

A CATHOLIC GUIDE FOR KIDS

When Parents Divorce or Separate



I Can Get
Through This

Written by
Lynn Cassella-Kapusinski

A CATHOLIC GUIDE FOR KIDS

When Parents Divorce or Separate

I Can Get Through This

By Lynn Cassella-Kapusinski


Pauline
BOOKS & MEDIA
Boston



*This book is dedicated
with deep love and appreciation
to my wonderful husband,
George Kapusinski.
Without him and his immeasurable support
along this journey,
neither this book nor any of my ministry work
would have been possible.*



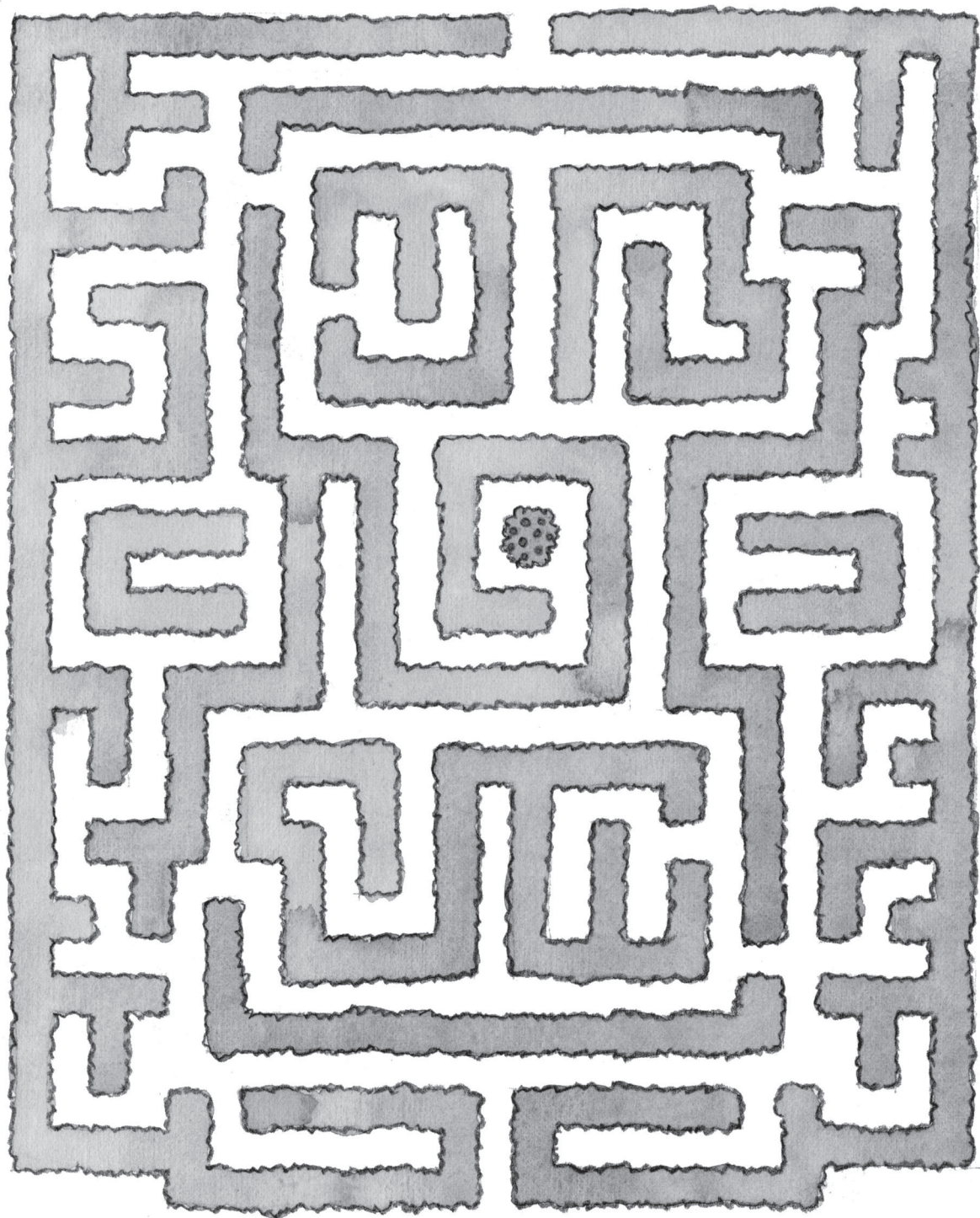
Contents

A NOTE TO THE READER	1
A NOTE TO PARENTS	4
ONE: FAMILY	6
Do I Still Have One? Will I Ever Have One Again?	
TWO: CRUMMY FEELINGS	23
What Do You Do with Them?	
THREE: SEPARATION AND DIVORCE	45
Why Does It Happen?	
FOUR: DIVORCE PROBLEMS	62
What Can I Do to Help Solve Them?	
FIVE: DIVORCE SOLUTIONS	80
How Do I Take Action?	
SIX: CAUGHT BETWEEN	101
How Do I Get Out of the Middle?	
SEVEN: ANGER	122
How Do I Handle It?	



EIGHT: GOD.....	139
Does He Care?	
NINE: FORGIVENESS	157
What If I Don't Want to Forgive?	
TEN: WHEN A PARENT STAYS AWAY.....	171
What Do I Do?	
ELEVEN: DATING, STEPPARENTS, AND STEPFAMILIES	186
What If I'm Not Ready for Another Change?	
TWELVE: GOD'S PLAN FOR MARRIAGE	206
Where Can I Find Hope?	
Words About Divorce and Separation You May Hear	231
Additional Resources.....	237





