

## **When the holidays end, why do so many marriages?**

By Randall Bennett MA, LMFT, LCPC

For many couples the holiday season is not the most wonderful time of the year. First comes Thanksgiving with its huge emphasis on family, followed by Christmas and New Years. All of these special holidays are followed by what some call *Divorce Day*. A recent survey revealed that divorce filings jump the Monday following the Christmas break. In fact, legal activity remains elevated throughout the month of January.

They are several reasons for this jump in filings. Some couples wait until the holidays are over in order to not ruin this special season for their children. Other couples hold out hope that something special would happen during the holiday season, something that would re-ignite their passion for one another. Still other couples go into the holiday season with no intentions of separating or divorcing only to endure the revelation of an affair, the humiliation of abuse, or one last drunken outburst, severing any hopes for a future together. The holiday season is often full of tension, emotion, and financial challenges, all of which can trigger major arguments. One additional possible cause for this jump in filings is a desire for some to start the New Year with a new life or clean slate.

A crucial question in all of this is, "Do you really want to do this?" One should never file for divorce out of anger and emotions often run high after the holidays. After these emotions have cooled are you going to be happy initiating a divorce and ending your family as you know it? Rather than running first to an attorney, consider seeking a skilled marriage counselor. A skilled therapist can assist with communication skills, conflict resolution skills, and do this while exploring underlying issues that make all the difference.

As a marriage and family therapist, I can't emphasize this point enough: *don't make a rash decision*, slow down, think long and hard before seeking a divorce. Discuss your situation with a trusted friend, a family member, or a skilled therapist. As hard as it is to think of it this way, treat this important decision as a business deal, because at its core a marriage is similar to a complicated business arrangement. Therefore be strategic with your thinking. A skilled marriage and family therapist is trained to help you think through this as clearly as possible.

One suggestion I often share with people in this situation is to divorce the old relationship and build a new one! In our practice we try to save marriages when it is appropriate and possible to do so. We believe that it is often in your own long-term best interest to save the marriage. At the same time, we are realists. We live in a fallen world with fallen people. In our fallen condition, relationships do fail.

Some things to keep in mind when facing serious marital difficulty:

-Be prepared to experience a different type of separation anxiety as the ideal of the two becoming one is torn asunder. At the same time it is common to experience feelings of grief as if there has been a death, a death with no funeral and regular reminders as to how things use to be.

-Allow time to process the situation. It usually takes months to plan a wedding, even with lots of help and supports available. Yet a divorce can happen quickly and leave one feeling very lonely. People going through this process can find themselves in a room that is only big enough for one, along with their attorney who is charging by the minute!

-Document everything- every assertion you make should be backed up by evidence. Where is the evidence he has a hidden bank account? On what basis are you asserting that she is keeping the children from you?

-Get financial disclosures. Don't open your spouse's mail but document the source of his or her financial statements.

-Get a therapist! A divorce is 45% emotional, 45% numbers, and 10% legal. Since such a huge piece of this process is emotional, it makes sense to have an expert on emotions on your side, a supportive, neutral party who can help you navigate the the minefields as well as the emotional roller coaster.

-Put a price on everything, since divorce is a numbers game. Be honest with yourself as to the value of physical possessions. At the same time ask yourself how much your peace of mind is worth, how much your good reputation and character are worth, how much your soul is worth.

-Consider whether you need an attorney. This is not always necessary, particularly when there is no real argument over assets or custody. Good attorneys often suggest a marriage therapist as a first response. Mediation may be another viable option. There are advantages in sharing an attorney. In short, try to keep this out the courts if alternatives are reasonable. Whether you use an attorney or not, it is important to understand the legal terms and the fine print of any divorce settlement.

-Develop good coping mechanisms, healthy coping skills. When going through something as traumatic as a divorce, you may not behave or feel as you normally do. Beware of destructive coping mechanisms like drinking (even wine) or other addictive behavior, spending, sexual acting out, and gambling.

-Avoid using your children as your sounding board. Don't involve your children before, during or after the divorce, although depending on their ages, they may

have some input on the custody arrangements. Don't bad-mouth your spouse (or ex-spouse) to your kids, as they are likely hurting, too! They love their other parent just as much as they love you. Talk to trusted friends, participate in a support group, or meet with your therapist.

-Stay on speaking terms, especially when there are children involved. Be courteous and respectful. The key is to avoid escalation. The love you have for your children should be the driving force behind your actions, NOT anger, hurt feelings, or resentments!

If you find yourself in a failing or already failed relationship, we would love to talk with you about the latest innovative program from Intermissions Therapies, Our DivorceSherpa Program. Our DivorceSherpa Program walks you through key aspects of the divorce process including legal and financial considerations, emotional and social support, networking and career options, and effective parenting through and after a divorce.