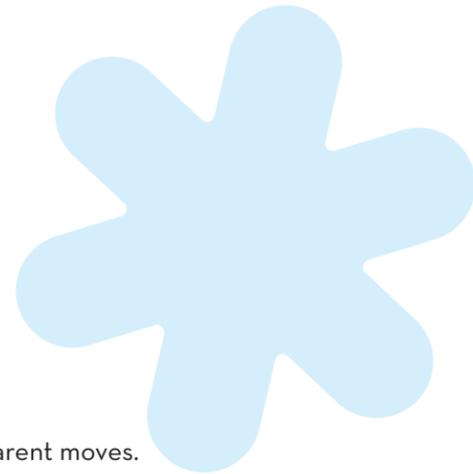
This is a time of major adjustment for everyone. Letting go of What Was and moving onto What Is can be a bit of a rocky road for everyone. Parents moving from one home to two can be overwhelming for kids... as can other big changes, like a new town, a new school, or new daily routines.

Kids find comfort in routine and structure, and they are often resistant to change. We need to remember that parents have a lot more lead time to get used to the idea of the separation—and that kids are often the last to know. Given this, our kids' adjustment to changes will happen in a different time frame than ours as parents.

### What's new?

Children will face a number of big changes, including:

- Different day-to-day routines.
- A parent going back to work or working different hours.
- One or both parents moving to a new home.
- Having toys and clothing divided between two homes.
- Not having what they want where they want it.
- A parent living miles away instead of close by.
- Being away from things that feel familiar or safe.
- Missing pictures or other sentimental belongings when a parent moves.



.....  
**jane** *I don't have my own room at my dad's house. I just have my own bed... so that's a little annoying. But life goes on.*  
.....

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### Give the kids a “heads-up.”

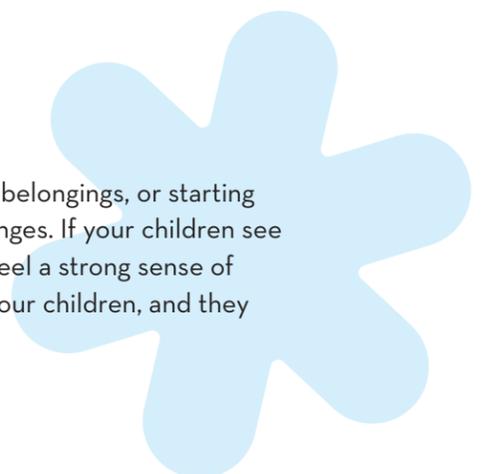
Do your best to give the kids a “heads-up” before changes happen. The more lead time they get, the better off they'll be. Help them adjust. If you're moving, explore the new neighborhood together. Working a new job? Take them to your new work place. Spend time creating a new morning routine with the kids, and do a test run before you start.

Talk to the kids about:

- When changes will take place.
- What will be different.
- How life will look after the change happens.
- The feelings that can accompany change.

### This is a time of change for you, too.

You might be setting up a new home, dividing up furniture and belongings, or starting a new relationship. Your child will notice even the smallest changes. If your children see you put away pictures of you with the other parent, they may feel a strong sense of sadness or loss. Remember, each of these changes will affect your children, and they may not be as ready as you are for the change.



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## talking to **parents** about **moving on**

Kids often feel anxious when they don't know what to expect. Julia was surprised by the kind of house her dad got. Elijah says that the changes were really scary at first.

- + What are some changes that kids face in their day-to-day lives when parents split up?
- + How can parents prepare kids for big changes like a parent moving out, a new home, or less money in Mom's or Dad's pocket?
- + How can you help your children maintain a sense of security and stability in the midst of big changes in your family?

Too many changes all at once can be overwhelming for kids. Elijah says things were scary for him at the beginning, but then he felt a little better.

- + What about your home or your home life do you think is most important to your kids right now?
- + What are some familiar objects and routines that give your kids comfort and a sense of continuity?
- + What are some things you can keep the same?
- + What are some ways you can minimize change for your children?



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## talking to **kids** about **moving on**

*The following can be read directly to children, or can be used to guide a conversation with them about moving on.*

Sometimes change comes as a big surprise. And while some changes feel exciting, others don't seem like such great ideas.

Change can be really scary for kids (and parents too!) because it's hard to know what's around the corner. A lot of us like to keep things just the way they are, even if the way they are is not so great.

When a change feels really big or scary, let a parent know. Together you can work out ways to make the change a little easier for everyone.

Elijah said things were scary for him at first, but then things got better.

- + What do you think might have been scary for Elijah when his parents first separated?
- + What was scary for you at first, when we separated?
- + What do you think parents can do to make changes easier for kids?

Sometimes it's hard to know who to talk to about the divorce. Jonah says it really helped when he told the kids in his class... and they were there for him.

- + Should kids tell their friends about their parents' divorce?
- + What about teachers and other important adults?
- + Do you need help figuring out who to tell, or what to tell people about the changes in our family?

It's hard for kids when they don't know what to expect... especially with big changes. When Julia moved to a new house, she wasn't sure if she was going to be sharing a room with her brothers, and then she was surprised when she found out she would be. And it turned out to be just fine.

- + What changes in our family have been hard for you?
- + Have there been any changes that surprised you?
- + What changes have been good?
- + Do you have any questions or worries about other things that might change in the future?

Sometimes things work out better than we imagine. At first Jonah didn't like the idea of having two homes, but then he found out it was kind of cool.

- + What could be cool about having two homes?
- + Were there any things you were worried about at first, but then they turned out okay?

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# 8

## back & forth



### what kids say about **back & forth**

**jane** *I live with my mom on Mondays and Thursday nights... and Friday nights and Sundays.*

**thea** *I have my mom Sunday, Monday, Tuesday...*

**eva** *...but then on Wednesday nights I'm with my dad, and on Thursday nights I'm with my dad.*

**kaelan** *...two nights with Mom, two nights with my dad, two nights with Mom, two nights with my dad...*

**eva** *It's really confusing but I've just kind of gotten used to it. Christmas... I have it with everyone. A couple years ago I had seven Christmases... so that's pretty cool!*

**ehryn** *It's kind of fun, but sometimes when you're having too much fun, you don't feel like going back to the other parent. And you just don't want to hurt the other parent's feelings... so that's kind of hard.*

**thea** *I go back and forth for my birthdays. This time for my birthday I'm going to my dad's house. Then next year I'm going to go to my mom's. But sometimes I wish could have my birthday at my mom's... I can... but I want it to be fair.*

.....  
**kaelan** *...two nights with Mom, two nights with my dad, two nights with Mom, two nights with my dad...*  
.....



## things to know about **back & forth**

### Transitions can be hard.

Even under the best of circumstances, going back and forth between households can be confusing and unsettling for kids. It can feel like moving between two very different worlds.

When kids get stressed, they may act out their frustrations by:

- Withdrawing into themselves.
- Sulking.
- Being disrespectful.
- Pushing limits.
- Becoming clingy.
- Acting younger than their age.
- Throwing temper tantrums or having meltdowns.
- Being hyper or overly fearful.
- Leaving things they need at the other parent's home.

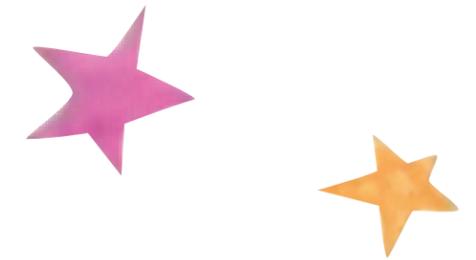
Pay attention to what's going on in your home when kids are going back and forth. Think about what you can do to make the change easier for your kids. For example, if your child is having a difficult time leaving your home to go with the other parent, consider meeting the other parent at the park for pickups. To help your child feel less anxious, arrive at the park thirty minutes early so you can take a walk together or spend time at the playground.

### Keep things simple and predictable.

If your children know what to expect during transitions, they will feel more relaxed and have less anxiety. Normal everyday life is already pretty hectic for today's kids. Add two homes and two parents' schedules into the mix, and it's easy to understand how kids might get overwhelmed and confused when moving between households. You can help them by keeping things as predictable and uncomplicated as possible.



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### Be flexible.

Choice and voice are important for children, especially when there is so little they control. Do your best to be flexible about arrangements or schedule changes in ways that can benefit your kids and keep their lives more comfortable.

### Don't ask kids to choose.

Asking a child which parent they want to be with can create stress and divided loyalty, especially with younger children. Your children love both parents, and saying yes to one parent means saying no to the other. Let the grown-ups make the big decisions, while giving kids the opportunity to make some of the smaller ones.



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.....

**ehryn** *Sometimes when you're having too much fun, you don't feel like going back to the other parent. And you don't want to hurt the other parent's feelings. So that's kind of hard.*

.....



### try this... Create predictable, stress-free transitions.

To ease the stress of going back and forth, consider creating a **regular transition routine** for your children. This involves doing an activity with your kids when they leave or come back to your home.

To get started, it's best to choose an activity that fits your child's personality. A child who is quiet or laid-back might want to read a book or color. A child who is more active or outgoing might like to play outside.

Ask them! See what they might want to do. You could:

- Go for walk together.
- Read a book together in a cozy place.
- Sit and play a game or watch a short movie.
- Make dinner together, or prepare a special treat.
- Ride bikes or play catch.
- Color or draw a picture.
- Play with modeling clay or Play-Doh.

Making transitions predictable gives the kids the emotional space they need to shift gears between the two households. It also helps them feel less stressed because they'll know what to expect when they walk through your door.

## talking to parents about back & forth

Each of the kids in *SPLIT* has a different parenting schedule. While a parenting schedule may look fair and reasonable on paper, it may be confusing for kids who are living it day-to-day.

- + How did it feel to hear the kids recite their parenting schedules?
- + What do you think works for your kids with their current schedule?
- + What do you think might be hard for them?
- + What could you do to make things easier for your kids with your current schedule?

Moving back and forth can be stressful for kids, especially when they first walk through your door after spending time with the other parent.

- + What is a typical transition like in your home?
- + What could you do in the first hour of your parenting time to make a smoother transition for your kids?
- + Have you asked the kids what works best for them?

Kids often feel they need to manage their time and attention with each parent so that the balance is "fair." Ehryn talks about not wanting to hurt one parent's feelings when she is having fun with the other parent. Thea wants to choose where she has her birthdays, but she also wants to be fair to both parents.

- + What went through your mind as you listened to these kids talk about fairness?
- + When are some times that your kids might worry about being fair or needing to manage your feelings or the other parent's feelings?
- + How can you reassure your kids that they don't need to worry about making things fair?

One year Eva had seven Christmases, and she thought that was pretty cool.

- + What are some benefits for kids with two homes during holidays and special occasions?
- + What challenges might kids face on these special days?
- + What can you do to make things easier for your child during holidays or on special occasions?



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## talking to **kids** about back and forth

*The following can be read directly to children, or can be used to guide a conversation with them about back and forth.*

When parents divorce, kids usually start living in two homes. The back and forth can be a little confusing, even when you have a schedule!

All the kids in *SPLIT* have different schedules, and they all go back and forth between homes.

- + What are some of the hard things about going back and forth?
- + Are there some things that would make going back and forth easier for you?

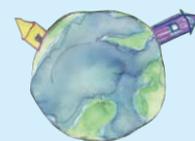
Letting your parents know how you feel about the schedule can help. Although it might not be possible to change the schedule, knowing how you feel gives your parents a chance to make changes where they can or at least explain why they can't.

There may be some good things about having two homes. One year Eva had seven Christmases, and she thought that was pretty cool!

- + What are some good parts of having a two-home family?
- + How do you feel about the way we celebrate holidays now?
- + What is the hardest part of holidays now?
- + What would make holidays and special days easier for you?



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## try this... Create a color-coded calendar.

Have your child choose a color for each home to help them keep track of their time with each parent. Mark important dates like family birthdays, school events, holidays, and other special occasions. Put the calendar in a place where kids can see it every day, and update it regularly. For more tech-savvy kids, create a shared online calendar or a calendar on their phones/devices.

