



REMEMBER

- Much of our theology is based on God the Father and 80% of kids in broken homes live with mom alone. Make sure that your language doesn't actually push youth away from God by linking him to a confusing picture of a father.
- Family instability robs youth of the feeling of security and safety. It leaves them questioning their belonging. We as the body of Christ can offer a safe place of hospitality. Invite them into that place even before they know Jesus, and surround them with the family of God.
- Your healthy relationships can model new ways of being for them. Remind them that their future doesn't need to be determined by their family's past. Dare to invite them to watch your relationships and ask you questions about what they see that may be different.

"Even if my father and mother abandon me the LORD will hold me close." Psalm 27:10



RECOGNIZE

- 1 in 3 youth (age 10-14) are living in a lone-parent family, in a stepfamily or without their parent. Almost 1 in 2 children will experience family breakup.
- Family breakup can create a huge obstacle for young people to get past. The effects vary but can include attachment issues, abandonment fears, sped up or slowed down maturing and a shaken sense of security. Teens from divorced homes are more likely to suffer from anxiety, depression and poor physical health.
- Some of the variety of emotions you may see around family breakup are sadness, anger, worry, confusion, resent, guilt, and sometimes relief.
- A parent's remarriage when children are adolescents tends to result in ongoing problems with the youth's adjustment and family relationships. Younger children who appear to have adapted well to their new family situations may have re-emerging problems at adolescence.
- Family break-up is filled with things that are beyond the teen's control and this can leave them feeling powerless and stuck. Risk seeking behaviour can be a consequence if the teen has no positive outlets for "letting go".



RESPOND

Because broken families are so common, we forget the huge impact it can have on youth who walk through it. They may not act out because of it, but no matter their age, chances are that they will deal with some complex and often confusing feelings, possibly years later.

- **Bring it up.** Talk about the fact that family instability can impact people in all sorts of ways. Let them know that it's ok to not know how they feel and that they may find themselves experiencing a variety of feelings over time.
- **Listen.** Offer an empathic ear and be careful not to take sides or feed the negative emotions that the youth may express about one or both of the parents. Focus on normalizing their emotions and exploring ways to manage them.

- **Help them express their grief.** If the family breakup is recent, show them through example how it looks to express emotions in a healthy way and not bottle up negative emotions; think together about healthy ways of letting their inside feeling out.
- **Invite them into trust through community.** Because of this significant disappointment in their parents and the loss of security, youth may adopt a strong sense of independence as a self-protection measure - seeming not to need anyone or anything.
- **Be consistent.** Be an example of a healthy adult who can be trusted to do what they've said they'll do.
- **Teach them ways of coping with stress.** The challenges of family break up can add to the already stressful life of an adolescent. Be intentional about recognizing this reality and equipping them with practical stress management skills.



RESOURCES

rootedministry.com - Search "divorce" for 3 podcast episodes guiding parents in helping their children navigate their family's breakup.

www.youthhelpphone.ca/ (search: divorce) - Helping youth think about the feelings they are dealing with around family break up and custody.

It's not Your Fault: A Practical Guide to Navigating the Pain and Problems from Your Parents' Divorce by Joey Pontarelli. A practical and personal book, guiding teens and young adults from broken homes as they navigate the challenges they face - both emotionally and spiritually.



BROKEN HOMES

lifeteams
resources