

When One or Both Parents Don't Attend Church

By Karmel Newell

President Russell M. Nelson grew up in a loving home with parents he adored. Yet as a child he went to church without his mother or father, and he longed to be sealed to his family in the temple.¹ But no child needs to walk the covenant path alone. The love and care of family and ward members can fill gaps for children who might not have gospel support at home. Ultimately, sound gospel teachings and good experiences at home and at church can help every child feel Heavenly Father's love.

For Parents Who Attend Church without a Spouse

1. **Share the blessings of living the gospel.** Help your children see that living the gospel can bring peace—and lift burdens. Explain why you choose to participate in the Church, without speaking ill of a parent who chooses not to attend. Share your feelings about how keeping your baptismal covenant gives you comfort and guidance.
2. **Cultivate a positive attitude.** Help children see the good in their family. You can also help them see the good in their Church teachers, leaders, and ward members. Talk about what



Talking to children about the good they experience at home and at church can help them feel Heavenly Father's love.

- your children learned at church. Don't dwell on the weaknesses or insensitive remarks of others. Instead, speak positively and show a willingness to learn from others.
3. **Work through negative emotions.** Help children label negative emotions, such as fear, loneliness, disappointment, and anger. Then you can help them process their emotions

- through drawing, playing, or talking. When needed, you can also seek professional help. Healing wounded hearts will help everyone be more receptive to spiritual feelings and have better experiences at church.
4. **Ask for help when necessary.** If you need help, don't wait for someone to offer. Sometimes Church leaders and ward members may not notice

a need, or they may hesitate to help without an invitation. If a child needs a blessing, prayerfully consider who might be able to help, and then ask. Also consider who you might help.

For All Adults

1. **Notice and love children who attend church without one or both parents.** Learn their names and greet them with warmth and kindness. Withhold judgment about their circumstances, and don't ask questions about absent parents. As children feel sincere love from fellow Church members, they are more likely to relax, learn, and feel the Spirit.
2. **Be sensitive to special needs.** When children attend church without one or both parents, be mindful of how specific teachings or activities might affect them. In a lesson on priesthood blessings, teach that everyone has access to these blessings. If an activity involves parents, include all parents. Be aware of children who might have sensitive feelings on special days like Father's Day or Mother's Day.
3. **Help them love and strengthen their family.** Teach children that the family is ordained of God.² Encourage them to appreciate the good in their

families. Family history work can help children realize that their family began before they were born. And doing family history work can bless them "with more closeness and joy in [their] family."³

4. **Teach them true doctrine.** Agency is a key doctrine in the plan of salvation, and children are not responsible for their parents' choices and sins (see Moses 6:54). Parents' problems are neither their children's fault nor their children's responsibility to repair. Knowing this can help children worry less about things they cannot change and appreciate the many daily blessings of family.
President Henry B. Eyring, Second Counselor in the First Presidency, taught: "Our Heavenly Father is anxious to gather and bless all of His family. . . . His plan gives each of His children the opportunity to accept or reject His invitation. And families are at the heart of this plan."⁴ ■

The author lives in Utah, USA.

NOTES

1. See Russell M. Nelson, "Revelation for the Church, Revelation for Our Lives," *Ensign*, May 2018, 93–96.
2. See "The Family: A Proclamation to the World," *Ensign*, May 2017, 145.
3. Quentin L. Cook, "The Joy of Family History Work," *Ensign*, Feb. 2016, 33.
4. Henry B. Eyring, "Gathering the Family of God," *Ensign*, May 2017, 20–21.

FOR CHILDREN

In the *Friend*:

- President Nelson's childhood experience: "Grateful for Parents" (June 2019, page 2)
- "A New Chapter" (June 2019, page 4)
- "Steven's First Future Father's Day" (June 2015, page 8)

FOR YOUTH

In the *New Era*:

- "Youth in Greece" (July 2018, page 16)