

STARTING TOUGH CONVERSATIONS

DIVORCE ISN'T EASY

It can be uncomfortable to have a conversation with a friend or family member who may be going through the process of a divorce or a separation with their spouse/partner. If you find out that a friend or family member is going through a separation or divorce show your care, concern, and respect for them by letting them know that you understand that this may be a tough time for them. So how do you do that? What do you say? How do you show your concern for them without being perceived as crossing the line? How do you support them through this process?

RECOGNIZING THAT A FRIEND IS HAVING A HARD TIME WITH COPING THROUGH A SEPARATION OR DIVORCE

- Your friend appears overly anxious or sad
- Withdrawing and turning away support
- Disengaging from responsibilities
- Losing sleep and feeling restless
- Appearing physically disheveled
- Not caring for their personal environment (dirty home, car, etc. when they were not previously this way)
- Distracting self with high-risk behaviors such as substance use, excessive alcohol use, promiscuous behaviors

TIPS ON STARTING THE CONVERSATION

1. Check in with them to let them know you care. You can do that through a telephone call, or a quick text message. "Hey man, I haven't seen you in a while. I know that you are going through some difficult changes. Why don't we hang out?"
2. Don't judge. Every marriage and relationship has very different dynamics and what works for one may not work for another.
3. Be willing to listen to them express their feelings without needing to know all of the events that led up to the divorce/separation. Don't ask for the details. When you start asking lots of questions you may unintentionally make the person feel judged or reprimanded for their action or inaction. "I'm here for you to listen or just sit quietly. We can talk if you would like to, but we can also sit in silence. I just want you to know that I'm here for you."
4. Acknowledge that this may be hard on them. Also, understand that you may not be able to help them and that there are people who are trained that can. "Divorce isn't easy. It's normal to still have feelings, recognize that it is not going to work out. That takes a lot of strength."
5. Support them in seeking support from a counselor or a chaplain. Help them look up the number to the Community Counseling Center, the Family Advocacy Program, or walk with them to the Chaplain's office. "I know of a great counselor that I used to talk to. Here is his/her name and number."
6. Understand that they may be alone for the first time and may just need to be around people. Invite them over for the Thanksgiving meal, include them in your ultimate Frisbee tournament, or invite them over for Friday night pizza and movie night. "Come on over. I've missed spending time with you."
7. Remind them by your words and your actions that you are there to help and support them through this process.

TIPS TO HELP YOU OR SOMEONE YOU KNOW GOING THROUGH THIS DIFFICULT TIME

Going through a divorce or separation is never easy. It does not matter if you were married for one year or twenty-five years, the decision to end your marriage has a profound impact on your life. Families face huge changes to living arrangements, finances, and daily norms. Here are some tips to help you or someone you know get through this difficult time:

Take care of yourself: Be good to yourself mentally and physically. Make sure you are eating properly, getting enough sleep, and exercising. Take time to relax, do something you enjoy, and recharge your batteries.

Invest in yourself: Do something that you have always wanted to do. Sign up for a painting class, join a club, take a class, or volunteer somewhere. Take the time to enjoy life, have new experiences, and make new friends.

Find support: You are not alone in this. Lean on your friends and family to help you. You can also join a support group either online or in person to talk to others who are having similar experiences.

Having children further complicates a divorce or separation. Here are some tips to help kids going through this situation:

Maintain routines: Try to keep your family schedule. Maintain the schedule for homework, dinner, sleep or whatever family routines you might have. Kids thrive in a predictable environment.

Listen: Listen to their concerns. Kids will often place some degree of blame on themselves. Reassure them that the divorce is not because of something they did or did not do.

Protect them: Your kids do not belong in the middle of the conflict. Do not make them take sides or use them as messengers. Avoid badmouthing their parent in front of them.

SUPPORT & RESOURCES

Services and resources are available if you or your children need additional support to help get through this difficult time. Your local Family Advocacy Program and Community Counseling Program are available to provide individual and family counseling. The DSTRESS Line is available 24/7 at **1-877-476-7734** or **www.dstressline.com** if you are feeling overwhelmed and need to talk. Military OneSource has additional resources and information at **1-800-342-9647** or **<http://www.militaryonesource.mil/>**.

For information on the Family Advocacy Program and/or the Community Counseling Program, see Contact information is on the MCCS websites.