Work to keep the schedule predictable, and make sure the kids always have access to the schedule.

Ehryn says that it's sometimes hard for her to leave when she's having fun with one of her parents, but she doesn't want to hurt the other parent's feelings.

- + Do you ever worry about hurting a parent's feelings?
- + Do you sometimes feel you need to take care of a parent?

One year Thea spends her birthday with her dad, and the next year she spends it with her mom. Sometimes she wants it to be different, but she says she wants to be fair to her parents.

- + Do you ever feel this way?
- + What do you think about the way we celebrate your birthday?
- + What would make birthdays more fun for you?
- + How do feel when both of us are at a school or sports event, or a special occasion?
- + What can we do to make this easier for you?

.....  
 thea *I go back and forth for my birthdays. Sometimes I wish could have my birthday at my mom's... but I want it to be fair.*  
 .....



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# 9



## what kids say about missing

**jonah** *Some things that aren't that cool about it is... when you're at one person's house, sometimes you miss the other, and when you are at the other person's house you miss the other one. So that's one of the hard things about it, but... yeah.*

**thea** *Sometimes I have to do vacations with my dad, and I really miss my mom... and we used to all go to vacations together.*

**ehryn** *I see families that have dads and I just miss having the feeling of having a dad around.*

**trevor** *I told my dad about a month ago about my fifth-grade graduation... how I was going to graduate and then... he didn't come. And my cousin said, "You know... he never comes when you ask him to come to something so why try?"*

**ehryn** *I miss having a father in the house, but we do have a man in the house— but he's not really a person, he's an animal. He's my rat. Don't worry—he's okay, he doesn't bite!*

**jonah** *I think it's kind of nice that my parents— when I got a lot more settled about it— they told me that I could go over to either house when I wanted, if I really missed the other person. That's really what helped, for me.*

**elijah** *We call them every night and morning. I just like to talk to them. And every time I leave their house to go to the other house, they say, "I love you and I'll miss you until you come back." They say "I love you" practically, like, every day.*

.....

**trevor** *I told my dad about a month ago about my fifth-grade graduation... how I was going to graduate and then... he didn't come.*

.....



## things to know about missing



### Kids will miss the other parent.

Of all of the changes in your kids' lives, perhaps the most challenging is that one of their parents is no longer in the next room to help with homework or tuck them in at night. When dinnertime or bedtime rolls around, kids may struggle with feelings of sadness or longing.

### Respect your kids' love for the other parent.

It's understandable if you have mixed feelings about your children's other parent. But no matter how you feel about the other parent, make a point to separate those feelings from the needs of your children. Avoid (at all costs!) the temptation to speak badly of the other parent. You will only hurt your child's feelings at a time when they need to find a new sense of balance and security.

When your children want to contact the other parent, let them. You will have happier and more-relaxed kids, and the other parent may just follow your lead!

### Respect their time with the other parent.

Your children need quality time with each parent, so respect their time with the other parent. Allow your children to settle into their other home. Keep telephone calls short and sweet. Too much contact may make things harder for your child. Also, if the kids are involved in an activity or a meal with the other parent, have them return the call when they are free. The other parent will appreciate the respect you are showing and may well do the same for you.

### Let kids know that you're going to be okay.

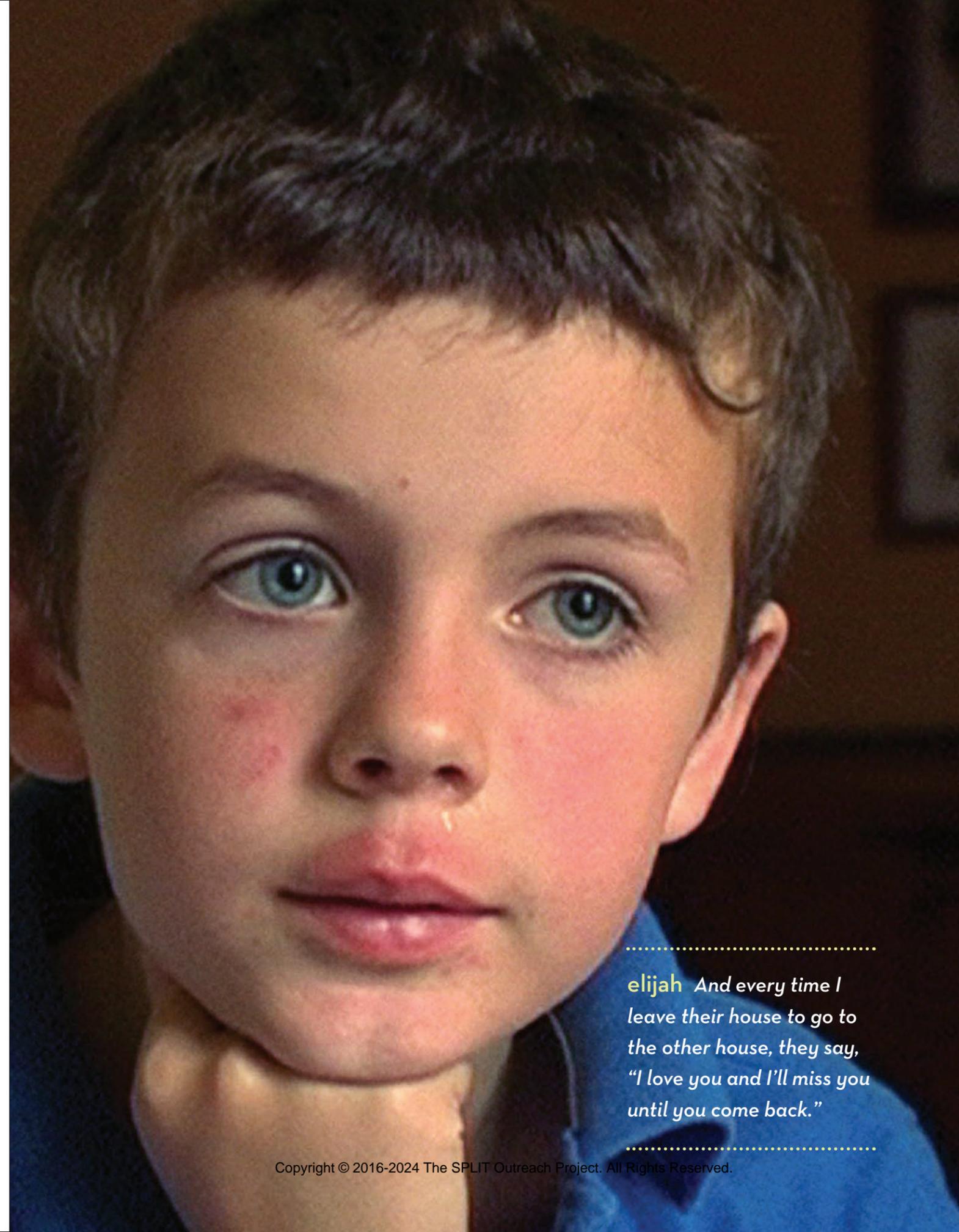
Kids often worry about the parent they are not with, so do what you can to ease their concerns. Let your kids know that while you will miss them, you are okay when they are with their other parent.

### Show up for your kids!

It's really important for children to have regular and consistent time with each parent. Even if a conflict or strained relationship makes you want to avoid the other parent, don't let this tension keep you from spending time with your kids, and don't keep your kids from the other parent.

This is an important time to keep your word. When you don't show up for your parenting time, birthday parties, or baseball games, you will disappoint your kids. A promise is a promise! If there is an unavoidable no-show, apologize and make it up with a special treat or an extra bedtime story. Kids are usually pretty forgiving.

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elijah *And every time I leave their house to go to the other house, they say, "I love you and I'll miss you until you come back."*

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## talking to parents about missing

Children feel a sense of connection to both parents, so it's normal for kids to miss the parent they're not with.

- + How do you feel when your children say they miss their other parent?
- + How can you help your children when they miss the other parent?

Do your best to comfort your kids by making it possible for them to get in touch with their other parent. Elijah says he talks to his parents every morning and every night.

- + Do your children feel comfortable contacting the other parent while they're with you?
- + What spoken or unspoken agreements do you have about your child's communication with the other parent?
- + Can you have a clearer agreement with the other parent about communication between households?

Trevor is really sad that his father missed his graduation.

- + If you were Trevor's mom, what would say to help him?
- + How can you help your kids come to terms with a parent who doesn't show up, or who continually disappoints them?
- + What are some ways you can stay involved in your children's lives when they are with the other parent, while still respecting the other parent's time?

Jonah says that once things settled down a bit, his parents let him go back and forth whenever he missed the other parent.

- + What do you think about this flexibility with Jonah's schedule?
- + Are you and the other parent flexible with your schedule to accommodate your child's needs?
- + Can you and the other parent come to an agreement to allow some flexibility with your parenting schedule?



## talking to kids about missing



*The following can be read directly to children, or can be used to guide a conversation with them about missing.*

There are lots of changes for kids after a divorce. A big one is that your parents don't live in the same house anymore. So it's normal to miss a parent you do not see every day, especially in the beginning.

When you miss the other parent, there are lots of ways to stay in touch. Elijah says he talks to his other parent every morning and every night.

- + What helps you the most when you miss one of us (Mom/Dad)?
- + Do you feel comfortable calling or texting your mom/dad when you are with me?

Thea misses her mom when she goes on vacation with her dad, because they used to all go on vacation together.

- + Do you ever feel that way during our vacations?
- + What would make our vacations more enjoyable for you?

Trevor was really sad when his dad didn't show up for his fifth-grade graduation.

- + What do you think Trevor was feeling?
- + What might make Trevor feel better?
- + Have you ever been disappointed or sad when one of us didn't show up for something?
- + How does it feel for you when we are both at school or sports events, or special occasions?
- + Is there something we could do to make these events easier and more enjoyable for you?

Ehryn talks to her pet rat when she is missing her dad.

- + Why do you think Ehryn talks to her rat?
- + What do you do when you are missing a parent?
- + How can I help you when you are missing Mom/Dad?

Some parents follow the schedule and never change, and some parents are really flexible with the schedule. Jonah says that once things settled down, his parents let him go back and forth whenever he missed the other parent.

- + What do you think about a system like that?
- + What do you like about our schedule now?
- + Is there something that might make it better for you?
- + Do schedule changes make you uncomfortable, or do you like them sometimes?



# 10



## what kids say about **two homes**



- eva** *It seems so weird, since I have such different lifestyles.  
I eat different food at the other houses!*
- jane** *My mom's a librarian and my dad's a bike messenger...*
- chayil** *At my dad's house I take a bath and at my mom's house I take a shower.*
- eva** *I have Dad pajamas and Mom pajamas.*
- thea** *My cat is at my dad's house and my dog is at my mom's house.*
- eva** *I mean, I've had some problems, like...  
there's different rules at my dad's house than at my mom's house.  
It's like, "Well, wait a minute, I'm allowed to do this at my mom's house...  
why am I not allowed to do it here?"*
- jonah** *My mom really doesn't like TV. She's like, "No, no, no, no,"  
and my dad is okay with TV.*
- chayil** *Well... at my dad's house I have to vacuum,  
but at my mom's house I don't have to vacuum.  
And at my dad's house I have to wash the stairs,  
but at my mom's house I don't have to wash the stairs  
because we don't have stairs. We just have an elevator.*
- jonah** *At my mom's house the bathroom's to the right  
and at my dad's house it's to the left.  
Wait... no... it's the opposite.*
- jane** *When I'm alternating houses, I forget stuff.  
Like, I recently forgot a report, so I turned it in a day late.*
- chayil** *Well, sometimes I forget the clothes that I'm supposed to bring to my mom  
that she gave me to take to my dad... but I have to bring it back to her.*
- jonah** *And sometimes when you wake up you're, like,  
"Oh, another day at Mom's house. That doesn't look like Mom's house.  
Oh, this is Dad's house!"*

## things to know about two homes



### Two homes can make heads spin.

Two households often mean two very different lives for kids—different rules about screen time and bedtime, or what is considered appropriate language and clothing. It can be a challenge for kids to continually shift between such different rules and expectations.

