

## The Healthy Divorce

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Can we really have a “healthy” divorce and what would it look like? So many couples stay in unfulfilling, resentment filled marriages simply out of fear. They fear the unknown, they fear the financial ramifications and they fear the effects a divorce will have on their children and their families. Sadly, everyone around them, including themselves is miserable and on edge. This is not a healthy family environment and despite what you keep telling yourself it is not better for your children. As parents our job is to be a role model. One of the most important things you model for your children is love and happiness. Your relationship with your partner is the foundation upon which your children will model their own relationships. So you really need to take a good, long look in the mirror and decide if this is what you want your sons/daughters to aspire to have as their relational foundation. If the answer is no, then it is time for some changes.

Yes, it is possible to have a “Healthy” divorce. One where both your needs are met and your family is not torn apart and forced to pick sides. There are a few critical ingredients though to ensure this possibility. Both partners need to be emotionally well. This means you may need to see a counselor to help you emotionally navigate this life transition. Second, both partners must agree and commit to keeping their family’s needs the primary focus. This may require you to delay gratification and execute some added impulse control when starting new relationships, making large purchases etc. Finally, you must be in agreement on the fact that although your



relationship may be ending your partnership in raising your children must remain strong. You do not have to be intimately involved to run your “business”, aka your family, effectively. You do however have to commit to working together, as partners in this “business” to ensure your product(s), aka your children, reach fulfillment.

**So how do we accomplish this “healthy” divorce?** I highly recommend meeting with a Divorce Mediator. The difference between divorce mediation and divorce attorney/litigation is significant, especially in the tone it sets. When you meet with an attorney, each of you do so separately, with double the expense. The process immediately becomes inherently adversarial; me verse him/her. When you sit down with a divorce mediator the focus is on collaboration. You work together to create the most positive outcomes available for everyone. Mediation allows you to create a plan that works for each of you individually, and for your family. There is no “one size fits all” when we are dealing with people’s emotions, needs, financial constraints and children. You will be

guided through the process but also supported to advocate for what you want and believe is important. Mediation is often a much quicker and considerably more cost effective process.

**How do we talk to our children about what is happening?** First and foremost, openly and honestly. Most children are very perceptive. If you have reached a place in your relationship where you've decided divorce is the best option, I am confident your kids have felt the discord. It is important they hear repeatedly, this is NOT about or because of them. Kids can feel responsible, especially if they have been acting out, doing poor in school, have hectic schedule and costly extra-curricular activities. They may think these things have caused the problems. Assure them that this is about you as a couple having grown apart and in different directions. Sometimes children themselves have had friendships where this has happened and that can be a great frame of reference. Be clear about the different types of love that exist between people and that parent-child love is constant. Children need to understand that you will never stop loving them.



It is important to answer their questions, but only the question. We tend to share more information than necessary. Check in with them frequently. Ask what they are thinking and how they are experiencing this. Ask for a “thumbs up” part and a “thumbs down” side. Ask what would make it easier or better for them. Do not involve them in decision making topics unless you truly plan to take their suggestions and follow through. Children do well with structure, clear, predictable outcomes and expectations. The more specific you can be about changes in the household, schedules, visitations, personal possessions etc. the less scary and unsettling this process will be for them. The toughest task is keeping a united front when you are amidst separation and individuation as a couple, but it is critical to your children’s well-being. If you and your partner present as confident and optimistic about the changes in your family dynamics, your children will be less resistant and anxious.

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