

# Stories for Kids in Divorce

A Read Aloud Storybook



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Stories for Kids in Divorce  
A Read Aloud Storybook

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## Note From the Author

This book is designed to provide much-needed hope for every child who is struggling with the divorce of his or her parents. I wrote this book to connect children with other children who have feelings and experiences similar to theirs. Each storyline comes from my personal experience in working with children. The characters are real, but the names are fictitious. When reading the stories, tell your young listeners these stories are about children just like them.

### Where are the pictures?

As you thumb through the book, you will notice there are no pictures. We designed the book this way so that as the children listen to the stories, they will be free to create images in their own minds. They will have no preconceived notions about any characters, allowing them to place themselves, their parents, friends and others within the stories. They may begin to connect with one or more of the characters in a particular story.

The 13 stories in this book are designed to complement the *DC4K, DivorceCare for Kids* curriculum. However, each story can stand alone, and they are prudent to any situation involving a child of divorce. These stories can be read to children by school teachers, church workers, child care teachers and others who work with children of divorce. Parents, in particular, will find that the questions at the end of each story are designed to enhance the relationship between parent and child.

It is suggested that you choose one story at a time to read. Find a place where you, the adult, can feel comfortable and where the children can stretch out, lean back or curl up as they listen. Be calm and don't rush. Let the words sink in. Don't be surprised if the children want to snuggle in close as they listen. If you are a parent, please use this time to nurture each child in your family.

Relish the connections you will make with each child, and may the Lord bless you abundantly.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Linda".





DivorceCare for Kids DivorceCare for Kids DivorceCare for Kids

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# My Parents Are Getting a Divorce? Not My Parents!



**J**eremy and his sister Jamie were very happy children. Jamie was just finishing fourth grade, and next year she would be in fifth grade. She was growing up and couldn't wait to be one of the older girls at her school. It would be fun to boss some of the younger kids around when she became a school crossing guard. Oh just wait until her little brother wanted to cross the street. She would make him wait. Another thing she was looking forward to next year was enrolling in gymnastics. Her mother had told her for years that when she went into fifth grade, she would be able to take gymnastics.

Jeremy was going to be in second grade next year. Both were excited about their summer vacation. This summer their parents



had promised to take them to Disneyland. For several years they had wanted to go to Disneyland, and now they were finally getting to go. Jamie was already planning what to pack in her new suitcase. She had never had her very own suitcase before. Oh boy, this was going to be a fun summer and the best summer ever.

A week before they left for Disneyland, Jamie heard her mother and father fighting. She thought she had heard her parents fighting before, but it was always when they were in their own bedroom late at night. This time it was the middle of the day, and there were loud and angry voices coming from the kitchen. Jamie could hear them all the way next door where she was playing with her best friend.

When her parents saw her come inside from playing, they got quiet. Dad looked at her mom with an angry look and said, “We’ll talk about this later,” and then he said to Jamie with a happy voice, “Hey JamieMamie, what’s up?” Her dad had called her JamieMamie ever since she could remember. But even though his voice had sounded normal when he said her name, Jamie didn’t know what to think. What if they were fighting about taking her and Jeremy to Disneyland? What if they weren’t going to go to



Disneyland? Suddenly Jamie felt very scared, and she didn't know why she felt this way.

On the next Saturday Daddy loaded up the minivan, Jamie, Jeremy and her mom, and off they went. They had a wonderful time at Disneyland. Daddy even told Jamie that he thought she was old enough to have her own camera. Not only did he buy her a camera, he even supplied her with a lot of film. Mommy took pictures with her digital camera. She took several pictures of Daddy, and that seemed kind of strange to Jamie. But Jamie thought it was the best week she had ever had. Even her little brother, Jeremy, had been nice to everyone.

When they got home, Jamie decided to put together a memory scrapbook. She had watched her friend's mom put one together, and she knew just which stickers she was going to buy and which album she wanted. Her mother thought it was a great idea. When she explained to her dad what she wanted to do, he didn't seem very interested. Later that night she crept out of her room and down the hall to her parent's bedroom. Sure enough, they were arguing again. She hated to think they were fighting; she preferred to think of her parents as arguing. As she listened to



her parents, she realized they were talking about Daddy moving out of their house. He told her mom that she just spent too much money and she was going to have to go and get a job because he was leaving. He even said something about her mom encouraging Jamie to spend a lot of money on silly things like a memory scrapbook. He said, “What on earth is a memory scrapbook anyway?”

So that was why her daddy was going to leave. It was Jamie’s fault her parents were fighting. The more Jamie listened, her head began to hurt and her stomach got a big knot right in the middle of it. Then she heard her dad say he was sleeping downstairs, and as she heard his feet walking toward the door, she ran to the safety of her room. As she sat behind her closed door in her room, tears began to fall. What could she do to keep her daddy from moving out? She loved her dad so much. What would Jeremy do without his dad around? She was afraid Jeremy would be really mad about Daddy leaving. She wasn’t mad, but she was . . . well . . . she was . . . hurting. It felt like there was a big hole in her heart. What if her heart was breaking in two? Was that possible? And what about her mom? What would her mom do? She didn’t have a job, and as far as Jamie could remember, her mother had never had a job before. She began to



pray, “Oh God, please don’t let my daddy move. Please God! Make him change his mind. Please.”

The next morning at breakfast her dad said that he and her mom needed to talk to the kids tonight after dinner. He was in a hurry and left for work. Mom looked like she had been crying all night. Jeremy even asked Jamie what was going on. Jamie couldn’t tell Jeremy. He was just a little kid. She was the big sister. She would have to shoulder all this blame by herself. After all it was her fault.

The more she thought about things, the more she decided that she must have dreamed the entire thing last night. Sure that was it. Daddy was stressed out about his job, and Mom must have caught a cold. Tonight after dinner her parents were probably going to talk about inviting Grandma and Grandpa over to talk about their trip to Disneyland. She thought to herself, “I’d better get busy organizing my pictures so when I get my album, I’ll be ready.” She thought about her grandparents and decided she would ask her grandmother to help her. Oh this was going to be so much fun. Jamie went to her room and began looking over the vacation pictures.



Later that afternoon Jeremy came in and asked, “Hey Sis, whatcha doing?” They put on their Mickey Mouse ears and spent the afternoon laughing and talking about their trip to Disneyland. By the end of the afternoon they were already planning where they would ask their parents to take them next year for vacation.

When they sat down for dinner, Daddy said with a tense voice, “Well kids, there’s no sense waiting until after dinner. We might as well get this out in the open. Your mother and I have something to tell you. We—um, err—um are getting a divorce. I’ve found an apartment about a mile from here, and I’ll be moving out of the house this next Saturday.” Her daddy kept talking, but Jamie couldn’t hear what he was saying. All of a sudden she heard a sob coming from somewhere inside her. The tears started to flow down her face, and she thought she was going to throw up. She grabbed her stomach and went running to her room. She kept thinking, “It’s not true. It’s not true. It can’t be true—a divorce?”

Later Jeremy came busting through her door. He never knocked! He said he didn’t understand what had happened at dinner. What did it mean when parents got divorced? Jamie started to cry again, but then she looked at Jeremy and said with an



angry voice, “It means Daddy won’t live here anymore! Don’t you understand? He’s going to live in an apartment.”

Jeremy got excited as he said, “Do you think he’ll get one with a swimming pool?”

Oh! Little brothers! “Jeremy, you are so stupid!” Jamie said as she rolled her eyes and yelled for him to leave her alone. Their whole lives were getting ready to change, and Jeremy didn’t have a clue what was happening. Jamie knew nothing would ever be the same again. She wondered if her dad would still call her JamieMamie, or would that change, too?

The rest of the week things were very tense around the house, and then all of a sudden it was Saturday. The day Jamie had been dreading. Daddy got up early and started packing some things. He told her mom he would be back later to get some more things. He hugged Jamie and Jeremy and told them he loved them. He told them as soon as he got his apartment all fixed up, he was going to come and get them and they could come and spend the night with him. Wow, that sounded strange to Jamie—spend the night with her dad without her mom being there.



Her mom had gone about the day in a daze. It was like she wasn't even there. Late in the afternoon she went to her room and didn't come out. It got late and Jamie fixed Jeremy and herself a sandwich. Jamie wondered if this was the way things were going to be from now on.

The next morning Jamie's mother woke her up and told Jamie they were going to church. She wondered if Daddy would be there and if he would sit with them in their regular place. She didn't have to wonder long because Daddy didn't come to church. Jamie, Jeremy and Mommy sat all alone. Her mom kept her arms around Jeremy and Jamie the entire service. After church Mommy said it might be a good idea to go to McDonald's to eat. Jamie wasn't really very hungry, and her mother didn't eat one bite. Jeremy ate all his hamburger and fries and asked if he could have her fries.

"What is wrong with you, Jeremy?" Jamie growled. "Don't you understand that our dad is not going to live with us anymore? How can you be hungry? Give me a break!"

Jeremy looked up from gulping down his soda. As he stuffed his mouth full of fries, he said, "Oh, that. I'm pretending Dad has



gone out of town on one of his business trips. He'll be home soon.  
He just has to get out and get his act together. I'm not worried. . . .  
Hey Mom, can I have some ice cream, too?"



## Questions to Encourage Conversation:

Why do you think Jamie thought the divorce was her fault?

What do you think about Jamie trying to protect her brother from knowing her parents were fighting?

Why do you think Jamie felt scared after she heard the argument? What was she afraid of?

Why did Jamie's stomach feel like it was getting a big knot in it? When has your stomach felt like that?

Why do you think Jamie pretended her parents' fighting was a dream?

Remember the part in the story where Jamie was excited about her new suitcase? What do you think she will put in it when she goes to stay with her dad?

What does it mean when parents get a divorce?

Why wasn't Jeremy worried like Jamie?

Why did Jamie fix Jeremy and herself a sandwich? Why didn't she ask her mom to do it?

Was it a good idea for their mom to take them to McDonald's to eat? Why or why not?

Do you think Jamie will get to take gymnastics when she is in fifth grade? Why or why not?

What do you think will happen next summer with the vacation Jamie and Jeremy planned?



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## I Wish There Were Two of Me



“Come on Kristi, we’re going to have a good time. You’ll see.” Kristi’s dad was taking her to a retreat up in the mountains. He called it a single parent family retreat. Kristi didn’t know what he meant by single parent family retreat. All she knew was that this was her dad’s weekend and she didn’t want to go to a “retreat,” whatever it was. She was going to stall as long as she could. Maybe if she stalled long enough, he would change his mind.

“Come on, Sweetie, this will be fun. There are going to be a lot of kids there, and you’re going to make some new friends,” Daddy was saying.



“Sure thing,” thought Kristi, “but I bet none of them have to live in two different houses with divorced parents.” She still shuddered at the thought of her parents being divorced. Kristi had been staring out the car window when all of a sudden her dad shouted, “Hey, we’re here. We made it! Let’s go inside.”

“Oh yea, we’re here,” thought Kristi sarcastically. “I can’t wait!” Kristi was dragging her feet and looking down at the ground as her dad dragged her into a big room with a lot of noise. Kristi heard another girl say, “Hey, this is like a great big party.” Kristi looked up and saw the room was set up with balloons and streamers, and everyone was laughing and eating. So everyone was having a wonderful time, big deal. She still figured she was the only kid here who had to live in two houses; these other kids could party but not her!

In a little while a lady came up to meet them. The lady said she was so glad that Kristi had come to this retreat with her dad. Kristi got up enough courage to ask the lady what they were going to be doing. That’s when she heard it. She thought, “Surely not. I’d better listen a little more carefully—I think she just said that all of the kids here live in a home with only one parent. Could this be true?”



“Hey lady,” said Kristi, “did you just say all the kids here live in a home with just one parent? Because my parents are divorced and I live with my mom and then I live with my dad, and I have to go back and forth. We used to live in a big house with a swimming pool and everything, and now Dad lives in this tiny apartment that has a pool. But I’m scared to go swimming there because of some mean kids. My mom lives in a tiny house in a neighborhood that I don’t like.”

Wow, Kristi couldn’t believe she had just said all that stuff and to a stranger, too. She looked up and the lady was smiling and said, “Then you will fit right in around here. That’s who this retreat is for, children living in single parent homes.” Ah-ha! So that was what a single parent family retreat was all about.

Kristi was having such a wonderful time. She made some new friends, and they all stayed up really late. Some kids were with their moms, and some were with their dads. The next day there was a church class, a funny puppeteer and lunch, and then all of a sudden it was time to leave. She couldn’t believe it—it was over. Kristi felt a little sad because now she had to go back to the “real world” as her new friend had called it.



On Monday Kristi was still thinking about the retreat. She had learned a lot of things. First of all she learned that there were other kids who lived in “single parent homes.” She decided she liked that name. She had once heard one of her mom’s friends say she was sorry they had a “broken home.” Kristi didn’t look at her home as being broken. She needed to tell her mom to tell her friend that they had a single parent home.

Kristi learned that some kids live with only their mothers and never get to see their dads. One little girl said that she lived with her dad and didn’t ever remember seeing her mom. Kristi learned that some kids live with their grandparents because their parents can’t live with them. “Oh man,” she thought, “that would be so hard not to be able to see either parent.” Kristi decided she was lucky because she got to live with both parents, just not at the same time. She had also learned at the retreat that it didn’t make any difference what kind of home you lived in, that Jesus loves kids in any kind of home. She wondered if that included those kids at her school who had to live in a shelter? They didn’t even have a home.

Living with both parents in separate homes did create some real, big-time problems though. Each of her parents wanted to



spend a lot of time with her. They both loved her. Oh how she wished there were two of her. That way she could be with each parent at the same time. Suddenly she remembered something else she learned at the retreat; there are people she could talk to. One lady had said they could go talk to their school counselor if they were having problems. Kristi decided this might be a good plan, so she asked her teacher if she could go to the office.

Mrs. Giliam, the school counselor, was a really nice lady. Kristi explained that she had gone to a retreat and she needed to talk about some things to a counselor. Mrs. Giliam asked how she could help. Kristi began to explain how hard it was to have divorced parents. She shared that both her parents loved her and if there were just two of her, things would be a lot easier. Mrs. Giliam asked Kristi what her responsibilities were at her mom's house and at her dad's house. Responsibilities, what did that mean? Mrs. Giliam explained that at each house Kristi needed a set routine and she needed to contribute to helping around the house. She also asked if Kristi had any rituals that she did with either parent.

