

HOW TO TELL YOUR KIDS YOU'RE GETTING DIVORCED

Hi. This is Natalie Hoffman of Flyingfreenow.com, and you're listening to the Flying Free Podcast, a support resource for women of faith looking for hope and healing from hidden emotional and spiritual abuse.

NATALIE: Welcome to Episode 247 of the Flying Free Podcast. Today we're going to talk about how to tell kids that you're getting a divorce. Now, if you're not thinking of getting a divorce, don't turn this off just yet. I've been reading a book called "The Psychology of Money" in preparation for a book study that we're going to be doing in Flying Higher in October, and one of the concepts the author talks about is the fact that we can't know the future — we will inevitably change. We, as people, will change. Who we are today will not be who we are in five years or ten years. The choices that we're making today will most likely not be the choices that we will make forever and ever amen.

Now, I think there are exceptions to this, actually. I know some people who are the same people today that they were fifty years ago. They haven't learned anything new and they have insisted that they are right about everything, and they really haven't changed. They aren't very interesting people to hang around because they are stagnant. God is all about change. The Bible says so much about transformation and renewal and learning and growing and making all things new and change, becoming, looking forward, and so on.

The Bible is also clear that what is required for our transformation or our change to take place is humility. That is the stance that says, "I could be wrong about this." Now, it doesn't mean that we don't have convictions — it just means that we hold them loosely, knowing that we never have all the answers, and we don't have the entire big picture because all of that belongs to the Creator. We have convictions for today based on the information that we've been given so far, based on our experiences up to this point, and we've built those convictions around that, but those things might change because of this thing, this powerful force of change, called "Love."

Now, if you're listening to this and going, "Okay, that does not make any sense," I could try to explain it to you — it's not going to help. But I truly believe the Holy Spirit lives inside of you. And I believe that that powerful Being full of Love, it is at the ready to give you and impart to you all the wisdom that you need. And I encourage you to read the Gospels. Just go to the Gospels and read them over and over again and observe the life of Jesus, and I believe that you'll start to see it. Give it time, invest your heart and your mind and your soul in the pursuit of Love, capital L (God is the essence of Love, by the

way), and I promise You will catch amazing glimpses of God, of Love.

So don't just turn this off because you have no intention of getting a divorce and you think this doesn't apply to you. I promise if you listen with the full intent of walking away with a nugget of something, either for yourself or someone else you know, you will. You'll get it. You will walk away with a nugget, or maybe even more, okay? Are you ready? I mean, are you willing to give this a try? This episode is not going to be a long one, so just try it out, okay? And let's see what happens.

All right, this is a question I get a lot in my private forum, which you can be part of, by the way, if you're not already. Just go to joinflyingfree.com for more information. The question is always some version of, "I'm going to be filing for divorce soon, but I don't know how to tell my kids." Now, these women are not asking, "How do I open my mouth and say the words, 'Your dad and I are getting a divorce'?" All of these women know how to talk, so that's not what they're asking. What they really want to know is, "How do I tell my kids that their parents are getting divorced without destroying their lives?" or some version of that. Sometimes they actually do use those exact words, "destroying their lives."

We don't want to hurt our kids. Of course we don't. So we want to know if it's possible to break this kind of news to our kids without hurting them, or in some way that the hurt won't be a problem or that big of a deal. It's basically our brain saying, "I don't like pain, my kids don't like pain, so what can I do to create a pain-free existence?" which, the logical part of us knows that can't happen.

But I think it's important to understand and just acknowledge that this really is the underlying wish of our brain. Our brain is not into logic. What it is into is avoiding pain and experiencing pleasure. That's what our brain is wired to want. So these parts of us that believe these illogical things, like, "Well, they just can't experience any pain, and I'm responsible for making sure my kids are happy all the time," these parts of us are younger versions of ourselves.

