



DIVORCE

CONVERSATION GUIDE FOR SGLS

IT'S SUNDAY MORNING. You've been singing, playing games, talking through the topic of the day and then a kid pulls you aside and tells you one of the hardest things he has ever told anyone—his mom and dad are getting a divorce. The mood quickly drops and this person standing in front of you is waiting for you to help make some sense out of what's happening. What are you going to say? A starting point can be L.U.V.E. That's an acronym for *listen, understand, validate and equip*.

WHAT TO SAY

(LISTEN)

- "I want to listen to you and support you through this hard time."
- "Would you like to tell me what's happening?"
- "If you want to talk, great. I'm here. If not, that's okay too. I'll be here when you want to talk."

A great place to start is simply listening to a kid share what they're thinking and feeling. Many times they don't even know what they're thinking and feeling until they begin trying to put words on what's happening. Being a good listener can help them do this.

(UNDERSTAND)

- "I have no idea what you're going through or how you feel but I want to be here for you."
- "How do you feel about what's happening?"

Every person is different and has their own experiences, thoughts and feelings when it comes to divorce. Just because you've experienced divorce in your own life doesn't mean you know how exactly how someone else feels. Be open to trying to understand how someone else may feel.

(VALIDATE)

- "It makes sense that you'd feel that way."
- "I wonder what we can do to help you with your _____ (sadness, anger, fear, etc.) in a healthy way?"
- "_____ helps me when I feel _____. Would you like to do that together sometime?"

Kids need to know that what they're feeling is okay. Emotions help us understand what's happening in our lives and cue us to take action to meet needs we have. It's important to help kids identify their emotions and choose actions that will help them during hard times.

(EQUIP)

- "It stinks that this is the situation now, but where do you think you want to be with your mom and dad down the road?"
- "Do you think holding onto anger or unforgiveness towards your mom and dad will get you where you want to be with them?"
- "What your mom/dad did was hurtful. I know people who can help you with that hurt. Would you like to talk with someone about what you're feeling? You could even invite your mom/dad."

Once you've listened to a kid and you have a better understanding of the situation—including his thoughts and feelings—it will be very important that you help him think beyond the present situation. This may involve seeking professional counseling.

WHAT NOT TO SAY

- "I know exactly how you're feeling."
- "When my parents got divorced I felt . . ."
- "Me too. When that happened to me . . ."
- "You should be thankful that you have parents. Some teens have parents who die of cancer, go off to fight in the war and some never even know their mom or dad. You're actually lucky to only have divorced parents."
- "I can't believe that!"
- "They did what?!"
- "I think your mom is totally in the wrong and I see why your dad would leave her." (Or vice versa.)

These are some typical phrases we tend to fall back on when we really don't know what to say. **When in doubt, remember to L.U.V.E—listen, understand, validate, equip.**