

## **Building Hope for Your Family's Future**

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It's so easy to become fearful when you watch news programs or read the statistics.

Children of divorce are more likely to become delinquent, or depressed, or even suicidal than their peers. Marriage partners who experience divorce have a difficult time recovering financially, and indeed sometimes slip below the poverty line. Lawyers even tell "war stories" about families they know who rendered themselves homeless in a contested divorce.

***You and your family members do not have to become divorce statistics.***

Here are the Top Five ways to keep from becoming a statistic, and instead to build hope for your family's future after the fact of divorce:

1. ***Take care of yourself.*** No one can do this but you. One fact of divorce which is not understood by the general population is that separation or divorce (the "marital rupture") is likely to cause a deep emotional injury at the outset of the process. This is even demonstrated by the body, in sleep disturbances, eating disturbances, and lowering of resistance to outside viruses. Those who expect these health disturbances, and act quickly to remedy them, are more likely to be successful in the divorce process. Healthy eating, exercise, time outdoors, time with family or with members of your faith community, can all help dramatically. Perhaps the most important health factor is good sleep quality – if this is lacking for you, don't hesitate to consult your doctor. There are effective treatments for sleep disorders which have little or no side effects. Why is it so important to care for self during this time? Because reducing stress and anxiety will help you to be more effective in the divorce process, and to make better quality decisions about your future.

2. ***Don't expect to understand everything that went wrong with your marriage.*** The more intelligent you are, the more difficult this may be for you! When going through a stressful event, our minds tend to seek backwards rather than forwards. Why did this happen to me? Why does my spouse always act this way? What could I have done differently? All these questions direct our thoughts to the past. Major research has shown that people who work only to ***contain*** these unanswerable intellectual struggles from the past, rather than to ***resolve*** them, will be more successful in the divorce process. Why is this? Because their attention is focused forward on the future, not backward into the past. They are more ready to find positive, practical solutions for moving forward. Just construct a temporary storage box in your mind for questions which are presently unanswerable – you can take them out again in the future when you have more time, more information and more energy to digest them!

3. ***Find a way to stay out of court.*** The benefits of this are obvious, and include financial savings for your family, reduction of stress, preserving your health, saving time, and saving emotional resources. The other benefit, which is not immediately obvious, is that other forms of dispute resolution (such as collaborative law or mediation) are better designed to help you make better decisions about your future. Contested divorce proceedings are likely to set you and your spouse on opposite paths into the future, and destroy whatever balance of trust may be left which is needed to construct a post-divorce parenting partnership. Court hearings should be viewed as major, life-threatening surgery: if you absolutely need them, they are there for your help; if you don't need them, don't place your body at risk! There are wonderful alternate dispute resolution options described in [collaborativelaw.org](http://collaborativelaw.org), [divorcenet.com](http://divorcenet.com), and other websites, for your education and benefit! One little known fact is that, nation-wide, most divorce cases (as much as 95%) are settled sometime during the process. However, most cases settle "on the courthouse steps", after expensive attorneys fees have already been incurred. Don't pay your attorney to do two jobs – prepare for trial and work toward settlement at the same time! It doesn't work efficiently, and will only poison the emotional and financial well you and your children need to draw from into the future.

4. ***Employ the right experts.*** In Collaborative Practice, there are adult and child psychologists and financial analysts who are trained to act as neutrals in the process. They receive the same training that collaborative and mediation attorneys take to learn skills of conflict resolution. Are you wondering which retirement asset would work best for you in a settlement? Are you wondering what parenting schedule might work best for your young children? Choose an alternative dispute resolution process that uses neutral experts to help, and ***look for the very best professionals in each field.***

5. ***Give your children a voice in the process.*** This does not mean asking your children to choose a parenting schedule, or a parent! It means asking them what their concerns are, and what would be helpful for them. Frequently children of divorce are fearful of alienating one parent or the other, and clam up when parents ask them questions. The Child Specialists (psychologists) trained in Collaborative Practice can ask the questions you can't ask, and get reliable feedback from your children. This isn't therapy – it is teaching communication and adjustment skills that will build a better foundation for a happy future. ***Virtually every major study on children of divorce has concluded that the single most important factor in success is the parents' ability to cooperate and communicate in a post-divorce parenting partnership.*** Keep that in mind the next time you feel like letting loose against "the ex", especially in the presence of your children.

You should know that there are caring professionals – lawyers, psychologists, and financial analysts -- who have committed their professional lives to designing a better decision making process for you and your family. They are there to help you find a successful path forward which is cost effective. Take the time to find them in your community!

***References: Judith Wallerstein, Second Chances ; Constance Ahrons, The Good Divorce***

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