

# Living in Relationship

## Topic 3

### A Difficult Time for the Family

*None knows the weight of another's burden.*

George Herbert

**A Difficult Time for the Family**

As you grow up, your family changes and becomes a more grown-up family. That happens to every family.

There are other changes in families. People move to another house, new babies are born, or parents may change jobs. Has your family had a change like this?

There are also some changes that are very difficult. Perhaps a parent is out of work. Or maybe someone in the family becomes very ill or dies. In Tim Casey's family, his father had a terrible accident seven years ago, and can no longer walk. When difficult changes happen, family members feel upset, worried, and sad. They may also feel angry because they don't like what is happening.

Another very sad event happens in some families. Sometimes parents decide not to live together anymore. When parents separate, it affects every member of the family. It is important for family members to share their feelings with each other and with their friends. They also need to share their feelings with God.

Beatriz Perez has a friend, Andrea, whose family is going through a very difficult time. Beatriz needs some help to understand how she can be a good friend to Andrea.

**Beatriz and Andrea**

One Sunday evening, Beatriz closed her books. "I've finished my homework," she said.

"So have I," her mother said, as she folded the last piece of laundry. She looked at Beatriz. "You're quiet tonight," she said. "Did you and Andrea have a fight today?"



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Beatriz sighed. "I wish it weren't happening."

"I do too," Mrs. Perez said. "But I know that Andrea's parents love her and her brother very much, and they want to do the best they can for their children. Even if they don't live together, they are still Andrea's parents."

"What can I do?" Beatriz asked.

"You can try to be a very good friend to Andrea. If you think about how she's feeling, it will help you to be patient. And we can both pray for Andrea and her family."

"I will," Beatriz said. "And I'll ask Papa to look after them."

Mrs. Perez smiled. "That's a good idea," she said.

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Andrea needs a good friend. She might not want to talk to Beatriz about what is happening in her family. But Beatriz can help just by spending time with her and by being patient.

What we see and do affects other people. We can help when something sad has happened to one of our friends. We can't take the hurt away, but we can make it a little bit easier. We can listen and be especially careful of the other person's feelings. We can be friendly and loyal, even if the other person isn't being very friendly. We can make a difference just by being there.



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**A Prayer for Families**

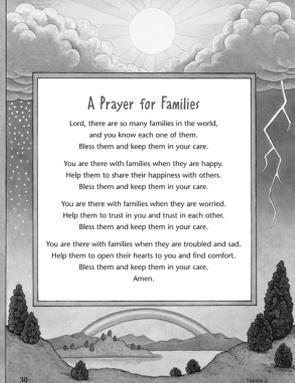
Lord, there are so many families in the world, and you know each one of them. Bless them and keep them in your care.

You are there with families when they are happy. Help them to share their happiness with others. Bless them and keep them in your care.

You are there with families when they are worried. Help them to trust in you and trust in each other. Bless them and keep them in your care.

You are there with families when they are troubled and sad. Help them to open their hearts to you and find comfort. Bless them and keep them in your care.

Amen.



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## Expectations

The students will:

- identify different strategies to manage stress in situations in which they have some control and situations over which they have less immediate influence.
- identify some of the feelings that children experience as a result of separation and divorce.
- recognize the need to be sensitive to the feelings of those who have recently experienced a separation in their families.

## Note to the Teacher

Families change for a variety of reasons. One of the most serious reasons families change is because of the separation of parents. This event profoundly affects all family members. The purpose of this topic is to help the students understand and be sensitive to the feelings of children involved in a parental separation.

In grades 1 to 3 in *Fully Alive*, students learn about mental health, different feelings, and reactions the body has to stress. In this lesson, students learn about factors that they have some control over, and factors that are out of their control, such as parental separation.

It is quite possible that there are children in your classroom who have experienced or are presently experiencing some of the feelings discussed in this topic. It is important that you be sensitive to their need and that of their families for privacy. This topic with its story, “Beatriz and Andrea,” is intended to provide a safe vehicle in a classroom situation to discuss the feelings of sadness, anger, guilt, and confusion that are inevitably aroused by separation and divorce. There are group discussion programs available for children who have experienced a parental separation that are designed to be used outside the classroom. The focus of such programs is on the children’s feelings and their need to share these feelings with others who have similar experiences.

This topic may raise a number of questions from students: What is a separation? If people are separated, do they get divorced? Why do parents stop loving each other? If you pray really hard, will God make your parents get back together? In addition to having questions such as these, most children worry at some time or another that their parents will separate.

