

The modern divorce – amicable or acrimonious?

By Debra Wallace, correspondent / Sep 2, 2017

[Bucks County Courier Times](#)



When Elizabeth was married 20 years ago, she intended for the relationship to last a lifetime, believing that her commitment to her husband, and her faith, was unbreakable. Even when the relationship became extremely volatile, she refused to call it quits.

“I made this commitment to my husband, and to God, and through thick or thin, I felt that you just make it work out,” said Elizabeth, 48, a Doylestown massage therapist. She was stunned when her husband ended the marriage, filing for divorce on Memorial Day 2014. She received divorce papers in July of the same year, and has been divorced for two years.

During those two years, she has been rebuilding her life, and the lives of her 11-year-old son and 13-year-old daughter, and is pleased to report that she has a current amiable relationship with her ex-husband.

With as many as one in two marriages ending in divorce, (an estimated 40 to 50 percent of US marriages end in divorce), according to recent statistics from the American Psychological Association and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control, there are generations of couples, parents, and children — as well as numerous attorneys, mediators and family therapists — picking up the pieces and trying to find a positive new normal.

Many experts say that even the most amicable mediation or divorce process can be extremely complicated, because it can involve the same five stages of grief as a major loss like the death of a loved one: denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance.

In addition to the grief that some women and men experience during a divorce proceeding, there is so much more to consider: intertwined finances, property, pensions, health insurance, taxes, friendships, extended family members and, of course, continuing to co-parent their children.

There are those who consider filing for divorce but back down because of the financial ramifications, or fears over having to start over or of being alone.

While many people consider a divorce to be “a failure” that ends the fairy tale they envisioned for their life, it can also mark a new beginning.

Elizabeth (not her real name) has a more positive attitude now. “For me this experience was finding a sense of freedom and discovering my true self and all of the things I had to put aside to please someone else,” she said.

“I am discovering all of the beauty our world has to offer; it has been a tremendous time of growth and learning,” she said. “I learned about boundaries, forgiveness and unconditional love, and I have learned not to put limits on myself and my abilities.”

After all of the ups and downs in her life, Elizabeth said she and her ex-husband have a great deal of mutual respect and concern since their divorce. “I want my ex-husband to be happy and feel good about himself. I still care about him, and I always will.”

Would she remarry one day? “I definitely want someone who loves, adores and is committed to me, and is also my best friend. I want someone who understands me and gives me freedom and space. But sharing my home again, that’s still a big question mark.”

David Woosley, an attorney with the Doylestown law firm Woosley Naragon LLC, is also a professionally trained mediator. Like most divorce attorneys he has seen tug-of-war over money, property, pets, children and more. His aim is to help his clients navigate an amiable divorce, one without a lot of strife.

“People are often able to put their resentments, concerns, and anxieties in the background,” explained Woosley, “so they can get through the practical realities of the divorce, and move forward with their lives, without focusing so much on the situation that they had in the past. I believe that the past should be a reference, and not a residence.”

He said that it’s counterproductive to concentrate on the “would have, could have or should have.”

“Divorce is not just about money and property, it is about feelings and the sense of self, and where someone fits in their social situation and in the world.”

There are some surprising twists and turns when it comes to negotiating the nuts and bolts of a divorce settlement. “Once the communication channel is open and they are each able to express what they really want, they can work out some kind of mutual arrangement.”

The shortest amount of time to get a divorce in Pennsylvania is 95 days, after a one-year separation. Previously, the law required a two-year separation period.

“This is a very personal choice,” Woosley explained, “everybody has an opinion about what you should do, but those people are not in your skin. You are the one who needs to follow whatever path you feel is the most appropriate.”

Woosley is an advocate of divorce mediation, because it provides an alternate path to litigation, and is most often much less expensive than divorce proceedings in court. The process of mediation is helping people to come to an agreement on their own, without litigation.

“I am not there to arbitrate and say ‘you do this ’and ‘you do that.’ I am there to help reach the kind of settlement that they can each live with.”



David Woosley of the law firm Woosley Naragon LLC
Alex Rodemich

Deborah Hudson, of Doylestown, a licensed clinical social worker, has spent 29 years working with couples and families to navigate their way through family issues, including divorce. In addition to her Deb Joy Innovations, LLC therapy practice, she is a leader of Divorce Care at the Doylestown United Methodist Church. Divorce Care is a national Christian program that supports everyone in the community going through separation and divorce.

“Even under the best of terms divorce is stressful,” Hudson said. “It is life-changing and the end of the life that you thought you had. It is also a time when there is the least amount of communication.”



Deborah Hudson

Her advice? “Focus on the children, understanding the effects of divorce and practical suggestions for single parenting. It’s important for the entire family that parents learn how children process divorce, and help them to move forward and accept it.”

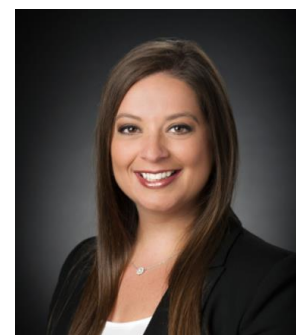
Hudson said the reality is children have as many friends who have experienced separation and divorce as those who have not, and there are a large number of “blended” families or “step-families,” which can provide challenges for children and their parents.