### Parents don't have to always see eye to eye.

It helps when parents can be on the same page about rules, everyday routines, and structure. However, good co-parenting doesn't mean you have to do everything exactly alike. If you and the other parent don't see eye to eye, focus on core values (i.e., safety, education, respect, health) instead of haggling over parenting styles (i.e., bedtimes, food choices, how homework gets done, how much TV kids watch, etc.).

### Keep the kids connected to the other parent.

Kids might be anxious about one of their parents disappearing from their lives. No matter how you feel about the other parent, do what you can to make sure your children have regular contact with him or her.

### Fill your home with love.

Remember, the two households may be quite different. One parent may be working with a much smaller budget than the other. One home may have more toys or electronics. But what kids want most is a home filled with love and support, a place where they can relax and feel secure. And kids do best when they feel a sense of belonging in both homes.



.....  
*eva I mean, I've had some problems, like... there's different rules at my dad's house than at my mom's house. It's like, "Well, wait a minute, I'm allowed to do this at my mom's house... why am I not allowed to do it here?"*  
.....



## talking to parents about two homes

Chayil takes a bath at her mom's house and a shower at her dad's. Eva has Mom pajamas and Dad pajamas.

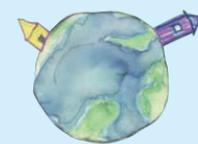
- + What are some things that are different in your child's two homes?
- + What are some things that are the same?
- + What might be hard for your kids about having two homes?
- + What are some ways your kids benefit from having two homes?

Eva is like lots of kids who get frustrated when parents have different rules.

- + What can you do to make the differences between households easier for your kids?
- + Are there some agreements you can make with the other parent, so that your children can have more consistency between homes?

Jane and Chayil talk about forgetting things when they go back and forth.

- + What can you do to help your kids stay organized and keep track of their belongings as they move back and forth?
- + How has listening to these kids talk about living in two homes changed your views about your own kids?



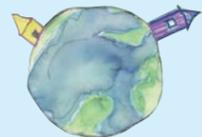
### try this... Make each house a home.

Even if your children don't spend equal time in each household, you can still make your house feel like home. Make a special space where the kids can keep their things when they are with you.

Remember, special doesn't mean expensive or large. If finances are tight, get creative. Think about what would help your children feel comfortable.

- Buy a footlocker or cabinet to paint or decorate in your child's favorite colors.
- Pick out photos your kids like that they can put in their room or on a shelf.
- Have everyday items your kids use and need (e.g., pajamas, favorite toys, toothbrushes, clothes, etc.) in each home so that kids don't need to worry about carrying stuff back and forth.
- Keep items in your home that support a hobby or interest that your kids enjoy.

**Remember, what matters most to your kids is that your home feels like a place where they belong.**



## try this... Draw your two homes.

Draw a picture of your home with Mom. Now draw a picture of your home with Dad.

Write down three things that are special about Mom's house.

What could be better or different about your home with Mom?

List three things you really like about Dad's house.

What could be better or different about your home with Dad?



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## talking to kids about two homes

*The following can be read directly to children, or can be used to guide a conversation with them about two homes.*

Every kid is different, and the same is true for parents. Parents are different people with different habits and different ways of doing things. When parents have separate homes, you can notice these differences even more, and for kids that means different rules, different food, and different clothes. For lots of kids it feels like they are living in two separate worlds.

Eva eats different food at each house.

- + What is different about your two homes?
- + What things are the same in both homes?
- + Are any of these differences hard or confusing for you?

Jane's dad is a bike messenger and her mom is a librarian.

- + How do you think her life is different with each parent?
- + Are we (your parents) very different?
- + If so, what is it like to have such different parents?

Like Eva, lots of kids get confused or frustrated when parents have different rules.

- + Do you have different rules in each house?
- + Do you ever get confused when you switch households?
- + What would you want to change if you could?

Sometimes, when they go back and forth, Jane forgets her homework and Chayil forgets her clothes.

- + Do you forget things when you go back and forth?
- + What would make this easier for you?
- + What is hardest about having two homes?
- + What are some good things about having two homes?



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## what kids say about stuck in the middle

- kaelan** *One night I was at my mom's house and my dad was coming to pick me up. And when my dad came over they fought for like an hour. It doesn't feel very good.*
- jonah** *Once, I think it was my mom, after a fight, my mom got really mad at my dad and she threw the phone on the ground and called him a bad word, and I got really mad at her... and sometimes my dad does that, too.*
- olivia** *They are just fighting and fighting and you are just so sad.*
- julia** *I never really try showing it, but I feel really, really bad inside, but I don't say it 'cause they are in the middle of a fight and they probably won't listen.*
- ehryn** *When they both are fighting and it's like, "Okay. I'm going to take that side or this side. Which side?"*
- honah** *Ahhhh! If I choose my dad, my mom will think I love him more. If I choose my mom, my dad will think...*
- ehryn** *Oh no! It's like, "You guys, why do you guys do this? You guys have already been to court. Please stop."*
- olivia** *Stop! You want them to stop it and just calm down.*



.....  
**ehryn** *When they both are fighting and it's like, "Okay. I'm going to take that side or this side. Which side?"*  
 .....

## things to know about stuck in the middle

### Fighting is really hard on kids.

Fighting is always stressful for kids, and they just want it to stop. When parents fight, kids have different ways of dealing with it. Some try to stop the fighting by jumping in as a peacemaker, while others withdraw and stop communicating. Some kids act out or feel sick in an effort to distract parents from the fighting.

### Kids are not messengers.

Don't make the kids your confidantes, peacemakers, messengers, or informants. Communicate important information directly to the other parent. When kids have to share information between parents the end result is often increased tension and more misunderstandings.

### Take the high road.

Keep your negative thoughts about the other parent to yourself. Kids think of themselves as half Mom and half Dad. So when you say negative, critical, or damaging things about the other parent, it hurts your child.

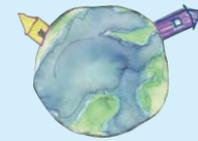
While you may be keeping your opinions to yourself, the other parent may not. Even though it may be tempting to give what you get, remember that when you fight fire with fire, your kids are the ones who end up getting burned.

Kids pick up on unspoken tension, too. When parents ignore each other at events, refuse to communicate, or openly criticize each other, kids notice and it makes them feel bad.

.....  
**olivia** *They are just fighting and fighting and you are just so sad. You want them to stop it and just calm down.*  
.....



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## try this... Learn from your mistakes.

We can't go back and change the many times we acted in less than skillful ways when we were tired, frustrated, or angry. But we can change how we manage things from this point forward.

If you haven't done the best job of shielding your kids from issues between you and the other parent, take the opportunity to set things right.

Apologize to your kids and let them know you should have handled things differently. Then make a commitment not to repeat the behavior. It's also important to let them know that if you slip up in the future, it's okay for them to remind you of your promise.

### Respond, don't react.

Sharing parenting responsibilities doesn't mean you have to be available to the other parent 24/7. Aside from emergencies, very few situations require an immediate response. If the other parent sends a demanding e-mail or tosses an insult your way, remember that you have a choice. While you can't control what he/she does or doesn't do, you can minimize the tension for kids by avoiding knee-jerk reactions when disagreements crop up.

Instead, try the following:

- **Prepare** – If you need to raise a sensitive issue with the other parent, spend time thinking through how you can avoid an argument or at least shield kids from any fallout. It may also help to discuss difficult issues at a neutral location (e.g., a coffee shop or restaurant). To stay on task, consider writing out the points you want to talk about before meeting.
- **Step away** – When things get tough, give yourself some time to step back from the situation and weigh out your options before responding. You could say something like: "This is an issue we each seem to have a strong opinion about, so I think we both need to cool down before we talk any further."
- **Get another view** – It's hard to solve problems and get perspective, when you're angry or frustrated. Find someone you can trust to help you sort things out and brainstorm possible solutions.
- **Try stay focused on the issue and leave the emotions out of it** – If it truly requires a response, then keep it short and to the point.

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## talking to **parents** about **stuck in the middle**

When parents fight or refuse to communicate with each other, kids often feel stuck in the middle. Seeing conflict between the two people they love most in the world can create a real dilemma for kids as they struggle to keep both parents happy without disappointing or betraying either one.

Kaelan says his parents fought one evening when his dad came to pick him up, and it didn't feel very good.

- + What can you do to keep exchanges peaceful and stress-free for your kids?
- + How do your children react when you and the other parent aren't getting along?
- + When you feel angry with the other parent, what are some things you can do to keep your cool and stay focused on the kids?

Julia says she doesn't let her parents know how sad she feels when they fight.

- + Do you think your kids ever feel like Julia?
- + What are some things you can do or say to turn the tide, if you are in the middle of a fight with the other parent?
- + When you are having a difficult time with the other parent, who do you talk to?

Ehryn feels like she needs to take sides when her parents fight.

- + What are some ways parents can keep kids out of the middle?
- + When parents aren't getting along, what are some things kids need to hear?
- + What are some things they should not hear?

Jonah worries that if he picks a side during an argument, the other parent may think he does not love him or her.

- + How can you reassure your children that they don't have to choose between parents?

.....

**julia** *I never really try showing it, but I feel really, really bad inside, but I don't say it 'cause they are in the middle of a fight and they probably won't listen.*

.....

## talking to kids about stuck in the middle

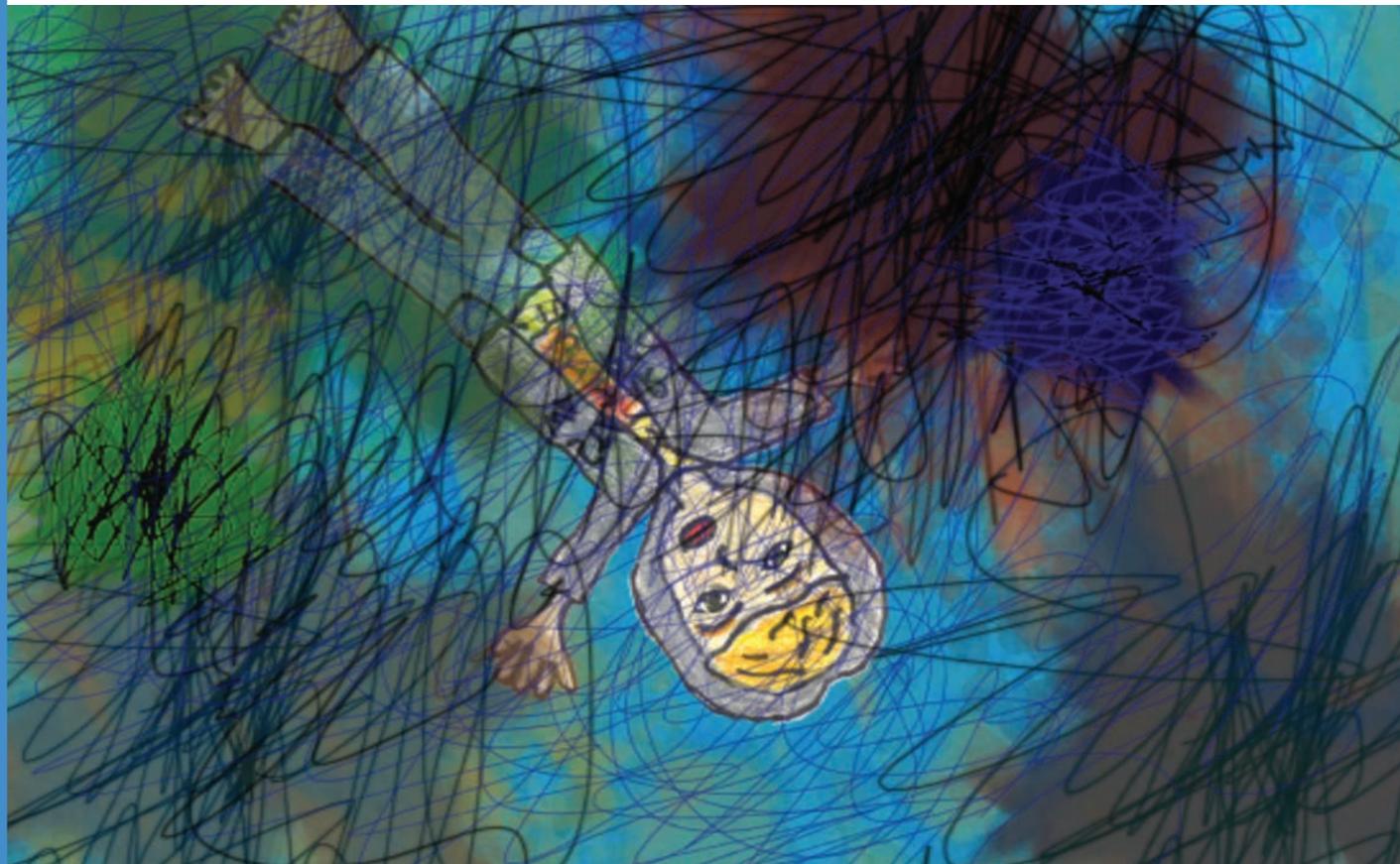
*The following can be read directly to children, or can be used to guide a conversation with them about stuck in the middle.*

All parents disagree sometimes. When parents divorce, disagreements can easily turn into arguments or even big fights. There may be times when parents get so angry that they say mean things to each other or about each other. Hearing bad things about one of your parents never feels good, and it may hurt your feelings.