You know how kids have magical thinking? Well, our younger part inside of us are magical thinkers too, and there's nothing wrong with them for being this way. But we get to decide from this place of our adulthood if we want to let those younger parts of us drive our lives or if we want to consciously choose beliefs that come from our adult self that will serve us and our kids a little bit better.

So first, we can be onto our brain when it says to us, "Well, how do I tell my kids I'm getting a divorce?" and we can ask our brain some questions. Here's the first question

to ask: "Brain," or "Self, tell me more about what the problem is here when it comes to telling the kids about the divorce," and then I want you to write down what comes up for you. And you can do this with any question, you guys. That's why I'm saying, even if you're not planning on filing for divorce, these are some tools I'm going to give you that you can use with any issue that your brain is saying, "Oh my word, this is a problem." Just say, "Tell me more about that. Why is this a problem?"

So here are some things that might come up for women who are thinking, "How am I supposed to tell my kids I'm getting a divorce?" They might write down something like this: "Well, I'm worried my kids will fall apart. My kids will blame me. They will be looked down on in their Christian school if their parents are divorced. Divorce will ruin my kids and their opportunities in life." And by the way, I actually did an episode on this. It's actually called, "Will Divorce Ruin My Kids and Their Opportunities in Life?" It's Episode 187, and you can listen to it by going to flyingfreenow.com/187 or you can look on your favorite podcast app and just look up the words "Will Divorce Ruin My Kids and Their Opportunities in Life?" if you want to. I go into more of that particular thought in that episode.

You might think, "Their lives will be destroyed." You might think "They will not have a normal family" or "They will be sad," okay? So you dump all of these thoughts out into your journal because when these thoughts are rolling around in your brain, they create a lot of chaos in your brain. And when you've got a lot of chaos in your brain, your body does not feel good. If you get them all out onto paper where you can look at them, then your logical brain can kick into gear and look logically at these thoughts, and it just eliminates a lot of the chaos, all right?

Now, I had all of these thoughts and more, so just know that it's very normal for our brain to think these thoughts. These are normal thoughts that parents have. In addition to all these thoughts, if we've been programmed to believe that divorce could cause them to fall away from God or to lose their faith or go to hell, we are especially going to be terrified. We might think that how we tell them that we're getting a divorce will be the difference between them burning forever and ever in eternal torture or living forever and ever in paradise, right? That's pretty serious.

So once you've written down all of the thoughts and beliefs that you have around this idea of telling your kids that you're getting a divorce, you look at the list and just pick one. Just one. I know women will say, "Oh no, it's so overwhelming. I have five million thoughts." It's okay. Of course you have five million thoughts. We're only going to look at one. We're going to just slow it way down and just look at one.

I'm going to go back to talking about that chaos in our brain when we have all these thoughts rolling around. There are parts of us, inside of us, that want to know that we're listening and paying attention. So they're going to get louder and louder in our brain if they're sensing that we aren't paying attention or that we're shutting down. So we want to be a loving and attentive witness to these parts of ourselves who are concerned, who have all of these concerns, these thoughts.

So we're just going to pick one, and for the sake of example, let's pick the thought, "They will not have a normal family," okay? Then you might ask yourself a question like this: "So let's go there. Let's say that they don't have a normal family. Then what?" Another angle that you can dig into is you can dig into what this belief means. So, for example, what does your brain even believe is a normal family? Everyone has a different idea of what a normal family even looks like. So you want to dig in and figure out, "What do I believe about what a normal family is?" Maybe you would write down, "A normal family is a mom, a dad, and kids. They all live together and they're happy."

So then you'd look at that, and another question you might ask yourself is, "Well, do I have a normal family now?" And you might write down, "Not really." Well, why not? "Well, right now we have a mom and a dad and kids, but we're not really very happy. We're living in lies. We have to walk on eggshells. Some of my kids are traumatized. I'm traumatized and easily triggered." So if you already don't have a normal family according to your own definition, what if it's okay to not have a normal family?

