



## **Explaining Separation and Divorce to a Teenager**

When children become teenagers, they move into the formal operational stage of cognitive development. This is when they are capable of abstract thought and understanding concepts like heaven and love. They can think about possibilities also. So, this is when it can be helpful to explain separation and divorce in religious terms.

With adolescents, it's important to convey information in a clear and straightforward manner while maintaining an objective, factual tone as much as possible. Focus on the ways that the divorce will directly affect them (e.g. which parent they will live with, if they'll see their other parent and when, if they'll have to move or change schools, how the divorce might affect the flow of money in the house, etc.).

### **How Parents Can Break the News:**

"I'm sure you know that your father (mother) and I are not happy living together. We have decided that it's best if we get a divorce and live apart. We wanted to tell you this now so that, as we go through the process and things start to change around here, you'll know what's going on. We'll try to keep you informed about how all this is going to affect you, but if you have any questions, be sure to ask us."

### **What Other Adults Can Say:**

"Divorce happens when parents cannot be happy together anymore and have hurt each other too much. Even though you parents will not longer be married to each other, they will always be your parents."

"The Church views divorce as a deep wound to the natural moral law. However, there are situations (such as physical abuse, flagrant adultery or failure of child support) in which divorce may be morally justified, either as a practical necessity or as the lesser of two evils. The Church recognizes that there are innocent victims in divorce." (*The Modern Catholic Encyclopedia*, Collegetown, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1994, p. 244.)

For more on "Catholic Church Teachings on Marriage and Divorce," see Chapter 12 of *When Parents Divorce or Separate: I Can Get Through This* (Pauline Books & Media) and Chapter 13 of *Making Your Way After Your Parents' Divorce* (Liguori).

**Why Did It Happen?**

For an explanation of common reasons, see pages 47 – 50 of *Now What Do I Do? A Guide to Help Teenagers with Their Parents' Separation or Divorce* (ACTA).

“We fought too much and weren’t able to talk about our feelings without getting angry and hurting each other.”

“We weren’t strong enough for each other, and we let other people and things interfere in our relationship.”

“Your father doesn’t love me anymore. He’s decided that he prefers someone else. It takes 2 to make a marriage, and he doesn’t want it. He loves you, but he doesn’t love me.”

“Your mother been depressed for years. I’ve tried to get her into treatment but she refuses. I just can’t live with her like this anymore.”