



Let's (Not) Stay Together: Divorce Explained

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Marriage & Divorce

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You've tried everything, but the marriage is not improving. Divorce may be the best option.



A couple may experience rough patches and tumultuous periods in their relationship, but if their separation reaches the courts, divorce is the likely conclusion. Divorce, unlike separation, is the legal dissolution of a marriage, which terminates a legal union.

While divorce is sometimes a financially and emotionally difficult process, the ultimate goal for each individual is to find happiness on their own, or potentially with another partner later.

Throughout history, the most traditional path in life was to marry, start a family and keep that bond to the grave. Divorce was even forbidden by various religions, and couples who divorced lived with a heavy social stigma.

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These days, young people often feel discouraged from getting married in the first place and, for unhappy couples, it is much more generally accepted that divorce is sometimes the best way to end a dysfunctional marriage.

But, however socially acceptable divorce may be, it can still be a hard-fought battle, stressful and emotionally grueling. Not only is a relationship ending, but the newly separated parties also face dividing their assets, potentially moving to new homes and, if children are involved, explaining a huge change in the family dynamic and arranging custody.

Divorce during COVID-19

To start to understand the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on marriage in the United States, it's important to look at the collective disaster-response curve.

In the time immediately following the initial lockdowns in 2020, there was an increased sense of social cohesion. A few weeks later, this energy wore off and depression or disillusionment kicked in. At this point, couples began to struggle with marriage issues.

According to LegalTemplates, a website that sells templates for various life events, including divorce, by April 2020, the number of couples buying a divorce template had increased by almost 34 percent in the U.S., with newly married couples the most likely to seek divorce.

Approximately 20 percent of couples purchasing a template had been married for five months or less, compared to 11 percent of couples in that category during the same period in 2019.

With many couples stuck at home, some with children out of school, and many facing financial uncertainty, it shouldn't come as a surprise that the COVID-19 pandemic has placed extra strain on marriages that were already struggling. Support systems became harder to access: Spending a night out or venting to friends over coffee was no longer an easy option. People who previously used these social gatherings as outlets to manage stress or avoid dealing with family problems suddenly found themselves in a position where they must confront conflict on their own.

Even the most healthy marriages involve a degree of conflict, and it's considered normal behavior to argue. Boredom, financial stress, sex and disagreements about parenting are some of the most common sources of problems within a marriage. These issues have been amplified by the COVID-19 pandemic.

More than a marriage

Ending a marriage comes with complications. In most cases, both parties spend a lot of time and resources trying to solve their problems before filing for divorce. By the time they've decided on divorce, the conflict has been going on for a while, draining patience and emotional stability. This degree of separation is amplified when each side is represented by a lawyer.

If children are in the picture, divorce can be painful for them. Depending on their age, they may have difficulty understanding why one parent has to leave the family home. Friends and family of the recently uncoupled may find it necessary to take sides, or divide their time between the two parties. Divorce may be just between two people, but its aftermath impacts many more, both family and friends.

A new beginning

While divorce may be a difficult process, it's important to realize that the dust will eventually settle. Seek the help of a counselor or therapist, try to keep communication with your ex-spouse civil and make sure you let yourself process the change in your own time. Counseling for your children may also be appropriate.

Divorce may be the end of one union, but it can also be the beginning of a new life. Some research indicates divorce has several benefits for the exes, including a happier state of mind, better health than if they had remained in an unhappy marriage, finances that are no longer tied to someone else and, if they remarry, less likelihood of suffering another divorce. Divorce isn't pretty. But sometimes it's the best chance for happiness in the long run.

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