You're just digging. You're loosening up some of the threads. It's kind of like being handed a ball of twine that's all tangled up and you're going to try to loosen up these threads so that you can make sense of them. Some other questions you might ask is, "What if nobody has a normal family? What if it's better for our kids to have a safe space of peace and love than to have a normal family by this definition of what a normal family is? Or maybe what if a normal family is completely different from what we previously thought a normal family was?" And then just journal, journal, journal. Everything your brain offers or brings up, write it down, and then ask yourself questions about it.

This is what I do in my weekly coaching sessions with members of Flying Free and Flying Higher. So women come to me with their thoughts and beliefs, and then I help them question everything. Because when we already have the answers, we can't learn. When we know that we don't have the answers, that's when we are in the perfect position to learn, grow, and heal. When you become a member of Flying Free, you have access to several years' worth of past coaching calls. I know people who come in and they just binge on the coaching. They listen to it on our private podcast. They hear how it's done

and they learn how it's done, and then they can practice on themselves. Also, you can come and get coaching yourself. You can listen to other people get coached and you can come and get coaching.

So here's another example of a thought that you might want to dig into. Let's say your thought is, "My kids will fall apart." Okay, so ask the question, "Well, what does falling apart mean?" Sometimes we just need to define our terms, like, "What's a normal family?" Well, what do you mean when you say they're going to fall apart? What does that actually mean? You might write down, "Well, they'll cry," or "They'll throw things and have a temper tantrum," or "What if they have a hard time sleeping?" or "What if they yell at everybody and beg us not to do it?" and on and on and on. You can just write down everything that comes up when you ask yourself the question, "What will they do if they fall apart?"

Another really good question is, "Okay, and then what will happen? After they're done falling apart, then what?" Well, my guess — maybe they'll get used to it? Maybe they'll move on? I don't know. So here are some other questions you might ask: "Are kids never supposed to fall apart? If not, why not? If they are, why?" "Are kids supposed to always be happy and never go through anything challenging? Why or why not?" "What happens to trees, plants, animals, and humans when they have no challenges, when they have no choices, when they never take any risks, when they never make any mistakes?" "What happens to our muscles when we just lay in bed all the time?" They atrophy. Muscles get strong when they work out, when they're forced to work out and challenged — when they encounter those challenges. So do trees and people and all living things.

So do we want our kids to grow up and have no character, no opportunities to be brave, no opportunities to learn wisdom, no opportunities to grow and evolve into a stronger version of themselves, no empathy for other people who go through hard things?

What if it's okay for kids to fall apart? And then you might be reminded of the verse that says, "In this world, you will have trouble, but I have overcome the world." God never promised an easy life. In fact, He promises trouble on planet Earth. So do we trust that God will ultimately win and overcome? I think to the degree that we trust God, that is the degree that we will experience the wins. God's winning whether we are experiencing that or not. That doesn't mean we will experience the easy life. The victories always come inside of the hard stuff. And we will, as we trust God and lean into Him, we are going to be able to see those victories and we'll be able to grow stronger in our faith, and our kids will too.

It's interesting because I recently got an email from someone who said that I'm teaching things that are going to destroy the lives of children. And I thought this was fascinating. My adult daughter actually answers emails for me, and she answered this email and said, "If my mom hadn't made the choices that she made, that would have destroyed her kids." And my daughter said that she was glad that her mom got out when she did. My daughter's husband is also glad that his mother got out when she did. And now my daughter and her husband are raising their children differently, and those generational cycles of spiritual and emotional abuse and lies have been broken.

Their children are going to grow up learning about a very different God than the one that I grew up learning about. Their children will grow up immersed in love instead of terror. And I sometimes wonder how that will change the world. I may never know in my lifetime, but threatening people does not change anything. All that does is spread more fear. We got a lot of fear in the world. It doesn't change anything. Fear makes us susceptible to abusing others or to being victims. That's the fruit of fear. The fruit of God is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, and self-control. Self-control. Not control of others. Control over ourselves.