She said her clients have to deal with the end of the fairy tale, and unrealistic expectations. “People tell me they knew marriage was going to be really hard, but they didn’t realize just how hard it was going to be,” Hudson explained. “It starts out with love, and everyone putting his or her best foot forward, but when life goes back to a normal state and the day-to-day stressors and doldrums enter into the picture, people can see that as falling out of love, when it’s really another stage of love.”

Hudson said she has worked with couples who considered a divorce but stayed together after finding love with one another again. “We work on the negative patterns of them not understanding one another, and forging resentments toward one another. We develop commitment strategies to have them agree to work on this together.”

Since 2007, Jennifer Iseman, an attorney in Mount Laurel, New Jersey, has primarily focused on family law. She said when there are no children involved, it is easier to divide the assets, but she also finds that “sometimes people who have less, fight more over what they do have. On the other hand, the people who have more to protect, don’t always mind giving it up, because they don’t want to give it to their attorneys.”

There is a growing trend of couples who are ready to come up with an agreement to resolve everything, and are choosing mediation over litigation. She said she has been tagged as a “mediation friendly” attorney who encourages her clients to strike a deal among themselves.



Jennifer Iseman
David Michael Howarth
Photography

Mediator Mindey Elgart, an attorney, has for nine years been exclusively practicing mediation in Pennsylvania and New Jersey, as part of her firm, New Hope Mediation.

“I had an amicable divorce and that has created an amicable relationship for parenting our children, now ages 21 and 24,” she said. “That’s the way I thought it should be. I feel that all of my clients should work together with mediation, rather than litigation, because they once loved this person, and he or she is the parents of their children. I wish that more people knew that mediation is an option when they are approaching divorce.”



Mindey Elgart

Elgart said that during mediation she is the neutral party who works with the couple all the way through the divorce process.

“I am working to create two financially independent households when there was one. When we arrive at a sticking point, we look at which party cares more about one element of the marital estate and who prioritizes another element, in order to find an amicable resolution that both parties can live with.”

Typically, with litigation, she said, there is a retainer and an hourly rate. With the way she handles mediation, she uses a set fee in order to provide a distinctly different process from litigation. She said she provides “clarity and education” about the relevant laws, so that informed decision-making is comfortable to all participants in the mediation.

So after seeing all of the broken marriages and distressed couples and families, does Elgart believe some couples still live happily ever after?

“Yes, in fact I named my practice New Hope Mediation because I wanted people to have new hope for their future,” she said. “I absolutely feel that people don’t ever give up on the dream of a genuine love affair.”

While clients may sit in her office and say they are never getting married again, Elgart believes it is because of the hurt feelings they are experiencing during the divorce.

“It’s more of a transition than a failure,” she said. “I see divorce as the first step in finding the strength to do things your own way, and to find a path to start a happy and healthy new life.”

Just The Facts

Eight Tips for A Healthy Divorce From Several Local Experts

Local attorneys, mediators, family therapists, and recently divorced couples, want those who are considering a divorce, or in the throes of the process, to know that there is life after the turmoil.

To put everything in perspective during this emotion-laden process of mediation, or litigation, they offer some practical tips and suggestions for a positive aftermath.

1. Don't sweat the small stuff.
2. Learn and grow from the experience. Take areas of your life, like communication, and find a way to be more honest and articulate about your feelings.
3. Minimize the animosity – at the end of the day, everyone will be much happier.
4. Shift your focus from your current situation to five years from now. Ask yourself: What kind of relationship do you want with you ex?
5. Before going to an attorney make sure you know what you have – take with a list of assets and liabilities, including various insurance, mortgage and car loans.
6. Run a credit report on yourself (but not your spouse). If you don't know what is in your name, it could be a problem. Typically, one person in the relationship is responsible for paying the bills and the other is in the dark on how the household is run.
7. If you have children – try to figure out where you are going to live in relation to your spouse and what kind of custody arrangement you want. The fewer the transitions throughout the week, the better it usually works.
8. If you decide to hire a shark for an attorney, don't be surprised if he or she turns out to attack you like a shark, as well.

By Debra Wallace

FYI

David Woosley

Attorney at law
Woosley Naragon LLC <http://woosleynaragon.com/>
72 N. Main St.
Doylestown Pa. 18901
215-230-7776

Deborah Hudson

Licensed clinical social worker and family therapist
debjohudson@gmail.com
500 N. West St.
Doylestown Pa. 18901-2366
215-345-5300

Jennifer Iseman

Attorney at law <http://www.ronayneesquire.com/>
644 S. Church St.
Mount Laurel New Jersey 08504
215-291-0335

Mindey Elgart

Divorce mediator
New Hope Divorce Mediation <http://newhopedivorcemediation.com/>
181 N. State St
Newtown Pa. 18940
855-222-4673