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Navigating Covid-19: Quarantine questions that every married couple may face

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China, the first to experience a Covid-19 lockdown, has lifted its in-home restrictions and this newfound “freedom” has liberated couples from more than just their physical homes. Since the breakout of Covid-19 in China, there has been a spike in the country’s divorce filings.

Although various states in America are far from being in the clear from this life-threatening virus, there is already data showing an increase in divorce interest in New York and other parts of the country where, with certain exceptions, courts remain closed to the public. Despite the court closures, clients are keeping divorce lawyers extra busy with desperate calls to get them out of their unhappy Covid-19 impaired marriages.

You may be thinking, “What is a Covid-19 impaired marriage?” and “Can these marriages survive the global pandemic?”

As a family law attorney and a practicing relationship counselor and professional matchmaker we hope to shed some light on what is likely to be the next big trend in the family law and counseling arenas.

“I, __, take you, __, to be my lawfully wedded wife/husband. To have and to hold from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and health, until death do us part.”

When reciting these vows, couples usually do not picture “married life” as 24 hours a day, 7 days a week without leaving the marital home. However, this is the reality that today’s couples are grappling with; the in-your-face, nonstop, paired isolation. Mano a mano.

In recent history, marriages and relationships have not been put to the test of living under the same roof for such extended periods of time. Now, households have taken new shape: kids are home from school, and most parents are obligated to do their respective jobs remotely. Family members who are essential workers must be on the front lines and risk exposure. Many men and women are without work altogether. Enduring this unprecedented level of stress and anxiety may be more than many marriages can withstand.

So, we ask: can marriages survive a global pandemic? The answer is hopefully yes, but many couples may unfortunately split given the new level of stress we are all enduring.

Questions will inevitably arise within a relationship during these unprecedented times.

Do I like this person let alone love this person?

Can I live with this person for the rest of my life?

What is there to talk about day in and day out with this person?

Am I better off getting divorced during or after this downturn in the global economy?

Although the above concerns may seem daunting, many therapists recommend keeping your mind focused on the positive around you.



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This, they say, is the time to remember all the wonderful reasons why you married each other instead of why you can't live with this said person. These times we are living in with social distancing and near seclusion can create the perfect storm to bring out the worst in people. How does one deal with too much togetherness? One answer is to concentrate not on what is wrong, but rather on what is right and meaningful. Let's call it a "pandemic pause." Take stock in what you have as well as what made you fall in love in the first place. Crack open family milestone albums or videos and relive happier times and memories of loved ones.

When living within the monotonous slog that is quarantining, it is important to maintain structure and balance in any given day or even week. From mundane to crucial, tasks should be divvied up among partners. Responsibilities such as who puts out the trash, who gets the enviable job of grocery shopping, whose turn is it to make dinner, or even who decides what movies to watch should be rotated. Last but certainly not least, intimacy should not be forgotten.

Couples must be creative and make a "social" life for themselves. Have a virtual dinner date with your closest friends. Set a get together with peers or old roommates on a Saturday or a Tuesday night via Zoom or Skype. Connect with long distance relatives who usually just get a quick hello here and there. Knowing when to give each other space is equally as important.

The flip side of this positive view on the challenges created by Covid-19 and the related governmental restrictions and guidelines for how we live our daily lives include:

While I knew we had drifted apart, being home and in daily contact with my spouse and/or children 24/7 makes me realize and appreciate how little we really have in common anymore.

All those little things that bothered me pre Covid-19 lockdowns are now intolerable.

I can hardly figure out how I am going to make it through the end of this month let alone the rest of my life with this person. I feel like I barely know him/her anymore and/or I can barely stand to be around him/her. Why not free myself from the shackles of matrimony and parenthood?

Some of these statements and questions may seem extreme and overly dramatic, but for many they ring true. The workaholic or the full-time homemaker spouse, who has spent less than 10 hours a day with their significant other and children for the last 10, 20 or 30 plus years of life may be unable to cope with the realities of their Covid-19 impaired lifestyle, with divorce seeming to be the only way out.

Before you jump on the Covid-19 divorce bandwagon and call/text/e-mail or schedule a Zoom meeting to reach out to a divorce lawyer, there are a number of economic factors you may want to consider before making a decision that can have serious financial impact now, and in the future, more than ever.

Among those financial considerations related to divorcing in the midst of a pandemic are the following:

Can you really afford to set up a second household with a second set of expenses if your work has cut back on or eliminated your compensation entirely due to the potential recession in the wake of Covid-19?

Will the record high unemployment rate support your spouse's claim that he/she cannot find employment therefore giving them little or no earning capacity for making support determinations?

Will the effects of COVID-19 make selling your marital home and/or other real property an added challenge and hurdle?

Will you be penalized or benefitted by the realities of a post COVID-19 real estate market? For example, will the value of the marital residence be treated as lower and having less equity for one spouse to buy out the other spouse's equitable interest?

Will the down stock market create benefits for valuing your marital and/or separate assets and estate and your ability to buy out the other spouse's interest in your portfolio?

Will the low interest rates impact the valuation of a business interest to your benefit or detriment?

Will the low interest rate enable you to better afford the monthly payment for a loan to buy out the other parties' interest in certain assets like real estate or a business?

Will creditors be less or more inclined to forgive a portion of the marital debt owing and due for a cash payment?

Will you benefit from your reduced or non-existent income being used to base your support obligations?

Will expenses that were part of a couples pre-COVID-19 lifestyle be deemed reasonable and necessary going forward?

The above are several of the considerations that you should be thinking about, but by no means is this list exhaustive.

These and a host of other financial factors need to be carefully considered when making the decision to divorce or to work even harder to make your marriage thrive/survive during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Now more than ever there is a need for careful and thoughtful consideration as to whether social distancing which leads to divorce is right for you. Regardless of the financial factors, if you or someone you know is experiencing domestic violence as a result of social distancing and confinement to their home with an abusive spouse, there are resources available to you like The Philadelphia Domestic Violence Hotline that are confidential and available toll free 24/7 at 1-866-723-3014.

Before we know it, life will slowly start to get back to normal. One day, when the country is in fast forward mode again, we might long for the time when taking a long walk, gardening, cooking, and working from home were our only options. Some say absence makes the heart grow fonder. In these coronavirus times, perhaps togetherness will make the heart swell with joy and appreciation. Conversely, it may cause a relationship to falter and/or self-destruct. What will the fate of your marriage/relationship be in the wake of Covid-19?

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