

# Parents or Grandparents Who Want Counseling For Their Child

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As a CM leader, you may be approached by a parent or grandparent who wants you to “counsel his/her child.” This is always a challenging encounter! On one hand, it is a compliment that the parent or grandparent views you as someone who could help his/her child. It may also be a terrifying question because you are not necessarily trained to wade into the deep waters of counseling a child.



The fact that a parent or grandparent wants you to “counsel his/her child” proves two important facts:

- 1) That the parent or grandparent realizes that the home environment is not the best it could be, and
- 2) That the parent or grandparent wants what is best for his/her child.

These are both very good things! How you respond to their request is critical. You don’t want to jump in and take responsibility for the child’s happiness, and you don’t want to ignore the parent’s cry for help.

If the parent or grandparent asks you this question at a time when you are very busy, you may need to quickly pray with the parent or grandparent and ask him/her to come back when you can talk more freely, or you may want to make an appointment to talk with the parent or grandparent later during the week. It is important to not ignore the parent’s cry for help! If you can break free for a few minutes to talk with this parent or grandparent right away, do so.

When you can spend time with the parent or grandparent, it is important to listen to the parent or grandparent as he/she tells you about the child. Let him/her describe what prompted him/her to ask you for help. What does the child do or say that causes the parent or grandparent to be concerned? **It is important to have this conversation apart from the child!** To have the child listening to the parent or grandparent describe behavior that concerns the parent or grandparent may only aggravate the situation. It may make the child feel guilty or responsible for the problems in the home.



Remind the parent or grandparent that his/her child might be reflecting the tension and insecurity in the home. A child is very aware of the tension and unrest in a home. Parents or grandparents can’t hide the tension from the children. When parents or grandparents ask you to counsel their child, it is important to begin with them first. They don't usually like that! They want the emphasis to be put on the child, and not on them. But the “root” of the problem expressed by the child is most often found in the tension between the parents or grandparents. This could be similar in a single-parent home. The tension that a single parent or grandparent feels is unimaginable! Helping the parent or grandparent cope with life will always help the children.

If the parent or grandparent agrees to talk with you, apart from the child, you must remember your limitations. You are NOT a licensed counselor (unless you are). You are simply a Christian who is aware of some wisdom regarding children, and who is willing to listen and help if possible. One of the greatest roles you could play is to help the parent or grandparent “see” more clearly, and to recommend that they speak with a trained counselor for more help. The parent or grandparent know and trust you. This is very good. You may be used by God to give them some simple ideas for how to improve the “feeling tone” of the home.



Since the parent or grandparent is talking with you, it is okay to be bold and say something like, "...if you really want to help your child, do all you can, with the amazing power of God, to bring more peace into the family." If the parents are considering a divorce, encourage them to not put this little innocent child through a lifetime of pain because of a divorce. Beg them (this is a strong word, but it is applicable here) to seek the power of God to help them fix the problem. Challenge them to remember what attracted them to each other at the very beginning and ask them what made them forget about those things. Obviously, life has taken its toll on them somehow! But God can heal and restore their relationship if they submit to Him. If they are not willing to work on "fixing" their marriage, then the only thing they can do is to comfort their child through the terrible, painful process of divorce. Here are some ideas to bring more peace into the home:

- **Isolate the tension** - Absolutely agree on no fights, arguments, or tension around the child! He/she knows what is going on, but if the parents can agree to keep the stress away from him/her, that would be better.
- **Physical attention** - Children need a lot of hugging and touching! Children going through a divorce need twice as much from BOTH parents! Both parents must hold, hug, and cuddle the child!
- **Intimate times** - Children need a lot of intimacy! Children going through a divorce need twice as much from BOTH parents! Intimate times are before going to sleep (reading talking, praying, laughing), getting up in the morning or from a nap (cuddling, laughing, talking, stroking), while eating, and playing with him/her. Statements of love and value, with physical touching and hugging, must be "sprinkled" throughout these times! These are all identified in Deut. 6: 4-9!
- **Play times** - Both parents need to be involved with play times! Building with blocks or Legos, coloring, craft projects (cutting, gluing), making a "fort" with pillows/cushions/blankets, pretending with dolls or toy animals, etc. These times must be calm, fun, and intimate! Statements of love and value, with physical touching and hugging, must be "sprinkled" throughout these times!
- **Honesty** – Children have feelings, fears, and emotions! The tension in the home is probably causing fear and emotional instability. Encourage the parents to ask simple questions as they play with and cuddle their child. The questions can be, "What scares you?" or "Tell me how you're feeling." or "Are you worried about something?" Obviously, the child will talk about what is going on! The parents don't want to hear it, but it will be good for them to realize that they can't protect their child from being harmed by their problems!



