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CHILD ABUSE &
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

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Overview of the Child Abuse and Domestic Violence Issues

- **What is child abuse?**

Child abuse is the nonaccidental injury or pattern of injuries to a child.¹ Child abuse includes the following: nonaccidental physical injury, neglect, sexual molestation, and emotional abuse.

- **What is domestic violence?**

Domestic violence is a pattern of assaulting and coercing behaviors, including physical, sexual, and psychological attacks, as well as economic coercion, that adults or adolescents use against their intimate partners.² Domestic violence mainly involves violence directed by a husband against his wife, or a live-in boyfriend against his girlfriend.

- **How common are these problems?**

Child Abuse

In a recent year, nearly four million children were reported for child abuse and neglect to various child protective service (CPS) agencies across the nation. Between 1988 and 1997, child abuse reporting levels have increased 41 percent. Roughly 47 out of every 1,000 children are reported as victims of child abuse.³ In 1998, an estimated 1,100 children died of abuse and neglect—an average of more than three children per day. Of these children, more than 75 percent were under the age of five and 38 percent were under the age of one.⁴

Domestic Violence

Reports on exact numbers regarding domestic violence differ, due to the lack of reporting of this crime. However, the following statistics illustrate how large a problem this is:

A 1995 survey found that 31 percent of women said that they were victims of domestic abuse.⁵ Estimates of women abused by a spouse or live-in partner range from 960,000 incidents⁶ to 3,900,000 per year.⁷

According to the FBI Uniform Crime Statistics from 1996, 1,500 women in this country are murdered by husbands or boyfriends each year.

- **What are the long-term effects of child abuse and domestic violence on children?**

Children from violent homes have an increased risk of drug and alcohol abuse and juvenile delinquency. They may experience learning, language, and developmental problems.⁸ In addition, they may develop the following characteristics: low self-esteem, aggressiveness, anxiety, poor health, distrust of relationships, guilt, desensitization to pain, self-abuse, depression, anger, avoidance, mood swings, and anti-social behavior.

Boys who witness domestic violence are four times more likely to become batterers of female partners as adults, twenty-five times more likely to commit rape as an adult, six times more likely to commit suicide, 74 percent more likely to commit crimes, and 24 times more likely to commit sexual assault.⁹

Girls from homes in which domestic violence occurs are 6.5 times more likely to be sexually assaulted and are more likely to become pregnant as a teen.¹⁰

- **What are the signs of child abuse?**¹¹

Signs of child abuse can be divided into three categories:

1. *Physical signs*—crying or attempting to avoid going with the abuser or to a place where abuse occurred, bruises, cuts, burns, broken bones, or repeated injuries.
2. *Emotional signs*—shunning affection, overly clingy, extreme behaviors, acting inappropriately (infantile or adult-like), reducing or stopping communication, unexplained illnesses.
3. *Sexual signs*—difficulty walking or sitting, reluctance to remove outer clothing (sweaters/coats), wearing extra clothing, exhibiting sexual curiosity not normally associated with their developmental age.

- **What help is available for suspected cases of domestic violence and child abuse?**

In an emergency, call 9-1-1. Other resources include:

National Domestic Violence/Abuse Hotline

1-800-799-7233

(1-800-799-SAFE)

Childhelp USA's National Child Abuse Hotline

1-800-422-4453

(1-800-4ACHILD)

We have discussed this Tough Choice.

Parent/Guardian Signature

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Church Teaching on Child Abuse and Domestic Violence • • • • •

• What does the Church teach about domestic violence and child abuse?

While the Church does not use the terms “domestic violence” and “child abuse,” it unquestionably teaches that all people are to be respected and to live free of the fear of violence against them. This is especially true within the context of the family. Several relevant paragraphs in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* apply, including:

CCC 2203

CCC 2222

CCC 2223

• Why is that the teaching of the Catholic Church?

All people are to be treated with dignity and respect. Both domestic violence and child abuse are examples of people exhibiting violent or psychological power over another in an unjust manner. On the subject of child abuse, it does not mean that parents cannot discipline their children but that discipline has limits.