Well this talk was certainly new to Kristi. She asked the counselor to explain what she meant. Mrs. Giliam thought it



would be a good idea to get Kristi's mom and dad to come in so they could all talk about it together. "Oh no," Kristi thought, "Mom and Dad in the same room." She didn't know about that. She didn't think that was such a good idea. Mrs. Giliam was already on the phone calling her parents.

A week later all three of them sat in front of Mrs. Giliam. She helped each person feel at ease and said they needed to all talk about helping Kristi feel better about herself and her living arrangements. She explained that each home needed a set routine. It didn't have to be the same routine at each house, but whatever Mom decided on, she needed to stick with it, and the same was true for Dad. In other words, when Kristi was at her mom's, she needed to go to bed at the same time, get up at the same time, help cook dinner, clean up the kitchen, help with the laundry and help her mom plan meals. Kristi was also getting old enough to learn how to cook, so she could help each parent with meals. This way each parent would have more time to spend with Kristi, and they would be able to have fun together. Mrs. Giliam said Kristi's dad needed to set a schedule at his house and develop some chores for Kristi also. Mrs. Giliam told everyone to go home and do some planning and that she expected to see them back next week with all their plans.



Just when Kristi was feeling left out of this entire conversation, Mrs. Giliam said, “By the way, Kristi needs to be a part of the decision making process. She needs to have some input into the schedule and the rituals and even which responsibilities she wants to start learning.”

“Okay,” Kristi thought, “that feels much better to be included. Maybe this is going to work out okay.” Everyone agreed they needed to work on this for Kristi’s benefit.

On the way home Kristi explained to her mom that it was very confusing changing homes so much. How was she ever going to keep track of what she was supposed to do on what days and at whose house? What if she forgot? Her mom thought it might be a good idea to develop a calendar. They could mark which days were Dad’s days and which were Mom’s. They got on the computer and quickly developed a calendar. Mom printed three copies of every month. “Why three copies, Mom?” she asked. Mom explained one would go on their refrigerator at home, one at Dad’s and she could take one to her teacher at school so her teacher would be aware of whom to call if something happened or if Kristi forgot which day it was. “Wow, this is going to be cool!” she thought.



Kristi and her mom sat at the kitchen table and wrote down all the chores and things that had to be done. There were some things that Mom would have to do, like paying the bills and buying the groceries. But she told Kristi that she could help her a lot by getting the mail every day and laying it on the desk. She also said Kristi could help with the grocery shopping. “Mom, how can I help? I can’t drive,” Kristi replied.

“Each week,” said Mom, “we will make out a menu together of everything we want to eat. I’ll tell you what items we will need, and you make a list of things to shop for. Then you can scour the newspapers for coupons. We will go to the store together on the Saturdays that you’re at my house, and we can come home and put everything away. That way you’ll know where things are when it’s your turn to cook dinner,” Mom said.

“Yikes, cook dinner? You mean I’ll have to learn to do that, too?” Kristi yelped. But Kristi was beginning to feel really proud that they were able to plan so many things to do together. She couldn’t wait to go to school and tell her friends about how grown up she felt. She bet none of them knew how to cook.



When Kristi got to Dad's after school on Wednesday, he had already been busy with his list of things that needed to be done at his apartment. He asked her to look at them and check which ones she wanted to do. Some of the things they planned to do together, like doing the laundry at the Laundromat, going out to eat at Taco Bell once a week and shooting hoops at the park when the weather was nice. Her dad wanted to make sure she learned how to play some sports. He thought it would be a good ritual if on the Saturdays she was at his house, they would look at the sports page in the newspaper together. That way he could explain things to her. "Oh boy," she thought, "I'll be the envy of every girl at school because I'll be able to talk about sports to the guys. This is gonna be so awesome."

Kristi shared with her dad about all the responsibilities she would have at Mom's house. And what she learned to cook at Mom's, maybe she could cook for him since he wasn't much of a cook. She also told him about the tea parties they planned to do every Monday morning before school.

As Kristi went to put her things in her room, she thought to herself, "Hey, maybe I don't have to wish there were two of me



anymore.” She couldn’t wait to go to Mrs. Giliam’s office next week and tell her about all the plans.



## Questions to Encourage Conversation:

Why did Kristi not want to go to the retreat?

When was a time you tried stalling like Kristi did when they were going to the retreat?

What do you think a single parent home is?

What do you think Kristi's new friends meant when they said "go back to the real world"?

Kristi learned that Jesus loves children who live in all kinds of homes, even those who live in a shelter. What kind of home do you live in? *(Be sensitive to the children's current living arrangements and past living arrangements. If you have children who live in a shelter or have lived in a homeless shelter, be sure to build them up and say positive things about them.)*

What is a school counselor?

Why do you think Kristi was worried about her mom and dad both being in the same room together?

What are some of your responsibilities at your mom's? At your dad's? *(Or wherever the children live.)*

Why did Kristi's mom make three copies of her schedule?

Have you ever gotten confused about which parent you are supposed to do what with?

What are some things you can cook for dinner? What are some things you can learn to cook?

What did Kristi want to tell her friends at school? What did she mean about "how grown up she felt"?

When have you felt like you wished there were two of you?





## Ethan Can't Remember a Time He Wasn't Angry



**M**iss Lori was at the art table helping a child with an art project when she looked up to see Ethan busting through the back door. “Uh-oh,” she thought, “Ethan’s mad again.” Miss Lori took a deep breath. She walked over to Ethan and said, “Ethan, it seems to me you are angry. Take a deep breath. Breathe with me. Come on. Breathe with me. That’s it. Take a breath from your belly. Relax your shoulders! Breathe with me.” As Ethan began to breathe along with Miss Lori, she could feel him begin to calm down. She kept saying, “Come on, breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth like we practiced. You can do it.”

As Ethan calmed down, Miss Lori asked him if he wanted to talk about what had happened. The words began tumbling out of



his mouth. It wasn't his fault. They had been playing dodgeball and he got hit with the ball and he guessed he threw it really hard and somebody came running at him . . . and . . . and . . . well he didn't remember what happened after that. All he knew was that the teacher at the after school program had sent him inside. It wasn't fair. That teacher was always picking on Ethan. Ethan was sure the teacher didn't like him. As he started explaining, he began to get upset all over again.

Miss Lori said, "Ethan, listen to me. I don't want to talk about what happened outside. I want to talk about the fact that you did it! You calmed yourself down. You got yourself in control by breathing and relaxing your muscles. Did you know that?"

Ethan looked at her and for the first time he realized that he did do it. He did calm himself down. It was a first. A big smile crept across his face as he said with the most surprised voice, "I did do it, didn't I?"

Ethan had been mad for as long as he could remember. When he was little, about two years old, he had come to Miss Lori's daycare. Miss Lori and the other teachers told him that he had



been a happy little kid, but he didn't remember being happy. Then he and his parents moved to Michigan. While they were there, his mom and dad had gotten a divorce. After the divorce he and his mother moved back to Texas, and he found himself enrolled in Miss Lori's program again. Except now he was in school, and his parents were divorced. He was very angry. At first he tried to blame all of his anger on Miss Lori and her child care program. He had been happy and now he was mad, so it must be her fault.

Ethan was so confused. He loved his mother and he liked living with her, but he loved his dad, too. Ethan got to go visit his dad every Christmas, Easter and for the entire summer. The strange thing was when Ethan was with his mom, he missed his dad, and when he went to visit his dad, he missed his mom. It seemed like he was always missing somebody. And he worried about his mom while he was living at his dad's all summer.

People told his mom that Ethan should be used to his schedule by now. After all, it had been three years since his parents had gotten a divorce. Ethan kept thinking to himself, "What's wrong with me? I am so angry all the time." It wasn't like he woke up every morning and said, "Oh boy, I'm going to be mad today!"



It just seemed to happen, and the stupidest things set him off.

He had to hand it to the daycare teachers, though. They were so patient with him. At first he had thought if he were bad enough, they would send him home and not let him come back. That was his plan anyway, but these teachers were strange! Not only did they not send him home, they worked even harder to help him. Miss Lori explained to Ethan and his mom that three years wasn't a very long time to be divorced. Could've fooled Ethan, because it seemed like forever to him. Then she said it takes a long time for children to get over their parents' divorce, sometimes longer than three years, so they all needed to be patient with each other.

The teachers kept telling him he could do it. At first he thought, "Do what?" Then he began to understand. They had faith in him. Was it possible that he would be able to control his anger? They reminded him about how talented he was and how good he was at dodgeball. One of them had even said he was good with little kids. Him? Good with little kids? Why he didn't even like little kids.

Miss Lori had suggested to Ethan's mom that they see a



counselor. This counselor was one who came to the child care. Ethan didn't want to talk to a counselor, especially one who came to daycare. Everyone would know that something was wrong with him. Then Miss Lori went a step further, and she asked Ethan's permission to call his dad in Michigan and talk with him about Ethan seeing a counselor. Ethan had shrugged his shoulders and said, "I don't care." Maybe if he acted like he didn't care, this would shut her up. This woman was beginning to get on his nerves. He was sure his dad was going to be really mad about her calling. Ethan didn't know what Miss Lori said to his dad, but the next day his dad called him. His dad said he thought it might be a good idea for Ethan to talk to the counselor. Oh brother, it seemed like everyone was against him.

Jeff, the counselor, could sense that Ethan didn't want to talk at the child care, so he suggested that Ethan and his mom come to his office once a week for a while, but he didn't think Ethan should come to his office just yet. He thought they should become friends first. When Jeff came to the after school program, he and Ethan and a few others played games. Jeff was pretty good at dodgeball, but not as good as Ethan. On rainy days they played cards. Then something amazing happened; Ethan began to notice that other



kids went into Miss Lori's office with Jeff. So he wasn't the only one who had to talk to a counselor. Hmmm, this might not be so bad after all.

He also began to notice that Miss Lori and the other teachers were constantly talking about being in control of yourself. They said to think of your brain as being divided into three different parts. One morning Miss Lori said, "Okay, where's my brain?" Three kids jumped up to do a demonstration. Arthur was the lower level of the brain; Alex said he wanted to be the middle level, and Sophie was the upper level. This sounded kind of complicated to Ethan, but Arthur, Alex and Sophie had practiced, and they were so funny that Ethan actually began to understand how it all worked. Miss Lori said our brain is like an elevator with different levels. In the lower level of the brain it is always fight or flight, and Arthur began to act like he was fighting and then running in place like he was running away. He was too funny! She said when we get scared or stressed out, we flip back into the lower level and we start trying to fight or run away.

Ethan thought, "Hey, that sounds like me. Maybe that's what happens when I throw things." She said we say words that don't



make sense, and sometimes we don't even know what we are doing. She also said this happens a lot when we don't feel safe and that many kids whose parents are divorced don't feel safe. "Hey, that's like me," Ethan thought.

She said when we move to the next part of the brain, the middle level, that we add emotions like being happy or sad or mad. Alex started acting like he was laughing, then crying and being angry. Miss Lori said we have words in the middle level. Alex started moving his lips, and he actually looked like some kind of puppet up there. Everyone was laughing. Miss Lori said when we get to the upper level, we can actually begin to think and understand. Sophie put her finger against her forehead and started tapping her head like she was really thinking about things. Miss Lori said the brain is like an elevator and some of us are going down the brain elevator and she wants to help us move up the brain elevator. She said that we can't think and reason things out unless we are at the upper level of the brain.

"When you feel yourself getting upset," said Miss Lori, "start breathing from your belly. Relax your shoulders. You can encourage each other when you see someone starting to get angry by saying,



‘Your face looks like this’ or ‘Your hands are going like this’ and ‘Breathe with me.’ Our bodies send signals when we are starting to get upset. We need to learn our signals so we can calm ourselves down.” She demonstrated an angry looking face and hands that were opening and closing.

Ethan thought to himself, “So that’s how she knows when I’m starting to get upset. She has watched me, and she knows the signals my body is sending. I wonder if she would share this with me?” Then Miss Lori made everyone practice breathing and relaxing. At the end she told the kids that even adults will go down the brain elevator at times. She said she does it when she is driving down the highway and a car cuts in front of her. She said she can feel herself getting upset and she used to get mad and wave her hand and say, “Duh!” Now she remembers to breathe deeply, and she says to herself, “Maybe that person is late for a meeting. I’ll just let that car in.” She explained she can choose to ruin her whole day by being angry or she can choose to breathe deeply and let it go.

Ethan began to notice that he wasn’t in trouble all the time at school and at home. Maybe this stuff he was learning at daycare was really working. His teachers began to comment on how helpful



Ethan was. He went from being hurtful to helpful. The little kids liked him even more now that he was helpful. They were always asking him to play a game with them or teach them how to play dodgeball. Maybe he was good with little kids—he'd have to think about that a little more.

As Ethan began to feel more comfortable, he began to open up and tell people what was going on in his life. He told about flying to Michigan by himself. When he explained that he had to change planes in Chicago, Miss Lori said she had to change planes in Chicago one time and it was a little scary. Ethan explained how the flight attendants helped him and how he had learned to ask a lot of questions if he got confused. He felt reassured by his mom when he went to his dad's because she always had him call when he got to his dad's to tell her he arrived safely. And then when he flew back to Texas, he had to call his dad to tell him he had arrived safely in Texas. Miss Lori said she thought it was cool the way his parents had worked everything out, and they must love him a lot. That was nice to hear. Ethan began to think that Miss Lori might not be so bad after all. Could it be that she wasn't the cause of his problems?



Ethan began to feel comfortable enough to share many things with Jeff and Miss Lori. At one point Ethan shared that his dad had called the night before. He shared that he really liked talking to his dad on the phone, but he felt kind of guilty and was afraid to say very much because it seemed like it was upsetting to his mom. Miss Lori got busy and came up with a plan. She arranged for Ethan's dad to email him after school at the daycare program. She let Ethan come into her office and read his dad's email. She even let him print it out. And one day his dad sent some pictures of Ethan when he had been at his dad's apartment. Ethan was swimming in his dad's pool. Ethan laughed when he saw the pictures, and he remembered how much fun he had swimming. He figured this was a pretty good way to handle things after all.



## Questions to Encourage Conversation:

Why did Miss Lori tell Ethan to breathe at the beginning of the story?

