

"MY PARENTS SPLIT UP" [divorce]

THIS WEEK

This TalkSheet isn't about the right or wrong of divorce, or to judge those parents who may be split up or divorced. Teens aren't responsible for marital failure but they must live with its consequences. This discussion will help you understand the feelings of kids who are experiencing or have experienced a divorce. And it gives kids whose parents haven't divorced the chance to understand and empathize with the tragedy of a marital failure.

Be sensitive to your group members who may be dealing with divorce or split families. There are many unique family situations today—even within the church. Pay close attention to the dynamics of your group and mediate this discussion. Be careful not to sound accusatory or judgmental—and don't let your kids get away with it either.

OPENER

For this intro, you'll need five photocopies of a marriage certificate, one frame, and some tape. Place one of the certificates into the frame, poke one with holes, tear one in several places, tear one into pieces and tape it back together again, and save one to be torn. Now hold the certificates up before the group. Explain that each of these certificates represents a marriage—

- The framed certificate is the picture-perfect marriage—the husband and wife care for each other and work hard at keeping the marriage together.
- The certificate with holes represents a marriage with some problems—there are a few difficulties eating away at it, but so far it's stayed together.
- The one torn in several places represents a hurting marriage—perhaps with help it will survive, or it may end in divorce.
- The certificate torn into pieces but taped together again represents a marriage that has been torn apart but is healing—there are scars, but it can still last.
- Finally, the last certificate should be held up and torn to pieces. This represents a marriage that has ended in divorce—the certificate of marriage no longer means anything.

THE DISCUSSION, BY NUMBERS

1. Ask the young people to speak up with their thoughts and then write each contribution on the whiteboard or on newsprint.
2. This lets kids who've experienced the pain share some of it with the rest of the group. Ask several of the students whose parents have divorced to share their answers, but be sensitive to those who may not be ready to discuss the issue in front of the group.

3. You may want to role-play these situations so that your students practice their peer counseling and support skills. But what would your kids say to others in these situations? How do teenagers in general deal with these situations?
4. How do your kids respond to these? What legitimate reasons do they have for their answers? Take some time to talk about these and why teenagers hold some of these ideas.
5. What do these verses say about dealing with divorce? Take some time to talk about God's comfort during challenging times with families.

THE CLOSE

For a close, use this activity to illustrate the high divorce rate in today's society. Sit with your group in a circle so they can see you flipping a coin (or you can have your kids take turns flipping the coin). As you (or the kids) flip the coin, have them call heads or tails. If they lose the toss, have them leave the circle. Continue this until everyone in your group has called a coin toss (or some of them, if your group is too big). Explain that this activity is like marriage and divorce—roughly half of all marriages in the U.S. end in divorce. The people outside of the circle represent those whose marriages failed. You may want to mention that—statistically—if they marry again, their chance of another divorce is even higher.

What fears or questions do your kids have about divorce? What does God think about divorce? Remind them that no one is judging those who are divorced—only God knows and understands each situation. Encourage your kids to find an adult to talk with if they are angry with their parents—but point out that their parents need love and support, too. Close with a time of prayer for your kids and their families.

MORE

- You may want to assemble a group of four to five people for a panel discussion on divorce—a divorced person, an adult child of divorce, a Christian counselor or pastor, and a married couple. Have your group members write questions for the panel—in advance if possible. What scares your group about marriage and divorce? How can they prepare themselves today for healthy marriages?
- Has the media influenced the divorce rate? Undoubtedly. You may want to take some time to talk about media influences with your kids. What do TV shows and movies say about divorce? How is separation and divorce portrayed? What affect does pornography have on marriages? What does music today say about divorce and splitting up? Does the media condone cheating on partners? How? Discuss each of these with your group and ask for specific examples that they may have.