

D-I-V-O-R-C-E SPELLS MISERY

Divorce is no fun - no fun at all. Not for the spouses, definitely not for the children and certainly not for their families, friends or coworkers. Divorce is no fun for anyone involved, not even the lawyers.

Husbands and wives trying to "ex" each other will never be more depressed at any other time in the rest of their lives. After all, it is hard to deny (though harder to admit) that you've just cocked up one of the most important decisions of your life. It's even harder coming to grips with the realization that you might be responsible.

Unfortunately, the spouses are not the only ones to suffer. Innocent children get hurt or confused or guilt ridden or neurotic or a whole bunch of other things, none of them good. It is particularly hard on the children when they are used as negotiating chips, helpless pawns in a dangerous, destructive and ultimately selfish game.

As for the lawyers, well, "grief is their business and business is good" but lawyers don't get any more enjoyment out of seeing a couple split up and a family rent asunder than cardiologists get out of one of their patient's heart attacks. But whatayagonnado, huh?

Well, actually, there are quite a lot of things you can do. For starters, why are you thinking about divorce in the first place? Can the problem be fixed? Since most divorces are caused by money problems, does it really make sense to spend a whole bunch on lawyers?

Is there still a chance to straighten things out? Maybe there is a better way. Maybe this is just a rough patch, the kind of thing that happens to all married couples sooner or later. Maybe there is still a chance. Isn't it worth a try at least?

How in the world did your parents or grandparents manage to stay together for thirty or forty or fifty years? How do the people manage who have had their marriages arranged for them? Surely, someone else has faced this problem and overcome it. Maybe you should ask them. Maybe you should ask your priest or your pastor or the wisest person you know. There's no shame in getting a little help with your problems from time to time.

Have you tried counseling? How about mediation? Have you tried just sitting down and talking to each other honestly, calmly and rationally? Why not at least give it a try before you concede defeat? It probably won't hurt as much to sit down, bite your tongue and listen (for a change?) as it will be to completely turn your life upside down and share all your hard earned money

with the legal profession.

Quite often, divorce is not the easiest solution or the cheapest. You can buy an awful lot of counseling for what the two of you will pay for one hour in court time, never mind the costs of all the preparatory work it will take just to get there.

And if you do decide in the end that splitting is the only answer, there are lots of reasonable alternatives to beating each other up in court. Again, sitting down and reasonably resolving as many issues as possible is a sensible beginning. You may not solve all of your problems but every one you do sort out will save you a lot of time and money and grief.

You could also try mediation, where trained professionals try to help you resolve your outstanding issues in a non-adversarial setting. Aside from the fact that your chances of settling your differences tend to increase as your blood pressure decreases, it is also usually more economical since costs are often split between the parties.

Mediators can help you navigate the legal labyrinths of property rights, common law relationships, custody, maintenance, support and that sort of thing. They are trained in the art of providing unbiased, sensible advice and direction to the discussions. Properly utilized, they can help you get through the ordeal with minimal misery for everyone, including the innocents.

By the way, if you ever do end up in front of a judge, he will not be on your side or your spouse's side. He or she will be on the side of your kids and if you are being unreasonable about custody or access or support for the kids, you are going to have a real problem with the court. Consequently, it is not only the right thing to do but it will be quicker and much cheaper in the end if you come willingly to a reasonable position rather than having it forced upon you. It will also be less destructive for the kids.

Don't make the mistake of choosing divorce as your first option. Divorce, like the courthouse, is a last resort. But these are the kind of resorts where you don't have any fun. No fun at all.