Students’ questions about separation and divorce should be answered, but it is important to keep the focus of the topic in mind, which is the feelings of children involved in a parental separation and the response of friends and classmates. In other words, it is important not to let this topic become a discussion of the event of separation and divorce.

The following answers to questions students may ask about separation and divorce may be helpful to you. As you present this topic, you should be aware of its sensitivity and the need to be very careful not to worry or upset the students.

- **What is a separation?**

Sometimes parents make a very serious decision not to live together any more. They decide to separate and live apart. This is a difficult decision, and it affects all of the family members.

- **If people are separated, do they get divorced?**

After people are separated for a while, they sometimes get a divorce. But sometimes they may decide to live together again.

- **Why do parents stop loving each other?**

Everybody has difficulty being loving sometimes. People aren’t perfect; they make mistakes and they fail. We all need God’s help to be loving people. When people live together and can’t get along with each other or find a way to settle their differences, it’s a very unhappy sit-

uation. After a while, it seems as if all the love they had for each other is gone. But in one way, no matter what happens, the love is never really gone. Children are a sign of the love parents had for each other. And even when parents no longer live together, they continue to love their children.

- **Do parents sometimes separate because of something their children did that made them unhappy or made life difficult for them?**

Children sometimes believe this, but it's not true. When parents separate, it is for reasons between them, not because of anything children did or didn't do. It is very difficult for children to understand grown-up problems, which is why they sometimes feel guilty. They think they must be the problem that caused their parents to separate. They shouldn't feel guilty because they aren't the problem. This is not something children can control or be responsible for.

- **If you pray really hard, will God make your parents get back together again?**

God doesn't *make* us do things. God created us to be free. We are responsible for what we do. But parents always need our prayers, especially if they are having difficulties. We can ask God to guide them and help them do what is right.

Students' questions about separation and divorce should be addressed, but it is important to keep the focus of the discussion on the feelings of the children involved in a parental separation.

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## Program Resources

- Student Book, pages 27 – 30
- Family Connections (Difficult Changes in the Family)
- BLM #12 — A Prayer for Families
- BLM #12.1 — Managing Stressful Situations

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## *We Experience*

Read together the opening section of page 27 of the student book and invite the students' response. You might ask them:

- Changes in families are always difficult. Why? (we like things to stay the same; we depend on our families and changes may worry and upset us)

You might mention a common family change that has happened in your family (a child leaving for university, moving, a new baby) and what your feelings were.

Invite the students to think of small changes that they found difficult, like moving or going to a new school. How did they feel about these changes? You might ask them:

- How do you think the Casey family felt when Tim's father was hurt and couldn't walk any more? (upset, worried, angry, sad)

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## *We Discover*

Read together the story, "Beatriz and Andrea," and invite the students' response. You might ask them:

- What did you learn from this story?
- What are some of Andrea's feelings? (sad, angry, upset) You may want to mention that sometimes children feel guilty when their parents separate. They think they are to blame in some way, but they aren't, and this can be a source of considerable stress for children.

Explain to the students that stress is something your body feels when you are worried or uncomfortable about something. It is a part of life, and there are times when stress can be helpful and give you energy or motivation. Being aware of our thoughts and feelings helps us to decide what we can do to support ourselves at challenging times, both when we have some control or influence over what is causing the stress and when we don't. Different strategies work in different situations. Explain that it is important to be able to know what things in life we have some control over and what things we do not, which can vary, depending on the circumstances. Sometimes we can lessen the stress or impact of a situation (calm the fire) but we can't make it go away. Create a t-chart with students listing stressful situations where they have some control and situations which they cannot control.

Share the following example with students:

- I can have a new pair of skates if I change the way I spend my allowance and save for a new pair or do some chores for neighbours who would pay me. However, no matter how much money I make doing chores for a neighbour, I cannot help my parents pay for car repairs. I may still feel badly that my parents are arguing about money, but I cannot change the situation.