Remember, just because parents get angry at each other doesn't mean you have to pick sides, get in the middle, or become angry too. Your parents' disagreements are theirs, not yours.

Julia says she doesn't let her parents know how sad feels when they fight.

- + Why do you think Julia keeps quiet about her feelings when her parents fight?
- + What could Julia do when she feels sad about her parents fighting?
- + What rules would you make for parents when they fight?



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Ehryn feels like she needs to take sides when her parents fight. Jonah worries that his parents might think he doesn't love them if he picks a side.

- + Should kids take sides when their parents argue?
- + Do you ever feel that you have to pick a side?
- + If so, how does that make you feel?
- + Can you try to tell us if you feel that way again?

Sometimes when parents are angry they say mean or bad things about each other to kids. Jonah tells about when his mom called his dad a bad word, and sometimes his dad does the same.

- + How do you think Jonah felt hearing bad things about his other parent?
- + How do you feel when someone says something bad about one of us?
- + What can kids do when that happens?
- + What can parents do to make this better for kids?
- + Is there anything we can do to make things better for you?

Olivia just wants her parents to stop fighting.

- + Can kids stop their parents from fighting?
- + Do you ever try do stop fights?
- + Does it ever work?
- + What can kids do to feel better when their parents are fighting?
- + What can you do next time we (Mom/Dad) fight?

Different kids do different things when their parents are fighting. Some kids go into their room to read, others put on headphones and listen to music. Some go outside and play, or call their friends to talk.

When Julia sees her parents fighting, she doesn't want talk about it.

- + What can Julia do to make herself feel better when her parents fight?
- + When kids are feeling sad or worried, who besides their mom and dad can they talk to?
- + What makes you feel better when you feel sad?

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# 12



## what kids say about **what helps**

**jonah** *When they're fighting, sometimes I feel like I have to be the peacemaker and stand in front, but they can usually just work it out themselves.*

**olivia** *Don't get in their way!  
That's something I've learned: Don't get in their way.  
They are doing something. They have to do it.  
You can go into your room and just...  
ughhh, scream if you have to scream. Aaaaaah!!... like, screaming.*

**jane** *I write what happened down, and I either keep it as a memento.  
Or, if I don't ever want to remember it again,  
I just rip it up and throw it away.*

**thea** *This is kind of weird, but I meditate.  
I close my eyes and sit there until I forget about everything that happened.  
I think about a happy place.  
I try to see everything that I love, like my best friends, my family.  
And we're all together, and I only concentrate on that.  
That makes me feel better.*

.....  
**olivia** *Don't get in their way!  
That's something I've learned:  
Don't get in their way. They are  
doing something. They have to  
do it. You can go into your room  
and just... ughhh, scream if  
you have to scream. Aaaaaah...  
like, screaming.*  
.....



## things to know about what helps

### Help kids become resilient.

Divorce is not the only challenge your children will face in their lifetime. When kids go out into the world, they'll have to deal with situations they can't change or ignore. They will encounter challenges in life that they never expected.

As a parent, you can't protect your children from every obstacle that life throws their way. But you can help them gain the skills and confidence they'll need to meet these challenges.

### Kids need emotional distance from adult issues.

Children can easily get drawn into taking on adult roles in an effort to keep the peace. Help your children understand that the problems you have with each other are your problems, not theirs.

To avoid kids getting pulled into adult roles like peacemaker, reassure them:

- When Mom or Dad are angry at each other, it is not your job to make things better. Mom and Dad need to find a way to work things out.
- Your feelings don't have to be the same as Mom's or Dad's.
- You can't fix or change how your parents feel or behave. The only person you can take responsibility for is you.

### Help kids learn how to shift gears.

As adults, when we're having a tough day, most of us have ways we mentally or emotionally shift gears. Kids, however, don't always have the same options, abilities, or the know-how to manage stressful situations.

When tensions are running high or your kids are feeling overwhelmed, sad, angry, or upset, what places or things can become their refuge? Some kids put on headphones and calm themselves with music; others write in their journal or get in bed with a good book. Some kids need to completely change their environment by going outside, shooting hoops, or spending time at a grandparent's house.

### It's how we respond that matters most.

Teach your kids that all problems aren't the same. Some problems can be fixed, and others we just have to learn to live with. What matters most is how we respond to life's obstacles. Quite often kids follow a parent's lead when responding to a life challenge. While it's not always easy to be skillful in stressful situations, try to model good responses for your children whenever possible. Remember, our kids often look to us for cues.

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## talking to parents about what helps

Jonah says he sometimes feel the need to be a peacemaker when his parents argue. Olivia stays out of her parents' way when they are fighting.

- + Do you ever notice your child trying to be a peacemaker?
- + What situations encourage your child to try to be a peacemaker?
- + What can you do or say to let your children know that this is not their responsibility?
- + What can you do in the future so you don't put your child in this situation?

Olivia goes to her room and screams when the fighting overwhelms her. While that's one way for Olivia to manage frustration, chances are that this approach wouldn't work very well for her in a public place, such as school.

- + What do your children do to let off steam in high-pressure situations?
- + What are other ways your kids might get their feelings out?

For a child, figuring out how to handle feelings can be confusing and hard. Jane writes things down. Thea talks about meditating and thinking about things that make her happy.

- + What does your child do to calm down and feel better?
- + What do you do to calm yourself down so you can be an example to your child?
- + Can you talk with your kids about safe and appropriate ways they can release tension?

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## talking to kids about what helps

*The following can be read directly to children, or can be used to guide a conversation with them about what helps.*

It's hard to know what to do when your parents aren't getting along. Remember, their problems are not your problems. Even though you can't fix their problems, there are lots of things you can do to get through the tough times. Some kids find that it helps to talk to someone they trust, remember a happier time, go play outside, or listen to music.

Figuring out how to handle your feelings can be really confusing and hard. Olivia goes into her room and screams to get her feelings out. Jane writes things down.

- + What are other things kids can do to get their feeling out?
- + What do you do when you need to get your feelings out?

Jonah says he sometimes feel the needs to be a peacemaker for his parents.

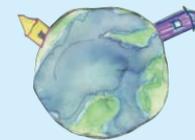
- + What is a peacemaker?
- + Do you ever try to be a peacemaker? How does it feel?
- + Is it a kid's job to be a peacemaker in the family?

Olivia stays out of her parents' way when they are fighting.

- + Is this a good idea?
- + What might happen if you get in the middle of a fight?
- + What other things can you do if we are fighting?

Thea meditates and thinks about things that make her happy.

- + What do you think about that?
- + What do you do to calm yourself down?
- + Are there places you like to go that feel safe and help you feel better?



### try this... Learn how to handle a not-so-happy day.

Sometimes when you're feeling upset, angry, or sad, it can be hard to remember what to do to turn things around.

There are lots of ways to feel better when you're upset. Here are some that might work for you.

- Stare at the sky and watch the clouds go by.
- Hug a tree.
- Run around, jump, hop, sprint, anything—just MOVE!
- Draw a picture.
- Get a HUG!
- Write down your feelings.
- Remember a time you didn't feel this way.
- Read a good book.
- Listen to music.
- Take a walk.
- Cuddle with a stuffed animal or pet.
- Sing.
- Watch a funny TV show.
- Call a friend.

Think about things you've done in the past that helped you get through a hard day. Now make a list of ten things you can do when you're having a tough time.

Put your list where you will see it often... in your desk drawer, on the wall near your bed, in a journal, or on your computer or phone.

Remember... you know how to make yourself feel better when things get hard.

# 13

## talking about it



### what kids say about **talking**

**olivia** *When they were going through the process, I had a counselor. She was a counselor that handled kids with divorcing parents. And she told me, "Your only job is to be a kid. There's no right or wrong things to do. You're just being a kid. This is their own problem. You don't have to worry about anything."*

**jonah** *Sometimes I just really don't want to talk about it... and sometimes it feels good to talk about it.*

**kaelan** *My teacher... I really like him. His name is Mr. Aaron. He's the kind of teacher that you'll only get once in a lifetime. He's really good at knowing when we are having a hard time.*

**julia** *If it's at school, I tell my friends. If it's at home, I either don't tell anyone and just cry alone, or I just tell my brothers and they say, "Yeah, we're feeling really sad, too" and stuff.*

**trevor** *I only talk about it with kids that are going through the same thing... like my best friend right now, he went through this, too.*

.....  
**olivia** *When they were going through the process, I had a counselor. She was a counselor that handled kids with divorcing parents. And she told me, "Your only job is to be a kid. There's no right or wrong things to do. You're just being a kid. This is their own problem. You don't have to worry about anything."*  
.....



# things to know about talking

## Talking about it helps.

Kids need to understand what's happening as their family changes. Don't avoid talking about divorce with your kids just because you feel guilty, you don't know what to say, or you are afraid of upsetting them. The separation is already on their minds. Talking can be a big relief.

## Kids don't always want to talk.

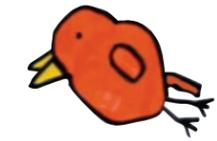
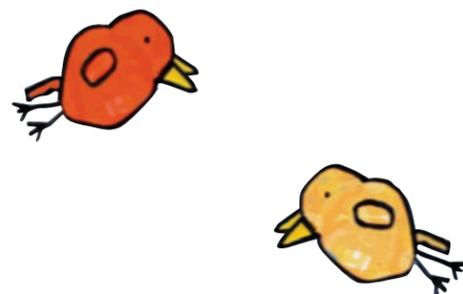
Sometimes they just don't want to talk! You may be doing your very best to support your children's feelings, but they still might find it difficult to talk to you. Kids often worry about how their feelings and actions will affect their parents. Kids don't want to:

- Hurt a parent's feelings.
- Start an argument between Mom and Dad.
- Make a parent angry.
- Cause a parent to stop seeing them.
- Make a parent feel betrayed.

## Help kids open up.

There is a thin line between pushing kids to talk and encouraging them to open up. If it's been a while since you've talked about things, or if you sense that your child is holding something in, try starting the conversation. Going for a ride in the car or taking a walk may help.

- Reassure your kids that it's okay to talk and ask questions.
- Be open to hearing what your kids have to say.
- Let them know that it's okay to talk to others.
- Help identify safe adults they can turn to for advice and support. Good people for kids to turn to might be grandparents, aunts or uncles, family friends, teachers, coaches, or clergy.