Miss Lori wanted Ethan to calm down before they talked. What did she have him do to help himself become calm?

Why do you think Ethan felt like the outside teacher was unfair?

When Ethan said, “I did do it, didn’t I?” what did he mean?

What made Ethan angry about having to move?

Do you think he liked leaving his friends? His dad? His home?

Why did Ethan feel like he was always missing someone?

Tell about a time when you felt like that.

What did you think about Ethan’s plan to be so bad that the daycare teachers would send him home and not let him come back?

Why did Ethan feel like everyone was against him?

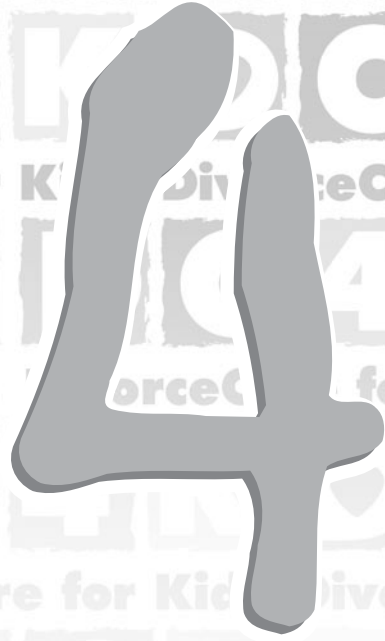
Miss Lori talked about learning the signals your body sends when you are getting angry. What signals does your body send when you are getting out of control? *(Most children will not know the answer to this question, and you may want to wait until later to address this issue.)*

What made Miss Lori think that Ethan’s parents loved him?





## Ho-hum Another Day



**J**asmine woke up early and heard her mother getting ready for work. She closed her eyes and thought, “Maybe if I lie real still and keep my eyes closed, I’ll go back to sleep. Maybe I am asleep and this is a weird dream, and soon I’ll wake up and Dad will be taking his shower like he used to and Mom will be fixing breakfast.”

Jasmine tried hard to go back to sleep. Ever since her mother and father divorced, Jasmine had been upset. “Go back to sleep. Go back to sleep,” she kept saying to herself over and over.

In a few minutes she heard her mother say, “Get up you sleepyheads. It’s time to get ready to go to school. Let’s go, Jasmeeny.” Oh school! Jasmine didn’t think she could go to school today.



Why did her mom have to be so happy this morning? And when was she going to quit calling her that baby name—Jasmeeny? Her dad had named her Jasmine, not Jasmeeny. Why couldn't her mom understand she wanted to be called Jasmine? Besides, if she didn't make people call her Jasmine, then did it mean that she didn't love her dad anymore?

Jasmine just wasn't in a good mood today. All she could think was "Ho-hum, another day. I have to get through another day." Jasmine dragged her body out of bed and stumbled into the bathroom.

"Hey Sis," her sister said. Jasmine didn't bother to say anything. Maybe if she ignored Sara, she would go away.

Just then her little brother came running into the bathroom. He was all happy and full of smiles. "Move over nerd-heads," he said with a twinkle in his eyes. Spencer was only in first grade, but he loved teasing his sisters. Some mornings his whole reason for getting out of bed was to give them a hard time. But since their dad had moved out, his sisters were different. They kept telling him to stay away from them and to stay out of their things. It just



wasn't as much fun teasing them as it used to be. He could deal with Sara's anger, but he was beginning to worry a little bit about Jasmine.

All three children rushed to get dressed and make it to the breakfast table in time to grab a bowl of cereal before rushing out the door to school. Seemed like they were always rushing now.

"Come on you guys, I'm going to be late for work again today. I can't be late one more time, or I'll get docked on my paycheck. Goodness knows we can't afford that. Come on, hurry up," Mom said as she finished putting on her makeup.

Ever since their mom had to change jobs, it seemed like she was always gone. She either had to go to work early or stay late, and they didn't get to see her as much as they wanted. Their dad had moved to Phoenix, Arizona, and they didn't get to see very much of him either. He flew into town on holidays, or he had them fly out to stay at his house. They were going to spend the entire summer with him. Jasmine found all of this traveling back and forth very tiring. It seemed like she had to say good-bye and hello all the time. In order to say hello to her dad, it meant saying



good-bye to her mom. When she was at her dad's and knew it was time to go to her mom's, it meant having to say good-bye to her dad. This was all so confusing.

Their mom dropped all three children at school and waved as she drove off to work. Jasmine watched her mom's red car until she could no longer see it. She turned and walked very slowly inside the school. Once inside the school she went straight to her classroom. Some other kids were laughing and talking when Jasmine came in. She used to join the others, but now she just came in and went straight to her desk. Sophie, one of her friends, came over to talk to her. "Hey Jazz, what's happened to you? You used to be all fun and everything, and now when you look at me, you turn your head and walk away. Have I hurt your feelings or something?" As Jasmine looked into Sophie's eyes, she wondered if she should tell her best friend about how she had been feeling.

"Sophie, no, you haven't hurt my feelings. I just don't feel very good. It's like my bones feel heavy or something. Have you ever felt that way?"

Sophie surprised Jasmine when she said, "Yep, I have felt like



that. It was when I was in preschool and my mom and dad got a divorce.”

Jasmine couldn't believe her ears. She stammered, “Your mom and dad got a divorce? But you never told me that, and your mom is married. Isn't that man I see picking you up from school your dad?” Sophie explained that her mom had remarried a few years ago. She said the man was her stepdad.

Jasmine got permission from her teacher to go to the school office. As Jasmine stepped into the office, Miss Smith looked up with a smile. “Miss Smith,” Jasmine said as she held her hand on her stomach, “my stomach hurts again today. Can I lie down in the nurse's office until she gets here?”

Miss Smith was so nice and understanding. She was the school secretary. Somebody said that she was divorced, but Jasmine didn't think that could be true. Miss Smith was always so happy. How could anybody who's divorced be that happy?

“Having a rough morning, Jasmine?” Miss Smith said in her comforting voice. “Go on in. The nurse will be here shortly,” she



said as she touched Jasmine's shoulder.

Jasmine put her backpack on the floor and climbed up on the nurse's bed. She felt like she was going to start crying. She kept thinking, "What is wrong with me? I must have some kind of disease. I hope I'm not contagious." Her mind began to whirl with thoughts about being sick. Then she began to think about what Sophie had said to her, and just when the school nurse walked into the office, the tears began to slide down Jasmine's face. She couldn't stop them.

"Whoa, what's wrong Jasmine?" Miss Betty, the school nurse, asked. "Having another rough day? This is the third time you've been to my office this week. Don't you think it's about time you talked about things?" Even before Miss Betty could finish her sentence, Jasmine's words came tumbling out. She told Miss Betty everything about the divorce and how she was feeling and how she hated saying good-bye all the time and how much she missed her dad and how she must be the only kid besides herself, her brother, sister and Sophie who had divorced parents, and would she ever feel better?



“Hey, slow down. One question at a time, please.” Miss Betty went on to explain that she had been waiting for Jasmine to be ready to talk. She said she already knew that her parents were divorced because her mom had come to school last year and told the school counselor. Her mom had given permission for the counselor to share with the school nurse. Miss Betty told Jasmine that she understood how hard it was on Jasmine.

“How could you know what it feels like for your dad to leave you and move to another state?” Jasmine scowled.

Miss Betty replied in a quiet and tender voice, “Jasmine, when I was about your age, my father left also. I was the oldest, and I had to take care of my little sister. I remember what it felt like. I decided I was going to go to school and learn all about how people get over a loss in their lives. When I went to nursing school, I learned in one of my classes that it’s called grief. When we experience a loss in our lives, we will go through different feelings and emotions.”

Hmm, this sounded very interesting to Jasmine. She asked Miss Betty to explain about these emotions. Miss Betty went on



to say, “Some of the emotions we feel when parents divorce are denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance, and some people add the word hope after acceptance. It takes a long time to go through all of the emotions. And not everyone will experience a loss the same way.” So that explained why Spencer and Sara didn’t seem to be as sad as she was. Miss Betty explained that Jasmine was depressed. Jasmine didn’t know what the word “depression” meant, so she decided to ask. Miss Betty explained that depression is a terrible sadness that people who are grieving feel. People who lose someone to death or divorce may get depressed. Miss Betty also said that she had learned how to grieve, and recently, when her little dog, Muffin, died, she grieved over losing her. But because she understood the stages of grief, she knew that life would go on and at some point she would feel happiness again.

Jasmine doubted she would ever feel real happiness again. Miss Betty shared with her some things she could do to help herself. One thing was to talk to herself and encourage herself. Jasmine said, “Oh you mean like when I have to get up in the morning, I should say to myself, ‘Hey, get yourself up out of this bed and move it, girlfriend!’”



Miss Betty laughed and said, “Yes, something like that.” She also told Jasmine there are some special foods that she might try eating like mashed potatoes, applesauce, bananas and orange juice. With a shocked voice Jasmine said, “All at once?”

“No, not all at once but maybe one of those foods every day.” She explained that they are soft and comforting in the mouth and they are considered “comfort foods” and they help you to feel better when you are eating them.

Then Miss Betty said, “It’s okay to cry. Did you know that in the Bible it talks about Jesus crying? He cried when one of his friends died. Jesus knows how sadness feels. When you feel like you want to cry, you come to my office, and we can talk. I’d like to be your friend. And Miss Smith, the secretary, she would like for you to know that she is divorced and she understands what you are going through also.” Jasmine already felt better. So she wasn’t dying with some awful disease. She would get through this, and maybe she could help her family with their stages of grief. All of a sudden she couldn’t wait to get home and tell Mom about what she had learned today.



## Questions to Encourage Conversation:

Why did Jasmine try to go back to sleep?

Why didn't Jasmine like it when her mom called her by her nickname, Jasmeeney?

Why didn't Jasmine get mad when her friend called her Jazz?

Jasmine's family had many changes after their dad moved out. What were some of the changes?

What changes have you had in your life since your parents separated?

Why didn't Jasmine like to travel?

What was wrong with Jasmine when she went to the school nurse's office?

When the school secretary told Jasmine to go into the nurse's office, she put her hand on Jasmine's shoulder. How do you think that felt to Jasmine?



The school nurse told Jasmine about some special foods to eat.  
What were these foods?

What kind of foods do you like to eat when you are feeling sad?  
*(If the children only mention junk foods, then talk about how we need to choose healthy foods like fresh fruits and vegetables. We are responsible to take care of the body God gave us.)*

The emotions one can experience during divorce are

- Denial – Pretending it isn't happening.
- Anger – Feeling very mad all the time about the divorce.
- Bargaining – Thinking, “If only I would have done something differently, my parents wouldn't be divorced.”
- Depression – Feeling very sad all the time.
- Acceptance – Accepting the changes in your life.
- Hope – Knowing that things are going to get better.

*Explain that children can experience all of these emotions or only some of them and they experience them more than once.*

What do you think Jasmine told her mom when she got home that night?





## So What If My Mom Left? No Big Deal



**E**very day after school Kyle would sit in a big rocking chair at his daycare center and stare out the window. He wouldn't talk to anyone; he didn't want to play; he just rocked and rocked and looked out the window. Kyle had just started third grade. He had a little sister in first grade, and they both lived with their dad. Two summers ago his mom had packed her bags and left. All last school year they didn't know where she was. Kyle acted like he didn't care about his mom. He would say, "No big deal. So what if my mom left?" Then one day at the end of the school year, their mother called. She wanted them to come and spend the summer with her. Both kids got very excited. They began telling everyone where they were going for the summer.

As it got closer to summer vacation, Kyle could hardly contain himself. He was so excited about seeing his mom. He missed his mother and couldn't wait to spend the entire summer with her. No daycare, no babysitters, just his mom, his little sister and him. The last day of school he told his teachers good-bye, and as he left daycare that evening, he waved a big good-bye to everyone there. "See you when school starts," he shouted as they drove off. Everyone was happy for Kyle.

In two weeks Kyle was back at the daycare. All of his friends began making comments like, "Hey Kyle, I thought you weren't going to be here this summer" and "How come you didn't stay with your mom all summer like you said?" Kyle looked at everyone, turned and walked away. He couldn't talk about it. All summer he was different. He didn't want to go swimming. He didn't want to go skating or bowling. He didn't want to do any art or craft projects. He acted like he didn't even want to eat. Several new kids tried to be his friends, but he told them to go away and leave him alone. The kids who had been his friends last year tried to talk to him and encourage him also.

And now school had started again. Except instead of being



excited about the beginning of the school year, Kyle acted like he just didn't care.

Here he was again, sitting in the rocking chair, rocking and staring, rocking and staring. What was he looking at? What was he looking for? What was he thinking about?

One day his grandfather came to the after school program. "Come on, Kyle. Let's go somewhere, just you and me," he said. Kyle really loved his grandfather, but he didn't want to go anywhere. Just when he was going to say he didn't want to go, his grandfather grabbed his hand and pulled him out of his chair and said, "I won't take no for an answer. Come on, Kyle, we are going fishing!" And off they went.

Kyle's grandfather had been planning this fishing trip for a long time. He had bought Kyle a new fishing rod. He had brought all kinds of snacks to eat along with four different kinds of drinks to choose from. They sat on a dock and fished for a long time. There was no talking, just silence. Then all of a sudden in a very quiet voice Kyle asked, "Grandpa, can I tell you something?" His grandpa just nodded his head yes. Kyle cleared his throat and



began, “You know how this summer I was going to go and stay with Mom for the whole summer? After just two weeks she told Bree and me that we had to pack our bags because she was taking us home. I don’t know why she brought us back. We tried to be good and not fight with each other. Mom left us alone almost every night. I mean really alone, all by ourselves. I kept thinking, ‘I don’t know what to do if something happens to Bree or me.’ I was so scared. Then real late at night I would hear her come back. I fixed Bree and me breakfast every morning—well, when there was food to eat, I fixed us breakfast. How come my mom doesn’t love me, Grandpa? How come she didn’t love us enough to buy us food? How come I’m not lovable?”

When his grandfather looked at Kyle, he could see Kyle was almost ready to cry. His grandfather spoke very slowly, “Kyle, I thought it was something like this that’s been bothering you. I’m glad you can talk to me.” His grandfather put his fishing rod away and looked straight into Kyle’s eyes as he said, “Son, your mother has some problems. They are her problems, not yours. She has made some bad choices and now you kids are having to pay for her mistakes. If I had a magic wand, I’d wave it and make everything better. But there is no magic wand. You need to understand that



you are a very lovable young man. God made you the way you are, and He made you to be loved. Your grandmother and I love you. Your dad loves you. There are many people who love you.”

