

1 Crisis & Chance

1.1 Practical example: My wife wants a divorce

"I am 45 years old and have been married to my wife for eleven years. I generally thought our marriage was okay, but tonight my wife told me, that she wants a separation because she doesn't love me anymore. She said there was no other man involved. A certain routine had crept into our marriage, but I think that's normal after all this time. Our sex life had pretty much fallen apart lately, to which we are both to blame. I'm falling into a deep hole right now, I never expected anything like this. I feel totally overwhelmed with the situation."

From one second to the next, long-tested life plans can shatter. Even though separation and divorce are unfortunately the norm today, they represent a drastic experience for those affected - for both men and women. Often the entire world view collapses; the abandoned person reacts with grief, pain, anger and self-doubt. Physical and psychological complaints are typical accompanying symptoms. Separations and divorces are rarely uncomplicated. Harmful words and insults experienced by the ex-partner tempt each other to fight and to wash "dirty laundry".

Most affected are the children, who react with fear or guilt to the separation of their parents. This is where a lot of empathy and understanding is needed from both parties. All those who are thinking of separating or who have to deal with a separation should make a serious effort to do justice to the best interests of the children and deal with them fairly. Particularly in matters of custody and especially in contact arrangements, parents should show a willingness to compromise and always cooperate and stand up for the concerns and needs of their children. Those who seek support from the child- and youth-service (Office for Social Services) and counseling centers, demonstrate good will.

1.2 Tips in case of separation

Tip 1: *Set new goals*

When the separation is inevitable, it is time to process the pain, deal with the new situation and accept it as it is. The question of which partner is more or less responsible for the break-up does not help. More importantly, is how you shape the new phase of your life. So get out of the perpetrator-victim way of thinking. Shaping things yourself, setting yourself new goals and coming to terms with yourself should be a priority.

Tip 2: *Negotiate good agreements*

Since a separation or divorce agreement may form the basis for shaping the entire future life of both partners, one should carefully consider what one wants to agree upon and what consequences the agreements will have in the future. The importance of financial issues, often cause people to overlook the fact, that contact rights to the children must also be formulated with greatest care. If communication between the parents is incomprehensible, they are often interpreted unilaterally and the children, for example, have to suffer from arrangements that don't work. The more generous and stable the contact between children and the separated parent is agreed upon, the more likely it is that the threat of alienation will be prevented. A rigorous turning away of a child from one parent, with simultaneous attention to the main caring parent (Parental Alienation Syndrome PAS) can be observed especially when the children are "programmed" or influenced accordingly. This is definitely not in the best interest of the child.

Tip 3: Clarity in communication

Despite clear agreements, it happens that one side does not stick to them. What if the ex-wife is negligent in dealing with the children or tries to use her power against the father of the children? Then it is time to communicate clearly. If the best interests of the child seem to be at risk, action must be taken, if necessary with the involvement of child- and youth-services (youth welfare office) or in court.

Tip 4: Share responsibility for the children's daily tasks

Especially in the classic residential model, where - as a rule - the father can only visit his children about every second weekend, it becomes apparent that he is cut off from the children's normal everyday life. Contact with the children including overnight stays benefits closer ties, than daytime contact. But children should benefit from the parenting influence of both parents, which is more possible in normal everyday life than during weekends. Fathers should therefore also be able to be involved with their children during the week, e.g. by helping with homework, everyday conversations and more. Many studies show that this strengthens their role as fathers.

Tip 5: Use counselling services

Men feel just as overwhelmed in crisis situations as women. In order to be able to tackle all the problems associated with a separation or divorce, Liechtenstein offers a wide range of legal or psychosocial counselling services (see Chapter 12).