NESTLING MINDS

Tough Talks

A Parent's Guide to Navigating Difficult Conversations with Your Kids

Talking About Divorce or Separation in the Family (5 to 12 years)



Helping Kids Feel Safe, Loved, and Seen During Family Changes

WHO THIS GUIDE IS FOR

This guide is for parents of children aged 5 to 12 navigating divorce, separation, or major family restructuring. Whether you're preparing to talk about it, co-parenting post-separation, or noticing your child struggling after changes, this guide offers clear, compassionate tools to help your child feel secure and loved throughout.

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WHAT THIS GUIDE COVERS ?

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WHY THIS CONVERSATION MATTERS

For children, divorce often feels like the ground shifting beneath their feet. Even if they're not fully aware of the details, they sense tension, changes, and worry about losing their sense of safety.

What they need from you is clarity without cruelty, and reassurance without overpromising.

"Children don't need all the details. They need to know what's changing—and what never will: your love.".

WHAT TO SAY (AND NOT SAY) WHEN BREAKING THE NEWS

What To Say

Use simple, honest language without blaming either parent.

"We have something important to tell you. We've decided not to live together anymore, but we will both always love you, and we will both be your parents forever."

"You didn't cause this. It's not because of anything you did or said. This is a decision between the adults."

"We'll make sure you know what to expect, and you can always ask us anything."

What Not To Say

- **"Your dad/mom left us."**
- **"We just fell out of love."**
  (This is confusing to children who equate love with security.)
- **"Don't cry, it'll be fine."**
- **"You'll get used to it."**

These responses may shut down emotion or create guilt, shame, or misplaced blame.

REASSURING KIDS: LOVE, BLAME BELONGING

Every child wonders:

- Did I cause this?
- Will I still see both parents?
- What if I feel sad, mad, or want us to be a family again?

Here's what to reinforce—**again and again:**

- "You are deeply loved—by both of us."
- "This was an adult decision. Nothing you did or didn't do made this happen."
- "It's okay to feel sad, confused, or even angry. Your feelings make sense."

Even if your co-parent isn't always available or loving:

"Families can look different, but your heart is never short on love. You're allowed to love both homes, both parents."

EMOTIONAL REACTIONS WHAT YOU MIGHT SEE

Age Group	Emotional Responses	Behavioral Signs
5–7 yrs	Fear of abandonment, guilt, magical thinking ("I can fix this")	Regressing (bedwetting, tantrums, clinginess)
8–12 yrs	Anger, confusion, loyalty conflict, sadness, withdrawal	Academic issues, acting "too grown-up," aggression or silence

Tip: Respond with presence, not perfection.

"It's okay to miss how things were. We can talk about it together."

COMMON QUESTIONS AND GENTLE ANSWERS

Q: "Do you still love each other?"

"We care about each other, but we don't want to be married anymore. What hasn't changed is how much we love you."

Q: "Can't you just get back together?"

"We know it's hard to hear. But our decision is final. It's okay to feel sad or even mad about that."

Q: "Will I have to choose who to live with?"

"No. Grown-ups will decide together how to make sure you see both of us. Your job is to be a kid."

Q: "Why do my friends have one home and I have two?"

"Every family is different. Some families live in one home, some in two. What matters is that you are loved and cared for in both places."

IF THE OTHER PARENT ISN'T SUPPORTIVE

Sometimes, your co-parent may:

- Not want to talk about it with the child
- Blame you in front of them
- Be inconsistent in visitation or messaging

In these cases, your role becomes even more important as the anchor parent.

What you can do:

- Stick to your truth without attacking the other parent
- Repeat:

  "It's okay to love both of us. You never have to choose."

  "What they said might feel confusing. I'll always answer your questions honestly and kindly."

Keep emotional doors open, even when your co-parent doesn't.

TOOLS FOR HEALING AND MOVING FORWARD

- **Use a weekly calendar** (color-coded) so the child knows where they'll be.
- **Pack "transition bags"** with comfort objects that travel between homes.
- **Start a "Feelings Journal"** where they can draw or write when words are hard.
- **Have a code word or object** to carry when they're missing the other parent.
- **Create a ritual** for pickups/drop-offs (e.g., same goodbye hug, joke, or phrase)

"We're still your family. It just looks different now."

BOOKS AND STORY RESOURCES
(SUGGESTED, NOT FREE)

Here are books that offer gentle, relatable explanations—many available online or via libraries:

Ages 4–7:









Ages 8-12:





These books are not freely available online, but they are widely used by therapists, educators, and families.

Parent Reflection

MOVING FORWARD IT'S NOT ABOUT PERFECTION

Your child doesn't need you to "fix" the divorce.

They need you to:

- Keep showing up.
- Stay open to hard feelings.
- Help them build new safety in this new shape of family.

"Even though this is hard, we're still a family.

And you will always be loved, wherever you are."

PARENTS REFLECTION

- Have I made space for my child's questions—even the hard ones?
- Am I modeling calm and honesty, even when I feel sad myself?
- Have I reminded them lately: *"None of this is your fault"?*
- Have I shared what **won't** change?

And remember—supporting your child starts with supporting yourself. If you ever feel unsure about how to navigate this chapter, it's okay to reach out for help. Whether it's through a counsellor, a parenting coach, or a gentle outside voice, you don't have to do it alone.

*At **Nestling Minds**, we're here to walk with you through the hard stuff—offering support for parents, kids, and schools as they navigate change, emotion, and new beginnings.*

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At Nestling Minds, we're here to walk with you through the hard stuff—offering support for parents, kids, and schools as they navigate change, emotion, and new beginnings.

Difficult conversations with your kids may be uncomfortable, but they're essential for building trust and emotional connection. You don't need all the answers—just a listening ear, an open heart, and the courage to be honest. These moments strengthen your bond and teach your child how to face life's challenges with confidence and compassion.

Stay Joyful, Stay Curious,

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