

The Costs of Divorce

By Greg Hanson

True or false: Unhappily married couples become happier after getting divorced.

The correct answer is “false.” There is no evidence that unhappily married couples who divorce become any happier than unhappily married couples who stay married. Instead, research has found that two thirds of unhappily married couples who stay together describe their marriages as happy five years later.

Why? Because they have been forced to work through (though not necessarily solve) their problems.

On the other hand, husbands and wives who decide to divorce rather than working through their problems often find themselves facing the same problems in their next relationship. They become trapped in a cycle of defeat and denial that takes them from one relationship to the next to the next.

Perhaps there are times when divorce is necessary. Particularly in cases of abuse or adultery, divorce may be the only viable solution. Yet many family counselors believe couples opt for divorce unnecessarily. Yes, there are problems within marriages. That is unavoidable. But often those problems can be addressed without dissolving the marriage.

The truth is, divorce always exacts a toll. Even when divorce is seen as the only option there is still a price to be paid.

The Personal Costs

A victim of divorce undoubtedly encounters added stress, which may adversely affect his or her health. They may encounter struggles with self-worth and battles with depression. According to one study by the Atlanta Center for Disease Control, the physical, relational, psychological, sociological and emotional results of divorce far outweigh the positive aspects of divorce.

The Financial Costs

Even a trial separation can lead to tens of thousands of dollars in extra expenses. An actual divorce can catapult that into the hundreds of thousands of dollars.

There are the lawyer and accountant fees, the additional costs of a second furnished residence, and alimony payments to name a few. Plus there may be added transportation fees and special arrangements that must be made for children. The financial costs of divorce are much greater than many couples expect.

Couples facing marital conflict could benefit from some sessions with a marriage counselor. This may seem to be an expensive option. But in reality, counseling sessions cost only a fraction of an actual divorce.

The Costs for Children

A common rationale is that divorce is better for children than subjecting them to a marriage filled with tension. But that is simply not the case. In fact, about one in four children of divorce eventually require clinical help. Except in rare cases of violent abuse, children are better off in a home with a mother and a father even if they are dealing with marital problems.

As Ken Nielson, a family counselor and educator explains, “The ‘triple-threat’ of marital conflict, divorce, and out-of-wedlock births has led to a generation of children at great risk for poverty, alienation, and antisocial behavior.” He adds, “A boring marriage doesn’t harm the child.”

Divorce is often seen as an easy way out of a bad situation. But those who have been through a divorce would say there is nothing easy about it. It may seem like a simple solution, but it may not be worth the cost.