

### Learning Outcomes

#### 14.1 What are macro factors contributing to divorce?

Macro factors contributing to divorce include increased economic independence of women (women can afford to leave), changing family functions (companionship is the only remaining function), liberal divorce laws (it's easier to leave), fewer religious sanctions (churches embrace single individuals), more divorce models (Hollywood models abound), and individualism (rather than familism as a cultural goal of happiness). Regarding individuals, 95 percent of 1,319 undergraduates at a large southeastern university disagreed with the statement, "I would not divorce my spouse for any reason"; hence, all but 5 percent would divorce under some circumstances.

#### 14.2 What are micro factors contributing to divorce?

Micro factors include having numerous differences, falling out of love, negative behavior, lack of conflict resolution skills, satiation, value changes, and extramarital relationships. Being in one's teens at the time of marriage, having a courtship of less than two years, and having divorced parents are all associated with subsequent divorce.

#### 14.3 How might one go about ending a relationship?

About 30 percent of undergraduates in one study reported that they were unhappy in their present relationships; another 30 percent reported that they knew they were in relationships that should end. After considering that one might improve an unhappy relationship and deciding to end a relationship, telling a partner that one needs out "for one's space" without giving a specific reason helps a partner avoid feeling obligated to stay if the other partner changes. Although some couples can remain friends, others may profit from ending the relationship completely. And recovery can take time (twelve to eighteen months).

#### 14.4 What are gender differences in filing for divorce?

Women are more likely to file for divorce because they see that, by getting divorced, they get the husband's money (via division of property or child support), the children, and the husband out of the house. Husbands are less likely to seek divorce because they more often end up without the house, with half their money, and separated from their children. Regardless of who files, more than two-thirds of both women and men who are separated recommend that other couples who are contemplating divorce try to "work it out."

#### 14.5 What are the consequences of divorce for spouses?

The psychological consequences for divorcing spouses depend on how unhappy the marriage was. Spouses who were miserable while in a loveless conflictual marriage often regard the divorce as a relief. Spouses who were left (for example, a spouse leaves for another partner) may be devastated and suicidal. Women tend to fare better emotionally after separation and divorce than do men. Women are more likely than men not only to have a stronger network of supportive relationships but also to profit from divorce by developing a new sense of self-esteem and confidence, because they are thrust into a more independent role.

### Key Terms

**binuclear** a family that spans two households, often because of divorce.

**blended family** a family where new spouses blend their children from previous marriages.

**covenant marriage** type of marriage that permits divorce only under specific conditions.

**December marriage** a new marriage in which both spouses are elderly.

**developmental task** a skill that allows a family to grow as a cohesive unit.

**divorce mediation** process in which divorcing parties make agreements with a third party (mediator) about custody, visitation, child support, property settlement, and spousal support.

**divorcism** the belief that divorce is a disaster.

**homogamy** tendency to select someone with similar characteristics to marry.

**legal custody** decisional authority over major issues involving the child.

**mating gradient** the tendency for husbands to be more advanced than their wives with regard to age, education, and occupational success.

**negative commitment** individuals who remain emotionally invested in their relationship with their former spouse, despite remarriage.

**no-fault divorce** a divorce in which neither party is identified as the guilty party or the cause of the divorce.

**parental alienation syndrome** a disturbance in which children are obsessively preoccupied with deprecation or criticism of a parent.

**physical custody** also called “visitation,” refers to distribution of parenting time following divorce.

**postnuptial agreement** similar to a premarital agreement, a postnuptial agreement specifies what is to be done with property and holdings at death or divorce.

**satiation** the state in which a stimulus loses its value with repeated exposure.

**shared parenting dysfunction** the set of behaviors by both parents that are focused on hurting the other parent and are counterproductive for a child’s well-being.

**stepfamily (step relationships)** a family in which partners bring children from previous marriages into the new home, where they may also have a child of their own.

**stepism** the assumption that stepfamilies are inferior to biological families.

Factors associated with a quicker adjustment on the part of both spouses include mediating rather than litigating the divorce, co-parenting their children, avoiding alcohol or other drugs, reducing stress through exercise, engaging in enjoyable activities with friends, and delaying a new marriage for two years. Recovering from a broken heart may also be expedited by recalling the negative things a partner did (for example, lied, was unfaithful, and so on).

## 14.6 What are the effects of divorce on children?

Although researchers agree that a civil, cooperative, co-parenting relationship between ex-spouses is the greatest predictor of a positive outcome for children, researchers disagree on the long-term negative effects of divorce on children. However, there is no disagreement that most children do not experience long-term negative effects. Divorce mediation encourages civility between divorcing spouses who negotiate the issues of division of property, custody, visitation, child support, and spousal support.

## 14.7 What are some conditions of a “successful” divorce?

Divorce is an emotionally traumatic event for everyone involved, but there are some steps that spouses can take to minimize the pain and help each other and their children with the transition. Some of these steps include mediating the divorce, co-parenting, sharing responsibility, creating positive thoughts, avoiding drugs and alcohol, being active, releasing anger, allowing time to heal, and progressing through the psychological stages of divorce.

## 14.8 What are strategies to prevent divorce?

Three states (Louisiana, Arizona, and Arkansas) offer covenant marriages, in which spouses agree to divorce only for serious reasons such as imprisonment on a felony or separation of more than two years. They also agree to see a marriage counselor if problems threaten the marriage. When given the option to choose a covenant marriage, few couples do so.