Kyle thought about everything his grandfather had said. They were both quiet again, not saying anything, just thinking. Kyle trusted his grandfather, and he knew that Grandpa would tell him the truth about everything. Then his grandfather said, “Seems to me it would be very scary not knowing why your mom left. Have you sat down and told your dad that you need to talk about this?” Kyle shook his head no. His granddad continued, “Son, I can’t tell you what to do, but if it were me, I’d start asking some questions. Your daddy loves you so much. He asked me to bring you out fishing today. He’s been very worried about you, and he was hoping you and I could talk about things that are bothering you. I can help you, but you really need to be asking your daddy these questions.” His granddad was the only one who had told him anything about his mom.

As Kyle sat there thinking about everything his grandpa had said, he realized he felt . . . well, he felt better. He felt peaceful. “You know, Grandpa, I think you are right. I need some answers. I



think I will talk to my dad.”

“Hey, I got a bite! Help me, Grandpa! Help me reel in this fish!” Both grandfather and grandson got excited about the big whopper Kyle had on his fishing line.

“Wow,” Kyle said, “Wait till I show this fish to my friends at school. They won’t believe it.” For the first time in months Kyle was looking forward to going to school. He had something to talk about. Kyle didn’t feel so alone. He realized he was lucky to have a grandfather who cared so much about him.

That evening when they got to Kyle’s house, their neighbor saw their fish and came running out to get a closer look. “Oh my goodness,” she said. “That is a big one. This calls for a celebration. I was just getting ready to bake some cookies. I’ll bring some over as soon as they are done. Hot and right out of the oven, just the way you like them, Kyle.”

All of a sudden Kyle realized that his neighbor lady really cared about him. She was always being nice to him. And she knew exactly what kind of homemade cookies he liked. She was forever



baking them and bringing them to him. “Hot and right out of the oven, just the way you like them, Kyle,” he repeated to himself. “Hey, I guess I am a little bit lovable after all,” Kyle thought as he smiled to himself. Maybe later tonight he would put some thought into all the people who cared about him and loved him. Maybe he would make up a list of all these people. Yeah, that’s what he would do.

His grandfather stayed with him until his dad and Bree came home. “Dad, can we talk a little bit tonight after dinner?” Kyle asked his dad.

“Sure, Kyle. I’m ready. But right now let’s get busy and clean your fish and cook it for dinner tonight,” his dad said.

“No way,” said Kyle. “I’m not eating this fish. I’m saving it to show to my friends!” He grabbed his fish away from his dad. Everyone laughed. It felt good to laugh, and even Bree was laughing as she held her nose and said, “Whew, that thing stinks!”

“Silly little sister,” Kyle thought.

After Bree had gone to bed, Kyle’s dad came into his room.



“Ready for that talk now?” he asked. Kyle explained everything to his dad, even the part about being scared when his mother left them alone at night.

His dad said, “I didn’t know you were left alone at night. I can’t keep you from being with your mom, but let’s do some things that will help you to feel safe.”

They talked about Kyle and Bree memorizing their dad’s phone number at home, at work and even his cell phone number, including the area code. Kyle knew the numbers, but he didn’t realize there was an area code to learn, too. His dad showed him how to dial 911, and he explained what the number was for. He also said he would ask their mom to get someone to stay with them if she went out at night. His dad made up a list of other people’s phone numbers like their nice neighbor lady. He put them in a special little phone book for Kyle to keep in his backpack at all times.

Kyle’s dad took him to a counselor to talk, just in case Kyle didn’t feel comfortable talking to his dad about his mom. The counselor asked if his mother had done other inappropriate



or unhealthy things besides leaving them alone at night. Kyle explained about the scary movies she let them watch, and he shared some other things that had happened. The counselor told Kyle that if things happened at his mom's that didn't feel right or that he knew was wrong, then he was to tell his dad or another adult he trusted about it. The counselor called it "intuition." In other words if he felt something was wrong, then it was his "intuition" warning him. He said your intuition can help keep you safe. Kyle would need to tell his father or call the counselor when this happened. The counselor assured Kyle that his dad would not be mad at him. Kyle began to realize it's okay to ask people to help him. His granddad even told him it was okay to talk to God when he was feeling lonely, and Grandpa said they could start reading the Bible together. They could read about people in the Bible who got lonely.

A few weeks later Kyle was sitting in the rocking chair at the after school program. He still liked to sit and rock, but now he took that time to make some plans, like things he could do with his grandpa and with his friends. He decided he could help his little sister more. He would make sure she felt safe and not so alone.



## Questions to Encourage Conversation:

What do you think Kyle was doing when he sat and rocked and looked out the window at the beginning of the story?

How do you think Kyle felt when all of a sudden his mom called and wanted him to come and spend the summer with her?

What do you think Kyle thought his mom and he were going to do all summer?

How do you think Kyle felt when he had to go back to the daycare after he had told everyone he would not be there?

How come Kyle didn't want to swim, skate or do anything fun that the other children were doing?

What were some of the things Kyle told his grandpa?

Have any of these things happened to you?

What did you think about Kyle's neighbor lady who made him cookies?

Was she helpful or hurtful to Kyle?

Was Kyle's grandfather helpful or hurtful?

How was Kyle's mother hurtful? What could she have done to be helpful?

What are some things you can do to help yourself be safe when you are away from home or when you are in a dangerous situation?

What important phone numbers do you know? Do you know the area codes also?

What other things do you think Kyle shared with the counselor about inappropriate and unhealthy things his mom had done?



Tell about a time when you used your intuition to keep you safe.

*This lesson can bring up some pretty tough questions and issues for children who have had bad experiences. If a child brings up one of these issues, it is best to take the child aside where he or she will feel free to discuss the issue without other children listening. Remind the child that you are the safe keeper and you are there to keep him or her safe. If something is happening that could hurt the child, then you will call on another safe keeper such as a counselor, doctor, minister, etc. for the child to talk to about the situation.*





## Who Is God Anyway?



**L**uis is seven years old, and he doesn't remember a time when his dad lived with him. For as long as he can remember, he hasn't had a father at home. His older brother, Raphael, has a dad, though, and Luis feels like Raphael's dad is his dad. Raphael's dad comes to visit often. He always takes Luis when he takes Raphael someplace. When Raphael goes to visit his dad out of town, many times Luis goes also.

Luis is in second grade. His mom works, so he has to go to school and then to an after school program. He has gone to the same child care for many years. When he was real little, about three years old, he would get very out of control. He would throw things and shout at people and try to hurt others. He didn't really mean



to do all of these things. It was just that people bothered him, and he didn't know how to handle everything that happened. It seemed like the only place he could stay in control was at home and at child care. And even there, every once in a while he would get out of control. Luis began to wonder if the reason his dad didn't stick around was because of his behavior. Could it be his fault his dad didn't live with his mom and him?

Luis loved his mom so much. She had always been there for him. She said she had "faith" in Luis. Luis didn't really know what that meant, but when he heard his mom say it, he felt proud. Even when he would get in trouble at school and his mom would have to come to the school, he could always count on her understanding him. He also knew that when his mom had to come to school because of his behavior, he would have a consequence at home. He would have to do some cleaning or be grounded to his room. But that was okay because it gave him a chance to calm down and get in control.

Then it happened. His mom started talking about going to church. He didn't know what church was. He had never heard much about church before. Oh, he had seen her watching



something on TV called a church, but he was always too busy running and chasing his brother around the house to watch TV. Then she started talking about God. Who was God anyway? And why did she think God was so great? Was God some guy she was going to start dating? Did she meet God at church?

One Saturday Luis's mom told him the next day they were going to go to church. Luis didn't want to go to church. He didn't want things to change. What would they do there? How would the people treat him? What if he got out of control? And what if this God guy was there—how would Luis act? Luis had many questions, but his mom was so excited that he couldn't bear to disappoint her, so he kept quiet. He guessed he would find out in the morning what church was all about.

The next morning Raphael was up early and busy getting dressed when Luis got up. "Hurry up, Luis. Take your shower. We need to get ready to go to church."

"Raphael?" Luis asked. "Do you want to go to church?"

"Sure, it'll be fun. I've been to church before. You have, too,



you probably just don't remember much about it. You'll like it. We'll sing some songs, and somebody will talk. Then you'll get to leave to go to children's church, but I'll stay in big church with Mom because I'm too old for children's church," Raphael said.

"Hmm, Raphael seems to be excited about this church stuff. I'll just see how things go," Luis mumbled to himself.

Luis thought he tried really hard at children's church, but when his mom came to pick him up, he saw her talking to one of the ladies who was in charge. Mom had a sad look on her face when she took Luis to the car. She didn't say anything about what the lady had said, but Luis knew inside his heart that he could have behaved better. Maybe he would try harder next time, if there was a next time. But then again, maybe there was something wrong with Luis. He noticed other kids didn't get out of control like he did. His body just wanted to run and jump around all the time. And when somebody made him mad, he just hauled off and slugged them. Then he was always in trouble when that happened. He began to wonder how other kids kept from being in trouble all the time. "Shoot," he thought, "they probably all have dads at home and that's why they know how to be in control." Well,



he didn't have a dad at home, so he would be out of control and everybody would just have to deal with it.

All the next week his mom seemed different. She was, hmm, Luis didn't know the word to use. She was calm. She was even happier. On Sunday he woke up early. He heard his mom in the kitchen, and he heard Raphael in the shower. As Luis walked in the kitchen he asked, "Hey Mom, are we going to church today?" She nodded her head and told him to get dressed.

This Sunday things went a little better. This Sunday Luis tried to listen a little bit to what was said. "Oh no, now this lady is talking about this God guy. Who is this guy anyway?" Luis thought as he looked around.

About that time someone bumped Luis and interrupted his thinking. Luis reared back and popped the kid on the arm. "Great, now I've done it. I'll be in big trouble again," he thought.

One of the ladies came over, and instead of scolding Luis, she started talking to him. "Luis and Trent, seems like something happened here. Luis, what happened?"



“Wow,” Luis thought. “She wants to hear my side of the story. That’s different.” He explained the best he could.

Then the lady said, “Let me see if I understand this. You were just sitting here listening, and all of a sudden Trent bumped you on purpose so you couldn’t listen anymore. Is that right?”

Luis said, “Yeah, that’s what happened. And he made me hit him. It was all his fault.”

“And Trent, what do you think happened here?” she said.

“Oh man,” Luis thought, “here it comes. I’m probably going to be kicked out because I’m so bad.”

Trent explained that he had bumped Luis by accident. He was going to say he was sorry, but Luis hit him before he could explain. Luis just looked at Trent; he couldn’t believe it. This kid didn’t blame him. What was going on with these people anyway?

Then the lady repeated everything each child had said. Well, this certainly was different; she wasn’t mad at Luis. “Amazing,” he thought.



Then she said, “This is a real problem. It seems to me that you, Luis, are kind of mad, and, Trent, it seems you are just bewildered. Is that pretty much how you feel?” They both nodded their heads, and she went on to say, “We need to find a way to solve this dilemma. Any ideas, boys?”

Trent began first by saying, “Well, I didn’t mean to bump him, and I could move over to the right a little bit so he would have more room.”

“Luis, do you think Trent has a good idea about moving over a little bit? Will that help?” the lady asked.

“Uh, yeah, I guess,” Luis said, not quite sure if that’s what the teacher wanted to hear.

The teacher said, “Luis, if you don’t like this idea, you don’t have to agree. You tell us what you want.” Luis was so surprised. It was like this lady could read his mind, and he wasn’t in trouble. He was starting to feel really bad that he had hit this kid.

“Umm, I think if Trent moved over, then I would not feel



quite so squeezed in here, and he probably wouldn't bump me," Luis replied. He was sure this teacher was going to make him apologize for hitting Trent.

The teacher asked, "Do you both agree that this is a solution you can live with?" Both boys nodded their heads yes, and Trent scooted over.

"That was it?" Luis thought. "Hey lady," he hollered, "Aren't you going to make me say I'm sorry for hitting him?"

"No, you have to want to apologize from inside yourself for it to mean anything. Apologizing is not a solution to a problem. I wanted a solution that both of you could agree on so we can continue with our story. It is up to you to want to say you're sorry. It's a choice you have," she said as she began reading the story again.

Luis and his family continued to go to church. Luis's mom really seemed happy to be going to church. One evening after attending worship services, she said to Luis and Raphael, "Boys, I've been thinking, and I'd like for us to start having a devotional



every day.” She went on to explain that a devotional is a time to praise God and to thank Him for all they have. She said, “It’s a time to tell God about things we need and ask for His help.”

After all these weeks of going to church, Luis was beginning to understand about God. But what he didn’t understand was what happened between his mom and dad. He had to find this out first before he could trust a God he couldn’t see. After all, his dad had left him, and what if he started trusting God, and He left Luis, too?

When Luis asked his mom about his dad, she explained that his dad’s leaving had nothing to do with Luis. His dad was afraid to be a dad. His dad decided he wasn’t grown up enough to be a dad, so he left. She apologized to Luis for not helping him understand more. Then she asked Luis if they could pray together. His mom thanked God for Luis; she asked God to help Luis understand he had choices about how to treat people, and she asked God to forgive his dad for leaving them. After the prayer Luis felt different. The first thing he thought about was Trent. His heart felt sad that he had hit Trent. It had been bothering him for several weeks. He decided that the next time he saw Trent, he would ask Trent to forgive him for hitting him.



Luis decided that this God thing might not be so bad after all. Luis decided to give God a chance to love him. Luis knew this was a good choice he was making. That night when he went to bed, he asked God to take care of him and Raphael and his mom. He asked God to help him and love him, and the last thing he said was, “And, God, don’t leave me like my dad did.”



## Questions to Encourage Conversation:

Why do you think Luis thought it was his fault his dad didn't live with him?

What did Luis's mom mean when she said she "had faith in Luis"?

Why do you think Luis didn't want to go to church and have things change?

Why do you think Luis felt people would just have to deal with his out-of-control behavior?

Does not having a dad mean you can be out of control? Why?

What happened after Luis hit Trent?

Why didn't the teacher make Luis apologize?

Share about a time when someone made you apologize and you didn't think you should.

