

What Is Divorce?

Divorce is the legal end of a marriage. It involves going through the family courts to have a judge legally declare the marriage over. A dissolution and annulment can also end a marriage, but these have slightly different definitions. A dissolution is a divorce in which both parties are named as the plaintiffs and file for the divorce jointly. An annulment ends the marriage and legally invalidates it. From the court's perspective, an annulled marriage never happened. Annulments have strict qualifying criteria, including how long the couple has been married and the circumstances under which they married. (1)

While divorce is clearly a legal matter, it's not one that only involves formalities. It's also the end of a deep personal relationship, and it means a huge change in the family dynamic. Divorce can be especially difficult to navigate emotionally if it's unexpected or unwanted.

How to File for Divorce

The process of filing for divorce depends on the state the couple lives in. In general, the couple must have lived in the state for at least 6 months to be able to file for divorce in the district court. When someone files for divorce, they must complete the required forms, which include:

- Financial affidavits
- Separate and marital property declarations
- Petition for divorce (2)

If the marriage resulted in children, the parents must file a parenting plan. In cases where the parents are in agreement, they can file one joint plan. However, if there's a conflict between the two parties, they'll need to file separate parenting plans that detail what they're asking for in terms of legal and physical custody and child support.

The filing party must also serve the other party according to the state requirements. Some people choose to work with an attorney, but this isn't required. However, hiring an attorney can help alleviate some of the stress and anxiety that is common with divorce, particularly if it's likely that it will be a high-conflict divorce.

How Much Does a Divorce Cost?

The average cost of divorce in 2023 ranges between \$15,000 and \$20,000. (3) However, the median cost of divorce is \$7,000. How much a divorce costs depends on several factors, including:

- In what state the divorce takes place
- Whether it qualifies as a high-asset divorce
- How much the parties are able to agree on
- Whether there's a prenuptial or postnuptial agreement in place
- Whether there are children involved

In general, the more the two parties can agree on, the lower the cost of divorce. This is because any issues they can't agree on have to be settled at trial in the family courts. This requires hours of attorney preparation, as well as the time spent in the actual courts. Attorneys usually charge by the hour, which means the longer a divorce takes to settle, the more expensive it's likely to be.

It's important to keep in mind that there aren't only financial costs to divorce. Those involved also pay a price with their mental and emotional health. Divorce is stressful, and it can be difficult to navigate the emotions and grief that come up during the process. This is especially true because those involved must handle all of this in addition to adjusting to changes that could include a dramatic lowering of income, a change in employment, or having to relocate. (4)

How Many Marriages End in Divorce?

According to data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, there were more than 630,000 divorces or annulments in 2020. (5) The divorce rate as a percentage of the population comes out to about 2.3 divorces for every 1,000 people. However, some areas of the country have higher divorce rates. For example, Wyoming had the highest divorce rate in 2020, while Massachusetts had the lowest. (6) Being aware of how prevalent divorce is can help those going through divorce know that they aren't alone, which can make it easier to move forward during this time of transition.

How to Cope With a Divorce

Divorce is a major life change and is recognized as one of the most stressful occurrences in a person's life. (7) Those who have success coping with divorce generally have a strong support system and can recognize that the change is ultimately positive. (8) Having friends and family nearby can help, but it's also possible to find community through divorce support groups and local singles groups. Therapy can also be helpful for those going through a divorce or having difficulty transitioning after the divorce is final. Finding a mental health provider who specializes in divorce aftercare or life transition issues can help people learn coping skills and connect with other resources for emotional support. Couples therapy can also be useful in helping parents to learn new communication skills and set boundaries around co-parenting.

How to Help Someone Going Through a Divorce

When it comes to divorce support, it can be difficult to know exactly how to help someone who is going through a divorce. However, listening to them, validating their emotions and experience, and providing real-world help and companionship can lighten the load.

While it may be tempting to share an experience or give advice to a loved one, it's important to remember that every divorce is different. Instead, it can be helpful to ask the person how they're doing or to provide a safe space to vent. Some people may want a distraction, so a good option might be offering to take them out to a favorite activity or restaurant. Always offer an invitation without judgment or pressure, as some people may not be up for going out, having conversations, or answering questions.

Another good way to help someone going through a divorce is to share a bit of the burden as transitions and new roles occur. That could be providing a meal, coming by to help fold laundry, providing manpower during a move, or taking the children for a while. It can help to offer a few options for the person to pick from, as they may be too tired or overwhelmed to provide an actionable answer to the question, "What do you need?" (9)

Sources:

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