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## Dissolving a Family

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### How Separation Affects Us All

According to Eurostat data, in 2011 the crude average divorce rate was 2.0 per 1.000 people, in contrast with the average of 4.2 marriages per 1.000 people. We can therefore conclude that not only has marriage, in its classic nature, becoming less of an option, but also that for every 2 marriages one may end in divorce. This topic is equally important when it comes to cohabitation agreements.

These statistics also illuminate the fact that separation of long-term couples is becoming more common than ever before. But is it less difficult for a family to deal with the breakup, along with the subsequent necessary changes and adjustments? Not quite. Divorce is still a challenge for the whole family and despite being common, it still requires a lot of psychological effort and a healthy period of grieving for all members.

In the next few articles we will talk about the most common challenges couples, families, and children go through when facing separation and how to overcome some of these challenges.



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## Separation Is a Process

Divorce doesn't start when the couple signs the divorce papers. It's a rather long process. Even if you have been cohabitating and don't have as much bureaucracy to deal with, upon breaking up, it still takes time. Among some of the reasons for separation are betrayal, growing apart from one another, family stress, such as an illness or a child's passing, unemployment, just to name a few. Some couples may argue a lot, while others might not speak to each other for weeks or months. However, the most significant change takes effect when two people stop looking at one another as a team and can't see the point in being together any longer.

## **Separation and Children**

When a couple reaches the conclusion that they should no longer be together, it makes sense to start thinking about living apart. If there are no children, one only has to deal with breaking up with the extended family. But when children are a part of the family, it's even harder to deal with the changes, especially for them. Not only are the parents no longer together, but the children have to move out of their house, leave their school and friends behind, and sometimes live in a climate of war between the parents.

Some children and teenagers will surprise you with their adult view on divorce, some may throw tantrums, act out, rebel and blackmail you. The reactions may vary. Each situation is unique in its own way. Still, some children and teenagers believe that it is best for their parents to live apart, rather than be in constant war and a state of hatred. Even if that is the case, this viewpoint doesn't ease the pain.

## **The Decision**

If the separation has happened upon mutual agreement, some of the practical issues might get resolved rapidly. One of the main reasons people don't end the relationship sooner, is because of financial commitments and debts (which is ironically also one of the main reasons why people split up). Unfortunately, when one of the parties is not willing to separate, everything else can get harder. Dealing with your own feelings, the feelings of your partner, your children and your extended family, can be a terrible burden. In fact, it is not uncommon, even for people convinced in the benefits of separation, to suffer from depression, self-doubt and guilt for wanting to dissolve the relationship.

## **Rebuilding Yourself**

Once you've started living on your own (with or without your children), and the custody terms have been decided, it's time for the recent singles to once again create their own identity, as a single person, and as an individual and/or a parent, to develop new hobbies and friendships, and to learn how to raise children on their own. Some people who have been married or cohabitating for decades, before the relationship comes to an end, find it difficult to be alone for the first time after so many years. Once again, finance can also be a large issue.

## **Guilt and Regret**

Another issue to address is separation guilt. It can occur even if there's no one to blame. Breaking up, after years together, may be perceived as the admission of failure in a marriage,

of being unsuccessful. It's a loss like any other. You might have had expectations to spend the rest of your life with that special someone and it didn't work out in the end. In many ways, it will feel like mourning someone. And in fact it is just that - you're mourning the death of the "we" and the meaning of "family" for you.

## **Readjusting**

Some people adjust quite quickly to divorce and separation, and easily find someone else to "replace" the lost companion. Others may take more time, and there are also those who never recover from grief and do not build another couple. But it is becoming increasingly common to talk about rebuilding families – where both parents are divorced and bring the children from their previous marriages, or even have new ones together.

## **There Is Always a Solution**

Seems confusing? Doesn't have to be. In reality, we human beings are social creatures who have been designed to live in groups, that's how we thrive and prosper. What better group than a family? Sometimes the challenges a family faces can make it stronger and more united. However, even if separation is the right decision in your personal circumstances, mental health professionals, such as family therapists, can lend a hand.

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