



Newsletter of Stonebriar Counseling Associates

☐ Confusion Over Divorce

According to the Barna Group, a Christian research and polling organization, data from nationwide interviews with a random sample of 7043 adults found that 94% of people in their fifties and beyond have been married at least once. Among all people age 18 or older, 73% have been married at least one time.

New data on marriage, divorce, and remarriage in the United States show that 43 percent of first marriages end in separation or divorce within 15 years, according to a recent report by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The report, "First Marriage Dissolution, Divorce, and Remarriage in the United States," also shows that one in three first marriages end within ten years and one in five end within five years. The findings are based on data from the 1995 National Survey of Family Growth, a study of 10,847 women 15-44 years of age.

But marriage is not as stable a relationship as it once was. Among the three-quarters who have been married, one-third has also experienced at least one divorce. Statistics show that the highest rate of divorce for women are those who are under 20 years of age (49.5%). While the highest rate of divorce for men is between 25-29 years of age (52.2%), middle age has the second highest divorce rate (due to 2nd and 3rd marriages) From all this research three surprises are identified in

terms of who is most likely to get divorced.

- Compared to divorce among adults who marry in their 20's or 30's, the adolescent divorce rate is 1.5 times greater (75% end in the first five years).
- Born again Christians are just as likely to get divorced as are non-born again adults.
- Overall, 33% of all born again individuals who have been married have gone through a divorce, which is statistically identical to the 34% incidence among non-born again adults.

In an age of information and technology within the most sophisticated society the world has ever known, our national reputation is marred by problems of divorce. Divorce statistics reflect the very troubling nature of conflict between a man and a woman who at one time never imagined what painful experiences of life would be in store for them.

☐ Coping With The Pain

Divorce is never easy. It is a painful, heart-breaking experience for everyone involved. Families are torn apart, leaving confused, angry, and hurting children. (see next month's edition) No one "wins" in divorce. When someone first begins to go through a divorce, the main thought is survival. They want to "just get

through" the excruciating pain and keep up with life. Their heart feels like it is being ripped out, but life goes on. They know that they must go to work, pay their bills, clean the home, and continue to parent, which some days can seem like an impossible feat. Divorce is such a shock that many try to survive it through a defense mechanism called denial. As an emotional safety shield of the heart denial protects the individual from harsh feelings of rejection, despair, and betrayal, which can temporarily help absorb the initial trauma. Consciously or unconsciously, they may be telling themselves, "This really isn't happening." They may use another defense mechanism called rationalization or intellectualization as a way to be convinced that their spouse is just bluffing. On the other hand, some might even avoid telling anyone that their mate has left or intends to do so.

☐ New Marriages

People, particularly women, who are currently age 65, are expected to live until 82. Younger people are expected to live longer, into their 90s. More and more people are reaching the age of 100 and beyond. It is becoming commonplace for people to have more than one career in a lifetime. After all, a youngster of 65 still has another 20 or more years in which to begin a new career. Young people today no longer think about a career that they will be in for the rest of their life; they think more about their "first" career, fully expecting a second

or perhaps third career to follow. These same young people are thinking about marriage in a similar vein. Many of them believe that the concept of marriage "until death do us part" is more a figurative use of the phrase than a literal use. People currently in their 40s who married while in their 20s are compromising their vows and becoming convinced that to have one partner for a lifetime may be highly improbable. The thinking runs something like this: how can two people from different backgrounds, with different histories, and different needs find each other and live together for 20 or 30 years even for 50, 60, or 70 years? The likelihood of two people growing in similar directions and similar paces would appear to be small. People in their 20s have different values, expectations, needs, and interests than they may have when in their 40s. And people in their 40s may be different than those in their 60s. Priorities and goals change. People change. As friends may grow apart as people grow and change, so may spouses. Contemporary marriages have to rely upon different models than in previous generations. The metamorphosis of marriage has been underway since the 1950s. The models represented by "Father Knows Best," "I Love Lucy," and "Leave It To Beaver," where the man was the provider and the woman was the housewife, was the model of the day. In the 1980s we began to see a different model of marriage as represented by "The Cosby Show," where two professional people were married and raising a family. In previous generations a woman was taught to