## Be a good listener.

Knowing they are truly being heard will mean more to your children than you can imagine. Here are some tips for listening well:

- Wait for your child to finish before you respond. Be patient!
- Be careful not to put words in their mouths... but asking for clarification is okay.
- Respect their honesty. Whatever they are feeling is okay.
- Calmly repeat or restate what they said in order to acknowledge that you understand their feelings.
- Watch how your children respond to how you listen, and be willing to change your approach.

## Make time to listen.

At times you may be physically there but still not giving kids your full attention. Listening can get easily lost between emptying the dishwasher and responding to a text. When your children are speaking from the heart, make sure you put down the phone, take a breath, and really focus on what they are saying.

Remember, this transition will take some time. Instead of waiting for a crisis to arise, make a habit of regularly checking in with your kids to find out what's going on in their world.

Block out 15-20 minutes a day or a couple times a week to touch base with your kids. Choose a time when both you and your kids are free from the distractions of phones, TV, and computers.



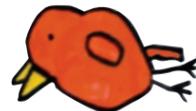
.....  
**kaelan** *My teacher...  
 I really like him. He's the  
 kind of teacher you get  
 once in a lifetime. He's  
 really good at knowing  
 when we are having a  
 hard time.*  
 .....



### Ask open-ended questions.

Ask simple questions such as:

- How are you feeling about things?
- How did that make you feel?
- What did that mean to you?
- How would you like things to change?
- On a scale of one to ten, how (mad, sad, upset, etc.) were you?



### Resist the urge to fix things or offer advice.

Listen, listen, listen. When kids are hurting or they say something that hits you hard, it can be a real challenge not to try to fix it, or tell them what you think, or keep your own feelings in check. Remember, what children need most is for you to understand the problem, not necessarily to solve it.

Listening well also means tempering your own reaction. Your kids need to be able to express themselves to you without worrying about your response. Try not to get defensive or to contradict what your child says.

Listening to what your kids are experiencing with a focused and open mind is a key factor in understanding them. When you understand accurately what they are feeling, your responses will be more in line with what they need.

## talking to **parents** about **talking**

We hope our kids always feel comfortable talking to us when they are upset, but sometimes it is helpful for our kids to talk to someone who is not a parent. It is important to support our children's relationships with other trusted adults as well as their close friendships with peers. The more support, the better.

Kaelan talks to his teacher, who understands when he is having a hard time. Julia talks to her friends and her brothers. Olivia shares with a counselor, who works with kids of divorce.

- + Are there times when your child is upset and doesn't talk to you directly?
- + What has been successful in encouraging your child to open up and communicate feelings or concerns?
- + Do your kids have trusted adults they can talk with besides you and the other parent?

How we respond to what our children tell us often determines whether or not they will confide in us again. Think for a moment about what you do when your children talk about how they feel.

- + How easy or hard is it for you to just listen to your child?
- + Are there certain topics that trigger you?
- + Do you try to fix the problem or offer advice?
- + What could you do to become a better listener for your children?

Over the next week, pay close attention to what you do when your children talk about how they feel.

.....  
**trevor** *I only talk about it with kids that are going through the same thing... like my best friend right now, he went through this, too.*  
.....



## talking to kids about talking

*The following can be read directly to children, or can be used to guide a conversation with them about talking.*

Talking about divorce isn't easy, but many kids find that once they get started, talking actually helps them feel better. Sharing how you feel with someone you trust almost always helps. If you're scared, lonely, angry, or sad, it's great if you can tell your parents. It can feel like putting down a very heavy backpack!

Most of us have good friends or relatives who are always there for us—a parent, a brother or sister, Grandma, a friend, a coach, or a school counselor. If no one comes to mind, this is a good time to look around for someone trustworthy who you feel okay talking to. Everyone needs someone they can trust.

There are lots of adults around you who love and care about you and are willing to help. Kaelan's teacher is really good at knowing when he is having a hard time.

- + Who do you talk to when you're having a hard time?
- + What adults, other than us (Mom/Dad), do you love and trust?
- + Would you feel comfortable talking to them if you are having a hard time?

Julia says she doesn't talk about her sad feelings very much. She talks to her brothers, or she cries alone.

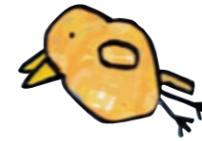
- + What else could Julia do to feel better when she is feeling sad?
- + Do you ever hold your feelings inside?
- + How does it feel to hold your feelings inside?
- + How does it feel to let your feelings out?

Olivia's counselor says that her only job is to be a kid and that she should not worry about her parents' problems.

- + What do you think about that?
- + Do you ever worry about us (Mom/Dad)?
- + Do you ever try to fix our problems?



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Half of the kids in America come from divorced families, so you are not alone. When Trevor needs to talk to someone, he feels comfortable talking to kids who have gone through the same thing.

- + Why do you think Trevor feels that way?
- + Do you know other kids whose parents are divorced?
- + Do you ever talk to them when you are feeling sad or angry or confused?

Sometimes parents aren't very good at listening to kids... and sometimes parents just don't know that you have something to say.

- + What can you say when you want us to stop what we are doing and listen to you?
- + What are some good times to talk to us, like when Dad is cooking or when you are riding in the car with your Mom?



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## new people



## what kids say about new people

**jonah** *When my mom told me she had a new boyfriend, I got really sad and I just kind of... crying did help in that case. I just kind of went and I just cried for a long time. And that was about it. I just kind of... and it helped. It helped a lot. When he arrived, I didn't really talk to him. I felt really awkward and weird. And he was eating dinner with us, and I just kind of sat there eating. Sort of like, "Okay... this guy who I've never met before is in my house..."*

**olivia** *I just don't like the feeling of a new mom or a new dad. Because it's kind of weird and... I don't want it to happen again.*

**jonah** *It kind of felt like my mom was betraying my dad... but after a while I realized that it really wasn't that. I got my guts up and asked my dad if it was okay if I liked Tom, and he said it was fine. So that helped.*

**jane** *I have a list of what my parent's boyfriend/girlfriend needs to be. I have a "Must Be" list and a "May Be" list. He or she needs to respect my mom and me, or my dad and me, and needs to respect our stuff. And needs to really adore the parent... really. And I love snakes. I want a snake so badly, so on the list it says that it has to respect snakes. And then... my mom's current boyfriend—his name's Alan—he doesn't really like snakes. So I moved the "Must Love Snakes" to a "May Be." Like, I would like him to like my friends... and like my dad... and like me.*



**jonah** *It kind of felt like my mom was betraying my dad... but after a while I realized that it really wasn't that. I got my guts up and asked my dad if it was okay if I liked Tom, and he said it was fine. So that helped.*

## things to know about new people

### You may be ready... but are your kids?

Dating or starting a new relationship may feel like an exciting new chapter in your life, but your kids may have a very different view. For them, seeing Mom or Dad with someone different may stir up lots of uncomfortable and confusing feelings. It's also another reminder that life won't ever go back to the way it was before.

### Don't rush the introductions.

Give new relationships time to grow into something more serious before involving your kids. It's okay to let your kids know you're dating. They may be curious and have questions, but involving kids too soon can backfire. When kids form a relationship with a parent's boyfriend or girlfriend and it doesn't work out, it can trigger the same sense of loss they felt when the divorce happened.

### And when the time is right...

When you are ready to introduce your kids to a new partner, consider doing something your kids will enjoy that also gives them some space to get to know your girlfriend or boyfriend. You might meet up at a local park, take in a movie, have pizza, or go to the zoo. Keep your expectations realistic and don't pressure your kids to give you their opinions of the new person. Instead, allow them time to get to know each other.



### try this... Give the other parent a heads-up.

When big changes are happening in your life (e.g., you have a new boyfriend or girlfriend and want to introduce the kids, you've decided to get remarried, you're expecting another child, etc.), take responsibility for informing the other parent instead of expecting your kids to deliver the news.

While you may think it's none of his/her business, informing the other parent in advance spares kids from walking on eggshells, getting pumped for information, or being blindsided by the other parent's unexpected reaction.



.....  
**olivia** *I just don't like the feeling of a new mom or a new dad. Because it's kind of weird and... I don't want it to happen again.*  
.....



### Kids are loyal.

Kids can be fiercely loyal to their parents, and they may feel they are betraying one parent by liking the other parent's new partner. (This is a hard one!) Help put your children's minds at ease by reassuring them that it is okay for them to like or even love this new person. If this feels impossible, at least work hard at resisting the urge to make negative comments about the new partner.

Remind them that they will always have their parents.

Kids need to know that Mom will always be their mom and Dad will always be their dad, no matter who else comes into the picture. Parents don't get replaced.

### Take it slow.

In the early stages of a new relationship, it's important for you as the parent to stay in charge of discipline and important parenting decisions. When a new partner becomes a disciplinarian too early in the game, kids may come to resent them, and this may create long-lasting tension between the partner and the kids. As your child's relationship with your partner grows, your partner can transition into being more of a parental authority in your children's lives.

### Make time with your kids a priority.

Following a divorce, kids may worry about you loving a boyfriend or girlfriend more than you love them. While you may be really excited to be in a new relationship, be mindful that your kids still need one-on-one time with you and reassurance about their importance in your life.

## talking to **parents** about **new people**

Jonah was really worried that he would betray his dad if he liked his mom's new boyfriend.

- + Do you think your child would feel like Jonah if you or the other parent had a new partner?
- + What could you do to make it easier for your children to accept someone new in your life?
- + How could you reassure your child that liking someone new doesn't mean you are betraying Mom or Dad?
- + What are some things you could do to make a new relationship easier for your kids when you introduce them to someone new?
- + What are some ways you could make it easier for your children when the other parent has a new relationship?

Jonah's father told him it was okay to like his mom's new boyfriend.

- + What do you think about that?
- + Do you think your kids might need permission to like someone new?
- + When do you think kids should meet someone a parent is dating?

Olivia says doesn't want a new mom or new dad. She's worried that divorce might happen again.

- + Do you think your kids have that same worry?
- + What do you think are some other worries kids may have when parents decide to date or remarry?
- + How can you make it okay for your kids to talk about these concerns?



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## talking to **kids** about **new people**

*The following can be read directly to children, or can be used to guide a conversation with them about new people.*

After a divorce, many parents think about dating again or getting remarried. Seeing your mom or dad with someone new can feel kind of weird at first. It's okay to take it slowly. Liking someone new doesn't mean you're betraying the other parent. No matter who else comes into your life, your parents will always be your parents, no matter what.

Jonah cried when his mom got a new boyfriend. He felt really awkward when this new person came to dinner. He said, "I just kind of sat there eating...."

- + What do you think he was feeling?
- + How could his mom have made it easier for him?

Jonah was really worried he would be betraying his dad if he liked his mom's new boyfriend.

- + Why do you think he felt that way?
- + Do you every worry about that?
- + What might be hard about one of us getting involved with someone new?
- + What might be some good things about one of us getting involved with someone new?

Jonah's dad told him it was okay to like his mom's new boyfriend.

- + Do you think that helped Jonah feel more comfortable?
- + If you were Jonah, what would make it easier for you?

Olivia doesn't want a new mom or new dad. She's says she is worried that "it might happen again."

- + What do you think Olivia is worried about?
- + Is it ever possible to replace a mom or a dad?

Jane has a "Must Be" list and a "May Be" list for when her parents start dating again.

- + If you had a list... what would be on the "Must Be" side?
- + What about the "May Be" list?
- + What would be the most important thing of all?

