



Divorce, Money and Parenting

Divorce is a common occurrence in our American culture with almost 50% of marriages being dissolved. Divorce courts, mediators and lawyers are kept constantly busy filing the necessary paperwork to end marriages. Counseling offices are filled with adults and children trying to cope with the emotional aftermath of marriages with unhappy endings. The emotional and financial scars last for a lifetime. No one walks away unaffected; not the married couple, their children, the extended families nor the friends.

Three things seem to have the greatest impact on the climate around a divorce; anger, financial control and child custody tug of wars. All three have devastating long term effects.

Anger: When a marriage “dies” there is a grieving process that occurs. Like all grieving processes the parties involved experience a variety of emotions including denial, bargaining, anger and depression. Anger seems to be the emotion that most characterizes divorce. But anger is a “secondary” emotion. It is the emotion we experience after we experience another emotion first. To resolve the anger a person must address the primary emotions, rejection, fear, insecurity, abandonment, hopelessness. To address the challenges in a marriage each partner needs to be honest about the primary emotions they are feeling. Divorce may not be the appropriate action for resolving the primary emotions a partner is feeling. People will know they need to make a change in their lives and they choose divorce without exploring other options. Often it is not the best nor more appropriate choice and thus does not resolve the primary emotional feelings effectively. Neither party is “happier” after the divorce.

Financial control: A natural component of grief is to hold on to possessions that represent the loss whether it is a person, place, item or event. In the case of divorce fear and insecurity often drive parties to use money and financial resources as a way to define emotional security. Since anger is the expressed feeling in a divorce using finances becomes a weapon in expressing the anger. The party with the most financial control uses it to obtain the “upper hand”. The party with the least financial control is often at the mercy of the party with control. While courts and mediators attempt to equalize the situation they are not always successful and even if they are the emotional “battle scars” remain.

Co-parenting: Children suffer the greatest loss in a divorce. Not only do they lose their family unit, they often lose the relationship with one parent and sometimes their home, school, and friends. Children become the unwitting “pawns” between the parents as they process their own grief and work through their emotions, especially anger. The manner in which parents cope with dissolution of the marriage, their relationship going forward and their relationship with their children impacts the children’s ability to cope initially and long term.

Any divorce is going to have some long term negative impact on all parties. But there are actions which can be implemented which will support a cooperative divorce process and minimize the negative impact on all parties, especially the children. These include:

- 1) Both partners need to be honest with themselves about their emotional feelings and communicate those feelings to the other partner on an ongoing basis.
- 2) Both adults need to be willing to seek outside support whether from a counselor, spiritual leader, or other trained professional in exploring all options and defining the best resolution for all involved, including children.
- 3) Both partners need to understand that the dissolution of a marriage brings a grieving process and provide each other the necessary support during the process
- 4) Both Parents need to be committed to their parenting role separate from the dissolution of their marriage. A divorce does not eliminate parenting responsibilities; financially, emotionally or physically. Children need to be assured of both parents love and joint commitment to raising their children in a positive and cooperative manner.
- 5) Both partners need to seek financial advice together to ensure that all fiscal resources are divided equally to minimize negative impact on each party and on the children.
- 6) Both partners need to show sensitivity to the other partner and the children in making choices about a new life and relationships.

Divorce is always a sad situation as prior hopes, dreams and expectations come to an end. Our emotional reactions to these losses drive our behaviors. Our behaviors can either support healing of these losses or create greater injury, suffering and pain.

It falls on the adults to curb hurtful behaviors for the wellbeing of all involved, especially the children and to show compassion and understanding.

This is a tall order when feelings have been hurt and retaliation is the natural reaction.

Adults who can keep the key priorities of honest emotional communication, financial equality and cooperative parenting in the fore front will be successful in minimizing long term damage for everyone involved.