

## **Divorce, Effects on Relationships**

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Divorce has been seen to have significant impacts on relationships both within and outside of families. In terms of friendships, the divorced couple is often seen to withdraw from other couples prior to the divorce in order to avoid sharing uncomfortable details. With more attention instead focused on friendships with individuals, divorced couples lose some, if not all, of their couple friends, whom may take sides either individually or as a couple. As well, fellow couples may not wish to be pulled into conflict. However, individual friendships tend to strengthen as the divorcees turn their freed-up time for attention towards friends.

Interestingly, divorce has a significant effect on the structure of a person's social network. Both positively and negatively, it appears the attitude one's social network has toward marriage and divorce can influence one's own attitudes and behavior. There is an idea of social contagion, whereby divorces within social networks can extend its influence of up to two degrees of separation, disappearing at three degrees of separation. Research has indicated a clustering of divorce, where an individual's likelihood of dissolution increases by 75% if there is divorce among first-degree friends, and 33% among second-degree friends (McDermott, R., Fowler, J. H., & Christakis, N. A., 2013).

Results have also suggested a divorced friend or family member living far away could have just as much effect on an individual's likelihood of divorce as someone living nearby. This increased likelihood is witnessed equally for both men and women. Because divorced individuals are often viewed negatively, divorcees are more likely to remarry other divorcees whom have

gone through a similar experience. This pattern of remarrying may act as one source of explanation on the observed clustering effect within social networks.

In thinking of children, parental divorce has been seen to negatively affect children's attitudes toward romantic relationships. Consistent with social learning theory, if a divorce occurs within the context of high inter-parental conflict and low quality of marriage, this could contribute to a child fearing commitment. This could lead the child to develop a pattern of early termination of romantic relationships in young adulthood, and later taking a favorable position of divorce as an option. However, it is important to consider the contrary, where children may also grow from the experience of inter-parental divorce.

Findings contend that, while divorce can be a stressful event in life, a child's adjustment can be saved from negative effects brought on by high marital discord. Experiencing divorce as a child can have long-lasting effects on mental health, with increased rates of depression in midlife and older adulthood, in comparison to peers whose parents remained married throughout child/adulthood. Family solidarity has also seen to be negatively impacted, with decreased quantity and quality of contacts with family members. This is not just a result of losing touch with in-laws. A more proximal example of this is the experience for nonresidential parents, of whom are mostly men. It is subsequently difficult to maintain close relationships with their children post-divorce. A consequence of this is boys of divorced fathers may experience less closeness than mothers and girls in single-mother households.

Lastly, grandparents of the divorced couple are also affected. As their adult children divorce, grandparents are often seen stepping in to ameliorate the stress of emotional and financial adjustment, and childcare, often becoming a surrogate parent. This is advantageous not

just for the parents, but for the children, as closeness with grandparents is associated with better adjustment.

In conclusion, each case should be seen in context, as divorce can have both positive and negative outcomes for relationships within and outside of families.

### **Further Reading**

Cui, M., Fincham, F. D., & Durtschi, J. A. (2011). The effect of parental divorce on young adults' romantic relationship dissolution: What makes a difference?. *Personal Relationships*, 18(3), 410-426.

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Uphold-Carrier, H., & Utz, R. (2012). Parental divorce among young and adult children: A long-term quantitative analysis of mental health and family solidarity. *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage*, 53(4), 247-266.

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