

Divorce is a process not a single event or experience.

Divorcing parents are immediately thrust into a major life transition that affects the foundation stones of their lives: their family, social community, financial security and emotional well being. It changes the family structure and dynamics to such an extent that no one in the family feels secure until a new structure is established and stabilizes. In the interim the parents worry about... How will they make their money stretch to support two households? What is a parenting plan? Will I be able to move if my job requires it? And most of all, how will this experience affect our children?

Children of divorce are not destined to suffer irreparable psychological harm, poverty, or the loss of a secure relationship with one parent, or the other.

Divorce in, and of, itself is not toxic to the emotional health and well being of children. It depends upon how the parents cope with, and handle the stress of ending their marriage. Psychological research clearly shows that high conflict divorces make children more vulnerable to emotional, academic, and behavioral problems, because the parents emotional energy and financial resources are drained to such an extent that they tend not to parent as well, if at all, during a high conflict divorce. If the level of conflict is reduced the stress in the lives of both parent and child is reduced making it more likely that the children will adjust to the change in their parent's relationship in a healthy way.

*" The good divorce is a concept that does not advocate divorce as being good, but rather accepts the fact that it is part of our society. It is a natural reaction and safety valve for bad marriages. "* C. Ahrons, *The Good Divorce: Keeping Your Family together when your marriage comes a part.* (1994) New York: Harper Perennial.

A good divorce allows the intimate personal relationship between the parents to end while supporting the children's deep attachment to both parents and their extended family's. It allows each member of the family to grieve the loss, accept the change and to explore the possibilities of a different future. Mediation, with or without lawyers, is the first step in any "good divorce" , because it gives the separating couple the opportunity to collaborate, negotiate, and work out the terms of the end of their relationship in a constructive manner which reduces conflict and preserve limited financial resources. Some couples mediate the terms of their divorce without the assistance of any professionals, but others, especially those with children and assets find this to be difficult and potentially reckless. Many couples agree upon a mediator and work alone or with their attorneys in a collaborative or adversarial legal process. Which method is best, depends on the family, its financial resources, and the unique needs of each member. I will discuss how to select the process that is best for you in my next article. Nevertheless, in every "good divorce" the parents recognized that compromise is absolutely necessary, and they have a vision of a future that involves two households linked by their commitment to parent their children.