Facing the Challenges of Divorce

Presented by Military & Family Life Counselors
Agenda

» Definitions and Causes
» Reality of Divorce
» Ways to Cope
» Responsibilities
» Forgiveness
» Children and Divorce
» Tips, Hints and Help
Legal Definition of Divorce

The termination of a marriage by legal action. The division of property, child custody and support, alimony, child visitation and attorney’s fees.

“Law.com dictionary”
What is Your Definition of Divorce

» Divorce is one of the most stressful and challenging events a person can experience in their life
» It is not a single event but a series of transitions and family reorganizations
» Brings changes that are emotional, economic, involve family relationships, standard of living, possible change of residence, friends, and extended family
Common Causes of Divorce

» Infidelity
» Financial problems
» Poor communication
» Lack of commitment in the marriage
» Failed expectations or unmet needs
» Addiction or substance abuse
» Physical, sexual, or emotional abuse
» Incompatible intimacy
» Military lifestyle and deployment issues

Ask audience if they have any other causes they can think of
The experience of divorce is individual but the following realities are common:

» Legal
» Relational
» Financial
» Parental

» Physical
» Emotional
» Spiritual/Religious
» Mental
Common Physical Issues

- Weight loss or gain
- Headaches
- High blood pressure
- Upset stomach or digestive problems
- Fatigue
- Sleeping problems

Ask audience if they can think of any more examples,
Remind them that prolonged health issues should be addressed by your physician
Common Emotional Issues

- Shock and denial
- Anger and rage
- Sorrow and despair
- Fear and anxiety
- Guilt and shame
- Sadness, loneliness and feeling empty
- Relief and/or acceptance

Remember that divorce is an individual experience which may bring some or all of the following “roller coaster” feelings. Emotions are necessary for healing... experience and embrace them.

**Shock and denial** - Shock and Denial are common reactions to the anguish that persists during and after a divorce

**Anger and Rage** - Anger is a natural emotion that must be controlled both in duration and effect. It is normal and ok to be angry but be careful as to how you are acting on that anger

**Sorrow and Despair** - Deep sorrow is a normal reaction to the end of an important relationship

**Fear and anxiety** - fear of future, finances and falling in love again

**Guilt and shame** - Distinguish between true guilt and false guilt

**Sadness, loneliness and feeling empty**

**Relief and/or acceptance**

These are the general stages of Grief and loss, it is likely you may experience some or all of these feelings at varying degrees and in no particular order.
Common Feelings

» Numbness: the sense that none of this is real, not having an emotional reaction
» Expecting your “ex” to come back
» Sense of anger and/or injustice
» Feelings of emptiness, loneliness, or despair
» Lack of focus or trouble concentrating
This is a personal road that each individual may want to explore. Spiritual and religious questioning is common.
Common Mental Impacts

» Changes in your view of the world
» Mistrust of self and others
» Fear of abandonment and rejection
» Forgetfulness
» Lack of focus or trouble concentrating
» Feeling dazed and confused
Legal Impacts

The dissolution of marriage by the courts:

» Allows individuals to legally remarry
» Is NOT a problem solver
» May cause or increase anger, hurt and bitterness
» Can create chaos in the family system
Relational Impacts

» Mutual friends may pick sides
» Making new friends
» Dating
» Possible loss of spouse’s family
» Custody issues
Common Financial Impacts

» What once supported one household, must now support two separate households
» Usually a decline in finances for everyone
» Stay-at-home spouses may have to return to work
» New family dynamics are created
Common Parental Impacts

» Shared duties are now primarily one parent’s responsibility
» Managing children’s emotions
» Communication between parents can become strained
Coping with the Realities of Divorce

» Productive and healthy ways of coping with loss, pain and stress

» Non-productive ways in which to cope with loss, pain and stress

Productive and healthy ways of coping with loss, pain and stress:
Ask your audience if they can think of examples
humor----journaling----sharing feelings with trusted friends and family----
counseling---physical exercise----eating well----taking time out for yourself, being
nice to yourself/positive self-talk----getting adequate sleep, rest and relaxation

Non-productive ways in which to cope with loss, pain and stress:
denial----stuffing your feelings----blaming----unhealthy or abusive anger----
regression----falling into addictions (drugs, alcohol, sexual promiscuity, gambling, porn…)
Responsibilities

» Assume responsibility for your present situation
» Live one day at a time
» Make healthy choices for you and your children
» Seek help and realize that sometimes you will need assistance
» Learn how to focus when decisions need to be made and be able to separate your feelings from the facts

Seek help and realize that sometimes you need assistance: examples include books, community, counselors and trusted friends
Forgiveness

» The difficult part of forgiveness
» The myths of forgiveness
» Benefits of forgiveness

**The difficult part of forgiveness** - you might believe that forgiving is the same as condoning behavior, you’re not ready, you are too angry or hurt, you want to punish, you believe they need to earn forgiveness, it won’t help to forgive, you feel guilt