How did it make you feel to have to apologize when you didn't want to?

Why do you think Luis's dad left? What was the reason his mom gave for his dad leaving?

Why do you think Luis decided he would apologize to Trent?

Do you think God will love Luis and not leave him? Why?





## Growing and Changing



“O

h, Dad, why can't I go to Mom's this weekend?" Diana asked her dad. "I don't understand. It's her weekend!" she yelled. "And if I can't go there, why can't my sister come here and stay with me? I don't get to spend very much time with my sister, and now you tell me I can't go spend the weekend with them. Ugh!" Diana screeched as she ran to her room and slammed the door shut.

Diana's dad hated telling her that she couldn't go to her mom's, but her mom had called and she had plans. It wasn't fair to Diana, but what could he do? Now Diana would be mad for the entire weekend. His heart hurt for Diana.

Diana was in her room stomping around. Maybe if she stomped hard enough, she could work out some of her anger. Sometimes she would get so mad that she thought she was going to explode. She didn't understand why she couldn't go to her mom's, and she was mad that her mom and dad didn't live together.

For a long time she kept hoping they would get back together again. They had been married when she was a baby. She loved looking at the pictures of herself when she was a baby and her mom and dad were holding her. They looked so happy together. Then there was this thing with her sister. She didn't understand why her mom had kept her sister, Hilary, but not Diana. Hilary was older than Diana. Hilary had lots of friends and Diana envied her. Diana didn't have very many friends, but that was her choice because she didn't want very many friends.

Hilary thought it was cool when their mom had a date with somebody new, but Diana didn't like it when Mom had a date. After she thought about it for a while, she thought, "Hey, I bet my mom had a date this weekend. She must have called Dad and told him not to bring me to her house." She felt bad that she had yelled at her dad. It wasn't his fault she couldn't go to her mom's.



For a long time it had been just Diana and her dad living together. They had a good routine. Her dad was pretty strict about things. Diana could always count on him to be firm. When she went to her mom's house, though, things could get out of control real fast. Her sister and she would start arguing and fighting, or sometimes they would just be having fun and start giggling and get out of control. Diana never knew if her mom was going to be mad and yell at them or join in the fun and get out of control herself. But with her dad, Diana knew just where she stood with things. If she got mad and threw something, then he made her clean it up. If she acted silly when she was doing the dishes and got water everywhere, she knew when she was finished, she would have to get out the mop and mop the floor. And worst of all he made her keep her room clean. He made her do her homework, and he grounded her if she got in trouble at school. But one thing was for sure, she could count on her dad. He never failed her. He was always there for her.

Diana loved her dad, but she just couldn't let go of the dream she had always had. Her dream was that her mom and sister would come and live with her and Dad in the same house. She imagined waking up every morning in the same room as Hilary. They would



share a bedroom. They could even share their clothes and other things. She could just see her mom in the kitchen fixing breakfast before school. In her dream she would imagine her dad giving her mom a kiss on the cheek when he walked in the kitchen for breakfast. They would all eat breakfast together and they would laugh and talk, and then everyone would go to work or school, except her mom of course. She would stay home and clean the house and have some homemade cookies ready for Diana and her sister after school. Her mom would help her with her homework, and she would always get all A's and never be grounded. Her mom would have dinner fixed when her dad came home in the evenings. No more fast food or leftovers! In her dream everything would be perfect. Everyone would always be happy. They would go on vacations together and laugh and talk and hug. Everything would be the same—nothing would ever change. “Perfect, perfect, perfect,” she thought.

Just then her dad hollered that she had a phone call. “Phooey,” thought Diana, “I was really enjoying my daydream about our family being together.” The phone call was from Shay, one of Diana's friends. She wanted to know if Diana would like to come over to her house tomorrow. Diana said she would have to



think about it. She was kind of angry at Shay right now. Shay lived with her mom, and Diana liked her mom, but Shay was excited because her mom was starting to date a really nice guy. Shay's mom had been single for many years, and Shay was hoping her mom would get married someday. Not Diana, she didn't like to think about her dad dating. As a matter of fact she liked it when her dad stayed home all the time. She didn't even want him to have very many friends to pal around with.

A few weeks later Diana went to see her mom. Her mom's new boyfriend was there. "Oh yippee," she thought sarcastically, "what a fun time we can all have together." When it was time to go back to her dad's, Diana realized that she had actually had a good time. It was good to see her mom happy. And if Hilary liked this guy, well, maybe she could learn to like him, too. After all she didn't have to live there. "Hey, that's right," she thought, "I don't have to live there. I live with my dad!"

Diana had a good family friend, Miss Sophia. Diana thought she might talk to Miss Sophia about things. Miss Sophia had worked with children of divorce for many years in her church and people considered her an expert. Diana called Miss Sophia her



substitute mom because ever since she had been fifteen months old, this lady had been there for Diana and her dad. She had helped Diana and her dad understand why Diana would get so mad sometimes. She had given them “tips,” she called them, in helping Diana with her anger. She said it was okay for Diana to let go of her dream about their family getting back together. She said it didn’t mean that Diana didn’t love her mom, her sister and her dad, but if she let go of the dream, it meant that she was beginning to understand that things change in life, and we have to learn to live with changes. Diana realized that her mom and dad would not ever get married again, and she decided this was okay. Her dad and she had a good life. She began to realize that everyone has changes to deal with.

For a while Diana would sneak around and call her mom and Hilary without her dad knowing. It made her feel better to talk to her sister and mom sometimes. She didn’t know why she didn’t want her dad to know about it. When he found out, he didn’t get mad. He explained it was okay with him. He even said she was old enough for a cell phone, and he bought her one so she could call her mom and sister. He also told her she could call him, too. This helped Diana feel a little better about the confusion in her life.



Miss Sophia talked to Diana and her dad about developing some rituals at home. Miss Sophia also gave them the name of a good counselor to visit. The counselor suggested Diana and her dad needed to develop a “talk time” where they just sat and talked about things. And because Diana’s dad didn’t ever hug her, the counselor said they needed to figure out a way her dad could show her some affection that they both felt comfortable with. Later Diana told Miss Sophia about their talk time, and she said, “When my dad and I sit and talk, he likes to run his hands through my long hair. Maybe someday my dad will feel comfortable enough that he will be able to give me a big hug. My dad and I are getting real close. I still miss Hilary and my mom, but things are getting better for me.”

Miss Sophia helped Diana realize it was okay for her dad to have friends and go out every once in a while without Diana. One weekend Diana’s dad had a chance to go out of town with some guys from work. Miss Sophia encouraged him to go. She even said that Diana could come stay at her house. She told Diana’s dad not to worry about a thing, just go and have a good time.

Diana wasn’t too sure how she felt about her dad going out of



town with some guys. “What if he doesn’t miss me?” she thought. “What if he doesn’t come back to get me?” she questioned. “He’s never been away from me for more than a day or two, and now he’s going to be gone for three days. That’s a long time for him to be gone.” But she trusted Miss Sophia, and she was excited about staying at her house. She knew she’d have a good time.

Diana had a wonderful time at Miss Sophia’s. Miss Sophia had a swimming pool and a cute little dog. When Diana was watching TV, the little dog jumped up on her lap and snuggled in real close. “Awe, look, Miss Sophia, he likes me,” Diana said. She had never had a dog snuggle up to her before. This felt good being here. She felt warm and comfortable and safe, and Miss Sophia reassured her that her dad would be back on Monday evening.

Diana was a little nervous at school on Monday; she could hardly wait to see her dad. Later that evening she saw her dad’s truck pull into the driveway. “He’s here! He’s here!” she shouted as she ran out the door. Her dad hugged her so tightly he literally picked her up and carried her into Miss Sophia’s house still hugging her.

“Come in and sit down and tell us all about your trip,” Miss



Sophia said. As Diana's dad talked, he kept his arm around Diana's neck. She leaned up real close to her dad. She felt so proud. Then he started running his hand through her long dark hair. Oh, she had missed him doing that. She had missed her dad so much. She decided he must have missed her as much.

"This feels good," thought Diana "I guess things are going to be okay after all." She smiled and closed her eyes as her dad's hand rubbed her hair, and she listened to him talk about his trip.



## Questions to Encourage Conversation:

Diana got mad because she couldn't go to her mom's. Share about a time when you felt so mad you thought you were going to explode.

If you were Diana's anger management coach, what are some things you could tell her to do to help her with her anger? *(This is a good time to review breathing, draining and being a STAR from Session 3.)*

The story doesn't talk about how Hilary felt about not living with Diana. What do you think Hilary thought about things?

Do you think Diana felt safe at her mom's? Why or why not?  
How about at her dad's? Why?

What do you think about Diana's dream about her parents getting back together again?

Even when parents live together, do you think everyone is always happy and life is perfect like in Diana's dream? Why not?

Why was Diana upset with her friend Shay?

Diana began to realize that everyone has changes to deal with. What are some changes you have had to make?

What were some reasons Diana and her dad were getting close?

What do you think Diana thought about her dad being gone for three days?

How do you think she felt when the little dog jumped up in her lap? Can you share about a time when you felt this way?

What did Diana's dad do when he came home from his trip that helped Diana know he missed her?

Think about giving your parent a hug tonight. Sometimes parents need hugs, too.



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## But Mom, We Need a New Pair of Jeans



**“K**im and Kelly get in here,” their mom shouted.

“Uh-oh, Kelly, Mom’s upset again, better hurry and get in there,” said Kim. The girls hurried into the living room where their backpacks lay in the middle of the floor and the TV was blaring away.

“Girls, how many times have I told you to put your things away when you come home? I tripped over your backpack and dropped this bag of groceries. At least it wasn’t the bag with the eggs in it. The bread is smooshed, but we can still eat it. And what about the TV? It costs money to operate the TV,” their mother said as she lugged the groceries into the kitchen.



As the twins were putting their things away, they said excitedly to their mother, “Hey Mom, Amanda got a cool new pair of jeans. They are really the newest craze. Can we get some, please? They don’t cost that much, and they are on sale at the mall.” The girls begged, “Please, please?” They saw their mother’s shoulders drop, and immediately they knew what she was going to say.

When the twins’ dad lived at home, they had everything they wanted. They dressed just alike, and he always bought them the best of everything. Since their dad had moved to an apartment and their parents were getting a divorce, things had been different. It seemed like there wasn’t enough money to buy the things they wanted, and their mom told them yesterday that things were probably going to get a lot worse. What could she mean “get worse”? Weren’t things bad enough now? I mean all their friends were still able to spend a lot of money. Why couldn’t they?

One of their friends told them their dad should pay something called “child support.” If it’s called *child support*, they thought, then surely it would provide them with money to spend on whatever they wanted. “After all, we’re the children, and the money would be for us to spend, right Kim?” Kelly had questioned.



“Or it will be for Mom to spend on us,” said Kim. They were sure they had everything figured out. Now all they had to do was wait for the child support. That weekend when they went to see their dad, they told him about the special jeans they wanted to buy. They also asked him when he was going to start paying this thing called “child support.”

Their dad got real upset. He said, “I am paying child support. Isn’t your mother buying you the things you need? I can barely afford this apartment, let alone pay her more money.”

“Oh dear,” whispered Kim to Kelly, “we’d better talk to Mom about this when we get home.”

By the time the twins got home, they had forgotten all about the child support thing. The phone started ringing when they walked in the door. Several girls were over at Melanie’s house, and they wanted the girls to come over; they had missed them. Melanie lived down the street, and she wanted to show them her new jeans and some shoes the same color. Off they went to see their friend’s new things. “Be home in one hour, girls. Tomorrow is a school day, and you haven’t finished your science report,” their mom called out after them.



Later that evening when they were working on their science report, their mom came into their room. “Girls, we have to talk,” she said. “I haven’t wanted to tell you this, but I’m afraid we might have to move to an apartment. You see, I don’t think I can afford to pay the house payment much longer.” Kelly and Kim were shocked! Move to a different place to live? They had always lived in this big house. How could they move? All their friends lived in this neighborhood. Their mom continued, “And if we move, you may have to change schools,” she said sadly.

“But Mom,” both girls screeched, “move? Change schools? Mom, you can’t do this to us.” Their mom said they would talk about it later. She said she just wanted to let them know this might happen. After she left their bedroom, both girls looked like they were going to cry. How much worse could things get for them? At least when their dad dropped them off, their parents hadn’t gotten into a fight about the child support thing. Kelly and Kim hated it when their parents fought. “Let’s try to think of the positive things,” Kelly said.

At breakfast the next morning their mom reprimanded the girls for leaving the light on all night in the bathroom. “Girls,



it costs money to leave the light on. You are going to have to remember to turn things off. Last week when you went to your dad's, you left your CD player on. I can't afford to keep paying for these things."

"Oh good grief," exclaimed Kim. "Mom, how much could a little electricity cost anyway?"

Then Kelly chimed in, "Yeah, doesn't Dad give you child support to buy us things? How come we can't get that new pair of jeans? And Melanie's parents bought her new shoes the same color as her jeans! What's the big deal with electricity?"

"Well, young ladies, I can see it's time for me to sit down and do some explaining. Seems to me each of you is pretty upset about our money matters. Tonight after dinner we will sit down, and I promise you I will explain things. But right now if you don't eat breakfast, you are going to be late for school. Tonight I will fix us a special dinner. How about macaroni and cheese?" she asked.

Both girls rolled their eyes, "Mom, macaroni and cheese? That's not special."



“It will be if I put little smokies in it like you like. I’ve been saving them for a special dinner. Come on, let’s get going,” Mom said.

That evening after dinner Mom invited the girls to go outside with her. They looked at each other and shrugged their shoulders, “What are we going to do outside?” Kelly asked.

“I thought you were going to explain some money matters to us,” Kim added.

“That’s what we are going to do. I’m going to start by explaining about the electricity,” she said. “On the side of the house is the electric meter. This machine counts all the units of electricity we use. See this little meter?” she asked as she pointed to a little round thing.

“So that’s what that thing is,” said Kim. Their mom went on to explain that every time something was turned on inside the house, the meter kept track of it. If they left a lot of things on, the meter continued to run, even all night, even when they weren’t home.



“The more electricity we use, the more we have to pay at the end of the month,” she said. “It’s not that I don’t want you to use electricity, but we are going to have to start remembering to turn off the things we are not using. Is this making any sense?” she asked.