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# 15



life goes on

## what kids say about life goes on

**ehryn** *Well, sometimes I think, Oh my God... it's so hard having two parents, and it's true—it is hard having two different parents and having a tight schedule with each one... but I usually get through it. I just talk to myself and I usually let go of a little bit of tears.*

**olivia** *Even though my mom is just still kind of angry at my dad and all that stuff, I think we are still a family, and we are always still going to be a family, even if my mom marries again.*

**jonah** *I think my mom and my dad are happier now. I think it really actually helped their relationship. Because they were kind of, like, mean with each other and sort of... I don't know... they weren't enemies, but they weren't even friends... and now they are friends. So I think that that's cool.*

**elijah** *If you think that they don't love you, they actually do. If you don't think that they aren't happy that you're born, they actually are. Like... they just love you in every single way.*

**thea** *Since it's been a long time, I am kind of getting used to it. It's like a roller coaster. When you're on the top you feel so happy, it's fine the way it is right now. But when you're on the low part of the roller coaster, you know you're frustrated, like I really never wanted them to be my parents. As time goes, you might feel a little bit sadder. But soon you're going to get back to the top and be happy.*

.....  
**elijah** *If you think that they don't love you, they actually do. If you don't think that they aren't happy that you're born, they actually are. Like... they just love you in every single way.*  
.....



## things to know about **life goes on**

### The ride usually gets smoother over time.

The journey may have started like a roller coaster, but it's possible to get past the extreme ups and downs and begin establishing a new normal in your family. Children can find ways to talk about the hard stuff and also find some good things about how life has changed. Transitions between homes gradually become smoother as kids learn to cope with their new family life.

It's our hope that your kids, like the ones in *SPLIT*, can become resilient, capable, confident, and happy.

### Keep doing the best that you can.

Raising positive, well-adjusted kids isn't about being a perfect parent or having the perfect co-parenting relationship. We all make our share of mistakes. In some situations, you may be very limited in what you can do to minimize conflict or control the choices that the other parent makes. Focus on the things you can change and what you can influence. Stay connected to people and activities that help you feel good about yourself, and keep finding ways to move forward.



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.....  
**thea** *It's like a roller coaster. When you're on the top, you feel so happy, but when you're on the low part, you are frustrated. As time goes, you might feel a little bit sadder, but soon you're going to get back to the top and be happy.*  
.....

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## talking to parents about **life goes on**

The separation was hard for Jonah at first, but he can see that his parents are happier now.

- + Are there things in your life that are better or easier after the divorce?
- + In what areas of your life could you use more support in order to be happier?
- + Where might you get the support you need?
- + What do you want life to look like for you and your kids six months from now?
- + In a year?

Ehryn talks about how hard it is to have separated parents and to have a tight schedule.

- + What do you think are the hard parts for your kids?
- + What could you do to make life a little easier for them?

Olivia says that even if her parents are divorced, they will always be a family.

- + What do you think about her statement?
- + What does it mean to you to be a family after divorce?
- + How easy or hard is it for you to think of yourself as a family with the other parent?

Elijah says that his parents were happy he was born and they will always love him.

- + What are some ways you can help your children feel secure about the love you have for them?
- + What are some things you think children need to hear from their parents after the split?



.....  
**olivia** *Even though my mom is just still kind of angry at my dad and all that stuff, I think we are still a family, and we are always still going to be a family, even if my mom marries again.*  
 .....



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## talking to **kids** about **life goes on**

*The following can be read directly to children, or can be used to guide a conversation with them about life goes on.*

Ehryn says that sometimes it's really hard having separated parents and different schedules. She talks herself through the hard times, and sometimes she sheds some tears.

- + How do you make yourself feel better when things get hard?
- + What advice would you give other kids about the changes that will happen in their lives?

Olivia understands that even if her mom remarried, they will still be family and they are always going to be a family.

- + Do you feel like we are still a family, even though our family has changed?
- + What can we do to feel more like a family?

Jonah thinks his parents are happier now, and they are friends again.

- + What have been some of the good changes for our family?
- + Are things getting easier for you?

Elijah says no matter what has happened in the past, parents still love their children very much.

- + How do you feel about what Elijah said?
- + Do you feel loved by both of your parents?

Thea says that as she gets used to the divorce, there are always ups and downs, like on a roller coaster, but she usually gets back to a happy place.

- + Does what happened in our family feel like a roller coaster ride to you?
- + What have been your highs?
- + What have been your lows?
- + Are you on the top of the roller coaster these days, or near the bottom?
- + What does moving on mean for you?



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# onward!

In making *SPLIT*, we were struck by the incredible resilience of many of the kids we interviewed. They show us that moving beyond divorce is possible. While divorce is hard, kids can still become capable, confident, and happy.

Although your journey may have started with a lot of twists and turns, life levels out for most families. Transitions between homes gradually become smoother. Children find ways to talk about the hard stuff, but they also find good things about the many changes in their lives.

Children will grow and change. New issues may come up. And you may hit an occasional bump in the road. The good news is that getting through the initial stages will leave you and your kids better prepared for what follows.

How well our children do has a lot to do with the choices we make as parents. Raising resilient, happy, well-adjusted kids isn't about being a perfect parent or having the perfect co-parenting relationship. We all make mistakes. And at times you may be very limited in what you can do to minimize conflict or to counter choices that the other parent makes. The key is to keep doing the best that you can. Focus on the things you can change and not the ones you can't.

As parents, we can help our children on their way by reaching out to them, by really listening to them, and by helping them see a path forward so that they can begin to talk, process, and heal.



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# resources

There are many resources available to support you and your children. We have listed some of our favorites here.

## books and films

### Books for kids

#### 3 to 5 years old

*The Boy Who Didn't Want to Be Sad*  
by Rob Goldblatt

*The Invisible String*  
by Patrice Karst

*Missing Rabbit*  
by Roni Schotter

*My Family's Changing*  
by Pat Thomas

*My Stick Family*  
by Natalie Reilly and Brandi Pavaese

*Two Homes*  
by Claire Masurel

*Was It the Chocolate Pudding?*  
*A Story for Little Kids about Divorce*  
by Sandra Levins and Bryan Langdo

#### 5 to 8 years old

*Fred Stays with Me!*  
by Nancy Coffelt

*Mom and Dad Glue*  
by Kes Gray

*When They Fight*  
by Kathryn White

*The Way I Feel*  
by Janan Cain

*The Creative Journal for Children\**  
by Lucia Capacchione

*Is a Worry Worrying You?\**  
by Ferida Wolff

\* These two books aren't about divorce but can be great tools for talking about feelings and developing coping skills with younger kids.

#### 8 to 12 years old

*Creative Interventions for Children of Divorce*  
by Liana Lowenstein

*HELP! A Girl's Guide to Divorce and Stepfamilies*  
by American Girl Library

*"I Don't Want to Choose":  
How Middle School Kids Can Avoid  
Choosing One Parent over the Other*  
by Katherine Andre

*Mom's House, Dad's House for Kids*  
by Isolina Ricci

*Why Are We Getting a Divorce?*  
by Peter Mayle

#### Fiction for older kids

*Amber Brown Is Green with Envy*  
by Paula Danziger

*Catching Crazy*  
by Jacob Cummer

*The Divorce Express*  
by Paula Danziger

*Just Another Day in My Insanely Real Life*  
by Barbara Dee

*Maniac Magee*  
by Jerry Spinelli

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## Books for parents

### Parenting after divorce

*Co-Parenting 101: Helping Your Kids Thrive in Two Households After Divorce*  
by Deesha Philyaw and Michael D. Thomas

*For Better or For Worse: Divorce Reconsidered*  
by M. E. Hetherington and Joan Kelly

*Helping Your Kids Cope with Divorce the Sandcastles Way*  
by M. Gary Neuman

*Mom's House, Dad's House: Making Two Homes for Your Child*  
by Isolina Ricci, PhD

*Parenting Apart: How Separated and Divorced Parents Can Raise Happy and Secure Kids*  
by Christina McGhee (divorceandchildren.com)

*Storms Can't Hurt the Sky: A Buddhist Path Through Divorce*  
by Gabriel Cohen

*The Truth about Children and Divorce*  
by Robert Emery, PhD

*We're Still Family: What Grown Children Have to Say about Their Parents' Divorce*  
by Constance Ahrons, PhD

*What About the Kids? Raising Your Children Before, During, and After Divorce*  
by Judith Wallerstein and Sandra Blakeslee

### On healing

*After the Affair: Healing the Pain and Rebuilding Trust When a Partner Has Been Unfaithful (2nd edition)*  
by Janis A. Spring

*The Divorce Ritual: Get Up, Get Out, and Get On with Your Life*  
by Lois G. Tarter

*Getting Past Your Breakup: How to Turn a Devastating Loss into the Best Thing That Ever Happened to You*  
by Susan J. Elliott, JD, MEd

*How Can I Forgive You? The Courage to Forgive, the Freedom Not To*  
by Janis A. Spring

*How to Survive the Loss of a Love*  
by Peter McWilliams

*Surviving Divorce: Your Guide to Finding Hope and Healing After an Unwanted Divorce*  
by G. D. Lengacher

*When Things Fall Apart: Heart Advice for Difficult Times*  
by Pema Chodron

### Managing conflict

*Beyond Reason: Using Emotions as You Negotiate*  
by Roger Fisher and Daniel Shapiro

*BIFF: Quick Responses to High-Conflict People, Their Personal Attacks, Hostile E-mails, and Social-Media Meltdowns*  
by Bill Eddy

*Custody Chaos, Personal Peace: Sharing Custody with an Ex Who Is Driving You Crazy*  
by Jeffery Wittman

*Joint Custody with a Jerk*  
by Julie A. Ross and Judy Corcoran

*My Ex Is Driving Me Crazy: 10 Strategies for Reclaiming Your Life after Divorce*  
by Aleta Koman and Edwards Myers

*Taking the War Out of Words*  
by Sharon Ellison

### Parent alienation

*Breaking the Tie That Binds*  
by Amy Jo Baker

*Divorce Casualties (2nd edition)*  
by Douglas Darnell

*Divorce Poison: Protecting the Parent-Child Bond from a Vindictive Ex*  
by Dr. Richard A. Warshak

*A Family's Heartbreak: A Parent's Introduction to Parental Alienation*  
by Michael Jeffries

### Stepfamily life

*Ex-Etiquette Series for Parents*  
by Jann Blackstone-Ford and Sharyl Jupe

*Stepcoupling: Creating and Sustaining a Strong Marriage in Today's Blended Family*  
by Susan Wisdom and Jennifer Green

## Films

### For kids

*SPLIT* (dir. Ellen Bruno, 2013) [www.splitfilm.org](http://www.splitfilm.org)  
*Mrs. Doubtfire* (dir. Chris Columbus, 1993)  
*The Parent Trap* (dir. David Swift 1961)

### For parents

*A.C.O.D.* (dir. Stu Zicherman, 2013)  
*Liar Liar* (dir. Tom Shadyak, 1997)  
*Mrs. Doubtfire* (dir. Chris Columbus, 1993)  
*Stepmom* (dir. Chris Columbus, 1998)  
*The Whale and Squid* (dir. Noah Baumbach, 2005)  
*What Maisie Knew* (dir. Scott McGehee and David Siegel, 2012)

## on mediation and collaborative law

### Mediation information

The Academy of Professional Family Mediators – [www.apfmnet.org](http://www.apfmnet.org)  
Mediate.com – [www.mediate.com](http://www.mediate.com)  
National Conflict Resolution Center – [www.ncrconline.com](http://www.ncrconline.com)

### Collaborative law

International Academy of Collaborative Professionals (IACP) –  
[www.collaborativepractice.com](http://www.collaborativepractice.com)

### Books and guides

*Collaborative Divorce: The Revolutionary New Way to Restructure Your Family, Resolve Legal Issues, and Move On...*  
by Pauline H. Tesler and Peggy Thompson

*The Collaborative Way to Divorce: The Revolutionary Method That Results in Less Stress, Lower Costs, and Happier Kids—Without Going to Court*  
by Stuart G. Webb and Ron Ousky

*It Doesn't Have to Be That Way: How to Divorce Without Destroying Your Family or Bankrupting Yourself*  
by Laura Wasser

*Graceful Divorce Solutions*  
by M. Marcy Jones ([www.gracefuldivorcesolutions.com](http://www.gracefuldivorcesolutions.com))

## ideas for using *SPLIT* in your practice or community

Here are some creative ways you can incorporate the *SPLIT* film into your work with children and parents, in one-on-one or small-group sessions.

