

## Divorce

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### When It's Not Happily Ever After After All

Did you know it is easier to get a divorce in Arizona than it is to get a driver's license? I didn't know this either until I started to look up divorce. Apparently, the other party doesn't even need to be informed. It seems that all you have to do is fill out the form, enter your credit information, submit it into the machine, and presto, it's over. \* Unfortunately, it's not at all that easy or painless for most people.

*\*Source: Arizonaquickdivorce.com. Note: We in no way endorse this site. Only found it amusing.)*



**DIVORCE:** Google the word and endless advertisements from “alimony advice” to “lawyers seeking to represent your best interests” to zoning laws on “property acquired in the partnership” will bombard your screen. Entrepreneurs have made fortunes specializing in all things divorce. Unbelievably, there are even divorce games and underwear advertising your status. This topic however isn't humorous to everyone.

With the statistics reporting that 50% of all US 1<sup>st</sup> marriages, and 60% of 2<sup>nd</sup> marriages end in divorce, we can expect that divorce will affect all of us at some point in our lives. These do not account for common-law unions, and other non-recorded unions that end with the same emotional, financial, medical, and psychological implications for the people involved.

For many adults and children, a divorce directly affects them. They are the individuals involved in the dissolution of the union and the family. This is often the most stressful situation that they have experienced. Everything in their world is being turned around. This is a time when work or school may be one of the only constants in their lives. It is helpful to have some routines in our lives which are familiar to us. The ripple effect of the divorce process can have consequences that are job related. Both the person getting divorced and their co-workers can feel the loss of time the person may be able to devote to projects, or overtime at work, as they need to take time off for other things. The support and understanding of co-workers can help the person through.

During the next month I will cover how divorce affects not only the individual involved, but also those around them. How can the rest of us be supportive? Feel free to send suggestions from any perspective that you would like to see addressed.

Whether you are the individual getting divorced, the mother-in-law wondering what will happen to her relationship with the grandkids, a co-worker or a friend of the couple, we are all affected by divorce. Employee Assistance counselors can help any of those touched by divorce



### Divorce-The Roller Coaster Ride

“My wife and I were happy for 20 years. Then we met”.

“We sleep in separate rooms, we have dinner apart, we have separate vacations-we're doing everything we can to keep our marriage together.” Rodney Dangerfield.

Laughing is often very good therapy. What isn't good is making jokes and gossiping about "real individual's" tumultuous experiences dealing with divorce and separation. Unfortunately many of our friends, relatives and co-workers have to deal with the real life challenges and extreme emotions that can accompany a divorce. Sometimes, we are unaware that these changes are actually occurring in their relationships well before they become public. Once we know, or suspect something is changing, what is the appropriate response? What can our role be to help our friends?

There are different stages of adjustment for each family that goes through the divorce process. Often there are negative and bitter feelings between the people involved, and it seems natural to take sides, or to offer support by trashing the ex. "You're better off without him..."etc. Although we may be well meaning, this type of support may not be helpful. It can possibly make the person feel worse because they think you blame them for staying in the situation, or they may start to actually defend the ex by saying that you only see the bad in them.

One thing we can do is to respect that there are different sides to every story, and that in fact, even though someone may be verbalizing some of the "facts" they still may be harboring emotions which are very conflicting to them. Each day can bring new ups and downs and perspectives about their changing circumstances.

Divorce is a process with distinct stages, and like death, they are experienced differently, and at different rates by the people involved. There are no days off. The gamut of emotions can run from shock and denial at being told your spouse is leaving, to ambivalence and hope that they will reconsider, and things will work out. Stages also include anger, depression, resentment, physical ailments, and hopefully acceptance that your life as you knew it has changed.

As friends and co-workers, we can offer support, friendship, a listening ear, and perhaps offer to pick up the slack if needed. Not helpful might be our own opinions of the situation, and our advice on what our friend "should" do. If asked for suggestions try to keep them positive and supportive. One suggestion might be that they take advantage of talking to an EAP Counselor who can provide them with the resources they need. Your understanding and patience will go a long way in helping them to adjust to their new world.