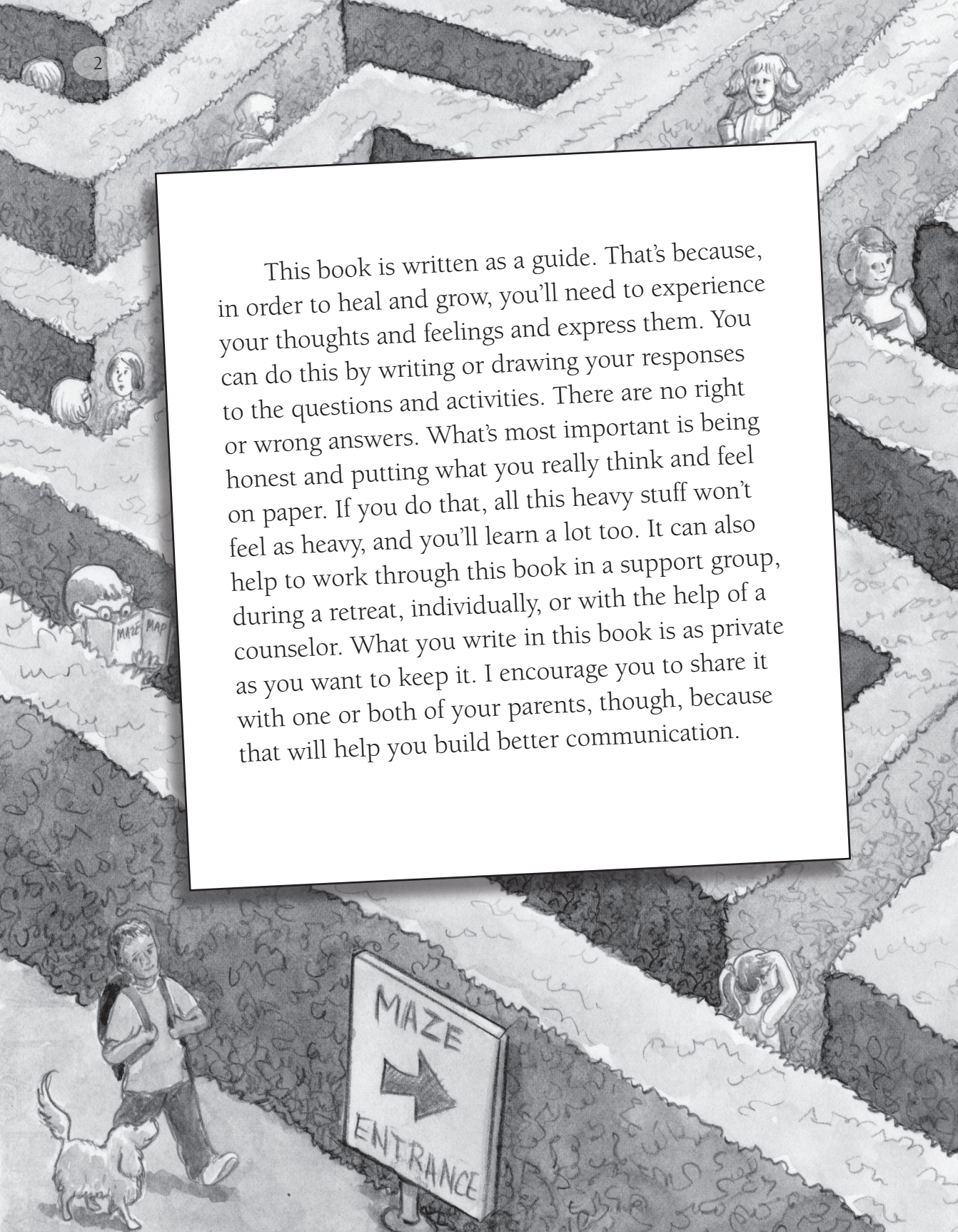
A Note to the Reader

Dear Reader,

Hello! My name is Mrs. Kapusinski. A lot of young people call me “Mrs. K” for short. I’m so glad that you will be reading my book. It was given to you to help you learn and grow from your parents’ separation, divorce, or remarriage. It can also help you if you have an absent parent, or if your parents never married and are now living apart.

You and I have something in common. My parents separated when I was eleven years old. That’s why I wrote this book: because I know how tough this experience can be and how much it helps to get some guidance along the way. This book contains a lot of what I learned. I hope it makes your journey easier.





This book is written as a guide. That's because, in order to heal and grow, you'll need to experience your thoughts and feelings and express them. You can do this by writing or drawing your responses to the questions and activities. There are no right or wrong answers. What's most important is being honest and putting what you really think and feel on paper. If you do that, all this heavy stuff won't feel as heavy, and you'll learn a lot too. It can also help to work through this book in a support group, during a retreat, individually, or with the help of a counselor. What you write in this book is as private as you want to keep it. I encourage you to share it with one or both of your parents, though, because that will help you build better communication.

It can be challenging to work through your parents' separation, divorce, or remarriage in a positive way. This experience, however, offers you a tremendous opportunity. I grew more from my parents' divorce than from any other experience of my life. It also brought me closer to God, who showed us through Jesus's resurrection that he can bring good things even out of bad situations. As a result, I'm a better—and happier—person today. The same can happen to you. God and your Catholic faith can help you work through the hurt and find light and new life along the way. May God bless you and guide you on your journey. Let's move ahead!

— Lynn Cassella-Kapusinski



A Note to Parents and Other Family Members

Dear Parents,

Thank you for your interest in using *When Parents Divorce or Separate* to help your child or children address the hurt and insecurity of separation, divorce, or remarriage. In working with parents over the years as a counselor; through my foundation, Faith Journeys; and from what my own parents have shared with me, I know that what you face is challenging, sometimes even overwhelming.