accommodate - to put aside her needs in favor of the needs of the man. She was to accommodate her needs to him. In a marriage of equals, constant accommodation on the part of one person will eventually cause resentment and subsequently conflict. Implementing Christ-like love, on the other hand, recognizes the equality of both parties as they seek an equitable and mutually satisfying solution to a problem. In compromise, neither party may get exactly what they want at any given time. In these marriages preservation and enhancement of the relationship is more important than getting what one wants. Couples must learn to let go the argument in the service of maintaining an intimate connection. When being right and winning becomes more important than the relationship, the marriage will be in trouble. When either party is more interested in winning and has poor communication skills, the more likely they will have the kinds of difficulties that will lead them to consider divorce.

Anger and Divorce

All too often divorcing couples demonstrate anger in an atmosphere of hostility. They forget that they once were in love with one another. This is indeed unfortunate. Divorce ranks second only to death of a loved one as the most stressful of life's experiences. The stress is inevitable. But the strife is not. Usually there are other variables at play that lead to the acrimony accompanying divorce. Frequently the acrimony covers pain and hurt. This is true regardless of who feels like the injured party. Pain is integral to

loss. In a divorce there are many losses. The loss of the beauty of marriage and the joy of the relationship, the loss of the friendship, the loss of friends, a lifestyle, a home, familiarity, children, loss of love, identity, to name but a few of the losses. When we are angry we do not have to experience the hurt and the loss. We can cover the pain with anger, at least temporarily. Sometimes our anger is directed toward the other person for not being all that we wanted them to be or expected them to be. Sometimes we are angry because the other person did not change; we think, "if only s/he would change then we would not have to divorce." Sometimes we feel angry because of being victimized by one's spouse. They feel like the injured party and want to fight back or hurt the other person in the same way they feel hurt. So what do they do? They hire a lawyer to seek retribution for their emotional bleeding. Sometimes they are angry at themselves for not being a better spouse, for not knowing better, for not paying attention, for not being all that they might have been. Rather than get personally angry, they get angry at their spouse. Sometimes the fight is about who gets the dog or the dishes so they can feel empowered. And, occasionally depression may set in where they blame themselves, feel guilty, or ashamed. So they hire a lawyer to help give everything to their spouse in order to make amends for real or imagined hurts that they have inflicted. Consider the following steps or stages that characterize the emotional upheaval an individual goes through in a divorce.

📌 Four Emotional Stages of Divorce

Divorce represents the ending of a romance and the failure of a partnership in marriage, and is bound to have an emotional impact on one or both partners. Regardless of the circumstances of a divorce or the conditions that led up to it, the break up of a marriage is a loss that requires the individual to address the feelings that divorcees typically go through. Although every divorce is highly personal and unique, we can help divorcees know that they're not alone in their confusion and despair, and that things improve over time. A common reaction to the early phases of separation and divorce is to keep to your self. This is not a problem over the short term. After all, it can be awkward talking to friends and family, especially when they haven't sorted much out yet. But they really need support now more than ever to help them seek out the friends and relatives whom they have found helpful in the past. As a counselor, you might help them understand what's typical in the divorce process such as what to expect from their emotions, and what sort of emotional and practical issues they're likely to experience. The necessary emotional aspects of divorce work, include:

- facing the reality of the divorce
- working through painful feelings
- experiencing the full range of emotions associated with the breakdown of a marriage

- coping with the situational and lifestyle changes resulting from loss
- adapting to the change, and reconfiguring of life

Stage 1: "**Shock and Disbelief**" begins as soon as the idea of a separation and divorce is introduced and sinks in. It involves four major tasks and issues to be worked through.