• Which Scripture passages are relevant to the child abuse and domestic violence issue?

Sirach 30: 1-2

Ephesians 6:4

Reports on child maltreatment regarding domestic violence often focus on the lack of reporting of this crime. However, the following statistics illustrate how large a problem this is:

A 1995 survey found that 71 percent of women said that they experienced domestic abuse.¹ Estimates of women abused by a spouse or live-in partner range from 960,000 incidents² to 1,500,000 per year.³

According to the FBI Uniform Crime Statistics from 1994, 1,500 women in this country are murdered by husbands or boyfriends each year.⁴

• What are the long-term effects of child abuse and domestic violence on children?

Children from violent homes have an increased risk of drug and alcohol abuse and juvenile delinquency. They may experience learning, language, and developmental problems.⁵ In addition, they may develop the following characteristics: low self-esteem, aggressiveness, anxiety, poor health, distrust in relationships, post-traumatic stress, self-abuse, depression, anger, avoidance, mood swings, and anti-social behavior.

Boys who witness domestic violence are four times more likely to become batterers of female partners as adults, twenty-five times more likely to commit rape as an adult, six times more likely to commit suicide, 74 percent more likely to commit crimes, and 24 times more likely to commit sexual assault.⁶

Girls born in homes in which domestic violence occurs are 5.3 times more likely to be sexually assaulted and are more likely to become pregnant as a teen.⁷

CHILD ABUSE & DOMESTIC VIOLENCE DILEMMA #1

Steve and Mark have been friends for years. Growing up, each had spent a great deal of time in the other's house. Lately, Mark has been noticing that they have spent an increasing amount of time at his house, instead of Steve's. One day, when picking up Steve for school, Mark noticed bruises down Steve's mom's arm and across the side of her face. As soon as Steve got into the car, Mark asked him what had happened to his mom. Steve tried to change the subject, but Mark's persistence got him to reveal what was really going on: Steve's father was abusive to Steve's mother. He told Mark that if the truth got out, the beatings would only get worse. Besides, Steve said this was something he and his mom had learned to live with.

Discussion Questions:

- 1) What should Mark do?
- 2) Would your response be different if it was a child that was being beaten? How?
- 3) Does a friend's request not to tell weigh into the decision? Why or why not?
- 4) What are the short-term and long-term problems if this is allowed to continue?
- 5) Are families allowed privacy around an issue like this? Why or why not?

We have discussed this Tough Choice.

Parent/Guardian Signature

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CHILD ABUSE & DOMESTIC VIOLENCE DILEMMA #2

Mitch is in Will's first period chemistry class. Will knows that Mitch and his dad do not get along well, and he has been in their house during a few of the confrontations. The yelling and distress caused by the situation has often caused Will to leave early. In recent weeks they have been fighting more because of Mitch's poor grades. Will heard Mitch's dad tell him that he had one more chance to improve his grade in chemistry, "or else". Mitch got a "D" on his third quarter report card. On the day after report cards were sent home Mitch came to school with a red mark under his eye. Will asked him what happened. Mitch said that he did not want to talk about it and ignored Will for the rest of the period.

Discussion Questions:

- 1) What should Will do?
- 2) How would you define child abuse in your own words?
- 3) Who should Will talk to?
- 4) Does Will have the right to pry into Mitch's family situation?
- 5) Suppose Mitch's father has been prosecuted for abuse before. Does knowing that Mitch will be placed in a foster home change the situation?

We have discussed this Tough Choice.