It can be difficult to acknowledge all that your child may be experiencing. Even in the best circumstances, this experience is one of grief and loss, but it doesn't have to remain only that. The good news is that the more a child is able to process this loss, the more good can come from it. That includes the possibility of your child's own happy marriage someday.

The key is to provide children with a safe space in which to work through their grief, and ample opportunity to do so. It is important that you respect your child's need for that space in order to heal. As difficult as it may be, please remember that this book belongs to your child. The decision to share what is inside also belongs to your child.

While the experience of separation or divorce can strain our faith, it is important to help children put it all together by drawing on their Catholic faith. That usually means answering their questions about Church teaching in the process. In this way, children can grow from their experience, not just in spite of it. The goal of this book is to help kids do precisely that.

When Parents Divorce or Separate assists kids in developing foundational skills such as effective communication, problem solving, anger management, and empathy. It also offers children a relevant faith perspective in service to the healing journey. As a result, your child will be better equipped not only to adjust to a family break-up or remarriage, but also to build their other relationships in a healthy and faith-filled way.

Whether your family's breakup is recent or years old, *When Parents Divorce or Separate* will assist your child in navigating what is often very tricky territory. Loss due to family breakup is often ambiguous, as divorce lacks the finality and closure that accompany other losses, most notably

death. The fact that some things are lost and others stay the same can have the effect of freezing grief for the children in these circumstances.

Since children process and rework their losses at different levels as they mature, I recommend that you encourage them to work through this book on a regular basis. This approach provides the best opportunity to help kids keep from developing unhealthy coping skills and relationship patterns. It may also be helpful to return to this book whenever a related transition arises in your child's life. Moving, changes in custody arrangements, parental dating or remarriage, or the birth of a half-sibling often reopen old wounds.