### Educate others.

- **Develop a lending library.** Keep copies of *SPLIT* DVDs and Guides on hand to loan out to parents or families.
- **Share *SPLIT* at your professional meetings and conferences.** Raise your colleagues' awareness of the effect of divorce on children.
- **Use clips of *SPLIT* as a teaching tool** in peer presentations or continuing education courses. Play segments of the film and conduct small-group discussions.
- **Educate and increase the sensitivity of your staff** to issues your clients/parents and their children may be facing.
- **Host a networking reception that features *SPLIT*.** Invite area professionals from other disciplines who work with separated and divorced parents. Follow the event with a small reception that offers opportunities for networking and brainstorming.

### Spread the word.

- **Write a review** of *SPLIT* and include it in a blog or newsletter to your community.
- **Be social.** Share information about *SPLIT* and how you are using the film in your work on Facebook, LinkedIn, Google+, Pinterest, Twitter, and other social outlets.

### Pay it forward.

- **Donate copies of the *SPLIT* DVD** to a local charity, school, or nonprofit counseling center. Send out a joint press release announcing the donation. In the release you can also include information about services offered by your firm and the organization that received the donation.
- **Embed the *SPLIT* trailer on your website** or in your e-mail promotions to draw traffic to your website. Contact [info@splitfilm.org](mailto:info@splitfilm.org) for details.
- **Join forces with a local school or community organization** such as your PTA or local Boys and Girls Club to organize a community screening of *SPLIT*. Follow the screening with a panel discussion and/or a meet-and-greet reception.

## suggestions for family lawyers, collaborative law teams, and mediators

### Enhance your work with clients.

- **Get a *SPLIT* Streaming Subscription** and distribute “views” of *SPLIT* to your clients. Your clients can view *SPLIT* directly from your website with a password you provide. For more information contact [info@KanopyStreaming.com](mailto:info@KanopyStreaming.com) or (415)926-5293.
- **Assign *SPLIT* as homework** before meeting with clients. Lend a DVD to your clients or distribute a “view” from your *SPLIT* Streaming Subscription. Connecting with their children’s experience often makes your sessions with clients more productive.
- ***SPLIT*’s menu allows viewing of select scenes of the film.** Have parents watch relevant segments of *SPLIT* as homework before discussing specific case options such as parenting schedules, finances, or other issues.
- **Play *SPLIT* in your waiting room** so the needs of children are fresh in your client’s mind when the session begins.
- **Gift a DVD to your clients.** Purchase a 10-pack of *SPLIT* DVDs at [www.splitfilm.org](http://www.splitfilm.org). Put your firm’s label on the DVDs and gift them to new clients or include a copy in your firm’s information packet.
- **Embed the *SPLIT* trailer on your website** or in your e-mail promotions to draw traffic to your website. Contact [info@splitfilm.org](mailto:info@splitfilm.org) for details.



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## suggestions for schools, teachers, and school counselors

### Reach out to parents through your PTA.

- **Show *SPLIT* at a PTA meeting** and use it as an opportunity to connect with parents. Discuss how your PTA can help schools be more supportive of separating families.
- **Develop a lending library** for parents in your school. Include a copy of *SPLIT* and the *SPLIT* Guide along with other resources to help parents manage divorce well for their children.
- **Create a resource list** of community organizations and online support for families dealing with divorce. Include *SPLIT* as a tool to help families talk about divorce.

### Increase the PTA’s exposure in your community.

- **Introduce *SPLIT* to other colleagues and local school districts.** Invite school counselors in your district or area to attend an informal screening. Engage the audience to discuss the needs and challenges of school counselors working with children of divorce and their parents.
- **Host a Back-to-School campaign or a Family Awareness Day/Week.** Use *SPLIT* as a springboard for starting a discussion about family diversity.

### Use *SPLIT* directly in your work with children.

- One-on-one: **Use *SPLIT* as an intervention tool with children** who are experiencing divorce or have been identified as needing support. Talking about divorce can be hard for kids. Watching *SPLIT* helps kids open up.
- In a group: **Create a support group for children of divorce** in your school. Use segments of *SPLIT* to encourage children to talk about their feelings and build skills for coping with divorce.
- In the classroom: **Use *SPLIT* to engage students in discussions** about family diversity. The film offers students a chance to understand what life is like for friends with divorced parents, offering students the opportunity to cultivate a sense of inclusiveness and empathy.

### Raise awareness of teachers and staff.

- **Show *SPLIT* at an in-service training** for teachers and other school personnel. Engage teachers and staff in a discussion about the effects of divorce on children and how it affects children at school. Increased sensitivity around family change will help teachers better support their students and will improve their interactions with parents.
- **Offer teacher training on inclusiveness and family diversity.** Encourage teachers to adapt their curriculum, assignments, and classroom materials to include a variety of family types.
- **Develop a resource library** for teachers, school social workers, counselors, and staff that includes a copy of the *SPLIT* DVD and Guide.

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## suggestions for therapists, social workers, mental health workers, and counselors

### Let children know they are not alone.

- **Use *SPLIT* as an intervention tool** with children who are experiencing divorce or have been identified as needing support. Talking about divorce can be hard for kids. Watching *SPLIT* helps kids open up.
- **Create a support group for kids of divorce.** Use clips from *SPLIT* paired with the interactive exercises and process questions in this book to encourage children to talk about their feelings. *SPLIT* also opens the door for group leaders to discuss healthy coping strategies, and it helps kids build skills for dealing with divorce.

### Get families talking.

- **Help parents use *SPLIT* in the family.** In an individual or group setting, watch *SPLIT* with parents and help them process their own feelings about the film. Use these sessions to engage parents in discussions about how to create the best viewing experience for children. This can also be an opportunity for parents to discuss the fears or apprehensions they may have about talking to their children.

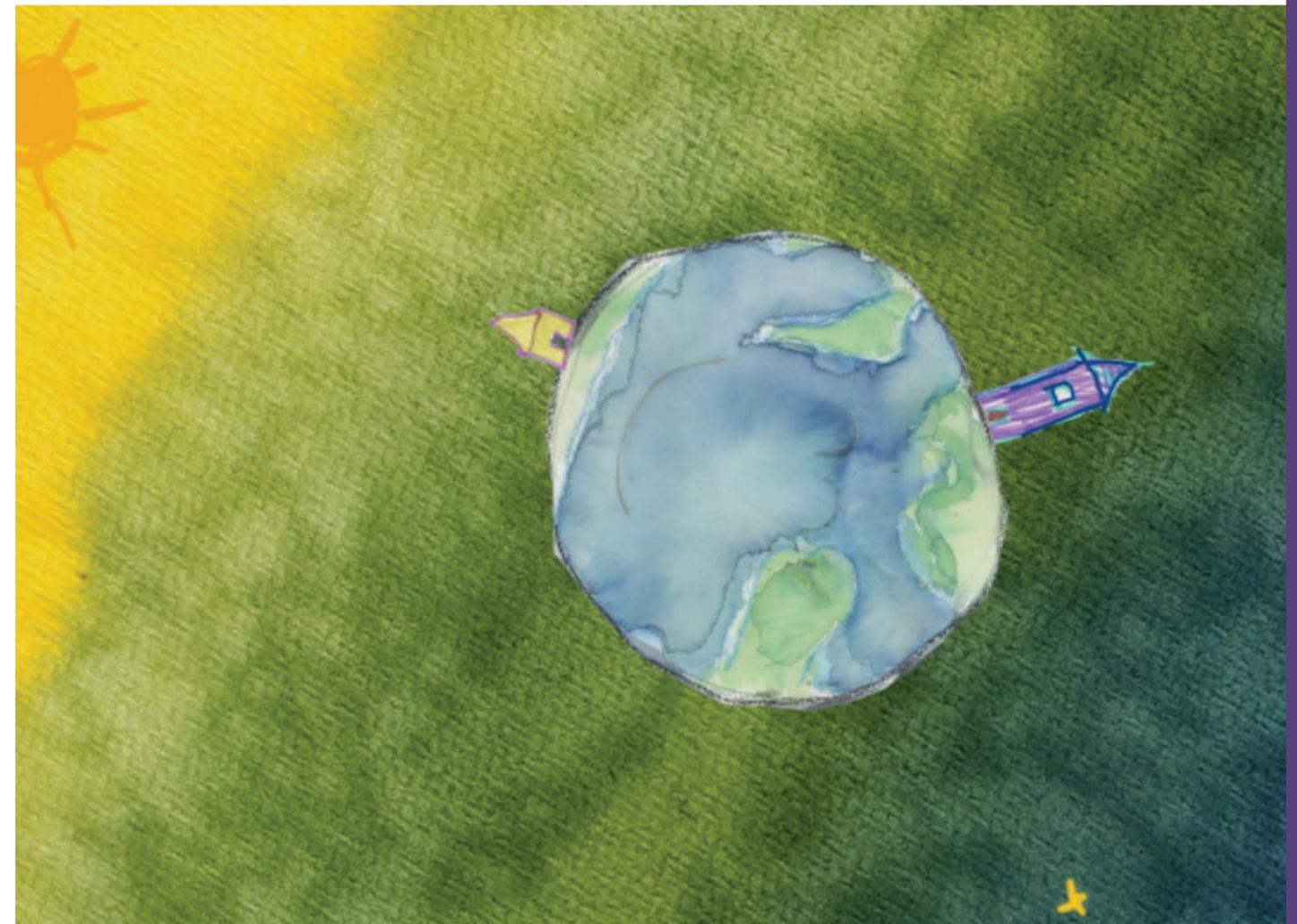
### Increase parents' awareness.

- **Use *SPLIT* as a catalyst for change** when a client is stuck in his or her own anger and hurt. The film can be a poignant reminder of how parents' choices and actions affect their children.
- **Introduce *SPLIT* to parents in the early stages of divorce.** *SPLIT* can be an ideal resource for helping parents stay focused on their children's needs and start thinking about how their choices will affect their children's future.
- **Assign *SPLIT* as homework in co-parenting sessions.** Before meeting with clients, lend them a DVD, or, if you have a *SPLIT* Streaming Subscription, give them a streaming code ([info@kanopyfilms.com](mailto:info@kanopyfilms.com)). Watching *SPLIT* before talking about parenting plans or schedules can make sessions more productive.
- **Start a support group for parents.** Many parents going through divorce feel isolated and alone. Organize a community group and use *SPLIT* as a tool to help break the ice and begin building a community of support. The *SPLIT* DVD and Guide offer an avenue for engaging parents in deeper, more meaningful conversations.
- **Get a *SPLIT* Streaming Subscription** and distribute "views" of *SPLIT* to your clients. Your clients can view *SPLIT* directly from your website with a password you provide. For more information contact [info@KanopyStreaming.com](mailto:info@KanopyStreaming.com) or call 415.926.5293.
- **Use selected chapters of the film.** When in engaging in joint sessions or couples therapy, show parents relevant segments of *SPLIT* before discussing sensitive issues or specific case options like parenting schedules, finances, how to tell the kids, or setting up two households.

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### Raise awareness in your community.

- **Host a training for colleagues and area professionals.** Sponsor a lunch-and-learn event. After screening *SPLIT*, offer a short talk on the work your organization is doing to help families, or hold a panel discussion that draws attention to how divorce is affecting your community.
- **Provide continuing education.** Create an in-person course that offers continuing education credits to professionals in your discipline. Become a *SPLIT* affiliate authorized to use segments of *SPLIT* to enhance your course. For more information, contact us at [info@splitfilm.org](mailto:info@splitfilm.org) and put *SPLIT* AFFILIATE in the subject line.
- **Embed the *SPLIT* trailer on your website** or in your e-mail promotions to draw traffic to your website. Contact [info@splitfilm.org](mailto:info@splitfilm.org) for details.