Both girls said they understood. After they got back inside, Mom invited them to sit on her bed. She had a stack of papers she called bills. She said they didn’t need to be burdened about all the bills, but she did want them to understand some things. She explained how it cost more for their father and her to pay for two places to live. She told them about all the things that had to be paid for at both places. Besides electricity there was the cost of paying for the rent, the phone and the water.

“Water?” said Kim, “You mean you have to pay every time one of us takes a shower? Is that why you are always harping about not staying in the shower so long?” she asked.

“And why you tell us not to run the dishwasher until it’s really full?” said Kelly.



The girls asked about child support. Mom explained that the child support helped pay for their living expenses. Because they lived with her, she paid part of their living expenses and their dad paid part of them through child support. Living expenses were things like food, the house they lived in, the car they drove and the gasoline the car needed.

“Wow,” said Kelly. “We had no idea you had to pay for all these things. We’re beginning to understand why you get so upset with us all the time. Mom, we promise we’ll try to do better. Don’t we, Kim?”

Kim nodded her head as she asked, “What else can we do?”

Their mother suggested they come up with their own ideas of ways to save money. Both girls felt so grown up that their mother trusted them enough to explain money matters to them and that she asked them for their ideas!

“Well,” Kelly said, “how about if we save our birthday money that Grandma gives us? We could start saving for those jeans we want. And Mrs. Brown told us if we would help her clean out her



flowerbeds, she would pay us.”

“We could clean out our closets and have a big garage sale,” Kim exclaimed. “We really don’t need all those toys up on the shelves. We’re getting kind of old for all that stuff. Maybe we’ll make enough money to buy at least one pair of jeans.”

“We could take turns wearing them,” Kelly said.

The three worked all evening thinking of ways to cut back on things. They decided they could make up a menu and buy only the items on the menu and no junk food. The girls made the choice to take their lunches to school and save their lunch money. They made up a list of things to turn off every night when they went to bed. They even talked about budgeting their time. If they came home and got busy on their homework, they would have more time to help their mother. Their mom wouldn’t get so tired, and there would be time for all three of them to go for a walk or go to the park. They could even rent cheap movies to watch at home together. This wasn’t going to be so bad after all, they thought.

After several weeks the girls had enough money to buy one



pair of jeans. They felt so proud they had earned the money by themselves. They decided it was kind of neat not to dress alike all the time. Their dad said they were growing up and becoming independent.

The girls' mom expressed how proud she was of the girls for pitching in and helping out around the house. Now when she brought the groceries in, she didn't trip over backpacks, no more smooshed bread. After a while their mom said she still wasn't sure, but they might be able to stay in their house. They would have to wait and see.



## Questions to Encourage Conversation:

At the beginning of the story when their mom yelled at them, what was she upset about?

Why was she concerned about ruining some of the groceries?

Why did the mother's shoulders drop when the girls begged for some new jeans?

What was different since their dad had moved out of the house to an apartment?

What did their mom mean when she said, "Things could get worse"?

Why were Kelly and Kim upset when they thought they might have to move?

If you have had to move, what advice could you give Kelly and Kim about having to move?

What are some things that child support pays for? (*Don't forget doctor bills, insurance, etc.*)

What are some things the twins decided they could do to help out at home?

What are some things you can decide to do to help at your home?

What did it mean when the story said "budgeting their time"?

What are some ways you can budget your time?

Why do you think the twins felt proud when they were able to buy their own jeans?





# Are You Telling Me It's Not My Fault?



“O

kay class, it's time to turn in your spelling tests,” Jimmy's teacher said. Jimmy didn't want to turn in his spelling test. He already knew what would happen. He would get a bad grade. It happened every Friday. And every time his dad came to pick him up, he would ask Jimmy how he did on his spelling test. “Sheesh,” thought Jimmy, “I hate spelling!”

There was something else Jimmy knew—his mom and dad got divorced because of him. It was Jimmy's fault. Jimmy's dad drank a lot and many times he would get drunk. When he got drunk, he wasn't very lovable. Jimmy didn't like his dad when he wasn't lovable. On the way to the after school club, Jimmy started thinking, “Every Friday I have a spelling test, and I always get a

bad grade. My dad gets drunk every Friday—ah-ha! It must be the spelling test. Yeah, that’s it.” Jimmy was sure he had figured it out. He would either have to start studying really hard, or he’d have to figure out a way to not take the spelling test. But he already studied hard, and every time his mom tested him at home, he could spell the words. When he got to school and started worrying about his dad, he would mess up on the spelling test.

Jimmy’s dad was supposed to pick up Justin, Jimmy’s younger brother, and Jimmy every Friday and take them to his apartment. Sometimes, though, his dad would forget it was Friday. Jimmy and Justin would just wait and wait. It was so disappointing when his dad didn’t come. His dad used to be a lot of fun, but that was before he started drinking so much. Jimmy felt sad a lot of the time. His brother Justin was mad a lot of the time. Jimmy figured Justin knew it was Jimmy’s fault their parents got divorced.

“That’s why Justin is so out of control all the time because he is mad at me,” Jimmy thought to himself.

One of Jimmy’s best friends had divorced parents, and his friend was actually glad about it. How could David be glad about



something like that? And how come it wasn't David's fault his parents were divorced? Jimmy thought the next time he saw David, he'd ask him about this. To Jimmy, it didn't seem fair that Jimmy had to carry such a big burden about his parents and that David didn't. Jimmy sighed real big and thought to himself, "Life is so hard sometimes."

When Jimmy saw Justin, he could tell right away that Justin was in one of those angry moods. In a few minutes Justin was out of control, and he picked up a chair and tried to throw it across the room. "Whoa boy! This is going to be a fun evening, especially if Dad doesn't come and pick us up," Jimmy thought to himself as he ducked out of the way of a flying chair.

"Mom," Jimmy yelled, "Do something!" Jimmy's mom helped Justin get in control. She worked with him to pick up the chair, and then she had him vacuum the carpet. He sure hoped Justin got done vacuuming before their dad got here.

In a little while Jimmy saw his dad's pickup pull into the driveway. The first thing he said to Jimmy was, "How'd you do on your spelling test today?"



“Uh, we, um, didn’t grade them today,” Jimmy said. He knew this would buy him a little time. Maybe they could get through the weekend and have a good time if his dad didn’t know about the spelling test. Jimmy hated to lie to his dad, but he didn’t know what else to do. He hurried and got his bag before his mom could say anything.

“Bye Mom,” he muttered as he looked down at his feet and ran out the door.

Jimmy hated this traveling back and forth between homes. It seemed like he was always forgetting something. When he went to his dad’s, he forgot to bring his science project. He was supposed to look for bugs this weekend and mount them on this special board. When he got back to his mom’s, he remembered he had left his jacket at Dad’s. Well, at least he had another jacket to wear to school.

“Back and forth, back and forth,” thought Jimmy. “Where does it all end? I don’t feel like I even have a place to call home.” Then he remembered his friend David; he was going to have to talk to David and see how he handled all of this—what was it the



school counselor called it—uh, transition period? Yeah, that was it. He thought about what he would say to David the next morning when he saw him at school.

“Hey Dave, ole buddy, ole pal,” Jimmy said as he hit David on the arm.

“What do you want, Jimmy?” David asked.

David knew Jimmy wanted to ask him a question. Ever since Jimmy’s parents had gotten divorced, Jimmy had been full of questions. David was glad he could help. When David’s parents divorced, his mom and he had to move to a different place, and he had started a new school. He remembered feeling so alone at the new school. He wished so many times he had had a good friend. That’s why he wanted to help Jimmy. At first when David had arrived at the new school, he was so mad. The school counselor had met with him and explained that David could be hurtful or helpful. It was his choice. She worked with him at being helpful. “Whew, that was a long time ago,” David shook his head as he thought about it.



David looked at Jimmy and said, “Jimmy ole buddy, ole pal, what can I do for you?” David put his arm around Jimmy’s neck and pretended to be choking him. Both boys laughed as Jimmy broke free.

“David, how do you do it? I mean, how do you stay so, so happy all the time?”

“Oh that,” David said, “you see, ole pal, ole buddy, I like being a kid. I like doing kid things. Lighten up.”

“But you don’t understand,” Jimmy said, “My dad drinks and he gets mad and I think it’s my fault my parents got a divorce. My dad drinks because I get bad grades on my spelling test.” The words started tumbling out before Jimmy could stop them.

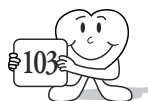
David took in a deep breath through his nose and blew it out through his mouth, relaxed his shoulders, and said, “Jimmy, what you just said about your mom and dad, well, those are adult problems. Divorce is an adult problem. I used to feel the same way you do, but after I started seeing the school counselor, I began to understand there are adult problems and there are kid problems.



I didn't want my parents to be divorced, but they used to fight all the time and things were really tense around the house. Since they separated, things are calmer at home. And you know what else?" David asked. Jimmy shook his head. "I bet you make a bad grade on those spelling tests because you are so worried about your dad getting mad. Do what I do, man. When you get tense, take in a deep breath through your nose like this. Hold it for a second and then let it out through your mouth, like this, and relax your body," David demonstrated. "You gotta learn about the brain and what happens when you're all stressed out. Where've you been during science class when we were talking about this stuff, anyway?"

David went on to say, "Adults have to deal with their problems, and we as kids have to deal with our problems. Like right now, you're my problem! You're a real pain!" David grabbed Jimmy's soccer ball and took off running. "Come on, be a kid and have some fun!" he laughed as he ran.

That night when Jimmy went to bed, he thought about everything David had said. "Maybe it was true about the spelling test," he thought. He just couldn't let go of his parents' divorce, though. It had to be somebody's fault. Then he decided it was



Justin's fault. After all, Justin didn't keep his room very clean. Their mom was always griping at Justin. His dad probably got tired of all the griping and decided to move. So Justin was the one to blame. It wasn't Jimmy's fault—it was Justin's. Now that it was settled, Jimmy could go to sleep and wake up happy in the morning like David. But the next morning when Jimmy got up, he wasn't very happy. He was more confused than anything. He remembered what David had said about divorce being an adult problem, and Justin was just a kid, so that meant it couldn't be Justin's fault. Oh, this was getting to be too much to deal with.

Jimmy worried all week about things. His mind went back and forth between “it was his fault, it wasn't his fault, it was his fault, it wasn't his fault.” Divorce is an adult problem, not a kid problem, he thought. Justin and he were kids; they should be playing and having fun. He couldn't seem to think straight. He got in trouble at school for not listening.

Then all of a sudden it was Friday, and the dreaded spelling test was sitting in front of him. Jimmy just wanted to scream and go running out of the room, out of the school, out of the neighborhood, out of the state and out of the world. He closed his



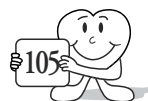
eyes, and he noticed he was breathing hard and his body was very tense. He kept his eyes closed, and then he took in a deep breath through his nose. He held it for a long time, as long as he could. Then he let it out through his mouth just like David had done. When he let out his breath, he remembered to relax his shoulders.

“Hey, that felt pretty good,” he thought. “I think I’ll try that again,” he whispered to himself. He looked over at David, and David gave him a thumbs up and mouthed the words, “You—can—do—it.”

Jimmy couldn’t wait until evening. He was outside waiting for his dad when he pulled in. “Dad, Dad, I got a B on my spelling test. See I’ve been worried about the divorce, and I thought it was my fault, and then my friend David explained things to me, and I got a B. Dad, a B, aren’t you proud of me?” Jimmy said excitedly.

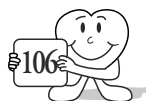
When his dad heard everything Jimmy said, he looked shocked, like somebody had hit him really hard. “What did you say, Jimmy, I mean, about the divorce?” he asked.

Jimmy explained it again. His dad got tears in his eyes. “Oh



Jimmy,” he said, “I had no idea how you were feeling about all of this. My problems caused the divorce, not you or Justin. I have made some bad decisions. I’ve been thinking about getting some help with my drinking problem. I think you have taught me something today. I have to learn to help myself. I have to be an adult about this. Tell you what, I’ll be the adult and you be the kid again. How about that?” his dad said.

Jimmy let a smile cross his face, and this time a smile crossed his heart, too. He felt so proud, and he really wanted to feel like a kid again.



## Questions to Encourage Conversation:

Why did Jimmy think his spelling test was the reason his dad got drunk?

How do you think Jimmy felt when his dad wasn't lovable? (*Scared, confused, etc.*)

Why did Jimmy know his spelling words at home, but when he got to school, he messed up?

How do you think Jimmy could tell Justin was in one of those angry moods?

Why do you think Justin's mom made him vacuum the carpet after he got mad? (*This is a good time to discuss using one's anger constructively by doing something that is helpful instead of hurtful.*)

Why did Jimmy lie about his spelling test?

Why did he look down at his feet when he said good-bye to his mom? (*Try to bring out the fact that Jimmy's conscience was bothering him because he knew it was wrong to lie.*)

What did David do to be a good friend to Jimmy? Why?

What did David tell Jimmy about divorce?

What do you think David was talking about when he said, "You gotta learn about the brain and what happens when you're all stressed out"? (*Good time to review the three levels of the brain talked about in Session 3. Lower – fight or flight; middle – add our emotions and words; higher level – thinking level.*)

Jimmy worried all week about things being his fault. Share about a time when you might have done the same thing.

Did Jimmy's breathing slowly and relaxing his shoulders help him on his spelling test? Why do you think this helped?



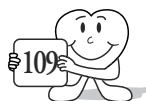


## How Do I Tell My Mom How Important This Is to Me?



**M**aria was supposed to be getting ready for the church choir program. But instead of getting ready to go to the choir program, she was getting ready to go to her mom's house for the weekend. When she was there two weeks ago, she gave her mom the note about the rehearsal and program. She had given her dad a letter from the choir director that said everyone must be at the church by 6:00 p.m. for the dress rehearsal on Friday. If you were going to sing a solo, you had to be there by 5:30. Maria was supposed to be one of the main soloists for the choir program. Here it was 5:00 p.m., and she wasn't able to go. She had tried to call the director, but he wasn't home. Now what was she going to do?

Maria had tried several times to tell her dad how important



this was, but all he would say was, “It’s your mom’s weekend. You will have to talk to her about it.” So instead of getting ready to practice her solo and be with her friends, she was getting ready to go to her mom’s. The choir director was going to be so disappointed in her. And her friends would think she was a quitter. She felt like crying because she wouldn’t be there. What were they going to think about her, a no show? Who would sing her solo? Oh she wanted to sing her solo so badly. She had practiced; she was ready, and now this!