The healing process for your child will probably take longer than you'd like. At the same time, you may find yourself replaying your own grief. In any case, it is important for you to give permission to your child to heal and grow at his or her own pace. That process may be longer—or shorter—than the path you take. It will necessarily be different.

Through it all, however, remember that the suffering of Jesus led to new life. So too can your child's pain, and your own, be transformed into something good and valuable. This is what our Catholic faith offers us: the grace to find meaning in suffering. Once we do, our pain can become growth; we can move past self-pity and recognize that—although things are really tough right now—we have the power and ability to make good choices. Realizing their hurts won't last forever, our children can accept help from others.

When children learn how to handle suffering with faith, a greatness is created inside them. It is my prayer that this book may be used as a healing instrument in your child's life. Always remember that "all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28). May God bless you and your family!

— Lynn Cassella-Kapusinski

Please note that this book is not intended to replace the advice of psychologists or other healthcare professionals, but should be considered an additional resource. Questions and concerns about mental health should always be discussed with a healthcare provider.

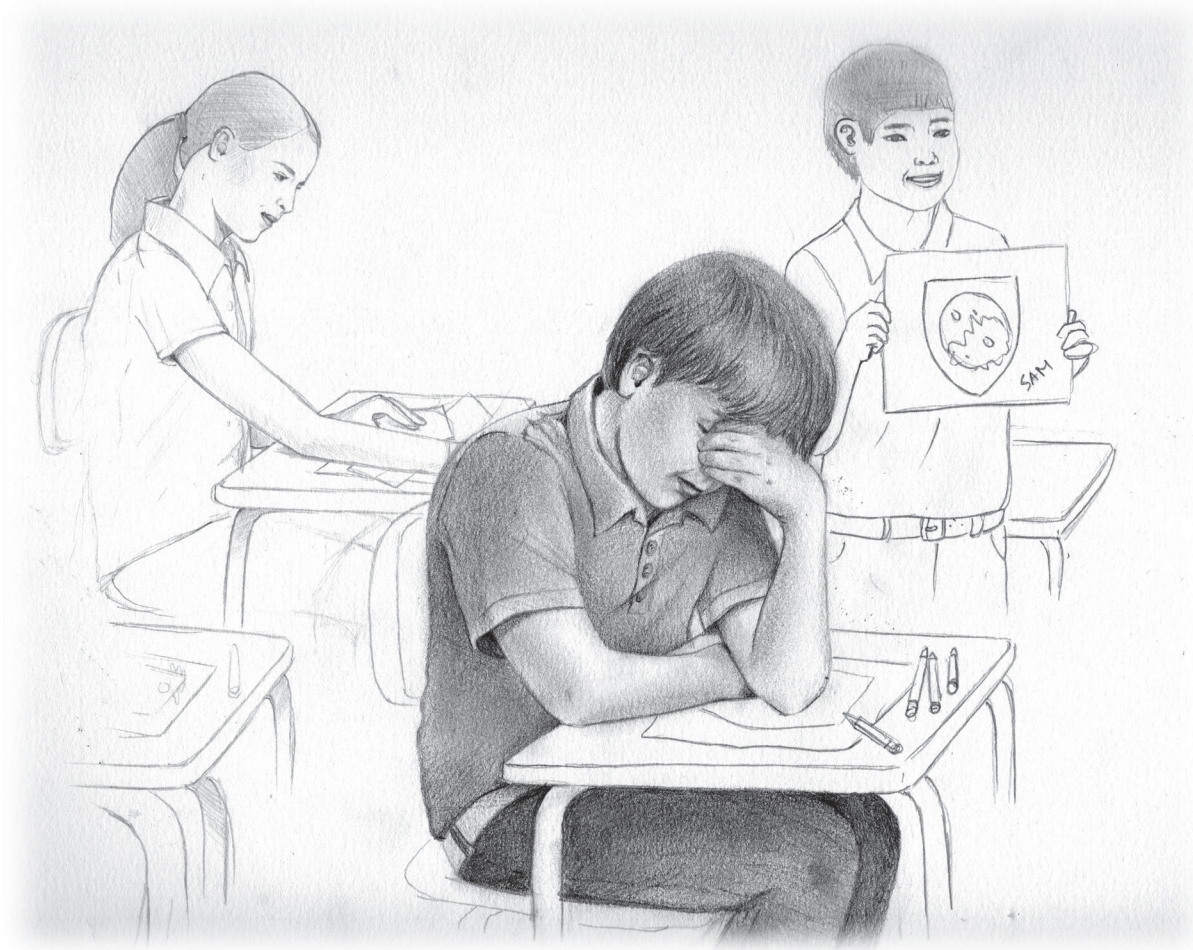


Chapter One

Family

*Do I Still Have One?
Will I Ever Have One Again?*

Ethan wished he could crawl under a desk and hide. This was the worst assignment ever. Miss Jones, his social studies teacher, asked the class to create their own family crests. She told them to start by thinking of ideas and symbols that represented their family histories or lives. Before Miss Jones was finished giving the details, one of Ethan's classmates, Sam, had already drawn and colored his symbol. Miss Jones walked by Sam's desk and was so impressed that she asked him to show it to the class. He held up a red and blue yin-yang symbol from the South Korean flag. He said the symbol represented balance between opposites. Then he told the class that his family came to the United States when he was five years old and found many differences living here. Miss Jones said, "That's very interesting," and went on to observe that his symbol



could also mean balance or harmony. Natalie, another classmate, was so excited that she opened her backpack and took out pictures of her cousin's recent wedding in El Salvador. Miss Jones liked that idea too, and said it could represent joy.

But there was nothing about Ethan's family that he was happy about. Instead, he felt embarrassed and angry because his parents had separated a few months ago. Now, his mom was hardly ever home because she spent a lot more time at work. As a result, Ethan's aunt watched him and his younger brother on most days. Ethan saw his dad a whole lot less, too, just every other weekend from Saturday morning to Sunday afternoon.

