

DIVORCE

Divorce rates in the United States have increased dramatically in the past 25 years. Over 40 percent of the marriages among young Americans will end in divorce. There is a lot of stress on all the people involved. The man has to deal with, usually, not seeing his children, being alone, and the responsibility that is accompanied with much of the legal process. The wife has to go through, maybe, entering the work force for the first time. Children are often viewed as a back burner issue but more often than none they are the center piece of discussion. The children may begin feeling inadequate around their friends and even in personal esteem. Feeling like it is their fault they might get depressed or perhaps even rebellious. Regardless, divorce is an activity that has become common place in today's family structure, behavior, and morality.

When two people meet and decide their love is strong enough to carry them to

the next level marriage is usually the outcome. Sometimes they decide to have children and sometimes they don't, but when they do, it usually brings them closer together. All parents have desires and hopes for their children. The way in which parents achieve these ends can differ. Researchers do not agree on which of the child-raising practices is best. But it is known that parents provide role models for their children and that children rely on their parents to teach them about the world.

When a culture's values and traditions undergo a rapid change it becomes difficult to decide which attitudes and beliefs children should be taught. As one researcher has stated, "today's children are the first generation to be raised amid doubt about the role prescriptions that have long gone unchallenged. This makes their socialization especially difficult. Traditionally, socialization was a process of raising the young to fill major roles in society when the present incumbents vacated them. Yet today we do not know what type of society our children will inherit, nor the roles for which they should be prepared." (pp.34) Divorce among married couples is the most well-documented and studied of the various ways relationships end. According to Dworetzky:

Divorce rates in the United States have increased dramatically in the past 25 years. According to current assessments, over 40 percent of marriages among young Americans will end in divorce, of the children born in the last ten years, almost 50 percent will spend on an average of six years in a one-parent household. Nine out of ten children will reside with their mothers. Between 9 and 11 million school-age children in the United States live in one-parent families. About one-half of all divorces occur within the first seven years of marriage with the first two to three years being an especially vulnerable time period for divorce. (pp.47-63)

The actual rate of divorce may only represent a small amount of the problem. It is unknown how many marriages end in non legal separations or how many married people stay together in an empty, essentially dissolved, relationship for the children's sake.

Of course, you do not have to be married to experience a separation from a close relationship. "If we add to the official divorce rate the number of cohabitation couples who break up, those who terminate their engagements to marry, break-up, steady dating partner, or otherwise bow out of a relationship, several million couples end intimate relationships each year." (pp.27-28,30)

So, why do people separate? Unmarried couples give us a number of reasons for separation. In one study, researchers followed over 200 couples for a three year period. "During this period of time, more than one-half of them ended the relationship. Seventy-eight percent of the men and women listed boredom as the major reason for the separation. (Kolata: pp, 42) Apparently their romantic, passionate love had lost its power and there was little else between them. Couples reported other differences in several areas as caused for breaking up, including differences in interests, hobbies, outside of the home activities, religion, intelligence, and education. "Almost two-sixth percent of the men and women felt their sexual attitudes contributed to the separation. Arguments about the frequency and types of sexual activities became major barriers to living happily together." (pp.139-160)

Among married couples, similar issues are the reason why people have other problems. An important wife should stay within the traditional roles; that is, the man earns a living and the wife stays home and takes care of the house. There are conflicts when women begin having different desires. "In addition, when married women work, they are still expected to do more than their fair share of household and childbearing chores. In effect, they find themselves with two full time jobs." (pp. 98-104: "Understanding") Conflicts over roles is becoming an important factor in whether married couples remain together.

Separations present two challenges to our ability to adjust. On one hand we must cope with the additional stress that enters our lives. Studies of divorced men and women, for example, provide a number of illustrations of the types of stress to which people must adjust. "Divorced men often find themselves working longer hours to meet alimony payments. Since courts usually award the mother the custody of children, men have longer periods of separation from them. Men also find they dislike spending time alone. Many divorced women find themselves in the working field for the first time making less money than their husband did. Feeling helpless, lost, isolated and in a deep state of depression they soon feel trapped by the children and the new responsibility put on them." (pp.56-63: Psychology Today) The division to divorce, the process of a divorce, and the postdivorce adjustment, are all very stressful. It is not uncommon for the divorced partner to experience hurt, resentment, and anger. To many people, divorce signifies failure in an extremely important relationship. Lower self-esteem and feelings of worthlessness and reduction are also common and stress producing results. If children are involved, the stress can be even greater. Researchers now believe that the most important influence on the emotional health of children is the quality of their relationships within their family, however that family might be structured, according to Robert Every, a psychologist at the University of Virginia. For example, psychologists used to think that boys needed their father within the home until at least age of seven or eight. Now, they have discovered that the physical presence of a father in the family are warm and supporting adults. This shift occurred partly in recognition of the changing American family and the changing demographics of divorce. The focus on relationships also means that if divorced parents are angry and bitter, children will suffer and they will suffer more if they are exposed more to the conflict through joint custody.4" (pp.20-46) Parent-child interactions may become difficult, because the children of divorced families tend to exhibit more inappropriate behavior than those in intact homes.

Many children respond with anger and fear to divorce. It is also common for children who do feel guilty or in some way responsible for the divorce and to become withdrawn and depressed.

"Most children can adapt to a divorce within a couple of years, but, if the crisis is aggravated by additional stresses or conflicts, serious developmental disruptions may result. Whether children fare well may depend on their temperament, their past experience, their age, and the support they receive from their parents .5" (pp. 189-197) Such parental support is often lacking, because parents are so wrapped up in their own problems during a divorce that their ability to function as parents diminishes. "Although children may fare well in single-parent families, the chances increase that they will face problems. There are many stresses associated with divorce. These include the disruption of bedtimes and eating schedules, the effects of the parents emotional state, and the lessening of adult contact. Also, the level of income in the household usually decreases, and this may produce more stress. Less income may require the parent to move, which in turn may cause the child to behave to change of schools or move to a poorer neighborhood with a higher rate of crime and delinquency." (pp. 170-174)

Divorce is happening every day to couples in the United States. The only problem, is that the couple thinks they are the only ones going through it when almost twenty-two percent of adult America is also. When parents get divorced the children get divorced too. Children and adolescents face a lot of stress during their lives, but divorce is very confusing, speaking from personal experience. It can be too much stress to peoples' lives but they also present opportunities to form new relationships and to strengthen existing ones.

