

A Good Divorce is better than a bad marriage

This may sound shocking and offensive to some. But here is an even more shocking bit of information. About 10% of divorces take up about 90% of the court's time and resources because of the amount of conflict and legal paperwork flying back and forth. A heavily contested divorce can literally bankrupt a family. It is not unheard of in extreme cases for each parent to spend from \$50,000.00 to over \$100,000.00 or even more in legal fees and other costs (expert witnesses, psych evals, custody investigations). Of course having a marriage that lasts is the ideal. But the reality is that as many as half of all marriages in the U.S. end in divorce.



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The flip side of the 10/90 statistic is that most divorces settle relatively quickly and most people are able to move on with their lives. So, if all else has failed – you have tried to make it work and you see that it is not going to, you have tried counseling, advice books, support from friends, and divorce looks like the option then try to have a Good Divorce.

What is a Good Divorce?

A Good Divorce is one that is finished in less than a year, and does not cost much in time, money, emotional energy, and stress. When it's over you feel free rather than victimized and run over by a run-away train. In addition, if you have children a Good Divorce will have laid the foundation for a working relationship with your former spouse in regard to parenting and decisions about your children. The reality is that if you have children, if you get a divorce you are not ending your relationship with your spouse, you are changing it. You are no longer married but you will forever be the parents of the children you brought into the world. You don't have to like each other but for the good of your children and yourselves you need to get along and learn to peacefully co-exist.

A lawyer will tell you that the two most important issues to settle in a divorce are property and custody of the children. I am here to tell you that there is a third issue that impacts the resolution of the other two – stress and emotions. Going through a divorce is high on the list of stressful things that people do. During a divorce fear, anger, sadness, worry and grief can be an almost constant presence. As these emotions go up clarity, judgment, wisdom and rationality go down. People react, act, say and do things they would not otherwise do under the pressure of a divorce.

In the heat of the moment words are said, or sent via text and e-mail that sting and have lasting impact. If the tension is high it's a good idea to avoid face-to-face communication. Use e-mail. But remember that has its own risks. When you need to communicate with the other, write two e-mails. First write the one you want to say full of emotion and venting your feelings. Don't hold back. Give voice to all your angry, hurt, and outraged feelings. When you are done read it out loud. Share it with a trusted friend. When you have done this delete it completely. Leave no trace of it behind. Then write the second e-mail. The second one should follow the advice of Joe Friday from the old show *Dragnet* – "Just the facts." Communicate the essential information. Keep your communications polite and professional. The person you are divorcing is the most important person in the world for you to be polite to. This is even truer if you feel the person you are divorcing does not deserve this courtesy. You are not being polite to your ex because he or she deserves it. You are being polite to him or her because you deserve it. Maintain your dignity and keep to the high ground. Your self-respect and more importantly your children will thank you.

Children do not like divorce

They don't like the stress, disruption, changes and more that go along with it. But at the same time divorce is not inherently harmful to children. It is the conflict between the parents that is harmful. Change is inevitable. Even unpleasant changes like divorce are simply a part of life to which one must adapt, accept and move on. The parents' conduct during the divorce can either help or harm the children. In some cases I have seen the children expecting and even hoping

for a divorce long before the parents came to that decision. Children generally would rather see their parents living apart and not fighting than living together and not getting along. Remember that your children's experience of the divorce will be completely different than yours. You are all riding on the same train but seeing a completely different view.

Space does not allow for an in-depth treatment of this subject. To have a Good Divorce takes work. But even a bad divorce takes work so you might as well put your efforts towards a good outcome. There is a cartoon that teaches a lesson that applies here. Warner Brothers made a cartoon called *The Fighting 69 1/2th*.

The red ants and the black ants are fighting over a picnic but getting nowhere in their struggle. Finally the Red Ant General turns to the Black Ant General and says, "We've lost almost everything, let's stop this senseless fighting and share what's left." All that is left is one small cake with a cherry on top. The Generals shake hands. The soldiers stand together like comrades. Then the generals try to divide up the cake. The Red Ant General draws a line down the middle of the cake but goes around the cherry so it is on his side. The Black Ant General angrily redraws the line so the cherry is on his side. The truce ends in an angry outburst and the ants go back to fighting.

Nobody gets the cake and everybody loses.

Children are often the biggest losers in a high conflict divorce. A Good Divorce requires that you respect your children's right to love both their parents. Don't drag them into the middle. Don't make them choose sides. Express your feelings about the divorce away from your children. Encourage and require them to be respectful to both their parents.

Get help from professionals on how to help yourself and your family get through this trying time. The effort you put into a Good Divorce will pay you back in having an even better life when the divorce is over.



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