### **Divorce-Coping with the Holidays**

Coping with a divorce is hard enough and the first holidays you spend as a newly single person can feel very lonely and depressing. If you have children, these feelings may be compounded if you will not be spending your time with them. Several things can help ease the pain of this new arrangement. One is to enlist the support of family and friends. Hopefully people in your life will include you in their plans, simply because they realize that this may be a difficult time. If they don't seem to be forthcoming with any invitations, don't be shy, invite a friend to join you.



Even though people may be well meaning, sometimes they get caught up in their own lives and forget to include friends who could use the support. An opening line might be "I'm anticipating the dread of the holiday. This will be the first year that I won't be spending it with my family. I was wondering if you might like to have dinner with me?" This may be the opening they need to approach you. Sometimes it's awkward for them as well. They hate to bring up the subject for fear of upsetting you. They also may think you would be "uncomfortable" in certain gatherings.

If you find you will be alone, you can still make a plan to do something to keep yourself occupied and distracted from your aloneness. Volunteering at a shelter or soup kitchen has great benefits for all involved. You realize that despite adversity in their own lives, the people you interact with are very grateful to have you as a part of their holiday. It can be a very rewarding way to fend off the blues and to make new friends.

If you do have children try to be open with them about their ambivalence of leaving you behind. Very often they feel guilty, and even dread that they are going to the relatives without you. Depending on the degree of hostility or support between you and your ex, you can do a great deal to make this less painful, and not so dreadful for them. Assure them that you will miss them, but that you have plans with friends for the day. The separation is hard enough already, but they don't have to be miserable because they are so worried about their parents. Let them know that it's okay to have fun.

Depression is common during the holidays. Please call Solutions to speak with one of our counselors who can work with you on a personal plan to deal with the ups and downs.

### **Divorce- "They were my friends first"**

Your good friends are getting a divorce. You've vacationed with them, the kids share activities, you belong to the same organizations, and you work together. Now what? How do we maintain our friendships without looking like we're "taking sides"? Is it a good thing to invite them both to our son's wedding? What if it gets nasty? Can you ask them NOT to bring a date? What is the proper etiquette so that we don't make things worse? What about the divorced person who suddenly loses their social network? How do we respond appropriately to them? "It's all couples, they'll probably be uncomfortable." "I can't invite her even though I want to, because if he finds out..." Sometimes our family members divorce their spouses whom we have grown very attached to, and consider them a part of the family as well. Now what? These are common reactions from those who aren't sure what to do, so sometimes we do nothing.

We may find ourselves on the outside looking in. There is a grieving process that occurs when two people that once loved each other, are now going their separate ways. We experience many types of feelings from grief and sadness, to uncertainty as to how to remain supportive and sustain the friendship without taking sides. Attempting to support both people can become complicated, and we can feel like we're caught in the middle.



Communication is the biggest factor in handling these relationships. First acknowledge your own feelings about their divorce. Try to remain as objective as possible realizing that it is not your job to resolve their issues. When asked for your opinion directly, it's best to answer that you are conflicted, and although you know your friend may want you to take sides, you feel that what transpired between them is their business, and you prefer to keep communications open.

Talking honestly about your need to be able to interact with them is especially important when children are involved, or you work with the ex. You can express that you may disagree with their ex's choices, but that again, you don't want to be in the position of taking sides. Listen, and continue to offer your friendship, make special attempts to include your newly single friends, and continue to be honest about your own sadness that life has changed.

The counselors at Solutions EAP are always ready to talk with you about this, or any other issues on your mind.

**Call Solutions EAP at 1-800-526-3485 for assistance for all of life's challenges.**

**It's free, confidential and open to your family members.**

**Check us out on-line at  
[www.solutions-eap.com](http://www.solutions-eap.com)**