

# Should You Divorce or Save Your Marriage?



The following shocking divorce statistics are from the U.S. Census Bureau:

- Around **50% of marriages** in the United States end in divorce.
- 48% of first marriages** end in divorce.
- 60% of second marriages** end in divorce.
- 73% of third marriages** end in divorce.
- In America, there is one divorce every **13 seconds**. That is **6,636 divorces per day** and **46,523 per week**.

The above statistics suggest that if people fail at their first marriage, they choose to give it another chance, or two, or even three. This makes sense as the need for secure attachments is part of the human condition.

Yet, despite the repeated attempts, the divorce rate keeps climbing, suggesting that people don't learn how to have successful relationships.

Should you stay in your troubled marriage or should you divorce? To answer this question, let's first take a look at the financial and emotional costs of divorce.

## The Financial Costs of Divorce

As if the emotional toll isn't rough enough, couples who split must then confront harsh financial realities. It's not just the cost of getting the divorce, but also the often-extreme lifestyle shift that comes when one household severs into two. What are some of those harsh financial consequences of divorce?

According to George Mason University Sociology and law professor Lenore Weitzman in her book, *The Divorce Revolution*, we see a staggering drop in women's household incomes, while men, on the other hand, see continued income growth. A typical woman endures a 73 percent reduction in her standard of living after a divorce. Her ex-husband enjoys a 42 percent increased standard

of living.

People often say, "I have to get out of my marriage," but after digging into the numbers they are shocked and wonder if they can afford it.

One of my female clients described her financial dilemma the following way: *My husband, who makes no secret of his dislike for me, makes a good income and together we own a lovely house. The alternative to living with him is being on my own with two little kids and no job training or skill set. Should I stay or should I go?*

Another client summed it up this way: *Being in a divorce battle and dividing the assets is akin to being held hostage by guerrillas. The sooner you can get out, the better.*

If a couple is unable to work through their divorce amicably or with the help of some form of dispute resolution, using an attorney will double, even triple the cost of the divorce.

### **Money and Emotions = Oil and Water**

Let's talk money and psychology for a moment. Usually, money is thought of in black-and-white terms – either there is enough of it or there isn't. However, the truth is that money is chock full of psychological, emotional, and symbolic meanings. A person's relationship with money mirrors his or her conflicts, vulnerabilities, fears, needs and desires. Our feelings about money and how to manage it are largely dependent on our unique family history.

Emotions and money can be a dangerous combination. In fact, during divorce financial negotiations, emotions can be your worst enemy, leading to both higher legal bills and frazzled nerves. Yet, in the grip of fear for one's very financial survival, exercising rational judgment can be an uphill battle.

### **The Emotional Costs of Divorce**

Divorce challenges the basic sense of who you are, who you've been and who you will become. Transitioning from being part of a couple to being unattached is a journey all divorcing people must embark on.

There are two different processes people go through during the emotional roller coaster of divorce. First, there is the struggle for a more complete sense of personal identity. Post-divorce, you think, *If I'm not a part of a couple, then who am I? How am I going to do this on my own?*

Second, there is the grief of losing a loved one.

## **The Importance of Grief to Post-Divorce Healing**

All divorcing people will grieve.

From the time we are born, we attach. And where there is attachment, inevitably there will be loss. And where there is loss, as in divorce, there is grief.

Grief consists of a mixture of all of your raw feelings, both positive and negative, sometimes contradictory, which can include longing, fear, anger, love, sadness, hate, regret, and guilt.

People in the midst of grieving can experience typical symptoms of depression: difficulty sleeping, loss of appetite, negative feelings, low self-esteem and lack of energy.

Your instinct may be to find a way around the pain. Don't even go there or your capacity for lifelong happiness may be impaired.

*Ultimately, divorce can cause massive financial and emotional hardship in two people's lives. Navigating through this post-divorce period is challenging.*

## **Can Unhappy Marriages Become Happy Again?**

You fall in love. Neither one of you has a clue about the problems that will begin to hit you just a few years into the marriage – sometimes just a few months into the marriage. If any of us had the slightest inkling about the bumps in the road ahead, we might be inclined to avoid marriage altogether.

Problems encountered in your marriage are rooted in events that occurred when you were an infant and child, when your identity was formed. How completely your early needs were met will be mirrored in your relationship with your spouse. If your needs were poorly met, you may expect your spouse to meet them for you – a recipe for disaster.

The truth is that every married couple will be forced to deal with difficulties and many will face the decision to stay married or to divorce.

Individuals at the crossroads of divorce sometimes struggle with a false choice: "Do I divorce so that I can find happiness again, or do I keep the family together and remain unhappy?"

You may be surprised to learn that most unhappy marriages become happy again, if couples can stick it out. While some divorces are necessary, many marriages can be repaired.

It may be difficult to face the issues that you and your spouse are struggling with, but research suggests that couples who can manage to stay together usually end

up happier down the road than couples who divorce.

I have heard many individuals express regret that they and their ex-spouse did not work harder to try to save their marriage. In the end, divorce did not make their life better.

## **Conclusions**

We know several things for sure:

- Any couple who ties the knot can face problems in their marriage.
- The process of divorce and its aftermath is devastating, both emotionally and financially.
- Getting divorced and remarried does not improve one's chances for a successful outcome.
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Perhaps problems in a marriage should be considered a wake-up call to work on the marriage rather than take the road leading to divorce.

Wouldn't it be better if every couple saw their pain as a catalyst to deeply examine their relationship, get professional help and grow stronger?

Wouldn't it be wonderful if each individual could be honest with themselves and take personal responsibility for their contribution to the problems?

If partners choose to invest in their relationship and make needed changes instead of repeating their mistakes, they might be able to avoid an unnecessary divorce. And if they do finally decide to divorce, their personal work in couples therapy might increase their chance of a successful marriage next time. Either way, those alarming statistics could improve.



### **About [Deborah](#)**

Dr. Hecker's 35 year career as a psychoanalyst and psychotherapist, treating individuals and couples, is defined by her success in helping her clients develop a strong sense of Self and to acquire the skills they need to create long-term committed relationships. Dr. Hecker has developed a cutting edge partnership model, "Yours, Mine, Ours: Partnership Done Right," which she incorporates into her clinical work. She is the author of "Who Am I Without My Partner? Post-Divorce Healing and Rediscovering your SELF." Learn more at [www.drdeborahhecker.com](http://www.drdeborahhecker.com).

