

Divorce is Contagious

People want to be like everyone else and are heavily influenced by what they perceive everyone else is doing. Divorce and separation is contagious. According to a US study, which used research from across three U.S. universities, couples are 75 percent more likely to get divorced if they have a close friend who also gets divorced. The technical term they coined to describe this phenomenon is called, 'divorce clustering.'

Research also revealed that people are 147 percent more likely to divorce if they have multiple divorced friends in their social network, compared to married people with mostly married friends, this is called the 'multiple source effect'. Divorced siblings render people 22 percent more prone to split. Even having divorced coworkers comes with a 50 percent increase in divorce risk.

In addition, there are clusters of divorcees that extend two degrees of separation in the network. In other words a person's tendency to divorce depends not just on his friend's divorce status, but also extends to his friend's friend.

Taken at face value, these statistics confirm what we suspected that divorce may be much like the Flu with germs that are easily transmitted. However, to conclude that 'divorce is contagious' often feels quite insulting to many separated people. Divorce and separation is almost always a decision entered into much more seriously and reluctantly than a marriage or an intimate long-term relationship.

The statistics are big numbers. Then again, it may not be entirely surprising, considering people feel comfortable and can be motivated to make changes when they see other people doing the same.

Strangely enough, empathy can be a reason for "contagious" separations; "We generally choose friends who we respect, admire or closely relate to. When our friends share their experiences with us we are placing ourselves emotionally 'into their shoes.' That sort of experience can make us start to relate our friends' experience and their chosen solutions to our own lives."

Social proof goes beyond just wanting to fit in; there's also an element of security involved in following the pack. When someone is unsure of what to do, they'll follow what their friends are doing, assuming that the most travelled path is the best one to take.

For couples already experiencing problems and considering separation, a close friend's choice to end their relationship is often the final straw. Having a friend who has separated "can provide the shot of courage that one has been looking for in advance of taking that daunting first step toward ending a bad relationship," and most of us humans think the "grass is greener on the other side," so, no matter which side we are on, we think the other side will "make us happier."

Resistance to Divorce

Divorce is contagious, just as Flu and Colds are contagious. However, many couples have built up resistance and immunity to 'divorce'. Just as not everyone catches the Flu, not everyone will catch 'divorce'. Separation and divorce will come to the relationships that are susceptible. A fit and healthy relationship will survive the onslaught of a 'divorce season'.

Immunization & Cure for Divorce

Prepare for action; if you are serious about wanting to stop or prevent a divorce or separation, as soon as possible, soothe the panic, skip the moping, and make an action plan. The steps below will guide you to a strong start:

1. Smother the urge to play victim; “How could you do this to me?” may express how you feel, but it’s likely to be a losing strategy for regaining your spouse’s affection. Trying to make your partner guilty and shaming into returning, will only win back, if it wins anything, a depressed “I hate being here again” spouse. Skip the “poor me,” and flip to “proud me.” Remind yourself of the positive qualities you can bring to a relationship, and figure out how to show them in their full colours. Pretty soon you’ll start believing in yourself more. Save your words for appreciation of them, not for comments about yourself. Flattery will get you everywhere. Self-praise is a turn-off.
2. Be positive; strong people give out lots of positivity. Smile at your partner and laugh at their jokes. Express affection. Share your gratitude for good things your partner has done.
3. Clarify what you need to change; make a list of all the negative comments that your spouse has made to you that now, with hindsight, you can see were attempts to stop a separation. List all the complaints, criticisms and angry comments you can recall that you probably see now were about causes for the current situation. Check out the list with your partner. Be sure you left no criticisms out. At the same time, keep your tone strong, as if you are just checking the list you are bringing to the grocery store. “No big deal; I’m just bringing certain my list is complete.” Then map a plan of action for fixing each and every item on your list. No victim and no grovelling either.
4. Clean up all the old hurts; find out what resentments and hurt feelings your partner carries that may have been factors that led to the current situation. Write out a list of all the moments that your partner recalls with anger or bitterness. Create your own list as well. Then go through each item on the list together, one by one, to “find the mis.” That means each of you needs to look for your own part in the misunderstanding, misperceptions, mistakes etc. No one gets to comment on what the other did that was problematic. Just aim to understand what *you* did that inadvertently contributed to the problem. Apologize for it. Then figure out what in the future you can do differently to prevent any repeats.
5. Mistakes are for learning; if your relationship is rocky now, maybe you haven't been doing enough learning from the mistakes.
6. Look your best; appearance can be a huge factor in the odds of success in preventing a separation. Pay attention to the clothes you’ve been wearing. Picture how you would look if you were to look strikingly attractive.
7. Relationship counselling; it can also be very helpful, but choose carefully, be sure the one you pick can give you the skills and tools for your relationship that you need.

***Be a partner that is:
Bigger, Stronger,
Wiser and Kind.***