The bell rang. Ethan's classmates quickly packed their things and lined up for lunch. Ethan shoved the assignment sheet into his backpack. *Another stupid assignment I probably just won't do*, he thought. He had been an okay student, but had lost interest in his schoolwork ever since his parents separated. He wished he could have a perfect family like the other kids. On some days, he even felt like he didn't have a family at all.

At dinner that night, after grace, Ethan's Aunt Dawn asked him about his homework. Ethan said he didn't have any but, after his aunt pressed him, Ethan told her about the assignment and why he couldn't do it.

His aunt put down her fork and said, “It can seem like you don’t have a family anymore because of all the changes you’ve been through. But you’re forgetting that the most important parts have stayed the same.”

“Like what?” Ethan asked.

“Your love for one another,” she told him. “Your parents are struggling a lot right now, but they still love you very much.

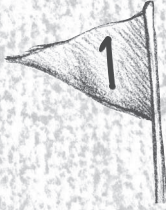
“A lot goes into making a family,” she went on, “things like sharing, sacrificing, and helping with homework. It all boils down to love.”

Ethan nodded. He had forgotten about his family’s love for him. He didn’t think much about his part in loving them, either.

“And there’s your faith, too. God is still with all of you,” his aunt said. “And the more you live in Christ and for Christ, the stronger your family will be.”

Ethan realized his Aunt Dawn was right. “Thanks,” he said, then got up from his chair and hugged her. He felt a lot better about his family now.





Your Family

Ethan felt embarrassed and angry about his family because of his parents' separation.

On some days, he even felt like he didn't have a family at all.

What are your thoughts or feelings about your family?

Write or draw a picture about them below.



my family

Facts About Families

1. There's no such thing as a perfect family.

Like Ethan in the story, you may think others have a perfect family. But think about it: since no one is perfect, no family is perfect either. Instead, all families are imperfect because they're made up of imperfect people. We all have different personalities, as well as different strengths and weaknesses.

2. *All families experience loss.*

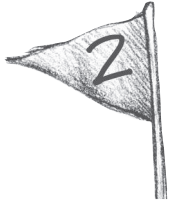
Every family experiences loss at some point. For example, you may have a friend whose family member has died or is facing a serious illness. Or, you may know of someone whose parent has lost a job or left home to serve in the military. Families can face losses that are the result of natural disasters or having to move far away, too. All of these situations challenge us to accept and adjust to a loss. Your parents' separation, divorce, or remarriage means adjusting to a loss, too.

3. A separation or divorce affects all family members, but in different ways.

While you might feel sad or mad, your brother or sister may feel frightened, your grandparents may feel disappointed, and your parents may



feel lonely. All these feelings are normal. Because every one of us is unique, we should expect that our family members might experience their losses in different ways.

