

## Tips for Teaching Children from “Nontraditional” Homes



Twenty-one million children in the United States live with either their mom or dad only. And over three million children live in their grandparents' homes.\*

You, undoubtedly, can name some of these children in your church. They have some unique situations and issues. Here are some tips to keep in mind when teaching children who are not living in two-parent homes.

### **Know Your Students**

*Know the family situation of the children in your class.*

- How many live with just one parent?
- Is the single-parent situation the result of death, divorce, or never having been married?
- Do any of your students live with grandparents? What are the circumstances?

The emotional and spiritual well-being of a child whose parent recently died or divorced is different from that of a child who has lived with one parent or a grandparent for several years. Children who never knew one parent or who have a parent in prison will have different needs.

Your ministry approach to each child and circumstance will be different as well. Read materials that will help you better understand how various family situations affect children. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you relate to each of these children.

### **Be Sensitive to Family References**

*When teaching, be sensitive when using references to traditional whole-family units. This can be especially unsettling to children whose homes have been recently torn apart.*

- If the whole-family unit is presented as the only right way to live, children in other situations may feel unacceptable and hopeless.

### **Help Students Know God's Plan**

*On the other hand, you can help children realize the whole-family unit is God's choice for the family. Most children sense this to be true and would like it in their homes.*

- Reinforce this desire in their lives without criticizing their parents. The children in your class will one day consider a marital relationship. Help them develop a healthy view of the home while they are still young and impressionable.
- A majority of single-parent children live with their mothers. This means the children grow up without a father figure in the home. A husband-wife team in the classroom helps

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provide a male role model for children. It is important for single-parent children to see a healthy marriage relationship in the context of a church environment.

### **Love Your Students**

*Children need to know that someone loves and accepts them for who they are, no matter what their home is like. Your love can help them accept God's unconditional, unchanging love for them.*

- Some parents share custody of their children, which means the children may not be in your class every week. Attendance contests can be hurtful to them. If you do projects that carry over for several weeks, look for ways that children who are not there each week can continue to participate.
- Be aware that finances may not be available for the children to do extra church activities. Develop a fund that will cover expenses so that all children can participate. Provide this in a confidential manner so that unnecessary attention isn't brought to the child's situation.
- Children may feel stress, guilt, or great sadness and need to talk. Be available to listen. Let a troubled child express his feelings freely. Pray with the child.
- It is important for you to get to know the parents of the children in your class. Assure them of your love for their children. Include single parents and grandparents in class activities. Do all you can to build a sense of trust with parents so you can minister to the family.
- Help the children view God as a loving Father. Even though they may not have an earthly father at home, their Heavenly Father will never leave them.

Children who are living in "nontraditional" family situations have special needs. Providing godly, loving care to help them through the difficult times they face can be a rich and rewarding part of your ministry.

\*March 2004, U.S. Census Bureau Statistics

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