

## Divorce: When is it Traumatic?

Adapted by Ria Severance, LMFT from Ellie Izzo, Ph.D.,  
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- One in 2 marriages ends in divorce. Do some of those who stay married do so to avoid the trauma of divorce? Given that it's so common, can divorce also be traumatic? Yes! Ellie guesses that many of those who have divorced would describe it as an agonizing ordeal.
- **Some factors associated with divorce being experienced as traumatic:**
  - Degree of trauma/distress in each partner's family of origin's history of divorce, and/or personal history with divorce – may not be evident.
  - Degree and severity of conflict (acting out, defensiveness, verbal attacking, pulling the kids into the middle, fear, hostility, aggression etc.) expressed emotionally, verbally, physically, financially and/or legally.
  - The specific, larger meaning "divorce" has for a given partner – may not be evident.
  - A partner's coping skills (e.g. ability to regulate emotions, tolerate distress, verbally negotiate effectively, consider the other's perspective, empathize, stay focused on goals).
  - A partner's beliefs, values, spiritual views regarding divorce – may not have ever been identified.
  - Degree and quality of available support and the nature of reactions from family, friends and helping professionals.
  - Degree partners' standards of living may fall, the presence of very young children, and the degree of change required (e.g. change schools, change living location, change in childcare) are, understandably, associated with increased levels of fear and anxiety.
- **Those experiencing divorce as traumatic, are at risk to:**
  - Struggle to sustain close relationships,
  - Struggle to choose friends or new partners wisely,
  - Experience sexual challenges,
  - Experience periods of hostility,
  - Argue repeatedly with friends, family and colleagues,
  - Withdraw socially, and/or
  - Feel threatened constantly.
- If you or someone you care for is suffering through a divorce, meet with a collaboratively-trained and qualified Divorce Coach, Child Specialist who also works with adults or a Co-Parenting Specialist. These skilled Professionals can:
  - Help a partner transition more effectively, rather than being at the effect of trauma,
  - Assess and enhance a partner's ability to integrate and finally accept the experience of divorce,
  - Facilitate effective parenting during this traumatic time, and
  - As necessary, support and build coping skills that mitigate the traumatic effects of a high-conflict divorce.