

## BRAVING THE STORM: HELPING CHILDREN THROUGH THE CHANGE OF DIVORCE

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In today's Bible reading (Ruth 1), we see that Naomi was no stranger to change and certainly no stranger to grief. In her despair, she felt that even the Lord had turned against her and insisted that her daughters in law, Orpah and Ruth, leave her. But Ruth refused to depart from Naomi and remained by her side. What a beautiful example of sacrificial love and faithfulness during a time of devastation and trial.



Just as Naomi suffered great loss, families going through stresses, conflict or divorce may find themselves feeling broken and isolated from one another. Changes that come with family conflict and divorce can be overwhelming for everyone, especially for children. A parent may notice children displaying behaviors and an influx of emotions that may indicate difficulty adjusting. Fortunately, there are things that a parent can do to help them prepare and cope with the inevitable changes that are to come.

- 1. Be appropriately transparent:** Whenever possible, provide children with notice of upcoming changes and events and inform them of what they can expect. A child may be caught off guard by these impending changes, and in offering ample warning they will have additional time to process, reflect, and prepare for them. Remember to share only details that are appropriate for their age or maturity level, avoiding details about the divorce or the spouse that may be harmful or confusing.
- 2. Listen:** Children may have a lot of questions and undoubtedly a lot of thoughts and emotions. These emotions may include worry, sadness, shame, guilt, or even relief. Offering empathy and validation is essential in helping your children cope. When they are ready to talk, a parent needs to be there to listen. Parents may also have them seek support from a trusted family member, pastor, or counselor.
- 3. Create consistency and structure:** Change is easiest to accept and adapt to when we feel a sense of control and safety. Things as simple as maintaining expectations over household chores, family dinners, and routine bedtimes can provide a sense of safety and purpose. Creating new and meaningful routines can create a sense of comfort and inclusion as they work toward adjustment and acceptance. This can be as simple as establishing regular family game nights or any activity that encourages bonding and togetherness between parent and children.
- 4. Provide reassurance:** Children will need reassurance and encouragement surrounding all of the changes that divorce can entail such as relocating, adjusting to new routines, and adjusting to the full or partial absence of a parent. Most importantly, children need reassurance of parental love. With the swell of thoughts, feelings, and concerns that are bound to emerge, children will need assurance that no matter what storm is raging around them, parents will always love and protect them, and will walk alongside them as the family navigates these new beginnings together.

The beauty of the story of Ruth is that we are given a living illustration of God's providence and deep, everlasting love for his people. When change threatens to turn our lives upside down, when we are faced with soul-piercing trials and despair, the Lord himself is with us to calm our weary hearts. He also places people in our lives to walk alongside and comfort us. Through his Grace, parents can provide that comfort for their child as they navigate through their new beginning.

Want to dig deeper? Check out Family Fire's article ["Child-Centered Life After Divorce: 7 Ways to Protect Your Children"](#)

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