

Reconciliation-An Option for Some Couples

Reconciliation as an Option

Even after the decision to break up is made, some couples find themselves considering reconciliation (getting back together). Research suggests that about 1 in every 3 couples has second thoughts after the divorce is filed and tries to save their relationship. Of those that try to save their relationship, about 30% are successful. Of course, this number would probably increase if couples were to find the appropriate services to help them work through their difficulties.

Helping people get back together is not the purpose of this class. Still, research suggests that parents' getting back together is better for the children, whenever possible to do so (see the sheet entitled: When NOT to Co-Parent for exceptions to this rule). Because so many couples express a desire to try to save their relationship, we are including some brief information about reconciliation to help move them toward their goal.

Why Couples Choose to Reconcile

A growing amount of research suggests that when people find themselves in dissatisfying marriages, they will be happier five years later if they stay together and work on their marriages compared to couples who choose to divorce. This is probably due to several reasons. For example,

- Couples whose marriages are less than satisfying are often under a great deal of stress because of life circumstances. Their relationship may be that all couples face, but in addition, they may have big financial problems, have health issues, a death or severe accident in the family, or have some other issue that makes the problems in the relationship even worse. After their circumstances change, their marriage usually gets better as well.
- Most couples that divorce try to solve their problems in the same way over and over again. After trying so many times without success they give up on the relationship. Other couples have the same problems, but they learn to make changes in how they deal with those problems. This change allows them to find new solutions and to enjoy each other more. Sometimes, the problems don't completely go away, but they learn to deal with these old problems in new ways that help to increase understanding, communication, and relationship satisfaction.
- Couples who choose to divorce often have unrealistic expectations about marriage. They often times find a new partner hoping that things will be better. But, after the "honeymoon" period is over, they end up with similar problems in their new relationships. Unfortunately, they are just as unhappy in their new relationship as they were in their previous marriage. Couples who stick together, in spite of being unhappy with their relationship, often learn more realistic expectations for their relationship and are happier five years later.
- Finally, some people who divorce underestimate just how difficult divorce can be. They mismanage the divorce, allow their anger to fester, and end up creating a lot of wounds. Unfortunately, this mismanagement of the divorce often harms their children. These wounds, and the guilt that goes along with them, can take a long time to heal, and can leave emotional scars as well.

Tips if you are thinking about reconciliation

Many couples discover, at some point after the divorce, that they are not any happier than they were before the divorce. At this point they attempt to put their marriages back together. Either way, most people looking to reconcile will need some help to repair their marriage.

It is important to think about how your children will react to you and your spouse working towards reconciliation. Some things to remember are:

- Some couples will move back in together to try to reconcile. Beware of what's called the "yo-yo" effect – moving out, then back in, then back out, then back in, etc. As children are looking to their parents for stability and consistency, this process can negatively affect a child's emotional well-being.
- Remember, only 1/3 of couples who try to reconcile their marriage are successful, so be careful telling your children that you are working on getting back together. They may get their hopes up and then be re-traumatized if they find out you two finally decided to divorce.

Most couples that are thinking about getting back together will need help to repair their marriage. Finding a good couples therapist or other professional like a pastor, rabbi, or priest that has solid experience working with couples is an important first step. Shopping around for the right help is also a good idea because not all professionals are equally good at working with couples. You may need to ask specifically about a professional's credentials or try several options before you find someone who has the right set of skills to help you and your co-parent work things out.

An additional resource that many have found helpful is a short handbook put together by researchers and other professionals at the Utah Marriage Initiative. This handbook contains many tips and advice to help divorcing couples work through their differences. You may access a free version of this handbook at <http://strongermarriage.org/htm/divorce-remarriage/should-i-try-to-work-it-out>.