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## suggestions for clergy and religious institutions

### Reach your broader community.

- **Host a community-wide screening** of *SPLIT* for your congregation, followed by a panel of local mental health and mediation professionals who are available to support families in transition.
- **Show *SPLIT* in smaller groups** and use the film and Guide to start a conversation about the challenges of modern family life. Discuss family diversity and ways your congregation can offer support to families facing divorce.
- **Develop a lending library** of *SPLIT* and the *SPLIT* Guide for parents in your congregation.
- **Create a resource list** that identifies community organizations and online support for families dealing with divorce. Include *SPLIT* as a tool for helping families talk about divorce. Include the list on your website or in your newsletters and electronic communications.

### Use the film in direct work with children and parents.

- **Use *SPLIT* in spiritual guidance and counseling sessions** with parents, teens, and younger children in crisis.
- **Show *SPLIT* in Saturday/Sunday school classes** to heighten awareness of family diversity and to encourage empathy for separated families.
- **Use *SPLIT* as inspiration for a sermon** or a Saturday/Sunday school discussion.
- **Share *SPLIT* with couples in pre-marriage classes** to underscore the responsibilities of starting a family.
- **Start a divorce support group for parents** in your congregation, or incorporate *SPLIT* into the curriculum of an existing support group.
- **Create a support group for kids.** Work with a local counselor or youth minister to create a support group for kids. Watching *SPLIT* with other children helps kids understand they're not alone.
- **Donate a copy of *SPLIT*.** Buy several copies of *SPLIT* and make them available to families with limited resources, or donate a copy of *SPLIT* to your public library, local school counselor, or charity.

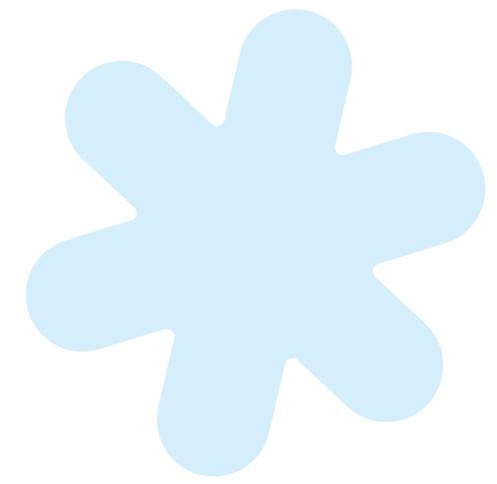


### Increase clergy and staff awareness.

- **Include *SPLIT* in trainings and conferences for clergy and staff.** Engage in discussions about the effects of divorce on children and how churches can best support families in crisis.
- **Offer a workshop on inclusiveness and family diversity** for Saturday/Sunday school teachers or youth workers/counselors.
- **Watch your words.** Encourage staff and teachers to adapt their communications, curriculum, assignments, or Saturday/Sunday School materials to include a variety of family types.
- Develop a resource library for teachers, youth workers, and staff that includes a copy of the film *SPLIT* and the *SPLIT* Guide.

### Increase your congregation's exposure in the broader community.

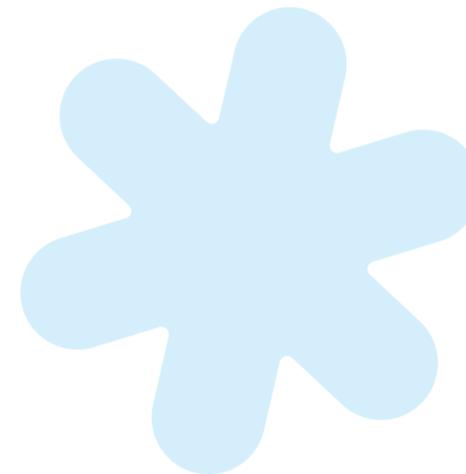
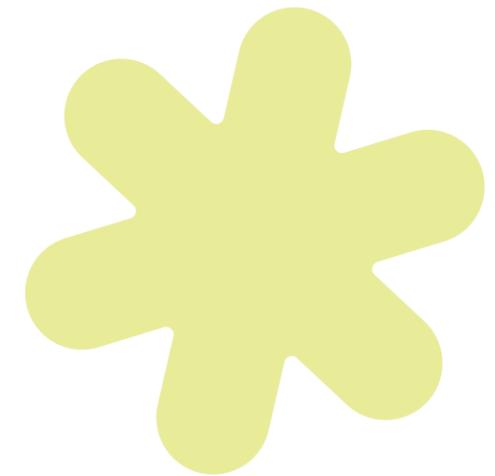
- **Host a community screening of *SPLIT*.** Following the screening have a speaker offer a presentation or provide a panel discussion with a moderator. Invite other congregations, local mental health professionals, family lawyers, and organizations that serve families.
- **Become a local leader.** Introduce *SPLIT* as a resource to other places of worship in your area. Invite local clergy, lay ministers, and volunteers to attend an informal screening. Facilitate discussion about the needs of separating families and the challenges that religious communities face in supporting families in transition.
- **Use the film to forge partnerships.** Co-host a screening of *SPLIT* with a local organization that offers services to families (e.g., YMCA, Boys and Girls Club, United Way). Use the screening as an opportunity to draw in families in crisis and to raise community awareness of the support your congregation has to offer.
- **Host a Family Awareness Month.** Each Sunday your congregation can highlight different kinds of families (e.g., single-parent, divorced, extended, or blended). Use *SPLIT* as a springboard for starting a discussion about different kinds of families. Attending an event like this can increase a family's comfort level in discussing family change.



## Still have questions?

Or maybe some ideas we haven't thought of yet?  
We'd love to hear them!

Contact us: [info@splitfilm.org](mailto:info@splitfilm.org)



# about the authors

## Christina McGhee

Christina is an internationally recognized divorce coach, speaker, and author of the highly acclaimed book *Parenting Apart: How Separated and Divorced Parents Can Raise Happy and Secure Kids*. She gained worldwide attention for her work with three British families in the Channel 4 documentary *How to Divorce Without Screwing Up Your Kids*. Passionate about changing the way children experience divorce, Christina has devoted her career to educating parents and creating resources that make a difference. In addition to her coaching practice, she continues to speak and to offer trainings to both professionals and parents. You can learn more at [www.divorceandchildren.com](http://www.divorceandchildren.com).



## Ellen Bruno

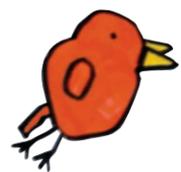
Ellen is an award-winning documentary filmmaker based in San Francisco. *SPLIT* is her first film for children. Drawing on her background in international relief work, Ellen's films have focused on issues at the forefront of human rights. She earned an MA in Film at Stanford University, and is a recipient of Guggenheim and Rockefeller Fellowships, a Goldie Award for Outstanding Artists, an Alpert Award for the Arts, and an Anonymous Was a Woman Award for the Arts. See: [www.brunofilms.com](http://www.brunofilms.com).



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Visit [www.splitfilm.org](http://www.splitfilm.org)  
for information on the *SPLIT* film and  
to order DVDs and *SPLIT* Guides

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# praise for *SPLIT*



*"SPLIT* is a powerful documentary that brings the voices of children of divorce alive in an unforgettable way."

– Ron Ousky, JD, President, Collaborative Law Institute of Minnesota

*"SPLIT* is powerful and moving, and the best 'voice of the child' resource I have ever seen. Every family lawyer, mental health professional, and financial specialist should watch it, and strongly urge all parents who are considering, or in the process of, divorce to view it also."

– Margaret Anderson, JD, Collaborative Council of the Redwood Empire

*"SPLIT* is a window into the thoughts of children who are not your own, but like your own. A rare and authentic opportunity to learn from the experts whose lives you are guiding, it teaches parents the value of keen active listening so they keep it real."

– Sandra Sherr, Parenting Mediator, Main Line Family Law Center, Havertown, PA

*"SPLIT* is both a mirror for children whose parents have divorced and a window for those whose parents have not. The kids featured in this film were sincere, real, honest, relatable—I'd love to see it shown in schools as part of life skills classes."

– Peggy Orenstein, Author of *CINDERELLA ATE MY DAUGHTER* and the *New York Times* best seller *WAITING FOR DAISY*

"I am overwhelmed with joy. The impact that *SPLIT* has had on our daughter has been incredible. Listening to the other kids speak about their family struggles has helped her understand that she is not alone. With the help of this film, her self-awareness and self-esteem have soared to new heights. Thank you for giving kids a voice."

– Lacreia, mother of Chayil, 8

"As a public school teacher for fifteen years, I have seen the academic and emotional impact of divorce on my students, including depression, anger, and sadness. For families with limited resources, schools provide the most consistent services for children in need. As more and more families from diverse backgrounds experience divorce, *SPLIT* becomes invaluable in the classroom."

– Sesheta Hanible, Public Elementary School Teacher, Harvey Milk Civil Rights Academy, San Francisco

*"SPLIT* will put a great resource in the hands of service agencies on the front lines, providing an urgently needed tool for families experiencing the challenges and stresses of divorce. There is an acute need for more-effective tools to educate divorcing parents and facilitate parent-child communication."

– Sonia Melara, Executive Director, Rally Family Visitation Services, St. Francis Memorial Hospital, San Francisco

"A powerful film that every divorcing parent should watch before they meet with lawyers, mediators, or financial professionals. Then when things get rocky, they should watch it again."

– Talia Katz, Director for International Academy of Collaborative Professionals



**GOLD MEDAL WINNER!**

Parents' Choice Award

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This publication was made possible through the generous support of the following:

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Collaborative Practice is a method of resolving disputes where participants work with a team of professionals to craft their own agreements, outside of court. Clients work together in a respectful way, keeping in mind the importance of protecting their children from conflict. Decisions are made by the participants without the involvement of a judge or other decision maker.

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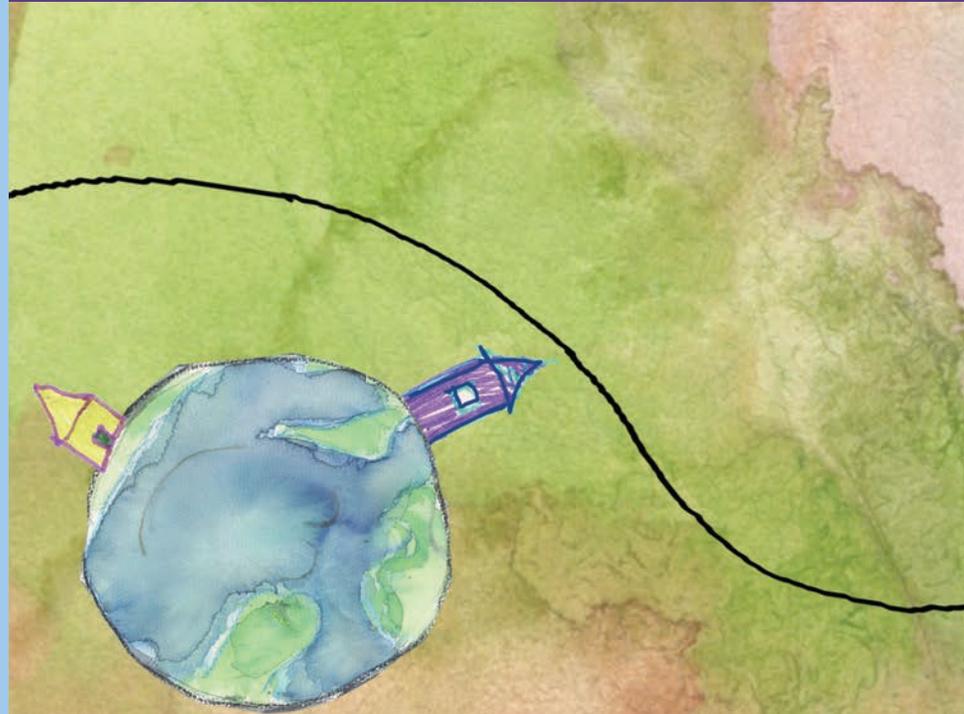
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**“Arresting, provocative, and illuminating... a rarely seen truth. All parents considering divorce and those who have divorced need to see this film.”**

– Gary Friedman

The Center for Understanding in Conflict