Encourage the parents to become the "therapists" for their child! They may not want to hear this! The parents may somehow want to be "free" from the challenge of fixing their marriage, without any effects on their innocent child. Don't be afraid of using their child as an incentive to get them to work on their marriage! They have already expressed concern about that! Use it!

There are many studies about the effects of divorce on children! It's never a good thing. It's a delusion to believe that "kids are strong, they'll adapt." The emotional scars stay with them their whole life!

### **For Single Parents or Parents Not Considering Divorce**



If a single parent or a parent who is not considering divorce asks you to "counsel" their child, there are definitely things that you can suggest that may relax the stress in the child's life.

The investment of **TIME** and **ATTENTION** is the best “antidote” to a stressful home. The expectations on a single parent are significant. The pressure to get everything “done” in a day, while still working a full-time job can lead to an emotional or mental “breakdown” for the parent. In both single parent homes, and dual parent homes, the home may be filled with urgency and pressure. These pressures may result in short, harsh commands from the parent to the child. The parent may “evolve” into this style of parenting as a desperate attempt to survive. When the child was young, the parent may not see any negative results from this communication style; but as the child grows, the child will most likely exhibit emotional blowups, crying, or even verbal attacks back to the parent. A parent who asks you to counsel their child is probably experiencing the result of many months of stressful lifestyle in the home. There is no quick “fix” for this challenge, but there are things you can suggest for the parent to try.

- **Protect The Sensitive Times** – There are 4 “sensitive times” described in Deuteronomy 6: 4-9.

*“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is One. And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These words I am commanding you today are to be upon your hearts. And you shall teach them diligently to your children and speak of them **when you sit at home** (inside times or mealtimes) and **when you walk by the way** (driving or walking), **when you lie down** (bedtime) and **when you rise up** (morning).”*

These “sensitive times” are described by God, who made us all. He knows what we need! He knows what the child of this parent needs! Using the 4 “sensitive times” carefully will lower the stress in the child’s life and bring peace to a busy or stressful home! The 4 “sensitive times” are:

- **Inside Times or Mealtimes** – (“...when you sit at home”) Parents or grandparents will probably have to plan and work toward taking advantage of “inside times,” or “mealtimes.” The average home today is busy, noisy, and filled with chores or commands. Slowing down to talk calmly, listen intently, and enjoy some peaceful moments together takes prayer, discipline, and planning. Planning more time for meals, planning time to play games together, do crafts together, cook or bake together, or watch movies or shows together may require that parents or grandparents organize their days differently. Encourage the parents or grandparents to talk about their day, ask children about their day, explore feelings and fears, and to shower their children with compliments and words of encouragement. God’s command in Deuteronomy encourages parents or grandparents to “season” these sensitive times with His Word, and hopeful thoughts about His care. This takes work, but the surprising deep joy of enjoying moments like these will be worth the effort.
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- **Driving or Walking** – (“...when you walk by the way”) Today’s parents or grandparents don’t “walk by the way” very often! We move quickly toward goals or with the purpose of checking things off of an endless “To Do” list. Significant conversations happen and relationships are deepened during simple “walk by the way” encounters. Once again, though, these encounters don’t “just happen.” They must be planned. This “sensitive time” is often robbed by giving children electronic devices to occupy them. When a child is enthralled by a “screen,” he/she is basically in another world! The parent may enjoy some “me time,” but the end result is a missed opportunity! Every parent goes on errands in the car. These errands can become significant times of conversation between the parent and the child. Today’s world is hostile and dangerous. Because
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of this, parents or grandparents may not want to walk around the block or in a park with their children. That's understandable. If a parent or grandparent has multiple children, walking together may not be an option. Whether they spend time with their child in the car or in a park, the basic principle is to talk about life and God during these times, rather than simply ignoring each other. Parents or grandparents may need conversation starter ideas. Do some research to make a list of some ideas they could use to start conversations or to understand their child's feelings, fears, and hopes about life. Encourage the parent to "season" their conversations with scriptures or comments about God's love and care.