Maria had been hoping for two weeks that her mom would change her mind about this weekend. After all, they could switch weekends, couldn’t they? Maria wondered why she couldn’t tell her parents how she felt about everything. One time when she had tried to tell her mom how important her church was, her mom had said, “Don’t be pushing that church stuff down my throat.” Maria had never felt strong enough to talk about it again. She had talked to God though. Someday she would get up her courage and talk to her mom again, but not yet; she just wasn’t ready.

For a while Maria had hoped her dad would step in and talk to her mom about being more flexible with weekend visits. But



they never talked to each other, not since her mom had moved out of the house and filed for divorce. They dropped Maria off and picked her up and never even saw each other. Her dad would go to the back of the house when her mom arrived. Her mom would honk her horn and not get out of the car. Because things were so tense when they saw each other, this arrangement was okay with Maria most of the time.

“Oh, why do they have to act like kids?” Maria thought. “It’s just not fair! I act more grown up than they do.” Just then she heard her mom honk the horn. She was on the phone trying to call the choir director when her dad said, “Maria, hang up the phone; your mom’s waiting.”

Maria got through the weekend, but she felt so guilty. And she felt confused also. She wanted to be with her mother. She loved her mom, but she felt guilty about not being with her friends at church. She felt guilty about not carrying through on her responsibility. She had made a promise, and now she hadn’t kept her promise. However, she felt guilty about wanting to be at church and not with her mom.



“Why do things have to be so complicated?” Maria thought. Her mom kept asking her all weekend what was wrong. Maria just couldn’t tell her mom. Not after the last time she had tried to talk about God.

On Monday when Maria went to school, she kept her head down. She didn’t want to face any of her friends from church. Some of her friends at church were from divorced homes, though, and they understood. She wondered how they got their parents to cooperate. Just then Bridget saw her and came running toward her. “Hey Maria, what happened to you this weekend? We missed you. The program was so great and everybody did their best,” Bridget said. Bridget didn’t say anything about Maria’s solo. Finally Maria got up the nerve to ask Bridget who sang her solo and if the choir director was mad at her for not coming and not calling.

“Well, he was pretty disappointed and he waited until the last minute, but he finally asked Tara. She did okay but not as good as you. Tara even said you would have done a better job.” This made Maria feel good. But then as soon as Bridget walked away, Maria felt bad again.



Maria was beginning to notice that she wasn't able to talk to her friends very well. She used to be able to talk about everything to her best friend, Tara, but now it seemed like she kept things inside of herself. Is this how it felt to be an adult? Did adults keep everything all bottled up inside them? Maybe this is why her parents got a divorce, because they couldn't learn to talk about things. "Well," she thought, "I'm not going to be like that. I'm going to work hard so I won't get a divorce. I don't ever want to put my kids through something like this."

That night when she was doing her homework, the doorbell rang. "Maria, someone's here to see you," her dad said. As Maria walked into the living room, she saw her choir director. Maria wasn't prepared for this. What would she say to him? What if he came to tell her how mad he was at her?

"Hi Maria, what' up?" he asked. He didn't act like he was mad.

"Oh, not much. Just doing my homework." Maria didn't know what to say or how to act. This really seemed strange.

"Maria, I came to talk to you about this past weekend. I got



your message on my voice mail. I was disappointed you couldn't be at our performance. You really have the best voice for that solo. All the kids missed you, and I missed hearing you sing. I understand from Tara that you had to go to your mom's this weekend. Is that right?" he asked. Maria looked down at her feet. She had a hard time facing this man. He was being so nice about everything. She kept thinking about the promise she had made to sing.

"Listen, I understand how hard the divorce has been on you. I have watched you struggle. My wife and I have been praying for you. I was so excited when you joined the choir. When I see you singing, I can tell you really love the Lord, and you always seem so happy when you sing praises to God," he said. It was true. Maria did feel better when she was singing and praising the Lord. It helped her to forget about her parents and concentrate on how much God loved her. It sort of gave her mind a break.

The choir director then said, "Maria, it seems to me that you need some help with communicating to other people. It's important to learn to talk to people and tell them how you feel, especially your parents."



“But you don’t understand,” she said. “I tried to tell my mom about how important coming to church is to me, but she just yelled at me. I don’t think I’m strong enough to talk to her again, and I don’t know what to do.”

“I think I can help you if your dad doesn’t mind,” he said as he looked at Maria’s dad. Her dad nodded his permission. “How about if we think of what you want to say to your mom and then we write it down together? I can help you with the words if you want. When you have the words written down that you want to use, then we could email them to her. This way you can take your time and not be nervous about what to say.”

“How come you understand all of this so well?” Maria asked.

He smiled as he said, “You see, Maria, my parents divorced when I was about your age. I do understand how hard this is. I always said I would help any kid whose parents separated because I know how much it hurts and how confusing things can get.”

Maria smiled and gave a sigh of relief. She thought to herself, “How about that? He really does know and understand.”



They worked for about an hour. The choir director told Maria to practice what she wanted to say on him. She went over it one more time, and then said she was ready to email it. But he said, “Not yet, there’s one more thing we have to do and that is—we have to pray and ask God to prepare your mother’s heart to receive this message.”

They both prayed and asked God to take the message Maria had written and prepare her mother’s heart to receive this message with love and understanding. Then the choir director asked the Lord to give Maria the words to say to her mother when she called. He asked for peace for Maria also. Maria felt very calm as she clicked the “send” button. They visited for a few more minutes, and as he was leaving, the phone rang. She waved to him as she ran to answer the phone. It was probably Tara calling, and she was excited to tell Tara what had happened.

“Yo, what’s up?” Maria said as she answered the phone, but it wasn’t Tara on the other end of the phone—it was her mother. Her mother’s voice sounded kind of upset, like she had tears in her voice.



Her mother said, “Maria, I read your email. At first I got mad, and then I got sad. I guess I have been so caught up with my own life that I haven’t paid any attention to your life.”

For the first time since the divorce, Maria and her mom had a long talk. Maria was able to tell her mom how much she missed her. Maria asked her dad to come into the room and listen to what she had to say. She told both parents how awkward their silence was when they were exchanging her. Her dad cringed when she used the words “exchanging her.” She told them this was what she felt they were doing, and she didn’t mind using those words if they could just be a little friendly toward each other. Maria explained to her mom that she needed her support in all of her activities, even if her mom couldn’t be there. She was able to share with her mom about what God and her church meant to her. Then she asked her mother if she could pray with her over the phone.



## Questions to Encourage Conversation:

What would you have done if you had been the one who was supposed to sing a solo at church and you had to go to your other parent's house?

Was Maria a quitter? Why or why not?

Why didn't Maria tell her mom she didn't want to come to her house that weekend?

Maria thought her parents were acting like kids. Why did she think this?

Maria felt guilty all weekend about everything. Share about a time when you felt guilty and what you did about it.

How come Maria kept her head down when she went to school on Monday?

Why did Maria feel bad after her friend Bridget walked away?

What made Maria think the choir director wasn't mad?

What do you think Maria wrote in the email to her mom?

What do you think Maria's parents thought when she told them she wanted them to be a little friendly toward each other?

Do you think Maria's mother let her pray with her over the phone?



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# My Dad Forgot My Birthday!



**T**yrone was so excited. Saturday was going to be his birthday, and he was going to be twelve years old. There was something thrilling about turning twelve years old. Why, he was almost a teenager.

In just one month he was going to be in sixth grade. He would go to the middle school where all the teens went to school. There was another reason Tyrone was excited. He was sure his dad was going to call him on his twelfth birthday. No one had told him his dad was going to call, but somehow he knew his dad would not forget this special day.

Tyrone's mom and dad got a divorce when Tyrone was a little baby. For some reason Tyrone had been thinking about his dad a lot lately. Some days he thought his dad must not have loved him



since he had left and he never called or came to see him. Other days he would wonder if possibly his dad did love him, but he just lived too far away to visit or call. Or what if his dad had forgotten him? Even worse, what if his dad had gotten married again and had another family and another son to replace Tyrone?

Saturday morning Tyrone woke up early. Since it was his birthday, his mom said she would do his chores for him and he could go out and skateboard at the park with his friends. Tyrone made up an excuse to stay around the house all morning. He didn't want to miss his dad's call. The day went by very slowly, and his dad never called. By the time Tyrone went to bed that night, he was so mad. He wasn't sure he could ever forgive his dad for forgetting his birthday. This was the final straw!

Tyrone couldn't even remember what his dad's face looked like. He found an old family picture album and decided to look at the pictures. Sure enough there they were—a happy-looking family. In the pictures Tyrone was a little baby and his dad was holding him. After studying the pictures for a while, Tyrone decided he would ask his mother why his dad had left. After all, Tyrone's mom had stayed, so Tyrone must not be that bad a kid.



“Oh, Tyrone,” his mom said. “Your daddy did love you. He was just scared of being a dad. He didn’t know how to be a dad and a husband. He said it was just too scary having all that responsibility. He didn’t think he could do a good job, so he left.”

She went on to say, “Your dad and I were young when we got married. Neither one of us was very mature. We loved each other a lot, and we wanted to start a family. We were happy when you were born. A few months after you were born, your dad began to tell me he didn’t think he was going to be a good dad. He tried, but he got scared. He didn’t have anyone to teach him or help him. I was scared, too, but I knew my mom and dad would help me. I knew my church friends would mentor and help me.”

“Mom,” Tyrone said, “do you think if my dad knew me now that I’m twelve years old, he would love me?” Tyrone’s mom reassured him that if his dad knew him now, he certainly would love him.

His mom went on to explain, “It took me a long time to get over being mad at your dad. He left us when you were just a small baby. I had to go to work and work very long hours just to be able



to buy food and clothes for you and me. I had just graduated from high school when your dad and I got married. When I had to go to work, I didn't have any skills, so I had to take night courses at the college. I worked during the day and went to school at night. Your grandmother helped me a lot by taking care of you when I went to school. It took me a long time, but I finally was able to get a good job.

“I was resentful for many years. I couldn't talk about this when you were younger, but over the years I have learned to forgive your dad. It wasn't easy to forgive him. The only way I could forgive him was to turn it over to God. Would you like to hear about how God helped me?” she asked. Tyrone and his mom had talked a lot, but he had never heard his mom talk like this before. He wanted to know more.

His mom continued talking, “I stayed mad for a very long time. And I got tired of working and going to school. One night when you were little, you started crying, and I realized that I wasn't being a good mom. After I got you back to sleep, I went in my bedroom and I sat down on my bed and I started talking to God. I always thought that when you prayed, you had to be on your knees or in church, but that night I learned that praying is talking



to God from your heart. And boy did I talk! I told God how mad I was. I told God how tired I was of doing all of this by myself. I was so mad that I cried. And then I asked God to please help me and to forgive me for being so mad all the time. I asked God to help me be a better parent to you. As I talked to God, I began to realize that I felt peaceful inside. The hurt that had been there for so long began to not hurt so much anymore.”

“Divorce happens because we live in a sinful world. But God sent his Son, Jesus, to the world to take the punishment for our sins, for the wrong things we have done, because He loves us. As I talked to God, I remembered how much He loves me. God hurts when I hurt, kind of like as your mother, I hurt when you hurt. As I kept thinking and praying, I realized God is a parent, too. And since our home only had one parent, I asked God to be the other parent in our home and to guide me and give me wisdom to know how to be your parent.”

“Mom, are you still scared?” Tyrone asked.

“Not anymore. I still make mistakes, but I continue to learn,” she said. “Want to know something else?” Tyrone nodded his head yes.



“When you grow up and have children, you are going to be a good parent. You will be responsible and loving to your children. And I will be a good grandmother, too.” For several days Tyrone thought about everything his mother had said. He wondered if he would be able to forgive his dad someday.

When school started, Tyrone decided he would join the track team. He had always liked to run, and the track coach was a man who went to his church. Tyrone liked his track coach, and as he got to know the coach better, Tyrone began to open up and talk. One day after school his mom had to go to a meeting, and she asked the coach if he could drive Tyrone home.

On the way home from track, Tyrone began telling the coach about his dad. He shared everything he knew about his dad. He told the coach about his birthday and how disappointed he had been that his dad hadn't called him. Then he said, “What's wrong with a guy that he won't even call his kid on his twelfth birthday? I can't forgive him—ever!”

The coach could hear the anger in Tyrone's voice. The coach told Tyrone that he didn't have to forgive his dad right now. He



also told Tyrone that he had some suggestions on how to help Tyrone get to the place where he could forgive his dad. Tyrone was doubtful anything would work, but he promised the coach he would listen to what he had to say.

The coach went on to explain that it might be easier to practice forgiving people for the small things in life first. For example, when someone bumped him in the cafeteria line, instead of getting mad about it, he could forgive the person. The coach explained that you could forgive someone even if the person didn't know he or she had done something to you, like bumping you in the cafeteria line or not calling you on your twelfth birthday.

The coach said after practicing forgiveness and after praying about forgiveness, maybe someday Tyrone would be ready to forgive his dad for leaving him. Tyrone decided he would have to think about this idea for a while. Would he ever be able to forgive his dad? Maybe, just maybe, he could.



## Questions to Encourage Conversation:

Why was Tyrone excited about his birthday?

Why had Tyrone been thinking a lot about his dad?

What made Tyrone mad on the day of his birthday?

What do you do when you can't remember what someone's face looks like?  
(*Like Tyrone with his dad.*)

What made Tyrone's dad leave Tyrone and his mom?

What were some things Tyrone's mom said that helped him to know that she loved him?

What was Tyrone angry about when he talked to his track coach?

What did the coach mean when he said, "It's easier to practice forgiving people for the small things in life"?

Do you think Tyrone is going to be able to forgive his dad someday?



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## Jena Wants Another Family



“I’ll be back after a while. I’m going to the Walker’s house,” Jena said as she slammed the door shut. “Oh no, I’ll hear about that later,” she thought to herself. “Oh well, got to hurry, too late to go back and close the door again, anyway.”

Jena was on her way over to her neighbor’s house. Ever since her mom and dad had gotten a divorce, it seemed like Jena wanted to spend all her time at the Walker household.

