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Hi John,

I know your name is not John, but we haven't met personally and I wanted to talk with you, and to other young people who are in the same situation like you, so I just chose the name John. My guess is that you're around 13 to 17 years old, and if your father is giving you this letter then your family is probably struggling with anger and conflict and pain, and I want to help, I want to help you specifically.

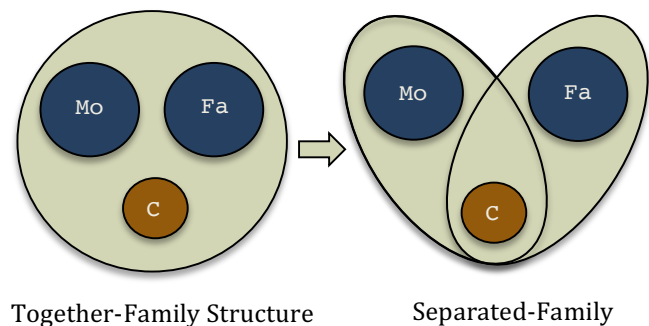
Your father is giving you this letter from me because he cares very deeply about you. I know this only makes it hurt more. I'm hoping that I can point you in a direction out of the pain. Right now the only way you can see out of the pain is to make your dad disappear. You hurt less then. Things are calmer and better inside. Well, mostly. There is that deep pain that still remains, but you can just not think about that.

I'm not going to ask you to fix things with your dad, because I know that's not possible right now, not with the situation as it is. But I'm a family therapist, a psychologist, and I want to explain a little bit about the situation you're in so that you understand a bit more. I think this will make things hurt a bit less, a lot less. That's why I'm writing to you, to all the Johns, to explain the situation to make it hurt less.

You know the situation. Your mom and dad got divorced a few years ago and there's been a lot of anger and conflict in your family. Did you know that when parents get divorced and there are children, the marriage ends but the family doesn't? When there are children involved there will always be a family, even after the marriage of the parents' end. The family structure just changes. It changes from a together-family structure before the divorce, which is united by the marriage, to a separated-family structure after the divorce that is now united by the children, and by the children's continuing relationship with each parent.

Before the divorce, it's the marriage that unifies the family. After the divorce, the children have that unifying role. But the family doesn't go away, the family doesn't end. Not when there are children. It just changes, from the together-family before the divorce that's united by the marriage, to a separated-family structure after the divorce that's united by the children.

But, as you know, your family is having a lot of trouble making this transition, and everyone is blaming the other people for the difficulty, and there's anger and hurt. I'm sorry this is going on for you. As the child, your role in the family is to bring things together, to continue to unite the family. But when there is a lot of conflict and anger, this anger tears the family apart... and tears you apart in the process.



The reason the family is having trouble successfully moving from a together-family to a separated-family structure is because the people in the family are having trouble processing their sadness surrounding the divorce, surrounding the loss of the together-family. Losing something we value always creates sadness in us. Your dad, your mom, and you were all sad about the divorce. Even if it didn't seem like it at the time, even if there was a lot of fighting and anger, that's only because people were hurting, and they blamed the other person for hurting them. When a divorce happens there is sadness. Big losses cause grief. Everyone was grieving the loss of the together-family, but instead of feeling sad and crying, the grief got turned into anger and blaming and that's what's getting in the way of transitioning into the new separated-family structure. There's still a lot of unresolved sadness and grief... even in you... especially in you.

You love your dad and your mom; both of them. You may say you don't love your dad, but I know you do. That's just your sadness and pain talking when you say stuff like that. Right now it hurts to love him. Because it hurts to love him you think it's because he's doing something bad to hurt you. That makes sense (but it's not true). When people do bad things to us it hurts us. So because you're hurting, he must be doing something bad to make it hurt. But that's just all that blaming stuff that's keeping the family from successfully moving into the new separated-family structure. The real reason you hurt is because you're sad that the together-family is over, and you miss your dad. Really, you miss your dad and you feel really sad about that.

You're actually feeling sad because you're just feeling sad, not because of anything anyone is doing. You're feeling sad about the loss of the together-family. You're feeling sad because there's so much fighting and conflict, and you're feeling sad because you're caught in the middle of the fighting between your parents. Your role in the new separated-family is to bring your parents together, to unite this new separated-family. But they have so much anger and blame toward each other that it's impossible for you to bring them together, and instead their continuing anger is ripping you apart. That's what's making you sad. It hurts, and you wish it would stop hurting.

You don't want to be a part of their fight. You just want to be a kid with your own stuff, your school, your friends, your activities, your stuff, without having to worry about their stuff, their anger, and their conflict. But you can't help but find yourself in the middle of it, because that's your role as the child in the new separated-family structure. You're the shared bond that keeps the family together. You belong to both households. You belong to your mother's new family AND you belong to your father's new family. But when there's a lot of anger and conflict between them, then you get caught right in the middle, because the child's role in the new separated-family structure is to hold the family together - but you can't do that because there is too much anger, and resentment, and blame.

So to find peace, to get back to your own life and your own stuff, you're finding that you have to choose one side or the other, either your mom's new family or your dad's new family, because you can't unify the new separated-family, there's simply too much anger, and resentment, and blame. So you had to choose one new family or the other, and you chose to go with your mom's new family. But that makes you sad because you miss your dad (don't tell me you don't, I know you do). But there's too much anger and conflict. It

just hurts too much to try to hold the family together in a new separated-family structure. So you have to make a choice. That's okay. I wish you didn't have to choose. I wish you could belong to both new families, your dad's and your mom's, that way your old family would still be alive, it would just be a new separated-family structure instead of the old together-family structure.

I know that you have to do what you have to do. And that's okay. When you're older you'll be strong enough to return to your father and love both your father and your mother. But right now that's not possible is it. Right now, in order to find peace, you have to choose. What your dad wants you to know, though, is that he understands the position you're in. No worries. He loves you and will always love you, and he'll wait for you when you're old enough and strong enough to love both your dad and your mom. So focus on your life right now, and make your dad and mom proud. If you have the chance, text your dad from time to time and let him know you love him too. It'll mean a lot to him. If he tries to pull you back into the middle, just politely let him know that you can't go there right now because it's too hard to be in the middle, but that someday it'll be better – and it will be better.

It's okay to feel sad. When we feel sad, we need a hug. So go get a hug. No need to blame anyone for feeling sad. You just miss the together-family and you miss your dad. That's okay to feel those things. If you need to talk to a therapist about the sad, just ask your mom for you to talk to a therapist because you're sad, or maybe go to the school counselor and ask them to ask your mom. You can keep the stuff you say to the therapist private. Your mom may ask you what you talked about, but that's okay, you can tell her some things and still keep other stuff private.

When you're old enough and strong enough, you'll be able to fix things with your dad. He'll be right there waiting for you. And then you'll be able to love both your dad and your mom, and everything will be okay. Big hug from me. You're the best.

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