- **Bedtime** – (“...when you lie down”) Unfortunately, in most homes today, bedtime is a time that is filled with fighting and barking commands. God knows that laying down and getting ready to go to sleep is a powerful “sensitive time” for everyone. Taking full advantage of this “sensitive time” takes work. It takes time! One of the greatest ways to make bedtime more peaceful is to begin earlier in the evening. Parents or grandparents with multiple children may have to create a staggered bedtime schedule to provide adequate attention to each child during bedtime. After taking a shower, brushing their teeth, and getting their pajamas on, the next thing that happens is the “magic” of this “sensitive time.” Regardless of how old or young the child is, creating some private moments between the parent and the child as the child is in the bed is powerful! If the parent feels okay with doing so, he/she may lay down next to the child on top of the covers. If this isn't something that makes the child feel comfortable, the parent may just sit beside the bed. This moment should be filled with soft conversations about the day, feelings, disappointments, perceptions, etc. The parent should ask how the encounters of the day made the child feel. The parent can also share reactions to their own day. The conversations must be “seasoned” with much eye-contact, words of affirmation and love, and connections to God's Word. The wonderful encounter can end with singing and praying together. Hugs should follow just before the light is turned off.
- **Morning** – (“...when you rise up”) During the school year, the morning may also be a time of rushing and angry words. Getting up and getting ready for school or work has pressure connected to it all. Once again, adjusting the wake-up time will help reduce the pressure. A “good” morning time includes soothing music, a relaxing breakfast, calming conversations, hugs, and words of encouragement and love. This “picture” is much different from most homes in the morning. A parent who views the morning as a barrier to getting in the car is missing the potential for this important “sensitive time.” As with all the other “sensitive times” listed in Deuteronomy 6: 4-9, taking advantage of the morning takes work and a disciplined plan. The goal of the morning should be to have a calm encounter before the day begins. Accomplishing this goal requires an earlier “get up” time, some consistent encouragement to work through the process (getting dressed, brushing teeth, combing the hair, making the bed, etc.), and reminding the child that the goal is to have a relaxing time together before the day begins. A good thing to suggest to the parent is to cook or prepare a yummy breakfast for the child. The definition of “yummy” is mostly defined by the child, and yet it is also nutritious. As the child comes to the table, the parent should say something



like, “I made this for you because I know you like it, and because I love you!” As the parent and child enjoy the yummy breakfast, encourage the parent to “season” the conversation with words of encouragement, love, and connections to God’s principles presented in His Word. When it is time to begin the day (leave for work or school), the parent should remind the child that he/she loves him/her and share some hugs together.

- **Play Together** – Depending on the age of the child(ren), “play” is defined differently. For a younger child, “play” may mean getting out the Legos. For an older child, “play” may be playing basketball or gardening together. What is interesting and enjoyable. If a parent decides that “playing” means sewing together, but the child is not interested in sewing, then “play” becomes something that is not enjoyable or even punitive. “Play” should produce interest in the child. “Play” may not be as interesting for the parent as it is for the child. A parent should observe what the child does on his/her own. It might be pretending with dolls, building with Legos, coloring or drawing, or simply reading a book. The purpose of play is to have fun together. This “sensitive time” requires that the parent stop what he/she is doing, or even needs to be doing, and clearly focus on the child. The child notices this attention. Playing together, no matter what it is, lays a healthy foundation between the child and the parent. The time spent playing will “payoff” during times of conflict. A parent must view playing together as a “deposit” and times of conflict as “withdrawals.” There must be more deposits than withdrawals!