In our private forum, someone brought up the idea of showing a united front to the kids, telling the kids about the divorce. "How do I show a united front when I've got this husband who's abusive and he's actually..." A lot of times men will use their kids as a weapon in a divorce. Abusive people aren't able to put themselves into the perspective of someone else. They believe that everyone revolves around their own perspective. So they're not going to have empathy or understanding for what the kids are going through, and they're going to say things that are very destructive and harmful to the kids.

I know in our experience, my daughter was told the divorce was all her fault because he was mad at her for doing something. I don't want to get into it, but what I'm trying to say is that the idea of showing a united front is not always possible with someone who's abusive, okay? So, I mean, you're getting divorced because you're not united, right? So I'm not sure how you'll be able to present a united front to the kids. So I might set that idea aside and focus instead on yourself and what you bring to the table. Your husband is going to be who he is and he's going to do what he does. You cannot change or control that. You can only control yourself and how you show up when you're talking to your kids about the divorce.

Okay, so when it comes to this question of "How will I tell the kids?" your first challenge, then, just to sum up, is going to be to figure out what beliefs are underneath any feelings of fear or shame surrounding this issue of telling your kids, and anyone who

chooses to invest their time and emotional energy into digging into those thoughts and beliefs is going to mine many golden nuggets of truth and insight and wisdom.

And again, if you want to do this kind of work with me inside of our community, go to joinflyingfree.com for more information. Now, once you've done that work, you will instinctively get your answers. They will start coming up for you in your journal. This is how I have had some of the most profound breakthroughs in my life, is journaling and asking my brain questions.

Here's the bottom line: You know your kids better than anyone else. How you approach each child with this news might be different. How you hold space for each child to process this news may be different. You will be able to do this more effectively if you have done this first within yourself, if you have first processed all of this yourself. We cannot offer our children any more than we have already learned to offer ourselves. So important.

In addition to this, I can share one little practical tip, and that is to normalize divorce. So I grew up in a home, and I think a lot of you guys did too, where people who were divorced were criticized and shunned. It was like divorce was the unpardonable sin, and I raised my kids that way too. So is it little wonder that when I told them I had filed for divorce, they were shocked and appalled? Not the little kids, but the older ones that I had successfully programmed. It's taken one of them several years to come around. The rest needed less time and interestingly enough, the younger they were, the less time they needed.

With the really younger ones, I checked out picture books from the library about divorce, and I read those books to my kids. The books were about little kids who shared their home with... "Sometimes I go to my mommy's, sometimes I go to my daddy's. This is what it's like."

Now, I had been separated for almost two years by the time I filed, so my really little kids actually couldn't remember ever living with their dad. But for the ones who did remember, we read books about other kids who were going through this, and all of it made sense to my kids. They easily picked up on the concept — kids are very smart — and they flexibly adjusted to the new situation. I found books that were geared toward tweens for my tween kids. And then the older kids, like I said, they just needed time. But as I said, we had been separated already for almost two years, so nothing really changed as far as our life once I filed, and then the divorce took almost two years to finalize. So when it was all said and done, it was almost four years.

The worst part for all of them was when their dad moved out when we were first separated. I know they all thought that he was eventually going to move back in. I thought the same thing. But during the time that he was away, they did get used to not having him around. So when I filed for divorce, it didn't really change that much on a day-to-day basis.

I guess my point is if we make divorce a big, hairy, scary deal to our kids... I mean, if we sit down with them and we're sobbing and we're like, "I have to tell you this horrible thing is going to happen, and it's going to be horrible. And I'm so sorry. And I just can't even believe that I have to tell you this," if we do that, they're going to pick up on that. They're going to react and respond in ways that match whatever kind of energy and fear we are bringing to the table. That's why I'm recommending doing your own personal work around this so that when you do break the news, you're doing it from a space of love and hope rather than from a place of fear and despair.

So anyway, I guess the big takeaway is that parenting is always, always, always, always going to be about our own personal work. And if you are interested in doing this work with me, go to joinflyingfree.com for more information.

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