**The myths of forgiveness** - if you forgive them it means that what they did was right or okay, you only have to forgive once, if you forgive you must forget, they must earn forgiveness

**Benefits of forgiveness** - freedom, brings some peace, can help mend relationships, has positive consequences, leaves a legacy of forgiveness to children, when we forgive it is more likely we will be forgiven
Issues with the Inability to Forgive

» May lead to bitterness and hatred
» *Can* create broken relationships
» Possibly prolongs the pain
» Possible health issues
» People around you may suffer

Can also make it difficult to negotiate decisions, about children, etc.
Process & Signs of Forgiveness

» Reflecting on what might have gone wrong in the marriage, to forgive both yourself and your partner

» We hurt, hate and keep hating *or* we forgive

» Not telling people what that person did to us
Tips for Talking About the Divorce

» Share what you feel comfortable sharing and nothing more
» Be careful about what you say about your “ex”
» Find a way to express difficult feelings privately
Tips for Talking About the Divorce

» Don’t ask friends to give you reports on the activities of your “ex” or to carry messages

» Avoid making your divorce the focus of every conversation

» Talk with trusted friends or relatives who have been through it
“Sometimes divorce is good. Sometimes divorce is bad. But the thing it always does is cause your life to change.”

--15 year-old boy of divorce

» Divorce means change in the lives of children.
» Children adapt more easily when they have an idea about what is happening
» When the divorce is undertaken impulsively, pursued in anger or guilt the child’s capacity to cope is severely compromised
» Let children be children
» Be cautious of alienating the child from either parent and/or relatives

Divorce means a change for children in the following areas: psychological, social and economical

The more hostile the conflict between the parents, the greater the damage to the children

It is best to help the child understand the sequence of events that lead up to the divorce

Please try not to have your child take upon parental roles. Role reversal can be difficult for children.
» Jointly tell them about your decision to separate / divorce
» Don’t substitute gifts for time and attention
» Refrain from using your children as messengers between parents
» Support relationships with both extended families

Use the resources that are available to you and your children. Books, counselors, support groups, family and friends

Children are sometimes relieved to be free of their parents arguing

Never use children as a weapon against each other
» Allow your child to communicate openly
» Offer your child choices, when possible, to increase their sense of power over their lives
» Find additional help for your child if needed

Make sure the decision is a definite one and that divorce is inevitable, not just a separation
Children are smart and usually know something is wrong, they should be allowed to be informed of what is going on and how it affects them
Allow children to ask questions and express their feelings
If it is possible, it is best to have the family together with both parents giving reassurance of continued love and support
Continue to reassure the children that the divorce is not their fault, it was the parents’ decision
Common Reactions from Children

» Denial, withdrawal and silence
» Fear of abandonment and losing their identity
» Anger and/or aggression
» Acting out
» Increased emotional need
» Possible regression in school and behavioral changes
Common Reactions from Children

» Sexual promiscuity in teenagers
» Conflicts of loyalty towards parents
» Panic and confusion
» Physical distress
» Guilt
» Relief (with some children it can be a relief to be free of chaos)
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<th>Do’s &amp; Don’ts</th>
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<td>» Don’t argue with your spouse in front of the children</td>
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<td>» Don’t discuss your spouse’s negative behavior with your children</td>
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<tr>
<td>» Have polite interactions with your spouse in front of your children</td>
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<td>» Choose to focus on the strengths of all family members</td>
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Just like…

…other life crisis and losses, divorce is a major loss and needs to be grieved.

Grief is the inner experience of someone who has experienced a loss. It may include emotions, thoughts and behavioral symptoms. Symptoms of grief are considered normal following a loss, but can also be considered abnormal when these symptoms persist for long periods of time.
Coping Tips

» Allow yourself time to grieve
» Think about what helped with other losses
» Let friends and family know how they can help
» Take care of yourself
» Look for healthy ways to express your feelings
Coping Tips

» Follow your own emotional timetable
» Join a support group if needed
» Make major changes slowly
» Talk!

WATCH OUT FOR: Obsessing over your former partner, going berserk, getting into a new relationship too quickly, getting even, spoiling the children, violence, having pity parties too frequently.
If it’s More Than Normal Grief

» If you believe that your grief is adversely affecting your life and activities, you may need to seek outside help from:
  - Military Community Services
  - Chaplain and Local Clergy
  - Behavioral Health Services
Coping with the loss or grief...

…that often follow a divorce or separation can be one of the hardest things you’ll ever do.

But if you allow yourself to grieve and learn ways to cope during this difficult period, you can begin to move forward.
Resources

» Military Community Services
» Chaplain and Local Clergy
» Military OneSource (800) 342-9647
» TRICARE www.tricare.osd.mil
» Behavioral Health Services
References

» https://www.militaryonesource.com/
» http://www.military.com/
» Elisabeth Kuebler Ross, MD, On Death and Dying
» Gene-Thomas Gomulka, Deployment and Divorce
» Scott Lorenz, Long Distance Relationships Suffer During Troop Deployment
» www.helpguide.org
Recommended Reading