Ms. Walker was divorced, also, but her house was different than Jena’s house. Ms. Walker had two teenage children, and everyone seemed so happy at their home. At Jena’s house everyone was on edge all the time. It seemed like her mom was upset about

every little thing. Her big brother, who is 14, was never home anymore. When her dad would come to pick them up for his weekend visit, her mom would hide in her bedroom and not come out until they left. Her little brother was a pest because he was so out of control all the time. Life in general was just awful at home.

Jena wanted to go live with the Walkers. “I spend all my time over there, anyway. Why can’t I go live there? I don’t think my mom or dad would even care if I disappeared from the face of the earth. So why would they care if I moved someplace else?” she thought to herself. Jena was running by this time. She wanted to get to the Walkers before Lisa and Rudy went to their dad’s. She remembered this was their weekend to visit their dad. She wanted to see how Ms. Walker handled it when her children left for the weekend.

“I wonder why they are so happy all the time?” Jena said to herself. Jena noticed that she talked to herself a lot more. She wondered out loud if this was normal or if she was going crazy. Ms. Walker had told Jena yesterday to come over this afternoon and spend some time with her.



Jena got there just as the kids were leaving with their dad. “Bye Jena, we’ll see you Sunday afternoon when we come home from Dad’s,” they said as they both waved from their dad’s car.

Jena jumped up on the porch where Ms. Walker was waving good-bye.

“Have fun kids,” Ms. Walker said. “Bob, you have some fun, too. Enjoy the kids, and don’t let them win all those computer games you guys play.” She laughed as she said this.

“Well, this certainly is different,” Jena thought. “Ms. Walker, you can be friendly to him?”

“Who? You mean Bob?” Ms. Walker asked. Jena nodded her head yes.

“Why wouldn’t I be friendly to him? After all, he is my children’s father. Just because we don’t love each other doesn’t mean he doesn’t still love our children. Because we had children together, I think it’s important to try and stay on friendly terms with each other. It helps my kids to know that their father still loves them



and wants to be with them. I want to make it easy for their dad to be with them. I want it to be a fun and happy time for everyone,” she said.

Ms. Walker went on to explain how when they were first divorced, she was so hurt she could hardly bear the thought of her kids spending time away from her. Even worse, she worried about them spending time with their dad. She said, “He wasn’t a nice person. He did some unkind things, and he hurt people. At the time we divorced, he wasn’t a Christian. Since then, he has come to know the Lord. Several years ago he invited Jesus to come and live with him and be the Boss of his life. When he did that, he began to change his life. He listens to what people have to say now, and he has become a very respectful person. He is helpful to those around him instead of hurtful. And I praise the Lord for the changes in his life.”

“Ms. Walker,” Jena said, “do you think there is hope for my family? I mean, we are all so, so disconnected or something. We are all unhappy.”

“Oh, Jena. It takes time for everyone to accept changes. You



have to give this divorce thing some time. Your parents are still hurting and adjusting. Right now it's hard for them to think very far ahead. I'm sure they still love you and your brothers, but they just don't show it right now," Ms. Walker said.

"That's for sure," Jena grumbled. "Last week when we went to my dad's, he spent the whole weekend doing work on his computer. He said he had some kind of project to finish at work, but I think he doesn't know what to do with us, so he just works when we are with him. And my mom brings work home all the time, and she hardly ever pays any attention to us. I have to do so much work around the house since Mom got this new job. I don't even have time to do my homework. I think that's why I want to come over here so much. I wish I could live here with you."

"I thought some of this might be going on in your family. That's why I asked your mom if we could spend some time together this weekend. I think I can help. That is, if you want my help," Ms. Walker said.

Jena shrugged her shoulders and mumbled, "Yeah, I guess, if you want."



“First of all, you know that you can’t come live with us, don’t you?” Ms. Walker asked. Jena looked at the ground and then nodded her head. Ms. Walker said, “I would love to give you a place in our home. Rudy and Lisa would love to have a little sister, but you have a home and your home needs you right now.”

She went on to say, “Let’s address one thing at a time. Okay?”

“Okay,” Jena said.

“What are some things you would like to do when you are at your dad’s?” Ms. Walker asked.

“I just want his attention. I wish we could sit on the couch together and watch a movie or go to the park and shoot hoops,” Jena said.

“So what can you do about letting him know these things?” Ms. Walker asked.

“I guess I could tell him, or maybe I could make up a list of things my brothers and I want to do and then hand him the list



when he picks us up,” Jena explained.

“Okay, that sounds like a good plan. You also need to understand that he may really have to spend a lot of time working right now. If this is the case, then you and your brothers need to have another plan so you can keep busy at your dad’s. Give him some quiet time when he’s on his computer. Who knows, if he can have some space and quiet time, he might be able to get his work done faster and be ready to watch a movie with you kids,” Ms. Walker suggested.

“Now for all the extra work you are having to do at home. Maybe your mother doesn’t realize what is happening. What if you said very calmly, ‘Mom, I’m just a kid. I don’t even have time to get all my homework done after school. Can we work out a way we can share some of these chores?’” Ms. Walker continued, “You might even make up a list of all the work to be done around the house and ask your mom to take some time and work with you on figuring out a schedule where everybody, even your little brother, can share the workload.” Ms. Walker was so smart about things like this. Why, this sounded so simple when Ms. Walker explained it.



When Lisa and Rudy came home on Sunday, Jena rushed over to see them. She asked them how they could be so happy when they came back from their dad's house. Lisa and Rudy explained that even though their parents were divorced, they realized a long time ago that both parents still loved them even if they didn't love each other. When their parents first got a divorce, their dad wasn't very lovable. They said they chose to love him and they had to work at showing him this love. Over the years things had gotten much better, and now they were all pretty happy with their routines.

Rudy said, "Jena, I'm sure your dad loves you and your brothers. He's confused right now."

"That's right," Lisa added. "And he is probably only thinking about himself, so just keep loving him and being kind to him. It's not fair that a kid has to be the one to show the parent love, but hey, that's how it is sometimes. Just set your mind to it and you can do it."

"Don't be a fool. Stay cool. Use love as your tool! Use love as your tool, your tool, your tool, your tool, boom, boom!"



Rudy chanted as they all began to laugh. The more Lisa and Jena laughed, the sillier Rudy got with his rap and movements. Even Ms. Walker came out on the porch and joined in the fun. Pretty soon they were all laughing so hard Jena thought she was going to burst.

On the way home Jena was still laughing. It felt good to laugh. It felt good to know that her parents still loved her. She decided she would work at showing her parents how much she loved them. Maybe someday her family would be able to act silly like the Walker family. As she skipped home, she started repeating Rudy's chant, "Don't be a fool. Stay cool. Use love as my tool! Use love as my tool, my tool, my tool, my tool, boom, boom."



## Questions to Encourage Conversation:

Why do you think Jena wanted to spend all of her time at the Walker's house?

How is the Walker home different from Jena's?

Why was Jena hurrying to get to the Walker's house before Lisa and Rudy left?

What do you think Ms. Walker meant about Lisa and Rudy's dad when she said, "He wasn't a nice person"?

What happened to him that caused him to become a kind man?

What was Jena upset about when she went to visit her dad?

What was her plan when she went to her dad's the next time?

Have you ever developed a plan when you go to visit the parent you don't live with? What was it?

What did Lisa and Rudy tell Jena about her parents loving her?

What was Rudy's chant?

What is your plan to show your parents that you love them?



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## It's Your Choice



**M**y name is Chris, and I want to share my story with you. Many of you will be hearing or reading this story in a group called DC4K. You are fortunate to be able to attend a group that helps you adjust to all the changes in your life. As most of you have learned, divorce brings about many, many changes in your life. How you handle each change is your choice.

I didn't have a group to attend when my parents got a divorce. I wish I had been able to get some help because by the time I became a teenager, I was pretty messed up. I am an adult now, and I want to tell you my story because I hope my story will help you. I hope you can learn from this story so you won't have to go through everything I did. It has been rough, and I'm still working



on myself. Here's my story.

My parents were divorced when I was very young. I really don't even remember my father. For a long time I was angry with my mom. Then I got mad at my dad for leaving us. When I heard all the things he did to my mom and why she left him, I got even madder at my dad. I carried this anger around for many years.

People tell me I was a really cute kid. I don't remember being cute. I do remember getting into a lot of trouble when I was little. My mom remarried, and for a while we had it pretty good. We had money, clothes, a nice house to live in and nice things. I was glad to have a dad around the house. After a while I began to realize that things weren't right between my mom and him. Things weren't right with my mom either. My mom had a lot of problems.

You see, my mom had grown up in a divorced home. Her parents, my grandparents, had divorced when she was a kid. There was no program to help her get herself together. She got into a lot of trouble and ran away from home when she was a teenager. Even though she went back home, she didn't change. She made some



bad choices in life. She got married when she was a teenager. She was divorced and then married again. After her divorce she didn't get any help. She didn't go to *DivorceCare* or any kind of program to help her. She continued to make bad decisions. Her bad decisions affected my older brother and me.

As a kid I ended up going to a lot of different schools. It is so hard to have to change schools all the time. Just about the time I would make friends, we would have to move again. I would look at the other kids and wonder why they didn't have to move as much as I did. It seemed like I was always the "new kid" in class. I learned that if I acted silly and funny, the other kids would like me. So I would go to a new school, act wild, get everybody's attention, and the kids there would like me. However, when I would act silly, I would get in trouble with the teachers. I got in so much trouble that I started to get behind in my work. My grades got worse and worse.

By the time I graduated to middle school, I was in bad shape. In middle school I started smoking cigarettes, using drugs, skipping school, and worst of all, I started to lie to my mom and to myself. I got in trouble with the police and was threatened with being taken away from my home. Just when my life was in the



worst possible shape, God seemed to get involved in my life. He connected me with my great aunt.

To me, my Aunt Linda was just an old lady that I had met a few times. After I got suspended from school, I had a couple of choices. One of the choices was to go stay at my aunt's for a couple of weeks. I thought, "Hey, why not. I can go there, chill for a while, come back home and just continue on with my life." I thought my aunt would be a pushover. I mean, after all, what can an old lady do with a wild teenager? But God had something else in mind for me.

My aunt lived in another town about two hours away from my home. On the drive to her home she began to talk about how things would be at her house. The first thing she told me was she would give me a lot of choices. She would allow me to make some of my own decisions, and she would also allow me to experience the consequences of my decisions—good and bad consequences. She would expect me to help around the house with some chores. I began to get an idea that this was not going to be as easy as I thought. But, what the hey? I could put up with this for a couple of weeks. Then I could go back home and continue getting into trouble, skip school and in general make everyone's life miserable.



The first thing she did when we got home was tell me that we had to put together a menu for next week. Then we would go grocery shopping. I had to decide which meals I was going to cook. I said, “Aunt Linda, I don’t know how to cook.” She explained that it was time to learn. Uh-oh, this was going to be more work than I thought. But the thing about making my own decisions was interesting. The next morning we got up, and she had a list of chores to do. She said I could decide which ones I wanted to do, and she checked off the ones she would do. In the afternoon I asked her if I could go to the park down the street and shoot some hoops. She looked me in the eye and said, “Gee, I don’t know, *can* you shoot hoops?” That was a surprise answer. She said if my chores were done, then sure I could go. And she asked me how long I thought I would be there. I couldn’t believe there was no hassle, no arguing and no yelling.

Something in my heart changed during the next week. I went to my aunt after one week of living in her home and told her I would like to try to live there with her and turn my life around. She laid out the ground rules as she called them. If I could agree to the following conditions, then sure I could stay and live with her.



1. Go to school every day. I didn't have to get A's or even B's, but I did have to try. She explained that she had talked to the school counselor and anytime I was not at school, the counselor would call her. I had to agree to go to school every day.
2. Help around the house. Cook some of the meals every week
3. Go to a counselor every week and work on myself. She already had a counselor picked out for me to see.
4. If I were going to live with her, then I would have to go to church with her every week. I had to agree to get myself up and get dressed and be ready so she wouldn't be late.
5. I had to agree to read to her at least three nights a week. She knew that I was way behind in my reading, and I couldn't spell very well either. She chose a book with short, interesting stories. Sometimes she would read to me.
6. She said she could get me a job at where she worked and that I could earn some money that way. With this money she said



she would teach me about how to spend it wisely. Hmmm, this was new—spending my own money wisely? First I would have to give ten percent to the church. She called this a tithe. I would have to pay my mom a certain amount each week for the damage to her car. I had driven her car when I didn't know how to drive, and I had wrecked it. Then I would have to buy all my own school supplies, lunches and clothes. With what was left, I could save some or spend all of it. It was my choice.

7. I couldn't smoke in her house or use drugs or alcohol.

There were some other conditions such as leaving her a note if I decided to visit a neighbor. She said she respected me and that she would do the same for me. I was curious about the things she had said. I wanted to experience this different kind of life. I agreed to everything. All the conditions were put in writing, and I signed it.

While I lived with my aunt, I learned a lot about life. First of all, I learned that this lady was a pretty smart person. She could handle me very well. She wasn't afraid to help me follow the rules. She liked to laugh and have fun, but she was also a hard worker. I



made some mistakes, and I talked back, but she understood. One time I tried to give her the silent treatment—you know, where a kid gets mad at an adult because the kid doesn't want to do something, so the kid purposely won't talk to the adult. Know what she said? She said, "Ah yes, you're giving me the silent treatment. Well, guess what? I like a lot of silence in the house." She went on about her day, and my silent treatment didn't affect her at all.

I learned there really is a God, and He loves me so much that He left heaven, came to earth and then died on the cross for my sins. I learned how to get along with my mom. I learned that even adults make bad choices, but when you are an adult, your choices affect many people around you—like your kids. I learned that I could get past the divorce. In the process I decided that I didn't want my own kids to suffer like I did.

Today I still don't read very well. I didn't graduate from high school. I work hard, and I have a good job. I made many mistakes along the way. Today I have a child of my own.

That's my story. When you grow up, what is your story going to be? You have the choice to make good decisions or bad



decisions. You can decide to get past the pain of your parents' divorce. You can choose to work through the anger, the sadness, the bargaining and the blaming of yourself. You can forgive your parents and others who have hurt you. You can think about what you want to be when you grow up, and you can set goals in your life. You can accomplish and be anything you want to be. The choice is yours. What is your story?

*Instead of asking the children questions, allow the children to tell their own story.*