- Facing reality
- Self esteem and inadequacy
- Telling the world
- Support and help

Stage 2: "**Initial Adjustment**" involves the ability of people to actively adapt to this new phase of their lives. The primary goal of this stage is adaptation and mustering the personal resources needed to manage the many emotional and practical changes faced by people during this phase of their divorce work. The tasks include:

- Functioning and responsibility
- Practical reality
- Legal Matters
- Managing emotions

Stage 3: "**Active Reorganization**" centers around how people live their lives and cope with the tasks of being suddenly single. Major tasks to be dealt with and worked through include:

- Managing life style and practical affairs
- Re-defining relationships
- Reconstructing personal values and beliefs
- Concluding legal procedures

Stage 4: "**Life Re-formation**" represents the final steps as the individual passes through to the "other" side of their divorce. During this stage the person deals with the emotional issues and life choices involved as they move on with their life.

- Constructing relationships
- New interests
- Personal responsibility
- Accepting their new life

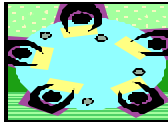
The first stage of the divorce typically passes the most quickly. It's the quick hit, and sometimes numbing shock wave, as people realize their marriage is over. The second and third stages are the most active and represent the bulk of active divorce work, covering the most active legal, practical, and emotional changes in life after divorce. The final stage represents that time in life during which divorcees are moving far away from their divorce, and into their new life. This stage really has no formal "end," and is marked by the full acceptance of the divorce and a resolution of most of the practical issues and many of the emotional. Of course, the reality is that many of the various tasks of each stage overlap. And things aren't as clean and neat as checking off one task and then moving on to the next. But helping divorcees recognize these stages and tasks can be an enormously useful way to help them see and understand the path that lies ahead for them. God challenges us to selfless love, and He expects us to reach out to people whose lives have been shattered by divorce. May we be open and sensitive in helping people toward personal healing and wholeness from wounded relationships.



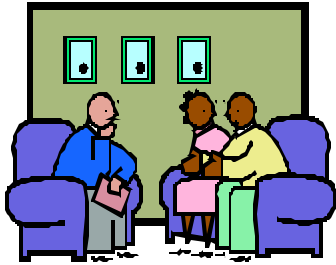
Newsletter of Stonebriar Counseling Associates

From the desk of...

www.stonebriarca.com



Bob Good



**Sexual Addiction Group Meeting
Tuesday Nights at 7:00 pm (SCA Office)**

Tom and Barbara (factious names) were at each other's throats. They stormed into the office shouting at each other. They wanted out of their eight-year marriage. Once I was able to get a word in, the tears began to flow from both of them. Their marriage was over and the pain of that realization was unbearable. The "D-word" struck at their core. As long as they fought they did not have to face the reality that their marriage was coming to an end.

The "D-Word" strikes at the heart of all married couples. Recent statistics suggest that 50% of all marriages in the United States will end in divorce. In Southern California the divorce rate is purported to be even higher, somewhere in the neighborhood of 60-75%, depending on which study one reads. When two people are married and over a period of years at least one person, if not both, undergoes a significant change in self-concept, the marriage will also change. The selves that married are no longer the same. If interests, goals, values change along with a changing self, you have a different dynamic set up between the two people. In some cases this dynamic is such that the marriage no longer seems viable. The relationship becomes questionable because of selfishness and unrealistic expectations. People expect more. Men and women want intimacy, romance, affection, understanding, commonality of interests, conversation, common values, and exciting sex, to mention a few of the more common requirements. They want an equal partnership with one another, where both parties participate equally in all of the decisions pertaining to the home and to child-rearing, regardless of who is earning more money. Combined with significantly changing expectations regarding marriage people must learn new or different ways of relating to one another if their marriage is going to thrive. When this is not possible, selfishness and unrealistic expectations enter in and divorce becomes an option.