Parent/Guardian Signature

Student Signature

Notes

1. <http://www.childabuse.com/fs20.htm>
2. Ibid.
3. C.T. Wang and Daro D. Wang. *Current Trends in Child Abuse Reporting and Fatalities: The Results of the 1997 Annual Fifty State Survey* (Chicago, IL: Prevent Child Abuse America, 1998).
4. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Children's Bureau, *Child Maltreatment 1998: Reports from the States to the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS)* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2000). Online statistical fact sheets: www.calib.com/nccanch/stats/index.cfm
5. Lieberman Research Inc. *Domestic violence advertising campaign tracking survey*, Wave 3, November 1995. (San Francisco, CA: Family Violence Prevention Fund and The Advertising Council, 1996).
6. U.S. Department of Justice, "Violence by Intimates: Analysis of Data on Crimes by Current or Former Spouses, Boyfriends, and Girlfriends" (March 1998).
7. The Commonwealth Fund, "First Comprehensive National Health Survey of American Women," July 1993.
8. *Domestic Violence—A Guide for Health Care Professionals*, State of New Jersey, Department of Community Affairs, March 1990.
9. A Safe Place: Lake County Crisis Center, P.O. Box 1067, Waukegan, IL 60079 at <http://www.asafeplaceforhelp.org/childwitnesses2.html>
10. Ibid.
11. <http://injuryboard.com/specificArticleFromSiteSearch.cfm?Article=271>

Overview of Divorce Issues • • • • •

- **What is divorce?**

Divorce is defined as the legal and formal dissolution of marriage by the state.

- **About how many divorces are there annually in the United States?**

In a recent year, there were 1,163,000 divorces in the United States.¹ In this same year, there was a 43 percent chance that all new marriages would end in divorce.²

- **How long do most marriages last?**

Using the same statistics, the average length of a marriage was 7.2 years.³

- **How many children of divorced couples are there?**

Each year, there are roughly one million children from new divorces.⁴ Roughly 24 percent of married households have children, while 27 percent of households with children have only one parent.⁵ Twenty million children under the age of eighteen are living with just one parent.⁶

- **Don't the divorce statistics indicate that people should live together first to see if they are compatible with one another?**

No, in fact, quite the opposite is true. Living together before marriage, or cohabitation, actually leads to more instances of divorce than for couples choosing to live separately until marriage. There are roughly 3.8 million cohabiting couples.⁷ For these couples, the risk of divorce is almost double that of those who did not live together.⁸

- **What are some of the reasons people get divorced?**

There are numerous reasons for each situation in which a couple decides to get divorced, and therefore it would be impossible to list all of them. However, in 1999, the Australian Institute of Family Studies conducted a study that offered four areas of conclusions: affective issues, abusive behaviors, external pressures, and other factors.⁹

By far, the biggest reasons people gave for divorce were affective reasons. These affective reasons were communication problems (27.3 percent), incompatibility or "drifting apart" (21 percent), and infidelity (20 percent). Abusive behaviors were the next most common response given with physical violence to spouse or child (5.5 percent), alcohol/drug abuse (7.4 percent), and emotional and/or verbal abuse (1.9 percent) representing this demographic. External pressures, such as financial problems (4.7 percent), work/time (2.7 percent), family interference (0.6 percent), and physical/mental health (4.7 percent), came next. Finally, other factors like spouse's personality (1.1 percent), children's problems (1.4 percent), and various other random cases (1.4 percent), rounded out the list.

What do these statistics tell us? Well, if one were to weed through all these numbers, one could see that there are a few simple reasons why so many divorces occur. It is our contention that so many divorces occur due to three important factors and the inter-connection between these three factors: age of the spouse(s), mutual knowledge of the spouse(s), and commitment to the institution/sacrament of marriage.

Age plays a role in divorce because many times, couples choose to get married at a very young age. While this is not necessarily a bad thing, sometimes this takes place before the two people have had a chance to develop as individuals. Hopefully, they will develop together, along the same direction and life path, but oftentimes, their development changes who they are and the two individuals mature in a way that leads them apart. Statistics back this point up: 40 percent of people who married under the age of twenty eventually get divorced compared to 24 percent who married over the age of twenty-five.¹⁰ Couples must be mature, developed, and content with who they are as individuals before they are able to give themselves to one another in marriage.

Second, and tied to the age problem, is the knowledge of the spouse. Due to technological innovation, career opportunities, and a decentralized ethnic family base, the world has become smaller. People are free to move and seek out their calling far from where they were born. This means that people no longer live in areas surrounded by those with whom they have grown up. Therefore, it is less likely that an individual will marry someone they knew while growing up, and it is that much more difficult to know an individual prior to marriage, unless a substantial amount of time has been spent with that person. Short-term dating and engagement periods are becoming all too common, which results in the unfortunate byproduct of people not truly knowing their spouses before getting married. While the amount of time required to truly *know* an individual is different in every case, it should be given top priority before something as serious and as sacred as marriage is considered.

