



Explaining Separation and Divorce to a 9-12-Year-Old

When children reach 7-11 years of age, they are in the concrete operational stage of cognitive development. This is when their thoughts become more rational and logical. However, they still need concrete objects that can be seen or felt in order to understand the world. At this age, children are usually interested in the details about divorce.

What is Divorce?

“Divorce is a legal process that parents go through when they no longer want to be married because they are very sad together and cannot find ways to be happy together anymore.”

“It means that we will no longer be married to each other, but we will always be your parents.”

Why Did It Happen?

Some possibilities include:

- a) “Sometime adults make each other sad and can’t live together anymore.”
- b) “We didn’t listen to each other enough. You know how sometimes you want to say something so much you don’t even hear what the other person is saying? That’s how your mother/father and I got to be. We cared more about what we wanted to say and not enough about what the other person was saying.”
- c) “We didn’t take the time to think, *How will he/she feel about this?* before we said or did something that hurt him/her or made him/her angry. That was very unfair.”
- d) “We fought too much and didn’t learn how to work out our differences.”

Note: An explanation to avoid is that parents “have stopped loving one another.” Since most children are not capable of abstract thought at this age, they cannot understand what love means. As a result, if they hear this explanation, they can easily think that mom and dad will stop loving them too.