



Sometimes, listening is enough

by Jen Carney



My best friend, Kate, is sitting in the dinner centre looking like she might burst into tears if I prod her. 'What's up?' I say plonking myself on the stool beside her and opening my lunchbox. 'Your mum made you egg sandwiches again?'

Kate shakes her head. 'I think my parents are getting a divorce,' she whispers.

That's not what I was expecting to hear. I'm always round at Kate's house and her mum and dad seem solid. Also, Kate has a tendency to exaggerate. Last week said she might need a blood transfusion when she got a papercut on her thumb.

I laugh and poke her in the ribs. 'Why do you think that? Did they disagree about what to watch on telly last night?'

Kate doesn't laugh. 'My dad has moved out,' she says. Then she starts to cry, so I know she's not kidding.

I'm not exactly sure what to say. The only other person I know whose parents are divorced is Ethan Pope, my next-door neighbour whose dad picks him up every Friday night and drops him back on Sundays. Ethan is always bragging about the advantages of having divorced parents, which gives me an idea.

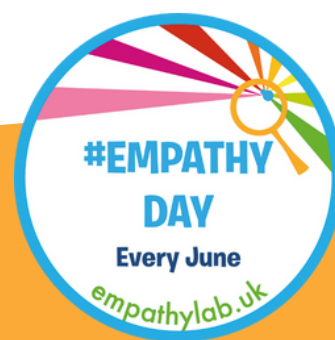
'Look on the bright-side,' I say. 'You'll have two bedrooms. OMG, you could get bunkbeds at your dad's new place so I don't have to sleep on the floor when I stay over. Ethan Pope told me his room at his dad's has a TV in it and everything.'

Kate stares at me and frowns. I try to help again. 'Hey maybe you'll get double Christmas presents! Ethan Pope says his dad spoils him rotten. He even gets to go on two holidays every year.'

'Will you shut up about Ethan Pope,' snaps Kate.

I do.

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We sit in silence for a couple of minutes, neither of us eating our lunches. I think about my own parents. How would I feel if they split up? It makes me sad just to think about it. Who would I live with? What if I wanted a hug from the one who lived far away and I had to wait until the weekend?

If I was in Kate's position, I'm not sure I'd be ready to look on the bright side yet.

I put my arm around my best friend's shoulder. 'I'm really sorry, Kate,' I say. 'Do you want to talk about it?'

Kate nods her head, wipes her eyes and tells me all her worries. I don't try to solve anything.

In fact, I don't say very much. And that's okay. Sometimes, listening is enough.

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