



## Transitioning Through Divorce: The Six Types of Divorce

Mary K. Lawler, RN, Ph.D.

Family Development Specialist

Divorce rates in the U.S. have dropped slightly over the past 15 years. For couples who married the first time in 2002, the probability of divorce is 20% within the first five years of marriage, 33% within 10 years, and 43% within 15 years. About two-thirds of remarriages in the U.S. end in divorce. One-half of all divorces involve children. Oklahoma's divorce rate has been among the highest in the nation.

As you and your spouse join approximately one million couples in the U.S. who go through divorce each year, it may be a challenging period for you emotionally. This series, **Transitioning Through Divorce**, is not intended to encourage divorce but to help individuals who have made that choice to have a "good divorce"—where you maintain at least the same level of emotional well-being as before the divorce.

This fact sheet provides information regarding six different types of divorce. Each type will affect individuals in a different way. By learning about the processes, you may be able to move through each type of divorce more successfully.

1. The *emotional divorce*—the emotional separation and feelings associated with it.

You need to let go of your feelings about the marriage. You may feel that you and your partner have grown apart. You may be angry and disappointed. Often these feelings occur before the legal divorce is finalized. Some individuals have emotional issues for years after the legal divorce.

You and your spouse should decide the most effective way to handle household responsibilities. One partner may move out of the house, changing roles and responsibilities. You should discuss how to inform friends and family of the impending legal divorce.

The emotional divorce takes more work when children are involved. Children probably will be dealing with anger, sadness, fear, confusion, or rejection, and their feelings may make it more difficult for you to process your own emotions. The on-going relationships between your children and both of their parents also complicate the resolution of emotional issues.

2. The *legal divorce*—the lawful end of the marriage by court action.

The legal divorce marks the end of the marital relationship. It allows individuals the choice to remarry in the future. Although you may have feelings of helplessness, your attorney and the court system can help make decisions regarding your situation. Tell your lawyer if you want more control over these decisions. Professional mediation can be useful in

Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Fact Sheets  
are also available on our website at:  
<http://www.osuextra.com>

resolving difficult issues and developing a co-parenting plan when children are involved.

3. The *economic divorce*—the division of money and property.

The division of assets can be difficult. Since two households are more expensive than one, you may have less money to cover expenses due to divorce. As a result, you may need to learn new financial skills. Set up a budget based on your current expenses and income. If needed, community resources can help you find employment opportunities. You also may be eligible for job training or educational assistance. Insurance (health and life) and retirement plans can become even more important after divorce.

4. The *co-parental divorce*—the negotiation of parenting following marital separation and establishment of the binuclear family.

You must learn how to continue your role as a parent while letting go of your spousal role. You cannot control the actions of your child's other parent. However, your children will adjust better if you shield them from post-marital conflicts between you and the other parent.

The amount of time you spend with your children may change following divorce. You may feel overwhelmed if you have primary responsibility for their care. You may feel that you don't have adequate time for yourself as an adult. On the other hand, you may feel lonely and out of touch if you spend less time with the child/children following divorce.

You can be successful as a parent in a binuclear family if you:

- Avoid criticizing the other parent in front of the children.
- Don't use your child/children as messengers to the other parent.
- Schedule meetings in an open and neutral location where you can talk with the other parent about the child/children.
- Use mediation, if needed, to help you talk together.
- Don't ask the child/children for information about the other parent.
- Don't make your child/children your confidante(s). Seek out adult friends, family members, support groups, or counselors to fulfill this role.

5. The *community divorce*—the changes that occur in relationships with friends and the community.

As the divorce process continues you may receive less support from family and friends. You may feel as though fewer people are willing to help when you need them most. You may no longer feel comfortable around your married friends. The mutual friends that you and your former spouse shared prior to divorce may seem uncomfortable in your presence. They may not want to take sides.

You may feel nervous about starting to date again, especially if you haven't dated for years. Support groups through your church, community, or work can help you establish new friendships. A divorce support group offers a setting where you can share your personal experiences with others. If you are not feeling good about yourself, consider seeking counseling to help build your self-esteem.

6. The *psychological divorce*—the process of mental separation and the development of your independence.

This is the “true” separation from the marital partner. At this point you learn to be self-supportive. You may develop insight as to the reasons why you decided to marry and divorce. Instead of spending time blaming another person for the divorce, you can spend your time adapting to the divorce as you learn about yourself and new ways to relate to others.

***You know that you have adapted to divorce in a healthy manner if you:***

- Have accepted that the marriage is over.
- Have let go of the anger.
- Remember both the good and bad aspects of the marriage.
- Have made peace with the other parent of your children and with yourself.
- Are realistic about how *you* contributed to the divorce.
- Have established a support network outside former marriage-related friendships.
- Have developed future goals.

- Have allowed yourself time to heal before beginning another relationship.
- Are planning your life as a single person.

## Summary

This publication describes the six types of divorce. Understanding each type of divorce will help you have a “good divorce.” Information on the grieving process, stages of divorce, and children and divorce can be found in the fact sheets listed below. Additional materials are available from the library, bookstore, and professionals.

## Resources

- Lawler, M. (2000). “Transitioning Through Divorce: Grieving the Lost Marriage.” (T-2235). Stillwater, OK: Oklahoma State University Cooperative Extension Service.
- Lawler, M. (2000). “Transitioning Through Divorce: Five Steps To a Good Divorce.” (T-2236). Stillwater, OK: Oklahoma State University Cooperative Extension Service.
- Fulton, A. (1998). “Helping Children Cope: Children and Divorce.” (T-2374). Stillwater, OK: Oklahoma State University Cooperative Extension Service.

## References

- Ahrons, C. (1995). *The good divorce: Keeping your family together when your marriage comes apart*. New York: Harper Perennial.
- Bohannon, P. (1970). *Divorce and after: An analysis of the emotional and social problems of divorce*. Garden City, NY: Anchor.
- Matthews, W. (1988). *Divorce: The undoing of a marriage*. (Publication number T-2230). Stillwater, OK: Oklahoma State University Cooperative Extension.
- Morgan, M. & Coleman, M. (1997). *Focus on families: Divorce and adults*. (Publication number GH6601). Columbia, MO: University of Missouri University Extension.