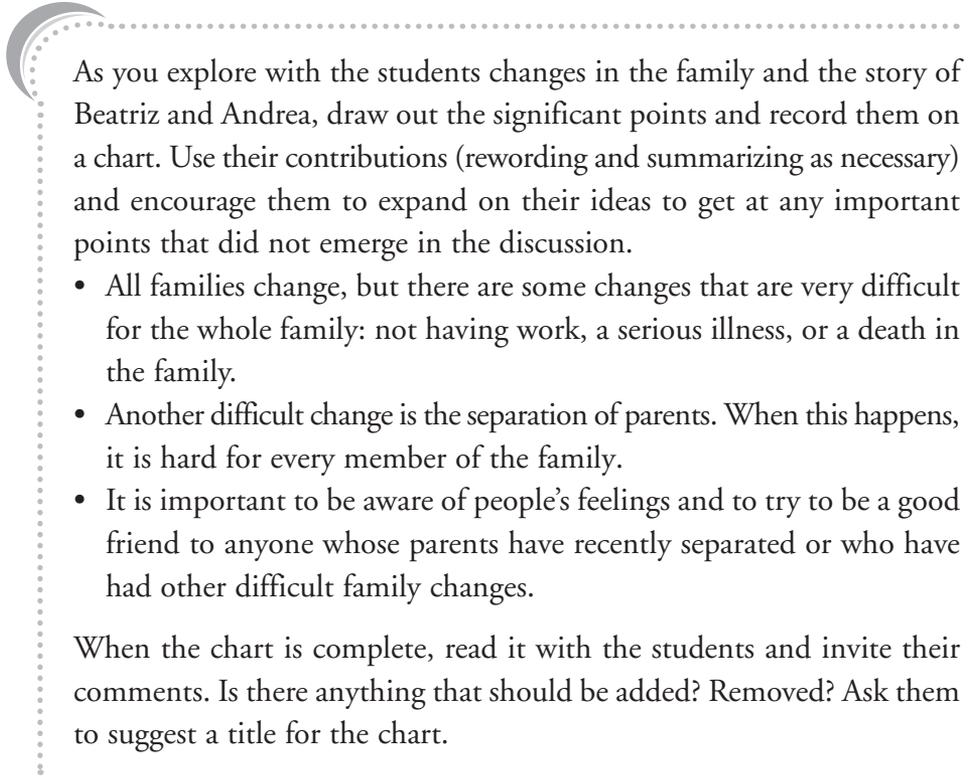
Discuss these questions as a class.

- What is the stressful situation about?
- What effect does the stressful situation create for me and others?
- If I did something different would the stress be lessened for me and others?
- If I did something different would the stressful situation be solved?

Discuss with students different strategies they can use to manage their stress in these situations. (writing about their feelings in their journal, finding someone to talk with about their feelings)

Encourage them to try praying to God for guidance, deep breathing, exercising, spending time with friends, sharing their worries with a trusted adult.

Have students work in pairs or small groups to complete BLM #12.1 — Managing Stressful Situations. As a whole class activity, discuss the strategies that students came up with to reduce the stress of the situations they explored.



As you explore with the students changes in the family and the story of Beatriz and Andrea, draw out the significant points and record them on a chart. Use their contributions (rewording and summarizing as necessary) and encourage them to expand on their ideas to get at any important points that did not emerge in the discussion.

- All families change, but there are some changes that are very difficult for the whole family: not having work, a serious illness, or a death in the family.
- Another difficult change is the separation of parents. When this happens, it is hard for every member of the family.
- It is important to be aware of people's feelings and to try to be a good friend to anyone whose parents have recently separated or who have had other difficult family changes.

When the chart is complete, read it with the students and invite their comments. Is there anything that should be added? Removed? Ask them to suggest a title for the chart.

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## *We Respond*

Give the students copies of BLM #12, A Prayer for Families, and say the prayer together. Ask the children to take the sheet home and invite their families to pray for families.

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*We Explore (related activities)*

- **Family Connections** — Send home the Family Connections sheet (Difficult Changes in the Family) so that the students can share with their families what they have been learning.
- **Journal Writing** — Depending the interest and maturity of your students, you may want to ask them to write a private response to this topic in their journals.
- **Coping Activity** — Invite students to identify one of the topics discussed and suggest the best coping strategies for managing stress in that situation.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Managing Stressful Situations

Read each scenario and write out what strategy could be used to manage the stress of that situation.

Scenario 1: Luca told his best friend Marcellus that he doesn't like another boy in their class. Marcellus told that boy how Luca felt. The boy was very hurt and upset. Luca felt embarrassed and angry with Marcellus. Marcellus thought he was helping by telling the boy. What can Marcellus do?

Strategy: \_\_\_\_\_

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Scenario 2: Mary's mom got a new job in another city that starts right away. Mary and her family need to move immediately and next week Mary will be starting at a new school where she doesn't know anyone.

Strategy: \_\_\_\_\_

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Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Managing Stressful Situations

Scenario 3: Jeremiah is a member of his school's Eco Club, Cross Country Running Club, and the Dance Club. He is busy three lunch times a week and two days after school to participate in these activities. He also wants to join a soccer team which practices one day after school with games on the weekend. It is becoming difficult for Jeremiah to complete his school work because he is so busy.

Strategy: \_\_\_\_\_  
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