## 14.9 What is the nature of remarriage in the United States?

Within two years, 75 percent of divorced women and 80 percent of divorced men have remarried. When comparing divorced individuals who have remarried with divorced individuals who have not remarried, those who have remarried report greater personal and relationship happiness. Most divorced individuals select someone who is divorced to remarry just as widowed individuals select someone who is also widowed to remarry.

Two years is the recommended time from the end of one marriage to the beginning of the next. Among those who have been previously remarried, living together does not seem to disadvantage the couple in terms of having a higher divorce rate. National data reflect that remarriages are more likely than first marriages to end in divorce in the early years of remarriage. After fifteen years, however, second marriages tend to be more stable and happier than first marriages. The reason for this is that remarried individuals tend not to be afraid of divorce and would divorce if unhappy in a second marriage. First-time married individuals may be fearful of divorce and stay married even though they are unhappy.

Stages of Parental Repartnering

Relationship Transition	Definition
Dating initiation	The parent begins to date.
Child introduction	The children and new dating partner meet.
Serious involvement	The parent begins to present the relationship as “serious” to the children.
Sleepover	The parent and the partner begin to spend nights together when the children are present.
Cohabitation	The parent and the partner combine households.
Breakup of a serious relationship	The relationship experiences a temporary or permanent disruption.
Pregnancy in the new relationship	A planned or unexpected pregnancy occurs.
Engagement	The parent announces plans to remarry.
Remarriage	The parent and partner create a legal or civil union.

Source: E. R. Anderson, and S. M. Greene. 2005. Transitions in parental repartnering after divorce. *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage* 43:49 (<http://www.haworthpress.com/web/jdr/>).

## 14.10 What is the nature of stepfamilies in the United States?

Stepfamilies represent the fastest-growing type of family in the United States. A blended family is one in which the spouses in a new marriage relationship are blended with the children of at least one of the spouses from a previous marriage.

There is a movement away from the use of the term *blended*, because stepfamilies really do not blend. Although a stepfamily can be created when a never-married or a widowed parent with children marries a person with or without children, most stepfamilies today are composed of spouses who were once divorced.

Stepfamilies differ from nuclear families: the children in nuclear families are biologically related to both parents, whereas the children in stepfamilies are biologically related to only one parent. Also, in nuclear families, both biological parents live with their children, whereas only one biological parent in stepfamilies lives with the children. In some cases, the children alternate living with each parent. Stepism is the assumption that stepfamilies are inferior to biological families. Stepism, like racism, heterosexism, sexism, and ageism, involves prejudice and discrimination.

Stepfamilies go through a set of stages. New remarried couples often expect instant bonding between the new members of the stepfamily. It does not often happen. The stages are fantasy (everyone will love everyone), reality (possible bitter conflict), assertiveness (parents speak their mind), strengthening pair ties (spouses nurture their relationship), and recurring change (stepfamily members know there will continue to be change). Involvement in stepfamily discussion groups such as the Stepfamily Enrichment Program provides enormous benefits.

### Differences between Nuclear Families and Stepfamilies

Nuclear Families	Stepfamilies
1. Children are (usually) biologically related to both parents.	1. Children are biologically related to only one parent.
2. Both biological parents live together with children.	2. As a result of divorce or death, one biological parent does not live with the children. In the case of joint physical custody, children may live with both parents, alternating between them.
3. Beliefs and values of members tend to be similar.	3. Beliefs and values of members are more likely to be different because of different backgrounds.
4. The relationship between adults has existed longer than relationship between children and parents.	4. The relationship between children and parents has existed longer than the relationship between adults.
5. Children have one home they regard as theirs.	5. Children may have two homes they regard as theirs.
6. The family's economic resources come from within the family unit.	6. Some economic resources may come from an ex-spouse.
7. All money generated stays in the family.	7. Some money generated may leave the family in the form of alimony or child support.
8. Relationships are relatively stable.	8. Relationships are in flux: new adults adjusting to each other; children adjusting to a stepparent; a stepparent adjusting to stepchildren; stepchildren adjusting to each other.
9. No stigma is attached to nuclear family.	9. Stepfamilies are stigmatized.
10. Spouses had a childfree period.	10. Spouses had no childfree period.
11. Inheritance rights are automatic.	11. Stepchildren do not automatically inherit from stepparents.
12. Rights to custody of children are assumed if divorce occurs.	12. Rights to custody of stepchildren are usually not considered.
13. Extended family networks are smooth and comfortable.	13. Extended family networks become complex and strained.
14. Nuclear family may not have experienced loss.	14. Stepfamily has experienced loss.

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### 14.11 What are the strengths of stepfamilies?

The strengths of stepfamilies include exposure to a variety of behavior patterns, happier parents, and greater objectivity on the part of the stepparent.



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### 14.12 What are the developmental tasks of stepfamilies?

Developmental tasks for stepfamilies include nurturing the new marriage relationship, allowing time for partners and children to get to know each other, deciding whose money will be spent on whose children, deciding who will discipline the children and how, and supporting the children's relationship with both parents and natural grandparents. Both sets of parents and stepparents should form a parenting coalition in which they cooperate and actively participate in child rearing.

#### **Remember**

Take the chapter 14 self-assessment, called Children's Beliefs about Parental Divorce, located in your self-assessment card deck.