Combined with these first two factors is the third, a commitment to the institution/sacrament of marriage. In previous generations, it was common for a man and a woman to be married for life. Today, it is not so. What is of equal concern is that sometimes even the *expectation* of marriage is not for life. This results from people's views on the institution/sacrament of marriage. As we have mentioned, nearly a million children each year become acquainted with divorce. As the idea of living in a divorced household becomes more commonplace in these children's minds, the expectation that this is not out-of-the-ordinary, but rather a fact of life develops.

This idea may fester throughout their lives, so when the time comes for them to get married, the idea that divorce is a legitimate alternative is already firmly planted in their mentality. Couple this with what takes place in our society today. Much of what is done is constructed to serve the individual's needs in a quick manner. Fast food, remote controls, the Internet, and other beneficial features in our society also possess an inherent quality of creating in individuals the mindset that personal satisfaction is to be obtained without much effort and in a very short time period. This attitude flies in the face of any committed relationship. Every relationship, especially marriage, involves struggles, fears, discoveries, growth apart, reconciliation, development as individuals, and development together. Marriage is a process, not an endgame. Just because a couple decides to get married does not mean that life will no longer pose any challenges. It simply means that an individual is open to exploring those challenges with another person. If marriage is seen in this light, then any obstacles that present themselves to a married couple do not become reasons for a quick and easy separation but rather reasons to pursue any and all means to work together to grow in love and deepen the marriage commitment. Therefore marriage needs to be seen as lifelong and any inherent struggles are not reasons to give up, but to push forward.

If we look at these three factors, we can see how they figure into the reasoning given by most people for divorce. Communication, incompatibility, infidelity, abuse, financial and work reasons, family interference, spousal personality, and many others all can be tied to age, knowledge of the spouse, and commitment to the institution/sacrament of marriage. Knowing yourself and your interests comes first. It allows you to be fully conscious of what you offer to another. Learning about and understanding your spouse comes next. Taking the time to find out the joys, sorrows, motivations, and struggles of your partner in a variety of situations and emotional states will prepare two people for what to expect in marriage. Finally, truly believing and taking to heart the words "for richer or poorer, in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health," is the final piece of the puzzle. If couples share a common mindset on and commitment to marriage, they will be open to whatever life has to offer. By keeping these three factors in mind, there is hope for decreasing the occurrence of divorce while upholding the sanctity of marriage.

Parent/ Guardian Signature _____

Student Signature _____

Church Teaching on Divorce • • • • •

• What is the Catholic Church's position on divorce?

The Catholic Church holds that God intended marriages to be "indissoluble" or permanent. It holds marriage as a sacrament and thus promises are made before God and the Church. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states: "A ratified and consummated marriage cannot be dissolved by any human power for any reason other than death" (2382). The Church does teach that separation of spouses while still maintaining the marriage bond is acceptable in certain cases. Thus "civil divorce" is acceptable if issues such as legal rights, care of the children, or the protection of inheritance is at stake.

• Why is that the position of the Catholic Church?

The Church calls divorce a "grave offense" because "it claims to break the contract, to which the spouses freely consented, to live with each other until death." Remarrying, even when recognized by civil law, adds to the gravity of the offense because the remarried person is in a situation of both "public and permanent adultery" because in the eyes of God, he or she is still married to another.

• What is an annulment?

An annulment is a declaration by the Church that a marriage is invalid. It is an official judgment that a sacramental marriage never took place, in spite of all appearances. For example, an annulment can be granted if the Church deems that one or both members of the couple did not freely enter into the marriage.

• Which Scripture passages are relevant to the issue of divorce?

