

DIVORCE : SEVEN SEPARATIONS

The complexity of divorce is a traumatic personal experience and a social phenomenon of increasing magnitude. At least seven separations take place at the time of divorce. These seven separations may occur in varying sequences and at different intensities, but inevitably each is experienced at some time before, during and after separation.

1 EMOTIONAL DIVORCE

- Begins when the spouses become increasingly aware of feeling discounted or dissatisfied.
- They realise that marriage relationship is deteriorating and the level of trust plummets.
- One spouse indicate that if matters do not improve he/she will leave.
- Partners experience the grief that accompanies loss of a (former) love object.
- In continuing to live together they experience daily rejections, the knowledge of not being cherished/desired, and frequently diminutions of sexual and other activities occurs.
- The loss of the love and the accompanying mourning often occurs in the least on spouse long before the break.

2 LEGAL DIVORCE

- Affects one's status in many ways, also makes partners re-marriageable.
- Often the legal action becomes quite embittered and escalates the marital war.
- Finances, custody and/or jealousy over a new love object the spouse has become attracted to are major battlegrounds.
- Custody remains a burning issue, as well as non-payment of support, child visitation and many other grievances.
- Women are often advised by their attorney to stop working during the process of the legal divorce. Ironically it is precisely at this point that many women need to find a job/remain in existing employment, as structure and adult companionship of the workday helps to maintain continuity - and work represents an area of adequate functioning.

3 ECONOMIC DIVORCE

- This deals with division of property, the settlement at the time that the legal divorce is finalised, maintenance and child support payments.
- Each is concerned with dividing the bounty in relation to past financial and emotional inputs, their current lifestyle, and desires to live as well as possible in future.
- Some want all they can possibly get, other prefer nothing (as this helps them close the door on the relationship and give them autonomy).

4 COPARENTAL DIVORCE

("Co-parental" because although the adults are divorcing each other, neither is getting divorced from their parental relationship to child)

- The parents are no longer one unit rearing the children - they may not even be in

agreement.

- Each may experience the ex-spouse's activities as going against his/her personal definition of the best interest of the child (money may be used as leverage e.g. to get longer/more frequent visitation/bargaining power)

5 **COMMUNITY DIVORCE**

- As the marriage dissolves, friends of the couple move towards one or the other.
- although friends may include one or the other for a while, there is a tendency to feel like an extra, an unmatched person in the world of couples.
- Singles and marrieds tend also to talk about different things, frequent different places and move in different circles.
- Single - again individuals usually have a transitional period of feeling isolated and of not belonging anywhere until he/she begins to make contact with other single divorce or widowed people, and slowly build up a new social support system.

6 **PSYCHIC DIVORCE**

(separation from dependency)

- Here the problem of autonomy must be confronted and mastered : the separation of the self from the personality influence of the ex-spouse.
- Learning to live without someone to lean on.
- That you are in charge of your own thoughts, behaviours and must take full responsibility for what occurs.

7 **SPIRITUAL DIVORCE**

- Come to acknowledge the sin of divorce before God.
- Come to a point of repentance for one's failure to keep the vows of marriage
- An acceptance of the forgiveness and mercy of God
- An acceptance of God's healing and cleansing power

The final resolution occurs after the individual has:

- Come to reasonable understanding of why they married
- What led tot he choice of mate
- What difficulties contributed to the marital strife
- What combination of factors led to the divorce

Once all this has happened, there can be some acceptance of the current status.

PROCESS OF DIVORCE

DIVORCE STAGE	FEELINGS	ACTIONS
Pre-divorce Deliberation period	Disillusionment Dissatisfaction Alienation	-Confronting partner -Quarreling -Seeking therapy -Denial
	Dread Anguish Ambivalence Shock Emptiness Chaos Inadequacy Low self esteem	-Withdrawal (physical & emotional) -Pretending all is OK -Attempting to win back affection
During divorce Litigation period	Depressed Detached Angry Hopelessness Self pity	-Bargaining -Screaming -Threatening -Attempting suicide -Mourning
	Confusion Fury Sadness Loneliness Guilt Relief	-Separating physically -Filing for legal divorce -Considering economic arrangements -Considering custody arrangements -Telling relatives and friends -Grieving and mourning
Post divorce re-equilibrium	Optimism Resignation Excitement Curiosity Regret	-Finalizing divorce -Begin reaching out to new friends -Undertaking new activities -Stabilizing new lifestyle and daily routine for children
	Acceptance Self confidence Energetic Self worth Wholeness Exhilaration Independence Autonomy	-Resynthesis of identity -Completing psychic divorce -Becoming comfortable with new lifestyle and friends -Helping children accept finality of parents' divorce and their continuing relationship with both parents

Some ways of promoting own healing

- accepting, recognising, ventilating your feelings
- ventilating your anger - tape recorder or writing may help
- allowing yourself to mourn

- allowing yourself some time to be alone - not running from feelings and loneliness
- actively combating loneliness

- seeking out help - someone to talk to
 - looking for practical help - with children, household chores
 - guiding others in what they can do to help

- counting your losses

- recognising ways you cover up pain and not allowing these to continue too long
- not allowing ex-spouse to continue to hurt you by your harbouring feelings of being victimized. You may have been victimized but do not have to remain a victim, one who is unable to do anything about the situation.

- recognising small achievements that can show you that you are managing better today than you did yesterday, that you are a single person who is able to survive on your own

- coming to terms with the finality of the separation and assessing the marriage (not spend more thought and energy on marriage than you may have done for years during the marriage). Objective evaluation cannot occur during mourning.
- realising that the person you were and the life you lived no longer exist

- taking every opportunity to make your own decisions - not major decisions too soon

- finding ways to turn negative thoughts into positive ones - e.g. use phrases to tell yourself something like "One step at a time" or "I am stronger today than I was yesterday"

- looking after your health - proper eating and exercise, handling insomnia
- treating yourself - you owe it to yourself and to your children
- taking more trouble with your appearance

- making your living environment pleasant

- finding new friends

- joining or starting a support group

We acknowledge that this article was developed by Rev. Chris Harrison of the Methodist Church in South Africa and adapted by him from an article written by Paul Bohannon on the "Six stages of divorce" which appeared in a book of some 35 articles titled "Marriage in Family, Coping with Change" written by Leonard Cargan and published by Wadsworth ISBN-0-534-044-10-7.