



# FACING THE CHALLENGES OF DIVORCE

PRESENTED BY MILITARY & FAMILY LIFE COUNSELORS

# AGENDA

- **Definitions and Causes**
- **Reality of Divorce**
- **Ways to Cope**
- **Responsibilities**
- **Forgiveness**
- **Children and Divorce**
- **Tips, Hints and Help**



# LEGAL DEFINITION OF DIVORCE

**The termination of marriage by legal action.  
The division of property, child custody and  
support, alimony, child visitation and  
attorney's fees.**

**“Law.com dictionary”**



# WHAT IS YOUR DEFINITION OF DIVORCE

- Divorce is one of the most stressful and challenging events a person can experience in their life.
- It is not a single event but a series of transitions and family reorganizations.
- Brings change that are emotional, economic, involve family relationships, standard of living, possible change of residence and extended family.



# COMMON CAUSES OF DIVORCE

- Infidelity
- Financial problems
- Poor communication
- Lack of commitment in the marriage



# COMMON CAUSES OF DIVORCE

CONTINUED

- Failed expectations or unmet needs
- Addiction or substance abuse
- Physical, sexual, or emotional abuse
- Incompatible intimacy
- Military lifestyle and deployment issues



# REALITIES OF DIVORCE

CONTINUED

**The experience of divorce is individual but the following realities are common:**

- Legal
- Relational
- Financial
- Parental
- Physical
- Emotional
- Spiritual/Religious
- Mental



# COMMON PHYSICAL ISSUES

- Weight loss or gain
- Headaches
- High blood pressure
- Upset stomach or digestive problems
- Fatigue
- Sleeping Problems





# COMMON EMOTIONAL ISSUES

- Shock and denial
- Anger and rage
- Sorrow and despair
- Fear and anxiety
- Guilt and shame
- Sadness, loneliness and feeling empty
- Relief and/or acceptance



# COMMON FEELINGS

- Numbness: the sense that none of this is real, not having an emotional reaction
- Expecting your “ex” to come back
- Sense of anger and/or injustice
- Feelings of emptiness, loneliness, or despair
- Lack of focus or trouble concentrating



# SPIRITUAL & RELIGIOUS IMPACTS

This is a personal road that each individual may want to explore. Spiritual and religious questioning is common.



# COMMON MENTAL IMPACTS

- Changes in your view of the world
- Mistrust of self and others
- Fear of abandonment and rejection
- Forgetfulness
- Lack of focus or trouble concentration
- Feeling dazed and confused



# LEGAL IMPACTS

## The dissolution of marriage by the courts:

- Allows individuals to legally remarry
- Is NOT a problem solver
- May cause or increase anger, hurt and bitterness
- Can create chaos in the family system



# RELATIONAL IMPACTS

- Mutual friends may pick sides
- Making new friends
- Dating
- Possible loss of spouse's family
- Custody issues



# COMMON FINANCIAL IMPACTS

- What once supported one household, must now support two separate households
- Usually a decline in finances for everyone
- Stay-at-home spouses may have to return to work
- New family dynamics are created



# COMMON PARENTAL IMPACTS

- Shared duties are now primarily on parent's responsibility
- Managing children's emotions
- Communication between parents can become strained





# COPING WITH THE REALITIES OF DIVORCE

- Productive and healthy ways of coping with loss, pain and stress
- Non-productive ways in which to cope with loss, pain and stress



# RESPONSIBILITIES

- Assume responsibility for your present situation
- Live one day at a time
- Make healthy choices for you and your children
- Seek help and realize that sometimes you will need assistance
- Learn how to focus when decisions need to be made and be able to separate your feelings from the facts



# FORGIVENESS

- The difficult part of forgiveness
- The myths of forgiveness
- Benefits of forgiveness



# ISSUES WITH THE INABILITY TO FORGIVE

- May lead to bitterness and hatred
- Can create broken relationships
- Possibly prolongs the pain
- Possible health issues
- People around you may suffer



# PROCESS & SIGNS OF FORGIVENESS

- Reflecting on what might have gone wrong in the marriage, to forgive both yourself and your partner
- We hurt, hate and keep hating or we forgive
- Not telling people what that person did to us



# TIPS FOR TALKING ABOUT THE DIVORCE

- Share what you feel comfortable sharing and nothing more
- Be careful about what you say about your “ex”
- Find a way to express difficult feelings privately



# TIPS FOR TALKING ABOUT THE DIVORCE

CONTINUED

- Don't ask friends to give you reports on the activities of your "ex" or to carry messages
- Avoid making your divorce the focus of every conversation
- Talk with trusted friends or relatives who have been through it



# CHILDREN & DIVORCE

“Sometimes divorce is good. Sometimes divorce is bad.  
But the thing it always does it cause your life to change.”

--15 year-old boy of divorce

- Divorce means change in the lives of children
- Children adapt more easily when they have an idea about what is happening
- When the divorce is undertaken impulsively, pursued in anger or guilt the child’s capacity to cope is severely compromised
- Let children be children
- Be cautious of alienating the child from either parent and/or relatives





# CHILDREN & DIVORCE

CONTINUED

- Jointly tell them about your decision to separate/divorce
- Don't substitute gifts for time and attention
- Refrain from using your children as messengers between parents
- Support relationships with both extended families



# CHILDREN & DIVORCE

CONTINUED

- Allow your child to communicate openly
- Offer your child choices, when possible, to increase their sense of power over their lives
- Find additional help for your child if needed



# COMMON REACTIONS FROM CHILDREN

- Denial, withdrawal and silence
- Fear of abandonment and losing their identity
- Anger and/or aggression
- Acting out
- Increased emotional need
- Possible regression in school and behavioral changes



# COMMON REACTIONS FROM CHILDREN

CONTINUED

- Sexual promiscuity in teenagers
- Conflicts of loyalty toward parents
- Panic and confusion
- Physical distress
- Guilt
- Relief (with some children it can be a relief to be free of chaos)



# DO'S & DON'TS

- Don't argue with your spouse in front of the children
- Don't discuss your spouse's negative behavior with your children
- Have polite interactions with your spouse in front of your children
- Choose to focus on the strengths of all family members



# JUST LIKE...

...other life crisis and losses, divorce is a major loss and needs to be grieved.



# COPING TIPS

- Allow yourself time to grieve
- Think about what helped with other losses
- Let friends and family know how they can help
- Take care of yourself
- Look for healthy ways to express your feelings



# COPING TIPS

- Follow your own emotional timetable
- Join a support group if needed
- Make major changes slowly
- Talk!





# IF IT'S MORE THAN NORMAL GRIEF

**If you believe that your grief is adversely affecting your life and activities, you may need to seek outside help from:**

- Military Community Services
- Chaplain and Local Clergy
- Behavioral Health Services



# COPING WITH THE LOSS OR GRIEF...

**...that often follow a divorce or separation can be one of the hardest things you'll ever do.**

But if you allow yourself to grieve and learn ways to cope during this difficult period, you can begin to move forward.





**QUESTIONS?**



# REFERENCES

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**THANK YOU**