Matthew 5: 31–32

Matthew 19:3–9

Mark 10: 9–12

Luke 16:18

I Corinthians 7:10–11

While this is not necessarily a bad thing, sometimes the false place before the two people begin their chance to develop as individuals. In reality, they will develop together, along the same direction and life path, but oftentimes, their development diverges when they are and the two individuals mature in a way that leads them apart. Statistics back this point up: 40 percent of people who married under the age of twenty eventually get divorced compared to 24 percent who married over the age of twenty-five.¹⁰ Couples must be mature, developed, and content with who they are as individuals before they are able to give themselves to one another in marriage.

DIVORCE DILEMMA #1

Lisa's family has always been a close-knit group. Her parents have been very active at the school, in their parish, and in the community. They host parties for nearly every holiday or special occasion, and they are well respected by the parents of their children's classmates. Rachel has been one of Lisa's close friends during their high school years. They have seen each other through many highs and lows. Lately, Lisa has been a little down because of what she calls "family problems". Rachel is surprised at this admission, considering that most people feel Lisa's family is the model family.

Last week, Lisa told Rachel that her parents are getting divorced. For the past week, Rachel has had to console Lisa inside and outside of school because Lisa has been very emotional. Much of the time involves Rachel answering Lisa's questions, like: "Why is this happening?" "Is this something I did?" "How could I have prevented this?" and "How am I going to grow up without two parents in the house?" Rachel wants to be supportive, but her lack of experience with divorce means she has little knowledge of what Lisa can expect.

Discussion Questions:

- 1) What could Rachel do or say?
- 2) Why do people get divorced?
- 3) Do you know of people whose parents are divorced? Discuss their experience.
- 4) Is there such a thing as an "ideal" or "perfect" marriage?
- 5) What is your opinion of marriage? What should an ideal marriage involve?
- 6) To whom can children turn when faced with the prospect of divorce?

We have discussed this Tough Choice.

Parent/Guardian Signature

Student Signature

DIVORCE DILEMMA #2

Tonya and Mark are good friends. Mark respects Tonya a great deal and often asks for Tonya's opinion on various matters. Also, they have been there for each other during tough times. Mark supported Tonya when her brother died. Tonya provided a shoulder to lean on and ear to listen when Mark's parents were going through their divorce. Mark now lives with his mother, but he is able to see his father every other weekend.

Lately, Mark has been complaining about his mother. Tonya knows that Mark's mother is a good person who looks out for Mark's best interests. She has certain expectations of Mark and enforces her policies. Mark's father is the exact opposite. He allows Mark to do whatever he wants. He also buys expensive gifts for Mark, even when Mark's mother specifically asks him to refrain from doing so. Mark has confided in Tonya that he would much rather live with his father because his mother is so mean to him. There is a court appointment coming up next week in which Mark wants to ask the judge to give custody to his father instead of his mother. Tonya knows that Mark's opinion is biased, but she also knows that he has a great love for his father, and she would not want to alter that perception for Mark.

Discussion Questions:

- 1) What should Tonya do?
- 2) What does it mean to be a good parent?
- 3) How much should parents try to be "friends" with their children?
- 4) What happens when one parent acts in opposition to the wishes of the other parent?
- 5) How can children of divorced parents show their loyalty and love to each parent without offending the other?

We have discussed these Tough Choices.

Parent/Guardian Signature

Student Signature

Notes

1. Statistics compiled by the U.S. Census Bureau, National Center for Health Statistics, Americans for Divorce Reform, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Institute for Equality in Marriage, American Association for Single People, Ameristat, Public Agenda, found at <http://www.divorcemagazine.com/statistics/statsUS.shtml>

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid.

7. Ibid.

8. Bumpass & Sweet 1995; Hall & Zhao 1995; Bracher, Santow, Morgan & Russell 1993; DeMaris & Rao 1992 and Glenn 1990, found at <http://members.aol.com/cohabitating/facts.htm>

9. Ilene Wolcott and Jody Hughes, "Towards Understanding the Reasons for Divorce," Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS) 1999. Found at <http://www.aifs.org.au/institute/pubs/WP20.html>

10. <http://www.divorcemagazine.com/statistics/statsUS.shtml>