The hallmark of the marriage is the expectation that it is to be a permanent relationship, in which both partners commit their lives to one another, joining their individual lives together in mutual co-existence. Accordingly, the breakup of a marriage can be devastating and life disrupting. As Christians in a society where divorce is rampant, I believe we must come back to the important biblical principles concerning marriage. Christians should work to build strong marriages. Pastors must frequently preach and teach about the importance of marriage. We should encourage fellow Christians to attend various marriage enrichment seminars and ministries in our community. In this article I will be exploring some of the reasons that people divorce, some of the consequences of divorce, and, when all else fails, counseling approaches to the divorcee that can be less stressful to all of the parties involved.

God Bless,

Bob

The Divorce Roller Coaster: Staying Buckled and Keeping Your Head

[\(provided by David John Berndt, Ph.D.\)](#)

The emotional impact of a divorce can be intense, and has lots of highs and lows - and upside down and sideways turns as well. Like a roller coaster ride that you didn't buy a ticket for, the emotions that emerge during divorce can come and go unpredictably. These feelings can be a bit overwhelming. There are, however, some things you can do to ground yourself at these times. The following 8 practical suggestions are useful for persons dealing with a difficult divorce. Of course if problems persist, you need to consult a pastor or other mental health professional for your specific situation.

1. EAT, SLEEP, and EXERCISE. You need to keep yourself healthy and fit through all that happens. Your children need you to be well, and you need resources not deficits in dealing with the many challenges ahead. Problems with too much or too little food can signal an emerging clinical depression. The same is true for too much sleep or waking up too early in the AM.

2. DO NOT GET ISOLATED. A common reaction to the early phases of separation and divorce is to keep to your self. This is not a problem over the short term. After all, it can be awkward talking to friends and family, especially when you haven't sorted much out yet yourself. But you need support now more than ever so be sure, sooner rather than later, to seek out the friends and relatives whom you have found helpful in the past. Make a new friend or two while you are at it, especially if your spouse is trying to isolate you (this is common in abusive relationships).

3. DON'T MAKE CHANGES TOO QUICKLY. Separation and Divorce create a lot of changes (changes in residence, changes in your relationship with the children, a more challenging budget, possible changes in school and work, dealing in new ways with family and friends, etc.). Do not overload yourself by taking on too much at once. Take "baby steps" at first.

4. DO NOT MAKE DECISIONS YOU WILL LATER REGRET. Anger, guilt and revenge motivations may all call for quick (and possibly stupid) decisions and actions. Since you should make as few changes as possible anyway (see #3 above), it's a good idea to put off those "hot button" decisions and actions until a calmer moment.

5. FOCUS AND PRIORITIZE. There never was a better time to get organized. One thing you should consider buying is a file-o-fax TM or Palm Pilot TM. Such gimmicks can help you get together an effective "to do" list. Sometimes it is easier to prioritize and focus when you bounce ideas off of someone else. A coach can be especially helpful at supporting you while you focus and prioritize.

6. RENEW YOURSELF. Spend time developing a closer relationship with God. Consider using various spiritual resources that may provide a close emotional connection with God

7. TREAT YOURSELF. Separation and divorce often brings unusual demands, more financial strain, and fewer opportunities to have fun. Be sure to give yourself a treat now and then. Things that can give you a smile or a moment of peace and quiet do not have to cost much in either money or time. Maybe a bubble bath is what you need, (or a walk in the park, or a good book).

8. GET THE SUPPORT YOU NEED. You are not a failure when you need help. It is actually sensible and maybe even a little brave to admit you can't do it all yourself. Support groups may be the answer, either through your church, divorce workshop or through a counselor.

These are a few ideas to help you stay grounded. As the divorce progresses the challenges are different. Soon you begin to negotiate the different stages of grief and mourning, and eventually its time to move on. It can be good to remind yourself that this is a process that has a beginning, middle, and end. Eventually, you can get off the roller coaster.