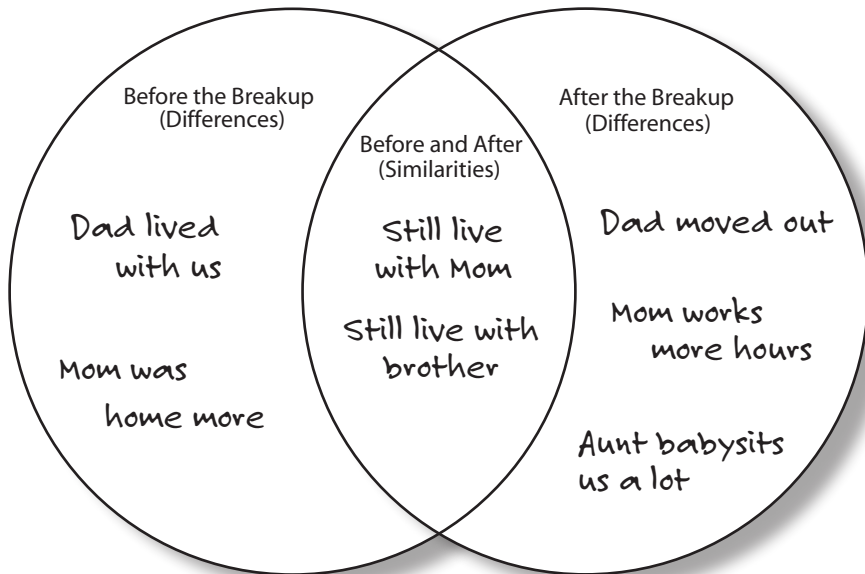


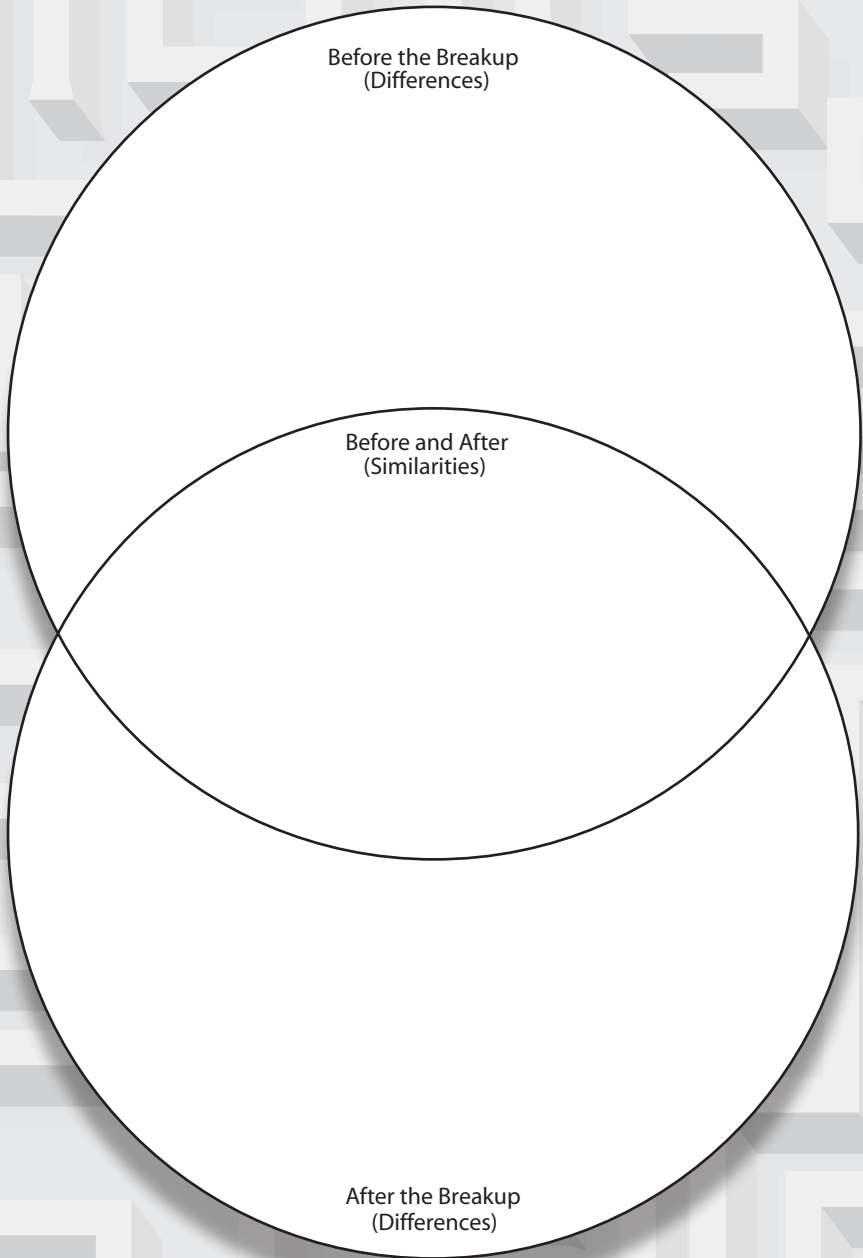
Similarities and Differences

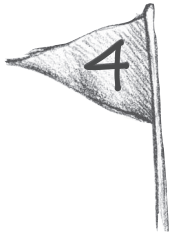
Ethan's aunt pointed out that some things change and some things stay the same when parents separate or divorce.

On the diagram below, note the similarities and differences for your family.

If you need help, see Ethan's diagram below.







Your Family's Love for You

Ethan's aunt emphasized one thing that stays the same after separation or divorce: a family's love for one another.

In what ways does your family show love to you?
Check off the ways (below) that apply to you.



- Helping me with homework
- Sharing their things (e.g., games, clothes, art supplies, etc.)
- Taking care of me when I'm sick
- Giving me a hug or kiss
- Sharing in my interests and hobbies
- Accepting my differences
- Listening when I'm talking
- Helping me with problems
- Providing for me financially
- Letting me have a say in family decisions
- Encouraging me
- Other. Please explain.





Things to Remember

The Fourth Commandment

