

# QUESTIONS HIGH SCHOOLERS MAY ASK (OR WANT TO ASK) ABOUT DIVORCE

Allowing your high schooler to process their feelings about your divorce—or divorce in general—is important, but not every teenager will do that the same way. You may find it difficult to get your kid to open up if the divorce hits especially close to home—don't take their hesitancy personally. Your high schooler is experiencing a myriad of emotions, many of which they may not be able to name yet.

While you shouldn't pressure your kid to talk to you if they aren't ready, there are a few strategies that can help open the door to some honest conversation.

- 1. Create a non-threatening environment.** Timing is everything if you want your high schooler to respond well—or if you want them to respond at all! Avoid days when they're overtired, distracted, or especially anxious. Take into account their schedule and plan time when it is not just convenient for you, but them as well. Approach them casually, calmly, and in a positive way. To put them at ease, here are some options:
  - Take your high schooler on an extended drive—somewhere at least 20 minutes away. Have them put their technology on "Do Not Disturb" so you have their full attention—and you do the same! (Note: Time in the car can be a great time to talk because there is no extended eye contact between the driver and the passenger. This can make teenagers more willing to talk about things they may otherwise remain closed up about.)
  - Spend time with your high schooler doing something that they enjoy. Get some food or dessert to-go from their favorite restaurant, browse the aisles of a store together, play a one-on-one game of their favorite sport, or go window-shopping somewhere.
  - Give your high schooler permission to write a question on paper and put it somewhere they know you will read it or have them put it in a notes app on their phone and share it with you. This would be a good option for kids who feel awkward asking a question face-to-face.
- 2. Begin by talking about a neutral topic.** Ask a question that has nothing to do with divorce. Try talking about what interests you know your teenager has or that you might share. "What's the latest show that you've been keeping up with?" Or "What's the most interesting or crazy thing you've seen on Instagram this week?" After you've both warmed up, give an invitation to talk about the divorce.
  - » "Do you have any new questions about your dad/mom and me?"
  - » "What's one thing that worries you about our family right now?"
  - » "You won't hurt my feelings if you need to say or ask something hard about what's going on with our family."
  - » "I can't imagine what you're going through, but I want to be there for you. Can you talk about what you've been thinking or feeling lately?"
  - » "Is there a thought you keep having over and over again that you'd be willing to share with me?"
- 3. Manage your reaction.** There's no way you can plan for the *perfect* conversation. So keep in mind, no amount of preparation will make it seamless. However your teenager responds—including if they don't want to talk right then—make sure you affirm them and the way they're processing. Honor them if they do not want to talk, keeping in mind that if you push them, they are more likely to feel trapped and flee even further away! If you didn't get the response you were hoping for, don't give up. Keep trying (maybe at a different time) and remember, this isn't a "one-time" discussion—it's a topic you'll need to revisit over and over again, in this phase and in the phases to come.

On the following page are actual questions high schoolers have asked as they have processed their parent's divorce, collected from over 15 different small group leaders/high school ministry leaders. Just as you, their parent, is figuring out a way forward in this new season of life, your teenager is asking basic questions about what this new reality means for them.

You may not have an answer to all of these questions, and these may not be questions your teenager ever asks, but being aware that these may come up and that they are processing these sorts of ideas on some level can be helpful for you and your relationship with your teenager moving forward.

Keep in mind that no question is too basic.

- Who knows about the divorce?
- How do or should I talk about this with my friends?
- What happens if my friends bring this up?
- What's the plan going to be for the holidays? Will I have a choice?
- Was this my fault?
- Can I fix this?
- If both my parents are Christian, what do I do? What does this mean about God?
- If one of my parents isn't a Christian, what do I do?
- If neither of my parents are Christian, what do I do?
- What happens if/when the rules are different between my parents?
- Can I be mad at my parents?
- Is/isn't divorce wrong?
- Who am I going to live with?
- Where will I go to school?
- Are we still a family?
- Is it going to be ok?
- Who is going to keep the dog?
- Is there something I can do to stop it?
- Did I do anything to make my parents get divorced?
- Does this mean that mom/dad is leaving me?
- Does this mean I have to move?
- Will I still have my own room?
- Will I have one or two of everything?
- How much money are they spending on this?
- How long is this going to take?
- Do I have to go to court?
- Who was right/wrong?
- Why do I have to listen to you anymore?
- Do you still celebrate anniversaries after a divorce?
- Do you still celebrate Mother's Day/Father's Day after your parent's divorce?
- When will things go back to normal?
- Will my sister/brother come with me?
- Is divorce even a big deal? Why do people get so upset about it?
- How do you get over feeling so sad about it?
- How can I help my sad parent(s)?
- Do I have to be mad at one parent just because the other is?
- What if I don't want to live with the parent I have to live with?
- Do you have any pointers on how to get back to normal?
- Can parents be divorced but still act married at school stuff?
- Is it okay for me to feel differently about the divorce than my siblings?
- How do I know who I can talk to about my parent's divorce?
- How do I tell people I don't want to talk about my parent's divorce?
- Is divorce okay if one parent cheated on the other?
- What do I do if I feel caught in the middle of my parents?
- Is it normal to feel relieved about my parents getting divorced?
- Does this mean my parents will get remarried to other people someday? Will I have step-parents?
- Will I get to spend half the time with mom and half the time with dad?
- Do I need to tell my teachers or my coaches my parents are getting divorced?
- What do I say to my friend whose parents are getting a divorce?
- Why are my parents fighting in the first place?
- Why didn't God answer my prayers for my parents to stay together?
- If mom/dad loves God, why are they leaving our family?
- Why would God allow my parents to get divorced?
- Is God okay with my parents getting divorced?
- How do I not get mad or upset about my parents getting divorced?
- What does the Bible say about divorce?