- **Laugh Together** – Children love to laugh! When they laugh, they build deep, memorable relationships with those around them. A group of children at school who never laugh together will most likely never become a group of friends. If a parent is too serious and is only focused on his/her child(ren) doing the “right thing,” may not laugh enough with his/her child. Laughing together may happen when watching a movie or show together. It may also happen when sharing a joke together. Parents or grandparents who are too serious may never “let their guard down” enough to be absurd with their children. Most children have a high sense of humor. They see the humor in everything! If a parent is never playful or absurd, then the child will probably never laugh with him/her. Playing or competing with the child will also usually lead to laughter if the parent is able to laugh at him/herself. For example, when bowling together, play with the different ways to propel the ball down the alley, and laugh at it, instead of trying to get as many points as possible. Laughter indeed is the best medicine!



- **Explore Together** – A boring home never enjoys exploration, danger, or new experiences. A parent who doesn’t stimulate exploration in the child may create a boring child. A child may read about exciting adventures, and wonder, “Why don’t I get to do things like that?” These thoughts can lead to frustration with the parent. On the other hand, a parent who often asks, “What would happen if...?” or “Where does that street go?” adds a level of mystery and excitement to the family. Exploration may happen in the kitchen (new combinations or recipes, new seasonings), in the living room (new programs to watch, new games to play), in the car (new ways home, new parts of the city), or in the yard (new plants, new things to barbecue). Parents or grandparents may enjoy some suggestions for ways to explore with their children. Parents or grandparents and children will both benefit from “explorations gone wrong.” These experiences will become things to talk about for years to come.



- **Work / Serve Together** – If a child lives in a home that runs on “survival mode,” the child may only experience what happens inside their own walls. A self-centered home produces a self-centered child who may end up being



selfish and angry. A parent who is in “survival mode” may not believe that he/she even has time to consider the needs of others. The “paradigm shift” away from only being concerned about their own needs to being interested in the needs of others is something that the parent needs to begin. It can begin small, and then grow over time. It may begin by baking a pie for one of the neighbors, and then bringing it to the neighbor together with the child. It may be as small as helping a neighbor with something that needs to be done, or joining a workday at church. The goal is serving or working together, regardless of how that happens. This experience will provide the parent with many opportunities to compliment the child, share frustrations, celebrate humanity, and share exhaustion for a good cause together! As the child grows, so should the experiences to work and serve together expand.

When it is all “said and done,” God looks to the parent or grandparent to “fix” the child! In Proverbs 22:6, He says to “*Train up a child in the way he should go...*” Yes, God might be talking about “God’s way” when He says, “*...in the way he should go.*” He might also be inferring that each child has a unique “way” about him/her. In ????, God says, “*...the way that seems right to a man...*” but God “*directs his steps.*” God created each of us uniquely. Psalm 139 says that He knew us all in our mother’s womb. Nowhere in the Bible does it imply that each one of us is the very same. We are all different. Jesus dealt with each of His disciples differently. He gave Peter opportunities to lead, and opportunities to fail. He understood Thomas’ hesitancy to believe without touching the scars. Jesus dealt with people as unique individuals, not as “products” with the same model number. Parents or grandparents must do the same with their children. Each child is different. Each parent or grandparent is different! A parent or grandparent who wants you to “counsel” their child wants some sort of quick fix to the challenge of parenting. Your “job” is to empower the parent or grandparent with support and ideas so that he/she can begin to repair and build a healthy relationship with his/her own child. The parent or grandparent must take the time, with God’s discernment and wisdom, to get to know the child maybe for the first time. Once he/she begins to understand the child, the parent or grandparent can begin to ask God to help him/her “*...train up the child in the way he should go.*”

Your work with the parent or grandparent through possibly multiple meetings or encounters, will give the parent or grandparent hope. You will see the parent or grandparent begin to enjoy the process of being a parent or grandparent. Hopefully, you will also see changes in the child. You should see the child being more connected to the parent or grandparent at check-in or check-out. The work is worth it! You are about something that is very dear to God’s heart!