In the Fourth Commandment, God tells us to “Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land which the LORD your God is giving you” (Exodus 20:12; Deuteronomy 5:16). This commandment also includes our relationships with other family members and relatives. Therefore, we are commanded to love our brothers and sisters, help them, treat them with respect, and accept their faults. We may find it easier to accept someone else’s faults when we are able to admit that we have faults of our own.

It can be difficult to honor your parents if you are angry at them, or if they have hurt or disappointed you. Sometimes, parents act terribly, and that makes it hard to honor them too. Honoring does not mean that you need to ignore your feelings. Nor does it mean you have to excuse your parents’ behavior. Instead, honoring means treating your parents with consideration and trying to forgive them.

The Fourth Commandment also tells us to obey other authorities, such as teachers, older people, and the Church.

A Domestic Church

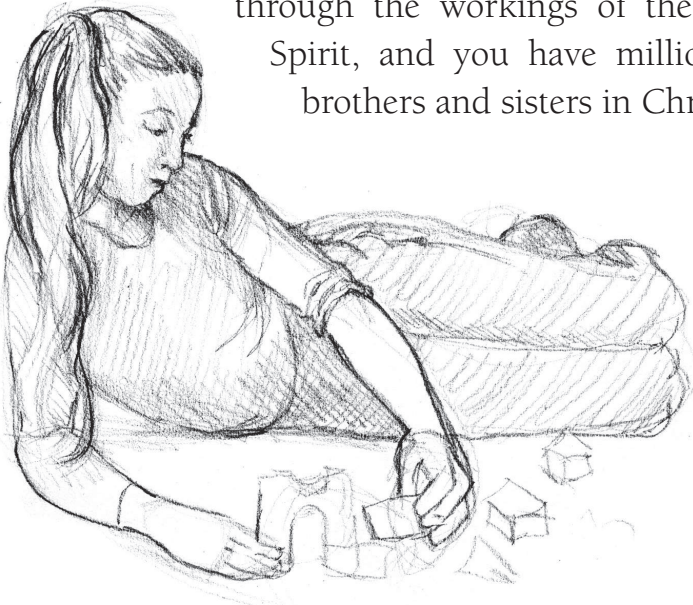
The family is so important that it's called to be a domestic church or a church in the home. This is because most kids first learn about prayer and God's love from their family. By showing love to your family and practicing Christian virtues (holy habits such as patience, kindness, and charity), you help to build a small church in your home.

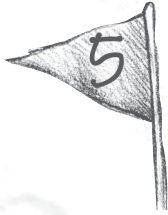
Your family may have been damaged by separation or divorce, but it is still a family. There is no hurt that is too big for God to heal.

You are always part of God's family.

As a Christian, you also belong to God's family. This happened at your Baptism when you became a member of the Church, the body of Christ. The Church is the community of people who are baptized followers of Jesus Christ. As a result of your

Baptism, you are united with all Christians through the workings of the Holy Spirit, and you have millions of brothers and sisters in Christ!





Loving Your Family

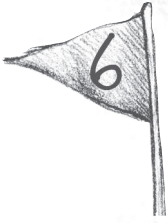
Ethan seemed to forget about his part in loving his family members.

How could you do a better job of loving your family members?

Write your answer below.

(Examples: showing more respect to my parents and/or siblings, doing extra chores, looking after a younger sibling, apologizing when I'm wrong, understanding another's point of view, telling family members I love them, and so on.)





Living in and for Christ

Ethan's aunt pointed out that God was still with him and his family too.

Below are ways to remember God at home.
Check off all the things you will try.







- Pray with my family at meals
- Say the Rosary together
- Make a shrine to Jesus or the Blessed Mother in my home or yard
- Celebrate the date of my Baptism with my godparents
- Place statues or pictures of Jesus or the Blessed Mother in my bedroom or living room
- Read the Bible together
- Attend Mass together
- Place a holy water font by our front door
- Celebrate the feast day of the saint I was named after
- Read about the saints and holy days noted on a calendar and discuss them




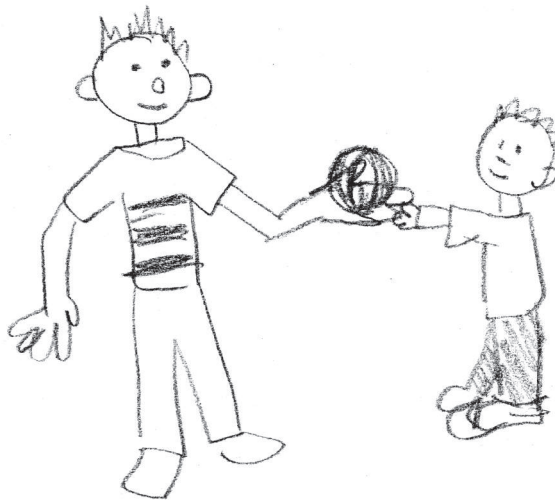


Extra Things to Help You

-  Look back at the section “Facts About Families.” Choose one and write about how it applies to your family, or draw a picture that shows how it applies.
-  Set aside a day (or part of a day) to do something someone in your family wants to do. For example, maybe your dad or sister enjoys watching a certain sports team on TV. Or, perhaps your mom or brother enjoys planting flowers. Join your family member in this activity, even if it’s not what you like to do. You’ll notice your relationship to that person grow closer as a result.
-  Surprise your parent or sibling with a special note. It can be a thank-you note, one that says “I love you,” or a note to let them know you’re thinking of them during a stressful time. Put the note where your family member will be sure to see it (for example, in a backpack, briefcase, or purse). They’ll likely appreciate your thoughtfulness.
-  In addition to showing extra consideration toward a family member, consider doing something to help someone in your community. For example, you could participate in a food and/or clothing drive at your school or church, volunteer at a soup kitchen, or do some other community service

project. When we help those less fortunate, it can remind us of the blessings we have (such as our own families).

 Ask your mom or dad if you can have a family meeting at least once a month in each home. This can be a special time set aside with either your mom or dad to discuss matters that affect you and your siblings. After the meeting, your parents can then discuss any important concerns or decisions that have to be finalized. A family meeting can include assigning chores, deciding how the holidays will be spent, or more serious matters like how to handle an illness of a relative or a change in family finances. The meeting can be used to share positives too, such as what's going well in your family. Family meetings can do a lot to strengthen your family.



PRAYER

Lord, I'm struggling. My family has changed in ways I'm finding hard to accept. Give me your peace, and the grace to understand that no one's family is perfect. Help me recognize that everyone has limitations. Show me, and all my family members, how to adjust to what has happened. Teach me how to love the members of my family more, and to be more grateful for the ways they show their love for me. You have the power to bring good from every situation. Help me to grow from this experience. Amen.

Take Aways

Write down two or three things in this chapter that you'd like to remember or think will help you the most.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____